A SEMANTIC ATTACK ON DIVINE-COMMAND METAETHICS

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According to divine-command metaethics (DCM), whatever is morally good or right has that status because, and only because, it conforms to God's will. I argue that DCM is false or vacuous: either DCM is false, or else there are no instantiated moral properties, and no moral truths, to which DCM can even apply. The sort of criticism I offer is familiar, but I develop it in what I believe is a novel way.

I. The Context

Like any metaethics, divine-command metaethics (DCM) tries to explain how, if at all, ethical sentences have truth-values and how, if at all, objects (such as actions, persons, or practices) possess moral properties. DCM asserts, among other things, that moral properties – especially moral goodness, rightness, badness, and wrongness – depend exclusively on God's will. In particular, DCM entails the following claim:

> (G) For any agent x, x is (morally) good because, and only to the extent to which, x wills what God wills.

I will argue that G, a consequence of DCM, is either false or else vacuous. Either G is false, or else there are no instantiated moral properties, and no moral truths, to which G can apply and thus no instantiated moral properties, and no moral truths, for DCM to explain in the first place. In short, then, DCM itself is either false or else vacuous. The kind of semantic objection I will offer is familiar, but I develop and defend it in what I believe is a novel way.

The last two decades have seen a resurgence in the philosophical advocacy of DCM, sometimes also called 'divine-command morality,' 'divine-command ethics,' or 'theological voluntarism.' Robert Adams and Philip Quinn, in particular, have devoted considerable energy to defending their respective versions of DCM, and they are only the most prominent

examples.[1] Not only theists have declared themselves committed to DCM; so have some well-known atheists. In his defense of moral nihilism,[2] J.L. Mackie writes:

> I concede that if the requisite theological doctrine could be defended, a kind of objective ethical prescriptivity could be thus introduced. Since I think that theism cannot be defended, I do not regard this as any threat to my argument . . . . Those who wish to keep theism as a live option can read [my] arguments . . . hypothetically, as a discussion of what we can make of morality without recourse to God . . .[3]

Later in the same book, he describes the only circumstances he can imagine that would allow for moral facts, or instantiated moral properties, or (objective) moral truths:

> [God's commands] would add an objectively prescriptive element to what otherwise were hard, descriptive truths, but in a quite non-mysterious way: these would be literally commands issued by an identifiable authority.[4]

Mackie thus seems to me to embrace DCM, since God's commands, and apparently only God's commands, would suffice to make some moral claims objectively true. But Mackie's atheism, of course, rules out any such divine source of morality, and so he is left with the moral nihilism to which his other arguments have already led him.

My semantic criticism of DCM will, again, look familiar. One can find versions of it in many places, but one will not find it carefully spelled out or persuasively defended. Mackie, for instance, is well aware of the semantic objection:

> Responding to Plato's *Euthyphro* dilemma, they [Ralph Cudworth, Samuel Clarke, and Richard Price] believe that God commands what he commands because it is in itself good or right, not that it is good or right merely because and in that he commands it. Otherwise God himself could not be called good.[5]

Elsewhere he puts the point more accurately:

> [DCM] would have the consequence that the description of God himself as good would reduce to the rather trivial statement that God loves himself, or likes himself the way he is . . . [According to DCM,] the God-based objectively prescriptive element in moral terms . . . can have no non-trivial application to God.[6]

Although, again, he ends up committed to DCM, Mackie begins by charging that, according to DCM, God cannot be called 'good.' That same charge is frequently repeated by semantic critics of DCM as if defenders of DCM had no answer to it, a misimpression encouraged by the defenders of DCM who simply accept the charge.[7] If it were true, the charge would make for a very quick refutation of DCM, but it is clearly false. Anyone can assert that God is good regardless of what DCM or any other metaethical theory says about the meaning or the truth-conditions of her assertion. More to the point, adherents of DCM can *coherently* call God 'good,' I will argue, in much the same way that we can coherently describe the standard meter-stick as 'one meter long.' Rather than preventing us from calling God 'good,' DCM lets us do so without the slightest risk that God will falsify our attribution.

Mackie comes much closer to identifying the real problem the second time around, when he says that DCM makes *trivial* any ascription of goodness to God. But he never explains what *kind* of triviality DCM produces or why that kind of triviality poses a problem for DCM. I suspect that Mackie does not explain the problem posed by triviality because he does not regard it as a *problem*: Mackie's combination of atheism and moral nihilism makes him unconcerned about the triviality of ascribing goodness to God. The interesting thing, I will try to show, is that *only* the combination of atheism and moral nihilism allows one to be unconcerned about it.

James Rachels, a prominent critic of DCM, is somewhat more helpful in spelling out the semantic objection:

> [O]n this view [i.e., DCM], the doctrine of the goodness of God is reduced to nonsense. It is important to religious believers that God is not only all-powerful and all-knowing, but that he is also *good*; yet if we accept [DCM], this notion is deprived of any meaning . . . . 'God's commands are good' would mean only 'God's commands are commanded by God' – an empty truism.[8]

Furthermore, says Rachels, because it renders 'meaningless' the assertion that God is good, DCM requires its adherents to 'give up the doctrine of the goodness of God.'[9] However, instead of making explicit the crucial part – namely, just how DCM makes the doctrine meaningless – Rachels closes his case against DCM by making a point which, by contrast, he could well have left implicit: 'From a religious point of view, it is undesirable to . . . give up the doctrine of the goodness of God.'[10]

Thus Rachels also misstates the objection. First, the allegation that DCM entails a tautology – in this case, the tautology that God is good – does not by itself pose a threat to DCM. Every theory, including every true theory, has tautological consequences, since any statement entails any tautology.

Second, the fact that DCM turns the theological doctrine 'God is good' *into* a tautology or 'an empty truism' does not, contrary to Rachels, mean that DCM makes the doctrine meaningless or a piece of nonsense. Tautologies, because they are obviously true, obviously possess truth-values and so cannot be meaningless or nonsensical. Tautologies or truisms lack, to be sure, any empirical content and convey no contingent information. But that fact makes them meaningless or nonsensical only if it also makes various elementary truths of mathematics and logic meaningless or nonsensical. Finally, the concession that the doctrine 'God is good' *is* tautological is absolutely the last reason anyone should have for rejecting or 'giving up' the doctrine: a tautology is as securely true as anything ever gets and so is the last kind of claim anyone should be willing, let alone compelled, to give up. In sum, although he may come closer than Mackie does, Rachels fails to capture the real force of the semantic objection to DCM.

Another critic, John Chandler, comes much closer:

> If God's will is the only standard of goodness and rightness, the state-
> ment 'God is good' reduces to the triviality that what God wills is
> always in conformity with what God wills, which is true whatever he
> wills. Consequently, it will not be possible to distinguish God from an
> omnipotent but evil being, or show that he is worthy of worship. Only if
> there is a criterion of rightness and goodness independent of God does
> 'God is good' become a significant, non-trivial claim . . . . [T]he central
> Christian doctrine of God's goodness cannot be significantly asserted
> by a subscriber to [DCM].[11]

Unlike any other semantic criticism of DCM that I have been able to find, Chandler's criticism goes to the heart of the matter. Even so, however, he does not bother to spell out his reasoning as thoroughly as one might have hoped. Perhaps he does not bother because he thinks the reasoning is easy and obvious, and so he leaves it as an elementary exercise for the reader. If so, he is mistaken: the reasoning required to support the semantic objection to DCM is neither easy nor obvious. Making the reasoning rigorous and convincing requires confronting important issues in theology, religious eth-ics, and philosophy of language.

II. Meaning or Truth-Conditions?

The first issue facing a semantic argument against DCM is whether DCM concerns the *meaning* of ethical sentences – in particular, ascriptions of moral goodness, rightness, badness, and wrongness – or whether, instead, DCM concerns only the *truth-conditions* of such sentences. If DCM makes

only the truth-conditions of ethical sentences depend on God's will and does not also make their meaning depend on it, then my criticism fails. But defenders of DCM often do present it as a theory of what ethical terms and ethical sentences *mean*, and, I will argue, they have no plausible alternative to presenting it that way.

Take, for example, Adams's earliest defense of DCM, 'A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness.' According to Adams, the traditional, unmodified version of DCM

> is the theory that [for example] ethical wrongness *consists in* being contrary to God's commands, or that the word 'wrong' *means* 'contrary to God's commands.'[12]

Moreover, even in Adams's modified version – a version modified chiefly to meet the objection from moral arbitrariness that I mentioned earlier – DCM still 'offers an analysis of the *meaning* of [for example] "wrong" in Judeo-Christian religious ethical discourse.'[13]

In offering DCM as a theory of the meaning of certain ethical terms, Adams acknowledges

> the . . . obvious objection . . . that [for example] the word 'wrong' is used in ethical contexts by many people who cannot mean by it what the theory says they must mean, since they do not believe that there exists a God.[14]

Adams responds to the objection by restricting the scope of DCM to the meaning of ethical sentences according to Judeo-Christian believers. But his restriction is both too weak and too strong. First, plenty of Judeo-Christian believers, including some illustrious ones like Aquinas and Leibniz, explicitly reject DCM, and so DCM will not capture the meaning of ethical sentences according to those believers. Second, some atheists also accept DCM; Mackie, again, is an example. Anyone, theist or not, who thinks that moral truths or instantiated moral properties must ultimately depend on the will of a Divine Legislator will be inclined to accept DCM. So Adams and other defenders of DCM are entitled to construe their theory as concerning the meaning of ethical sentences according to anyone who accepts DCM, whether or not she is a Judeo-Christian theist. Even so, this correction to Adams is not crucial for my purposes, since my argument against DCM goes through even if we restrict the theory's scope in exactly the way he proposes.

In later work, Adams famously retracts his claim that DCM gives the meaning of ethical terms.[15] Nevertheless, there are reasons for thinking that DCM *must* concern the meaning, and not just the truth-conditions, of

ethical sentences. According to a tradition whose philosophical expression dates at least to Anselm, God exists of metaphysical necessity, i.e., in all possible worlds, and he possesses his intrinsic properties not accidentally but essentially.[16] Moreover, even atheists have acknowledged the good reasons for thinking that *if* God exists then he exists (and possesses the same intrinsic properties) in all possible worlds; indeed, some atheists, such as J.N. Findlay, base their alleged disproofs of God's existence on the plausible assumption that God exists necessarily if he exists at all.[17] If these Anselmian assumptions are correct, then all of the following sentences have the same truth-conditions:

(S1) 'God exists.'
(S2) 'God is omniscient.'
(S3) 'God is omnipotent.'
(S4) 'God is morally good.'

Since S4 is an ethical sentence, an attribution of a moral property to an object, it belongs to the domain of sentences DCM needs to explain. If DCM gives only the truth-conditions, and not also the meaning, of S4, then it tells us nothing about S4 that is not just as true of the other three, presumably non-ethical, sentences. What is worse, if DCM gives only the truth-conditions of S4, then some entirely non-metaethical theory – a theory, say, giving the truth-conditions for attributions of omniscience – would tell us all that DCM tells us about that ethical sentence, in which case it is hard to see what would make DCM a metaethical theory, at least with respect to the moral attributes of God. So DCM had better concern not just the truth-conditions of ethical sentences but also their meaning.

Obviously I am assuming that a sentence's meaning differs from its truth-conditions. In support of that distinction, consider these four sentences, each of which expresses a proposition that is in some sense necessarily true:

(S5)   '$1 = 1$.'
(S6)   '$e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$.'
(S7)   'No red things are colorless.'
(S8)   'It is not the case that Tony Blair is a pencil.'

At least the first two, and arguably all four, of these sentences have identical truth-conditions: at least the first two, if not all four, are true under exactly the same circumstances and in exactly the same possible worlds. Yet no two of the sentences are identical in meaning, and so it follows that meaning and truth-conditions sometimes differ.

Even if one insists that any two logically equivalent sentences express one and the same proposition, it seems to me that one must conclude that there is more to the meaning of a sentence than the proposition it expresses. Even if one accepts the idea that, necessarily, anyone who believes what one of those four sentences expresses believes what is expressed by any of the other three, one should conclude that there is more to the meaning of a sentence than its role in the content of a belief. To put it differently, even if the referent, or the denotation, of a sentence is a set of possible worlds, in which case all necessarily true sentences have the same referent, the sense, or the connotation, of a sentence differs from its referent, and no plausible theory of the meaning of, for example, ethical sentences can concern only the referents of such sentences and not also their senses.

Adams's later work, as I mentioned, defends DCM not as a theory of meaning but as a theory of the *nature* or *essence* of moral properties, in particular moral wrongness.[18] On his view, moral wrongness is identical to the property of *contrariety to the commands of a loving God*. Assuming that the notion of contingent identity is incoherent, these identical properties are essentially identical, although their identity, being *a posteriori*, need not imply anything about what speakers *mean* when they describe something as 'wrong.' Similarly, water and H_2O are identical, and thus essentially identical, even though all ancient, and many modern, users of the term 'water' would not *mean* 'H_2O' by that term. But talk of essences is typically analyzed in terms of possible worlds: water is essentially H_2O because no possible world contains any sample of water that is not equally a sample of H_2O. For all its sophistication, then, Adams's revised version of DCM faces the same problem faced by any version that specifies only the truth-conditions of moral attributions: it is too coarse-grained to allow a distinction among the sentences 'God is omnipotent,' 'God is good,' and 'God never does wrong,' all of which have identical truth-conditions according to the Anselmian conception of the divine attributes. Even though God is no more essentially good than he is essentially omnipotent, 'good' and 'omnipotent' differ in meaning, a difference that any plausible theory of theological predication must capture.

III. Religious Triviality

Semantic critics of DCM rightly focus on the problem of triviality. But, as far as I know, none of them except Chandler makes clear just what kind of triviality arises and why that kind of triviality poses a problem for DCM. According to Chandler, DCM reduces the central theological doctrine 'God

is good' to 'the triviality that what God wills is always in conformity with what God wills,' a reduction that threatens the equally central doctrine that God is worthy of worship. Chandler is right, but, again, he does not spell out the reasoning needed to make the objection stick, again perhaps because he thinks the reasoning is easier than it turns out to be.

The crucial premise of that reasoning is this: no tautology is *religiously* significant, even though, contrary to Rachels, all tautologies, all 'empty truisms,' are cognitively significant. In particular, no tautology can contribute to making it the case that, or provide good reasons for thinking that, God is worthy of worship. But, according to traditional theism, the doctrine of God's moral goodness *does* contribute to making it the case that, *does* provide good reasons for thinking that, God deserves worship. So no metaethics is compatible with traditional theism if it reduces the doctrine of God's moral goodness to a tautology. This conclusion turns out to have dire consequences for DCM, since, as I will now show, it makes DCM untenable by traditional theists or by anyone else who thinks that there are moral truths.

IV. The Argument

Let 'traditional theism' stand for the claim that there exists a Supreme Being, God, whose moral goodness, in combination with his other attributes, makes him uniquely worthy of being worshipped.

    (1) According to no metaethics compatible with traditional theism is the sentence 'God is (morally) good' religiously trivial.

    (2) Every tautology is religiously trivial; no tautology is religiously significant.

    (3) If two sentences have the same meaning, then one of them is a tautology only if both are.

    (4) According to DCM, for any agent x, 'x is (morally) good' has the same meaning as 'x wills what God wills.'

    (5) Therefore: According to DCM, 'God is (morally) good' has the same meaning as 'God wills what God wills.' [From (4)]

    (6) 'God wills what God wills' is a tautology.

    (7) Therefore: According to DCM, 'God is (morally) good' is a tautology. [From (3), (4), (5)]

    (8) Therefore: According to DCM, 'God is (morally) good' is religiously trivial. [From (2), (7)]

(9) Therefore: DCM is incompatible with traditional theism.
     [From (1), (8)]
(10) Therefore: If traditional theism is true, then DCM is false.
     [From (9)]
(11) If moral nihilism is false and DCM is true, then tradi-
     tional theism is true.
(12) Therefore: If traditional theism is false, then moral nihil-
     ism is true or DCM is false. [From (11)]
(13) Therefore: If traditional theism is false, then DCM is true
     only if moral nihilism is true. [From (12)]
(14) Traditional theism is true, or traditional theism is false.
(15) Therefore: DCM is true only if moral nihilism is true.
     [From (10), (13), (14)]

Premise (1) stems from the indispensability to traditional theism of the doctrine of God's moral goodness.[19] As Chandler suggests, God's moral goodness is among the chief reasons why, according to traditional theism, God is worthy of worship. The reasoning behind premise (2) is that no tautology contains enough information to make a difference, religiously speaking: no recognizably religious claim is true or false, probable or improbable, on account of a tautology. Premise (3) seems to me to be a conceptual truth about synonymy or sameness of meaning.

Premise (4) has three sources of support. First, there is the admission of the early Adams and other defenders of DCM that the theory concerns the meaning, and not just the truth-conditions, of ethical sentences. Second, there are the reasons I gave earlier for thinking that, if it is to be a metaethical theory, DCM *must* concern the meaning, and not just the truth-conditions, of at least those sentences that attribute moral properties to God. Third, there is the intuition, which I at least find plausible, that giving an adequate *explanation* of why a sentence S is true (when S is true) or false (when S is false) is sufficient for giving the *literal meaning* of S. But DCM claims to give an adequate explanation – indeed, it claims to give the only adequate explanation – of the truth of ethical sentences when they are true and of their falsity when they are false: they have their truth-values 'because and only because' of facts about God's will. So, if my claim about explanation and meaning is correct, DCM suffices to give the literal meaning of ethical sentences – in particular, those ethical sentences formed by substituting appropriately for x in the formula 'x is morally good.'

The sentence quoted in premise (6) does not presuppose the existence of God's will, or it would hardly count as a tautological sentence. Rather, 'God wills what God wills' is tautological in the manner of 'Green unicorns

are green.' The logical form of both sentences is universal generalization, not existential generalization, and, at least in contemporary logic, universal generalizations carry no existential import. Barring equivocation, 'God wills what God wills' is a tautology.[20]

Premise (11) certainly needs further elaboration and defense. If moral nihilism is false, then there is at least one moral truth. If, in addition, DCM is true, then DCM correctly explains that moral truth: it is true because, and only because, of facts about the will of a particular agent. But not just anyone suffices as the sort of agent whose will provides a suitable foundation for and explanation of genuine moral truths; only the Supreme Being could suffice for that purpose. If DCM puts forward some lesser being to fill that role, it becomes a pressing question whether that lesser being wills what the Supreme Being wills, which suggests that the Supreme Being's will, after all, is serving as the ultimate foundation for and explanation of moral truths. So, unsurprisingly, DCM founds morality on the will of the Supreme Being alone. Again, I am using the label 'traditional theism' to stand for the claim that there exists a Supreme Being whose moral goodness, in combination with his other attributes, makes him uniquely worthy of being worshipped; traditional theism is true if there is such a being and false otherwise. So step (11) looks secure, and the only premise left, (14), is a logical truth and so also looks secure.

V. Axiology or Deontology?

Some defenders of DCM will object that my argument misfires, since they intend DCM to apply not to the axiological concepts of moral goodness and badness but to the deontological concepts of moral obligation, rightness, and wrongness. Indeed, Adams has always offered his versions of DCM as accounts of moral deontology, as has Quinn in his most recent work.[21] Some philosophers have questioned the consistency of a theory that uses God's will as the foundation for deontological moral concepts but not for axiological moral concepts.[22] Yet even without this worry the problem of religious triviality still arises. For just as central to traditional theism as the axiological claim 'God is morally good' are the deontological claims

(R) God is morally right

and

(W) God is never morally wrong,

which, according to DCM, become synonymous with the tautologies

(R*) God wills what God wills

and

(W*) God never wills other than what God wills,

thus making R and W religiously trivial, contrary to traditional theism.[23]
The only alternative is to construe R and W as containing no deontological
moral terms (appearances to the contrary notwithstanding), but in that case
it is hard to see how they *should* be construed.

VI. Conclusion

I will conclude by considering three further objections. The first objection
tries to undercut my argument by restricting DCM so that it applies to every-
thing *except* God. Apart from looking like an *ad hoc* evasion, this proposal
proves no more compatible with traditional theism than unrestricted DCM.
For if it offers no analysis of God's moral attributes, it treats those attributes
as primitive, or unanalyzable: It says nothing about what 'God is morally
good (or right)' means and so fails to distinguish that sentence from any
other sentence about God. That failure makes it not only implausible as a
theory of moral semantics but also inimical to traditional theism.

According to the second objection, my argument shows nothing not already
shown by G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument. After all, doesn't Moore
show that any naturalistic definition of 'morally good' – any definition of the
phrase in non-moral terms – will turn an ethically substantive claim into an
ethically trivial tautology? If, for instance, '*x* is morally good' *means* '*x* maxi-
mizes utility,' then the claim 'Maximizing utility is morally good' becomes
the tautology 'Maximizing utility maximizes utility.' I have two replies. First,
even if one accepts the Moorean reasoning just given, one could dispute the
objector's implicit assumption that no tautology can be ethically significant,
whereas I have given reasons for thinking that no tautology can be *religiously*
significant. Second, and more important, those offering naturalistic defini-
tions of goodness can accept the Moorean reasoning without giving up their
ethical or metaethical positions. One could, for instance, regard the sentence
'Maximizing utility is morally good' as tautological without giving up utilitari-
anism; indeed, regarding 'Maximizing utility is morally good' as tautological
commits one to the truth of that central tenet of utilitarianism. By contrast, I

have argued, no theist can regard 'God is morally good' as tautological without abandoning her theism. Traditional theism requires the religious non-triviality of God's goodness in a way in which utilitarianism does not require the ethical non-triviality of the sentence 'Maximizing utility is morally good.'

The third objection concedes that DCM turns the sentence 'God is morally good' into a religiously insignificant tautology, but it insists that nevertheless DCM is consistent with traditional theism.[24] According to the objection, what *is* religiously significant is that fact that

> (T1) 'God is morally good' is a tautology

and that

> (T2) God is the only being of which it is tautological to predicate moral goodness.

In other words, it is religiously significant that 'God is morally good' is religiously insignificant. In reply, I would emphasize, first, that traditional theism gives little indication of accepting T1; otherwise, why would the Bible, and why would traditional theists, repeatedly assert the moral goodness of God as if the assertion were important and non-tautological? As far as I know, the Bible does not repeatedly assert other tautologies. Do the writers of scripture fail to recognize the truth of T1, or do they recognize it yet deliberately mislead their readers into thinking the contrary? Neither of those options seems plausible. Second, I would question the *religious* significance of T1 and T2: they are semantic claims employing the recondite concept of *tautology*; neither of them has enough ordinary, pre-philosophical substance to form the basis of an entire theological metaethics.

If it succeeds, my argument has two main consequences: first, as step (9) concludes, no traditional theist can consistently accept DCM; second, as step (15) concludes, no one else can consistently accept DCM unless she thinks there are no moral truths, in the first place, for DCM to explain. DCM reflects the intuition that God's will alone is a metaphysically necessary and sufficient foundation for any moral truths there are. That intuition, of course, forces any consistent atheist who accepts DCM into accepting moral nihilism. As they search for the basis of morality, both traditional theists and atheists often find themselves attracted to DCM. But traditional theism is not, after all, a reason for accepting DCM – quite the reverse – and of course no atheist should accept DCM unless she is prepared to give up on moral truth.[25]

Endnotes

1. See Adams, 'A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness,' in *Divine Commands and Morality*, ed. Paul Helm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 83–108 [originally published in 1973], and 'Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again,' in Helm, pp. 109–119 [originally published in 1979]; and *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); 'The Recent Revival of Divine Command Ethics,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (1990): 345–365; and 'Divine Command Theory,' in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 53–73.

2. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977). 'Moral nihilism' is the term I use to denote the view that there are no moral truths, i.e., no moral propositions that are true – equivalently, the view that any moral propositions there may be are all false. Mackie himself calls such a view 'moral scepticism,' but since skepticism properly so-called concerns the knowledge or justified belief of propositions, rather than their truth-values, Mackie has mislabeled his own position.

3. Mackie, p. 48.

4. Mackie, p. 231.

5. Mackie, p. 48.

6. Mackie, pp. 230, 231.

7. See, e.g., Wierenga, Edward, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 221–222, and Burch, Robert, 'Objective Values and the Divine Command Theory of Morality,' *New Scholasticism* 54 (1980): 279–304.

8. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2nd ed., 1993), p. 48.

9. Rachels, p. 50.

10. *Ibid.*

11. 'Is the Divine Command Theory Defensible?' *Religious Studies* 20 (1984): 443–452; 446.

12. Adams, 'A Modified Divine Command Theory,' p. 84 (emphasis in original).

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. See, e.g., 'Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again,' pp. 112, 117.

16. On this theme, see Morris, Thomas V., *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

17. 'Can God's Existence Be Disproved?' in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955).

18. 'Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again.'

19. For Judeo-Christian proclamations of God's goodness, see, among many others, these Bible verses: Ex. 34:6; Ps. 25:8, 34:8, 119:68; Nah. 1:7; Neh. 9:35; Mt. 19:17; and Rom. 2:4.

20. The ban on equivocation is important here, since if we allow equivocation then perhaps no sentence counts as a tautology. Even the sentence 'All green things are green things,' a tautology if any sentence is, comes out tautological only if we read the two occurrences of 'green things' either both *de dicto* or both *de*

re. If, say, we read the first occurrence *de re* (i.e., as denoting the actual world's
green things) and the second occurrence *de dicto*, then 'All green things arc
green things' becomes non-tautological: it implies, for instance, that the (green)
car in my driveway is a green thing, which, while true, is only contingently
true, for the car could well have failed to exist or have had a different color.
Fortunately, this non-equivocation condition is uncontroversial in the present
context, since there is no reason to suppose that DCM intends to equivocate
in the interpretation of 'God wills what God wills.' (I thank Tim Schroeder for
pressing me on this issue.)

21. See, e.g., Quinn, 'Divine Command Theory.'
22. See, e.g., Westmoreland, Robert, 'Two Recent Metaphysical Divine Command
    Theories of Ethics,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 39 (1996):
    15–31; 25.
23. Biblical attributions of rightness to God include the following: '...a God of
    truth and without iniquity, just and right is he' (Dt. 32:4); 'The ways of the
    Lord are right' (Hos. 14:9); and '...the Lord, the righteous judge...' (2 Tim.
    4:8). See also Psalm 19:9 of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1662): 'the
    judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.'
24. I owe this objection to Ian Wilks.
25. For helpful comments, I'm grateful to my colleagues in the Philosophy and
    Political Theory Discussion Group at Acadia University.