



Divine Command Theory and the Euthyphro Dilemma

The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London
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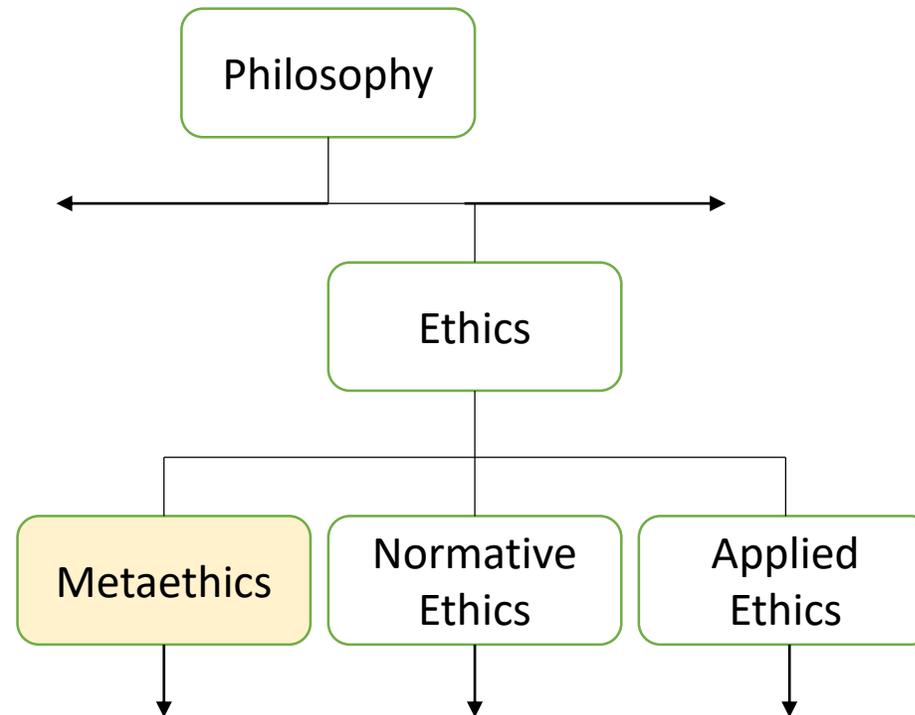


Today's agenda

- Divine Command Theory
- The Euthyphro Dilemma
- Reactions to the Euthyphro
- Natural Law Theory
- Implications for healthcare
- Medical cases

Intro to Divine Command Theory

- Metaethics – Subbranch of philosophy that answers how it is we come to know moral knowledge



Intro to Divine Command Theory

- Metaethics – Subbranch of philosophy that answers how it is we come to know moral knowledge
- Divine Command Theory provides AN answer to this question by suggesting morality originates with god



Divine Commands

1. God commands F
2. What god commands ought to be done

—
 $\therefore F$ ought to be done

Sources of Divine Commands

- Revelation as a source
- Reason as a source

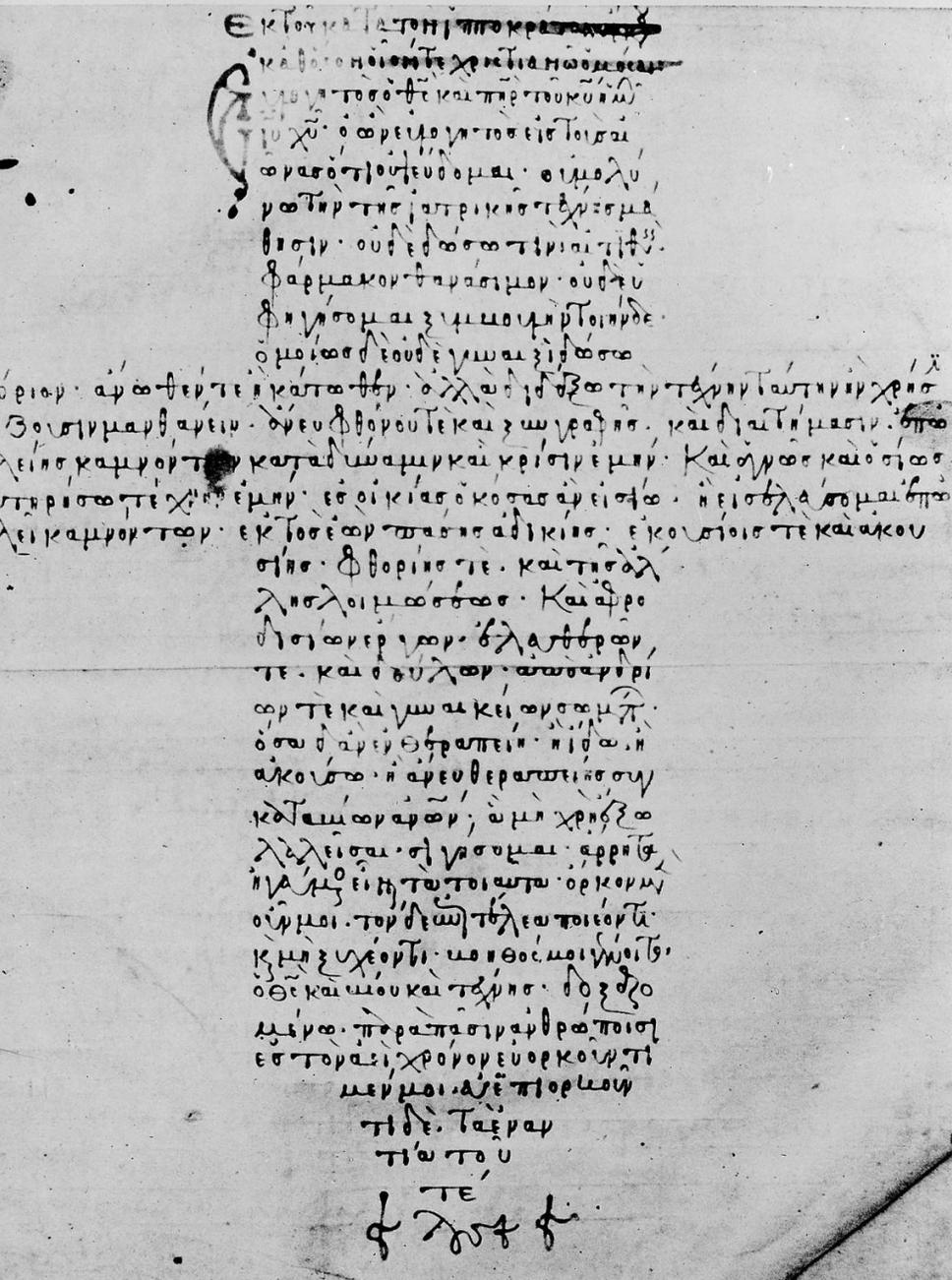


Revelation as a Source

- Depends on what we think Revelation is
 - Revelation must be interpreted
 - Who interprets?
 - If someone other than me interprets, how do I interpret the interpreters?

Reason as a Source

- Command known by reason is perhaps like a claim to conscience
 - *F* must be done because God commands it
 - *F* must be done because conscience commands it
- Why is it people disagree about fundamental moral tenets? (Aquinas)
- We will come back to Aquinas in more detail



Commands Are Insufficient

- Rules need to be interpreted
- They need to be applied
- Application is to particular cases (similar to medical ethics):
 - Which rules?
 - Is this an exception?



Side-discussion: How is this similar to duties?

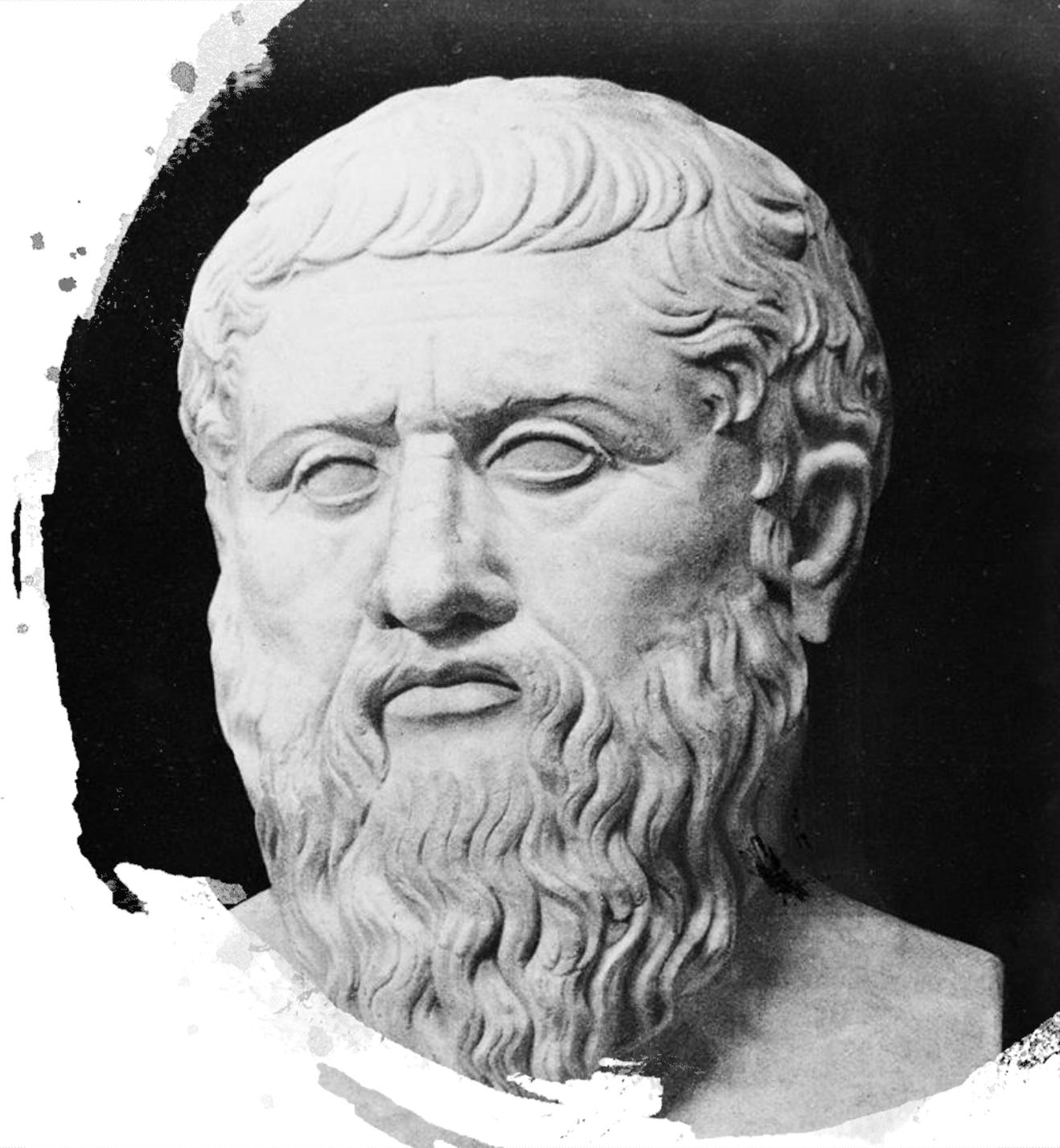
- Divine Command Theory starts with general rules and moves to specific cases. The same rule might play out in a number of different ways depending on the details of the case.
- This is how principles and duties function within medical ethics (remember back to Prof. Gillon's lecture). You start with a general principle and add in specific details about the case.
- How are divine commands and principles of medical ethics similar?
How are they different?

Why Obey God's Command?

1. Because god is good, so what he commands is good
2. Because what god commands will lead to human flourishing
3. Because god is to be feared
 - “A defiance of an Almighty God is insane: it is like trying to cheat a man to whom your whole business is mortgaged...”

Plato's *Euthyphro*

- Comments on the nature and possible implications of god's commands
- The *elenchus* of Euthyphro
- Elenchus (ἔλεγχος) – a cross-examination using logic with the purpose of refuting an argument



Plato's *Euthyphro* – Summary

- While waiting for their respective court trials, Euthyphro and Socrates bump into on another
- Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father for murder
- Euthyphro's family is outraged, and they believe it's unholy for a son to prosecute his father for homicide

Euthyphro's Definition of Holiness

[5d] Socrates

Tell me then, what do you say holiness is, and what unholiness?¹

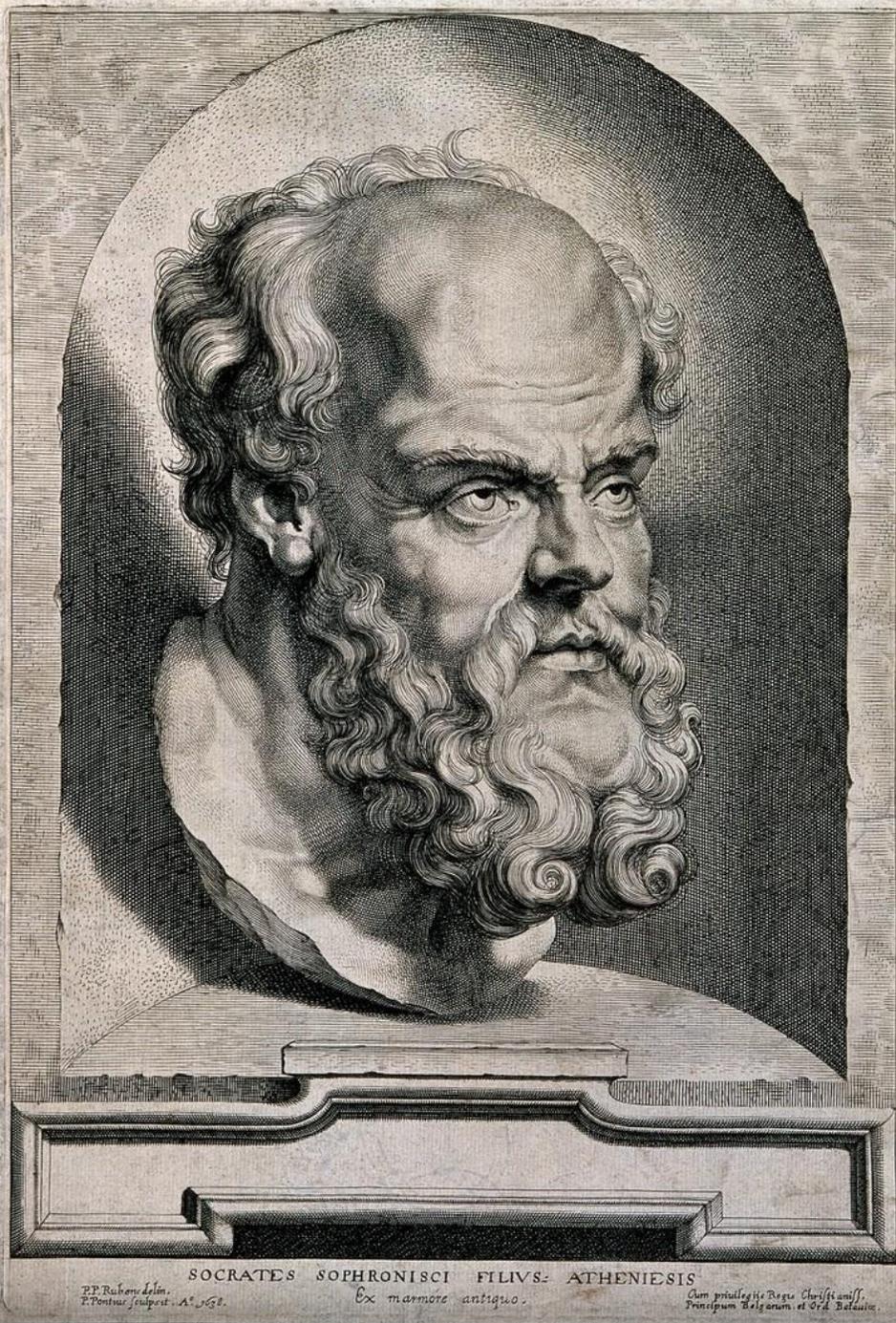
- Euthyphro's response: that which is holy (*ὅσιον*) is what god approves
- *ὅσιον* - pious, holy, lawful, pure, right, sanctioned or allowed by the law of God or of nature, duties men owe to the gods, not forbidden by divine law²

1. Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 1 translated by Harold North Fowler; Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1966

2. https://www.lexilogos.com/english/greek_ancient_dictionary.htm.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

- God commands the good (without reason)
- God recognises that which is already good



What are your thoughts?

- Was Socrates able to defeat Euthyphro (and by implication, the argument against a theist ethics)?

It's good because god commands it

- Historically, option preferred by those who made God's sovereignty the focus
 - William of Ockham (1287-1347)
 - God is absolutely free to command anything and could have commanded differently if he had chosen
 - Al-Ghazali (1058-1111)

God commands what is already good

- Thomas Aquinas
 - We can know what is right without reference to god
 - Morality follows from our nature
 - But god gives us a hand, because moral thinking is hard



Aquinas' Natural Law Theory

- God designs humans to be moral creatures
- Goodness comes from what humans naturally wish to do

Aquinas' Natural Law Theory

- God designs humans to be moral creatures
- Goodness comes from what humans naturally wish to do
 1. Life
 2. Reproduction
 3. Educate one's offspring
 4. Seek God
 5. Live in society
 6. Avoid offense
 7. Shun ignorance

Natural Law versus pure reason

- We have just seen how Natural Law Theory leads to specific guidance on actions
- How does this compare to specific action-guidance stemming from pure reason? (example using Kant)
- Implications of using pure reason: circumvents the need to use divinity in moral matters

Natural Law versus David Hume

- *A Treatise of Human Nature*
- Is–ought problem: Just because something IS a certain way does not mean it OUGHT to be that way

Euthyphro dilemma

I was interested to read your article on the Euthyphro dilemma. In stressing the common stance of moral realism between conflicting views, the author seeks to assert that we have a sufficient basis for 'campaigning for a better world' whatever our particular viewpoint.¹ While generally true, I do not think the meta-ethical question can be avoided forever, especially when deep tensions between views obtain. For example, I as a theist feel a moral duty to raise my children to know God, whereas a well-known atheist would consider this tantamount to child abuse.

Whose 'better world'?

In these discussions it is all too easy to confuse moral ontology (its' ultimate grounding) with moral epistemology (how we come to know moral values). Do you need to believe in God to live a moral life? Of course not, the Bible says as much (Romans 2:14–15). There are many ways to become aware of morality that don't involve

religion. Rather, what you actually need is a transcendent ground of morality to have any objective values whether you believe in God or not. And please, please note that the Euthyphro dilemma won't help you as a disproof of a theistic God as the ground of objective morality. It isn't a true dilemma for a start as the theist has recourse to a third option, namely that God IS the good, it is His nature, and thus neither decided arbitrarily by his will nor external to him.

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REFERENCE

1. Misselbrook D. An A–Z of medical philosophy: The Euthyphro dilemma. *Br J Gen Pract* 2013; **63(610)**: 263.

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp13X668131

Euthyphro dilemma

I was interested to read your article on

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God and goodness

- Isn't it possible that God turned out to not be good?
- Many theologians and religious philosophers will resist this by saying god is necessarily good
- Can we show god to be necessarily good?

Other rebuttals to the Euthyphro Dilemma

- Geach, P. T. (1966) Plato's Euthyphro: An Analysis and Commentary, *The Monist*, 50(3): 369-382.
- Bagget, D. & Walls, J. L. (2011). "The Euthyphro Dilemma" in *Good God: The theistic foundations of morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Takeaway: the Euthyphro Dilemma does not defeat a theistic ethics!

What are the implications for healthcare?

Out of Hours

An A–Z of medical philosophy

Box 1. Reflective notes

- Humans tend to huddle safely within their own tribes and throw bricks at others. Morality depends upon mutual respect. There is a morality of intellect also — do we respect the 'evidential golden rule' of evaluating the evidence of others' beliefs by the same criteria by which we test our own beliefs?
- How much do we promote an ethic of peace

The Euthyphro dilemma

The first recorded moral codes that we possess, such as the Code of Hammurabi (1760 BCE) or the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Law (1400 BCE) rely on the authority of divine commands. Some still debate today whether there can be morality

Buddhist, Hebrew, Christian, and Muslim scriptures. But it is also the basis for Kant's Categorical Imperative:

'Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.'

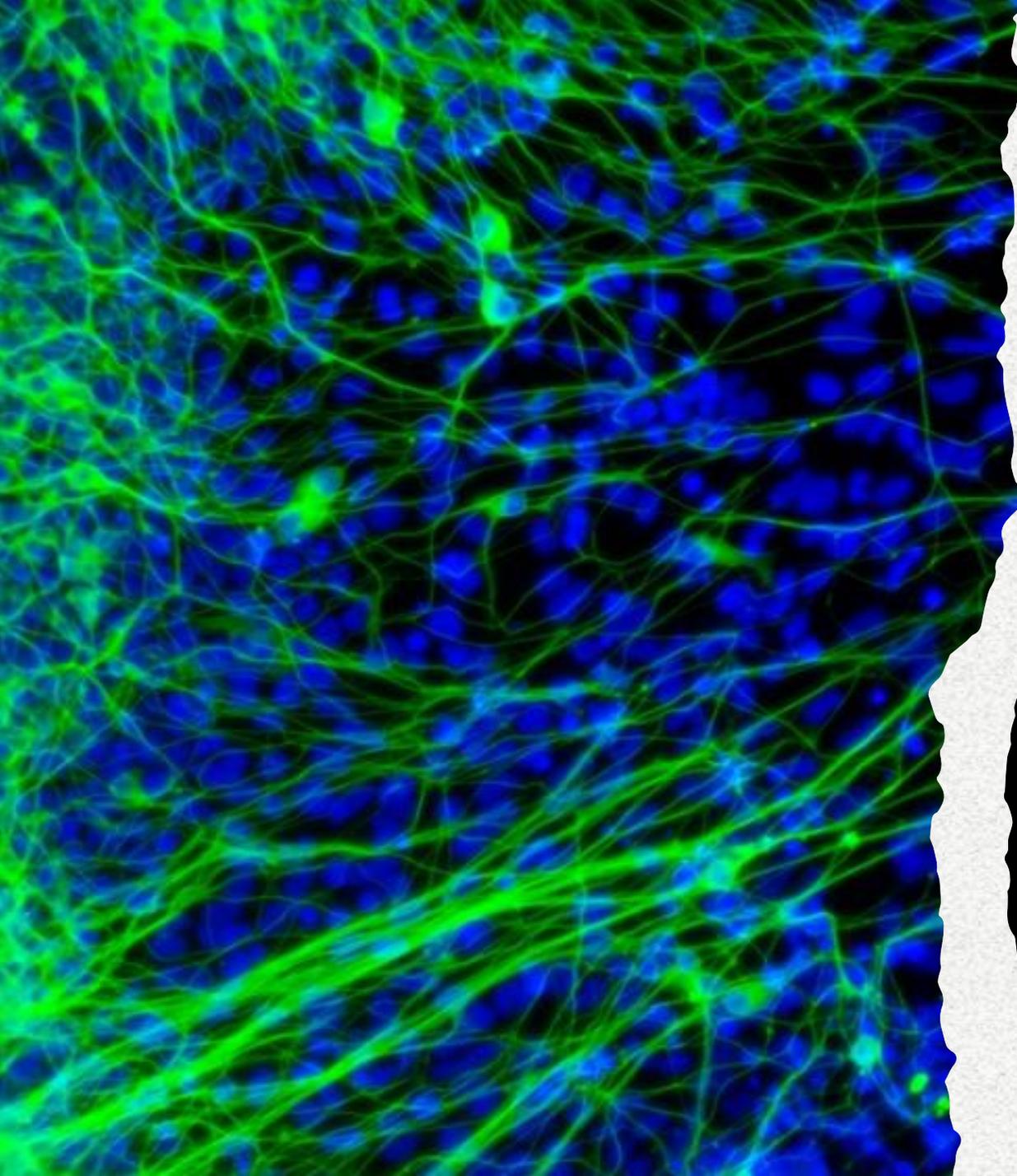
So, good news: the atheist and the faithful may interpret the deepest realities of the

A sustained Catholic interest in bioethics

- “Bioethics began in religion, but religion has faded from bioethics”
- Middle Ages: Abortion, amputation, contraception, & euthanasia
- 17th and 18th centuries: Abortion and contraception (seems to be a recurring theme)

Mid-1900s

- Natural law still used within Catholicism
- Pius XII (served 1939-1958) – euthanasia, human experimentation, amputation, organ transplantation
- Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae* (1968) – contraception (again!)
 - Led to a crisis among Catholic theologians and many theologians working within bioethics



Late-1900s

- Status of the human embryonic stem cells
 - Religious groups for
 - Religious groups against
- Take away: Catholicism has been interested in and has held opinions about many contested bioethical issues

CLINICAL ETHICS

Albert R. Jonsen, PH.D.
Mark Siegler, M.D.
William J. Winslade, PH.D., J.D.

Bioethicists who had their start within religion

- Albert Jonsen
- James Childress
- Robert Veatch



4-Quadrant Approach – adapted from *Clinical Ethics*

MEDICAL INDICATIONS	PATIENT PREFERENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical problems: ESRD (chronic and irreversible), other major progressive diseases (peripheral arterial disease, diabetes, hypertension) • Prognosis: fair to poor, given irreversible nature of ESRD; at best, if patient remains stable and avoids complications, can be called “fair,” without definition of remaining life expectancy • Goal of treatment: life extension (continued dialysis) versus “good death” (dialysis withdrawal and comfort care) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advance directive (created at time of renal transplantation) states patient’s desire to continue dialysis • After transplant rejection, resumption of dialysis, and stroke, patient begins to express (to son and primary care physician) a desire to stop dialysis; misses dialysis sessions, resulting in hospitalizations • Patient is passive at family meeting (wants “what is best for the family”) but tells nephrologist and primary care physician he wants to die peacefully at home • Patient appears mentally competent and understands the implications of stopping dialysis; he feels his death is near
QUALITY OF LIFE	CONTEXTUAL FEATURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient has severe, irreversible illness and a fair/poor prognosis • Patient has limited mobility from an amputation and stroke • Patient has high level of general pain • Patient lives with wife and has significant support from son; other children are nearby and involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient’s family members have differing opinions regarding continuing versus withdrawing dialysis; some cite religious reasons for sustaining life • Primary care physician obtains medicolegal opinion about the precedent and lawfulness of dialysis discontinuation • Relative costs of palliative care/hospice (low) versus continued aggressive treatment with or without frequent hospitalizations (high)

Does religion have a role in bioethics?

- H. Tristram Engelhardt
- Nigel Biggar – Oxford Theologian
 1. Secularity is not the only rational option
 2. Christianity is not irrational
- Mark Cherry

Religion's role in bioethics (Pellegrino)

- 1) What is the justification for introducing religious commitments in clinical bioethics in a morally pluralist society?
- 2) What specifically does the Catholic medical tradition contribute to today's clinical decisions?
- 3) How are faith and reason to be balanced in clinical ethics?

Fig. 1.1: Religious affiliation of the British population

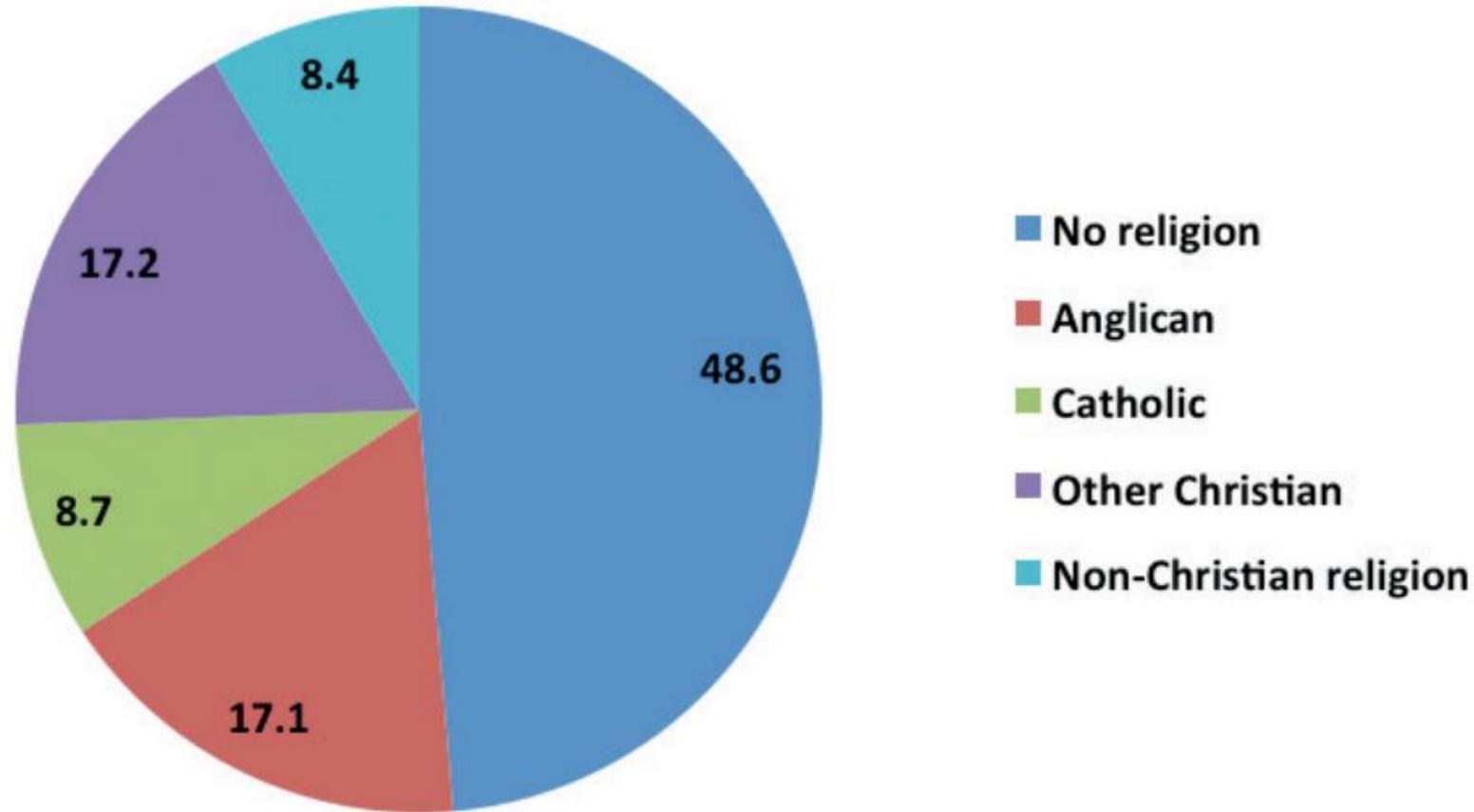
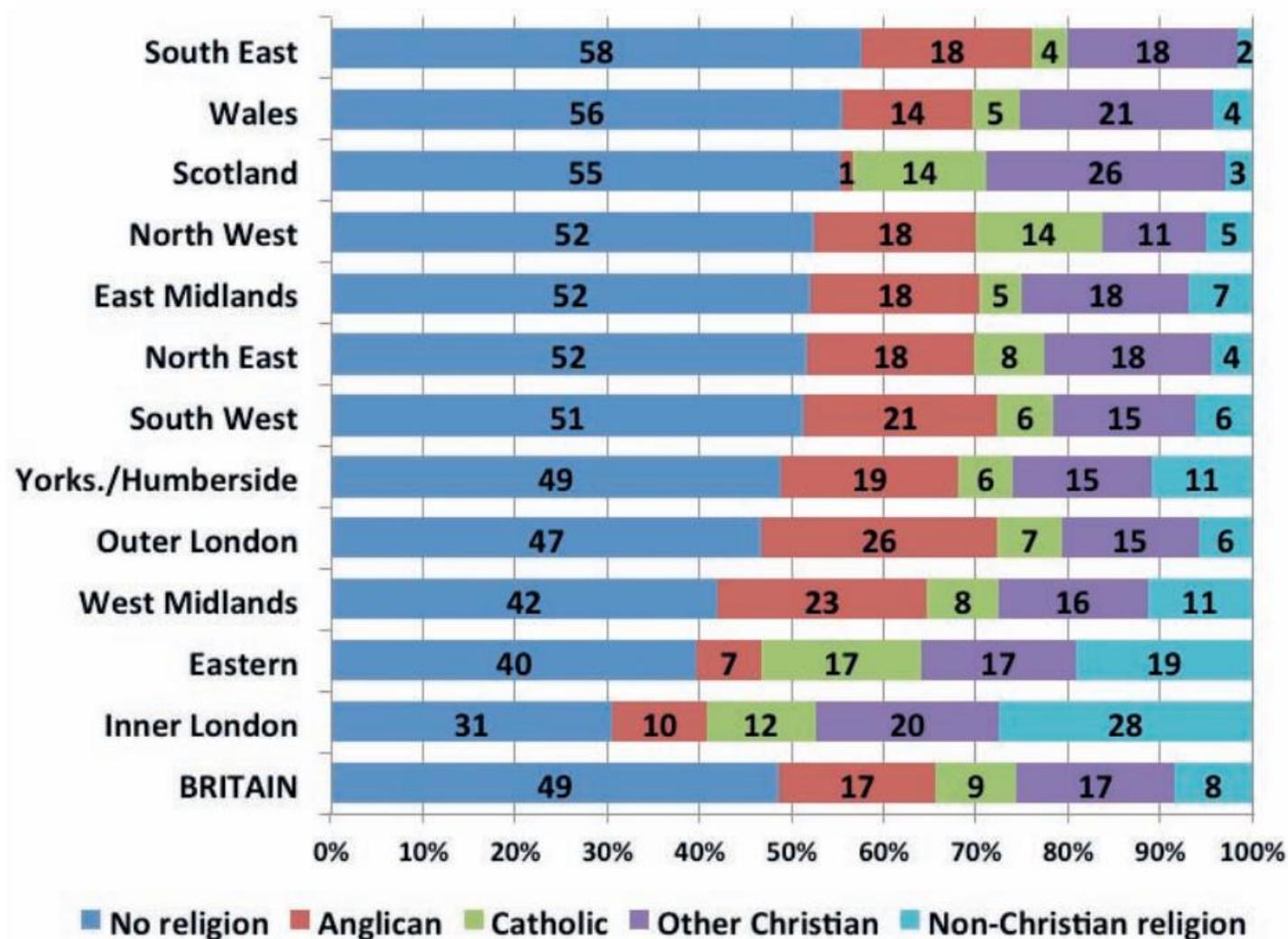
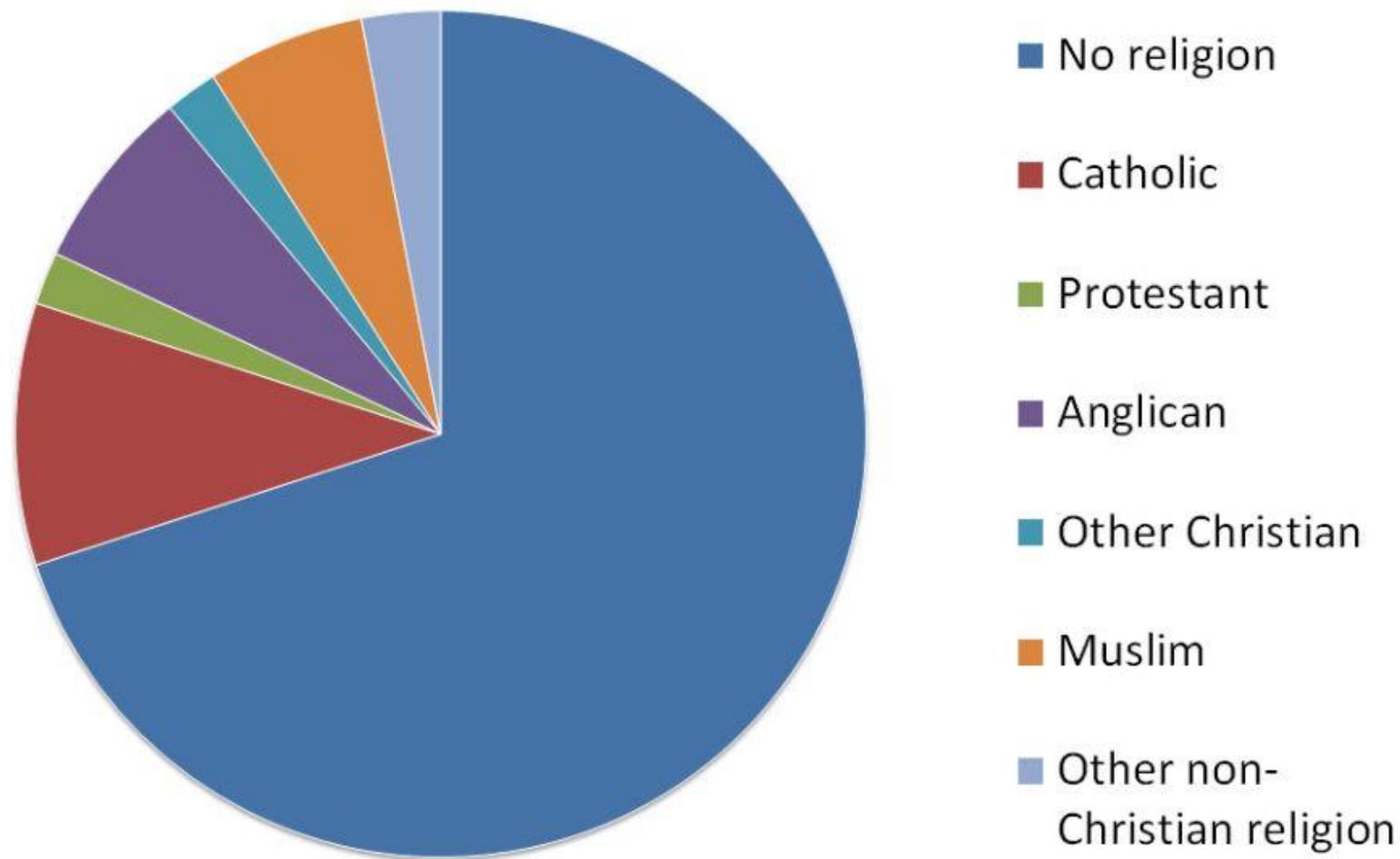


Fig. 1.2: Religious affiliation by region



Source: BSA 2015. Weighted data, based on 4312 valid cases.
 Question asked: 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?' NB: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Beliefs of 16 to 29-year-olds in the UK (2018)



Some patients use religion in decision-making

- Many patients that you will serve will be religious
- Patients may experience revelation leading to medical decision-making
- Opinions of a religious community could lead to individual medical decision-making (possible effects on autonomy)

Case 1: Ramadan Fasting and Diabetes

A 45-year-old man with type 2 diabetes mellitus consults to discuss how he might fast safely during Ramadan.

How do you consult this patient concerning his interest in fasting in accordance with his faith?

Case 2: Refusal of Medical Treatment

Rebecca was injured in a car accident when she was 36 weeks pregnant. After speaking to her mother who was a Jehovah's Witness, Rebecca repeatedly refused a blood transfusion, despite this being seen as essential to save her life. Rebecca said that although she was no longer a Jehovah's Witness herself, she still retained some of the beliefs.

Case 3: Refusal of Covid-19 Vaccine

Michael is a 69-year-old male with type-2 diabetes. He is overweight, uses a CPAP machine for sleep apnea, and occasionally smokes cigars. He also identifies as Roman Catholic, although he only attends church once or twice a year.

Upon being offered a covid-19 vaccine free-of-cost through the NHS, he declines saying that “he will accept god’s plan for him”.



Thank you for your attention!

Do you have any questions?



<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/fetemb2n/images?id=tdrvs3sb>



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