

## Introduction

- ☞ A biblical and secular perspective (i.e., I want you to understand how the unbeliever processes a lot of this)
- ☞ Desire lots of interaction (missing week . . .)
- ☞ If there are related topics that you would like to address, let me know (no promises)

See/read Barna Reports—the sad thing about ethics is that Christians don't always agree—sin.

### ***Ethical Dilemmas***

1. The Runaway Trolley – You are the conductor on a runaway trolley going at an extremely high rate of speed. You have lost control of your brakes and cannot stop the forward progress of the train. If you continue traveling in your current direction you will strike and kill 5 railway workers (by the way, they are all deaf and cannot hear the approaching trolley). However, you are approaching a Y in the track and can electronically activate the signal box thereby diverting the trolley to a different track, sparing the 5 workers. There is one problem though, there is an old lady (hard of hearing) walking in the middle of the alternate track; if you divert you will strike and kill her. What do you do?

2. Organs Needed – You are House MD, you are faced with one healthy autistic middle-aged man who cannot communicate with the outside world at all—he sits in the corner all day and stares at the ceiling. You also have five terminal patients needing one organ apiece—a heart, a kidney, lungs, a liver and the second kidney. Do you kill the 1 healthy patient to treat the 5? Why is this dilemma different from the one above?
  
3. You and your wife have been trying for years to have a child. Finally, after visiting the doctor, you hear the good news, “She’s pregnant.” However, 17 weeks later after experiencing kidney pain for several weeks, your wife is diagnosed with stage-four renal cancer. The doctor informs you that she needs to have surgery immediately to remove the left kidney and must immediately start chemotherapy. This will kill the child. What do you do (bear attack...)?

*Note* – “There is no sharp limit of development, age, or weight at which a fetus automatically becomes viable or beyond which survival is assured, but experience has shown that it is rare for a baby to survive whose weight is less than 500 gm or whose fertilization age is less than 22 weeks. Even fetuses born between 26 and 28 weeks have difficulty surviving, mainly because the respiratory system and the central nervous system are not completely differentiated” (Keith L. Moore & T. V. N. Persaud, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 103).

## ***Elements of Ethics***

Why be ethical? Where do ethics come from (a question concerning foundations)? I always start with these two questions. . . .

These are questions that unbelieving worldviews cannot adequately answer. Most (secular) ethics books either don't address this question (in sufficient detail), redefine what it means to be objective (thinking about ethics or coming to conclusions apart from intellectual biases), &/or come up with an autonomous standard that they deem to be objective (of course the standard vanishes once evolution is through with us or it may vanish as we evolve further).

We as Christians have to be able to answer this question. I think it makes the most sense (pedagogically) to start with a definition of ethics. Then move on to an adequate foundation—*What would have to be true of the world, what would have to be true about our universe for ethics to make sense?*

However, these are all intertwined—the definition depends on the foundation and the foundation leads to the definition . . . (but, you have to start somewhere).

## Definition

Ethics are: 1) Direction giving (i.e., authoritative), 2) they are personal in nature (i.e., *that assumes something about us, something about our nature, worth, etc.*), 3) they presuppose moral freedom (i.e., *free will*), and 4) they are abstract (immaterial, not physical), invariant (as to time) and universal (as to place)— (i.e., *they are objective*).

This is not *solely* a “Christian” definition of ethics . . . (Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* and William H. Halverson, *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy*).

Ethics are:

1) Direction giving (i.e., *authoritative*) . . .

It was once popular for unbelievers to deny this—ethical relativity was the popular “university” theory being taught 20 or 30 years ago. This theory taught that ethics was ultimately a matter of personal choice. No one else had the authority to tell you or anyone else what was right or wrong.

Now, however, unbelieving ethical professors try all kinds of things to somehow establish ethical authority. The problem is, it just doesn't work.

Where does objective, personal authority come from in naturalism? It doesn't! Atheistic, mechanistic naturalism (the reigning American, University worldview) teaches that the world is ultimately meaningless, purposeless and impersonal. No matter how hard you try, you cannot squeeze "authority" out of that.

Christianity doesn't have that problem. God is the Creator and sovereign controller of the universe—He is Lord. As such he has all the authority necessary to command his creatures.

2) They are personal in nature (*that assumes something about us, something about our nature, worth, etc.*)

Again, unbelieving worldviews fall short here as well. We've already noted the ultimate impersonal nature of the atheistic worldview. So let's look at the other two "monotheistic" religions—Judaism and Islam. Do they fair any better and the answer is no.

In Islam, God is so transcendent, so other, so above and beyond human beings that we cannot truly speak of Him. Well, if you can't speak of or about God, then how do you speak of what God wants? He would have to communicate that to us, but He's not able (immediate problem with the Koran).

In Addition, both Islam and Judaism, God is ultimately impersonal as well. Both religions teach that God is an absolute one—what philosophers call a monad. They also teach that God is absolutely independent of His creation. He doesn't need His creation to be God.

Think of some basic personal attributes—love, righteousness, kindness, etc—a moral person displays these characteristics. Keep in mind that the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Koran, teach that these attributes *go out* from God. God doesn't just love Himself; His love is always other-directed. All these books teach the otherness of these attributes.

Who does Allah love before he creates? Who is he kind to? Who does he show righteousness to? He is unable to exercise any of these things apart from his creation. So, he is either less than a person or less than god (because he is dependent on something outside of himself). Either way, this view of god cannot supply the needed personal foundation for ethics.

Christianity does. God is *Tri*-personal. Prior to creation, the Father, Son and Spirit *being* persons, *function* as persons—the Father loves, is kind to and righteous toward the Son and the Spirit; the Son loves, is kind to and righteous toward the Father and Spirit; and the Holy Spirit loves, is kind to and righteous toward Father

and Son. Because God is personal, He can create other persons with whom He can communicate; with whom He can command and instruct.

3) Ethics presuppose moral freedom (*free will*) bank robbery, personal responsibility . . . Let me first of all define Biblical “free will”—while our wills are dependent on our nature (e.g., I can't fly or run as fast as a cheetah, fallen man and sin), we *always do what we want*.

Consistent naturalistic atheists deny free will. Francis Crick, of Nobel Prize winning fame, wrote a book titled, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*, where he writes:

The Astonishing Hypothesis is that ‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll’s Alice might have phrased it: ‘You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.’ This hypothesis is so alien to the ideas of most people alive today that it can truly be called astonishing” (Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: the Scientific Search for the Soul*, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 3).

Sam Harris in his book, *The Moral Landscape*, says the same thing. Moral responsibility is absurd apart from the ability to do what you want.

God holds us accountable specifically because we willingly disobey Him (Gen 9:5-6; 50:19-20; Deut 6:5; Mat 7:17; 22:37; Luke 9:35; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Rom 1:32; etc.

4) Finally, ethics are abstract (immaterial, not physical), invariant (as to time) and universal (as to place)—*they are universally objective*

Ethics are real, yet they are not material.

Naturalism cannot account for ethics as it denies the *real* existence of anything but the material—the physical. Islam can't account for ethics because God is unable to communicate with beings so low as us. Judaism can't account for ethics because God is ultimately trapped in a monistic, non-personal, sub-divine reality.

In order for ethics to be truly objective, foundational moral principles cannot change due to location or time. In naturalism, the physical is constantly changing.

This ties directly to . . .

## Get from Tonight

1. Christians don't always agree—ethics can be hard.
2. Don't settle for a simplistic definition of ethics—this gives too much to unbelieving worldviews. Ethics involves a lot.
3. Ethics are worldview dependent—it matters what you believe.

- Frame, John M. (1988). *Medical Ethics: Principles, Persons, and Problems*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.
- (1999). *Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- (2008). *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.
- Murray, John. (1957). *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Vandrunen, David. (2009). *Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to making Difficult Decisions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books

The history of secular ethics:

<b>Deontological</b> / Normative Ethics	Natural Law Ethics Immanuel Kant Divine Command Theory Plato Idealism – G. E. Moore Etc.
<b>Teleological</b> / Situational / Outcome Based Ethics	Aristotle Utilitarianism – Bentham & Mill Egoism Peter Singer Sam Harris Etc.
<b>Virtue</b> / Character Ethics	Aristotle Postmodernism Business Ethics Existentialism Etc.
<b>Relativism</b>	Cultural Relativism Personal Relativism Situational Ethics Etc.

Each of these (except Relativism) is a part of the truth. You need all three of these elements!

Romans 1:18-32 – “Because that which is known about God is evident within them” (19); “For even though they knew God” (21); “And exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (23); “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (25); “And although they know the ordinances of God” (32).

Romans 2:14-15

**Normative** – Gen 1:26-28; Deut 10:13; Psa 1:2; 19:1; 119:16, 28ff.; Pro; Mat 5-7; 5:17-19; John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; Rom 1:18-32; 7:12; 1 Cor 9:21; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; etc.

**Situational** – Gen 1:1, 26-28; Psa 19:1; 33:6; 139; Isa 40:23; 41:22-23; 46:9-10; 45:6-7, 13; Mat 10:29-30; Acts 17:26; Rom 1:18-32; Eph 1:11; Col. 1:17; Heb 1:3; 4:13; 11:3; etc.

**Existential** – Gen 1:26-28; Deut 6:5-6; Pro 4:23; 29:13; Jer 31:33; Mat 5:8, 28; 6:21; 9:4; 12:34-35; 15:8, 18-19; 18:35; 22:37; Mark 12:30, 33; Luke 6:45; 8:15; 16:15; Acts 5:3; Rom 6:17; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 13; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 6:6; Heb 8:10; “Do unto;” etc.

Illustration (taken from Frame, *Perspectives on the Word of God*):

Lying is morally wrong (Normative)

Bill's statement was a lie (Situational)

Therefore, Bill's statement was morally wrong (Existential) (Frame, *Doctrine*, 241)