

# DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

# GANDHI

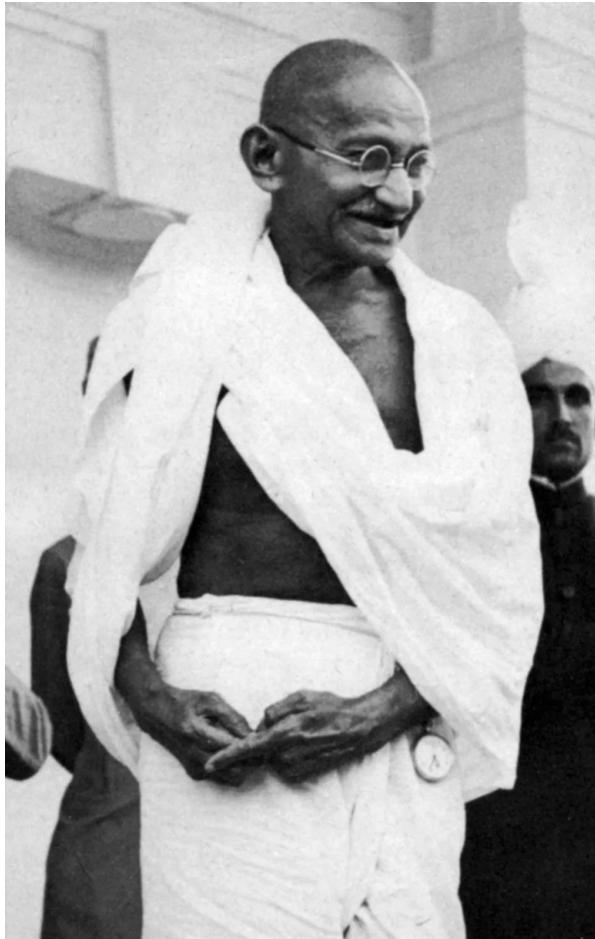
The lecture begins with Gandhi's response to a moral dilemma about killing rabid dogs

The context involves a humanitarian concern over the killing of 60 dogs at a mill premise

The key ethical tension presented is between Hindu principles of non-violence (ahimsa) and practical necessity

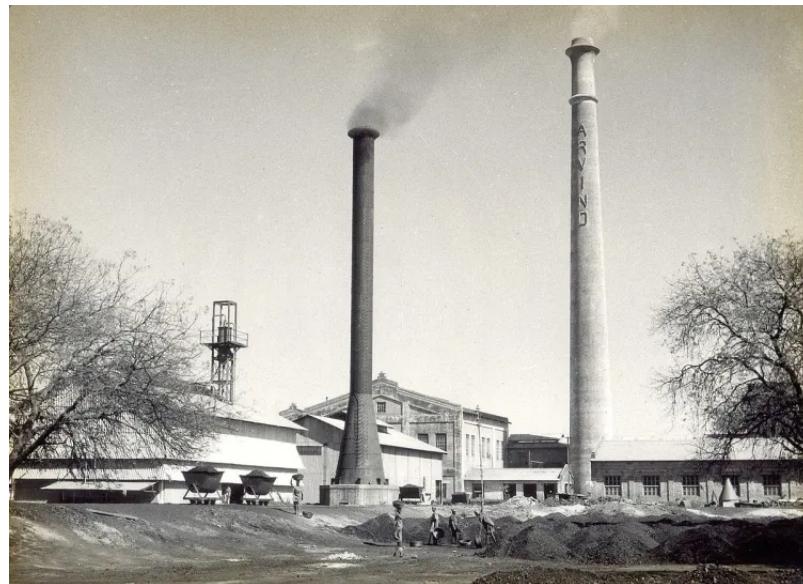
Gandhi's response introduces an important nuance to absolute moral principles, suggesting that:

- a) While killing is generally sinful in Hinduism
- b) Necessary violence (like killing rabid dogs) may be permissible
- c) Perfect principles often require practical compromise



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*The talk of the whole city of Ahmedabad is the destruction of 60 dogs on his mill premises at the instance of Seth. Many a humanitarian heart is considerably agitated over the incident. When Hinduism forbids the taking of the life of any living being, when it declares it to be a sin, do you think it right to kill rabid dogs for the reason that they would bite human beings and by biting other dogs make them also rabid? Is it not the man who actually destroys the dogs as is also the man at whose instance he does so both sinners?*

*We hope you will express your views in the matter and set the whole controversy at rest and prevent humanitarianism from being endangered by the shocks given to it by distinguished men like the Seth.*

...

*I have since thought over the matter and feel that my reply  
was quite proper.*

*Imperfect, erring, mortals as we are, there is no course open  
to us but the destruction of rabid dogs. At times we may lie  
faced with the unavoidable duty of killing a man who is  
found in the act of killing people.*

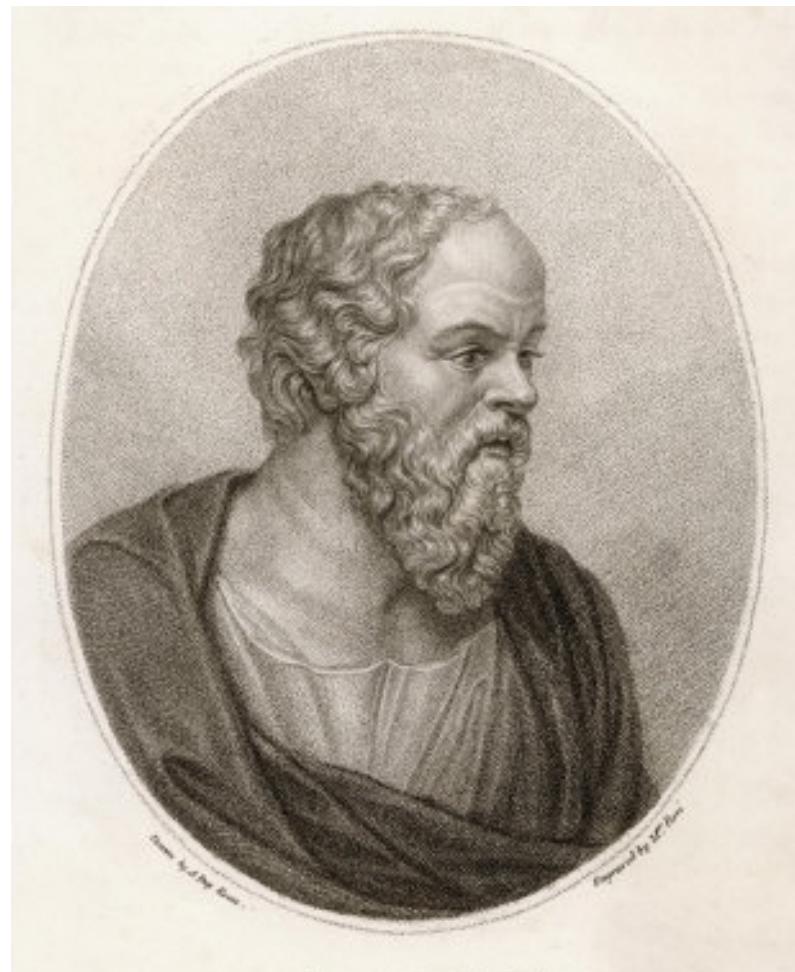
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*There can be no two opinions on the fact that Hinduism regards killing a living being as sinful. I think all religions are agreed on the principle. There is generally no difficulty in determining a principle. The difficulty comes in when one proceeds to put it into practice. A principle is the expression of perfection, and as imperfect beings like us cannot practise perfection, we devise every moment limits of its compromise in practice. So Hinduism has laid down that killing for sacrifice is no himsa (violence). This is only a half-truth. Violence will be violence for all time, and all violence is sinful. But what is inevitable is not regarded as a sin, so much so that the science of daily practice has not only declared the inevitable violence involved in killing for sacrifice as permissible but even regarded it as meritorious.*

# ATHENS



# SOCRATES



# PRINCIPAL QUESTION

*What is Piety*

OR

*What is good? / What is Virtue?*

“piety” (devotion or respect, especially to one’s parents, elders, or religious principles)

## DEFINITION 1

*Piety is charging my father with negligence.*

Definition 1 (“Piety is charging my father with negligence”):

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This reflects an example of piety rather than a universal definition.

It’s a personal, situational claim tied to Euthyphro’s actions, suggesting that doing what is “right” according to divine or moral law overrides personal loyalty.

## DEFINITION 2

*Piety is what pleases the Gods.*

Socrates questions whether something is pious because it pleases the gods or if it pleases the gods because it is pious (the Euthyphro dilemma).

## **DEFINITION 3 (DIVINE COMMANDMENT THEORY)**

*Piety is what pleases all the Gods.*

OR

*Piety is what pleases God*

This refines the previous definition but still faces the issue of whether “pleasing the gods” is a subjective or objective standard.

# EUTHYPHRO'S DILEMMA

*The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods?*

in layman terms it is basically  
that something that is pious  
holy hence beloved by god /  
or is it holy bacause it is  
beloved by god

## EUTHYPHRO'S DILEMMA (REPHRASED)

*Is something virtuous/good because God loves it, or is it virtuous/good, therefore God loves it?*

OR

*Is something virtuous/good because of God's commandments, or does God's commandments make it virtuous/good?*

## **TWO POSSIBILITIES**

1. Something is virtuous or good *therefore* God loves it.
2. Something is virtuous or good *because* God loves it.

# DIVINE PERFECTION ARGUMENT

If the Divine command theory is true, then a morally perfect God could not have created a flawless morality.

A morally perfect God cannot issue such commands, because that would make him morally imperfect.

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Therefore, the Divine command theory is false.

# READINGS

1. Chapter 1: Russ Shafer-Landau, *Living Ethics*.
2. Plato, *Euthyphro*.