A Critical Survey of Adams' Divine Command Meta-ethics

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Abstract

The divine command meta-ethics (hereafter, DCM) promote non-naturalist realism about the ontological status of moral properties while depending on this ontological status on a such-and-such divine being's moral roles derived from some relevant divine characteristics. As DCM typically contends, our moral discourse depends on God's commands and prohibitions to the effect that an action A is morally right if and only if God commands A. Robert M. Adams (1979, 1987a) offers a modification that explicates the dependency relation between a loving God's commands and moral properties on metaphysical grounds to the effect that some action A is morally right if and only if it is not logically but metaphysically necessary for a loving God to command A. In this paper, I discuss whether Adams' modification stands for a cogent account of DCM in a few respects. Firstly, Adams fails to provide robust reasons for grounding moral realism so that his commitment to the reality of moral properties merely expresses a theoretically unwarranted assumption hinging on a presumptive case in our moral discourse. Particularly, his assumption on the pervasiveness of strongly held moral beliefs is unwarranted and it inherits a vague notion of certainty. Secondly, Adams' response to the Euthyphro dilemma does not satisfactorily sort out the concerns accompanying this dilemma, mainly because his response relies on a vague notion of divine love that allegedly necessitates God commanding morally permissible acts while this notion cannot be trivially reducible into a moral aspect.

Keywords: Divine Command Meta-ethics, Meta-ethics, Moral Realism, psychological certainty vs. epistemic certainty, the Euthyphro Dilemma

Adams'ın İlahi Buyruk Teorisinin Eleştirel Bir İncelemesi

Özet

İlahi buyruk teorisi (kısaca, DCM); deontik değer ve niteliklerin ontolojik statülerini, ilahi bir varlığın bazı ilahi özelliklerden türetilen ahlakbilgisel rollere dayandırırken bu deontik niteliklerin ontolojik statüsüne dair natüralizm karşıtı bir gerçekçiliği savunur. DCM'nin tipik olarak savunduğu üzere, deontik diskurumuz özsel olarak Tanrı'nın emirlerine ve yasaklarına bağlıdır; öyle ki, eğer ve ancak Tanrı bir A eylemini emrederse A eylemi ahlaki olarak doğrudur. DCM'i Euthyphro ikilemi gibi zorluklara karşı restore etmek adına, Robert M. Adams (1979, 1987a) sevgi dolu bir Tanrı'nın emirleri ile deontik nitelikler arasındaki bağdaşıklık ilişkisini mantıksal bir zemin yerine metafiziksel bir zeminde açıklayan bir DCM savunusu yapar. Buna göre, sevgi dolu bir Tanrı'nın bir A eylemini emretmesi- eğer ve ancak A eylemi doğruysa- metafiziksel olarak zorunludur. Bu makalede, Adams'ın DCM yorumunu detaylı bir şekilde sunarak bu yorumun ikna ediciliğini birkaç açıdan tartışacağım. Bu minvalde, Adams, ahlaki gerçekçiliği zayıf gerekçeler ve muğlak kavramlar üzerinden temellendirmeye çalışmakta ve bunun sonucu olarak ahlaki gerçekçilik adına zayıf bir zemin sunmaktadır. Adams ahlaki inançlarımızdaki ahlaki kesinlik durumunun ancak ve ancak ahlaki nitelikler ile ahlaki olguların gerçekliği ile açıklanabileceği düşüncesindedir. Bu abdüktif uslamlamada, yüksek derecede güvenle sahiplenilen ahlaki inançların mahiyetine ve yaygınlığına dair varsayım hem temellendirilmemiştir hem de muğlak bir kesinlik kavramı

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içermektedir. Dahası, Adams'ın Euthyphro ikilemine yanıtı, bu ikilemle birlikte gelen endişeleri tatmin edici bir şekilde çözmemektedir, çünkü yanıtı, Tanrı'nın ahlaki olarak doğru eylemleri emretmesini zorunlu kılan ama ahlaki bir davranış kipine veya özelliğine indirgenemeyen rahmani sevgi kavramına dayanır. Bu kavram hem teolojik hem de kavramsal açıdan muğlak görünmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İlahi Buyruk Teorisi, Meta-etik, Ahlaki Gerçekçilik, psikolojik kesinlik vs. epistemik kesinlik, Euthyphro ikilemi

1. Introduction

The divine command meta-ethics (hereafter, DCM) austerely corresponds to non-naturalist realism about the ontological status of moral properties, and it principally seeks to ground the given status of moral properties in a divine being's moral roles which follow from such and such characteristics of the relevant divine being. In a nutshell, our moral discourse, as DCM argues, fundamentally depends on God's commands and prohibitions cohering with the attributed divine nature. Regarding this dependency relation between moral discourse and divinity, DCM standardly holds the thesis that an action *A* is morally right (or wrong) if and only if God commands (or forbids) *A* (Fisher, 2011; Evans, 2010, Frankena, 1963, Idziak, 2010).

From a theological perspective, DCM seems evident to many mono-theists believing in an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God; after all, it conforms with such theists' willingness to obey God's commands. As Idziak (2010) suggests further, DCM goes in line with "the experience of religious faith community" by capturing their "most important religious intuitions" such as "God's absolute sovereignty and freedom" (p. 586). Apart from its theological appeal, DCM also appears to provide some straightforward solutions for the meta-ethical disputes about the objectivity, normativity, and authority of moral claims. In the same vein, Fisher (2011) points out:

> Why might such a view be attractive? Arguably, it is because it is very well suited to capture the source of the normativity of moral claims. What justifies the claims that morality places on us? What gives them authority over us? Divine command theory claims that God is the ultimate omniscient being and he knows better than us about ourselves, about others, about how things were, are, and will be. Moreover, God is typically thought to have sanctions in place for failing to obey him (p.78).

Furthermore, DCM posits that there are mind-independent moral facts/properties that consequently constitute impartial and universal categories guiding us in our moral actions. By doing so, DCM attempts to account for "some of our fundamental commitments in morality such as convergence, truth, disagreement, moral progress, and phenomenology" (Fisher, 2011, p. 76). Nevertheless, DCM, in its standard form, runs into some persistent challenges which allegedly cast doubt on nearly all altercations of it. As will be thoroughly discussed, the *Euthyphro dilemma* solely leads the theorists to modify DCM by restoring its efficacy.

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Hereby, one commonly adopted strategy for divine command theorists is to defend DCM by reformulating the dependence relation held between God's commands and moral discourse. Philosophers such as Alston (1990) and Swinburne (2008), for example, take such a route to the effect that God's commands- which bear some logically and/or metaphysically distinct features (i.e., being objective, being necessary, being analytical,

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[1] As in Plato's dialogue with the same name, the Euthyphro dilemma originally posits the question of whether "something is holy because the gods approve it or… they approve it because it is holy" (Idziak, 2010, p.585). Drawing on this question, the Euthyphro dilemma for DCM stems from the question of whether something is morally right because God commands it or God commands something because it is morally right.

and such)- logically/metaphysically entail to/supervene on moral properties which are of some counter-features such as being subjective, being contingent and being synthetic.

Similarly, Robert M. Adams (1979, 1987a) offers two complementary modifications with minor differences that constitute moral properties in a loving God's commands. As Adams argues, a moral property of an action "consists in being contrary to [or in conformity with] a loving God's commands or that the word 'wrong' means contrary to God 's commands" (1987a, p.97). In this respect, he reinterprets DCM as a theory about the meaning of moral terms so that his modified variant of DCM lays out a metaphysically constituted equivalence between what a loving God's commands mean and what 'rightness' means in our moral discourse. Hereby, Adams (1979) further notes that a loving God's commands are metaphysically (not logically) necessary for constituting moral properties in the sense that God's commands on an action strictly refer to a certain moral property in all possible worlds regardless of how moral agents in each possible world use or relate with this moral property of the action. Consequently, what a loving God commands on an action necessarily constitutes the moral properties of this action in the sense that the former part rigidly/strictly determines the latter in a modally non-symmetrical manner.

As Adams (1979) admits, he roughly appeals to the Kripke/Putnam approach about natural kind terms which allegedly represents the convergence between Kripke's (1972) direct referentialist account of proper names and Putnam's (1975) semantic externalism. According to this approach, what a natural kind term or a proper name 'T' stands for is externally and strictly determined by virtue of the causal-historical relations between speakers' uses of 'T' and T itself so that 'T' necessarily (in all possible worlds) denotes T itself if the use of 'T' for denoting T has a prevailing or initiating position in the causal-historical chain of the uses of 'T'. As a result, the term 'water' strictly denotes a body of molecules made up of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom irrespective of how divergently a speaker might use the term and how correctly or incorrectly she knows about what the term denotes. Hence, a speaker might know nothing about what 'water' actually denotes, or she might be somehow misinformed about it; still, her use of the term strictly refers to H_2O.[2] Holding this semantic approach, Adams (1979) thinks of DCM as a constitutive relation like 'Water is H_2O' to the effect that the term 'rightness' rigidly denotes the property of being commanded by a loving God irrespective of how divergently speakers might use 'rightness' considering the presumed course of the causal-historical relations behind the term 'rightness'.

Regarding the standard interpretation of DCM, Adams' modified variant convicts that some action *A* is morally right if and only if it is metaphysically necessary for a loving God to command *A*. In this context, it is worth noticing that Adams diverges from the standard view by (1) implementing an immense significance on God's loving nature, (2) interpreting the given relation in DCM as a metaphysical constitution rather than a logical entailment held between being-commanded-by-God and being right.

Despite Adams' modifications for fortifying DCM, I believe Adams' DCM carries out some worrisome problems in a few respects. First, Adams fails to provide robust

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[2] Adams thinks it is fair to take moral terms analogous to natural kind terms based on the idea that "every component user of 'wrong' must know about wrongness" as to how and when an agent can legitimately employ this term although she does not have to know its constitution (1979, p.74). And a moral agent, in this epistemic standpoint, still satisfactorily uses moral terms in accordance with the relevant causal-historical relations behind these terms in our moral discourse. In this respect, Adams (1987a) holds that recognizing moral facts and properties becomes a posteriori process that does not logically entail a loving God's existence. Therefore; even an atheist, for Adams, can recognize and take morally right actions though an atheist ultimately omits the metaphysical foundation of how such moral properties as action-guiding properties are attainable in reality.

reasons for grounding moral realism so that his commitment to the reality of moral properties merely expresses a theoretically unwarranted assumption hinging on a presumptive case in our moral discourse. In particular, I take issue with his idea that moral realism is the best explanation for the alleged pervasiveness of moral beliefs with the highest degree of confidence. As I defend, his notion of 'the highest degree of confidence' is ambiguous and he does not warrant his assumption about the pervasiveness of strongly held moral beliefs. Secondly, I believe Adams' response to the *Euthyphro dilemma* does not satisfactorily sort out the concerns accompanying this dilemma, mainly because his response relies on a vague notion of divine love that allegedly necessitates God commanding morally permissible acts and cannot be trivially reducible to a moral aspect. As far as I am concerned; such a notion of love seems inconceivable considering Adams' supposition that God's loving nature unexceptionally prompts him to command morally right actions, whereas this nature cannot be defined by or reduced to moral rightness.

2. On Adams' Moral Realism

Adams' DCM starts with the claim that moral properties are "non-natural and objective" while consisting of "facts about the will or commands of God" (1987a, p.105). For him, moral properties are "objective in the sense that whether they obtain or does not depend on whether any human being thinks they do" (1987b, p.145). In this sense, moral properties in agents' ethical statements are real irrespective of agents' doxastic or cognitive attitudes towards these putative facts/properties. On the other hand, moral properties, for Adams (1987b), are of non-natural kinds "in the sense that they cannot be stated entirely in the language of physics, chemistry, biology, and human or animal psychology" (p.145). In short, moral naturalism holds that moral properties are identifiable with natural properties in terms of their causal and descriptive roles in our empirical experiences. In contrast, Adams believes moral properties cannot be identifiable with or reducible to natural properties through empirical inquiries. Hereby, Adams' commitment to moral realism and non-naturalism plays a vital role in his DCM since it would be inconsistent to hold that God- as an absolute being above and beyond nature and the subjects' beliefs- has some commands bearing some peripheral properties subjectively associated with one's action in a given moral discourse. If the moral rightness or wrongness of an action becomes relative to moral agents' beliefs under the contingent conditions of nature, then it would be perplexing to account for such a moral discourse through their relevance to God's commands that are believed to be categorical and universal due to his divine nature. Thereby, it is indispensable for Adams' DCM to maintain moral realism and non-naturalism for the sake of theoretical coherence and explicatory efficacy. At this juncture, it is worth questioning how Adams adequately grounds moral realism and non-naturalism. After all, his failure to substantiate moral realism and non-naturalism would naturally amount to the implausibility of his modified DCM.

First, Adams, in defense of moral realism, essentially draws on our allegedly distinctive degree of moral certainty. As he remarks,

> …in spite of the general uneasiness about morality pervades our culture, most of us do hold many moral beliefs with almost the highest degree of confidence. So long as we think it reasonable to argue at all from grounds that are not absolutely certain, there is no clear reason why such confident beliefs, in ethics as in other fields, should not be accepted as premises in arguing for the existence of anything that is required for the most satisfactory theory of their subject matter (p.145).

According to him, our beliefs in a given moral discourse stand "with almost the highest degree of confidence" so that our degree of confidence, in return, abductively indicates the plausibility of a non-naturalistic variant of moral realism (Adams, 1987b, p.145). To put it

simply, the reality of moral discourse, for Adams, follows as the best explanation for our so-called moral certainty. Adams, thereby, regards no further need for providing any robust ground for moral realism simply because the deepest commitments, as he argues, are sufficient for taking moral realism to be the case. The rationale behind endorsing moral realism comes with some puzzling and unsound aspects worth analyzing in detail.

First, I believe Adams' argument rests on vague notions and fallacious premises. In order to flesh out the flaws in his argument, we can reformulate it as follows:

P1. Most moral agents pervasively hold their moral beliefs with almost the highest degree of confidence.

P2. The beliefs with almost the highest degree of confidence are sufficient to implicate the mind-independent existence of the subject matter entertained by these beliefs.

C. Moral beliefs with almost the highest degree of confidence are sufficient to implicate the mind-independent existence of moral discourse (i.e. moral facts/properties/values)

In the above premises, there are crucial flaws that severely undermine Adams' argument for moral realism as the best explanation for our moral certainty. In what follows, I will critically discuss each premise along with the notions employed in them.

Regarding the first premise, what Adams means by 'highest degree of confidence' for characterizing moral certainty seems to be a vague notion considering whether it stands for a psychological sort or an epistemic sort of certainty. I believe such a vague notion of moral certainty is not adequate to propose the reality of moral discourse as the best explanation for our moral certainty since each available characterization of moral certainty has odd consequences for Adams' theoretical coherence. Again, his conviction about the pervasiveness of strongly moral held beliefs is rather presumptuous in the sense that he takes for granted the common recognition of moral cases with equal measure.

For one thing, it is common to analyze the notion of certainty in two categories: psychological and epistemic (Dahm, 2015; Klein,1981; Russell, 1948).[3] In this regard, psychological certainty is simply a matter of agents' strong emotional convictions about the truth of their beliefs regardless of whether the agents in question hold any sound reason for their convictions (Dahm, 2015, p.136).[4] Agents generally have many core beliefs that are strongly held with respect to their feeling of certainty about these beliefs, even though they are incorrect. In brief, being psychologically certain of a subject matter exclusively requires one's strongly held feeling about this subject matter regardless of having any substantial and independent evidence or justification processes. For instance, one might feel strongly certain about her childhood memories although her strong conviction might merely come from various psychological phenomena which might induce strong feelings as in the cases of false memories or delusions. In this regard, psychological certainty reflects agents' subjective states of beliefs, whereas an agent's psychological certainty does not entail the epistemic soundness of her belief content. Hence, if Adams seeks to account for our so-called moral certainty as a case of psychological certainty then it would be absurd to regard the reality of moral discourse as the most adequate explanation for our moral certainty. For one thing, if our so-called moral certainty as a psychological sort does not

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[3] The distinction has a long history to explicate; but, it might be traced back to Descartes' The Principles of Philosophy. For more see Reed, B. (2008). "Certainty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* , URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/certainty/>.

[4] Some philosophers such as Dahm (2015) take moral certainty as a third and distinct kind of certainty that shares some epistemic properties with epistemic certainty. Here, I deliberately refrain myself from providing a full-fledged account of moral certainty. For the sake of my argument, I simply defend that Adams does not specify the notion of 'highest degree of confidence' in one particular way or another.

require any independent or substantial ground for the content of our beliefs then our moral certainty does not stand for any viable indication as to whether our beliefs represent moral reality in one way or another. Because a psychologically certain belief merely instantiates a particular agent's strong psychological orientation about some particular moral belief. In this sense, moral beliefs turn out to be relative to moral agents' psychological states. Such a subjective picture of moral beliefs vehemently opposes moral realism. However, Adams' reasoning might be defended based on the idea that confidence in moral beliefs comes from our shared capacity and circumstances. Accordingly, agents' being psychologically certain of a belief, indeed, implicates the presence of agents' psychological capacities for taking subjective stands on how they feel about some set of claims. Based on the presence of agents' capacity for holding strong convictions, we might secondarily admit that agents' feelings of certainty indicate the presence of some feeling-inducing factors or conditions which might be real or not. Hereby, such a psychological capacity for moral certainty and some certainty-inducing factors seem common to every moral agent based on the apparent pervasiveness of strongly held beliefs about moral discourse. If so, Adams might entertain such a claim for grounding moral realism in our allegedly common certainty under the shared circumstances. However, the presence of moral agents' shared capacity under the same certainty-inducing circumstances still cannot be characterized by a mark of reality, or it cannot eliminate moral relativism/subjectivism as the best explanation for our psychological certainty. After all, the shared capacity for holding moral claims under the same circumstances does not necessarily implicate some commonly accessible moral facts. As addressed one theorist, in contrast to Adams, might equally appeal to such a notion of moral certainty as a strong indication for cultural relativism or even moral subjectivism depending on what convergences and divergences she takes into account in terms of moral agents' deeply convicted beliefs about some relevant moral claims. Consequently, psychological certainty falls short of indicating moral reality based on agents' being psychologically certain of some moral claims.

Psychological certainty does not work out for Adams unless he provides another account of moral certainty. Still, epistemic certainty might better fit into Adams' account of moral certainty. By appealing to the principle of charity, it is safe to assume that Adams takes moral agents' rational beliefs into his account so that his notion of moral certainty seems to inherit moral agents' rational convictions about their moral beliefs. Hence, it is fair to discuss whether the notion of moral certainty as an epistemic sort becomes a more viable option for Adams to reinforce moral realism as the best explanation for moral certainty. In this respect, a rational agent is epistemically certain of a belief if this agent stands in strong epistemic relation (such as knowing) with this belief so that she holds an objective and good reason – evidential and/or deductive- for being confident about what she believes to be true. To illustrate, a longtime Lakers supporter might be psychologically certain of her belief that L.A Lakers will make the playoffs due to her wishful thinking about the team she supports. In this case, this belief could have an epistemic certainty for her only if she grounds her belief in various data (i.e. playoff rules, performance stats, remaining games, and such) that strongly implicate the high probability of her belief. Hereby, Adams' abductive reasoning about moral realism can be re-established based on the idea that our moral beliefs have epistemic certainty for most of us. Accordingly, most moral agents are expected to hold epistemically strong reasons for their moral beliefs when they are with the highest degree of confidence about the truth of their beliefs.

The problem with Adams' characterization of moral certainty in the above sense lies in the pervasiveness assumption about making moral claims on epistemic grounds. For the sake of soundness, such an assumption must be - experimentally or phenomenologically- warranted in the first place. Hence, Adams does not offer any warranted account to show that most of us have strong epistemic relations with our moral claims. In this respect, there seems to be no distinctive ground to reinforce the

pervasiveness assumption; moreover, it is unclear how Adams arrives at the assumption that rational agents hold strong epistemic reasons for making moral claims. Against such an assumption, an alternative picture appears equally feasible for accounting for the pervasiveness of strongly held moral beliefs.

Drawing on J. L. Mackie's (1977) argument from relativity, here is an alternative picture that equally discards the supposed pervasiveness of moral beliefs with the same epistemic status. According to Mackie, so-called moral facts, if they exist at all, meet with definite moral behaviors and actions under common agreements once they constitute an objectively accessible domain to test our moral beliefs in the face of what they seemingly denote in the relevant discourse. In that case, one must be able to recognize such moral facts even though she would not comply with these facts. However, it is an observable matter that people's moral beliefs vary within distinct times, groups, and communities. Moreover, people generally do not have such a shared recognition of what counts as 'right' or 'wrong'. Hence, Mackie believes that allegedly common agreements on some objective grounds, as moral realism implies, are not comprehensible since people can hold equally sound but radically distinct beliefs about the rightness and wrongness of the same action. Thus, Mackie concludes that moral realism is futile to account for moral disagreements

Without any experimental data or any moral phenomenon favoring the pervasiveness of epistemic certainty, it is also possible to eschew an alternative picture that most people strongly hold moral beliefs by means of deference. That is to say, it is a common phenomenon to observe that moral agents customarily inherit their moral beliefs from their communities through social trust and integrity so that moral beliefs are on par with the cases of testimonial knowledge in a prescriptive social system where agents come to believe in something and act on these beliefs based on some other agents' prevailing beliefs in this social system. As the alternative picture implies, it is unwarranted to assume that our moral beliefs mostly have an epistemic certainty for us. Furthermore, it is dubious whether moral agents are more likely to agree on their moral claims with the highest confidence or whether they hold equally strong relations with the same moral claims. These crucial points are rather significant for moral realists to eliminate moral relativism or moral subjectivism as viable components for being the best explanation for our moral certainty. Unless Adams explains away these points in a warranted manner, his account fails to accommodate moral realism with epistemic certainty.

In addition to the concerns about Adams' first premise, there are also some worrisome concerns with his second premise that presumes an alleged connection between the strength of an agent's confident beliefs and the reality of the subject matters entertained in her confident belief. There are straightforward counter-examples against the presupposition that one's beliefs with almost the highest degree of confidence are sufficient to implicate the reality of the subject matter of her belief. First, one's belief about Santa's being identical to himself seems to have certainty for her for the sake of the nature of identity statements; however, it would be mistaken to assume that it is also acceptable for her to strongly embrace Santa's existence in one way or another. As one's confident belief in 'Santa is Santa' is not sufficient for her to believe in the existence of Santa. Even if the sentence 'Santa is Santa' logically presupposes that there is something named 'Santa', neither the presupposition is self-evident nor it is necessary for the agent to believe in Santa's existence. Therefore, the strength of agents' confidence in their beliefs does not suffice to entail the reality of the subject matters entertained in these beliefs. Again, imagine a person who likes to play with numbers and mathematical principles all on her own. Once she seeks to divide several integers by some other non-zero integer, she might come to believe that any integer divided by another is most likely a rational number. Hereby, it is difficult to see how the belief 'Any integer divided by another integer is most likely a rational number' entails the reality of numbers or one's commitment to the reality

of numbers. Her degree of confidence in asserting her belief comes from her successful calculations regardless of whether or not these integers are mind-independent and objective entities. Thus, any tautological or stipulative statement poses the same threat to Adams' presupposition since agents' confidence about the truth of such statements merely comes from the fact that some statements are always true either by definition or solely because of their logical structure. In other words, Adams' second premise certainly does not work out for such truths since their contents or the nature of these contents are somehow irrelevant for rational agents to hold these truths in the first place. If the second premise does not work out for some of our beliefs with the highest degree of confidence, why would it exceptionally work out for moral beliefs? Ostensibly, Adams does not offer any independent ground for moral beliefs to validate the second premise above; yet, the action-guiding property of moral beliefs might be the reason. Unlike the beliefs with tautological or stipulative contents, strongly held moral beliefs seem to prescribe agents to act on these beliefs in one way or another. Nevertheless, Adams does not reserve any exceptional status for strongly held moral beliefs. In short, Adams leaves his second premise ambiguous as to why and how some beliefs with a remarkable degree of certainty provide a basis for the reality of their subject matters.

Leaving aside the problems above, his general argumentative strategy seems also unwarranted. In other words, his abductive reasoning for moral realism as the best explanation for our moral certainty faces further challenges. First, his reasoning is weakly subsidiary because he does not elaborate and couple moral realism with some further moral cases and moral phenomena in favor of moral realism. In favor of Adams' presumptive maneuver, moral realism can further be reinforced with a weighty number of subsidiary reasons so that the reality of moral discourse follows from a stronger abduction. Even if such subsidiary reasons are not conclusive reasons to endorse moral realism, they might still fortify the plausibility of moral realism. In this respect, moral realism can be promoted as the best explanation for the following cases: (i) Independence: moral judgments seem to be irrespective of agents' personal preferences, desires, and opinions (For instance, an agent's ethical assertion appears to be binding him with a normative authority above his desires, and such); (ii) Convergence: there are moral judgments on which different people converge (It is hardly the case that inflicting cruelty on people for its own sake is morally acceptable for people from diverging backgrounds and ethical traditions) ; (iii) Disagreement, progress, and phenomenology: Something cannot have the disagreeing properties like being right and being not-right at the same time; there is moral progress or a possibility of it; people, in turn, discover some things as bad or wrong by their first-hand experiences no matter what they believe or think previously to these experiences (Fisher,2011). Moral realism might cohere with some or all of these moral intuitions, and thereby the plausibility of moral realism seems to be reinforced

Nonetheless, such intuitions, which might be interpreted in favor of moral realism, form exclusively presumptive reasons for the viability of moral realism. Hence, even a moral realist can sensibly refuse to draw on one or all of these cases while defending moral realism. As these intuitions, separately or even together, do not constitute any compelling reason why moral realism is the best explanation for our moral discourse. After all, these presumptions can be coherently explained away by some other theories opposing moral realism. To illustrate, a proponent of naturalism or relativism might fairly adopt and utilize these presumptions to fortify the plausibility of her account. Thus, we need more substantial grounds other than presumptions to decide on which meta-ethical theory actually depicts and explains our moral discourse most plausibly. In short, Adams fails to give a compelling picture as to why moral realism rather than another meta-ethical stance has to be taken into account for grounding our moral discourse in a loving God's commands. To preserve the cogency of his commitment to moral realism in the modified DCM, Adams ought to warrant the plausibility of moral realism.

3. Challenges from The Euthyphro Dilemma

Apart from his weak commitment to moral realism, Adams' DCM also looks susceptible to one standard concern about the simplified thesis that it is wrong (or right) to do the action *A* because it is contrary to (or in line with) God's commands for moral agents to do *A*. Although this formulation, at its face value, stipulates some sort of dependence (e.g. equivalence, supervenience, or constitution) between God's commands and moral properties, it never overtly articulates the grounds on which this dependence relation between moral properties and God's commands hold in the first place. That is to say, the above thesis of DCM does not straightforwardly answer the question of what makes an alleged set of moral actions and God's imperatives relevant to each other. Accordingly, it does not explicitly convey the very nature of the co-subsistent relevance between divinity and morality, which DCM is to constitute in the first place. Hence, DCM does not give a non-circular answer to the question of what makes an action apt to be commanded (forbidden) by God, and to the question of what makes God command or forbid an action. Therefore, there is a grave concern that DCM does not ascertain that God's moral authorship becomes relevant to define a set of moral actions or vice versa.

From a theistic perspective, this relevance appears to be self-evidential since such and such supreme attributes of an all-powerful "creator and the governor of the whole universe" inevitably stay relevant to moral discourse (Adams, 1987b, p.157). Based on this theological assumption, the proponents of DCM generally acknowledge that an action is right because God commands it. Hereby, the Euthyphro dilemma initially comes out as a critical test for DCM to figure out what relevance there might be between God's commands and moral properties. Considering the relevance relation presumed in DCM, the dilemma raises the following question: Is what is morally right commanded by God because it is morally right, or is it morally right because it is commanded by God?

Hereby, the Euthyphro dilemma suggests the following challenges, each of which puts DCM under a theoretical burden about how we ground the relevance between God's commands and moral discourse without implicating some undesirable consequences for the adopted conceptions of God and moral discourse.

1. Sovereignty Problem: If an action is commanded (forbidden) by God because it is morally right (wrong), then moral rightness (wrongness) is autonomous from God's commands to the effect that God has no sovereignty over determining moral properties.

2. *Arbitrariness Problem:* If an action is morally right (wrong) because it is commanded/forbidden by God, then moral rightness(wrongness) strictly depends on whatever God wills to command (forbids) to the effect that the assessment of moral aspects, such as moral values, actions, facts, and even moral agency, becomes an arbitrary enterprise under the tutelage of God's will.

Any proponent of DCM, including Adams, has to explain away the above implications if they desire to conveniently ground moral properties in God's commands by substantiating the relevance between God's commands and moral properties.

3.1 The Sovereignty Problem

As the sovereignty problem suggests, God would have no sovereignty over what moral properties or facts are; but a morally good God's commands, at best, would also go in line with these properties. As a result, the problem consequently entails that God's commands have no relevance in determining what is right or wrong. If it is the case, then the proponents of DCM must cope with a threatening implication that God's commands have no immediate nor explanatory relevance to the question of what is rightness or wrongness. This implication poses a very troublesome objection, mainly because DCM

would not define the nature of rightness/wrongness except for a claim that God's commands or prohibitions are on par with the moral properties grounded independently from God's commands. At this point, DCM faces two apparent problems due to diminishing God's omnipotence. First, the autonomy of moral aspects appears to restrict God's omnipotence which pertains to being capable of determining an arbitrary value for any action taken by any agent which God can choose. Secondly, the autonomy of moral aspects apparently subsumes God's acts (including his commands) under the given value assessment, and thus the autonomy of morality might subjugate God's omnipotence.

Adams (1979, 1987a) puts forward his modified account in which a loving God is metaphysically necessary for constituting moral discourse. Thereby, Adams contends that "wrongness is actually constituted by contrariety to the commands of (a loving) God" (1979, p.79). By reinterpreting the relation between God's commands and moral properties, he intends to posit that a loving God's commands are not taken merely as being logically equivalent to nor as being analytically synonymous with rightness. As Adams argues; although God's commands on an action and its moral property truth-conditionally overlap, they are distinct by definition, especially in terms of metaphysical properties. Any variant of DCM agrees on the truth-conditional equivalence between "(1) It is wrong (for A) to do X" and "(2) It is contrary to God's commands (for A) to do X" to the effect that they have the same truth value for any morally relevant action (Adams, 1987a, p. 97). So, this presumed equivalence only holds extensionally, and thus it does not exclude the idea that these sentences have the same evaluative conditions intensionally specific to what each sentence means.

Accordingly, Adams thinks that a loving God's commands are conceptually prior to forming such and such moral properties in the sense that a loving God's commands metaphysically and necessarily determine such and such moral properties in the first place. If it is the case that a moral property of an action and God's command on this action are on par with each other because God constitutes such and such obligatory standards or laws to abide in terms of these properties. Hereby, it is worth explaining how Adams justifies his reinterpretation of DCM as the constitution between God's commands and moral rightness.

In this context, Adams (1979) analyzes our moral discourse depending on a few intuitions which seem to be reasonable from both meta-ethical and theological points of view (pp.74-76). Thereby, we, as Adams argues, are prone to hold the following intuitions: (i) our moral discourse is to consists of "actions have or lack [wrongness or rightness] objectively"; (ii) moral properties in our moral discourse should be commonly and respectively categorized as such and such by "the important central group" of moral agents; (iii) moral properties also play "a causal role" to invoke moral agents for taking an action; (iv) moral discourse is to provide an independent "reason to oppose wrong actions as such"; (v) there should be a constitutive law or standard for moral properties so that "has a sanctity that is not possessed by any merely human will or instate" (pp. 74-75). As Adams suggests, the above intuitions are satisfied by taking God as a metaphysical foundation of moral discourse. In doing so, it is fair for him to hold that God as a metaphysical foundation of moral discourse objectively determines the entire moral discourse that includes the moral properties, the shared recognition, the causal roles, and the normative force. Once we endorse Adams' picture of the relation between God's commands and moral properties, then the sovereignty problem does not seem to be a compelling challenge any longer. As Adams underlines that it is implausible to think of moral properties as autonomous since God constitutes moral properties in the first place. Furthermore; he, thereby, explicates the question of what makes God's commands relevant to moral properties. He, after all,

conceptualizes a loving God as the author of any intuitively coherent notion of moral discourse.

Nonetheless, it is intriguing that Adams presumes a particular conception of God that most plausibly conforms with some stipulated intuitions about the moral discourse. Contentiously, those intuitions appear neither self-evidential nor prevailingly common. For one thing, they seem to be theory-oriented desires to meet rather than some genuine common beliefs that moral agents phenomenologically or principally share. In other words, it is really difficult to see why an anti-realist, for instance, can recognize any of them as a compelling intuition to understand moral discourse. For instance, almost every meta-ethical stance might also meet with the intuition that moral properties invoke and guide actions though they disagree with each other on how such properties enable to stimulate moral agents. Again, each alleged intuition that Adams enlists cannot be taken for granted by every meta-ethical stance considering how such views theorize the nature of moral discourse. To illustrate, a meta-ethical constructivist, who believes moral discourse to be the system of validation constructed intersubjectively in virtue of subjects' common and/or conflicting interests in the relevant actions, disagrees with the alleged intuition that opposing a wrong action or promoting a right action must rest on any ground independently from moral agents' social interests, and such. So, the moral intuitions above have a theoretical purport to imply God's existence only if one already assumes a certain type of moral discourse and a particular conception of God that somehow pertains to this certain type of discourse. For another thing, those intuitions, even if they are sensible to entertain, do not necessarily single out God as a metaphysical foundation for moral discourse. Platonic realists, for instance, might adopt these intuitions with minor differences to the effect that there is a metaphysical foundation of moral discourse that has no immediate relevance to any particular conception of divinity.

3.2 The Arbitrariness Problem

In addition to the sovereignty problem, the arbitrariness problem also leads divine command theorists to revise or drop their thesis for the sake of their previous commitments about the nature of God. The problem seemingly indicates that the divine command theorists demarcate the moral discourse firmly so that our moral discourse strictly depends on what a single moral authority commands. Regarding God's being omnipotent, the problem further implies that a supreme being, who is capable of willing and doing anything, has no restriction in his commands and prohibitions. Consequently, he can command or forbid one action rather than another in a volatile manner due to being the sole authority and the unrestrained arbiter in our moral discourse. If God is the sole author and the unrestrained arbiter of our moral discourse, then it is conceivable for us to come up with cases where God's such and such role in moral discourse conflicts with the adopted nature of moral discourse and the given conception of God. First, the moral properties of any action would not necessarily remain unchanged nor consistent through cases since any moral property of an action strictly depends on whatever God wills to issue. As it is conceivable to address the question of what refrains God from commanding an action in non-universal or non-ubiquitous manners. That God is the single author and the arbiter of moral discourse makes moral properties categorically inconceivable since a token of a right act is apt to vary from God's particular command to another. The arbitrariness problem further implies that God can command horrendous actions such as cruelty for its own sake (e.g. torturing children), which seems intuitively wrong. Thus, DCM entails that it is not wrong for someone to inflict cruelty for its own sake if God commands it and wrongness is being contrary to God's commands. However, the implications of the arbitrariness – namely, allowing non-ubiquitous moral properties and horrendous actions- disparage the idea that DCM is the most plausible theory to explain moral discourse.

As Adams (1987a) suggests, this is "the gravest objection" to DCM which cannot tolerate the arbitrariness of entire moral discourse if it coherently demonstrates the objectivity of moral properties and the attributed characteristics of God (p.98). At this point, Adams highlights that a couple of solutions, though not thoroughly satisfactory for him, can be proposed by the divine command theorists (1987a, pp.99-100). Firstly, it might not be unreasonable to embrace the outcome of the arbitrariness problem in the sense that one might bite the bullet and posit that it is wrong for an agent to dismiss an action X, which seems to be intuitively abhorrent if God commands us to do X. Accordingly, Adams conveys that some philosophers such as William Ockham admit that "*theft*, *adultery* and even *the hatred of God* would be meritorious if God had commanded them" to sustain the idea that it is logically possible for God to command "cruelty for its own sake" (1987a, p.100). Such a defense embraces the logical possibility that God can command an action X rather than Not-X if X and Not-X are opposite actions to take or leave. For Adams, this sort of defense, first and foremost, compromises theistic convictions about God's nature, and therefore it implicates a possible inconsistency with a loving God's omnibenevolence. Also, it is fair to note that the presumed reality of moral facts would be implausible due to such a volatile arbiter in our moral discourse if moral reality is intelligible in as much as it gets its objectivity from a being having a coherent character in his decisions. That is to say, if it is logically possible that God commands cruelty for its own sake then it undermines either the concept of a loving God or the objectivity of moral discourse. Thus, Adams concludes that the first defense against the arbitrariness concern simply fails.

The second defense, which Adams mentions, is to appeal to God's perfectly good nature, which he also employs in his defense with a minor modification. According to this defense, it is logically possible for God to command something wrong for our moral intuitions only if we ignore the unity of his attributes (1987a, pp.113-115). According to this defense, if God does anything, he does it following his divine nature. He is, after all, what he is only in virtue of possessing and actualizing this nature. Hence, God does not command anything abhorrent despite the fact that it is logically possible once we isolate his omnipotence from his unified character. After all, God commands under his divine nature as all-good thus he does not command something strikingly immoral. In this respect, Adams means to emphasize the distinction between logical possibility and metaphysical possibility so that it is metaphysically impossible for such a divine being to command cruelty for its own sake due to his defined nature. Adams (1987a) more or less agrees with this defense which appeals to God's metaphysical nature, but this defense, as he suggests, also falls short if some restrictions on what 'God is all good' means are not set (p.113). To explicate, let us take God's omnibenevolence exclusively in terms of morality. If God is morally good and this is the reason why he does not command killing innocent children, then it seems that his goodness can be translated into moral rightness. Hence, the statement 'God is all good' means that God always does what God commands since the divine command theory holds that what is good is to do what God commands. This leads us to the triviality that God always does what God commands. Adams, therefore, disputes that God's so-called metaphysical features, which dismiss the logical possibility of commanding horrendous acts, cannot collapse back on moral properties.

Regarding the disadvantageous facets of the above solutions, Adams (1987a, 1979) strategically brings out God's one particular characteristic into his formulation of DCM so that he aims to converge moral aspects of life with some morally relevant features of God's commands. As he puts it,

> …But 'It is contrary to God's commands to do X' implies 'It is wrong to do X' only if certain conditions are assumed—namely, only if it is assumed that God has the character which I believe him to have, of loving his human creatures. If God were really to command us to make cruelty our goal, then he would not

have that character of loving us, and I would not say it would be wrong to disobey him (Adams, 1987a, p.100).

In doing so, he emphasizes the notion of love and implements it into his modified DCM to the effect that a loving God non-trivially entails morally good commands. According to him, if there is God and he loves his creations, then wrongness is metaphysically reducible to its constitutive foundation that corresponds to being contrary to a loving God's commands. In this picture, a loving God does not issue commands conflicting with his loving character since it is metaphysically necessary for God to command in accordance with his loving character. In contrast to what the arbitrariness problem implicates, the idea that it is logically possible for an omnipotent God to command morally horrendous acts should not be taken into account as a matter of God's true nature, because it is metaphysically impossible for an omnipotent and a loving God to command something excluding His divine nature. In this regard, the arbitrariness problem, for Adams, arises only when someone adopts that God's commands logically implicate moral properties and that it is logically possible for God to command whatever he wills to command. Nonetheless, a loving God who metaphysically constitutes the very nature of moral discourse by His divine nature necessarily commands the actions which follow from His divine nature.

At this point, Adams further underlines that his response faces a danger of collapsing into the problem of triviality especially if this loving nature is equivalent to God's being morally good. Hence, Adams (1987a) offers a few retakes on the Judeo-Christian idea of God's being morally good to show how the sentence 'God is morally good' does not become a tautology due to his theoretical interest in the notion of a loving God. For him, it is possible to read 'good' in some broader contexts instead of reading it in moral contexts only so that he seeks to avoid the triviality concern about his modified DCM (pp. 114-117). As he stipulates, ascribing goodness to God generally expresses believers' "favorable emotional attitude" such as gratitude towards God concerning His certain singular quality or indefinitely long conjunction of qualities (e.g. kindness, forgiveness, guidance, and such) which are believed to favor humans in life (1987a, p.116). According to this analysis, Adams (1987a) believes that God's loving character cannot be reduced to a moral value or property in our moral discourse since God's loving character has nothing to do with whether God conforms to "a standard of ethical rightness which is independent of the will of God" (p.116). Thus, ascribing a loving character to God might illustrate that God is kind to us in his disposition for forgiving if and only if his kindness in his forgiving position, for instance, must be considered as a divine characteristic that transcends the moral standards and the ethical conditions for any moral agent's kindness or forgiveness in our moral discourse. Adams' retake on God's omnibenevolence seems to be self-evident for theists to endorse since theists are naturally reluctant to ascribe anthropomorphic virtues or qualities on God that might mislead one to assess God's character through the qualities such as "chastity", "dutifulness" and physical prowess which theists do not wish to apply onto God (1987a, p.115). In this respect, Adams ascribes an un-moral characteristic to God in his involvement with the moral discourse. In addition, he underlines the role of God's loving nature in this picture. To Adams, God's un-moral characteristic allows God to bring about the moral values and properties which fit into our moral discourse. In doing so, Adams believes that his metaphysical characterization of God's loving nature does not lead the modified DCM into the triviality concern since this characteristic goes beyond being moral, amoral, and immoral; yet, this divine characteristic carries out some consequences and implications for morally relevant actions.

Despite Adams' efforts to cope with the arbitrariness problem through his modified DCM, his modification still gets into further trouble due to his vague notion of a loving God. As discussed above, Adams mainly argues that a loving God cannot command

something which goes against his loving nature, and His loving nature is not exhausted by moral goodness that is the reason why a loving God's commands do not trivially correspond to moral goodness. Adams' response to the arbitrariness problem develops as a two-folded argument. First, Adams addresses the question of why God does not command something morally wrong despite its logical possibility derived from His omnipotence. Adams hereby responds that God's commands necessarily bear His essential characteristic, namely his loving nature. Secondly, Adams visits the question of how God's loving nature always results in moral goodness in a non-trivial manner. He hereby indicates that his loving nature is not merely a moral characteristic, but it is a non-moral kind of benevolent mode of acting or executing distinct sorts of things. So, Adams seems to believe that God's every command and act occurs in this mode of divinity; moreover, this mode distinctly comprehends every good action while it also distinctly excludes every wrong action.

Initially, Adams' account of God's loving nature seems to be ungrounded independently of theological commitments on a Judeo-Christian conception of God and his loving characteristic. For one thing, Adams' explanation of how God's loving nature does not trivially correspond to any moral sense of goodness heavily relies on the theistic conviction that one cannot ascribe moral characteristics to God due to His transcendental nature. Even if Adams is right about assessing God's loving nature independently of the moral standards to which only moral agents are subjected to conform, he still presumes Judeo-Christian standards for divinity to which this loving nature conforms. In other words, Adams relies on theological presumptions to ground how a divine being, who constitutes the moral properties by His command, can never command cruelty for its own sake. Nevertheless, he does not offer any philosophical ground on how God's loving characteristic, which Adams considers to be non-moral in nature, always results in or co-subsists with morally right actions despite the fact that this mode of commanding itself is not simply identifiable with commanding in the morally right manner. In this regard, Adams has to give a substantial reason why every act executed lovingly results in morally permissible acts. As long as he does not provide any substantial reason for the relevance between lovingly executed actions and morally right actions, his modified DCM can never reply to the question of why a loving God cannot command something morally impermissible. Here, the trouble for Adams is about grounding the conviction that God's non-moral mode of commanding an action necessarily co-subsist or overlaps with the moral properties of this action. It is easy to cast doubt on such a necessary relation between the non-moral mode of commanding an action and the moral status of this very action. To illustrate, it seems non-contradictory and legitimately conceivable that the right actions do not necessarily follow from kind or merciful modes of acting. So, it is conceivable to think that one kindly commands something horrendous unless kindness has a moral aspect excluding moral wrongness. Better yet, it is also difficult to see the reason why only divine mode of commanding – not another- always overlaps with morally right actions. In other words, some other divine modes of commanding an action (i.e. commanding an action furiously, vindictively or justly) might fairly result in morally right actions if all moral goodness rests on God's omnibenevolent nature which must manifest itself in His every mode of commanding something. Excluding his theologically-oriented justification for how a loving God's commands never result in horrendous actions, Adams does not substantially explain how God's loving nature as a non-moral quality necessitates his commands being relevant to morally right actions regardless of conforming to the ethical standards by which actions are right.

4. Conclusion

Adams (1979, 1987a), as a proponent of DCM, seeks to ground a non-naturalist realism in terms of moral discourse and yet he reinterprets DCM to fortify it in the face of some persistent challenges such as the *Euthyphro* dilemma. Here, Adams' modified variant

departs from DCM based on his thesis that an action A is morally right if and only if it is metaphysically necessary for a loving God to command A. In this context, it is noteworthy that Adams' view attaches immense importance to the loving nature of God, and further interprets the given relation in DCM –between God's commands and moral properties- as a metaphysical constitution rather than a logical equivalence between being commanded by God and being right. His interpretation, nonetheless, fails to constitute a robust account of DCM.

In this regard, he weakly construes moral realism by a presumptive claim that moral realism most adequately accounts for the alleged pervasiveness of our strongly held beliefs about moral discourse. In this context, Adams' defense for the plausibility of moral realism heavily hinges on the conviction that most moral agents pervasively hold their moral beliefs with almost the highest degree of confidence. Nevertheless, the conviction at hand is not sufficient to argue for moral realism. First, what Adams means by our highest degree of confidence seems to be vague as to what sort of certainty (i.e. psychological, epistemic or some other sort) moral agents pervasively entertain in their moral beliefs. Therefore, Adams must elaborate it first and then he must coherently justify the reason why moral judgements involve this adopted sort of certainty. Even if Adams may adopt a coherent notion of certainty to characterize our moral judgements in their epistemic or normative roles, Adams must still ground the pervasiveness of such and such moral judgements. Nevertheless; he does not experimentally or phenomenologically warrant the pervasiveness of our strongly held moral claims regarding how some opposing views such as moral relativism and subjectivism may characterize our moral discourse.

In addition to Adams' sketchy defense of moral realism, his modified DCM fails to explain away the *Euthyphro dilemma* thoroughly. He seems to sort out the sovereignty problem, i.e the first horn of the dilemma, which implicates the autonomy of moral discourse independently of God's sovereignty over moral discourse. Hereby, the standard construal of DCM considers that the moral property of an action is logically equivalent with God's command on an action, and yet here the standard construal omits God's sole omnipotence and its relevance to moral discourse. On the other hand, Adams' account satisfactorily accommodates God's sovereignty with the autonomy of moral discourse in the sense that a loving God's commands are conceptually prior to forming such and such moral properties, and his commands metaphysically but not logically cohere with such moral properties. Still, Adams' modified account is not a viable option for the second horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma, namely the arbitrariness problem, according to which our moral discourse firmly depends on what an unrestrainable supreme arbiter commands us to do. As Adams admits, many DCM theorists like himself seek to explain away this problem about God's unrestrainable-ness by holding that God's all attributes must cohere with each other to the effect that God's omnipotence, i.e. unrestrainable authorization, cannot contradict with God's omnibenevolence, i.e. goodness. Yet, the standard construal of DCM, as Adams agrees, goes in vicious circle if such a notion of divine goodness merely corresponds to a moral sense of goodness. Thereby, Adams' variant of DCM holds God's loving nature as a non-moral attribute which keeps God's commands morally relevant to our actions of discourse. However, Adams' account is unwarranted about how non-moral commands always correspond to moral properties in every possible moral case although God's loving nature does not essentially bear any moral aspect. In other words, Adams does not substantially ground that God's mode of promoting an action can never be reducible with the moral property of an action although this mode of commanding does not essentially bear the quality in question. Thus, Adams must elaborate how a certain mode of commanding an action (e.g. loving, caring, vindictive or furious)- rather than any other mode- always results in a certain quality of an action.

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