



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS AND PHILOSOPHY

Course Code

Course Name

PHL205

Critical Thinking And Practical Reasoning

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Group: 1

Question

With good reasons, show why being moral may not depend on religion

A work by Group 2

Why being moral may not depend on religion.

Religion has played an important role in creating moral standards, influencing ethical behavior, and providing a sense of purpose and meaning to human existence throughout history. Many religious traditions emphasize the importance of morality and religion, claiming that moral ideals are derived from divine precepts or sacred writings. However, in contemporary debate, the relationship between morality (a term derived from the Latin word *Mores* means manners or morals. Is an accepted code of human conduct in a given society.) and religion has come under increasing investigation, calling into question the concept that being moral is solely dependent on religious beliefs. Though religion may depend on morality, and even develop alongside morality, morality does not necessarily depend upon religion. This paper therefore delves into the Divine Command Theory, The Theory Natural Law and the existence of non-religious moral exemplars as reasons why being moral may not depend on religion,

Divine command theory, a theological voluntarism perspective theory postulates that someone's actions are morally acceptable if they originate from God and is determined by divine command. Some theologians have developed this idea into the Divine Command Theory, a theory concerning the essence of right and wrong. Essentially, this idea holds that morally right means God's command and morally wrong is God's prohibition. According to this theory, morality is inseparable from religion, and religious teachings provide the ultimate source of moral guidance. Divine command theory according to Murphy (1998) lays down four critical aspects, namely: Existence of a deity known as God is real; there are certain acts that are commanded by God and some forbidden by Him; any action commanded by God is right and people are obligated to follow what God commands or forbids. In the same line also, he further postulates that Gods will is fulfilled in three ways which are: through personal conscience; through religious authorities and by the uses of Holy Scriptures. Critics of Divine Command Theory claim that it has various flaws and limits. These issues can help to bolster

the case for morality does not depend on religion. Let us look at some of these criticisms: One of the most fundamental arguments levelled at Divine Command Theory originates from Plato's Euthyphro conundrum. The question is whether activities are good because God directs them or whether God commands them because they are fundamentally good. If activities are only good because God mandates them, this raises questions about moral arbitrariness. It indicates that anything, regardless of its intrinsic moral traits, can be considered moral as long as it is commanded by a divine power. On the other hand, if God dictates behaviours because they are essentially good, then implies that morality exists outside of religious doctrines.

- If activities are only nice because God orders them to be so:

According to this viewpoint, if a heavenly being were to direct an individual to execute an act of violence against an innocent person, it would be morally acceptable. This, however, contradicts our intuitions about the intrinsic wrongness of causing harm to others, implying that morality cannot be based simply on divine mandates. Similarly, if a divine being commands an individual to engage in dishonesty or deception, this viewpoint indicates that such behaviours would be morally beneficial, despite the fact that honesty and truthfulness are widely seen as virtues in most moral systems.

- If God orders activities that are intrinsically good:

The moral goodness of activities in this circumstance is independent of religious teachings. For example, regardless of supernatural mandates, activities such as honesty, kindness, and compassion might be regarded fundamentally good. Whether or whether they are expressly linked to religious belief, these virtues are valued in a variety of ethical frameworks.

Furthermore, the existence of moral concepts that predate religious writings or are shared by multiple religious traditions, such as the Golden Rule (treat others as you would like to be treated), demonstrates that moral standards can exist without from particular supernatural mandates.

The Theory of Natural Law is an ethical theory that proposes that there are intrinsic and universal moral principles that can be discovered through logic and observation of the natural

world. Moral standards, according to this theory, are not based on religious or cultural beliefs, but rather on the nature of humans and the natural order.

The Theory of Natural Law is based on the assumption that there are objective and unchanging moral truths that may be discerned by human reason. These moral truths are regarded as "natural" because they are seen to be inherent in human nature and the natural order of the universe. They are not dependent on any religious or cultural background.

The thesis was created by the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas and is related with the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. According to Aquinas, humans have an inbuilt understanding of right and wrong, which he called the "synderesis rule." He believed that humans may uncover the natural rule that controls human behaviour and leads to the fulfilment of human nature through reason.

Moral principles, according to the Theory of Natural Law, are drawn from a knowledge of human nature and the goal or telos of human beings. Human nature is thought to have certain intrinsic capacities, such as the potential for rationality and social connection. Then, moral rules are formed by studying how human activities might either satisfy or frustrate these fundamental rights.

- **Universal Moral Principles:**

The Theory of Natural Law holds that there are intrinsic and universal moral principles that can be discerned through reason and observation of the natural world. This implies that morality is independent of religious ideas and can be discovered independently. For example, the principle of non-aggression, which states that it is morally unacceptable to use force against others, can be derived from the realization that humans have a natural ability for empathy as well as a desire for self-preservation. This value may be recognized and upheld by people of all theological backgrounds, demonstrating that morality transcends religious bounds.

- **Ethical Principles Grounded in Human Nature:**

According to the Theory of Natural Law, ethical standards are anchored in human nature and the fulfilment of human capacities. For example, the notion

of fairness and justice, which encourages treating others with equity and impartiality, can be derived from human beings' natural capacity for reason and desire for fairness in social relationships. Individuals of all religious views can embrace and apply this notion, proving that morality can be established in human nature rather than religious teachings.

- Ethical Reasoning and Rationality:

The Theory of Natural Law emphasizes the importance of intellect in determining moral norms. It claims that logical investigation and meditation can lead to the discovery of moral truths. This suggests that people can reason ethically and make moral decisions outside from religious teachings.

Individuals, for example, can use reason to contemplate the repercussions of their acts, the well-being of others, and make decisions that promote the flourishing of individuals and society. This rational approach to ethics allows for moral decision-making that is not based on religious beliefs, confirming the notion that morality can exist outside of religion.

These examples demonstrate that the Theory of Natural Law provides a framework for understanding morality that does not depend on religion. By emphasizing universal moral principles, grounding ethics in human nature, and emphasizing rationality in ethical reasoning, the theory supports the notion that individuals can be moral without relying on religious beliefs or teachings.

The existence of non-religious moral exemplars is the third reason why morality is not solely dependent on religion. Individuals and societies who display moral behaviour and virtuous attributes without subscribing to any particular religion tradition are referred to as atheists. Individuals who are not religious, such as atheists, agnostics, and secular humanists, can live morally upright lives and exhibit ethical behaviour. They frequently exhibit kindness, compassion, empathy, fairness, and a dedication to social justice. These individuals, motivated by empathy, personal values, and a desire to promote the greater good, contribute to the well-being of others and society as a whole. The presence of non-religious moral exemplars calls into question the idea that religion is the exclusive or even the only necessary source of moral instruction. It demonstrates that morality can be influenced by factors other than religious belief. Humanistic and secular ethical frameworks based on reason, empathy,

and social relationships can help to explain moral decision-making and assist individuals in ethical action.

- Secular Ethical Codes and Laws:

Secular civilizations have developed ethical codes and legal systems that are not influenced by religion teachings.

Laws prohibiting murder, theft, and fraud, for example, exist in all communities, regardless of religious beliefs.

These laws are founded on the ideals of justice, fairness, and individual and community well-being.

They show that ethical rules may be developed and implemented without the need for religious authority, bolstering the idea that morality can exist and be sustained apart from religion.

- Moral Disagreements within Religions:

Even within religious communities, there are frequently considerable moral disputes. Different interpretations of religious texts, the presence of several religious sects, and the occurrence of moral issues within religious traditions all contribute to the reality that religious teachings do not entirely dictate moral norms. These conflicts emphasize the importance of personal reasoning, cultural influences, and individual conscience in creating moral attitudes, demonstrating that morality transcends religious boundaries.

- Historical and Cross-Cultural Moral Variations:

Moral Value Variations Throughout History and Across Cultures: Moral values have varied substantially throughout history and across cultures. Moral codes have been shaped by cultural and societal standards, and they can differ even across religious communities. The emergence of various moral systems shows that moral standards are influenced by a variety of circumstances, including social, historical, and geographical situations. This variability shows that morality is shaped by complicated interactions between numerous cultural, philosophical, and human variables rather than merely by religion.

- Personal Ethics and Atheistic Morality:

Atheists and non-religious people frequently create own ethical systems based on logic, empathy, and philosophical considerations. They may highlight ideals like as autonomy, social justice, compassion, and sentient beings' well-being. Personal ethics among non-religious people demonstrate that moral behaviour can be based on humanistic values, empathy, and critical thinking, regardless of religious views. This adds to the argument that morality is not primarily based on religion.

These examples demonstrate that moral values and ethical behaviour can exist and be upheld without an exclusive reliance on religious beliefs or teachings. Secular ethical codes, moral disagreements within religions, historical and cross-cultural variations in moral values, and the development of personal ethics among non-religious individuals all contribute to the evidence that morality is not solely dependent on religion but is shaped by a range of influences and considerations.

Finally, the evidence offered supports the claim that morality is not primarily dependent on religion. While religion has historically been linked to moral standards, the presence of critiques of Divine Command Theory, the Theory of Natural Law, non-religious moral exemplars, and the existence of secular ethical codes and moral variations across cultures all contribute to the understanding that morality can exist and be upheld apart from religious beliefs. This acknowledgement enables a more inclusive and complete approach to ethics, recognizing the role of reason, empathy, cultural influences, and humanistic values in creating moral action. By embracing the idea that morality extends beyond religious boundaries, we foster a broader understanding of moral values and promote ethical decision-making based on diverse perspectives and universal principles that transcend religious doctrines.

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