

God's creation of morality

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that classical theists should think of God as having created morality. In form, my position largely resembles that defended by Richard Swinburne. However, it differs from his position in content in that it evacuates the category of necessary moral truth of all substance and, having effected this tactical withdrawal, Swinburne's battle lines need to be redrawn. In the first section, I introduce the Euthyphro dilemma. In the second, I argue that if necessary moral truths are seen as analytically/logically so, then, *pace* Swinburne, they cannot be regarded as substantive principles. Thus, seeing necessary moral truths as analytically/logically necessary and independent of God does not threaten God's power or sovereignty and leaves open the possibility that all value is contingent upon His will. In the third section, I turn to consider how the claim that all value is contingent upon God's will might best be understood, arguing that classical theists will want to commit themselves to a relatively strong form of objectivism about moral value (even though this is not needed in order to solve the Euthyphro dilemma). I then give and defend an account of God's creation of contingent moral truths which coheres with what I argue is the most plausible form of this commitment. In the following section, I argue that this account avoids the charge that God is arbitrary in His choice of values and, finally, I argue that it avoids the charge that God may not be said to be good without vacuity. Thus, I conclude that the Euthyphro dilemma does not threaten classical theism.

The Euthyphro dilemma

The relationship between God and moral value has long been a subject of contention. In the *Euthyphro*, Plato famously captured the dilemma facing believers in both. Should they say that actions and states of affairs are morally good, bad, or indifferent because God makes them have those properties, or should they say that they have the moral properties they do independently of any of God's actions? Initially, neither answer appears to be without difficulty.

On the one hand, to say that God created moral values, perhaps by means of a command as a sovereign might make laws, would seem to threaten to make God's choices over the assignment of them, arbitrary and any description of Him as good,

vacuous. On such an account, it might seem to follow that God could very well have chosen to make torturing children bad up until today but good hereafter. It would appear to be no use for the proponent of this answer to the Euthyphro dilemma to appeal to God's steadfastness to resist this consequence. On the account, God could have made it the case that there was no value in His staying steadfast tomorrow. Alternatively, if one prefers a timeless God, He could have – steadfastly, from eternity – made it the case that torturing children be bad up until today and good hereafter. Similar difficulties would appear to beset the defender of this answer to the Euthyphro dilemma if they were to appeal to any other supposed character trait of God's in this connection, for example His being loving. On the account, God could have made it the case that it became bad to be loving after a certain time. The other potentially worrying consequence of seeing morality as due to God's action is that it would seem to reduce the claim that God is good to the claim that He acts as He acts. Words must mean what their users ordinarily take them to mean and religious believers would surely consider themselves to be making a substantive utterance when they say that God is good, and one the truth of which provides reason for praising Him.

On the other hand, to say that moral values were independent of God would be to posit an ethical standard prior to God's actions, one with which His actions ought to conform. It would thus seem to threaten His sovereignty, freedom, and omnipotence. On such an account, it would seem to follow that God was not the source of all value and thus that God could no longer be thought of as that on which all other things depend. There would be something – indeed perhaps the thing of overriding importance – that was independent of Him, the moral law. As well as this threat to His sovereignty, the question would then arise whether the believer should see God's accordance with the moral law as accidental or necessary. If accidental, then it would seem to follow that we could not rest assured that God would not order us to torture children tomorrow. If necessary, then God would not be free to deviate from the moral law. Again, the believer would appear to lose the possibility of saying of God that He was good in a sense that would provide a reason for praising Him. This time though, the believer would also seem to lose God's omnipotence. We are free and can deviate from the moral order, yet God cannot. He would seem to be more restricted in His choices and actions than we are.

Can we find a middle ground between these two positions, free from their entanglements? Richard Swinburne may be presented as arguing that we can.¹ I think that Swinburne's picture is, in outline, the correct one, but that he obscures this outline, and thus the attractiveness of the picture, by the way he fills it in. I shall endeavour to paint a similar scene from a different and informative angle. Although the outline of the view thus elaborated is the same as Swinburne's, the resulting view is not one that he would recognise as his, primarily as it washes the category of necessary moral truths of any substantive colour. We shall see what

this amounts to in the next section. Later, we shall see what implications this change has for his solution to the Euthyphro dilemma. First, let us give the common outlines.

The starting point is the distinction between moral truths that are necessary (for example, it is good to pay one's debts) and those that are contingent (for example, it is good that Smith pay Jones £10). The solution to the Euthyphro dilemma is to take the second horn of the dilemma for necessary moral truths and the first for contingent ones. Necessary moral truths are true independently of God, but His conformity to them is no more of a restriction on His sovereignty, freedom, or omnipotence than is His conformity to necessary principles of logic. Contingent moral truths depend on God, but this does not have the unfortunate consequences it is often considered to have.

Let us then fill in the details, turning to necessary moral truths first.

The status of necessary moral truths

Necessary moral truths should be understood as necessary truths about moral concepts. They are logically or analytically necessary.² As such, they tell us no more about how the world ought to be than necessary truths about other concepts tell us about how the world is. For example, the necessary moral truth that 'if Jones is innocent, then he does not deserve to be hanged' tells us no more than the necessary marital truth that 'if Jones is going to be a life-long bachelor, then he will not marry my sister'. It is a necessary moral truth that it is good to pay one's debts, due to the fact that 'one's debts' is the name we have decided to give to whatever monies it is that one is under an obligation to pay people, and one's obligations are a sub-category of those acts which it is good for one to perform. However, knowing all of this will not guide one's actions unless one can bring a particular amount of money under the concept of a debt one has incurred. No particular action can be obligatory of logical necessity unless one picks it out under a description which entails that it is, and one's success in securing reference with such a description will always be a contingent matter. For example, paying Jones £10 is not of logical necessity obligatory for Smith. Paying Jones the £10 which Smith owes Jones and which he is easily able to pay without greater loss to anyone else is of logical necessity obligatory for Smith *if and only if* 'the £10 which Smith owes Jones and which he is easily able to pay without greater loss to anyone else' secures reference. Whether or not such a description refers obviously depends on many contingencies. If we allow ourselves, with Hume, to divide all the objects of human reason or enquiry into two kinds, to wit relations of ideas and matters of fact, then we might say that the truth of necessary moral truths is vouchsafed by their merely stating the relations between moral ideas and their not stating any moral facts.

Although Swinburne clearly states that necessary moral truths should be understood to be analytically or logically necessary, and thus, one might think, he is of the opinion that they do not state any moral facts, his choice of examples is far from illustrative of this. ‘Among the necessary moral truths one would expect to find general principles of conduct such as that one ought to care for one’s children, not punish the innocent, not tell lies (together with whatever qualifications are needed).’³ The parenthetical clause in the third of these examples renders it unsuitable for discussion. Necessarily, if one makes whatever qualifications are needed to make a given thing logically necessary, then that thing will be logically necessary. In discussion, Swinburne claims that the qualifications spoken of here were meant to be taken as ones given in ‘non-moral terms’. However, if so, the qualifications could never be sufficient to make it *analytically/logically* necessary that one ought not to tell lies given those qualifications, just as any description of the planets in non-mathematical terms could never be sufficient to make it *analytically/logically* necessary that there be nine of them. We shall return to this point in a moment. Of the first two of Swinburne’s examples, only the second seems to be a plausible contender for an analytically/logically necessary moral truth. The innocent may plausibly be defined as those who ought not to be punished (or defined in such a way as to entail this more or less immediately) if we assume the falsity of consequentialism, which may be legitimate if we further assume that if it is false, it is logically necessarily so. To render the example obviously necessary, i.e. to avoid begging such meta-ethical issues, we would need to change it to something more obviously analytic like ‘the innocent do not deserve punishment’. The first of Swinburne’s examples is that one ought to care for one’s children. If ‘one’s children’ were understood in a purely biological sense, such a claim could hardly be analytically/logically necessary. It would be a substantive and action-guiding principle of great importance. Only if ‘one’s children’ were to be taken in a rather forced way, so as to include or entail without further assumptions the idea that one’s children are amongst those to whom one has a duty of care, would the principle come out as analytically/logically necessary. Then, of course, it would not guide one’s conduct without the addition of information to the effect that a given person was – in this sense, not (or not just) the biological sense – one’s child.

Given that necessary moral truths are analytically or logically necessary and thus cannot guide our actions, providing us with ‘general principles of conduct’ is exactly what we should expect necessary moral truths *not* to do. Why then does Swinburne suggest that they will do this? Why are his putative examples of necessary moral truths so ill-chosen to illustrate the point that necessary moral truths merely state the relations between moral ideas? The answer is that Swinburne wants some necessary moral truths to do more than we have allowed; he wants some necessary moral truths to stretch out beyond the realm of relations of ideas and state substantial moral facts.

Swinburne fears that without substantive necessary moral truths we will not be able to get to contingent moral truths. According to Swinburne, contingent non-moral facts, which are created by God, generate moral obligations by their conjunction with necessary moral truths, which are uncreated and which state the substantial truths that these non-moral facts entail moral ones. Swinburne argues for this with what he calls his ‘supervenience argument’: this argument is really simply the intuition that two worlds exactly alike in all non-moral respects could not differ in moral ones.⁴ We do not need to examine this argument, or justify the claim that it is really simply an intuition, to observe that, if it is valid/sound, then the conclusion cannot be of use to him. If the sense of ‘could not’ in which two worlds identical in all non-moral properties could not differ in moral ones is an analytic/logical one, this could only be because one was not specifying the worlds in entirely non-moral properties in the first place; otherwise, whence the entailment? Alternatively, if the ‘could not’ is a non-analytic/logical could not, then the truth that two worlds identical in all non-moral properties could not differ in moral properties would indeed be a substantial truth, but it would not be an analytically/logically necessary one: it would be some form of metaphysical necessity. The entailment here, Swinburne encourages us to believe, can be a substantial one even though it is analytic/logical. However, this is the one thing it cannot be. The thing about supervenience theories is that they posit dependence without conceptual reducibility, whereas the thing about analytic/logical necessity is that its dependence is a matter of conceptual reducibility. If one can leave out all moral properties yet otherwise exhaustively describe two worlds, then there must remain the logical possibility that the two worlds differ in moral respects; if one cannot conceptually separate out non-moral properties from moral ones whilst describing two worlds in this way, one cannot even perform the thought experiment that is Swinburne’s supervenience argument. Although we need not decide which of these is the case in order to proceed with our main line of argument at this stage, giving reasons to suppose it is the latter will clear the ground for the position that we will take on the status of contingent moral truths in the next section, so we shall pause for a moment to do so.

Interestingly, Swinburne would not accept the parallel ‘supervenience argument’ for mental properties as related to physical ones. Swinburne would contend that it is logically and metaphysically possible that two worlds identical in all physical respects might differ in all mental ones. In the first, let us say this, world, you are thinking as you read this paper. In the second world, your correlate – although he or she looks exactly like you and has the same physical processes going on in his or her brain – is not thinking at all and has never had any mental life whatsoever. Let us say that the same is true *mutatis mutandis* for all residents of the second world; in the terminology of the literature, they are all zombies. This, however, is the only difference (with the possible exception of moral differences) between that world and this. We may ask ‘Are these two worlds

to be counted as identical in all non-moral respects?'. If we answer 'yes', then we will – according to the supervenience argument which Swinburne does endorse – have to say that they must be identical in all moral respects, but this is implausible on any reading of the 'must'. If x is a zombie, then it cannot be bad if he or she has a large electric current passed through his or her body as it will not cause him or her any pain whatsoever. However, if x is not a zombie, then the passing of such a current might very well cause x severe pain and thus be bad for x . Suppose then that we count the 'qualia-tative'⁵ feel of experiences as 'non-moral' properties of the world, so that to describe fully a world in 'non-moral' properties – in the way we are encouraged to by the supervenience argument Swinburne requires – would entail that we specify how certain physical changes affect the mental lives of the residents of the world. Having stretched the net of 'non-moral' properties this wide, then indeed it would not be plausible to contend that a world the same in all 'non-moral' properties could differ in moral ones, but this would only be because the net of 'non-moral' properties would now be catching properties with distinctively moral implications. The 'qualia-tative' feel of experiences can sometimes analytically/logically entail moral facts. It is analytically/logically necessary that severe pain is bad for people and thus that the infliction of it is something which one has prima facie moral reason to avoid. To think otherwise requires one to hold either that meaning can be separated from use or that the meanings of a term such as 'severe pain' can be given by its use in genuinely non-moral contexts. However, neither of these positions is tenable.⁶ In short, one cannot paint a picture of a world devoid of moral colour yet detailed enough to make plausible the claim that two worlds alike to that extent in non-moral respects must be alike in moral respects. But if one cannot do this, then – though his supervenience argument does not work – the fear that motivated Swinburne to believe in substantive necessary moral truths must be ungrounded: there is no abyss for substantive necessary moral truths to bridge because there is no fact/value distinction – terms like 'severe pain' already 'span the gap'.

We are now in a position to say that given that necessary moral truths are analytically/logically necessary and insubstantial, the objections to taking the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma for them can easily be seen to be misguided.

Necessary moral truths do not constitute a moral law independent of God, which might threaten His sovereignty. They are just the laws of logic applied to moral concepts. Taking the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma for necessary moral truths thus places no more of a limitation on God's sovereignty or His omnipotence than we are already placing if we suppose, as all philosophers but Descartes have supposed, that God cannot do the logically impossible. That God cannot do the logically impossible when it comes to the concepts of morals – make a given action have a given moral property and not have that moral property at the

same time – should be no more worrying to classical theists than that He cannot do the logically impossible when it comes to the concepts of physics, chemistry, history, and so forth.

The suggested restriction on God is no more a restriction than it is a restriction on God that if he is to keep Jones a bachelor he must keep him an unmarried man. If necessary moral truths are analytic, the first difficulty for the theist in grasping the second horn in respect of them disappears.⁷

Importantly, this would not have been the case, *pace* Swinburne, had some necessary moral truths been substantive action-guiding principles, for then God's sovereignty would have been limited – His actions curtailed in substantive ways – by His accordance with them, their content being independent of His will. Prior to any decision of His, there would have been substantive principles to which He was required to conform. Taking the second horn of the dilemma for necessary moral truths does not constrain God's free action or make His goodness in any way contingent. That God has to create a world where, if a given action at a given time has a given moral property, that action does not also not have that property at that time, obviously does not constrain in any way His choice of what, if any, world to create, what moral properties to assign to what things, and how, if at all, He interacts with that world. Again, this would not have been the case had some necessary moral truths been substantive, for then His free choice would have been restricted by His knowledge of them or we would need to say that it was only contingent that He was perfectly good. We could have bought back His perfect freedom only at the price of renouncing His essential moral perfection. Thus necessary moral truths, such as 'either capital punishment is always wrong or it is sometimes right', leave the content or substance of morality, whether capital punishment actually is always wrong or whether it is sometimes right, undecided. It is open for the classical theist to maintain that this content or substance – what we shall call simply 'morality' henceforth – is contingent on God's completely unrestricted free choice; that all principles of conduct are as contingent as all principles of physics, chemistry, and so forth.

Let us turn then to consider the contingent moral truths of morality. In order to meet the objection that it makes morality, arbitrary and any description of God as good, vacuous, we need to consider the degree of objectivity allowed for by viewing morality as a part of God's creation. This we shall do in the next section.

The status of contingent moral truths

Swinburne makes a meta-ethical assumption in his characterization of the contingent moral truths that God has created, which he calls his assumption of the objectivity of morality. He is worth quoting at some length.

My assumption of metaethics is that expressions apparently attributing to things, goodness, obligatoriness, etc. (e.g. 'capital punishment is always wrong') are statements which are true or false independently of human beliefs or attitudes

towards those things; to call an action good is to attribute a property to it, not *merely* to express approval of it, commend it, or something similar. The status of ethical expressions is of course a very large philosophical issue on which it would be inappropriate to argue for a conclusion in an article devoted to another topic. Yet discussion of that topic is impossible without some view about the status of ethical expressions. In consequence I have to make an assumption about this and I shall make the one stated – that expressions apparently attributing to things goodness, obligatoriness, etc. are statements which are true or false independently of human beliefs or attitudes towards those things. I assume, in other words, that these are propositions of first-order ethics which have a truth-value, whether or not men recognize that truth-value, just as bodies are heavy or square or electrically charged whether or not men know about them. The assumption does have a certain intrinsic plausibility. Torturing innocent children just for fun, one is inclined to say, is wicked whatever I or anyone else thinks about the matter – just as the earth is a planet of the Sun, whether or not men recognize or approve this.⁸

Swinburne assumes then that moral facts are in some sense objective facts. The wickedness of torturing innocent children just for fun is, in some sense, a fact about torturing innocent children just for fun, not a fact about what he or anyone else thinks about such activities. Swinburne obviously thinks that most people would agree with him. It is especially interesting that he feels the need for the adjective ‘innocent’ and the clause that the torture is ‘just for fun’ in order to secure this agreement. People, one might think, would agree with him that torturing children was wicked regardless of the children’s guilt or the torturer’s motives as happily as they would agree with him that it was so regardless of whatever he or anyone else thought about it. Indeed, I venture that most people would extend the prohibition on torturing to adults, seeing torturing *per se* as wicked. Let us pause for a moment to examine the contention that torturing is wicked, whether it needs to be hedged around with qualifications of the sort Swinburne introduces in order for its truth to be accepted without contention, and whether the fact that we think that it is true independently of whatever Swinburne, or anyone else, thinks about it does indeed support his assumption of objectivism. Doing so will help us to appreciate the importance of remaining conceptually clear-headed in separating out necessary moral truths from contingent moral truths.

How is torture defined? One might plausibly suggest that torture may be defined as the morally unjustified intentional infliction of severe pain.⁹ If so, of necessity torture would be wicked in the richest sense of the term as it would produce severe pain, something which we saw in the previous section is a necessarily bad effect, and would produce it in a morally unjustified way. Of analytic/logical necessity, a torturer, *qua* torturer, would be a blameworthy person doing a bad thing. This definition’s being that with which we tacitly operate would explain our intuitions about the following examples.

Let us imagine two situations. In each, a man holds a small child to a table whilst, without the aid of anaesthetic, he sets about removing the child’s appendix

with a blunt carving knife. In the first, the man is removing the child's appendix either (a) just for fun (he likes seeing children suffer), or (b) in order to punish the child for some crime. In the second, the man is performing an emergency appendectomy with the best implement he can find, in the knowledge that if he does not do so the child's appendix will burst and the child die. The child undergoes the same terribly painful experiences in each situation. I suggest that we would regard the first situation as an example of torture regardless of whether (a) or (b) was the case, and we would not regard the second as an example of torture. This behaviour fits with the suggested definition, as the man's behaviour in the first situation is morally unjustified regardless of whether (a) or (b) is the case, whereas the man's behaviour in the second situation is morally justified. Does this establish then that torture *per se* is wicked in the richest sense of that term?

Sadly, it does not, as one might plausibly maintain that torture should be defined simply as the intentional infliction of severe pain and argue that the moral justification for the man's behaviour in the second of my cases is a distracting irrelevancy. The pain induced in the second situation is a foreseen but unintended consequence of the man's pursuit of another (as it happens laudable) end, whereas in the first it is intended. In the first case, the pain is the means to the man's end, whether it be (a) or (b). This, one might argue, is what makes the first situation torture and the second not. One might draw support for this 'ethically streamlined' understanding of torture from the putative fact that we seem to have reasonable argument about whether or not torture can be morally justified in some circumstances. Sensible people have conflicting views on how policemen should behave if they reasonably suppose that the only way they can find out the location of a bomb, which if it explodes will kill many innocent people, is by beating up the bomber.

On either the non-streamlined or the streamlined understanding of torture, torture is necessarily bad as it is the intentional infliction of severe pain, and severe pain is in itself necessarily bad (even though it might produce or be a by-product of the production of a great good, e.g. the saving of many innocent lives). On the non-streamlined understanding, it would also be the case that torture could necessarily never be morally justified: any intentional infliction of severe pain which one could justify would, *ipso facto*, not be torture. On either understanding torturers are doing a bad thing. On the non-streamlined understanding, torturers are also of necessity blameworthy; on the streamlined understanding, they are not. Which of these definitions most adequately reflects ordinary usage? I suggest that the non-streamlined one does. I contend that were we to decide that inflicting severe pain on bombers to coerce them into revealing the whereabouts of their bombs was morally justified, then we would not call such procedures torture. We would call them by some other name. This contention gains support from a study of the attempts of police forces and governments who employ these methods to justify their actions. They do not admit to 'torture', but then try to justify it; they

admit to ‘rigorous interrogation methods’ or some such and then try to justify those.

Consider also the following case, which I believe clinches this point. A certain child has a medical condition which is resulting in the build-up of dangerous toxins in his blood; if they continue to build up unchecked, he will die. The only way in which these toxins can be eliminated and the process reversed is if another chemical is released by the child’s body and this chemical will only be released if the child is subjected to the severe pain of having an appendix removed without anaesthetic. The toxins have built up to a critical level. Action needs to be taken now if the child is to be saved. As it happens, only one person is in the vicinity and the only means available are a table, a blunt carving knife, and a dose of anaesthetic. Knowing the medical facts, this person therefore pushes the anaesthetic to one side, holds the child down on the table as before, and removes his appendix with the knife. The pain is, in this case, intentional – a means to the (laudable) end that this person wishes to achieve. Nevertheless, we would, I posit, not describe this person as a torturer. Rather, he or she shows the sort of moral courage that we all hope we would be able to display if faced with such a horrible situation. If so, this can only be because the non-streamlined understanding of torture is that with which we operate. Torture is of analytic/logical necessity the morally unjustified intentional production of severe pain, a necessarily bad effect. Thus, ‘torture is wicked’ is a morally insubstantial claim.

To return now to the meta-ethical assumption of objectivism, we must notice that the example of torturing innocent children just for fun being wicked is an example of a necessary moral truth. (If one took wicked to mean merely bad, this would be so even on the streamlined understanding of torture.) It is a truth about the relationship between moral ideas; it is not, on any account, an attempt to use those ideas either to describe or to prescribe anything. Thus, its truth (or perhaps ‘correctness’ on non-descriptivist accounts) being independent of whatever Swinburne or anyone else believes about it would be granted by holders of even the most extreme form of subjectivism or prescriptivism. The independence of its truth-value or ‘correctness’ does nothing to support Swinburne’s meta-ethical assumption of objectivism.

We may suppose that my committing myself to an action’s being wrong is simply my expressing or stating my distaste for it or my committing myself not to perform relevantly similar actions in future and encouraging you to similarly restrain yourself. However, even on such suppositions, there are rules for the correct use of moral language which are independent of any particular language user. ‘Torture’, I have argued, is the name that people who know how to use the term employ to refer to whatever intentional infliction of severe pain they consider incapable of moral justification. On an extreme subjectivist model, considering an act incapable of moral justification, whatever Swinburne or anyone else says, amounts to having a distaste for it strong enough not to be affected by whatever

Swinburne or anyone else says. Similarly, on a prescriptivist model, considering an act incapable of moral justification, whatever Swinburne or anyone else says, amounts to having a disposition always to discourage the committing of it that will remain whatever Swinburne or anyone else says. That we all agree that torturing may be called wicked, independently of whatever Swinburne or anyone else says about it, is thus merely evidence that we ourselves know the meanings of the words, and we know that these meanings are independent of whatever Swinburne or anyone else thinks about them. It is not evidence that we subscribe to an objectivist view.

The failure of this example of Swinburne's to support his point becomes obvious if we take a parallel case from an area where extreme subjectivism seems intuitively right, preferences in matters of gastronomic taste. The fact that we incline to think that the truth of 'any drink one would truly describe as "by far the most disgusting thing I have ever drunk"' would not be one's favourite drink' is independent of whatever Swinburne or anyone else says about the matter, obviously does not provide evidence in favour of objectivism in matters of gastronomic taste. At this point in his argument, Swinburne ought to have used an example of a moral statement that he could plausibly maintain we incline to think is true or false, but only contingently so, such as his earlier example, 'capital punishment is always wrong'. The fact, if it is one, that we think that *this* is either true or false independently of whatever he or anyone else believes about it would indeed be evidence that we believe that the morality of capital punishment is more objective than are matters of gastronomic taste.

Let us therefore shelve for a moment our discovery that 'torture is wrong' – as an analytic/logically necessary truth – is morally insubstantial (it will obviously be of use to us later in arguing against the claim that on our theory God could have made torture morally acceptable), and suppose that Swinburne would be happy to use an example like 'capital punishment is always wrong' at this stage in making his case for the assumption of objectivism. Let us further suppose, firstly, that we do think that first-order ethical statements like 'capital punishment is always wrong' have a truth-value and we think that this truth-value is independent of whatever Swinburne or anyone else thinks about the matter and, secondly, that we are right in so thinking. The supposition that we think this way is empirically substantial; the supposition that we are right to do so is meta-ethically substantial – it amounts to an assumption of the falsity of non-descriptivist subjectivism and prescriptivism, i.e. to an assumption of the truth of descriptivism. To defend either this empirical or this meta-ethical supposition would be to embark upon an investigation that would take us beyond the scope of this paper. Even so, the way we understand our supposed endorsement of descriptivism requires some further investigation here, as our understanding of this will shape how we see God's creation of the contingent moral truths of morality, and thus affect how we fashion our solution to the Euthyphro dilemma.

The assumption of the truth of descriptivism is not obviously and immediately equivalent to Swinburne's meta-ethical assumption of objectivism, as we may ask whether, when it is said that the truth-value of 'capital punishment is always wrong' is independent of whatever Swinburne or anyone else thinks about the matter, the 'anyone' should be taken to mean anyone or everyone. The independence of the truth-value of 'capital punishment is always wrong' from human beliefs or attitudes which we are positing could either be understood in a weaker sense, as an independence from any particular human's belief or attitude, or in a stronger sense, as an independence from humans' beliefs or attitudes. Swinburne's choice of examples in the passage cited – a body's being heavy, square, electrically charged – leave his own position unclear, although from what he says elsewhere,¹⁰ and in discussion, it would appear that he would incline towards the stronger form of the assumption of objectivism. We shall come to his examples in a moment. Before doing so, it is worth pausing to consider an example of a fact which would be independent of human beliefs and attitudes only in the weaker way. This will enable us to see why the stronger form of the assumption of objectivism may be more attractive to the classical theist, even though it is not needed – *pace* Swinburne – in order to solve the Euthyphro dilemma.

A piece of clothing's being fashionable is, I suggest, a fact about it independent of any one human's beliefs or attitudes, but not independent of humans' beliefs and attitudes. To echo the passage from Swinburne given above, expressions attributing to things the property of being fashionable (e.g. 'these gentlemen's bell-bottomed flares with embroidery flowers on the pockets are very chic') are statements which are true or false independently of any particular human's beliefs or attitudes towards those things. To call a pair of trousers chic is to attribute a property to it, not *merely* to express approval of it, commend it, or something similar. Propositions of first-order fashion have a truth-value whether or not people recognize that truth-value. The assumption does have a certain intrinsic plausibility. Men wearing bell-bottomed flares with embroidery flowers on the pockets, one is inclined to say, are unfashionable (in the Great Britain of 2002) whatever I or anyone else thinks about the matter.

In considering this example, we will have been struck by the fact that men wearing bell-bottomed flares with embroidery flowers on the pockets are not unfashionable whatever *everyone* else thinks about the matter. Were everyone else to think that such gentlemen's trousers were fashionable, *ipso facto*, they would become so. The truth or falsity of an attribution of the property of being chic to a pair of trousers may thus appear to be a matter of whether or not one's attitude agrees with the majority. Other facts are certainly determined by a simple numbers. 'X is the most popular political personality' has a truth-value independently of what I or any one else thinks: it is determined by what the majority or largest minority of people within the implicit domain think. If the majority or largest minority of people within that domain prefer X to every other political

personality, ipso facto, the proposition is true. Fashion is, I suggest, more complicated. There is a fashion industry, a group of people who collectively form the 'true judges' of the standard of taste in fashion and, whilst their standard may not be that of the majority or even that of the largest minority, it determines the truth-value of first-order fashion statements. It is not a necessary truth that most people or the largest minority of people cannot be unfashionable, even if it is a necessary truth that most or the largest minority of the fashion industry cannot be unfashionable.¹¹

If morality were not independent of individual human's beliefs and attitudes to any extent, in other words if a full-blown subjectivism where values were relativized to individuals were true, the Euthyphro dilemma could still be solved within Swinburne's framework.¹² Again, if morality was only independent of human beliefs and attitudes in one of the variants of the weaker sense of the assumption of objectivism, the Euthyphro dilemma could still be solved within his framework. On either account, attitude facts would determine (in a more or less complicated way) value facts and God could have ordained that other attitude facts obtained in which case other value facts would have obtained. Just as the contingent fashion fact that, at least for men, flares are not chic in the Great Britain of 2002 depends on contingent facts about people's attitudes, so the contingent moral fact that capital punishment is always wrong (or sometimes right) in the Great Britain of 2002 would depend on contingent facts about people's attitudes. In short, Hume, however one reads him, could have accepted this solution to the Euthyphro dilemma as readily as Butler.

We have allowed ourselves to suppose with what I suggested was common opinion that morality is independent of human beliefs and attitudes at least in the weaker sense of Swinburne's meta-ethical assumption of objectivism. Let us briefly sketch a worry that one might have in resting only with the weaker form of objectivity. The worry, as it would strike the classical theist in this connection, would be that if being good were simply being to my taste or to the inter-subjective standard of taste of my society or some section of it, then God's being good would simply be His being agreeable to the relevant people, and this does not seem the sort of property that could be a *reason* for praising Him. In general terms, the worry is that the weaker reading does not seem to give us *enough* objectivity.

In matters of morality, we incline to think that society, and any subset of it, could be wrong just as much as any individual. Fashions change with the times. Moral truth (if not our perception of it) does not. Flares were once fashionable; now they are not. Slavery was once thought to be morally acceptable; now it is not. We incline to think that the latter change, in contrast to the former, represents a cognitive improvement in our condition. Fashions change with geography. Morals do not. In 1933, brown shirts and jackboots may have been fashionable in Germany and not in Great Britain. If so, neither would have been 'right' or 'wrong' by reference to any transcending standard. At that time, killing Jews for being such

might have been considered morally justifiable in Germany and considered morally unjustifiable in Great Britain but if so, we would incline to think, the Germans were wrong and the British were right, the implication being that we do suppose some transcending standard. (We have already allowed ourselves to assume the falsity of non-descriptivist theories, such as emotivism and prescriptivism, and thus that the British being right does not amount to our tendency to say ‘Hurrah for our chaps!’ or ‘Let’s be British about it’.) Our intuition is that, even if Hitler had won the war and everyone now thought that killing Jews for being such was morally acceptable, it would still not be morally acceptable: everyone would be making a mistake. If the above does represent our intuitions, then we must be assuming that moral facts are independent not only of any one’s beliefs or attitudes, but also of everyone’s beliefs and attitudes. We must be inclining to endorse the meta-ethical assumption of objectivity in the stronger sense, assuming that moral facts are more objective than are all matters of taste or fashion. Let us assume then that the classical theist would feel compelled to take the stronger form of the meta-ethical assumption, if not in order to solve the Euthyphro dilemma, then for these or other reasons. Henceforth, we will take it that first-order ethical statements, such as ‘capital punishment is always wrong’, are assumed, and correctly assumed, by the classical theist to have a truth-value which is independent of what any or every human thinks about them.

The sort of strong objectivity which we are now positing first-order ethical statements as having is itself capable of a stronger and a weaker reading. There are two sorts of facts of which the strong form of objectivism is true: those that are independent of humans entirely (for example, the fact that carbon has two isotopes) and those that, whilst independent of humans’ beliefs and attitudes, depend on other properties of humans (for example, the fact that the human appendix is redundant). Carbon would have two isotopes whether or not humanity had ever evolved or if we had evolved differently, whereas the human appendix would neither have been redundant or useful if humans had never evolved, but it might have been useful had we evolved differently. If one thought that the truth-values of first-order ethical statements were independent of humans entirely, one would endorse the strong reading of the strong form of objectivism. If, on the other hand, one thought that the truth-values of first-order ethical statements, whilst independent of humans’ beliefs and attitudes, were not independent of humans entirely, one would endorse only the weaker reading of the strong form of objectivism. Again, whilst either allows the Euthyphro dilemma to be solved, one’s solution will be shaped by whether one takes the stronger or weaker reading of the strong form of objectivism, and we must therefore look to see which is most plausible.

Let us pause briefly to clarify our use of the term ‘human’. It might have been objected to what was said in the previous paragraph that humans *could not* have evolved differently. If ‘they’ had done so, ‘they’ would have been a different

species. Thus, a person who superficially looked exactly like a human, but in whom the appendix performed a useful function, would not be a human. I do not think that biologists would divide species up this way, but we do not need to decide on this issue. 'Human' hitherto, we may take it, has served for 'person'. Were there to be people whose appendices were useful to them or people who were not biologically human, e.g. Martians, we may take it that, if our endorsement of the assumption of strong objectivism is right, the truth-value of statements such as capital punishment is always wrong would be independent of their beliefs and attitudes too. (Some philosophers deny that there could be people who were not human, but their position seems no more defensible than one which denied that there could be people who were not white Anglo-Saxon males, so we will not address it here.) The distinction between humans and persons is important for the rest of the argument. Let us therefore restrict the use of the word 'human' to a narrow biological sense, so that Martians, were they to exist, would not count as human, and use the words 'person' and 'people' in a sense wide enough to mean that Martians, were they to exist, might count as persons/people.

Swinburne's examples (a body's being heavy, square, and electrically charged) are far from ideal in indicating what interpretation we should give to his meta-ethical assumption. Would he endorse the weak or the strong reading of the strong form of objectivism? Is the truth-value of first-order ethical statements independent solely from persons' beliefs and attitudes, from persons per se, or from humans per se? An object's being heavy would, in day-to-day discourse, naturally be taken to be a fact independent of any individual person's beliefs and attitudes, of persons' beliefs and attitudes in general, but not of humans per se. An object's being heavy is its having great weight, and what counts as a great weight is relative to human abilities (and the force of gravity).¹³ Stereotypically, a feather would not be considered heavy whereas an elephant would be, as the former can be lifted by the average human without inconvenience, whereas the latter cannot. Whether or not something is heavy depends then on general truths about humans. Were humans to become much stronger generally, things that are heavy now would cease to be so. As it stands however, given the similarities in human abilities that there are, anyone who maintained without qualification that an ordinary elephant was not heavy would have made a false statement. Even were they able to lift it without any appreciable strain, this would simply be evidence that they had the unusual ability to lift a heavy thing without inconvenience; it would not show that the elephant was not heavy or was not 'heavy for them' (it might show that it did not feel heavy for them). The elephant's being heavy thus is independent of any individual person's beliefs or attitudes. It is also independent of persons' beliefs and attitudes: it is possible to imagine that the few people who had encountered elephants might have successfully promulgated the belief that they were filled with helium and thus not heavy at all. It is also independent of any individual human's abilities. But the elephant's being heavy is not independent of humans.

Swinburne's next example is that of a body's being square. In contrast to its being heavy, whether or not a given body were square (cubic?), whilst independent of any particular person's beliefs or attitudes, would seem to depend on persons' beliefs and attitudes. Whether or not an object is cubic depends on whether or not people consider the irregularities on the surface(s) to be important. Given that no body is perfectly cubic, a particular body's being correctly counted as such is a matter of convention based on people's interests, interests which may vary with context. In the context of a game, the manifest irregularities on the surfaces of dice, made so that there might be a clear number of dots on each of their sides, are not sufficient to sustain a charge that they are not cubic; in the context of a delicate scientific instrument, similar holes might well be. Swinburne's final example, a body's being electrically charged, seems to be of a fact which is as independent of people and humans as anything could be. However humans had evolved (or even if there were no people at all),¹⁴ positrons, electrons, and the like would still have the charges that they do.

I suggest that we incline to think that whilst independent of people's beliefs and attitudes, moral facts are not independent of people. If we were told that there was something in the next room that was morally obliged to act in a certain way, we would have been told, *inter alia*, that there was a person in the next room. If we were told that an earthquake had vigorously shaken an entirely uninhabited area, we would regard this as a matter of complete indifference, morally speaking. There are no obligations that are not obligations on people; there are no good or bad things that are not good or bad things for people.¹⁵ A body's being electrically charged thus does not seem a close analogy for the sort of independence of people's beliefs and attitudes which we are positing. A body's being electrically charged is too independent – it is independent of people entirely. Given that no body is perfectly cubic, then a particular body's being cubic, as we use the term, is dependent on how important the irregularities in its surface(s) are thought to be. A body's being cubic thus does not seem a close analogy for the sort of independence of people's beliefs and attitudes which we are positing. A body's being cubic is too dependent – it depends on people's beliefs and attitudes. A body's being heavy seems to be a good analogy. It is independent of people's beliefs and attitudes, but not independent of people.

As it happens, the only people we know of are humans, and thus the average person's ability to lift objects is the same as the average human's ability to lift objects. However, there could have been people who were not human, Martians for example. If Martians were stronger than humans, then what was heavy for a human might not be heavy for a Martian. Whilst we would describe a human with the ability to lift an elephant easily as a human with an ability to lift a heavy thing easily, were Martians generally able to lift elephants easily, we would say that elephants were not heavy for Martians (not just that they did not feel heavy for Martians). It is most plausible to think of contingent moral truths as similarly

species variable, i.e. to endorse the weaker reading of the strong version of Swinburne's meta-ethical assumption of objectivism. Had God not acted so as to produce us as people who, due to being human, normally and thus normatively have certain abilities, reactions, beliefs, and attitudes, then the truth-value of contingent moral statements about us would have been different.

The consequence of this view, that every substantial moral truth could have been different, is not immediately obvious. We will be assisted in seeing it by considering at greater length a species of people who are not human. Let us suppose for a moment then that there are Martians and that they generally look and behave like humans but have a different physiological construction. Let us call an amount of electricity that would kill a human in an excruciatingly painful way were it to be passed through his or her body a 'large amount'. One result of the differences in Martian physiology is that the passage through their bodies of a large amount of electricity produces no damage or discomfort, but instead a mildly pleasant tickling sensation. (Obviously, given this, Martians might be expected to consider what we have called a large amount of electricity a very small amount, but we need not worry about that.) Another result is that if a Martian has either of his or her hands shaken, this induces paroxysms of agony that are always fatal after only a few moments.

Shaking hands with the sort of people we know, humans, when we meet them is, in many cultures and contexts, polite. Even in those where it is not, it is not considered a great evil. Attaching electrodes to the bodies of the sort of people we know, humans, and passing a large electric current through them is considered not only impolite, but also a great evil. It is obvious that these moral truths are contingent upon human physiology and, in the case of shaking hands, culture. Martian society, we might imagine, would be governed by the opposite rules. As Swinburne puts it,

Why it is wrong for me to stick pins into you is that you are so made that sticking pins into you hurts terribly, and so is wrong, and it is God who has made you thus ... and so has made it obligatory on me not to stick pins into you.¹⁶

The truth-values of first-order ethical statements thus depend on biological facts about how people are constructed. They can also depend on culture. Within the parameters imposed by common features in human nature, we can construct divergent moral codes. It is necessarily true that it is bad to make people uncomfortable; it is contingently true that greeting people in certain ways can cause them to feel uncomfortable. What strikes people as an overly familiar form of greeting depends on culture and circumstance. One human society might construct the code that kissing someone on the lips was an acceptable way of greeting someone one had not met before; another might construct the code that it was not, but that shaking hands was to be preferred. These (what are sometimes called) 'minor morals' are objective only in the weaker sense of the meta-ethical assumption of

objectivism: they are independent of any one's beliefs or attitudes but not of everyone's beliefs and attitudes. As such, minor morals change with time, context, and culture. As well as contingent moral truths which stem from our constitution as human beings, there are then contingent minor moral truths which stem from the fact that people have organized themselves and their societies in different ways. Martian cultures would, given the biological facts essential to being Martian necessarily, see shaking hands as a great evil, but may or may not have a rule seeing the passing of a large electric current through the bodies of people when you meet them as polite. It may be that in some Martian cultures attaching the necessary electrodes was considered an invasion of the Martian's privacy whereas in others it was considered the merest of friendly gestures, which it would be grossly negligent not to perform on meeting someone.

God's non-arbitrariness

An analogy will help us in drawing the strands together and applying the above points to the Euthyphro dilemma.

Let us imagine that we are creating a board game. Supposing that we have already made the pieces and the board, there will still be decisions to be made about the rules. The same pieces and board might be used for several games. A Monopoly board and pieces can be used to play games other than Monopoly, e.g. 'anti-Monopoly' where each player starts with the same amount of money and the winner is the first to lose all of it. However, if we have already made the pieces and the board, then the number of rules open for us to choose between will be to some extent constrained by their natures. For example, supposing us to have made only four pieces, we would not be able to choose the rule 'The game must have at least six players, of whom each should start with a non-shared piece'. This is a logical consequence of the number of pieces we have contingently made, not a contingent one. It is logically necessary that if there are only four pieces, then six people cannot have one non-shared piece each. It is contingent whether there are only four pieces. The pattern on the board will similarly constrain our choice of rules. If in creating our game we are starting from scratch, with no pieces or board as yet, then the only principles restraining us are what might be called the 'bare principles of logic' – for example, that we cannot create a game where pieces always move clockwise and always move anti-clockwise around the board – and these bare principles are, I suggest, not properly thought of as restraints at all.

Thus it was with God's creation of morality. Prior to the creation of humans and the universe, the pieces and the board if we assume there are no non-human people, the only principles which restrained what morality He could create were the 'bare principles of logic', i.e. He was under no restraint at all. Having created humans with the contingent physiology that they have, this entailed that passing a certain electric current through their bodies would always be bad as it would

always produce severe pain (Humean miracles aside), which is necessarily bad. This is analogous to the maker of a game who has created a certain number of pieces or a style of board that constrains the rules he might then choose, in that it is a logically necessary consequence of a contingent fact. It is logically necessary that if passing a certain electric current through peoples' bodies produces severe pain, then it is bad to pass that amount of electricity through peoples' bodies. But these substantive moral truths are contingent: they could have been otherwise because people might not have been humans; people might have been Martians. When it comes to the minor morals of the universe that He creates, God is in the position of the maker of the game who has made the pieces and the board and now, whilst constrained by their nature, can choose between a number of different rules, for example the rules of Monopoly and the rules of 'anti-Monopoly'. Thus, were He to want to, He could make shaking hands on various occasions obligatory for human people without performing Humean miracles or affecting human nature at all.¹⁷ Of course, He may also have delegated the power to affect these matters to the pieces themselves, i.e. to us.

We are now in a position to meet the objection that seeing moral truths as part of God's creation entails that God could make torture morally acceptable. The account does not entail this. Torture is so defined that it is of analytic/logical necessity morally unjustifiable and bad and thus not even God could make it morally justifiable or good. Demanding that we say He could do so would be like demanding that we say He could make a married bachelor.

It is no restriction on God's power that he cannot do the logically impossible. If it is logically necessary, as we have claimed, that *certain* actions ... are wrong, then God can no more make them obligatory than he can make a man both married and a bachelor at the same time.¹⁸

God could certainly have made or could yet make passing an electric current of a certain amount – an amount which actually has always caused and will always cause severe pain in humans – through a child's body good. Were God to have created people with a biological construction similar to that we have posited of Martians, or change our biological properties, then passing a large electric current through a child's body would have been or could become good, morally acceptable, or even obligatory. But there is nothing counter-intuitive about this for then of course passing such an electric current through a child's body would no longer be torturing that child. After all, a magician can make sawing a lady in half good, morally acceptable, or obligatory (supposing him to have freely entered into a contract to saw a lady in half as a part of his show) *if* he can make it not have the consequences it would usually be expected to have in humans.

God's goodness

What of the objection that such an account would rob us of the possibility of substantively saying of God that He was good and thus of the possibility of providing a reason for us to praise Him? We have seen that given that God created us as human people, rather than Martians or some such, there are some contingent moral principles which dictate how we ought to act towards other people. If this is right, then to say that God is good is to say that He acts in His dealings with us now in accordance with these moral principles – that is what ‘good’ means for us. Strictly speaking then, this would be what was required for Him to be good to us. For Him to be good *tout court* would entail that, in His dealings with Martians if there were any, He acted in accordance with those moral principles relevant to Martians, and so on for Venusians and so forth. The point is easy to see if we suppose that humans have met Martians and each knows about the others’ physiology. If so, then a particular human on meeting a particular Martian would obviously be under an obligation to restrain himself or herself from shaking hands with that Martian. Conversely, the Martian would obviously have to resist what for him or her might be a natural tendency to attach electrodes to the human’s body and pass a large electric current through it. Is this a contingent moral truth? It is contingent upon the differences in their physiology. However, given these differences, then, as severe pain is necessarily bad, it is necessary. This is analogous to its being necessary, given that there are only four pieces, that six players cannot each have a non-shared piece. It is a necessary moral truth that if a given action would cause severe pain for a given person, then that action is a bad one. It is a contingent moral truth that passing a given amount of electricity through a person’s body causes them severe pain. This is where the wisdom of Jesus’ injunction, that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us, overlaps with that of George Bernard Shaw’s injunction, that we *not* do unto others as we would have them do unto us, as their tastes might be different: there are limits to the differences in tastes humans may have, limits imposed by their common human nature.

Could God have chosen not so to constrain Himself in His dealings with His creatures? I shall follow Swinburne in arguing that He could not. However, I shall argue (*contra* Swinburne) that this inability is no limitation on His freedom or omnipotence; neither does it entail that He is less worthy of worship.

Again, Swinburne is worth quoting at some length. This is what he says:

God’s omniscience (given that he is unconstrained) limits his omnipotence by limiting what he can set himself to do. If he chose to do an evil action he could do it. But being omniscient, he cannot chose to do it. This is because he will know that the action is an evil action, and so that he cannot by doing that action do an action which is better than any alternative (which is, by our previous argument, what every agent not influenced by non-rational forces seeks to do), and so he

cannot do the action. It may at first seem surprising that knowledge can limit what we can set ourselves to do but a few mundane examples will easily show that it does. If I really know that I cannot jump to the moon, I cannot try to do it. No action of mine would properly be described as setting about jumping to the moon or trying to jump to the moon. I could only be said to be pretending to jump to the moon, or to be going through the motions which I would go through if I were trying to jump to the moon. If I really know that the bus has gone, I cannot try to catch it. My running to the bus stop must be described in some other way.¹⁹

The first sentence suggests that, on the account, we should say that God's omnipotence is limited by His knowledge and His not being constrained by external factors, but how *could* one's unconstrained power be limited by knowledge of an impossibility? Swinburne's later examples seem to suggest that a recognition of the impossibility of success in an action limits one in that it prevents one from *trying* to perform that action. If I were to recognize that keeping Jones a bachelor whilst marrying him to my sister was logically impossible, then I could not even try to do so. Prior to gaining such knowledge, I would have been able to try. However, I would suggest that one's not being able to try to perform a logically impossible task is no limitation on one's power. The 'power' to set oneself to bring about logically impossible states of affairs is the 'power' to be confused about what one is doing and necessarily frustrated in one's aims. As such, it is not properly thought of as power at all – rather, it is a weakness. God's being unable to try to do that which cannot be done, even by God, is thus not a limitation on His omnipotence. If anything, it shows how God's omnipotence entails His omniscience.

As Aquinas put it:

To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore, it is that God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence. Now it is true that the philosopher says that God *can deliberately do what is evil*. But this must be understood either on condition, the antecedent of which is impossible – as, for instance, if we were to say that God can do evil things if He will. For there is no reason why a conditional proposition should not be true, though both the antecedent and the consequent are impossible; as if one were to say: *If a man is an ass, he has four feet*. Or, he may be understood to mean that God can do some things which now seem to be evil: which, however, if He did them, would then be good. Or he is, perhaps, speaking after the common manner of the pagans, who thought that men became gods, like Jupiter or Mercury.²⁰

Whatever the difficulties in his own exposition of it, the position Swinburne may be interpreted as endorsing on the issue of divine impeccability is then a venerable, simple and defensible one. God, of logical necessity, cannot fail to act morally. The 'previous argument' to which Swinburne refers in the passage cited is his argument to this effect. As it is, in my opinion, decisive, I shall merely outline and comment on it briefly:²¹ actions must be performed for reasons, as this is what distinguishes them from mere events. Given that moral reasons are overriding reasons, a failure to act morally can only be caused by ignorance or the influence

on one of forces beyond one's control. By definition, God knows everything (He is omniscient) and there are no forces beyond His control (He is unconstrained); thus, of logical necessity, He cannot fail to act morally.

We may observe that we do not need the premise that moral reasons are overriding to reach the conclusion that God, of logical necessity, cannot fail to act morally. We may suppose that moral reasons are one sort of reason, whilst allowing that sometimes it may be in one's best interests to act immorally in which case, if one knew this, one would be overall most reasonable in doing something other than that which one had most moral reason to do. I do not say that we should suppose this, merely that if we did so Swinburne's conclusion would still follow. On such a weaker supposition, a failure to act morally could then be explained by a correctly perceived inability to get what – for non-moral reasons – it was rational to desire without deviating from what morality required of one (instead of ignorance of moral truth or factors beyond one's control) and God could not be subject to this extra constraint either as He is, by definition, omnipotent. Thus of logical necessity – assuming that there are moral reasons as we have been assuming, even if they are not necessarily overriding – God must always do what there is most moral reason to do. Having a little knowledge may be a dangerous thing, but having all knowledge is not; power may corrupt, but absolute power perfects absolutely.

To place this point in our analogy of the maker of a game: it is a necessary truth that if the maker of a game is to play that game, he or she must play by the rules which he or she has laid down. To play by different rules would be to play a different game. However, it is a contingent matter (dependent upon his or her will) what these rules are and whether or not he or she chooses to play the game at all. Why does it sometimes happen in a game that players do not obey rules? There are three possible explanations. They might be ignorant of the rule; they might be subject to some non-rational cause or impulse; or they might want to achieve some end, e.g. winning, and be unable to do so without breaking the rule, i.e. they might cheat. God, the creator of the game in which we are the pieces and our universe is the board, in interrelating with us could not be ignorant, or subject to some non-rational cause or impulse, or desirous of some end which He was unable to achieve without breaking the rules. Thus it is a necessary moral truth that, in any relationship with us that God enters into, He will always do what is best by the rules He has laid down for us,²² i.e. He will always be perfectly good.

It is not a necessary truth that God will interrelate with his creatures. Just as the maker of a game might choose to create a game that was played without the maker being a player, by choosing not to have as a rule that the maker must play, so God might choose not to create creatures whose nature generated an obligation on Him to enter into relationship with them. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to suggest that on the truth of classical theism, it would necessarily benefit *people*, even if not other creatures, to be in relationship with God. He has made us for

Himself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him. If this is right, then it is necessary that if God creates people, which of course He need not do, then He will enter into relationship with them insofar as doing so is compatible with respect for their other goods, such as their freedom. Similarly, it is necessary that in entering into and conducting these relationships with people, He will be good to them in the sense of conforming to the moral principles relevant to their species (and indeed culture, insofar as the principles generated by the latter do not conflict with those generated by the former). He will play by the rules of the game. Being good in one's relationships with people is what makes one worthy of praise, not being *contingently* good. Thus, that God is *necessarily* good in His relationships with people does not in any way detract from our reasons for praising Him.

Conclusion

We have argued that once we distinguish, as Swinburne does, between moral truths which are necessary and those which are contingent, the Euthyphro dilemma may be solved. Within this framework, we have assumed, with Swinburne, a strong form of objectivism when describing how God creates contingent moral truths. We have argued for a weak reading of this strong form of objectivism. We have held that some contingent moral truths are entirely determined by the 'creaturely essences' of the people whom God chooses to instantiate and that some are determined by these and the context, conventions, and culture which those creatures find themselves in or freely create and enter into. We have seen that, contrary to what Swinburne suggests, such a strong objectivism is not essential to use the distinction between necessary and contingent moral truths to solve the Euthyphro dilemma. We could have held to an extreme subjectivism or held that all contingent moral truths were determined solely by the conventions and cultures which people find themselves adopting or freely enter into, their choices being entirely independent of common features in their nature or context. Although this would have been unsatisfactory for other reasons, and we briefly sketched a reason for thinking we assumed it to be false, if it were true, it would not threaten the framework of this solution to the Euthyphro dilemma.

The solution to the Euthyphro dilemma is to take the second horn of the dilemma for necessary moral truths and the first horn for contingent moral truths. That necessary moral truths are true independently of God is no worry if, *contra* Swinburne, they are seen simply as the principles of logic applied to moral concepts, for then they have no substance: they do not limit God. That all substantive moral principles are contingent upon God's free choice in creation is no worry either. Having understood contingent moral truths as generated by contingent facts about people's construction (*qua* the biological organisms they happen contingently to be) and/or in some cases contingent facts about their

context and how they have organized their societies, there is nothing more counterintuitive about suggesting that they could have been otherwise, than there is about suggesting that God could have made Martian people or affected people's cultural idiosyncrasies.

We have met the objection that seeing morality as a creation of God's would entail that He could make torturing children good, or good until a certain time and bad thereafter. *Contra* Swinburne, torture is of analytic/logical necessity morally unjustifiable and bad, so it is no restriction on God that He cannot make it morally justifiable or good. We have also met the objection that, on this account, saying of God that He is good would not provide a reason to praise or worship Him. We have argued that, of logical necessity, if there is a God who is omniscient and omnipotent, He will be good to us due to its being necessary, not contingent, that one ought in one's dealings with others to conform one's actions to the contingent moral truths pertinent to these others, and this is a reason to act which is either overriding or which, in any case, God – due to other essential divine properties – could have no reason not to act in accordance with. What is worthy of praise is being good, and God is more certainly good than anyone else; that He is necessarily so in no way detracts from His freedom (as it is only by His act of creation that the content of this goodness is fixed) or thus from our reasons for praising Him.

We may conclude that if the classical theist says that morality is a part of God's creation, the Euthyphro dilemma is solved.²³

Notes

1. R. G. Swinburne 'Duty and the will of God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (1974), 213–227; *idem The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), ch. 11; and *idem Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 126 ff. Material is duplicated between these works. Where a passage or argument has changed between the works, I shall refer to the most recent version; where it has not, I shall refer to the earliest work in which it appears.
2. Swinburne says that he understands 'by a logically necessary or analytic statement a statement, the denial of which states nothing which it is coherent to suppose could be true'; Swinburne 'Duty and the will of God', 217–218. We shall follow him.
3. *Ibid.*, 217.
4. Hare is perhaps the most famous proponent of the view that 'moral properties do not vary quite independently of non-moral properties, but are in some sense consequential or supervenient on them'; R. Hare *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 19.
5. This argument could be made, *mutatis mutandis*, without a commitment to *qualia*; however, unless one has prior philosophical reasons to be suspicious of them, it is easiest to appreciate its force with such a commitment.
6. This is a contentious point and one a full defence of which would take us well beyond the scope of this paper. As well as drawing on Wittgenstein, we may use certain insights of Davidson in support; D. Davidson *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and *idem Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), *passim*. To see the movements of your body as actions you are performing, rather than merely events which you are undergoing, I have to attribute to you a mind. To attribute to you a mind requires me to see you as sharing the values, aims and strategies which characterize people. One of the values that characterizes people is the value associated with avoiding generating unnecessary suffering (in people generally, not just in oneself).

Thus, I must generally be able to interpret the movements of your body as strategies which aim, no doubt amongst other things, to avoid producing unnecessary suffering. If one is going to perform actions, one's behaviour must generally be interpretable on the assumption that one takes oneself to have a, perhaps 'overrideable', reason to avoid causing others pain. For irreducibly ethically thick concepts (to use Williams's terminology) like severe pain, one cannot separate the reactive element from the recognitional. J. Griffin *Value Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), *passim* but esp. ch. 5; T. Nagel *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 159–162; and D. Parfit *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), sects 1–9, 32–40, 45–74 argue for similar conclusions.

7. Swinburne 'Duty and the will of God', 218.
8. *Ibid.*, 216.
9. Slapping a person in order to stop them panicking, whatever one thinks about it as a strategy, would not be described as a case of torture. Thus torture must be understood as involving 'the infliction of severe ... pain' (emphasis supplied) as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* has it. The word which I have omitted from the dictionary's definition is 'bodily'. Without wishing to speak to the issue of the relationship between mind and body, I suggest that the pain that torturers inflict may not be bodily in the ordinary sense of the term; we well understand the meaning of psychological torture.
10. Swinburne *The Coherence of Theism*, 188–209.
11. Searle gives a very detailed classification and plausible account of the various ways in which facts such as these can be determined by institutions which express our collective intentions; J. Searle *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Allen Lane, 1995). Blackburn is perhaps the most famous recent exponent of the strategy of advancing these sorts of explanations into the territory of ethics; S. Blackburn *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). The strategy of course goes back at least to Hume's *Of the Standard of Taste*.
12. Of course, on some non-descriptivist versions of subjectivism, the Euthyphro dilemma dissolves so quickly that it would be odd to describe it as being solved at all. However, to keep our discussion going, we are allowing ourselves to suppose that such accounts are false.
13. For ease of presentation, henceforth I shall speak of the constraints placed on people who are human by the facts of their biological construction, not speak of the constraints placed on them by the conjunction of the facts of their biological construction and the peculiar features, e.g. local gravitational attraction, of that section of the universe they are in.
14. This parenthetical clause would not be true on those interpretations of quantum physics which endorse Berkeley's *esse est percipi* principle. We need not detain ourselves by discussing these tangential issues. The substance of the argument which follows, if not the detail, does not depend on them.
15. This point would need to be 'nuanced' to accommodate plausible views about animal rights. If one thought that some things were good or bad, not because they were good or bad for people but because they were good or bad for animals, then it would be plausible to maintain that they could be good or bad for animals only insofar as these animals approximated people. Chimpanzees are very like people; flies are not. That, one might plausibly contend, is why chimpanzees have rights and flies do not.
16. Swinburne 'Duty and the will of God', 222–223.
17. For an informative account of why God might have reason to effect such changes, see Joseph Shaw 'The application of divine commands', *Religious Studies*, 35 (1999), 307–321.
18. Swinburne *The Coherence of Theism*, 210.
19. Swinburne 'Duty and the will of God', 221–222.
20. Aquinas *Summa Theologica* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, 1921), pt 1, reply to obj. 2, art. 3, q. 25.
21. His fuller treatment occurs in Swinburne 'Duty and the will of God', 219–221.
22. There is a slight complication here generated by the possibility that there might not be a best, either because two or more actions were equally good or because there were an infinite series of actions, each of which was better than the one before it. In other words, 'best' should not be taken to mean 'strictly best'.
23. My thoughts on this topic have benefited from discussion with the Editor and Richard Swinburne, and from the comments of two anonymous referees for *Religious Studies*.