

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-24: "Child Abuse" Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro.4

The account of God commanding Abraham to murder his son is often a target for positive atheists¹ and an occasion for embarrassment for many believers who try to defend God and Abraham, the father of faith. An excellent way to appreciate the moral issue is by recasting the Euthyphro Dilemma in Abrahamic terms: Is it morally good for Abraham to murder his innocent only son simply because 'Ehyeh commanded it (divine-command theory of ethics)? Or is some moral order in the fabric of the universe autonomous of God to which even God has to comport? The Euthyphro Dilemma, 'is something good because the gods will it, or do the gods will it because it is good,' is a false dilemma. One of the horns of the dilemma needs to be split to allow for a third option. This solves the problems in attempting understanding the relationship between goodness/morality and God.

The third option is that true goodness is in the very essence of God Himself. It is not a *result* of His will and it is not autonomous. However, can we show that Abraham understood that goodness was in the very essence of God in the face of such a command that did not seem to fit? I think we can. In order for Abraham to believe in the essential goodness in the nature of God all the while accepting unconditionally the command to murder his innocent child required Abraham to firmly hold to four propositions:

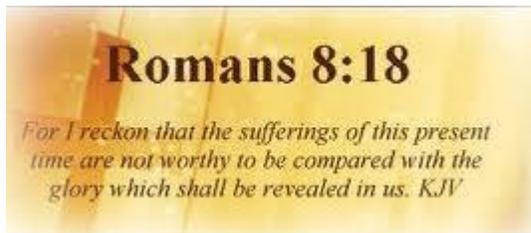
1. God has commanded me to kill my son.
2. God is good and altogether worthy of my obedience.
3. For me to kill my son, even as a human sacrifice to God, would be horribly wrong.
4. God is good and will not allow me to do something horribly wrong in obedience to his commands.

These four beliefs certainly strain against one another, but they are not impossible. Abraham could hold them all without being irrational, and if he did hold them all, his trust in God was unconditional. That Abraham's faith was unconditional can be seen in the statement, "he stretched out his hand and took the knife *to kill* his son." Unconditional is just that—which means that there was nothing like Abraham thinking something along the line of "Surely God won't let me actually do this horrible thing; so I'll go along with His command, at least until the

¹The positive atheist refers to an atheist who asserts there is no God and provides reasons for the proposition that God does not exist (e.g., the problem of evil). This is to be distinguished from negative atheist of late who simply asserts that he does not believe in God. The latter provides no reasons or arguments. Essentially, it is a non-position or a position by assertion—an assertion which is really only about the status of their belief instead of a stand on the ontological question of the existence of God.

last minute. But if there is no divine reprieve by then, I'll know deep down that God wasn't good after all, and I'll stop the knife at the last possible moment." A pretend faith or conditional faith may have been expedient or even sensible for some, but it would have fallen far short of the heroism with which Abraham was credited in the New Testament (Romans 4; James 2:21-23). Abraham trusted God's goodness unconditionally: he took the knife to kill his son, not merely to raise his arm as if to kill his son. This was no pretend faith. Abraham was a supergrace believer with a supergrace faith. We will examine this faith more closely in the next daily doctrine.

We are all another day closer to being face-to-face with 'Ehyeh - אֶהְיֶה,



Pastor Don