A CRITIQUE OF THE DIVINE COMMAND THEORY OF ETHICS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

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Abstract

Divine command theory is a theory of ethics that grounds the nature of ethical demands in the fact that they represent the command of God. It posit that God's command is the ultimate source of moral obligation or that God's will is the basis of moral laws. This position was held by the medieval theologians and philosophers like Anselm, Abelard, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Endorsed by Locke and Berkeley, and in the modern age it has been especially elaborated by Kierkegaard and Barth, it was criticized by Aquinas, who emphasized God's intellect rather than His will. The divine command theory of ethics, however, faces a philosophical difficulty. Interestingly, is that in spite of some disagreeing debates within, the divine command theory is supported in all the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). This article, therefore, aims to critique the arguments of some scholars for and against the theory. A hermeneutic framework is employed. The significance of all critique is that looking at morality within the religious tradition, solutions are provided to the moral problems within human conflicting societies.

Keywords: Divine command, ethics, morality, religion, ontic.

1. Introduction

Divine command theory is a theory of ethics that grounds the nature of ethical demands in the fact that they represent the command of God (Blackburn, 2008:103). Also called theological voluntarism, divine command is a position which claims that God's command is the ultimate source of moral obligation or that God's will is the basis of moral laws. An action is said to be good because it conforms to divine commands. An action is said to be bad or evil because it is performed even though the agent knows that such an act breaches God's commands. This position was held by the medieval theologians and philosophers like Anselm, Abelard, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. It was endorsed by Locke and Berkeley, and in the modern age it has been especially elaborated by Kierkegaard and Barth. It was criticized by Aquinas, who emphasized God's intellect rather than his will (Bunnin and Yu, 2004).

However, the social problem confronting the account is that in the period of declining religious belief, people fail to attach importance to such moral concern. More problematic is that the classical philosophical problem associated with such an account is the Euthyphro dilemma: "Does God command that a thing is good because it is good, or is a thing good because God commands it?" (Plato, 1961:169-185). If it is the former, God is not the authority and we should be able to determine our morality without reference to God; if it is the latter, we have a tautology: A thing is what God commands because it is what God commands. In neither case do we seem to have explained the nature of goodness. This theory

has difficulty in explaining how God's command can have moral force. If a moral law is justified in terms of God's will, it is not clear how we can determine that God's will is good. According to this concept of tautology, therefore, if we have other grounds for finding out what is morally good, we might determine that God's will is good, but we do not need his commands to know our moral obligations.

But Graber (1975) argues that divine command theory of ethics has more going for it than has been generally acknowledged. He identifies the factor responsible for obscuring the merits of a divine command theory as the heavy-handedness with which philosophers have been led to deal with it as a result of trying to handle too much at once. He shows that it is a mistake to expect any "inherent moral reason" for God's commands. The demand for independent validation of God's commands is based either on an assumption which can be shown to be question-begging, given the structure of systems of justification, or on a practical fear which, however much it is warranted with regard to human authorities, cannot be sustained in the case of divine authority, given God's benevolence and faithfulness. Hence, a divine command theory of ethics can be formulated in a way that is consistent and plausible.

In whichever way we conceive it, we can always ask what the basis of morality itself is. There are two quite different explanations that are commonly offered. The first is that the basis of morality is social agreement, and the other, that morality is ultimately rooted in religion. Our concern, therefore, is to critique the divine command theory of morality devised form the perspectives of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

2. The critique

2.1 Jewish scholars

The divine command theory of ethics, faces a philosophical difficulty. The difficulty is found in the famous dilemma posed in Plato's *Euthyphro*: does God freely determine morality, or is morality independent of God? Attempts to trace the origins of divine command theory in the history of philosophy often begin with the scholastic philosophers John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham (Idziak, 1979). Ockham's moral theory, as noted by Marilyn Adams, is often taken as 'the paradigm of "Divine Command Morality"' (1986:1-35). According to Idzik, in a passage in *On the Four Books of the Sentences,* Ockham writes:

> ...the hatred of God, theft, adultery, and actions similar to these according to the common law . . . can even be performed meritoriously by an earthly pilgrim if they should come under a divine precept, just as now the opposite of these in fact fall under a

> divine command. And, with a divine command in effect for the contrary of these, it is not possible that anyone meritoriously or rightly engage in such acts, because these are not performed meritoriously unless they come under a divine command. And if they should be done by an earthly pilgrim meritoriously, then they would not be called or named 'theft', 'adultery', 'hatred', etc... And therefore, as far as the total meaning or the definition of such names is concerned, they signify evil qualities…. (Idziak, 1979:56–57)

The overall import of this passage is that the moral status of an action depends solely upon God's command. Theft, adultery etc., are wrong at present only because 'the opposite of these in fact fall[s] under a divine command', that is because God forbids these actions. If these actions were commanded by God, they would be 'performed meritoriously', and, as the end of the quoted passage makes clear, they would not be called by names which are negatively morally charged. The forms of divine command theory Ockham accepts in this passage is explicitly stated, that the actions that he is discussing 'are not performed meritoriously unless they come under a divine command', in other words God's command is a necessary condition of the moral rightness of an act. But Ockham also says that theft, adultery etc., 'can even be performed meritoriously by a person if they should come under a divine precept', that is, God's command is a sufficient condition of the moral rightness of an act. This denotes that the moral status of an action is solely dependent upon the divine command. Ockham thus does not mean in this passage merely that God's command is a necessary and sufficient condition of the moral rightness of an action; that would yield only equivalence.

But Ockham plainly intends, as well, that there is an asymmetrical relationship of dependence of the moral rightness of an action on God's command. And the dependence that he argues for in this passage is clearly ontic as opposed to epistemic or semantic. In another passage, Ockham writes:

> By the very fact that God wills something, it is right for it to be done . . . Hence if God were to cause hatred of himself in anyone's will, that is, if he were to be the total cause of the act (he is, as it is, its partial cause), neither would that man sin nor would God; for God is not under any obligation, while man is not (in the case) obliged, because the act would not be in his own power. (Urban, 1973:312)

The beginning of this passage, '...by the very fact that God wills something, it is right for it to be done', asserts sufficient condition. In the remainder of the passage, Ockham claims that there are no moral constraints on God's actions. Thus, this extract also supports morality depends upon God, and He absolutely cannot be questioned, because He is not bounded by any moral obligation. Divine freedom from moral constraints is also asserted in Ockham's remark that '... obligation does not fall on God, since He is not under any obligation to do anything'. However, it should be noted that contrasting interpretations of Ockham's stance are not uncommon. Thus even Copleston (1953), who seems to agree that, ultimately, Ockham supports divine command theory, believes that 'we are faced with what amounts to two moral theories in Ockham's philosophy' because of Ockham's frequent employment of the scholastic concept of 'right reason' which he sometimes portrays as the norm of morality (Coplestone, 1953:107). Oakley states that Ockham is "simply inconsistent" (1961:70). David Clark (1971:72-87) and others have all argued that Ockham's position is significantly more complex than a straightforward espousal of ontic divine command theory.

What is interesting, however, is that in spite of some disagreeing debates within, the divine command theory is supported in all the Abrahamic religions. Some Jewish scholars, for examples, Immanuel Jakobovits, Isadore Twersky and Marvin Fox argue that Jewish tradition supports divine command theory, the notion that morality depends upon God's command. While others like Aharon Lichtenstein, Shubert Spero, Louis Jacobs and Avi Sagi object on the ground that tradition denies this view. But Harris, M.J. (2003) argues that the picture that emerges from Jewish texts is significantly more complex and nuanced than most Jewish philosophical literature is prepared to concede on this issue. He shows that the contemporary philosophical literature tends to recast Socrates's query, which is 'the *Euthyphro* dilemma', in monotheistic and more modern terminology. The structures of the dilemma are refashioned in the following way: is it the case that;

> (1) An act is right because God commanded (or wanted or willed or approved) it, or alternatively, is it the case that
> (2) God commanded (or wanted or willed or approved) this act because it is right? (Sagi and Statman, 1995:11)

According to the first structure (1), God, or more precisely His command or will, etc., determines morality; morality depends upon God. On the second structure (2), by contrast, morality is independent of God; He commands or wills certain things because of moral considerations that are not contingent upon Him.

However, an intriguing response to the issue of divine interaction with morality in Jewish tradition is offered by Yeshayahu Leibowitz. According to Harris (2003), Leibowitz propounds a highly austere view of Jewish religious life in the following statement:

> The religious Jew is he who has accepted upon himself the yoke of Torah and the commandments . . . if we are talking about the religion of Israel, we cannot avoid seeing the fact that the original, historical Hebrew concept of religiosity is the acceptance of the yoke of Torah and the commandments. (Harris, 2003:37)

For Leibowitz, Judaism, at least at the level of the individual religious life of the Jew who takes his or her faith seriously, is essentially co-extensive with the observance of Torah and the commandments of Judaism. Leibowitz admits that, on a more abstract plane, Torah study and observance of the practical commandments do not exhaust the entire content of Judaism. But so far as the individual's Jewish life is concerned, he remains adamant that observance of Torah and the commandments is the fundamental relevant characteristic. A corollary of this picture of what constitutes Jewish religious life is a claim which is highly germane to the Euthyphro's problem, and which Leibowitz (in Harris, 2003) repeatedly emphasises. It is that human needs, interests and values have no legitimate place whatsoever in Judaism, as characterised in the following statement; "Judaism is not a programme for the solution of the problems of humanity but [a programme for] the service of God." (Harris, 2003:37).

Against this background, Leibowitz's direct pronouncements about the relationship between Judaism and ethics come as no surprise, when he writes that:

> Judaism has not been embodied in ethics, and there is no meaning to the expression 'the ethics of Judaism' . . . ethics cannot be Jewish or non-Jewish, religious or non-religious -ethics is ethics . . . ethics is an atheistic category, which cannot be reconciled with religious consciousness or religious feeling . . . Scripture does not recognise the good and the upright, rather 'the good and the upright in the eyes of the Lord'. (Harris, 2003:38)

This way of de-ethicising Scripture is a technique which Leibowitz is fond of. In further attempt to reconcile his insistence that the Torah contains no moral directives with the Scriptural words held by Rabbi Akiva who attempts to constitute a great principle of Torah, Leibowitz points out that the relevant text, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' is followed immediately by the words 'I am the Lord' (Harris, 2003:38). This addition, argues Leibowitz, radically transforms the verse 'from a humanistic-moral principle into a religious

commandment' (Harris, 2003:37). Leibowitz sees ethics as 'an atheistic category'. Combining this contention with Leibowitz's treatment of Leviticus 19:18, we are again unsurprised by a statement which would otherwise have seemed unwarranted; Regarding 'And you shall love your neighbour as yourself' . . . as an expression of 'the morality of Judaism' is merely a heretical falsification of he Torah (Harris, 2003:37).

Leibowitz knows that there exists a category of ethics within the matrix of human life. What he is implacably opposed to is the use of Judaism as a means towards achieving these human ethical goals. He is also passionately committed to a related but even more radical notion: the idea that Judaism even contains any human ethics is anathema to him. Judaism and ethics are utterly discrete categories, separate realms, and there cannot be any such thing as a 'morality of Judaism'. What this argument necessitates is that we cannot base human morality on religion. But this study aims to show that societies have done that and have achieved some level of utility in the values and virtues derived from such religious morality.

In contrast to Leibowitz, Immanuel Jakobovits is an ardent advocate of Jewish divine command ethics. He writes:

> Every monotheistic religion embodies . . . a definition of moral values... In the Jewish view, the human conscience is meant to enforce laws, not to make them. Right and wrong, good and evil . . . defy definition by relation to human intuition . . . These values, Judaism teaches, derive their validity from the Divine revelation at Mount Sinai. (Jakobovits, 1979:119)

What is moral and what is not says Jakobovits, is, on the Jewish view, revealed to us by God. There is no place for the invention by human beings of their own moral laws. On the contrary: the task of humanity is simply to submit to the precepts of divinely revealed morality. Jakobovits does not consider the possibility of a non-man-made, objective morality that nevertheless does not depend upon God. He presents only two options, a morality contingent upon God and a subjective human morality, and claims that Jewish tradition unequivocally endorses the former. Jakobovits's remarks in the passage cited are brief, and appear in the context of a discussion whose primary focus is a topic other than the relationship between divine commands and morality. It is thus difficult precisely to determine his position, but it is at least clear that he takes morality to be dependent on God's explicit Torah commands, and it would appear that he construes this dependence as ontic in nature. In another work, Jakobovits, in a statement reminiscent of one of Leibowitz's observations

writes; "...the duty to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' is imperative only because 'I am the Lord' - that is, 'because I have commanded it" (1967:292)

This statement is a definite expression of support for an ontic command form of divine command theory. In fact, the concise nature of Jakobovits's articulations of support for the idea that divine command theory is the view of Jewish tradition is worth remarking upon, particularly when his statements are contrasted with Leibowitz's remarks.

Marvin Fox, another advocate of Jewish divine command ethics, makes several statements in support of the claim that Jewish tradition endorses various versions of divine command theory. In one of his celebrated articles he writes; "It is through God's revelation, mediated by the prophets that men are taught to know what is right and wrong" (1972:126).
The implication here, certainly in context, is that God's revelation is the only way that human beings achieve moral knowledge. Fox thus supports that we would have no moral knowledge without God's revealed Torah commands. The implication becomes explicit in Fox's next paragraph:

> In ancient Hebrew thought there is only one source of the knowledge of good and evil - the commandments of God as they are revealed to man. (Harris, 2003:38)

In another essay, Fox expresses unequivocal support for the idea that the Hebrew Bible supports both epistemic and ontic forms of divine command theory:

> The Bible knows only God as the source of all notions of right and wrong. There is no definition of the good except His teaching and His will . . . Within the biblical framework, He alone teaches us what is virtuous; there is no standard other than that which He has given us . . . Even in the moments of their greatest bitterness and despair, the biblical prophets did not question that God alone is the source of our knowledge of right and wrong . . . without the divine moral standard, there is no standard at all. (1990:202-203)

Fox, however, like most other contemporary Jewish writers who discuss the divine command theory, does not distinguish between different forms (e.g. ontic, epistemic, and semantic) of these theses. It is possible, therefore, that in this passage Fox is merely reiterating support for some version of ontic divine command theory. He might just mean to say that what God commands is *ipso facto* moral, and its morality is to be explained in terms of its being a divine command. And when he asserts that considering a law as both a divine commandment and immoral is a contradiction in terms, what he perhaps intends is the corollary of ontic

divine command theory that, as we shall see below, is emphasised by Luther for the Christian perspective of the divine command theory: if God's command (ontically) determines morality, then logically there can be no conflict between divine commands and morality.

2.2 Christian scholars

> The Christian perspective of the divine command theory is reflected in certain passages in the Reformation writings of Luther and Calvin. With their endorsement of divine command theory, these figures (among others) continued, after Ockham, a tradition of adherence to divine command theory in Christian thought. In reply to the question of why God permitted the fall of Adam and why He created all humanity God is He for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule or standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things. If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator – unless you set another Creator over him! (Idziak, 1979:95)

Luther's language in the third sentence of this citation ('What God wills', etc.) echoes that of the *Euthyphro* dilemma as originally formulated by Plato but provides (unlike Plato in *Euthyphro*) a response that favours divine command theory. Discussing the question of whether there is injustice on God's part, Luther states:

> For the fact is that there neither is nor can be any other reason for his righteousness than His will . . . Furthermore, since His will is the highest good, why are we not glad and willing and eager to see it be done, since it cannot possibly be evil? If the only reason for God's righteousness is His will, then God's will is both a necessary and a sufficient condition of morality. (Harris, 2003:97)

Luther also conveys the 'asymmetry' of divine command theory by making God's will explanatorily prior to His righteousness. Luther then makes explicit a very important corollary of divine command theory, which we have encountered above, though in a Jewish context:

> ...if God's will (or command) determines morality, it follows logically that there can be no conflict between His will (or command) and morality- 'it

> cannot possibly be evil'. (Sagi and Statman, 1995:117)

The context of Calvin's passages is a discussion of the doctrine of predestination and it also clearly supports divine command theory thus;

> For if His [God's] will has any cause, there must be something antecedent to it, and to which it is annexed; this it were impious to imagine. The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it. Therefore, when it is asked why the Lord did so, we must answer, because he pleased. But if you proceed farther to ask why he pleased, you ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found.
> ... the will of God is not only free from all vice, but is the supreme standard of perfection, the law of all laws. But we deny that he is bound to give an account of his procedure; and we moreover deny that we are fit of our own ability to give judgment in such a case. (Idziak, 1979:102)

Divine command theory is supported in these passages, certainly, at any rate, in the first and the third; but there are two further points of interest that make them particularly worth critiquing. First, proponents of divine command theory sometimes stress human obedience rather than human comprehension. The first passage, and even more so, the third, demonstrate the consanguinity that exists, for some advocates of divine command theory, between divine command theory and an emphasis on human obedience as opposed to human understanding. Second, the third passage in particular, makes plain Calvin's disapproval of human challenges to divine justice. We can understand the phrase 'when justice clearly appears' to be a reference simply to the divine will that Calvin says is the supreme standard of justice, not a reference to instances where what God does seems just to us. Calvin's disapproval of human moral challenges to God is echoed in an article by James Rachels (1981), who takes such disapproval to be the appropriate religious stance. However, Jewish tradition, in Genesis Chapter 18, has tended not to find such challenges problematic.

Other philosophers who advocate divine command theory in the history of philosophy include, among others, Descartes, Locke and Berkeley. Another supporter of the theory, though seldom mentioned as such in the literature, is John Austin, who writes: "the divine law is the measure or test of . . . morality . . . law and morality, in so far as they *are* what they *ought* to be, conform . . . to the law of God" (Austin, 1998:6).

Austin holds that there are two kinds of divine commands: explicit (which he terms 'revealed' or 'express'), and 'tacit'. Together, these types of commands give us (among other things) the content of morality. The way in which we find out what the 'tacit' commands are, according to Austin, is 'the principle of utility': whatever action (or, more precisely, class of actions, because Austin is a rule- rather than an act-utilitarian) brings about the greatest happiness of the greatest number is tacitly commanded. The class of actions that conforms to the principle of utility conforms also to God's command. In Austin's words:

> the Divine commands [are] the *ultimate* measure or test . . . the principle of utility, or the general happiness or good, [is] the *proximate* measure to which our conduct should conform, or the *proximate* test by which our conduct should be tried. (Austin, 1998:104)

The above shows that Austin takes divine commands or divine law as explanatorily prior to morality. He says further: "It [utility] is not in itself the source or spring of our highest or paramount obligations, but it guides us to the source whence these obligations flow" (Austin, 1998:104).

This passage clearly expresses divine commands, showing them as the source of our moral obligations. Austin's support, as articulated in the above appears to be for ontic divine command theory and plus some kind of explanatory priority of divine commands over morality. Ludwig Wittgenstein also endorses divine command theory, characterising as 'shallow and rationalistic' the notion that God commands *x* because *x* is good (1965: 3–12). Divine command theory has also been advanced in various forms by, for example, Robert Adams, Philip Quinn, Stephen Clark, Robert Burch, Edward Wierenga and Paul Rooney. All these support the thesis that divine command theory can be employed to inspire morality of individuals in particular, groups and societies in general.

2.3 Islamic scholars

About the literature on Islamic divine command, Al-Attar argues that the vast majority of the books which deal with "Islamic ethics" or "Muslim ethics" do not cover philosophical ethical problems (2010:xix). Donaldson's *Studies in Muslim Ethics* (1953), as well as Majid Fakhry's *Ethical Theories in Islam* (1991), both provide the reader with a general knowledge of what is usually referred to as Islamic ethics. Yet, neither of them deals in depth with the philosophical ethical problems that are related to any society's socio-political interests.

However, this is not true as this and similar works influenced by it represent only one trend of Islamic ethical thought, those intensely influenced by Greek philosophy. Such writers as Miskawayh, although outstanding in general philosophy, should not be regarded as representatives of the distinctive aspects of Islamic ethical thought. However, regardless of the misconceptions and errors that appeared in Donaldson's book, it was the first to be written on Islamic ethics by a Western scholar. Majid Fakhry surveyed major aspects of different ethical trends in Islam.

George Hourani's *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd al*-Jabbar (1971) is a pioneering work in the study of Muʿtazilite ethical thought. Hourani rightly points out that the writings usually described as ethics by philosophers such as Miskawayh and Tusi are mainly concerned with the classification and description of vices and virtues in the manner of Aristotle's treatment in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He also noticed that theories of values and ethics could be reconstructed from the works of the leading philosophers, but that their bases were regularly Neo-Platonism, incorporating Aristotelian elements (1971:2). Such books, according to Hourani, "offer little of general philosophical interest that is new" (1971:21). Therefore, he considers the Mu'tazila to be the first moralists of Islam. He reconstructed a "deontological" moral theory from the works of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, and provided the reader with valuable insights into Mu'tazilite ethics. But his conclusion about the Mu'tazila is erroneous, because as we shall discuss in the next chapter, many scholars, like Umaruddin (2003), are of the view that Muslim morality is as old as Islam.

The first indigenous source in Islam is the Qur'an, a scripture believed to be revealed by God to the Prophet of Islam. Ethics in Islam, therefore, takes its origin from the Qur'an and is wholly based on it. The Qur'an lays down the foundation of religious system on purely ethical principles that there is not much to distinguish between Islam and Islamic ethics. Umaruddin (2003:64) argues that the moral, civil, canonical and criminal laws of Islam are not rigidly separated from one another and cannot be identified as isolated systems. It was the Muslims' particular characteristic that "they took their stand on Qur'an and founded and developed their sciences on original and independent lines" (Margoliouth, 1950:55). According to Umaruddin, the Qur'an, through divine command, inspired in the Muslims the best and the noblest that is conceivable in life. He refers to some passages of the Qur'an which he chooses at random thus:

Shall the reward of good be aught but good Ch 4 Vs 60.

> *And be good to the parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbour, and the companions in a journey and the wayfarer and the slave-maids in your possession* Ch 4 Vs 36.
> *And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and (keep) between the just means* Ch 30 Vs 67.
> *And who control their desires... But whoever indulge in their desire beyond this are transgressors* Ch 70 Vs 31.
> *And enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and be patient under whatever shall betide thee: for this is a burden duty* Ch 31 Vs 17.
> *And let not ill-will towards any induce you not to act uprightly. Act uprightly* Ch 5 Vs 82.
> (Umaruddin, 2003:65-66)

The whole of the Qur'an is full of these kind of divine commands relating to kindness, forgiveness, piety, equity, just dealings, compassion, restrain of lust, nobility, modesty, and so on. In his book, *Ihya'*, al-Ghazzali is quoted to have said "the Prophet himself says, "I have been sent to perfect morals." (Umaruddin, 2003:66). Hashi (2011:124) also writes that "...in the Qur'an, belief in Allah, humility, better communications and continuation of good deeds are the foundations of good morals.". He quotes the Qur'anic statements about the best person being the person who upholds these moral foundations and invites others to practice these values.

> *Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in Faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend* Ch 4: Vs 125.
> *Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, I am of those who bow in Islam?* Ch 41: Vs 33.
> (Hashi (2011:124)

In Islam, therefore, while the Qur'an lays the foundation of ethical concepts and standards, the *Sunnah* [way of life] of the Prophet contains the actual practices of such concepts. And the Qur'an exhorts the Muslims to follow the guidance of the Prophet, thus, MacDonald writes that "It is the desire of every pious Muslim to model his life in every possible particular upon that of the prophet." (1960:103). Margoliouth also writes that "Every Muslim endeavours to reach the unapproachable perfection of the Prophet's character." (1950:239). He adds that "...the immediate followers of the Prophet who followed in his footsteps are also regarded as patterns of good conduct. In contrast to Hourani, therefore these immediate followers who are known as the companions of the Prophet were the first moralists after him.

They possessed all the good qualities, e.g. knowledge, understanding, piety, patience, gratitude, etc." (Margoliouth, 1950:239).

Despite the fact that the fundamental principles of ethics were present in the Qur'an, ethics existed in the form of aphoristic wisdom. It was not studied as a philosophical science until the influence of the Greek thought asserted itself on the Muslim mind (Umaruddin, 2003:68). And when the Muslims took to studying philosophy they mainly concentrated on metaphysics, logic and physical sciences. Like the Greeks, at that early stage they considered ethics as part of politics. It was Ibn Miskawayh who made an attempt to write a systematic treatise on ethics (Sharif, 1966:828).

3. Conclusion

This critique articulates the divine command theory of ethics, showing the theory as the source of moral obligations. In addition to the arguments presented by the Abrahamic religions, the discussion shows that Austin's support appears to be for ontic divine command theory adding some kind of explanatory priority of divine commands over philosophical morality. Ludwig Wittgenstein also endorses divine command theory, characterising as 'shallow and rationalistic' the notion that God commands *x* because *x* is good. Divine command theory has also been advanced in various forms by, for example, Robert Adams, Philip Quinn, Stephen Clark, Robert Burch, Edward Wierenga and Paul Rooney. All these support the argument that divine command theory can be employed to inspire morality of individuals in particular, and groups and societies in general.

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