

# **Biblical Integration**

## **A Christian Appraisal of Secular Ethics**

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### **A Christian Appraisal of Secular Ethics**

- There is much truth in each of the three perspectives...
  - Deontology, law, principle
  - Teleology, world, situation
  - Existential, self, heart
- ...but they cannot be held together as individual standards; there is no coherence
- It's all theology (Christianity) or nihilism

### **Normative Perspective**

- There exists universal norms or rules (transcendent “oughts”) that are binding on ethical decisions.
  - Example: Kant’s categorical imperatives, “truncated” Christianity
  - Strengths: Absolute standards
  - Weaknesses: Arbitrary; How are norms derived and made binding?
  - Pitfalls: Lacks imminence; What do you do when norms conflict?

### **Situational Perspective**

- Concerned with the particular situation and the specific consequences as they apply to the individuals in that situation (small scale consequentialism)
  - Strengths: Sensitive to individual situations
  - Weaknesses: Must appeal to at least one normative principle.
  - Example: Joseph Fletcher “Situation Ethics”
  - Pitfalls: Rules are made up as you go along.

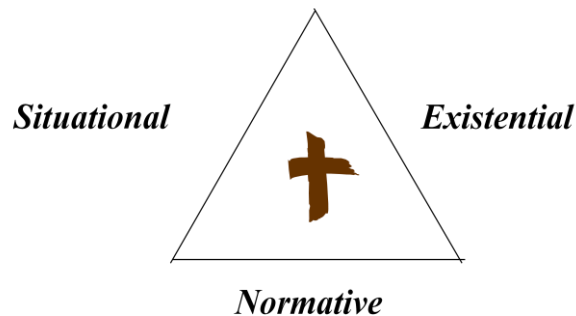
### **Utilitarian Perspective**

- Concerned with the broader perspective of the consequences, the greatest good for the greatest number (large scale consequentialism)
  - Example: John Stuart Mill
  - Strengths: Encompasses the broader perspective
  - Weaknesses: Global concerns > individual; society values > individual values; Still requires a normative guiding principle.
  - Pitfalls: The individual will be swallowed by the collective. How does one calculate value of good, pleasure, pain?

## Existentialist (Egoist)

- An individual is his own ultimate basis for ethical decisions; Ethical autonomy
  - Example: Jean Paul Sartre; Hemlock Society
  - Strengths: Maximizes personal freedom
  - Weaknesses: Individual concern > collective; What is the justification for egoist motivations?
  - Pitfalls: Anarchy; No basis for public morality

## Biblical Integration



## Justification is the presupposition of all Christian activity

- You cannot understand the Word of God or your situation without understanding yourself as a sinner saved by Grace
- No Christian ethos or human activity can ever be construed as a way of attaining God's approval and winning salvation
- Only the man who already has a good conscience because God has freely forgiven his sin can do good works. A good conscience is not the product but the source of the Christian ethos
- What we do for God can be described only in terms of obedience, and of thanks and praise to God.
- "A Christian is perfectly free and perfectly subject" –Martin Luther *Freedom of the Christian*

## The Christian Worldview

- John Kilner
  - Reality Bounded (Deontology)
  - Love Impelled (Utilitarian)
  - God Centered (Virtue)
- Geoffrey Bromiley
  - God is the ground of ethics (God is the "Good")
  - God is the norm of ethics (God's Word)
  - God is the power for ethical living (God's Spirit)
- John Frame
  - Lordship Ethics

## Slide 9

The Presence of God (Exodus 19)  
The Name of the LORD (Exodus 20:1)  
hwhoy

A proper name, not an abstract principle  
The LORD *Thy* God

Control  
Authority  
Presence

The Rule of God  
Blessing precedes obedience  
Priority of Grace

## God's Lordship Attributes

- Characteristics which define His covenant relationship to us
  - Control: Works all things according to the counsel of His will
  - Authority: His Word is unconditionally binding
  - Presence: God commits Himself to us so that we live in His presence. Results in blessings or judgment

## Slide 11

The Presence of God  
Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23)  
I will be with you..." (Matthew 28:20)

The Name of the Lord  
Control  
Authority  
Presence

The Rule of God (Kingdom)

## **Biblical Integration (3 slides)**

- Normative Perspective: God's Authority and Revelation
  - God in His authority and omniscience and the revelation of His truth has provided us with absolutes which inform all of life and His word is the standard by which all our actions are judged.
- Situational Perspective: God is in Control of All Things
  - There are no meaningless situations. God Himself is our environment and He plans history so as to determine what means are conducive to His ultimate purpose and our ultimate blessing. Nature and history are under God's control and there are relations between means and ends in God's economy.
- Existential Perspective: God is Present With Us
  - God Himself is our example of righteousness and it is by His presence that we gain the power to become righteous. A life of obedience gives us increasing discernment of what our duties are and He cares not that we apply His truths mechanically out of duty alone but with the right motives and heart.

## **Lordship & Ethics**

### **How does God govern our ethical life? (2 slides)**

- Control
  - God plans history so as to determine what means are conducive to His ultimate purposes and our ultimate blessing
  - Connects ends and means (e.g., suffering)
  - *Summum bonum*: The Kingdom of God
  - Biblical ethics is always an ethics of hope
    - The works of the evil one continue until the end of time
    - The ideal or absolute *summum bonum* will never be reached on earth
- Authority
  - God speaks through His Word to give us the norms for behavior
- Presence
  - God Himself is our example of righteousness, and it is His presence by which we gain the power to become righteous (the "Moral Gap")

### **Necessary and sufficient criteria of good works**

- Right Goal (Teleology)
  - Destination, purpose, end
  - The glory of God and His Kingdom
- Right Standard (Deontology)
  - Road
  - Sin is lawlessness, obedience is the criterion of discipleship
- Right Motive (Existential)
  - Attitude during the journey
  - Will to do the will of God
  - First and last message of the Gospel

## **Perspectives in Ethical Judgment: World, Self, Law**

- What is the situation, the problem?
  - Focuses on nature and history as under God's control
  - Notes relations of means to ends in God's economy
  - Asks, "What are the best means of achieving God's purposes?"
- What does God's word say?
  - Focuses on Scripture as the source of ethical norms
  - Asks, "What does Scripture teach about this question?"
- What is my attitude?
  - Focuses on the self in confrontation with God
  - Asks, "How must I change, if I am to be holy?"

## **Interdependence of the Perspectives**

- Each perspective necessitates the others; none can be treated alone
  - You don't truly understand the situation until you see it in the light of Scripture and its bearing upon yourself
  - Scripture is rightly seen only when it is properly related to the world and to the self
  - The "self" cannot be rightly understood until seen in the context of its situation and rightly interpreted by the word of God
- Each perspective is a way of viewing the whole of ethics
- The faithfulness and sovereignty of God insures that the three perspectives will be consistent
  - A right interpretation of the situation will be consistent with a right interpretation of the law and of the self, etc.

## **Implications for Pastoral Ministry**

- Minister of Presence (Existential)
- Minister as Interpreter (Situational)
- Minister as Partner in Discernment (Normative)
- Minister as Witness to the Gospel

## **Conclusions**

- Christians can learn much from studying secular approaches to ethics
  - Recognizing that all truth is God's truth
  - Limits of any philosophy that does not acknowledge the Triune, Personal God of the Christian Faith
  - Self-analyze our own positions
- By understanding secular approaches to ethics, Christians can enter more effectively into public dialogue without compromising the uniqueness of the Christian message
  - Not irrelevant
  - Not incoherent

## **Conclusions**

- God's command demands that the substance of our activity be morally correct. His commands are never removed from His presence and control over our situations; they are living and dynamic. However, our activity is really good in God's judgment only if we act with the right feeling and attitude toward God. The right attitude toward God consists in being certain that God has already given us salvation and that the God who justifies is already pleased before we act.
- Christians who are in fellowship with Christ and filled with His Spirit are able to establish norms and arrive at right judgment in every case that arises. This is not easy and must come about with diligent study of the Scriptures (know what God says), prayer (ask for God's presence), and practice (involvement in situations).

## **Principle #1**

- Truly right deeds and decisions can be made by the Christian only from a heart of faith-- regardless of its perceived outcome
  - This principle rejects legalism, which places rules over principles
  - It rejects consequentialism that suggests that the ends justify the means
  - Faith is the only valid criterion for a truly right decision
  - True faith is one which exhibits love and is not contrary to Scripture

## **Principle #2**

- God alone has the right to initiate and terminate life. THOU SHALL NOT KILL
  - God is the author of life and death
  - God begins life with human conception
  - God determines the end of life and uses many means to accomplish it
  - Without God's permission, man cannot take life
  - This principle rejects homicide, suicide, euthanasia (consensual homicide, and homicide by omission)

## **Principle #3**

- Human life has the purpose of glorifying God by coming to, growing in, and leading others to faith
  - Life is a time to come to and grow in faith
  - Life is a time to nurture and bring others to faith

## **Principle #4**

- God demonstrates in His word that while there may be different qualities of life, He extends to all human life an absolute value and dignity and all are the objects of His (common) grace (born-again Christians being the objects of His live and salvific grace)
  - All human life has equal dignity, which excludes sexism, racism, ageism, and subtle and

- subversive notions about quality of life
- This is exhibited by the high price paid for the salvation of man

### **Principle #5**

- While suffering is a result of living in a sinful world, the believer faces it knowing God can use it to display His power, strengthen the sufferer's faith, and provide an avenue for faith of others to be put into action.
  - Suffering is the result of life in a sinful world opposed to God
  - Suffering can give glory to God
  - Suffering can be used to strengthen personal faith

### **Principle #6**

- A Christian will recognize that sin brought death into this world but Christ changed the nature of death. The Christian longs for death and the paradise it brings with Christ, but we will seek to retain life as a time of faithful service to God until it is clear God wants to take us out of this life.
  - Death is an unnatural even in life
  - Death is not to be feared by the Christian
  - A Christian will not dictate to the Lord when death will come

### **Principle #7**

- A Christian will recognize that his body is not his own and should practice good stewardship in its use.
  - Our bodies belong primarily to *God*
  - Our bodies belong secondarily to *our family*
  - Our bodies belong to *our neighbors*
  - Only then do our bodies belong to *us*

### **Principle #8**

- Christianity is a supernatural religion, and hence we recognize the influence of the spiritual realm on disease and healing
  - Illnesses may, but not necessarily must, have a spiritual component
  - We must not neglect the role of spiritual healing and miraculous healing with or entirely separate from standard medical intervention
  - Sin, justification, and glorification are the spiritual counterparts to sickness, healing, and health