**Introduction to Christian Ethics**

**UCC204**



Africa Nazarene University

Institute of Open Distance Learning (IODL)

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Institute of Open Distance Learning (IODL)

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The course outline from which this unit is derived was designed by Africa Nazarene University, approved by the Kenya Commission for Higher Education for use of instruction in (course title) leading to the award of different degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

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# Programme overview of UCC 204, Introduction to Christian Ethics

**Welcome!**

Welcome to the unit, UCC 204, Introduction to Christian Ethics. The unit provides an introduction to Christian ethics and is a one trimester, university common course. It is part of the core curricular of the university. It is a two credit hour course, covered within 28 hours of the university’s trimester calendar. The course is taken by all undergraduate students in all programmes offered at Africa Nazarene University. Students taking the class need to think about ethical issues encountered in their careers. The unit will provide you with principles needed in making moral decisions from a Christian perspective.

Even though it’s a class on Christian ethics, other ethical systems will be presented so that the uniqueness of Christian ethics emerge. We should acknowledge at the outset that Christian ethics learns from other ethical systems and is not opposed to them. Since we are studying this class in Africa, African traditional ethics are also crucial in this endeavour.

The course program employs a blended mode of instructions comprising independent study, online engagement and contact support that will enhance your practice in the workplace.

The course has six major sections; each unit will be studied for approximately four hours, spread over fourteen days. Assessment and feedback for each unit will be provided within a period of seven days.

This welcome message tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, outlines the learning activities and how you can work your way through the module. It also emphasises the need for assessments. Detailed information on assignments and course materials will be found at the end of each unit as well as a separate document, called *Blended Medium of Learning* which you will be given or sent as you register.

**What Will You Learn in This Course?**

The overall aim of UCC 204, Introduction to Christian Ethics is to introduce you to the basic concepts in ethics, including the theological and philosophical foundations of ethics. In this course, you will learn about the definition of Christian ethics, its assumptions, and uniqueness. The course will also expose you to some practical ethical issues in our society Africa in particular and the world in general. These ethical issues include abortion, euthanasia, corruption, reproductive technologies, prostitution, tribalism, Female Genital Circumcision etc.

This unit will prepare you to take advanced classes in philosophy and theological ethics. More importantly this unit will make you a better person, who truly embraces

the kingdom of God and lives by kingdom values. In summary the unit will help you understand a Christian worldview and help you to evaluate your own worldview and its assumptions.

**Course Intended Learning Outcomes**

To achieve the aims of this course, there are set overall Intended Learning Outcomes. In addition, each unit also has specific Intended Learning Outcomes. The unit Intended Learning Outcomes are always included at the beginning of a unit; you should read them before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check on your progress. You should always look at the unit Intended Learning Outcomes after completing a unit. In this way, you can be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit. By meeting these Intended Learning Outcomes, you should therefore know that you have achieved the aims of the course as a whole. The Intended Learning Outcomes are as follows:

As a result of this course unit, you should show

1. **Ability to practise personal Christian ethics in faithful stewardship, in personal relationships, and in finances; this will include**

a. Defining terms used in ethics of "good", "bad", "right", "wrong", "duty" and "morality";

b. Evaluating different types of ethical approaches;

c. Differentiating Christian ethics from other types;

2. **Ability to publicly model Christian ethics, in decision making and in conducting oneself as a Christian in a secular society** by:

a. Examining some norms and practices used in African Traditional Ethics and what Christian Ethics can learn from them;

b. Discussing some ethical issues facing people in contemporary Africa;

c. Formulating principles that should be used in the development of personal

Christian ethics;

d. Modelling appropriate Christian ethics in your daily habits and relationships.

3. **Ability to teach and model sexual purity.**

**Working through this Course**

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, and read recommended books and e-materials provided by the Africa Nazarene University (ANU). Each unit contains some self-assessment exercises, activities, and at points in the course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment every week on Friday during the course of the trimester. In addition, a major paper for the class will need to be submitted two weeks before the end of the trimester. At the end of this course, there will be a final examination.

**Course Materials**

The main course materials are: Course Module, UCC 204; Introduction to Christian

Ethics, Blended Medium of Learning Textbooks and e-Materials.

The following information provides you with the general overview of the program, what you will do this trimester, how you will study the module, how you will be assessed, and contact sessions, course purpose, outcomes, what you should do and the learning outcomes of the course, course references, and other expectations of the course, course manual. You will also get a university hand book to guide you on requisite areas.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Title: | | Christian Ethics | |
| Code: | | UCC 204 | |
| Level: | | 2nd Year | |
| Credits: | | 2 credits = 28 hours | |
| Purpose: | | The purpose of this course is to provide the student with the guiding  principles needed to make sound moral judgments from a distinctively Christian perspective. | |
| Exit level  outcomes: | | As a result of this unit, the student should show   1. Ability to practice personal Christian ethics in faithful stewardship, in personal relationships, and in finances 2. Ability to demonstrate oneself consistently in public Christian ethics, in decision making and in conducting oneself as a Christian in a pagan society 3. Ability to teach and model sexual purity. | |
| Formative  assessment 1 | | Post to online discussion forum.  This activity counts 5% towards the final module mark.  You are required to formulate a 1000-word mini-essay which does the following: In this brief moral autobiography, reflect on how your life experiences have shaped how your approach to ethics.  In this account, address some of the significant communities and experiences (related to family, church, geography, race, gender, class etc.) that have shaped you, in what way have they shaped you? Where are you in your moral journey-are you making progress? What are some of the setbacks you face? | |
|  | | Who are some of the significant people who have contributed to your moral compass? What kind of person do you see yourself become in the future?  -Place ethics in its place as a branch of philosophy  -Explain and appreciate the significance of a worldview | |
| Formative  assessment 2 | | Written assignment to be submitted online.  1. This activity counts 25% towards the final module mark.  2. (Ask a colleague to comment on your draft before submission using ‘track changes’.)  In an essay of 2500 words:  3. Articulate the importance of the study of Christian Ethics  4. Relate Christian Ethics with Christian Theology  5. Discuss the role of the church in Christian Ethics  6. You will receive feedback within 3 weeks of submission. | |
| 3 | | 1. This activity counts 35% towards the final module mark.   In an essay of **3000 words** write an essay for question 2  2. You work for an NGO that has the mandate of ensuring the distribution of maize seeds to farmers in Elgeyo Marakwet. Your boss asks you to cooperate with her and sell the seeds instead of giving them for free. How would you respond as a utilitarian consequentialist? What is the proper Christian response?  3. You will receive receive feedback within 3 weeks of submission.wee | |
| Summative  assessment | | Practical activity and written assignment.  1. This activity counts 35% of their final module mark.  2. Choose an ethical issue in your community and use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to come up with a Christian position on this particular issue.(3000 words) | |
| **Unit** | **Core concept(s)** | | Key activity(ies) |
| **1.** | Introduction  Definition of philosophy, ethics, worldview  Subject matter  Role of ethics in society | | Blog  Forum discussions  Questions  **3 HOURS** |
| **2.** | Theology and Ethics  Introduction Being and Doing Creation and Ethics Sin and Ethics Salvation and Ethics  Discipleship and ethics Image of God and Ethics Eschatology and ethics Church and Ethics Summary | | Quiz  Blog on pros and cons Forum discussions Tutor–marked assignments  **6 HOURS** |
| **3.** | Philosophical Foundations of  Ethics Introduction Definition of terms Consequentialism  Deontology  Absolutism/ Relativism | | Quiz  Forum discussion on pros and cons  Tutor- marked assignments |
|  | Wesleyan Teological Ethics  Summary | | **6 HOURS** |
| **4.** | Authority in Moral Judgment  Definitions  Other sources of Authority Christian Sources of Authority Use of the Bible in Ethics Guidelines for Proper use of the Bible  Summary | | Quiz  Tutor- marked assignments  **3 HOURS** |
| **5.** | Other Ethics  Secular Ethics Islamic Ethics Hindu Ethics Buddhist Ethics  African Traditional Ethics  Summary | | Quiz  Chat on pros and cons  Tutor- marked assignments  **3 HOURS** |
| **6.** | Character and Virtue in Ethics  Introduction  Definition of character History of Virtue Ethics Classical/Cardinal Virtues Theological Virtues Character formation | | Quiz  Chat on pros and cons  Tutor- marked assignments  **3 HOURS** |
| **7.** | Applied ethics  Introduction Abortion Euthanasia Corruption  HIV and AIDS War | | Term Paper  **4 HOURS** |

# Lesson 1: Philosophy, worldview and ethics

# Introduction

This is the first lesson in a class on Christian Ethics. We will look at Ethics as a branch of philosophy and a worldview, its characteristics and significance. It is assumed that all of us have a worldview and this worldview influences our decision-making process.

## Intended learning outcomes

**As a result of this lesson you should be able to**

1. Place Ethics in its place as a branch of philosophy.

2. Explain what a worldview is.

3. Demonstrate understanding of the significance of a worldview.

# 1.1 What is philosophy?

In most African communities, when a man dies, his wife is often inherited by a close relative of the husband.

What assumptions about life and living underpin this practice?

In the understanding of these African communities, when a woman is married, she marries the family and not just the individual she is officially married to. When she leaves her family, it is a permanent move.

These assumptions reflect the philosophy of life for those who practice wife inheritance.

What do you think is philosophy?

This practice reflects the philosophy of life for the communities that practice it.

**The word is made up of two words**

**a. Philo- comes from the Greek word Phileo meaning love, the word Sophia is translated from the Hebrew word Chockmah which means wisdom.**

The word philosophy literally means the love for wisdom- and when one loves something there is searching that takes place.

**A simple definition of philosophy is the search for wisdom. Socrates, the father of Western philosophy, once said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”**

**Philosophy can also be defined as, “the search for a comprehensive view of nature, an attempt at a universal explanation of things.”(**Oniango,

1994, p 1)

Human beings have always asked questions about themselves, the world in which we live, about God and so on. **These questions are at the heart of the discipline of philosophy.** Philosophers are those who philosophize. We could say philosophers ask questions that not many people dare to ask. Our interest in this course is Ethics, and it is an aspect of philosophy and theology. No wonder our study begins with a look at Philosophy.

It is important to realize that Philosophy is an activity of reason. We have to engage our intellect in doing philosophy.

# 1.2 Branches of philosophy

The basic branches of Western philosophy are:

• Metaphysics

• Epistemology

• Axiology/ Ethics

• Logic.

Each of these represents distinct activities, but they are also related. The point of this part of the lesson is to give some account of these streams and show how they are related/ connected.

## 1.2.1 Metaphysics

The other name for Metaphysics is “first philosophy” because it asks the most basic or first philosophical question: **“what is real?”** Typically, when we are young we do not find it easy to distinguish between what is real and what is not real. A child may imagine a stuffed animal speaks to him or her, or pictures on wallpaper have come to life. Knowing the difference between what is real and what is merely imagined is essential to mature thinking and for that matter mature living. Part of what it means to grow up is to learn the difference between what is real and what is not real or imaginary. A famous metaphysical question goes like this: “If a tree fell in the forest and no one was there to hear it, did it make a sound?” In other words, does sound exist apart from it being heard? Perhaps, sound is objective—that is, sound waves—and if this is the case then whether or not a tree falling is heard, it still made a sound. Many philosophers have raised similar questions about what is real. It seems obvious that how one answers the question of reality is linked to how a person lives. For example, if I think an automobile I see heading toward me is real, then I will get out of the way. Therefore, the question of reality is materially connected to moral reflection. (Michael W. Vail, Clergy Development, 2005, 33)

## 1.2.2 Epistemology

**It is defined as the study of our methods of acquiring knowledge**

Concerns how we know anything. Traditionally, it has been understood that knowledge comes by experience or by reason. Regarding experience knowledge comes by the seeing, hearing, touching, etc. For example, if someone tells us a red car is in our driveway, then we can determine the truth or falsity of it by looking in the driveway. In fact, there is no better way of deciding if a red car is in the driveway than to look. Many things, if not most things we know come to our mind through experience. The problem arises when we think or talk about things that cannot be experienced. Therefore, some things we talk about require reason. For example, if someone says a BEAR is in our driveway—when we live in KENYA—we may not have to look because it is not reasonable to believe it.

**The root word of “epistemology” is the same word translated in the New Testament as faith.** When we understand this it is easy to see that faith is another way of knowing something. Faith is the way we know our salvation and it becomes evidence of what is not yet seen. Epistemology is how we test what we think is real. Going back to the tendency of a child to believe things like stuffed animals speaking or images on wallpaper jumping off the wall and onto a bed, a simple trip to the room will prove to be enlightening. But an adult does not need to make the trip because reason suggests it is irrational to believe such things. (Michael W. Vail, Clergy Development, 2005, 33)



What does it mean to “know” something Do I really “know” the concept 8 + 2 = 10 if I can pass a test but then give someone the wrong change from a Ksh10 purchase? How does one verify what can be known? What are the limitations of the positivist/scientific method paradigm that predominates?

“It is impossible to make choices without knowledge.” What is your opinion on this statement? Can you think about situations when choices can be made without prior knowledge?

Also think about situations when it is impossible to make choices without knowledge.

**What is real and how we know what is real are connected. Together they frame the question of ethics.** (Michael W. Vail, Clergy Development, 2005,

33)

## 1.2.3 Axiology/Ethics

Axiology is the study of values. In Philosophical deliberations this aspect of philosophy is usually called Moral Philosophy. It is the most practical stream of philosophy. We could say this is where the rubber meets the road.

A simple definition of ethics is **“a disciplined reflection on the formation of a healthy character and its relationship to virtuous action.”** (Michael W. Vail, Clergy Development, 2005, 34) A basic question for ethics is “What ought I to do?” There is a clear connection between what I think is real and how I act. For example, a Christian believes God created the world and because of this a Christian lives a very different life from someone who does not believe God created the world. Scripture tells us once there was nothing and all that is depends upon the creativity of God. The fact there is a world tells us a great deal about God and thus how we ought to live. (Michael W. Vail, Clergy Development, 2005, 34)

From a Christian perspective, the first ethical question is never what should I do, but rather what is God like and what would God have me do? This is why Christian Theology is critical for Christian Ethics. Christian Theology seeks to understand God, that understanding results in us knowing how we ought to live our lives. At the center of reality is God for the Christian, and from this will flow all moral decisions.

## 1.2.4 Logic

Oniango 1994, 39 defines logic as, “the branch of philosophy which treats all the forms of thinking in general and particularity of inference and scientific method: it is the fundamental science of thought and its categories include metaphysics or ontology” Logic can also be defined as, “the science or art of reasoning as applied to a department of knowledge.” (Oniango, 1994, 39).

When someone is contradicting themselves in their arguments, we usually say they are not logical. This is because arguments should not be self- contradictory. Logic is crucial for Christian Ethics, and Ethics in general in that two opposites cannot be at the same time right. Even through some people affirm what we call **relativism** a theory that says right and wrong is relative, or there is no objective right and wrong. It is crucial that our arguments be logical when we support or deny an ethical issue.

For example

*Wanjiku Otieno is certainly a better writer than Omondi Njoroge. I know this because my teacher who is an expert told me so. I am sure my teacher is an expert! Who other than an expert would be qualified to compare Wanjiku to Omondi?*

The kind of reasoning is usually called circular reasoning, because the arguments to support a particular premise are all related to that premise.



**These four streams of philosophy are as follows:**

� the question of reality—metaphysics

� the question of knowledge—epistemology

� the question of moral action—ethics

� the question of logical consistency—logic

# 1.3 Worldview

This section will deal with the issue of worldview. Worldview is crucial for Christian Ethics, it is assumed that no person is without a worldview, since one’s worldview is like the air we breathe. Before we can discuss ethics in details we will look at worldview.

What is a Worldview?

In most Africa communities when a woman gets married and her husband dies, she does not go back to her family, she will still stay with her newly acquired family even in the absence of her husband. What does this say about how these communities understand marriage?

We could when one marries they marry the whole family rather than just the individual in that family. Marriage does end at death. So the marriage vow “Till death do us part” does not have a place in the African community.

Wife inheriting here reflect the worldview of the African people.

A worldview is defined in various ways.

James H. Olthuis defines worldview (or vision of life) as a, “framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it.”

Olthuis goes to say that, “This vision need not be fully articulated: it may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy, it may not even be codified into creedal form; it may be greatly refined through cultural- historical development. Nevertheless this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretive framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.” “On Worldviews,” in Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science.

James W. Sire says, “a worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.” The Universe Next Door, 2009, 20.



What do you think about the definitions given above? What do these definitions says about the relationship between worldview and ethics?

The statements listed below describe aspects of a worldview.

* A comprehensive belief system
* A way of understanding the world and all that is in it.
* A comprehensive framework for understanding all of reality.
* A Plausibility structure upon which we hang all the meaning of life.
* A life system that governs every area of life.

Israel Wayne, a Christian apologist says concerning worldview “Everyone has a worldview. Whether or not we realize it, we all have certain presuppositions and biases that affect the way we view all of life and reality. A worldview is like a set of lenses which taint our vision or alter the way we perceive the world around us. Our worldview is formed by our education, our upbringing, the culture we live in, the books we read, the media and movies we absorb, etc.

For many people their worldview is simply something they have absorbed by osmosis from their surrounding cultural influences. They have never thought strategically about what they believe and wouldn't be able to give a rational defence of their beliefs to others.” “What is a Christian Worldview?” cited from <http://www.christianworldview.net/>

Charles Colson, *How Shall We Live* (1999)*,* 14: “The term worldview may sound abstract or philosophical, a topic discussed by pipe-smoking, …professors in academic settings. But actually a person’s worldview is intensely practical. It is simply the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the ‘big picture’ that directs our daily decisions and actions.”

Colson goes on to argue that every worldview can be analysed by the way it answers three basic questions:

o **Where did life come from and who are we (creation)?**

o **What has gone wrong with the world (fall)?**

o **What can we do to fix it (redemption)?**

The Christian faith which is the worldview on which Christian Ethics rests, has

in our opinion the best answers to these questions. In your class on Christian Beliefs, you have already gone through the Christian beliefs on creation, the fall- sin and redemption- salvation. We will give brief answers:

**Creation:** Christianity holds that God is the creator of the universe and he has made humankind in his image. Many people believe this fact, however not all believe that God is involved in running the universe, they think God created and left the world to run on its own. Christian Theology holds that God is not only the creator, but he is the sustainer of the universe. That means how we live our lives is a matter of concern to him.

**Fall:** Almost all people agree that there is something wrong about the world we live in. Everything is not the way it is supposed to be. However not all agree as to the reason for the way things are the way they are. Christian theology holds that humankind fell into sin, and as a result sin came into the world. Humanity is fallen: the original image is lost, we are no longer the way we were created.

**Redemption:** Even though most people agree that there is something wrong, not all agree as to what can be done about the problem of human sin. Some say men and women are ignorant, just give them knowledge and everything will be all right. Think of the most educated people you know, are they the most morally behaved? Indeed, often not, we knew you would agree with us. Christian theology proposes that humankind needs salvation, and that salvation is in Christ Jesus. Salvation is not an escape route from Hell, it is salvation from the sin problem.

Colson, xi: Colson looks at the U.S. and despite all its prosperity and wealth, notes that it is in the midst of a moral meltdown, a social crisis that has its roots in a clash of opposing worldviews. Is America going to maintain the Christian worldview upon which it was originally founded or will it continue to drift toward a secular worldview that marginalizes belief in God?

He writes “…Americans are groping for something that will restore the shattered bonds of family and community, something that will make sense of life. If the church turns inward now, if we focus only on our own needs, we will miss the opportunity to provide answers at a time when people are sensing a deep longing for meaning and order. It is not enough to focus exclusively on the spiritual, on Bible studies and evangelistic campaigns, while turning a blind eye to the distinctive tensions of contemporary life. We must show the world that Christianity is more than a private belief, more than personal salvation. We must show that it is a comprehensive life system that answers all of humanity’s age-old questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Does life have any meaning and purpose? As we will argue in these pages, Christianity offers the only viable, rationally defensible answers to these questions. Only Christianity offers a way to understand both the physical and moral order. Only Christianity offers a comprehensive worldview that covers all areas of life and thought, every aspect of creation. Only Christianity offers a way to live in line with the real world.”

We would only qualify what Colson has said by saying that Christianity provides the best way to understand the world in which we live. Christianity provides the most comprehensive, the most rationally defensible belief system, the best answers to life’s age old questions. There are many worldviews out there which seek to provide answers. Christianity is certainly not the only game in town but we will argue that it is the best option.

James W. Sire’s caution is important, “To be a Christian theist is not just to have an intellectual worldview; it is to be personally committed to the infinite- personal Lord of the universe. And it leads to an examined life that is well worth living." *The Universe Next Door*, 286.



What is your opinion on what Colson says concerning Christianity having the best answers to life’s old age questions? What answers have you given to these questions in the past? Are your answers the same as those provided by Christianity? Are they different, in what way are they different?

# 1.4 Characteristics of a worldview

Robert Benne in his book *Quality with Soul* (2001) where he is tracing the story of a Christian University that turned secular and how six premier colleges and universities keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions, provides some useful characteristics for a worldview. They are as follows:

**a) It must be comprehensive**

“It is a comprehensive account [of reality] encompassing all of life; it provides an umbrella of meaning under which all facets of life and learning are gathered and interpreted. Christianity’s comprehensive account does not claim to have all the relevant data and knowledge about our life in this world, but it does claim to offer a paradigm in which those data and knowledge are organized, interpreted, and critiqued.” Benne, *Quality with Soul*, 6

**b) It must be unsurpassable**

“It cannot be replaced by a better account, and therefore for believers its essential core persists through time. It claims to be the vehicle of ultimate truth, such that if another account of life surpasses the Christian story in the lives of believers, they longer legitimately claim to be Christians.”

Benne, *Quality with Soul*, 6

**c) It must be central to life**

“It definitively addresses all the essential questions of life: meaning, purpose, and conduct.” Benne, *Quality with Soul*, 6

Think about your worldview for a moment, does it pass the characteristics test? Would you say, your worldview is comprehensible, unsurpassable and central to life?

# 1.5 Worldview seven basic questions

James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (2005, 22) provides seven basic questions and answers that usefully summarise what one’s worldview is.

a. What is prime reality—the really real?

b. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

c. What is a human being?

d. What happens to a person at death?

e. Why is it possible to know anything at all? f. How do we know what is right and wrong? g. What is the meaning of human history?

Sire goes on to add question number eight which he did not include in earlier editions of his book.

h. What personal, life orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

We think this is a very crucial question to ask since it deals specifically with

the subject of Christian Ethics. What we believe is seen by the commitments we live by. The Christian is called to fulfil the will of God, to seek first the kingdom of God, to obey God and enjoy him forever, to be devoted to knowing God and loving God. (Sire, 2005).

# 1.6 Significance of a worldview

The “good life” is defined by one’s worldview. Our choices are ultimately determined by our worldview. A person may have never sat down and consciously examined his worldview but it is there nonetheless and it is shaping the decision-making process, perhaps without the person even knowing it.

In Colson’s words, “Our choices are shaped by what we believe is real and true, right and wrong, good and beautiful. Our choices are shaped by our worldview” *How Shall We Live* (1999)*,* 13.

What we hope to accomplish in this class is for us to examine our actual worldview, not our “stated or for public viewing” worldview and determine its adequacy, reshape it if necessary, and then to allow it to shape our decision- making more intentionally, consciously.

# 1.7 Worldview options

From what we have said so far about worldview, can you think of what you would classify as a worldview. What worldviews are out there that people subscribe to?

The following is a list of available options on the worldview market. Each of these options has different answers to the eight basic questions of a worldview.

a. Christian Theism

b. Naturalistic/Secular c. Postmodernism

d. Nihilism/Existentialism e. Deism

f. Islamic Theism g. ATR

h. Hindu

i. Buddhist j. Occult

k. New Age (Spirituality without Religion)

l. Uncritical, inconsistent Mishmash



What might be the answers of each of these worldviews to the eight basic questions of a worldview? Is your worldview on this list? What is it and how does it answer the eight basic questions.

# 1.8 Summary

The study of Ethics requires that it be placed in its rightful place as a branch of philosophy. In this lesson we have discussed philosophy and its various branches and their relationship with Ethics. Concerning worldview it is my belief that every serious decision, if not every decision bar none, involves the decision-maker in this process to one degree or another. It may only be done subconsciously or in a split second, but all these factors influence the way we make decisions in life. And what we want to do is to do this more intentionally.

Questions for Reflection on the Lesson:

1. Can you relate the basic streams of philosophy with Christian ethics?

2. In your own words define a Worldview

3. In your opinion what is the significance of a worldview?

4. In your understanding what has shaped your worldview?

## Texts for further reading

Benne, Robert, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions, Grand Rapids: W.B Eerdmanns,* 2001.

Colson, Charles; *How Shall We Live;* Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers Inc, 1999.

Oniango Clement; *An Introduction to Philosophy*; Nairobi: East African Publishers,

1994.

Sire James W; *The Universe Next Door*; 5th Edition Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

# Lesson 2: Christian Ethics and Christian Theology

# Introduction

Christian Ethics is different from the other kinds of Ethics because it is distinctively Christian. This lesson will highlight why we need to study Christian Ethics and also the relationship between Christian theology and Christian ethics.

## Intended learning outcomes

**As a result of this lesson you must be able to:**

1. Articulate the importance of the study of Christian Ethics

2. Relate Christian Ethics with Christian Theology

3. State the role of the church in Christian Ethics.

# 2.1 Definition and assumptions of Christian ethics

This is a class on **“Christian Ethics**.” Let’s take that title and analyse it briefly.

1. **Ethics:** What we are concerned about in this discussion is the study of ethics. **The discipline of ethics, properly understood, is the study of how people make decisions and choose a course of action.** That is what we are going to be investigating in this discussion and it is our hope that by the end of the unit you will know more about how you are making your decisions, how you ought to make your decisions, and how others around you are making decisions.
2. One of the problems we experience is that we far too often just take our decision-making, even in the moral sphere of our lives, for granted. We assume that whatever kind of ethic we have inherited is correct and we make decisions without really analysing them. We want to put our decision-making process under the microscope in this class.

2. **Christian: But this is also a course on “Christian” ethics**. We are not here concerned primarily with how non-Christians make their decisions, though that may be instructive as sort of a contrasting model of ethics and we will explore that as well. We are concerned with distinctively Christian ethics. If you are of another faith or just not sure there is a God out there to have faith in, we respect that, but you need to be aware that we discuss the subject matter of how should Christians make their decisions and respond to these tough issues in life.

a. Nazarene: And since this is a course being offered at Africa **Nazarene** University, we will not be bashful about injecting into the discussion any unique insight that the **Church of the Nazarene** brings to the table. So while, this is not a course on “Nazarene Ethics”, there are definitely points at which the particular emphases of the **Church of the Nazarene** bear heavily on the discipline of ethics. The theological tradition in which the **Church of the Nazarene** stands is the **Wesleyan Tradition**.

Even though this is a class on Christian Ethics, we will also take time to highlight other ethical systems, especially **Secular Ethics**, and the ethics of other faiths especially Islam and the Eastern Religions.

So, Christian Ethics is **the study of how to make morally good or right decisions from a Christian perspective.**

Christian Ethics can also be defined as “**critical evaluation of human conduct from a Christian perspective”.** Roger H. Crook, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*.

Crook identifies assumptions that ethicists (students of ethics) must make when approaching Christian Ethics. Every student makes assumptions. The assumptions Christian Ethics is built upon are as follows:

a. The Worldview on which Christian Ethics is based is the Christian Faith. b. There is orderliness in the universe. Orderly patterns are observable.

c. We can know something about that orderliness. Knowledge is tentative (not final) and that is what keeps the scholar humble. Information may be incomplete; later discoveries may alter thinking on what is believed to be true.

d. Freedom of will. Human beings make choices and act on them of their own volition.

e. Responsibility of the individual—having made a decision a person must

live with it. The consequences of an action are a logical result of the decision made.

f. A person who makes a choice is held accountable. From a Christian perspective a person is ultimately accountable to God, in addition to the duty to ourselves, communities, and the earth—our home.

# 2.2 Importance of Christian ethics

**Why is a course like this important enough for the University to require every student to take it, and not just “pastors”? Christian Ethics is one of the core classes of the university in addition to Old Testament, New Testament, Christian Beliefs offered by the department of Religion. So Why Christian Ethics?**

1. All of us make decisions. Our decisions as Christians have to be made from a Christian perspective. The Christian faith has to make a difference in how we live our lives. The other six days of the week are integral to our faith, hence our faith is not a Sunday affair, it has to be lived out in the real world with real people and real temptations.

2. All of us will face those crucial decisions sometime in our lives when our integrity, our faith, our principles will be tested. It would be good if before that time you had that integrity, faith and those principles confirmed and established. James 1:2-8 “This is your chance to ask so that when the time of testing comes you will be able to stand and not be blown to and fro; so that you will know what is right and good”.

3. Nominal Christianity: There are many people who claim to be “Christians”

but that does not mean they behave in Christian ways. a. Nominal Christians: in name only

b. Born in a Church, baptized, attend regularly, but their faith is not impacting the way they make their big and little decisions.

4. University’s Mission: not just to create business majors, but business majors with Christian values; not just computer science majors, but Computer Science majors with Christian values; not just Communication graduates but Journalists with Christian values; not just Education graduates but teachers with Christian Values.

**Mission:** The mission of Africa Nazarene University is to provide a holistic education that develops individuals academically, spiritually, culturally and physically and to equip them with excellent skills, competencies and Christian values which will enable them to go into the world well prepared to meet the challenges of their time.

**Vision of ANU**: A light to the people of Africa through higher education grounded in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. The University of choice for Christians desiring academic excellence. A community which will produce individuals of character and integrity of heart. A place where lives will be transformed for service and leadership to make a difference in Africa and the world.

5. There are many “thorny” or difficult issues for which there are no “easy answers” and it will be good to have a forum in which to discuss these issues. For example should we disconnect the machine when we have a terminally ill person in the hospital? Should Christians use Reproductive technologies? Should doctors terminate pregnancy that is threatening the life of the mother etc.?



Think about your area of study, your profession, What ethical issues are encountered by professionals in your career. How should a Christian overcome those ethical issues? Can Christians be lawyers, teachers, IT specialists, merchants (or whatever your profession is) and still be true to their faith?

# 2.3 Christian discipleship: foundations of the Christian life and ethics

## 2.3.1 Being versus doing

Christian Ethics is about the study of doing and why people do what they do. But it is not just about that. It is also about the kind of person you are, which manifests itself in those actions. That is why we will have a unit later on in the course addressing the issues of character and virtue in the Christian life.

Being precedes doing. Who you are issues forth in what you do.

• Matthew 7:15-23

• John 15:1-8; Vine and Branches.

God, mediated through Christ, is the source of our being. He is the vine and we are the branches. If we don’t remain in him then we will wither away and die and bear no fruit.

But it is true that we can’t always tell at first or even second glance who is among the good trees bearing good fruit and who are among the bad trees bearing bad fruit. The passage we read in Matthew 7 says that false prophets will be deceiving others and be like wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Jesus had more harsh words for the religious leaders of his day…

• Matthew 23:27 (and whole chapter); Pharisees and “White-washed tombs filled with dead men’s bones …”

So the Pharisees and teachers of the Law looked righteous on the outside, but on the inside were unrighteous. They appeared to be examples of acceptable moral behaviour, but their motivation was way off. And in fact, though Jesus is really attacking them here, there do seem to be some Pharisees and teachers of the Law who did honestly want to live righteous lives, but their “doing” was not grounded in the divine “Being.”

From a Christian perspective it is not enough just to keep all the rules.Yes it is important to keep the rules but it is not enough. Christians must surpass the laws. To live by the rules only is being a **legalist.** The apostle Paul says the letter of the law kills but the Spirit gives life. See **2 Corinthians 3:6**.

So the first thing we want you to know about Christian Ethics is that it is not simply a fixation on good behaviour. But rather it is first and foremost the kind of person you are and your acknowledgement of God as the source of who you are and what you do.

## 2.3.2 Theology and ethics

Christian ethics cannot be divorced from theological reflection, and theological reflection should not done without ethical inquiry. Waje Kunhiyop (2008: 45) says, “Christian Theology is critical to the development of Christian ethics.”

Kunhiyop cites Alister E. McGrath who says, “To lose sight of the importance of doctrine is to lose the backbone of faith and to open the way to a spineless ethic.” 45.

That leads to the second area of inquiry under Christian Discipleship. We need to explore a little more fully what the Christian World-view is.

Each doctrine of the Christian faith can be related to Christian Ethics. Some of the doctrines include Christology-Christ, Soteriology—Salvation, Cosmology—World, Eschatology—End Times, Harmatiology—SIN, Anthropology—MAN etc.

Some argue that Ethics should not be confused with theology. In your opinion, can Ethics survive without theology?

## 2.3.3 Creation and ethics

Anderson J.E (2012) writes, “The divine act of bringing the universe and all that inhabits it into existence. The biblical presentation of creation is neither scientific nor monolithic, but testifies to the beauty and complexity of this foundational event in ancient Israel’s consciousness.” Lexham Bible Dictionary

**God is the Creator, we are his creation**

Scripture declares in the book of Genesis, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth— 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1 LEB)

ILLUSTRATION: Christian T-Shirt that said: Two things you need to know in life: 1. There is a God 2. You are not Him.

If God is the creator, how we live should be something of his concern. We belong to him and he is the one who decides how we are to live. He has also structured the world in a way that good behaviour has benefits and wrong behaviour has consequences.

Emil Brunner, in *Divine Imperative* (86), asserts “Christian Ethics is the science of human conduct as it is determined by Divine conduct.”

This is contra egoism: an ethical theory that analyses an individual’s decision-making in terms of its impact on that individual alone. “Ego” is the Greek word for “I.” So, I make my decisions based on what is in my best interest. We will probably talk about that more later in the course but for now all I want you to know that is that the fundamental concept or doctrine of God as Creator and us as His creation means that God is the Source of reality, the One who sets the moral agenda. He is the Designer of the “the good life” to which we all aspire, the Creator of righteousness. It is God who determines what is good and what is bad. Therefore, we conclude that **God is the point of origin for the study of ethics**.

ILL: Think of a new Samsung phone, to get the most out of it, one needs to consult its manual. God as The Design Engineer/Owner’s Manual and Ethics is simply the task of learning and living according to the Owner’s Manual.

� **The Goal of Creation of humanity is fellowship with God**

� **God’s creation was “good”**

Gen. 1: says that what he created was good. What does this have to do with

ethics? First of all, it tells us that all the sticky, tough decisions we occasionally have to make, when we find ourselves between “a rock and a hard place” and there just seems to be no good decision—those situations are not of God’s making. They may not be of your making either; they may have been thrust upon you by someone else. But God is not the author of evil.

God originally wired us to make good choices: Paul writes to the Ephesians, “For we are his creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we may walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10 LEB)

� **Fellowship necessitates freedom**

Freedom of choice, as we will see, is a fundamental presupposition for all

ethical inquiry. There can be no right or wrong, good or bad without the freedom to choose. That’s why in a just society, a woman who is raped is not thought of as being guilty of adultery, or any such sin. It was not her choice. But how does this relate to God’s sovereignty?

**Q: what do we mean by sovereignty?**

In terms of salvation, those who emphasize God’s sovereignty. exclusively over against human freedom talk about predestination. They are of the opinion that whatever that happens to us or what we do has already been determined. Hence they operate with a deterministic worldview in which humans are just like puppets.

Christian theology recognizes Synergism which means working together , not monergism means working alone.

ILL: puppet

## 2.3.4 Harmatiology – sin and ethics

Paul writes in Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of

God”.

Paul also writes that sin came through one man and death came through sin. In a way Paul connects the story of Adam with the story of all of us. What Adam did affected each of us. Adam is a head of a sphere and we are born in that sphere. We call this **Original Sin.** No one comes into the world untainted by Sin.

So Christian Ethics affirms that whereas, before the Fall, we had a better than

50/50 chance of doing the right thing, now after the Fall, we have this propensity to sin, this inclination to sin—to do the unethical, rather than the ethical. So it is not so simple as just waking up and saying, “I’m going to be ethical today.” Or “I’m going to do the right thing today.” Any person who has struggled with some kind of addiction can testify to that.

Sin is also what we do. In the church of the Nazarene we talk of Sin as original and personal. The personal is related to how John Wesley defined sin as, “a wilful transgression of a known law of God.” Sin is also basic alienation from God, it is self-love, the determination to do what we want and no individual can overcome it alone.

Tracy, Freeborn, Weigelt and Tartaglia in their book on Spiritual Formation,

*The Upward Call* (1994) writes:

“Spiritual Formation [Ethics] must recognize that God’s design has been seriously frustrated by sin…. Many who write and speak in the field of spiritual development [moral development] give no evidence that they are aware of the devastating consequences of sin. They imply that effort and appropriate conditions will produce spiritual [moral] formation. It is necessary only to move relatively smoothly up the sequence from unholy to holy. [from unethical or immoral to ethical or moral]”, p.26

Romans 7:14ff

Acting sinfully harms us and others and it impedes our ability to live truly happy lives. Sin affects individual as well as social entities. We should not only be concerned about personal sin but systemic evil that affects social structures as well.



What aspects of our society have been tainted by sin? In what way does sin manifest itself in our society? What can Christians do to deal with this kind of sin?

## 2.3.5 Salvation and ethics

Sin does not have the final answer: Jesus is God’s answer to the sin problem. He is more than a great moral teacher, he is the saviour of the world.

Paul writes to the Romans “Christ died for our sins” See Romans 7:24-8:4

Salvation by grace through faith: Read Eph. 2:8-9

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it

is the gift of God; 9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we may walk in them.

Grace is defined as, “the help that God gives people to know and to live more truthful, holy, and virtuous lives in the manner directed ultimately toward union with God.” William C. Mattison III, Introducing Moral Theology (2008)

And it is “by grace” not just at that one time moment when you become a Christian, but throughout your life. The Christian life is one of radical dependence on God. It is not about what we do, but what God has done to make possible our doing.

So Christian Ethics is not about just deciding you want to make the right choice rather than the wrong choice, though that is part of it. It’s about dependence on God’s help to know the right choice and to actually make the right choice. It is a grace-oriented ethics.

H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image* (1998) quoting Christopher J. H. Wright: The sequence of events in the Biblical story is very important. God did not send Moses down to Egypt with the law already tucked under his cloak to say to Israel in bondage, “Here you are. This is God’s law, and if you keep it fully from now on, God will rescue you out of this slavery.” p.64 No, God, in an act of pure grace first delivered them from slavery. Then, laid out for them at Mt. Sinai what it would take to establish and live in covenant with God. Again, Christian ethics does not begin with our goodness, resulting in our salvation, but rather it begins with God’s gracious salvation, and then our lives then being offered back to him in thanksgiving.

**Sanctification and Ethics**

Sanctification is defined as the process of being made holy

The Bible in Romans 12:1-2— talks about being transformed by the renewing of our minds, the result is that we become living sacrifices, able to understand what God’s good and perfect will is. John 2:1-2--even if we do sin, we can still go to God. Good news!

To what extent might Christian salvation have relevance for the created order?

# 2.4 What is a disciple?

## 2.4.1 Biblical usage

The word “disciple” occurs 269 times in the New Testament. “Christian” is found only three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to the disciples. . . . The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.

## 2.4.2 What is a disciple?

What forms of following are there in the contemporary world today?

Twitter, people follow each other on twitter, whatever that person posts all the followers will get the message. At we discuss what a disciple is think about what could be the differences between following Jesus and following someone on twitter. Jesus went out and called Andrew and Peter and James and John from their fishing nets and said, “Follow me.” The essence of discipleship is following. In the first century Roman World that was a physical following. They did not have education by extension or universities where you take the bus to and then go home at night and keep your job while you go to school, much less did they have online Internet classes you could take. No, these guys had to leave thei nets, Matthew the tax collector had to leave his tax booth, they had to leave their livelihoods, even leave their families, to be Jesus’ disciple.

A student, pupil, or learner. In the New Testament it is used for Jesus’ followers. Often references “the Twelve” but also indicates a wider group of followers. Nässelqvist, D. (2012). Disciple. In (J. D. Barry & L. Wentz, Eds.)The Lexham Bible Dictionary.

So being a disciple of Christ means being a follower of Christ. It means doing as he did. Living as he lived. It means internalizing and affirming his teachings and applying them to our lives.

## 2.4.3 Discipleship and lordship

And because of the claims he and the rest of the Biblical witnesses made about him, it means accepting his Lordship of your life. Discipleship and Lordship in the case of Jesus are one and the same. You could be a disciple of Socrates or Plato or the Buddha and not accept them as Lord. Not so, with Jesus. And that makes His moral claims on your life even more decisive.

## 2.4.4 Cost and yet the absence of true discipleship

So while the new being that results from the right doing is free, it is a gift of God to us, the discipleship that results from it is very costly.

**Matthew 16:24**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who, during WW2, refused to cooperate with Hitler and, in fact, participated in a plot to assassinate Hitler and for which he was executed, wrote a book entitled, “The Cost of Discipleship.” In that book, Bonhoeffer complains about those who want to embrace what he calls “cheap grace.” By that he means grace that does not result in a changed life and more righteous behaviour.

Again, Matt 16:24 and Luke 9:23 “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

## 2.4.5 The lack of true discipleship

Dallas Willard, Devotional Classics (14) writes, “For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or intended to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. Contemporary American churches in particular do not require following Christ in his example, spirit, and teachings as a condition of membership…” ibid (14) “The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian—especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the Kingdom of God.”

In other words, those who are disciples are not some elite special forces group of Christians and then there are all the rest of us, less disciplined, less trained, less effective soldiers of Christ. No, you are either a follower of Christ or you are not, and if you are not, then you have no right to call yourself by

His name, “Christian.”

What can I do to communicate this to you: Christian ethics will not happen until Christian discipleship happens.

# 2.5 Ethics and the search for God’s will

As Christians it almost goes without saying that we want to Know God’s will. Discerning His will becomes the basis for our ethics, our moral decision- making. If it is not God’s will, it cannot be the right choice.

Q: Isn’t it hard, sometimes to know God’s will for your life? Can you think of a time in your life when you honestly sought God’s will and struggled to know what God wanted you to in that situation?

Again, if God is the Source and Originator of all life, then God is also the Determiner of what is right and wrong. It is His game. He makes up the rules. Now fortunately he is a benevolent and loving and just God and so the rules are good. Our job is to be in tune with God so that we might learn the rules of the game, that we might discern His will.

# 2.6 Knowing God versus knowing His will

Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (1991) Blackaby says that we focus too much attention on trying to “know God’s will.” That sounds like it contradicts what I just said about the importance for ethics of knowing God’s will, doesn’t it? Not really. Note how he follows that: he says the real issue at stake is not knowing God’s will, but knowing God. If we know God then we will know his will. He goes on to write: “If you want to know the will … of God, you must give the time and effort to cultivate a love relationship with Him. That is what He wants!” (p.74)

The Hebrew and Greek words for “know” as in, to know someone, both connote this kind of intimate relational knowledge, not simply a head (intellectual) knowledge

Do you know that God wants a relationship with you, each one of you, a deep personal relationship? And that comes through presenting yourself to God. And when you do that, then …

• Romans 12:1-2

Again, Get to know God and you won’t have near as much difficulty getting to know His will.

# 2.7 Discipleship and the image of God: personal ethics

• Genesis 1:26-27 We were created in the image of God.

“The biblical revelation was given in the context of a religious world. Rulers such as the Egyptian Pharaohs and later the Roman Emperors were regarded as divine. The Greeks and Romans depicted their gods in human form, as of course many people have done. Scripture rejects all such ideas along with their associated idolatry. There is only one God, and he is not to be represented by any visible form. He has however, made human beings in his image.” New Dict. of Christ. Ethics and Past. Theo. (476)

But as we mentioned, through the effects of sin, that image has been defaced. Christ, part of the holy Trinity has come to provide salvation and the salvation that is offered is more than just an escape from hell and a ticket to heaven. It is being renewed or restored in the image of God that was defaced as a result of the fall. And now we are called into discipleship, to followership of the one who created us. It is like we are coming full circle in this process of salvation.

* 1 Peter 1:15-16 We are to be holy like God is holy.
* Matthew 5:48 We are to be perfect like the Father is perfect.
* Philippians 2:4ff We are to be imitator of Christ, or have the mind of Christ.

**The biblical and theological term for this renewal in the image of God is sanctification**. The Church of the Nazarene has throughout its history given special emphasis, placed special importance on the need to be sanctified or to be made holy.

* 1 Thess. 4:3
* 1 Thess 5:23

What do we mean by this sanctification or holiness stuff? We mean just what that scripture said, that it is a work of God, not our work and so again, it begins with our “being” rather than our “doing”. Many people make the claim to be “holy” on the basis of what they are doing rather than on the basis of what God has done.

But then it goes on from there, the text says in this prayer of St. Paul for the Thessalonians that they would be kept blameless. We don’t need to get into a deep discussion of words here, but that word “blameless” has clear moral connotations to it. It might as well just say, “blameless in all you do.” And so Paul is praying that these Thessalonians’ believers would be sanctified through and through, and thereby renewed in the image of God, and that this would effect morally blameless behaviour.

Paul is not saying, “As a result of this, you are automatically going to live a perfectly sinless life, but what he and Jesus and others are all saying is that the more you become like (again) the One who created you, the less you will have to worry about immoral behaviour and unethical decisions. There may still come those tough decisions in which you honestly are not sure what to do.

But at least the desire of your heart will be right. Again, it is the “being” what’s on the inside that matters most. If the “being” is right, then most often the behaviour will follow suit. Good trees bear good fruit.

## 2.7.1 What is the image of God?

**Q: What do you think it means to be created in the Image of God?**

H. Ray Dunning *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan*

*Perspective* (1998) pages 77-123 identifies the following four aspects:

1. Image as Relation to God

2. Image as Relation to Others

3. Image as Relation to the Earth

4. Image as Relation to Self.

### 2.7.1.1 Image in relation to God

This aspect has to do with the relationship with God. First and foremost to be in the image of God is to be able to relate with God. We are God’s creation and God created us to exist in a relationship with him.

Obedience is key to maintaining the relationship to God.

Man disobeyed and God extended his grace to man to restore this relationship. The importance of grace in returning to this relationship cannot be taken for granted.

The end of obedience is communion, not obedience. John 14:5 if you love

me- you will obey my commands. A love for God is linked with the principle of separation. Anything that hinders this relationship must be rejected.

In the early days of Christianity, many avoided athletic games in the Amphitheatre because they were conducted in honour of pagan gods- this would compromise their exclusive loyalty.’



What do Christians have to avoid in today’s world that would compromise their relationship with God? What would be the equivalent of the Olympic games in the first century?

### 2.7.1.2 Image in relation to others

Humanity was created as social. This social aspect has a Biblical basis. Let us make man in our image, in our likeness. Elohim in Hebrew is plural- meaning God has a social nature, the nature of God is interpersonal in character. Hence man was intended to be communal- enjoying personal fellowship with his fellow humans.



**How would it be if you had access to everything you need - except fellow humans? If you are provided with all the conveniences of modern life and all the kinds of cars and houses that you would like. Would you opt for a life like that or one in which you have access to people but not all the things you would need?**

Gen 1-11 contains several pictures of distorted relationships that resulted from the fall. Abel and Cain, is one example. Neighbourly love is one ethical principle- love your neighbour as yourself. Mutuality and reciprocity are essential components of ideal relationships. This love for God and love for neighbour are inseparable components. Hebrews 2;14- live at peace with all men and be holy. In this first and greatest commandment- both vertical and horizontal aspects are included.

• Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18

• Matthew 5;43-48, Luke 6: 27-36.

The second commandment brings us—the problem of neighbour— Who is my neighbour? This question is an academic question Luke 10:29-37.Jesus moved the question into the practical realm Read page 90 Dunning

Love is demonstrated by identifying yourself with the wounded man on the Roadside. The nature of this love is agape—love that seeks the well-being of another, Love that is commanded, is grounded in eternity and is thus unchangeable.

If we are truly reflecting the divine image in interpersonal relations, we can never turn other persons into things to be used for our own self-centered ends. We cannot treat them as an “it”. Deut 1:17 --- do not show partiality in judging, hear small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God.

According to Jesus those at the mercy of the world, are to be especially cared for. These include

• **Orphans**

• **Foreigners**

• **Refugees**

• **Physically challenged**

• **Poor**

• **Widows**

What groups in your society are most vulnerable and are at the mercy of society? What makes them vulnerable? How can Christians help these people?

### 2.7.1.3 Image as relation to the Earth

Human beings were given dominion over the earth by their Creator. What dominion means is not exploitation but rather responsible stewardship. Human beings are to care for the earth and use its resources for the glory of God, not for their own gratification. The Land in the Old Testament- was always God’s, and those on it did not own it.

We are to have responsible stewardship of the Land and its resources

• Environmental ethics- have to do with proper care for the environment and everything in it.

• **Possessions- money and property how ought we to relate with these things?**

### 2.7.1.4 Image in relation to self

“If self is elevated to the place of God in one’s life, if self-centeredness is the determiner of how we relate to the other people, Self-gratification is how we relate to possessions then all of life is perverted.”

The second command says love your neighbour as thyself- this introduces one of the most difficult and puzzling paradoxes in Christian Ethics.

**i.** On one hand –the basis of the definition of sin involves self- centeredness; however

**ii.** There is strong evidence against self- denigration.

Augustine said the second command includes a third command to love thyself. Soren Kierkegaard argues that If we conceive a Religion of love- this religion needs to make one assumption as true, and take its realization for granted: namely the condition that man love himself, in order to command him to love his neighbour as himself.

Sanctification does not intend the eradication of the natural love of self but its distortion resulting from sin. The Foundation of our love for our neighbour should stand upon the love of God – this foundation shall never be moved. Soren Kierkegaard argues that the second commandment should be read to mean ‘thou shall love thyself in the right way’. Only from loving ourselves in the right way can we rightly love our neighbour. You shall love yourself as you love your neighbour when you love him as you love yourself.

Example- committing suicide- is not loving himself in the way in which a man ought to love himself- we belong to God our responsibility to our master prohibits it. Plato – says the philosopher seeks death all his life- but because he belongs to the gods he cannot take that life away.

1 Cor 6:19-20 we do not belong to ourselves

From the perspective of Christian Ethics, this is interpreted as being against the use of tobacco and other toxic substances because such practices are not in accord with good stewardship of our bodies. Consider:• Diet- food and drink detrimental to good health- is not being a good steward.

• Phil 1:10 to discern what is best

• Phil 4:8 to think about such things- noble, lovely, honourable

etc.

• Diet fed to people via the media, this principle has significant relevance

• A proper relation to oneself calls for a health self-image

• Self Esteem- God can’t make junk. What do you see when you look on the mirror? Do you like what you see? (Dunning, Reflecting the Divine Image, 77-123.

So personal ethics finds its proper context or milieu in the renewal of the individual in the image of God.

# 2.8 Pauline ethics: the spirit and Christian life

Gordon D. Fee in God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul (1994) provides useful insight into Pauline ethics.

For Paul Christian life not only begins by means of the Spirit; the whole Christian life is a matter of Spirit.

The Spirit and Ethical Life are thus intertwined.

The crucial role of the Spirit in Pauline ethics:

1. For Paul there is no such thing as “salvation in Christ” that does not also include righteousness on the part of God’s people.

• Getting in and staying in are the work of the Spirit

2. The Spirit is essential to Paul’s ethics because truly Christian ethics can only be by the Spirit’s empowering

• That is why Torah observance does not work; it may make one **“religious,”** but it fails to make one **truly “righteous**,” in the Pauline sense of reproducing the righteousness of God in the lives of believers.

• **Only dependence on the Spirit can enable one to know what is pleasing to God**.

• To the Colossian believers he prayed that they might “be filled with the knowledge of God’s will by means of the Spirit’s wisdom and insight”

o **Thus, rather than give them Christian “rules” he gives them the Spirit.**

o **It is the Spirit who reveals God’s will in such a way that ethical life is a reflection of God’s character.**

**Ethics for Paul, therefore, is ultimately a theological issue pure and simple.**

Everything has to do with God, and what God is about in Christ and the Spirit. Thus:

1. The purpose or basis of Christian ethics is the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)

2. The pattern for such ethics is Christ (1 Cor 4:16-17; 11:1; Eph 4:20)

3. The Principle is love, precisely because love alone reflects God’s character

4. The Power is the Spirit.

**Crucial role of the Spirit in Christian Ethics**

a. Walking in/ by the Spirit

• This is a basic imperative in Pauline ethics

• The primary form for such walking is love (Eph 5:2)

b. The Spirit as Holy

• The Holy Spirit is at work in the believers and Paul refers to the believers as saints = God’s holy People.

“1 Thess 4:3-8 addressing the issue of sexual immorality with a group of former pagans for whom sexual irregularity was not considered a moral issue. The argument begins, ‘this is God’s will for you, even your sanctification” (v. 3) and concludes that the person who rejects his instruction on this matter does not reject what a mere man had to say, “but rejects the very God who gives {present tense} you His Holy Spirit.’ (Fee,

881)

The early believers understood themselves to be dedicated to God…they were set apart for God, to be his “holy” people in the world.

According to Paul believers were to walk according to Spirit and not according to the Flesh. The flesh in Paul’s thought means, “life before and outside of Christ. Such a life is no longer an option for the new people of God, who are so by the indwelling of the works of the flesh as the empowering work of the Spirit (Rom 8:12-13).” (Fee, 881)

**The fruit of the spirit**

A discussion of Pauline ethics would not be complete without a look at the role of the fruit of the Spirit in Paul’s ethics. Gal 5:22-23 specifies the fruit of the Spirit, in contrast to the works of the “flesh.” (Fee, 881)

The Spirit who indwells the believer produces the fruit as believers continually walk with the Spirit’s help.

**Four Observations From Gordon D. Fee**

a. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but representative. An important phrase to note is

“such things” (ta tau:ta) meaning all other vices and virtues similar to these.

• Further items mentioned in Col 3:12-13 (compassion, humility, forgiveness)

• Specific applications like those in Rom 12:9-21

• Paul is addressing the context of the Galatian churches which needs these particular virtues. (Christopher Foster)

b. These fruits cover a broad range, including all manner of attitudes, virtues, and behaviour. Christian life across the broadest possible spectrum is the work of the Spirit.

• Fruits include the experiences of joy, and peace within the believing community

• Attitudes such as gentleness, forbearance, and self-control

• Behaviours such as love, kindness, goodness and all other kinds of behaviour consonant with these experiences and attitudes.

c. What this list of Spiritual fruit does not include is any attempt to “regulate”

Christian behaviour by rules of religious conduct. Because truly Christian ethics are the product of walking and living in the Spirit, there can be no law (Gal 5:23)

• Rules after all are easily regulated and easily performed, without the need of the Spirit’s empowering.

d. Both the fruit of the Spirit and the various imperatives (commands) that give specifics to Pauline ethics belong primarily to the believing community not the individual believer.

• The Context is one of : “biting and devouring one another”

• The imperatives (commands) are given to the Christian community not only to individuals.

“While these various attitudes and behaviours must be worked on at the individual level—no one is exempt from walking by the Spirit—they are primarily the ethics not of individuals, but of the community of faith.” (Fee,

883)

# 2.9 Principles for making moral decisions

Five principles set forth by Etiel in the development of a "Working Biblical Model for Personal Ethics."

1. Does not violate any clear teaching of scripture: Any practice which a Christian is trying to evaluate that directly contradicts any clear teaching in scripture is to be considered wrong.

2. Basic sanctity of the body to be observed: Christians are not to do something willingly which they know would destroy their body (physically mentally, or spiritually) as the temple of God's spirit. Anything which deteriorates one's state of existence is prohibited.

3. The believer should not do something which appears questionable at the risk of causing a brother (or a non-Christian by implication) to stumble in coming closer to Christ.

4. The believer should not do anything that violates the express will of one's spiritual head unless the spiritual head requests him/her to commit personal sin before God.

5. Whatever one does in regard to ethical questions should in the final analysis glorify God. Whatever God cannot be asked to bless with a clear conscience should be avoided.

Choose an ethical issue in your community and demonstrate how Etiel’s guidelines can help you and your community reach a moral decision.

# 2.10 Discipleship and the kingdom of God: social ethics

Ethics is not only personal, Ethics is also social. We are not only concerned about the personal ethics of individuals but the social ethics of the group as well. In the same way, personal ethics relates to the theological idea of the image of God, social ethics finds its proper context in the idea of the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? Think about any kingdom you know? What must be there for a kingdom to be truly a kingdom?

“The phrase kingdom of God (or kingdom of the Lord) primarily refers to God’s kingly power exercised over creation and people.” Seal, D. (2012). Kingdom of God. In (J. D. Barry & L. Wentz, Eds.)The Lexham Bible Dictionary.

The kingdom of God was central to Jesus’ message and ministry. His main sermon was: “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” In other words, stop doing wrong and start doing right—a message laden with ethical import.

## 2.10.1 The nature of the kingdom:

What was the nature ofthis kingdom Jesus talked about? Was it something purely spiritual: having Jesus in my heart? Or was it something more concrete? Many people of Jesus’ day understood the kingdom of God in the very literal obvious sense— a kingdom in which Yahweh, the God of Israel was king or at least one of his chosen ones, most like from the lineage of King David sat on the throne.

-Roman over lordship

-Judea as a war trophy

-Rise of Zealots—Masada

-Expectation of a Messiah, a deliverer from Roman tyranny

-Judas (a zealot) and the betrayal of Jesus

Luke 17:20-21; the Messianic secret

Matthew 16ff : Jesus is confessed as the Christ, but then immediately has to straighten Peter out about what the nature of that Messiah ship is all about. It is about suffering and dying, not armies and victories.

So it is clear that Jesus avoided being identified as a political figure and it is clear that he did not want the kingdom of God to be identified as a purely political, earthly kingdom. But that does not mean that the Kingdom of God. did not have any political or social significance. NDCEPT, 531:

It has often been noted that Jesus’ kingdom proclamation included no political or social programme. This differentiated his message from the nationalistic Messianism of his day. Undoubtedly, this transformation of Jewish expectation was a source of misunderstanding in Jesus’ 1st century context: Jesus announced the arrival of the long-awaited time of God’s sovereign rule, but, for many, the evidence for this phenomenon must have been disappointing.

Jesus’ refusal to interpret the kingdom along nationalistic or militaristic lines should not be taken as evidence that his message of the kingdom was without a social and political dimension, however. After all, we may recall, to speak of the coming of the kingdom is to speak of the coming of God to bring justice and peace for all creation, and the socio-political orientation of this reality is transparent. Moreover, the shape of Jesus’ own ministry underscores the nature of salvation as directed towards the whole person. Indeed, the preaching of the kingdom is an affirmation of creation, and the consummation of the kingdom is ‘creation healed.’”

In fact, so radical is this ethic of the kingdom that it calls for a total reorientation of life according kingdom principles. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the best expression of this Kingdom ethic. Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are those in mourning, blessed are the persecuted, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, love your enemies, not only don’t commit adultery, don’t even look at woman lustfully; whoever would save his life must lose it; whoever would be first must be last—the servant of all. The ethic of the kingdom seems to turn everything upside down! But then that is the nature of the command that Jesus gives in connection with the message about the kingdom—Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand. Repentance is turning away from the old reality and toward the new reality of God.

## 2.10.2 The timing of the kingdom

The timing of the kingdom of God makes a big difference in Christian ethics.

The “Already but Not Yet” describes the New Testament understanding of the present time between the 1st and (parousia) second coming of Christ.

The kingdom has begun with the coming of Jesus Christ. Immanuel: God with us. But there is also a sense in which it is not fully here otherwise we wouldn’t have evil and sin so rampant here on earth.

• Mark 1:15 The kingdom of God is near

• Mark 9:1 “some here will not taste death until the kingdom comes in power…”

• Mark 10: 25 hard for Rich man to enter kingdom of God

• Mark 12:34 “You are not far from the k of G

So on the one hand we have the idea that the kingdom is even now breaking in upon us and that is decisively confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus. Through the resurrection God is saying, the old is past, the new is here. Yet at the same time, we still face trials and troubles, and the devil is still the prince of this world. Not everybody is getting the picture of the good news of the kingdom. They are still living in the bad news of a fallen world.

Already--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Not Yet

1st Coming-----------------------------------------------------------------------Second Coming

Inauguration-----------------------------------------------------------------------Consummation

We live in the “in-between” times—between the already and the not yet of the k of God.

What does this have to do with ethics? Timing is everything.

**Q: what would you do if you KNEW that Jesus was coming to take his saints up into heaven then establish his kingdom here on Earth three days from now? Would you bother to come to classes tomorrow if you knew in three days it would all be over anyway and you wouldn’t be completing these classes?** Would you go repair some strained relationship? Would you go see relatives who are not Christians and say, “Hey, three days is all you have left to become a Christian…” ? Would you take all the money you have in the world and go on a trip around the world? Would you go and sell all you have and give it to the poor and go to some mountaintop and wait for Christ to return? What would you do?

It makes perfect ethical sense to sell everything you have and to move to some mountain top as some have done if you think that Jesus is coming tomorrow or next week to consummate or finalize the kingdom of God. But if the kingdom might be a millennium as easily as a month from now, then the choices you would make for your life would look much different.

So where one falls on this continuum makes a huge difference in the field of

Christian ethics. Let me summarize these differences:

“Already” ethics “Not Yet” ethics

Idealism Realism

God’s ability Human inability Purity and Holiness Struggle with sin Sense of urgency Patience

Crisis Growth

No Compromise Compromise, a fact of life

ILL: bribery—yes or no. School’s computers

ILL: abortion—yes or no.

ILL: pacifism or just war theory

We will see this played out more fully later in the course when we talk about basic options in Christian ethics. But where is the correct place to be on this continuum? I am tempted to say somewhere in the middle, because I think there is truth on each side, but at some points it appears to be an “either/or” choice and you just can’t have it both ways. And so, I want now to discuss the theological tradition of which the Church of the Nazarene is a part and in which I stand affirmed. And that is to side up with God’s ability to make it possible to do whatever he commands. I want to encourage you to live your life and make your decisions always giving the “already” side the benefit of the doubt. Because the old is passing away and the new order is breaking in even now. It may not seem like it always. In fact, at times it may seem like the old order is winning, but we know the end of the story. And the end of the story is the full realization of the Kingdom of God and so why not start living that way now!

So the kingdom of God represents the social aspect of ethics. Just as in personal ethics we seek the restoration of ourselves in the image of God as our goal, in social ethics, we seek the realization of the kingdom of God, as our goal. Because the kingdom of God represents justice and peace in all our relationships.

# 2.11 Discipleship, the Church, and the means of Grace

## 2.11.1 The Church

The Church plays a very important role in the shaping of Christian ethics if for no other reason than that it is where the Christian disciples are being shaped, and nurtured, and discipled. The Church has down through the centuries been described as the bride of Christ and the mother of all Christians, who fed and cared and nurtured us as babes in Christ and even as mature Christians. So the Church is where training in Christian ethics takes place. It is where the values and beliefs and faith needed to live the Christian life is inculcated or raised up in the believer.

Usually when people think about the church they think of the hierarchy, the church leaders. This is a Roman Catholic way of viewing the church, however the Protestant believes in the **priesthood of believers**. This means that each of us are priests not for ourselves but for each other. The church then consists of all those who profess Jesus as Lord. From this view it comes without saying that when we say “the church” we mean “you and me”. When we say what the church is doing or not doing, its an indictment on you and me. The only way the world is going to know that we are followers of Jesus Christ, is if his church live like he lived and love like he loved.

Georgia Harkness perceptively highlights the fact that the church needs ethical insight due to the network of human institutions that she finds herself in,

The Church exists to be the carrier of the gospel in a fellowship of

Christians. But the Church exists also as a human institution, a social

group made up of fallible human beings. These fallible human persons "who profess and call themselves Christians," who are of varying degrees of ethical insight and fidelity to Christ, are also enmeshed in a network of other human institutions, political, economic, domestic, recreational, cultural. It is only natural, therefore, that the standards current in these other social institutions should impinge upon their life as Christians and so find access into the structure of the churches. Hence, the churches are always in danger of themselves becoming secularized and conforming to the standards of the world instead of

being agencies of Christian transformation. Christian Ethics, 7-8

## 2.11.2 The means of Grace

What are the ways and means by which the Church raises up morally upright and righteous members? Again, what we are talking about here is allowing God to shape the inner being so that our righteous doing is just a reflection of it. Those ways and means the Church has called down through the centuries are “the means of grace” because in them, God mediates his grace to us. They become the channels by which God draws us unto Himself and makes us more like Him.

There are two ways of defining **“means of grace, broadly and narrowly”**

### General means of grace

By general means of grace we mean any way in which God speaks to an individual or encounters that person or grows that person. It may be a hike up Mt Kenya, or the death of a loved one, or something you read in a newspaper. Anything.

Included in these more general means of grace are what we call “Spiritual

Disciplines.”

• Prayer

• Bible Study

• Worship

• Preaching and Hearing of the Word

• Meditation

• Fasting

• Solitude

### Special means of grace

There are, however, special means of grace by which God ministers to us. Those include what we call the sacraments. Sacraments are Divinely Instituted means of grace. That is, they are means of grace which Jesus Christ instituted in his earthly ministry and commanded to us.

For Roman Catholics there are seven sacraments and they are **Eucharist, Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Holy Matrimony, Penance, Extreme Unction** …For Protestants there are only two: **Baptism and Lord’s Supper**. There has been tremendous debate down through the centuries over the number of sacraments and the exact manner in which God’s grace is mediated to us through those sacraments and how those sacraments should be performed, but suffice it to say that somehow **God uses these means in a special way to further his development of us into his image,** to make the inner being is what it should be and then the outer doing will reflect it; so that the good tree bears good fruit.



All of this constitutes the basis of Christian discipleship which, in turn, constitutes the foundation of the Christian life and moral behaviour. You just can’t talk about Christian ethics without talking about the Christian decision- maker, the disciple, and you cannot talk about the disciple without talking about the inner life from which discipleship springs.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. Why is it important for us to study Christian Ethics?

2. Can you relate Christian Theology to Christian Ethics?

3. What is the role of the church in the moral decision-making process?

4. Why should Christians take care of their bodies?

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# Lesson 3: Principles and approaches in ethics

# Introduction

The study of Ethics has principles and approaches that ethicists have developed through the ages. These principles or theories shall be presented and critiqued from a Christian perspective. Useful guidelines shall be adapted for Christian Ethics.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

**As a result of this lesson you must be able to :**

1. Identify the various theories used in decision-making processes.

2. Critique ethical theories from a Christian perspective.

3. Make decisions using each of the theories presented in this lesson.

**Before we can look at ethical theories, let us define definitions of key term in ethics.**

# 3.1 Definition of terms in ethics

In ordinary language, we often use the words “ethical” and “moral” (and “unethical” and “immoral”) interchangeably; that is, we speak of the ethical or moral person. We say, “That was an immoral or unethical act.” Yet while we speak of a code of ethics, we would rarely say, “a code of morals”. We have classes on Christian ethics but rarely do we have a class on Christian morals, however, some schools do call what we are doing in this class, “Moral Theology”. So there seems to be some ill-defined distinctiveness in how we use these terms, on the one hand, and yet interchangeability on the other.

Beyond that, we don’t use either of these words as often as we use “good” and “bad”, “right” and “wrong”. What do all these words mean and what are the relationships between them?

Etymologically, we gain just a little insight into a couple of words:

“Ethics” comes from the Greek “ethos”, meaning character. “Morality” comes from the Latin moralis, meaning customs or manners. So then, of the words have been left behind and we have modified the use of those as Jacques Thiroux writes, “Ethics…seems to pertain to the individual character of a person or persons, whereas morality seems to point to the relationships among human beings. Nevertheless, in ordinary language, we don’t often distinguish between them. This is a case where the linguistic roots of words have been lost and the meanings have changed over the years. And yet, both of those elements: the character of the person and the relations between persons are vital elements in the study of ethics.”

Here are our working definitions of these terms, and again, these distinctions should not be pressed too far, because in common usage, we use them virtually interchangeably:

## 3.1.1 “Ethics”

Ethics refers to the study of how moral decisions are made. **It refers to the rationale used to arrive at moral judgments.**

Ethics refers to **the reasoning used to come a course of action**.

## 3.1.2 “Morals” and “Morality”

**Morals refers to those judgments themselves**. When we say, “That was a very moral action (or a very immoral action), we are placing a value judgment on that action. But technically, we would not say, “That was an ethical decision.” We should say, “That was an ethically sound decision.”

**Morality refers to the value judgment we place on that action.**

So since we have a class on Christian Ethics, we are going focus a large part of our course analysing how Christians and others make moral decisions. If this were a class on Christian Morals or Morality we would have structured the course more along the lines of simply saying, This is what Christians believe about this particular issue and here is why we believe it…

So, generally, ethics refers more to the reasoning or rationale used in making decisions. Morals or Morality refers to value judgments we attach to those decisions.

The author of our class text Samuel Waje Kunhiyop thinks we should not separate ethics and morality. He is of the opinion that in Africa we do not make a distinction between these two terms.

## 3.1.3 “Right” and “Wrong”

Another set of words we need to understand and distinguish are right and wrong, good and bad. Right and wrong can refer to the correctness or appropriateness of something. For example: 4 is the right or correct answer to the equation of 2+2. But in Christian ethics, we use **the terms right and wrong to refer to moral legitimacy**. For example, we might say, “It is right that the government should help care for the poor. It is right that we tell the truth. It is wrong to kill an innocent person. This use of right and wrong is implicit in the 10 Commandments. And it is in this same vein of thought that we use related words like “righteous” or “righteousness” And so when we say, “He is a righteous man,” we are saying that his life is characterized by morally legitimate behaviour.

## 3.1.4 “Good and Bad”

The terms “good” and “bad” are not as clear cut in what we mean by them. Again, in many cases we use them in just the same way that we use “right” and “wrong”. We might say, “That was a good thing you did for that person.” “She is a good person.” Or “He is a bad man.” “What she did was bad.” **But in many instances, “good” and “bad” don’t refer so much to moral legitimacy as they refer to value, not moral value necessarily, but just value.**

ILL: A good painting: Hence, we might say, “That is a good painting.” Or “she is a good-looking woman.” When a guy says that about a girl he’s not saying, “She is a morally legitimate looking woman.” He is placing a value on her beauty.

So the terms “good” and “bad” introduce us to an aspect of ethics and to another field that is very much related to ethics and that is **aesthetics**. **Aesthetics is the study of beauty and the value we place on it.** The study of ethics is related to aesthetics because there are some decisions we face which are not a matter of right or wrong, that is moral legitimacy, but a matter of choosing between something that good and something that is not bad, but just not quite as good. And so ethical decision-making sometimes takes the form of deciding what is the best or better, or the least wrong decision.

ILL: What major in college to choose?

ILL: Whether to ask this girl out on a date or that girl?

ILL: Whether to purchase a vehicle or to pay for college tuition

ILL: Whether to purchase a 2000ksh pair of shoes or a 5000ksh pair of shoes

There may be nothing morally illegitimate about choosing to be an education major versus a computer science major, but it may be a matter of deciding what is the better or “more good” major to choose. It may not be “sinful” to ask that girl out on a date (but then again it might!) rather than that other girl, but what would be the better choice?

And on the other side of the coin, sometimes we find ourselves with no good choice, but only a range of bad choices. This we call a **moral dilemma**. In this case Ethics is concerned with how we decide which of these choices is the least bad, the least creating of evil.

For example Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian during the time of Hitler. In his early life he was a pacifist (did not believe in violence/war) later in his life having seen what Hitler was about, he decided to participate in a plot to assassinate Hitler.

What do you think about Bonhoeffer’s decision? Was it Christian? Should a Christian ever resort to violence as a way to resist evil?

But ethics (at least Christian ethics) goes beyond aesthetics, because in many instances aesthetics does not get beyond arguing over personal tastes and preferences.

Eg.: Blue is my favourite colour but red might yours.

Ethics is not only concerned with choosing between things that are a matter of personal taste or preference. **But it is concerned with discerning what will bring the greatest value and benefit from any range of options.**

So “good” and “bad” can refer to morally legitimate actions or choices, but it can also refer to the level of value and benefit, or lack thereof that our actions and choices produce.

## 3.1.5 Descriptive and prescriptive ethics

Another pair of words that have to do with what we believe the purpose of the discipline of ethics is are Descriptive and Prescriptive Ethics.

Descriptive Ethics is simply the study of human behaviour without placing moral judgment on those behaviours. It is simply the study of what humans actually do and how they actually behave. These ethicists are only concerned with describing human behaviour. Hence, the term, descriptive ethics. This manner of ethics is primarily utilized by social sciences and in reality there is not much difference between descriptive ethics and a sociologist or cultural anthropologist because they are concerned as well with human behaviour and social relationships.

The fact that as we mentioned we get the word, morals and morality from the same word as “mores” meaning customs and traditions related to behaviour, lends itself to this type of study of ethics. And so you will find some ethicists who underscore this aspect and they will argue that all human behaviour is neither right or wrong, it is simply an expression of the customs of the community of which that individual is a part. There is nothing binding or obligating about those moral customs. In this view, the study of ethics becomes simply a matter of studying the customs of a particular people.

A good example of descriptive ethics is Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount*

*Kenya*.

Prescriptive ethics, or sometimes called Normative ethics, goes beyond descriptive ethics to ask if there are norms that guide how humans should behave. **Prescriptive ethics presupposes a moral framework for the universe by which we can make “right/wrong” or “good/bad” judgments**. This understanding of the purpose of ethics supposes that certain choices are prescribed—that is, given to us as right or wrong, good or bad, and our job as ethicists is to discern the rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness of certain actions.

In Summary:

* + **Descriptive ethics studies how humans do behave.**
  + **Prescriptive ethics studies how humans should or ought to behave.**



Should Ethics be descriptive or prescriptive? What could be the value of each of these options?

# 3.2 Principles and approaches for moral decision-making

Steve Wilkens in his book *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics* (1995) provides a case scenario that reveals the use of ethical theories. He writes, “Imagine that three people see a twenty-dollar bill on the front seat of an unlocked car. Each person walks past and leaves the cash there. Why? The first person wanted to take the money but passed up the opportunity for fear of punishment if caught in the act. The second rejected the temptation out of a conviction that God makes certain rules that people are to follow, and one of those rules is that we shouldn’t take things that don’t belong to us. The third refrained from taking the money because of empathy—awareness of how frustrated and angry she herself would be if some of her money was stolen.” 18—19

Wilkens goes on to demonstrate the theories that each individual is employing even though the action for the three individual is exactly the same. He writes, “The bumper-sticker-sized version of the first person’s ethics is ‘Whatever you do, don’t get caught,’ while that of the second person is ‘Thou shall not steal.’ The final person builds her morality around ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ Those different reasons grow out of different theories about what constitutes right behaviour.” 18.

The point Wilkens is making is that whether or not we realize it we operate with an ethical theory and that theory informs our decision making. Wilkens concludes, “Thus ethical theory is important not only to guide our own actions

but also to evaluate the actions and theories of other people.” 18.

# 3.3 Two major approaches to ethics

Ethics can be approached from the perspective of two theories. These theories are Deontological and Consequentialist (Egoism is a type of Consequentialism— decision should benefit Self and Utilitarianism is a type of consequentialism—decisions made should benefit the majority). Deontology focuses on rules whereas Consequentialism focuses on the results of certain actions.

## 3.3.1 Consequentialism: results

Consequentialism is **the approach to moral decision-making that bases the rightness or wrongness of an action solely on the consequences of performing it; the right action is that which leads to the best consequences.**

**Process of decision making for consequentialists**

i. They seek to determine all the available alternatives.

ii. From a list of these alternatives, they try to foresee or calculate the consequences of performing each of those possible alternative courses of action.

iii. Finally, they evaluate the consequences in terms of which is best.

The action that is most likely to have the best consequences is the one judged to be the right thing to do.

Think of a decision you need to make, determine your alternatives, list all the alternatives available to you, evaluate the consequences and determine which has the best consequences?

Am sure you have realized this is not new, we already do this when making decision, however the difference is that consequentialists do not have regard for any rules but the results of actions alone.



ILL: Lifeboat Example: 1841 Steamship hits iceberg. It is said that there was only one life boat which had a capacity of 7 people and 30 people had jumped into the boat. If nothing is done, it’s going to sink, how do you go about deciding who lives and who drowns?

What are the alternatives?

-do nothing

-ask for volunteers

-throw some overboard …

**Three crucial points concerning Consequentialism:**

**a. No intrinsic value to actions: In the minds of many people, any** version of the third alternative is wrong. These individuals argue that to force some people off the lifeboat is to kill them, and that murder is wrong, no matter what the consequences. Those who would say this are appealing to a very different approach to thinking about moral issues, which we will discuss in just a minute. They are saying that certain actions are intrinsically wrong and should not be performed even if the consequences are desirable. Consequentialists reject this alternative way of thinking about moral issues. For them, actions hold no intrinsic value; whether they are right or wrong depends solely upon their consequences in a given situation.

**b. situation based: A certain type of action may have quite desirable** consequences in some situations but not very desirable consequences in others. Pushing people off a lifeboat, if it is in fact the only way to save some lives, may on the whole have good consequences in this situation. But in most situations, forcing people off the boat and leaving them to drown has very bad consequences. And so the rightness or wrongness of any action will be determined by the situation in which the action is taking place.

**c. the end justifies the means**: In any given situation, an action can be viewed as a means toward attaining certain consequences, and the consequences. can be viewed as the ends obtained. For example if the captain forces some off the boat, it is because he desires to achieve certain ends, namely, the saving of some lives. So in consequentialist ethics, the end justifies the means. And it is only the end that can ever justify the means because the only way a course of action can be acceptable is if it is like to produce the most favourable consequences, that is, to have the best end result.

This is pretty radical stuff. Most Christian ethics down through the centuries have not followed this line of approach to moral decision-making. We tend to read the 10 Commandments, not as the 10 Situationally dependent commandments. We have not tended to think of them as 10 commandments one should follow only if they happen to produce the most favourable consequences. So this is different from what most traditional Christian ethics has taught. However, on the other hand, is it not how many, many people, Christian or not, actually do make decisions in life?

ILL: students checking themselves present when they weren’t

ILL: students cheating on a test, or not cheating on the test

ILL: students and teachers claiming others’ work t be their own – I just discovered relativity, and me , so did I , me too, and me

ILL: people cheating on tax etc

## 3.3.2 Types of consequentialist ethics

### a) Egoism

Wilkens says the bumper sticker slogan for this theory (Egoism) is “Look out for Number One” p.46. Wilkens notes the contradiction that exists since we often want our children to be number one when our greatest heroes are not in fact those who lived for themselves but rather selfless people like Mother Teresa.

Ethical Egoism gets its name from the Greek word for “I” Ego. What the egoist says is essentially that moral decisions should be made on the basis of self-interest. The most accepted version of this theory is **Universal Ethical Egoism and it holds that everyone should always act in his own self- interest regardless of the interests of others unless their interests also serve yours**. This is different than saying that we should all just be selfish. In fact, the ethical egoist might on the appearance of things seem to be one of the most humble self-effacing persons you want to meet, but that would only be because that particular egoist has determined that that course of action is in their best interest.

ILL: Used-car salesman who is thinking long-term for himself, might be very fair and courteous to you.

Strength of Ethical Egoism

1. Links personal responsibility with self-esteem. Individuals are responsible for themselves and must take responsibility for what they do.
2. Self-preservation and self-interest do have a valid role in ethics.
3. Selfishness of others benefits us when they do things for us for selfish reasons.
4. Actions are not justified simply because they are unselfish (Wilkens, 53-54)

**Weaknesses of Ethical Egoism**

a. How do we resolve conflicts between persons if we operate according to the ethical egoist philosophy? We can’t and in the end, might makes right. The bigger, stronger person convinces the smaller weaker one that it is his best interests to concede to the stronger person or the stronger person will beat him up.

b. How does egoism relate with Christianity? At the heart of the Christian faith is Jesus who died for others. How might Egoists view Jesus’ actions? They will probably say he is the most immoral person who ever lived.

c. Can justice be possible if we all became egoists? Will you go to court if you knew the judge is looking out for his own interests. (Wilkens, 54-60)



Egoism argues that when we do good we do it because we feel good about doing good. Hence we act based on self-interest. What do you think about this assertion?

### b) Utilitarianism

The principle architects of Utilitarianism were Jeremy Benthan (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Utilitarianism gets it name from its central principle: that a course of action should be taken based on its utility, or usefulness. Utilitarians say that an act is justified if is useful in bringing about a desirable or good end. It was Mill who then added or refined this to say that the good end which justifies an action’s utility is **“the greatest good for the greatest number of people.”** So, that act which has the greatest utility is that which will produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people and it is that act which is the morally right choice.

**Utilitarianism takes two forms: Act Util. and Rule Util.**

Rule Utilitarianism arose in response to a common criticism of util., namely, that it is too cumbersome and unwieldy to have to sit down try and try to discern all the possible alternative courses of actions one might take in a certain situation and then calculate all the possible consequences in order to arrive at the one with the greatest possible utility. We have far too many decisions, big and small, for us to go through all of that for every decision we make. So Rule Utilitarians argue that there is enough predictability about the human existence and the moral life that we can embrace some rules to help streamline the decision-making process. The rule utilitarian says, “Everyone should follow that rule or rules which will bring about the greatest good for all concerned.”

Also, Rule Utilitarians are generally less optimistic about the average individual’s ability to accurately assess an action’s utility and so they seek to provide moral guidelines for novice Utilitarians to follow. But we need to underscore that it is not as though there is any intrinsic value in these rules. They are good rules only because they have proven their utility so consistently.

Act Utilitarianism are the purists. They hold to a more strict form of utilitarianism, by denying that any rules should be established to guide moral behaviour. Situations are too different and despite the cumbersomeness of it, Act Utilitarians affirm that each and every act must be gauged based on its utility in its unique context. There can be no generalizing about the utility of an action.

**Strengths of (Utilitarian) Consequentialism**

a. It seems fair

b. in some cases the ends do justify the means

c. blind obedience to rules in some cases does seem to end in injustice or immoral behaviour.

ILL: telling the truth to a crazed man with a machete as to where his innocent victim went.

**Weaknesses of (Utilitarian) Consequentialism**

a. How are we to determine what is the greatest good for the greatest number? Can we really know how many will be affected and to what extent they will be affected by our actions? And what if the number of people involved is, for example, only two and one will be benefited by a particular action and the other hurt in equal measure--How does one calculate that?

b. And how does one assess what the greatest good is? Do we really have the ability to accurately assess or measure the consequences, both qualitative and quantitative, (especially long-range consequences) of any action?

ILL: Choosing to be a business major in order to get a good job, make money and take care of family. But what if you were to choose medicine, become a doctor, and find a cure for some terrible disease?

ILL: Could President Harry Truman of the United States have been able to foresee all the consequences of deciding to drop or not to drop the atomic bomb on Japan at the end of WW2?

c. A third concern often raised about Consequences is that it does not take into consideration the special relationships in our lives that might call into question our calculation of “the greatest good for the greatest number” and any form of ethical egoism. For example: A Parent’s love for his/her children.

ILL: If a strict Consequentialist or Utilitarian saw two people drowning and he knew he could only save one of them and one was a famous medical researcher whose picture the Consequentialist had just seen on the cover of Time Magazine because the researcher was about to discover a cure for AIDS and the other drowning person was the father’s own son. The consequentialist would be obligated to let his son drown and save the researcher. Consequentialist ethics cannot take into consideration those special relationships that in normal life we clearly make allowance for.

So while Consequentialist ethics has some very attractive points about it, and it is widely employed, it has some problems that make it imprecise and susceptible to misuse.

### Situation ethics

Another type of Consequentialism is Situation ethics, this type of ethics was proposed by Joseph Fletcher. Fletcher’s theory holds that love is the only absolute that matters. When faced with a decision one must ask what is the most loving thing to do? One making a decision must enquire what choice will most effectively demonstrate love to those who will be affected by the decision. (Adeney, Strange Virtues, 147).

Joseph Fletcher summarised the fundamentals of Situation Ethics as follows:

* 1. The only thing intrinsically good, namely, love: nothing else.
  2. The ultimate norm of Christian decisions is love: nothing else
  3. Love and justice are the same, justice is love distributed.
  4. Love wills the neighbour’s good whether we like him or not.
  5. Only the end justifies the means: nothing else.
  6. Decisions ought to be made situationally, not prescriptively. (Wilkens, 134)

The problem with Situation ethics is that even though love is crucial for Christian Ethics (Jesus’ first and second greatest commandment) it is not the only absolute. Christians have to regard other demands from the gospel like justice, honesty etc. Even though it proposes to solve all problems concerning decision making it opens the door wide for immoral decisions being made in the name of love. Think of a young man and a young woman studying at Africa Nazarene University who are in love, following situation ethics they may end up having premarital sex and claim that they what they did was the most loving thing to do. Think of a woman who may justify her actions to steal her neighbours’ chicken to feed her children, and claim that her decision was motivated by love for her children.

Stanley Haurwas is right to note that, “Love becomes a justification for our own arbitrary desires and likes.” (Adeney, 148)



Imagine a situation a mother has children and she has nothing to feed them, how would she respond in this situation as an Egoist, Utilitarian and Situationist?

## 3.3.3 Deontology

The second major approach to the study of ethics is called “Deontology” or “deontological ethics.” The word “deon” is the Greek word for duty or obligation. And so this approach to ethics focuses on duty. It is often called “ruled-based” morality because it is natural to feel a duty to follow whatever rules are there before you. Deontological ethics proposes that an action is right if it conforms with a proper moral rule, and that an action is wrong when it violates that rule.

This differs radically from Consequentialist ethics because for the deontologist, the consequences of an action have little or no bearing on whether the action is the morally right thing to do.

ILL: Lying A lie is a lie and a lie is always wrong because honesty is a duty; it is a moral rule and thus, I have an obligation to tell the truth. Whether the consequences of telling the truth are good or bad, has little to do with it because it wrong to tell a lie.

For the Consequentialist, moral rules are merely advisory. They represent, at best, the wisdom of those who have gone before, but if the situation calls for it, they can and should be disregarded, if an alternative course of action will produce better consequences. But for the Deontologist, moral rules are not merely advisory, they are the essence of what morality is all about. For them the 10 Commandments are the 10 Commandments, not the ten suggestions and to break one of them is wrong, it is committing a sin.

For the Consequentialist, the end justifies the means. For the Deontologist, the end never justifies the means. The means must be able to justify itself. The action has intrinsic merit simply because it is in harmony with a moral rule or principle.

Examples: 10 Commandments

**Immanuel Kant’s Categorical Imperative**: act only in such a way that the rule of your action could be made a universal rule for all humans everywhere. Put conversely, an act is immoral if the rule which would authorize it cannot be made into a rule for all human beings to follow.

**Strengths:**

a. Addresses the “moral sense” or conscience we have that certain actions are right and others are wrong.

b. There is a consistency about rule-based ethics. You don’t have to sit down and do your calculations over each moral decision, and come up with a different answer each time you calculate the consequences because slightly different information was put into the calculus.

c. As Christians, we can add that deontological ethics seems to stand in harmony with the moral teaching of the Bible where we find a God giving his people commandments to live by. We can find rules and commands throughout the scriptures.

**Weaknesses:**

a. Whose rules? God’s, Allah’s, Buddha’s, President’s rules, society’s rules? How do we decide what set of rules to live by? Obviously, as Christians, since we believe God is the Creator of it all, we choose to live by his rules. And again, this is a course on Christian Ethics and so we will focus on just that. But we want you to be aware of the obvious and the obvious is that not everyone accepts the reality of my God or understands his moral teaching the same way I do. We live in a **pluralistic world.**

Define pluralism: the situation where two or more views of reality in which there is significant difference exist in one society.

The reality of pluralism has led many to become moral **relativists**.

And so while the focus of this course is on strictly Christian ethics and that our Christian ethics will work out there in the real world, we need to realize that when we step out there in the real world not everyone will share our assumptions. And so I’m prepared first to try to win them over to my view of reality, but apart from that to try to find common ground with them, to shape a moral society.

b. Can be rigid. Wooden. Inflexible. Legalistic. Why shouldn’t I tell a lie if it helps me or someone else, God? “Just because” or “Because I said so.”

c. What should we do when we are faced with two rules? Which rule should we follow. Kant does not seem to provide an answer for this scenario. See *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics* page 110.

# 3.4 Absolutism versus relativism

There is another way of framing this debate between consequentialist ethics and deontological ethics. And that centers around the two words, “absolutism” and “relativism”. It hinges on the question of whether there are moral absolutes in this world. .... In most cases, absolutists claim that those absolutes (like “Do not commit murder.”) were issued from some absolute being (God). If there are such absolutes then it logically follows that we should have rules which recognize those absolutes, and thus, deontological ethics would be correct.

**Relativism holds that there are no absolutes and that morality is relative only to a specific culture or society or group or even, individual**. Cultural Anthropology has taught us that there are not nearly so many absolutes as we once might have thought, but yet there are some similarities that exist in all cultures that might be called universals. But at any rate, if there are no absolutes in morality or elsewhere then the only basis on which to make moral judgments would be on the basis of their utility or consequences.

As Christians we believe that there are absolutes and that we must recognize them in our decision making. We don’t see how a Christian can be a Relativist. With that in mind let us look at Absolutism for a moment. There are three types of absolutism when it comes to ethics. **There is non-conflicting (unqualified) absolutism, conflicting absolutism and Graded Hierarchical Absolutism.** These options are trying to answer the question what should we do when we faced with conflicts between absolutes.

## 3.4.1 Non-conflicting absolutism

The basic premise of unqualified absolutism is that all moral conflicts are only apparent; they are not real. Sin is always avoidable. There are moral absolutes that admit of no exceptions and these never actually come into conflict with one another. They may appear to conflict with each other, but upon careful examination we find they don’t. And the reason they don’t is because these moral absolutes are reflections of God’s character and God cannot contradict Himself so these moral absolutes cannot conflict with each other. And whenever there is an apparent moral conflict between two of these absolutes, then God will provide a third alternative, a way out, of the dilemma.

1 Cor.10:13

ILL: Daniel and his friends who would not eat the food served to them by the Babylonians, and instead suggested a third alternative.

Corrie ten Boom who helped hide Jews from the Nazi’s in WW2, when asked where the Jews were she was hiding, replied, “There under the table.” She had a trap door in the floor under the table that led to hidden room in the basement of their home. So technically, she was telling the truth.

This sounds great. But Third Alternatives Are Not Always Available. Norman Geisler in his study of Christian Ethics, p. 93 or 94 observes:

“It is both unrealistic and unbiblical to assume that moral dilemmas never conflict. Real life reveals this kind of conflict daily. They are seen in hospitals, courtrooms, battlefields, and elsewhere. Sometimes one must choose who will be killed. Other times the baby must die, or both the mother and the baby, will die…Likewise the Bible suggests that there was no alternative for Abraham in killing Isaac (Gen. 22), or for the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1), or the three Hebrew children (Dan. 3). It is naive to assume that these kinds of situations never happen. And, if a Christian ethic is to be adequate for all situations, it must have an adequate answer for these real moral conflicts.”

Okay, so we admit that in real life as we experience it, real moral conflicts arise in which more than one moral rule/absolute makes a claim on our behaviour but we can’t satisfy them all without violating one or more of them. So what do we do about these conflicting claims upon us? Do we become a relativist and deny that there are these moral absolutes and do what we want? No, that doesn’t seem to be an adequate solution. And we have just decided that we don’t like the option of pretending that these moral conflicts are not real, but only apparent and if we just look carefully enough we will be able to figure a way out. Well, there are two more options:

## 3.4.2 Conflicting absolutism

The first is Conflicting Absolutism. Conflicting Absolutism, like Non-Conflicting absolutism affirms that there are moral absolutes that we are obligated to obey. But unlike Non-Conflicting Absolutism, it holds that at times these moral absolutes do come into conflict with each other and we find ourselves in a situation where if we obey one absolute, we will disobey another.

ILL: Lifeboat captain: He is under obligation to save lives. That could be considered a moral absolute, but in doing so, he may be forced to throw some overboard in order to save some.

The central assumption of the ethical position of conflicting absolutism is that we live in a fallen world, and in such a world real moral conflicts do occur. The accompanying premise, however, is that when moral duties conflict, we are morally responsible to both duties. God's law can never be broken without guilt. In such cases therefore, we must simply do the lesser evil, confess our sin, and ask for God’s forgiveness.

This understanding was given full expression by the Reformer Martin Luther who claimed that we are at one and the same time *simul iustus et peccator*, which is Latin for at one and **the same time righteous/justified and sinful**. Luther, in reaction to the Roman Catholicism of his day, took his stand on the issue of salvation by grace alone.

We are sinful creatures and will be till the day we die. It is only God’s grace that justifies us before God. And so for Martin Luther, the Christian life is one of constant repentance and seeking of forgiveness. So, as we go through life, we are still sinful human beings, but we are justified humans as well. Therefore when we come to morally conflictual situations it’s no problem for the Lutheran who just confesses his sin and goes on. It is just another example of the fallen world in which we live and our inability to live free from sin.

Earlier in this century, another Lutheran, Helmut Thielicke expanded on Luther’s teaching. He called these moral conflicts “borderline situations”.

Fundamental to his view is the belief in real, unavoidable moral conflicts, and “to deny the conflict situation is to deny decision." In conflict situations, says Thielicke, "I may have to face the possibility that what is involved here is a borderline situation which does not allow of any neat solution." And "I can reach such a decision only by going through the conflict and enduring it, not by evading it in the name of some facade of perfectionism." In the conflict situation sin is unavoidable, for we "constantly fall to sin in the borderline situation." In view of human depravity, these kinds of conflicts should be expected, since "the form of this world is no more able to produce absolute righteousness than our human heart." The consequence is that in this fallen world "conduct is defacto a compromise between the divine requirement and what is required by the form of this world, ... by the manifold conflicts of life." Even the so-called just war unavoidably involves injustices. For there is no such thing as a wholly just war, and my decision to endorse any given war and participate in it can be made only from the standpoint that I see, or think I see, greater wrong on the one side than the other... ."

Moral depravity is the cause of moral dilemmas. A moral conflict "not due to the character imparted to the world by creation. The World God created was good. (Matt. 19:8). . . ." No, "it is due rather to the complex of wrong decisions which lie behind us, which have their ultimate root in that primal decision recorded in the story of the fall." In brief, moral conflicts arise out of the fact this is a fallen world. In a sinless world there would be no moral dilemmas. There will be none in heaven. God did not design, nor does he desire, moral dilemmas. They are not his ideal. But, on the other hand, this is not an ideal world; it is a real and fallen world. In such a world, there will be times in which we cannot avoid evil.

When decisions are made in conflict situations, we must choose the lesser evil, for "there are heavier sins and lighter sins,” according to Thielicke. They are all sins, but "they do not have the same weight." Thielicke makes it clear that there is no justification for doing the lesser evil. Neither is there any pragmatic justification. We must recognize that in conflict situations both commands are our moral imperatives and that sin is inevitable." Nonetheless, since there are lesser and greater sins, the Christian should do the lesser sin, knowing forgiveness is available. "He knows that here in this world there is no perfect righteousness, but he does not therefore draw the conclusion that everything is under the same condemnation and that everything is equally permissible. . . ." On the contrary, he realizes that there is a ‘quantitative distinction between reprehensible and less reprehensible behaviour and between good and less good possibilities”.

According to Thielicke, "we can undergo and endure borderline situations and … inescapable conflicts only under forgiveness”.

ILL: Lifeboat: captain throws some overboard and asks for God’s forgiveness, even though what he did he felt was the right thing to do, or at least the least wrong thing to do.

**The Basic Tenets of Conflicting Absolutism**

**There are four basic premises in conflicting absolutism.**

* 1. God’s law is absolute and unbreakable.
  2. In a fallen world unavoidable conflicts between God's commands occur.
  3. When moral conflicts happen, we should do the lesser evil.
  4. Forgiveness is available if we confess our sins.

**Conflicting Absolutism has some good points about it:**

1. It maintains the idea of moral absolutes and that violating one of those absolutes is wrong, no matter what.
2. It is realistic: it recognizes and doesn’t try to explain away the conflicting situations in life. It recognizes that life is not always neat and pretty.
3. It sees moral conflicts as rooted in human fallenness and therefore unavoidable.

**Criticisms of Conflicting Absolutism:**

1. A Moral Duty to Sin Is Morally Absurd: [According to conflicting absolutism, in real moral conflicts we have a moral duty to do the lesser of the two evils. That is, one is morally obligated to do evil. But how can there ever be a moral obligation to do what is immoral? It seems a morally absurd claim.]
2. One who finds themselves in an unavoidable situation is Morally Culpable.

This leads to a second criticism, that conflicting absolutism holds that one is personally responsible for what is personally unavoidable. If I am the captain of that lifeboat, I am responsible for everyone on board and I am ultimately responsible for the decision that will be made, but that does not mean I am culpable for the loss of life that may result from my decision.

1. Definition of culpable: guilty, blameworthy, and deserving of punishment.

Q: Is a person guilty and deserving of punishment for committing a sin that was the lesser of two evils?

c. The Sinlessness of Christ: Conflicting absolutists have a problem when we come to the person of Christ. And it boils down to what do with His sinlessness. Christian tradition has held down through the centuries that Jesus was the only human being who lived a sinless life. And by virtue of that sinlessness he was worthy of being the sacrifice for our sins.

Hebrews: 4:15

But if Jesus was sinless, did he not face these morally conflicting situations? Even though he was sinless, he still lived in a fallen sinful world, and so as a matter of course he would have encountered such dilemmas, would he not? But if Jesus experienced these morally conflicting situations, the conflicting absolutist would have to admit that Jesus chose a lesser of two evils and, in fact, was guilty of sin.

ILL: Jesus at the temple: At age twelve Jesus faced a conflict between his earthly parents and his heavenly father. Although he later submitted to his earthly parents, initially he left them in order to fulfil God's will (Luke 2).

ILL: Jesus defended his disciples gathering grain on the Sabbath. And he did so by making reference to King David’s "stealing" of the consecrated bread the tabernacle (Matt. 12:3-4).

ILL: On many occasions, Jesus faced conflict between obeying the religious authorities, which he himself taught his disciples and followers to do (Matt.

23:3), and following the law of mercy by helping those in need (Luke 14:1-6). For example, he chose to heal a man on the Sabbath. When challenged, he said the law of the Sabbath should be subordinated to man, not vice versa.

ILL: His greatest moral conflict that Jesus faced, however, was his trial on the cross, where mercy and justice came into direct and unavoidable conflict. Should he speak in defence of the innocent (himself) as the law demanded (Lev. 5:1), or should he show mercy to the many by dying for our sins? Jesus chose mercy over justice. But did he sin in so doing? God forbid!

So, If Christ is our complete moral example, then he must have had morally conflicting situations in which both alternatives were bad. But if Christ never sinned, then Christ never faced them. Hence, we have no example from Christ to follow in some of life's most difficult moral decisions. But does not Hebrews say he was "tempted in every way, just as we are" (4:15)? Does not Paul exhort us to be followers of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1-2)? But how can we follow him in ethical dilemmas if he never faced them? **The Bottom line: If Christ was tempted in all points as we are, then he must have faced moral dilemmas. But if he did, then he must have sinned. If he did not, then he is not our perfect moral example.**

## 3.4.3 Graded or hierarchical absolutism

**The Essential Elements of Graded Absolutism:**

There are four essential premises of graded absolutism, and each is based on Scripture:

i. There Are Higher and Lower Moral Laws.

Not all moral laws are of equal weight. Jesus spoke of the "weightier" matters of the law (Matt. 23:23) and of the "least" and the "greatest" commandment (Matt. 22:36). He told Pilate that Judas had committed the "greater sin" (John 19:11).

Now, among evangelical Christians we don’t like to think in terms of a hierarchy of sin. We tend to think that sounds like saying that some sins are okay and some are not, sort of like the Roman Catholic teaching of venial and mortal sins.

Protestants have tended to emphasize that it doesn’t matter how big or small your sin is before God, it is still sin and it will still separate you from God and His salvation. Well, that is all very true. But be that as it may, the Bible does speak of the greater or lesser sins as well as things like the "greatest" virtue (1 Cor.13:13), and even of "greater" acts of a given virtue (John 15:13).

So there is biblical justification for seeking to discern the lesser of evils or the greater of goods. Any violation of the law is sin and God abhors all sin, but not all sin produces the greatest evil.

ILL: Jesus on lust and adultery: Thinking and desiring the act and committing the act are both wrong, but no one would argue that they both produce equal amounts of evil. Same way with being angry and murder.

Perhaps the clearest indication of this gradation of moral absolutes comes in Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question about the "greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:34-39). Jesus clearly affirms that the "first'' and "greatest" commandment is over or takes precedence over the "second," that loving God is of supreme importance, and then beneath that comes loving one's neighbour. And then beneath both of these hang all the rest of the moral law of the Prophets. This point is reaffirmed when our Lord says, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Jesus is not saying here, “You can’t love your parents.” He’s just saying, “You can’t love them more than me and be my disciple.” There is a hierarchy or scheme of priority to God’s moral absolutes. Numerous scriptural passages may be cited to support this same point (see among others 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 John 5:16; and Matt. 5:22). Popular belief notwithstanding, all sins are not equal, for there are clearly higher and lower moral laws.

ii. There Are Unavoidable Moral Conflicts

Personally unavoidable moral conflicts exist in which an individual cannot obey both commands.

ILL: The story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22) contains a real conflict. "Thou shalt not kill" is a divine moral command (Exod. 20), and yet God commanded Abraham to kill his son, Isaac. That Abraham intended to kill Isaac is clear from the context and that God was pleased with his faithful obedience is equally clear. Abraham wasn’t ignorant to what he doing. He knew exactly what he was doing: he was violating one command of God in order keep another. And so obviously there was a priority of the one command over the other.

So far, there is no distinction between Graded Absolutism and Conflicting Absolutism. Both teach that moral absolutes exist, that they sometimes come into conflict with each other, and that we must seek to do the lesser of the evils or the greater of the goods. But this is where the similarity ends.

iii. We are obligated to the higher duty. ILL: Obedience to State Authority

So this helps us answer the question that was raised earlier about obedience to the government.

Romans 13: 1-6. Here we have a divine command to obey the government. But what do we do if that conflicts with the command to obey God? What if our government is engaged in wrongful activity and we are ordered to participate in it? We respectfully decline or refuse saying while in most instances it is good to obey one’s government, I have a higher duty to obey the teachings of God to live a righteous life.

ILL: Early Christians many of whom refused to serve in Roman military and govt.

ILL: Vietnam Draft Evaders who chose to flee to Canada to avoid being drafted rather than fight in a war they felt was illegitimate.

Acts 4: 19--Peter and John: We must obey God rather than men.

iv one is not culpable for subordinating the lower duty to the higher one

When moral absolutes conflict and in order to keep a higher moral absolute a lower one is violated, there is no moral culpability. These are the people who criticize the Conflicting Absolutists for saying “You are damned if you do and you are damned if you don’t.” They claim it is patently unfair for a person to be declared guilty and worthy of punishment for an act in which any other course of action would have been worse or more evil.

ILL: According to Conflicting Absolutists, Peter and John were guilty of sin and worthy of punishment for disobeying the Sanhedrin and continuing to preach in the name of Jesus. Graded Absolutists say, “No! While they may have been guilty of disobeying the command to obey one’s rulers, they were surely obeying a higher law to witness to the Resurrection of Jesus.

Graded Absolutists hold that culpability and blame-worthiness only apply to situations in which we do choose to violate the higher moral absolute.

**Strengths:**

(a) There are moral absolutes

(b) There are times when these conflict

(c) When conflict does arise between them, there is no culpability for not obeying a lower moral duty.

**Weaknesses/Difficulties:**

(a) How do we determine what is the higher duty or obligation in a moment of conflicting absolutes? Who determines the hierarchy of absolutes? Who ranks them?

Much like the utilitarian who has to try to calculate the greatest good for the greatest number, the Graded absolutist, must have a scheme or ranking of the absolutes that might potentially come into conflict.

Furthermore, as we mentioned earlier, there is no universal agreement about what should be an “absolute” and what should not, or even if there are absolutes at all. The relativist, as you recall, would say to the graded absolutist, “Go ahead, have fun ranking your so-called ‘absolutes’ here in Kenya. Then take them over to Papua New Guinea, to the Amazon River basin, or to Northern Siberia or to New York City and see if they are still so ‘absolute’ and will still to be ranked in that order.”

**Summary of Graded or Hierarchical Absolutism:**

The essential principles of graded absolutism are: There are absolute moral principles rooted in the absolute moral character of God; There are higher and lower moral duties for example, love for God is a greater duty than love for people; These moral laws sometimes come into unavoidable moral conflict; In such conflicts we are obligated to follow the higher moral law; When we follow the higher moral law, we are not held responsible for not keeping the lower one.

# 3.5 Wesleyan-Christian teleological hierarchical absolutist ethics

We’ve looked at Consequentialist, Deontological, Non-Conflicting, Conflicting, and Graded or Hierarchical Absolutist ethical theory. What are we to choose?

## 3.5.1 Graded absolutism

Graded Absolutism is the most satisfactory understanding of Ethical theory we have discussed so far. Why?

Because it is the most consistent with a right understanding of the Bible, in the Bible we see people subordinating some moral absolutes in favour of others, yet they don’t beat themselves with guilt for doing so.

-There are moral absolutes that come from the nature of this holy God. God is not a relativist and we don’t see how Christians can be.

-ILL: Stealing is wrong in all cases.

And in the vast majority of cases this is all we need to know about ethics. It is wrong to tell a lie or steal something that doesn’t belong to us. 99% of Ethics takes place right here. We’ve talked a lot about those special situations, those conflicting decisions, like the lifeboat situation but how often do we find ourselves in that kind of situation? For most of us, most of the time all we do know is that God created this world with some principles of right and wrong that are as unchanging as His character, and if we want to live a good life then we had better acknowledge those moral absolutes.

But for those occasions when we do find ourselves with no good options to choose, it is good to have an ethical belief system that allows you to make a coherent decision without beating yourself up with false guilt or naively expecting God to bail you out of it.

Just because lying is wrong does not mean that it may not be the best course of action at that particular moment. When forced to choose between lying and murder we would choose lying every time and we would expect that God would want me to choose that. We would have no problem telling the Nazis “There are no Jews here,” if that would save their lives.

Graded or Hierarchical Absolutism allows one to, on the one hand, acknowledge God’s moral absolutes, and on the other hand, weigh those absolutes in relation to one another.

**Graded Absolutism Refined: Guilt vs. Remorse**

Now, having said that, we want to refine the Graded Absolutist position somewhat. We have not read anything about graded absolutism that distinguishes between guilt and remorse. The graded absolutist argues that we do not incur guilt when we break a lower law in order to keep a higher law. That much we agree with. But we believe we can and should feel remorse or godly sorrow for doing it. If one tells a lie to save someone, they should not feel guilty

but should feel remorse, for one of God’s laws, one of the principles He designed (ala the Divine Designer and the “Owners Manual”) to bring peace and shalom and goodness into our world has been broken.

ILL: Giving Birth, Rushing to Hospital and Damaging Car in process: Guilt--no, Remorse--yes

# 3.6 Teleological ethics

## 3.6.1 Definition of “teleological”

It come from the Greek word, “telos” which means, “purpose” or “end”. And so teleological ethics is concerned with the end of an action. It asks, “What is the purpose or end of this action?”

B. Often equated with Consequentialist ethics in most books (e.g. Kunhiyop, African Christian Ethics) on ethical theory. But we want to distinguish them and say that Consequentialism does not ask about the purpose of an action or decision. That is something different, something deeper than merely asking about its consequences. It begs the question as to who or what gave that action or decision that purpose or end. And for Christians it is easy to trace that back to God, the Purpose-Giver.

We want to say that every decision we make ought to be guided by asking the question: “How does this fit in with God’s purposes?”, “What purpose would this serve in the Divine scheme of things?”

And so actions are to be judged as good or right if they serve to achieve the goal, and morally bad if they are an obstruction to it.

What is the ultimate goal or purpose by which all decisions are to be judged?

**That purpose or end is: To Bring Glory and Honour to God.**

Even the things which we are calling moral absolutes serve a purpose beyond themselves. Keeping in the Law is not an end in itself. In other words, the purpose of keeping the 10 Commandments lies beyond merely keeping the 10Commandments. We keep them in order to bring glory and honour to God. It is through the keeping of those moral absolutes that we bring honour and glory to God as well as true happiness/contentment/shalom/well-being to the one keeping them.

Christian teleological ethics answers the question commonly asked of utilitarian consequentialists, “The greatest good, for whom?” by saying, “It is for God’s greatest good, to bring glory and honour to Him. But it just so happens that God’s greatest good is our greatest good as well. Remember what we

said about “Creation and Ethics” . God is the Creator, he designed this world in which we live and if we want to live a happy and fulfilled life we would be smart to live according to the “Designer’s Specifications.” We were designed to live in relationship to God and to bring glory to him in that relationship. And if our actions do not serve to facilitate that ultimate end or purpose, then they can be judged immoral.

So in Christian teleological ethics our ultimate end or purpose is to glorify God. But it will help also for us to keep in mind what God’s ultimate end or purpose is with regard to us, particularly where “us” is understood as fallen, sinful creatures. And here we need to go back to what we talked about earlier in terms of Personal Ethics and Renewal in the Image of God and Social Ethics and the Coming of the Kingdom of God. God’s purposes for you and me, individually is to renew us in His image, back into the image of God that was lost from the Fall. Socially, His goal is to bring a more concrete representation of the Kingdom of God on earth. And so we can ask the subsidiary questions of whether our action or decision serves to renew the image of God in us or on a social level, to further the kingdom of God in our world.

ILL: Jesus and healing on the Sabbath

ILL: Paul and food sacrificed to idols: 1 Cor. 8

H. Ray Dunning, 34-37 see p. 35.

So this is a point at which the **Wesleyan tradition** of which the **Church of the Nazarene** is a part, can make an important contribution. We understand this “holiness” or “sanctification” that God wants us to have as leading toward our renewal in the image of God. And so in a sense our decision-making can be called a “holiness ethic”. What decision or action will lead to our becoming a more holy person?”

Potential Criticisms or Objections to Wesleyan-Christian teleological hierarchical ethics:

1. Consequentialism in the back door? No, if by that you mean a secular calculation of consequences, in which all actions have no intrinsic moral value. Our understanding of Christian teleological ethics does take into consideration the moral absolutes God has “built in” to the universe.

2. Does the “end justify the means?” Well, in a sense, yes, it does. To bring glory to God does justify the means, but not any means will accomplish that, and that is where the moral absolutes issuing forth from God’s character fill out our understanding of the ethical life. Furthermore, in most cases, we use that statement, “The end justifies the means,“ to imply that a bad means has been used to attain a worthy goal.

2. The difficulty of coming up with an adequate culturally-sensitive hierarchy of moral absolutes. Yes, this is true. There is no easy way to come up with this hierarchy of moral absolutes that takes into consideration all the cultural differences between us human beings. But again, we would much rather struggle with finding and arranging the hierarchy of those absolutes than I would be left floating on a sea of relativism with no moral anchors in life.



You are to imagine you are a train controller (driver) on a train that has had technical problems - the breaks are gone. You have detached all the passenger carriages a few miles back and are hoping to run out of fuel but there is enough for you to keep going at full speed for another 20 miles. On the railway line ahead of you some maniac has tied 5 people to the tracks. The only thing that works on the train is the direction lever which can redirect the train where there is an adjoining track. Just when you decide you had better redirect to avoid the deaths of 5 innocent people - you see that the maniac has been really busy because there is another person tied to the adjoining track. You have to change direction - and therefore implicitly decide to kill the one person, or leave the train on its original course and see 5 people killed.

1. What would the Kantian deontologist do?

2. What would the utilitarian do?

3. Which is the ethically preferable choice?

4. What if the 5 were paedophiles and the 1 was Scientist on the verge of discovering a vaccine for cancer?

5. What if the 5 are unknown to you but the 1 is your mother?

Activity adapted from Business Ethics: Kantian Ethics ww2.it.nuigalway.ie/staff/h\_melvin/prof\_skill/L3\_hand**out**.pdf

**SUMMARY**



Consequentialism: decisions made based on results

Egoism: the results must benefit the decision maker

Utilitarianism: the results must benefit the majority

Deontology: decisions made based on rules

Relativism: No absolutes, morality is relative

Absolutism: There are absolutes

Non Conflicting –there are no conflicts

Conflicting—there are conflicts, choose the lesser evil.

Graded Hierarchical Absolutism—there are conflicts, follow the higher duty



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Define Consequentialism, Deontology and Relativism

2. Critique the theories in question one from a Christian perspective.

3. Which ethical theory covered in this lecture, satisfies you in its approach in decision making? Explain why.

**Texts for Further Reading**

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3. Gustafson, James; Can Ethics be Christian? University of Chicago Press;

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4. Haselbarth, Hans; Christian Ethics in the African Context; Uzima Press; Kenya; 1994

5. Kenyatta, Jomo. Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu. New

York: Vintage Books, 1965.

6. Thielicke, Helmut, and William Henry Lazareth. Theological Ethics.

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

7. Thiroux, Jecques; Ethics: Theory and Practice; (2nd Edition); Glencoe publishing Co. California; 1977

8. Wilkens, Steve. Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics: An Introduction to Theories of

Right & Wrong. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 1995.

# Lesson 4: Authority in decision-making

# Introduction

The question we have not answered up to this point is according to what standard do we make moral judgments? In other words on what authority do we make ethical judgments? This lesson will introduce you to various sources of authority that people employ when making decisions whether they are aware of it or it. First the human sources of authority and then Christian sources of authority from a Wesleyan perspective.

## Intended learning outcomes

**As a result of this lesson you must be able to:**

1. Identify secular sources of authority in decision making

2. Identify Christian sources of authority in decision making

3. Make decisions using the Christian sources of authority in a moral decision making process.

# 4.1 Human sources of authority

We shall rely on H.Odera Oruka, Ethics, (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1990) for this section.

## 4.1.1 Intuition as authority

H. Odera Oruka writes concerning intuition, “There is some inborn ability or force which everyone seems to have… There are people who are able to form a correct opinion about strangers as they meet them for the first time. What enables people to form such a correct opinion about strangers is

intuition which is the inborn ability or force that man has for making decisions.”

30.

Oruka provides an example to illustrate instances when we use intuition, “Imagine that you are walking in the wood alone unarmed in a bush and you come across an animal you have never seen before. You will wonder whether to avoid the animal or approach it and study it. The animal may be dangerous or it may be friendly. Whether you avoid it by running away or approach it to learn more about it will depend on how your intuition guides you.” 30

Oruka also relates Intuition with instinct, he writes, “Instinct is a kind of mental ability most animals (including man) have for accommodating themselves in their environment and reacting to strange situations. It is possible for a person to face his actions only on intuition and instinct. Those who appeal to intuition as authority claim that the best morality must be the one guided by intuition and instinct.” 30.

From a Christian, perspective intuition is not a reliable guide for decision making. Two people making using intuition will come up with two different choices.

## 4.1.2 Customs as authority

Customs are defined as, “established, socially accepted practice, social customs vary greatly from country to country.” The Complete Christian Dictionary. They are also known as a body of traditions. If customs become

the standard, then it follows that when we make any ethical judgment customs are the ultimate justification for our judgment. Oruka, 21.

Oruka provides an example of a custom, “It is wrong for a widow to take the entire responsibility of burying the body of her dead husband. Possible justification for the above judgment would be that the customs of that particular ethnic group are against a widow taking alone the responsibility of burying her dead husband.” 31.

Customs need not always be ancient habits. Customs can be rules of life in modern society. ILL: “It is right to teach mothers the evil of unplanned births” Our decisions are judged right or wrong because they are in line with what we have been practicing for a long time or conform with what we generally practice. (Oruka, 32)

Morals come from the Latin word which means customs. The term ethics is originally from the Greek term ethos which also means customs. (Oruka, 32)

Should Christians follow the customs of their cultures? When is it permissible for Christians to disobey the customs of their communities? What customs in your community cause conflict with your Christian beliefs?

## 4.1.3 Conscience as authority

Some people use their conscience as a standard. Conscience is some innate feeling which directs one’s will and conduct. Conscience needs to be distinguished from intuition, customs and reason. Intuition relies on instinct and is often difficult to express in words. Conscience is possible to express in words. (Oruka, 32)

ILL: one may say I consider inter racial marriage wrong because it goes against my conscience. When forced to explain himself further, he might explain his conscience as follows: “I conceive marriage as a means of continuing our traditional society and ensuring the purity of our peoples”

“This indicates that a person has an innate feeling that mixed races are undesirable. We don’t have to agree with him. But it is important to recognize his conscience. Conscience differs from customs in that conscience is usually personal while customs are generally public.” (Oruka, 32-33)

For a discussion on a Christian/Wesleyan understanding of conscience See Gift Mtukwa, “Conscience.” 121-121 in Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology. Edited by Albert Truesdale, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2013.

## 4.1.4 Reason as authority

Earlier on we talked about logic as a branch of philosophy. Reason is an important aspect of logic. Reason helps us to know when we are not logical, when our beliefs are contradictory. Two broad divisions of reasoning in ethics. These divisions are

i. deductive reasoning

ii. Inductive reasoning (see Oruka, 35-37)

**Reason as deductive**

A conclusion is drawn from statements which in themselves are universally accepted for instance:

a. All men are mortal

Kwame Nkrumah is a man

Therefore, Kwame Nkrumah is mortal b. Virtue is good

Giving alms is a virtue

Therefore, giving alms is good

The first two statements are universally accepted statements. It is universally accepted that all men are mortal and that Kwame Nkrumah was a man.

If either the first or the second statement used in deductive reasoning (they are referred to as Premises) is unacceptable, the conclusion reached is also rejected.

**Reason as inductive inference**

In deductive reasoning we move from the general to the particular. We move from e.g, from ‘All men are mortal’ general to one man ‘Kwame is mortal’ in particular. In inductive reasoning on the other hand, we move from examples of the particular to infer things about the general as in the following examples.

a. The goats that I have seen have four legs

Therefore, all goats have four legs

b. Adam is a liar; he is also an evil person

Boaz is a liar ; he is also an evil person Chuck is a liar; he is also an evil person Therefore all liars are evil persons.C.

All the swans (a type of large European bird) I have seen are white therefore I conclude that all swans are white.

Of course, it is possible that we might come across a goat that has three legs and a person who tells a lie in order to promote a greater good (i.e. not telling a would-be murderer where to find his victim). And, in fact, there are black swans.

“If our reasoning is deductive then it means that there are given principles which we hold to be absolutely true and we derive our moral views and judgments from these principles. When we reason inductively, we refer a general conclusion on the basis of the particular instances we have observed or can imagine. The conclusion can’t be certain, it can only be probable.” (Oruka, 36)

# 4.2 Christian sources of authority

So, where does the Christian find his/her sources of authority for the Christian Life? At several points we’ve asked, “Where do these moral absolutes come from? Who gets to decide what those absolutes are and how to rank them if one affirms, as I have, a form of graded or hierarchical absolutism?” Now, it will still be a weak point of graded absolutism that there is no universally agreed upon hierarchy of those absolutes, but we want to share with you how many Christians, particularly those within the Wesleyan tradition, discern God’s will in these sorts of issues.

# 4.3 Christian sources of authority/Wesleyan quadrilateral

“Four sources of authority in the Christian life, four sources of truth that shape the quality of our faith.”

Wesley did not coin this term. It represents a modern attempt to summarize the fourfold set of guidelines Wesley used in reflecting on theology and the moral life. “In giving primacy to Scripture, Wesley felt free to introduce extra biblical authorities in theological reflection and formulation. These authorities serve to organize, illumine, and apply Scripture” (Thorsen, 74). Thorsen goes on to say, “While maintaining the primacy of Scripture, Wesley functioned with a dynamic interplay of sources in interpreting, illuminating, enriching, and communicating biblical truths” (Thorsen, 125).

# 4.4 The four sources of authority/Wesleyan quadrilateral

## 4.4.1 Scripture

As Christians, the bedrock of our faith and practice is found in Scripture. The Bible is God’s definitive witness to God’s revelation of himself to us and in fact, they are a part of that revelation. They are the record of what God has done down through history to redeem humanity and to bring us back into relationship with Him. But they are not just a record of that revelation; they are a part of it for Christians believe that God has uniquely inspired the Bible

in order to preserve and interpret that revelation of God and so, in a way, they become part of that revelation.

Wesley himself could write, “I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures.” Elsewhere he could advise others, “What I wish nightly is that you all keep close to the Bible. Be not wise above what is written. Enjoin nothing that the Bible does not clearly enjoin. Forbid nothing that it does not clearly forbid.”

Protestants have often talked about sola scriptura, which means scripture alone as the source of authority for faith and practice. This was, of course, the reaction of the early protestants to the extreme Catholic emphasis on the traditions of the Church handed down through the priesthood and papacy. But the Protestant reaction was equally extreme because while the Bible is

our main source of authority it does not answer all of our questions, especially when it comes to modern issues that were not even thought of when the Bible was being written. And so while we can say, as Protestants, “sola scriptura” if we mean by that that Scripture is in a class by itself, we must go on to note that there are other “supplemental” or “confirming” or “interpreting” sources of

authority. The Wesleyan tradition, going back to John Wesley in the 18th

century has noted three such supplemental sources of authority.

## 4.4.2 Tradition

By “tradition” we mean the teaching of the church down through the centuries, especially those who lived and taught nearest the time of the New Testament.

-Early Church fathers and mothers: Ignatius, Clement, Tertullian, Polycarp, Irenaeus, etc.

-The Ecumenical Councils of the first four centuries.

-The Apostle’s Creed, Nicean Creed, etc. These are all evidence that Scripture doesn’t give us all the answers to all the questions. If it did, there would have been no huge debates on the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

But the value of tradition doesn’t stop with the first three or four centuries. We do believe, as Protestants, that that is when the Roman Catholic Church began to move into its areas of excess. But that does not mean there is not value in what was written throughout the history of God’s Church throughout God’s church.

But when we use the word, “tradition” we are often referring to a part of the whole, like when we say, “I’m in the Baptist tradition.” Or “My church is part of the Wesleyan tradition.” When we use it in that we are referring to the fact

that our particular tradition is one stream that functions as a tributary for the whole river of Christianity.

**ILL: Nile River and its tributaries.**

We are all a part of a tradition and that tradition influences how we look at things and what we value. Most often that happens without us even knowing it. But we are smart if we understand that that is the case and form an intentional critical appropriation of tradition.

-The Church of the Nazarene talks about the value of the “collective conscience”

-We need to value those who have gone before: African respect for elders and ‘those who tell the stories.’

So, tradition is perhaps second only to Scripture as a source of religious authority. In fact, one might argue that tradition is an essential extension of Scripture. And while we do not idolize it, tradition plays a vital role in filling in the gaps and in making contemporary applications of what the Scriptures teach.

In ethical issues, we recognize we are not the first Christians to walk on planet Earth, the issues we face have been faced by those who have gone before us in one way or another. The question is how did they handle those issues?

## 4.4.3 Reason

John Wesley wrote, “It is a fundamental principle with us [Methodists] that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion.” Thorsen, 169.

Human reason is essential to everything we do in life, not just religious matters. In fact, without the ability to reason, theology and ethics would be impossible, a university education couldn’t happen. And so human reason plays a role as a source of authority in the Christian’s life. It points out when our beliefs contradict each other. This is the role of logic in ethics: Reason will tell you that the point your opponent in our debates is making is illogical, fallacious, or unreasonable. This is the important role that reason plays in the moral life.

But reason is limited in what it can do for us. It can only take us so far and then faith has to take over. Reason can tell us Jesus died on a cross, but faith tells us that he died as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Reason can tell us the tomb was empty, but faith tells us that it was a resurrection from the dead. Reason can tell all about the scientific make up on this world, but faith will tell us that God did it.

And furthermore, we have seen how reason can so easily be misused and perverted. Some of the most brilliant minds have been the most diabolical.

This is why even though reason is essential to understand the Scriptures, Scripture is still the primary source of authority. Because we are sinful and fallen creatures, reason cannot be trusted to be fairly and properly used all the time.

## 4.4.4 Experience

Experience is not to be thought of as a source for doctrine or moral teaching, but it does serve an extremely important purpose in confirming what we reason that Scripture and tradition are teaching us.

One of John Wesley’s unique teachings was his emphasis on the entire sanctification of the believer. And he was willing to say that this teaching was confirmed by the many persons he had personally interviewed who had come into this experience.

Martin Luther found the monastic way of asceticism as a means of earning merit to not be confirmed in his personal experience and it was that which led him to study again the Scriptures and find in them the teaching of justification by faith.

So experience can help us confirm or deny our belief system.

**Dangers of Experience**

In the name of “experience” we can claim all sorts of things.

ILL: Many of the faith healers base their teachings on an understanding of religious experience. “God has healed all these other people and he can heal you too, if you just have enough faith.” A statement like that is based on the confirming power of religious experience. The danger is that while God certainly does and can heal people, the question is does He always choose to heal us and does such teaching in its extreme forms lead to bad theology and practice?

**ILL: Wesley was charged with “enthusiasm” which was the term used in his day to denote someone who put his brain in neutral to worship God experientially.**

When it comes to ethical issues, we also look at the experiences of those we live with, our contemporaries and learn from their experiences. For example when it comes to abortion the reasons of those who have procured or aided experience is crucial for our thinking concerning abortion. If they go through Post Traumatic Abortion Syndrome that ought to help us know that this is an unethical practice.

# 4.5 Summary and primacy of scriptures

Tradition is good but it can become despotic and lead one astray (ala Medieval Catholicism). Reason is necessary but it too can be used for self- serving ends. Experience is important but it can lead to all kind of crazy beliefs and practices.

All this is to show that Scripture is the primary source of authority because it doesn’t “fill in the gaps” or “confirm” or “support” the other sources. They confirm, support, and fill in the gaps for it. It is the foundation and structure of the house of faith and morals, while the others are the trim and accessories. Scripture is the main course while the others are the side dishes and the dessert. Furthermore, Scripture is the most objective and the least corruptible. It comes to us extra nos , that is, from outside ourselves. It wasn’t just the product of human writers. It was given by divine inspiration. Therefore, it becomes the plumb line the standard for all other sources of authority. We can still misinterpret the Scriptures, but that is our fault, not the Scripture’s fault.

Baseball Diamond

Richard Lovelace and Donald Thorson provide a useful allegory for the Wesleyan quadrilateral: “Imagine a baseball diamond. Home plate is Scripture. First base is tradition. Second base is reason and third base is experience. … Presumably one must begin theological reflection with home plate—Scripture. But to “score a run” one must cross the bases of tradition, reason, and experience before completing the return to Scripture— the start and finish of theological reflection.”

 There is a danger that in use of the term ‘Quadrilateral’ one might thing that all four legs or sides of the quadrilateral are of equal value or strength. Wesley expressly denied this. Scripture is the primary source of authority for Christians. We can safely say it is the first and last resort.

Using the Wesleyan quadrilateral, help a young woman contemplating aborting her pregnancy to make a decision. What does scripture say about abortion, what does tradition say about abortion, what does reason say about abortion, what does experience teach us concerning abortion?

Do the same with Euthanasia, Polygamy, Polygyny, Female Circumcision, Misogyny, Racism etc

# 4.6 The use of the Bible in Christian ethics

Well, we have talked about a “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” of sources of authority for Christian life and practice. Those sources are:

• Scripture

• Tradition

• Reason

• Experience.

# 4.7 Main problems

If you remember, we said that scripture was the primary source--the foundation, if you will, for the others because it is based on external revelation from God to us. We find ourselves at this point in “double jeopardy” facing

two problems.

# 4.8 Lack of use of the Bible

Our first problem is that most of us only give lip service to acknowledging the authority of the Bible in our lives. We say, “Oh, yes, I accept that the Bible is the Christian’s primary authority for doctrine and practice,” but our Bibles, if we own one, continue to collect dust on our book shelves or night stands or coffee tables at home. And so point number one under this heading is simple: If you are a Christian and you affirm that the Bible is the primary source of authority about the Christian life then **USE IT!!!!!!!**

ILL: If you want to know how to use a computer, you go to the user’s manual or the “Help” button on the computer. If you want to know how to live the Christian life, you go to the Word of God. Use it, people. It’s all there in black and white. Use it. That’s why God went to the effort to inspire these people who lived so long ago to write it.

Georgia Harkness, “The Bible is certainly indispensable to our knowledge of Christian truth and moral obligation. Without it, it is very possible that there would be today no churches, no Christendom, no knowledge of Christ. It is, of course, possible that God would have found a way to propagate the faith by word of mouth without a Book through all the centuries… Yet few would dispute the fact that without the Bible we should be infinitely poorer in our Christian experience and moral insight….Furthermore, in today’s world the Bible is the common possession of all Christians, and hence serves to unite Christians across deep divisions. This is not to say that all Christian agree on what the Bible says….Yet the Bible is still our common possession, and it is

no accident that its sales continue year after year to exceed that of any other book, [and] that it has been and continues to be translated into many hundreds of languages and dialects.” Christian Ethics, 25

Our second problem is almost as bad as the first. And it’s solution, however, is much more complicated.

Being a Christian pastor (Gift Mtukwa) I find myself preaching mostly to people who are Bible illiterate, people who do not know the basic stories of the Bible. In my undergraduate regular classes, I usually stop to ask how many people read their Bible or plan to read their Bibles before the end of the day, I usually get about 5% of the class raise their hands. That is evidence of lack of use of the Bible. If Christians are to be shaped by the scripture, how can they know what it says if they do not read it. I am often pleasantly surprised by African grandmothers who will ask their grandchildren to read for them the bible and yet those who are literate do not bother reading it.

# 4.9 Improper use of the Bible

Many people accept the Bible as an authority for their lives but they don’t know how to properly use it. And so our primary concern here is to understand how we should properly use the Bible as a source of moral authority.

ILL: the following reading of scripture illustrates what happens when people don’t use scripture appropriately. There was a man who was desperate to know God’s will for his life, he decided to open the Bible to find out God’s will for his life. He used was way of reading scripture that is very common, where one says wherever the Bible falls open that is God’s message for my life. So he opened the Bible and it fell open in three different scriptures listed below

• Matthew 27:5 Then he went away and hanged himself.

• Luke 10:37 Go and do likewise

• John 13: 27 As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. “What you are about to do, do quickly,” Jesus told him,

His conclusion was God must be telling to go and hang himself. So he did. Do you think that was God’s will for his life?

That may seem to be an extreme example but the problem is that most of us, when we do use the Scriptures for guidance in life use it in a manner not too different from that.

So the real question is how do we correctly use the Scripture to give us moral guidance and direction? The issue of the proper use of the Bible in Christian ethics is not nearly as simple and neat and tidy as it might seem and it has extremely serious implications.

ILL: USA White Southerners who defended slavery on the basis of its presence in the Bible

ILL: Even the devil can cite Scripture to his purpose. Look at the temptations of Jesus.

Richard B. Hays: “Despite the time-honored Christian claim that Scripture is the foundation of the church’s faith and practice, appeals to Scripture are suspect for at least two reasons: the Bible itself contains diverse points of view, and diverse interpretive methods can yield diverse readings of any given text.” --The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 1.Hays elaborates on the problem facing the church today regarding the development of a New Testament Ethic. He says that everybody wants to claim the Bible. And so you have conservatives and liberals, pacifists and militarists, rich and poor and everybody in between all quoting scripture to support their aims and purposes. And so we can understand the skeptic’s response, “Is it not nonsense for Christians to pretend that the Bible can regulate your moral life when you have all these Christians running around calling for allegiance to their particular moral platform and they are all claiming the Bible as their moral support?”

The apostle having the Old Testament in mind writes in 2 Timothy 3:14-17

14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This problem can only be solved by coming up with proper guidelines for the use of Scripture in decision making.

# 4.10 Guidelines for the proper use of the Bible

Well, we can’t do an entire course on Biblical Interpretation. But we can offer some brief principles for interpreting scripture properly and applying it properly to ethical contexts. Scripture has to be interpreted, if we are going to make sense of it.

## 4.10.1 Scripture is to be interpreted according to its historical context

When we read the Bible we are essentially reading someone else’s email. And so I’ve got news for you today: When you pick up your Bible and Paul’s letter to the Romans, you are not the primary reader Paul had in mind when he wrote that letter. It was the Romans! Same thing with Ephesians, and all

the rest of Paul’s letters, same thing with the Gospels, and all of O.T. and N.T. You and I are what we call “secondary readers” or “second-hand” readers.

Where did we get this idea that just because the Bible is “inspired” that it is no longer a first century or older document, but rather a 21st century document that can be instantly applied to our lives with no study or research? Where

did we get the idea that we can pick it up and read it like we would today’s newspaper?

Thus it is important to know the answers to the Big Five Questions:

1. Who wrote it

2. What is the nature of the writing

3. Where: To whom was it written?

4. When was it written?

5. Why was it written?

When you know the answers to these questions you on your way to understanding the historical context in which the Biblical text under consideration was written.

ILL: Paul and Judaizers in Galatians

ILL: John and Gnostics in 1 John

You see, it is crucial that we first understand the Biblical text on its own terms in its own context. Otherwise, we are bound to distort and jump to conclusions that are not warranted, just like the guy who thought he was being told to go out and hang himself. Or those who read Scripture and conclude that women should not lead, since Paul instructed them to learn in silence.

## 4.10.2 Interpreted according to its intended purpose and genre

• Law –mostly the Pentateuchal section of the Bible, first five books of Moses

• Poetic Wisdom literature thi consists of Proverbs, Job and Psalms

• Gospel or O.T. “narrative” or story-

• Epistle teaching- These are the letters we find in the Bible, mostly in the New Testament, the letters of Paul and General letters fit this category.

• Apocalyptic revelation- this is a type of literature that is other worldly, it makes use of coded language and it arise from periods of persecution. The book of Revelation this fits this category. The book of Revelation is the most abused book in terms of weird interpretations.

Hayes agrees essentially with this and argues that “New Testament texts must be granted authority …in the mode in which they speak: rule, principle, paradigm, or symbolic world” (M.V.N.T., 310).

The importance of this is seen, for example, in how people understand the Genesis accounts of creation. Now I do not propose to be able to solve the debate between “Creationism” and “Evolution” but I do believe that those evolutionists who have written Genesis off as a source for understanding how the world came to be as well as those creationists who go through all kind of contorted interpretations of Scripture and scientific evidence in order to explain the fossil remains of dinosaurs because they believe that Genesis teaches us that the world is only about 6,000 years old are both guilty of misunderstanding what the Genesis account of creation is really all about.

-Teleology (purpose) of Genesis 1 and 2 is not a biology, zoology, or geology textbook, but a theological account.

This was best illustrated by Dr Alex Varughese a former Professor of Religion at Mount Vernon Nazarene University and also a holder of an Master of Arts in marine biology, when he said, “The Purpose of Genesis 1 and 2 is not so much to tell us how, but who.” In this case we will add not the how but the who of creation.

## 4.10.3 Scripture is to be interpreted as a whole

1. “Plenary Inspiration” of Scripture: we believe that scripture is fully inspired. but

2. Interpret the parts in light of the whole,

-Ask: What are the main ideas or truths of Scripture? And keep those always in mind while reading its parts.

Richard Hays gives three main ideas or “focal images” as he calls them:

a. Community: Community obedience—what should we do?

b. Cross: paradigm for faithfulness—Jesus’ death on the cross.

c. New Creation: All will be renewed—future looking perspective. I (Prof Rodney Reed) would like to add to that:

d. Love: What actions are consistent with love?

e. Holiness: What actions are consistent with holiness?

f. Liberation: What actions result in liberations as opposed to oppression?

-Scripture is its own best interpreter

-Interpret from the clear to the unclear: You start with the “Main Ideas and Principles” and use them to interpret the more obscure passages.

-OT and NT: progressive revelation

This helps us to make sense of the Bible’s teachings. Many people have given up belief in God because the God of the Bible seems weird or even positively immoral at times. This is because they lose sight of the larger message in their focus on the particular example.

ILL: God’s behaviour in the OT that seems embarrassing or unethical or cruel: i.e. kill everyone even the women, children, and livestock. “If that’s the moral teaching of the Bible then those Christians can just keep it to themselves.” God’s concern in the Old Testament was the holiness of his people, it seems the elimination of the other people is tied to this idea. However the Old Testament makes it clear that not all the tribes that settled in Canaan were put to death.

So how do we respond to someone who says, I am going to marry another wife since people in the Old Testament also had many wives? The response has to do with what theologians have called Progressive Revelation **Progressive Revelation**—is a concept that says God takes us from where we are and reveals himself to us in ways we can understand and then moves us to the next level. And then he does it again. There is a kind of “progressive revelation” that happens personally as a person grows and matures psychologically and spiritually. But primarily progressive revelation refers to how God has dealt with humanity down through the centuries. He revealed himself his will to ancient Israel in ways they could understand. Again, this is part of understanding the historical context of the times. God didn’t give the ancient Israelites a 21st century morality. So God did not do what some early missionaries did when they found people who had more that one wife, told them to set them aside and keep only one wife. God allows people to know him and once they understand who God is, they capture that vision and order their lives accordingly and teach their children the same. They may not necessarily send their wives packing (they shouldn’t) but they understand that their lifestyle is less than ideal.

ILL: mass killing in OT to protect the “holiness” identity of God’s people. But in the NT we see Jesus say, “Love your enemies.” Now the idea is no longer to protect and preserve that holiness but to throw it out there as salt of the earth and light for the world. So we see the progressive nature of God’s revelation of himself and his will for us.

Therefore, if someone said, “I was reading the OT where God told the Israelites to go in and displace and drive out all the inhabitants of the Promised Land, and God told me when I was reading that I was to do the same to all the Tutsi’s in my district or province.” We would have no problem saying, “God didn’t tell you to that. Maybe the devil did, but God sure didn’t.” We could say that for several reasons, but for one reason, because God’s

revelation of himself and his will for us comes into clearest focus in the person of Jesus Christ and that is in no way consistent with who Jesus is. The Point: You can’t turn back the moral clock to an earlier time when there is clearer revelation that has been given since then.

## 4.10.4 Understand the principle behind Biblical injunctions

If a literal application results in “legalism” and injustice, then seek to understand the principle behind the biblical injunction

ILL: purification laws of OT

**A Couple of Test Cases: Sexism and Slavery**

So we interpret the Bible in its proper historical context. We interpret it according to its intended purpose and genre. We interpret it as a whole. We always keep in mind the main ideas, the central convictions that we talked about and we use the clear to interpret the unclear. Let’s apply this to a couple of test cases:

1. Question: Does the Bible accept slavery?

As mentioned earlier, in the period just before the Civil War in the U.S., some whites used the presence of slavery in the Bible as justification for having slaves. They said, “Paul tells slaves how to relate to their masters and masters how to relate to their slaves. Nowhere does he condemn slavery. Paul, in fact, takes it for granted as the entire Bible does.”

And it is true that the Bible does take the institution of slavery as a fact of life. What do we make of this? How do we say we oppose slavery and still say

that our moral convictions are based on the Bible?

Well, we do just what we said. We start by acknowledging that the Bible was written during a time when slavery was a fact of life and God had to take them where they were at that particular time and reveal himself to them in that context.

But the good news of the gospel is still applicable to the slave because God does not leave it there. In his revelation in the NT, he nudges humanity ahead and gives us those “main ideas” that will someday, when they are more fully understood and are applied more completely, totally abolish slavery. Those main ideas are found in such passages when Paul says in Gal. 3:28, “For there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, for we are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And when Paul writes to Philemon, the man who owned a slave who became a Christian and who was very helpful to Paul in his ministry, Paul says, 15Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—16no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.”

This idea of the brotherhood of the believers if taken seriously, could not help but over time erode the foundation of slavery.

And so we take the “main ideas” and interpret the lesser ones and say, that while slavery was a fact of life that the NT writers had to address and that they did not have it in their powers to abolish at that moment, God put in their

hearts and their writings convictions that would someday make it clear to all that slavery is clearly evil.

2. Question: Is the Bible “sexist”?

1 Timothy 2:9-15

**9**I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, **10**but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

**11**A woman**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Timothy+2:9-15#fen-NIV-29728a)**]** should learn in quietness and full submission. **12**I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;**[**[**b**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Timothy+2:9-15#fen-NIV-29729b)**]** she must be quiet. **13**For Adam was formed first, then Eve. **14**And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. **15**But women**[**[**c**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Timothy+2:9-15#fen-NIV-29732c)**]** will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

**34**Women**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+14:34-35#fen-NIV-28713a)**]** should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. **35**If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**[**[**b**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+14:34-35#fen-NIV-28714b)**]**

Should we understand these texts to be teaching that women should not become leaders in the church? What does learning in silent mean? if we don’t understand the historical situation of the first century, we will assume that the Bible does not allow women to teach or to be leaders?

-historical context: “babbling women”, women were mostly seated at the back of the room when a rabbi was teaching, and if they would ask questions, those questions would be disruptive. Hence verse 35 make sense with its proposal, “**35**If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” So the speaking in reference here is disruptive questions. These scriptures have to be interpreted with instances where Paul works with women like Phoebe, Princilla etc.

-historical context: a male-dominated society in which regardless of how one interprets these passages the NT as a whole was seen as radically egalitarian.“Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female…” (Gal. 3:28).

-Main idea: We are all one-neither male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek.

-The clear must be used to interpret the unclear: just two passages where women are told to keep silent in the church and yet there are numerous examples of when women were involved in leadership among God’s people for example:

-Deborah in Judges…

-Priscilla over Apollos (and Romans 16:3)

-four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9)

Follow the above criteria to see whether the Bible supports the use of alcohol?

And so there is much more to finding guidance from the Bible than just closing your eyes, letting your Bible fall open and dropping your finger on the page. Far too much Christian ethical reflection simply grabs a passage of scripture here and another one from a totally different part of the Bible there, and another one or two and then they are all strung together to defend some belief or practice with little or no reference to the contexts in which those passages were pulled from.

Now, thankfully God is a gracious God and He’ll do just about anything to get His message across to us. And so God is not beyond using our “hunt and peck” methods of finding moral guidance. But how much better is it to be a student of God’s word, to dig into it and, as it says, “hide it in your heart that you might not sin against him?”

# 4.11 Waje kunhiyop (class text) list of guidelines

a. Acknowledge the usual rules of grammar and interpretation. The bible is a piece of literature.

b. Read the whole Bible

c. Take note of the historical and literary context

d. Read the Bible reverently with a desire for obedience. Kunhiyop,

African Christian Ethics, 47—51.



There are four human sources of authority in decision-making:

a. Intuition

b. Customs

c. Conscience

d. Reason

There are four Christian Sources of authority in decision-making:

a. Scripture (primary source of authority

b. Tradition (teaching of the church down through the centuries)

c. Reason (our ability to think)

d. Experience (ability to learn from the experiences of others).



**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. In your opinion why do we people not use their Bibles in decision making processes?

2. In your opinion does the Bible support polygamy?

3. Does the Bible support slavery?

4. If someone told you God has told them to drive the Maasai people from their land, how would you respond?

## Text for Further Reading

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# Lesson 5: Christian ethics and other ethics

# Introduction

In this lesson we look at other types of ethics. Our goal is to show that Christian Ethics can learn from other ethics. We will also highlight the insufficiency of other ethics.

## Intended learning outcomes

As a result of this lesson you must be able to:

1. Differentiate Christian Ethics from other types of ethics.

2. Highlight the insufficiency of other types of ethics.

3. Identify what Christian ethics can learn from other types of ethics.

4. Appreciate the contribution of African values to Christian ethics.

# 5.1 Secular ethics

# 5.2 Define secular and secularism

“Secular” = basic meaning--not religious, but it does not mean irreligious. In its most basic sense it does not mean to be mean and bad and evil. It just means not religious.

ILL: OT priest had “sacred” and “secular” clothing

**“Secularism” is the term used to define the state of society when a secular or non-religious understanding of reality is pervasive.** In other words, secularism is the belief that human life is to be fundamentally understood as non-religious in nature. Secularism has hit Western Europe and America hard.

So when we talk about **“secular ethics”, we are talking about the formulation of a rational basis for moral decision-making that makes no recourse to God or divinity of any kind.** Properly termed, this section should be called, “Ethics without God” or “Non-religion-based ethics”.

# 5.3 Secularism and Africa

This may seem irrelevant to the African scene, where most will assume a supernatural world, the only question being, what is the nature of that supernatural world. But as more and more Africans get steeped in University educations, secularism will be on the rise. Even now we do have many Africans who do not go to church or visit the Mosque, however even these when faced with a crisis they still look for answers from religious practitioners.



What factors are contributing to increasing secularism in Africa? Would you say African urban centres are secularised?

# 5.4 Reasons for secular ethics

## 5.4.1 Need for a public morality

As we have admitted, there is a need in a public society for a moral consensus that everyone can agree upon regardless of religious affiliation.

## 5.4.2 God’s moral absolutes apply to everyone

Since God’s moral absolutes are absolute and are universal, they apply to everyone. And if they apply to everyone then why do we need “distinctively Christian Ethics?” Why not just have “human ethics”?

In *Mere Morality,* Lewis B. Smedes observes:

Mere morality is not for believers only. It has to do with what God expects of all people, regardless of whether they believe in him. You do not escape God's demands by denying that he exists any more than you stop being God's creature by denying his creation. He does not cancel his rules when you trade in your faith. He may, if worse comes to worst, leave you to stew in your own denial as Paul tells us in Romans 1. But while he may leave you on your own to act as if there were no God to obligate you, he does not annul his own demands. Mere morality is not mysterious. Any reasonable person can understand the sense of what God expects ordinary people to do in living their human lives together. God may use a special act of revelation to let his people clearly know the rudiments of morality. But what he reveals is not irrational or bizarre. If I try to explain the holy Trinity to my unbelieving friends, I'm likely to elicit a bewildered smile. But if I talk to them about the place of honesty in social life or the problem of private property, an intelligent dialogue is probable. They may not agree with everything the Bible says about morality, but they can understand it.

Here are some further examples of such issues:

* Respect for People's Rights
* Care for People's Needs
* Respect for Authority
* Respect for Human Life
* Respect for Covenant
* Respect for Property
* Respect for Truthfulness
* Obedience and Grace.

## 5.4.3 Agnostic ethics: no proof for god’s existence

Some say that due to the inability to prove the existence of God, there is no rational foundation on which to build religion-based morality. See Thiroux date?. Thiroux wants to be respectful of those who choose to believe in God but since that belief can’t be empirically verified, we can’t base a public system of moral decision-making on it. To his credit, what Thiroux wants to do is to create a system of ethics that everyone can agree with regardless of their religious inclinations.

## 5.4.4 Atheistic ethics: “religion as a crutch”

Some go further than Thiroux and imply that religion is for weak people who need some kind of a crutch to lean on. And we should do humanity a favour and just kick the crutch out from under us and make humanity stand on its own two feet.

Two such theorists are Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. They taught that it is positively immoral to base an ethical superstructure on the superstitious foundations of religion. Humanity will not reach its fullest potential (Hence Marx taught: liberation of the masses from the owners of capital; Nietzsche taught: the “superman” and the will to power) **a person who was above morality** which symbolized man at his most creative and highest intellectual development).The result would be that the moral teaching of Christianity in particular and religion in general would be seen to merely serves to weaken and further enslave those who need to be made strong. Other atheists have taught similarly down through the centuries. ]In this case Religion is seen to be part of the problem rather than the solution to humanity’s predicament.

Marx called organized religion “the opium of the masses.” (Religious suffering is one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of the soulless conditions.) It is the opium of the poor. Opium was the drug of choice in his day that was given to cheap labourers by their employers to addict them and thereby control them, and

willingly used by the labourers as a means of escaping from the drudgery and misery of their lives. So for Marx, any ethic that is based on Christian or any religious principles will most likely lead one to unethical behaviour because it will most likely promote the welfare of the “haves” over the “have nots.”

Nietzsche was the one who coined the phrase: “God is dead.” And his implication with that is that we would do good as a human race to just recognize that and get on with the real task of creating a better civilization. Nietzsche’s book on ethics shows the direction of his thought: “Beyond Good and Evil.” - 87 -

**Nietzche theorized two sets of morals one for the ruling class and another for the** slave class. He reviewed that ancient empires grew out of the ruling class and that religions arose out of the slave classes.

They claim that **there is a high humanistic motivation for ethical conduct**

and if religious foundations are removed, **morality does not collapse.**

They claim that a transcendent being is shown to be a giver of values that are already cherished, and **they conclude it is hardly necessary for man to invent a God** who then gives man the moral prescriptions that have grown in his own mind and conscience.

**Those who look to the Bible or Quran to justify their belief in a set of** commandments or ethical principles are deceiving themselves, for theistic religions are **simply spun out of human imaginations, they have no independent reality.**

**The great deception is consider an act good or evil, right or wrong in the name of a Go**d. They claim that the idea of God is synonymous with our own deepest moral ideals. Our conception of him is the standard by which we measure our pain and project our hope. We simply invoke him to compel us to obedience

These arguments find their inspiration in Greco Roman texts, particularly in the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Epictutus; it is the effort to provide some rational basis for ethical conduct. The quest for a rational ground for morality continues throughout the history of ethics and can be found in the writings of Spinoza, Kant, Bentham, Mill, Moore, Russell and Dewey.

# 5.5 Results of secular ethics: response to secular ethics!

## 5.5.1 Moral relativism

What happens to “Ethics without God”? It is set adrift, with no anchor to hold it in place. With no absolute norms or values, all moral decision-making will be relative to however he/she wants to calculate the needs of the particular situation. Ultimately, there is no place for the secularist to go but into the fold of moral relativism.

## 5.5.2 Ethical egoism

Analyze Thiroux’s argument regarding: “Why should human beings be moral?“ which follows his justification for divorcing ethics from religion.

-Thiroux wants a “rational” ethic, based on reason. Implication: belief in God is not reasonable. He’s sort of right: faith is evidence of things not seen.

-Why should humans be moral? According to Thiroux, because they need to get along with one another. See p. 25. This is really the ethical egoism he criticized earlier in his book in disguise. “I need to submit to these moral rules because it is ultimately in my best interest. So, without belief in God, there really is no justification for any behaviour that is not self-interested. If God is not the Creator and the “meaning and purpose-giver” of the world and instead we each are, then we have no reason not to create our meaning and purpose in life around our own self-interests. Hence, morality is “whatever helps me.” In summary ethics without God becomes “self-centred.”

If all moral systems are products of human culture and if we remove the self deceptive faith systems that sanctify them, is it still possible to lead an authentic ethical life in which a responsible morality can be developed.

-ILL: Ethics of Nazi Germany based on Nietzsche

-ILL: Ethics of Soviet Union based on Marx

## 5.5.3 More problems with secular ethics

• It is in one’s best interest to be moral but while one might or might not act immorally; others are bound to do so; independent of one’s actions.

• Goodness, obligation and morality have no lasting effects if there is no after life.

• High societal dysfunction in secular societies. Abundant data is available on high rates of societal dysfunction in the first world primarily in North America and Europe.

• Atheists do not have a moral code to which they must subscribe.

# 5.6 Islamic ethics

The Quran is the book of instructions about how to live. The ideal Muslim society is one that is faithful to the Quranic law in every detail. The commandments of God are the basis for a just and righteous social order. The dynamic of Islam is obedience and submission to Allah and acceptance of whatever happens as the fated will of Allah. Islam follows a kind of deontology kind of ethic where you obey Allah no matter what.

The Quran on many occasions refers to itself as a ‘Great Argument’ or ‘Light’ or ‘Explanation’. In this book, guidance provided is without doubt , for those who fear God (2:2).Whereas in Christianity Christ is believed to be the self-disclosure of God, in Islam the emphasis of the Quran is not on revealing God per se, but more importantly, on disclosing the commands of God.

As Kenneth Cragg observes ‘The revelation communicated God’s Law. It does not reveal God himself .. . the genius of Islam is finally law and not theology. In the last analysis the sense of God is a sense of divine command. In the will of God there is none of the mystery that surrounds his being. His demands are known and the believers’ task is not so much exploratory, still less fellowship, but rather obedience and allegiance.” In *The Call of the Minaret*, 55 Ajijola writes, “The Quran is a comprehensive view of life covering every aspect phase of human life. This book lays down the best rules relating to social life, commerce and economic, marriage and inheritance, penal laws and international conduct, etc.” The Essence of Faith in Islam.

## 5.6.1 The basis of morality in Islam

The question that has to be asked of any moral theory is Why should I be moral according to that system? The number one reason why you should be moral in Islam is that God commands it therefore you should obey. (Adeney, Strange Virtues, 173) Almost all human life is composed of acts whose good and evil nature are relative, therefore the intent of the act matters. The Prophet Muhammad declared that **“Acts will be judged only according to intention.” (Adeney, 174)**

Islamic law and morality are based on divine commandments. These commandments are contained in the Quran, the scripture for the Islamic Umma (community) and the Hadith (the traditions of Islam). It is assumed that human reason should affirm what is in the Quran but in most cases Divine law take precedence over any human reason. Because the reasoning of a philosopher, a jurist or a moralist, may differ and lead to completely opposite conclusions it is considered safe to follow Divine Law.  Muhammad Hamidullah,*Introduction to Islam*, *op cit*. paragraph 391

Example of what the Qu'ran says concerning morality, **and come not near into fornication. Lo it is an abomination and an evil way.**

## 5.6.2 Assessment of Islamic ethics

The central weakness lies in its eradication of the individual conscience in

favour of unthinking submission to the mere letter of revealed law. There is no rationality behind it for human reason to discover by exercising man’s God-given intellect. Revelation and tradition must not be questioned. (Serge Trifkovic, “The Moral Problem of Islamic Ethics” <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=20778>Accessed on

22nd May 2014

Since Muhammad is the final prophet, there can be no further development in any judicial matters where the Koran and Sunna provide guidance. This deeply undermines the possibility of rational civic debate in Moslem nations and accounts for the distinctly medieval flavour of their legal systems. (Serge Trifkovic, “The Moral Problem of Islamic Ethics”

Sharia Law requires the punishment of violators by the state. It presupposes and demands the existence of an Islamic state as an executor to enforce that law. We live in a changing world, laws that could be applied during the time of the prophet do not address today’s problem. Life is not so clear cut that a a single unchanging set of rules can help us to solve the complexity that we encounter in our daily lives. Human beings have proved that rules cannot change their behaviour, people often break rules.

Islam undermines the power of sin in a person’s life. (Serge Trifkovic, “The

Moral Problem of Islamic Ethics”



Norman Geisler in Answering Islam writes, “Muslims who take upon themselves to destroy their alleged enemies in the name of God can rightly claim to be following the commands of God in the Qur’an and imitating their prophet as their role model.” 319 How should we reconcile this with good faithful Muslims who also follow the Qur’an but who do not engage in such activities?

# 5.7 The meaning and value of morals in African religion

Morals deal with the question of what is right and wrong, and what is wrong and evil in human conduct. There are customs, rules, laws, traditions, and taboos which can be observed in each society. Africans believe that their morals where given to them by God and cannot be challenged.

**TWO DIMENSIONS**

**Personal** –Which deals specifically with the life of the individual-e.g. he would ask himself whether it is right or wrong to eat or to cultivate his field.

The individual has obligation he/she must fulfil based on the fact that that individual is a member of the human community.   
**Social Conduct**- The life of society at large. The conduct of the individual within the group or community or nation. The individual exist only because others exist. The community has its own social obligations to fulfil for the individuals who make up that community. This include teaching morals, “it take a village to raise a child.”

## 5.7.1 Role of morals in African traditional religions

a. To Keep society not only alive but in harmony

b. Without morals the world will be chaos and confusion

c. Morals guide people in doing what is right and good for their own sake and

that of their community.

d. They help people do their duties to society and enjoy certain rights from

society.

e. It is morals that have produced the virtues that society appreciates and endeavours to preserve, such as friendship, compassion, love, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, helpfulness, bravery and so on.

f. Morals sharpen people’s dislike and avoidance of vices like cheating, treachery, theft, selfishness, dishonesty, greed, and so on.

g. Morals keep society from disintegration.

## 5.7.2 Sources for the study of african ethics

Kunhiyop says that there are no written records but that there are numerous places where ethical principles are spelled out. For one to determine what entails right behaviour Kunhiyop quotes Neville Richardson who says, “observe and reflect upon the social life of the people—their rituals, customs, practices, events and relationships.”

Kunhiyop identifies two major sources, pages 8-14 a. Customs and Taboos

b. Oral Tradition

o Myths and legends

o Stories

o Songs

o Proverbs, riddles and wise sayings

o Liturgy



Provide examples from your community that show how the above mentioned sources teach ethics.

## 5.7.3 Role of religion in African ethics

In Africa ethics is not divorced from religion. Kunhiyop says, “Religious values and beliefs have a great impact on the way people live.” 15. Laurenti Magesa says, “God, the ancestors, and the spirits are all powers or forces that impinge on human life in one way or another. In that sense they are all moral agents.” African Religions: The Moral Traditional of Abundant Life, 42.

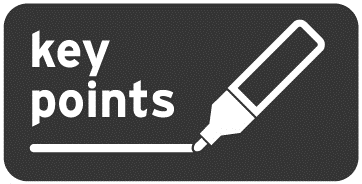
Religion is crucial for most Africans who take the existence of God for granted. They do not need justification for his existence. The Supreme being was known by many names (Musikadenga –Shona, Ngai—Kikuyu, Luo—Nyasaye etc) and he was known as the almighty, the great one, the one who sees everything and the king.(Kunhiyop, 16—17). John Mbiti is known to have said concerning Africans, “they are notoriously religious.” Meaning that religion plays a vital role in the life of Africans, religion is not an add on. According to Kunhiyop, “African ethics are thus deontological, in that they focus on doing one’s duty by being obedient to the demands posed by the gods or the spirits of the ancestors.” 17.

## 5.7.4 Role of community in African ethics

The I and me are substituted by we and us in African ethics. John Mbiti has taken time to explore the dimension of community in African thought. For him, “I am because we are and because we are therefore I am.” African Religions and Philosophy, 108-109.

In Mbiti’s understanding this is the reason why, “The greater number of morals have to do with social conduct…the conduct of the individual within the group

or community or nation. African morals lay a great emphasis on societal conduct, since the basic African view is that the individual exists only because others exist.” Introduction to African Religion, 174.

Kunhiyop says due to this strong emphasis on community, the issue of shame is a crucial element in African morality. What one does either brings honour or shame to the family. He concludes by saying, “It can thus be said that a major part of African morality is the “mutual obligations of human persons”, in particular the “duties of children towards parents, and the connected obligations towards the ancestors.” 18.

Other types of Ethics

a. Secular ethics: Ethics without God

b. Islamic Ethics: Obedience to Allah

c. African Ethics: Religion and Community crucial elements for African ethics



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why should I be moral as a secularist?

2. Why should I be moral as a Moslem?

3. Why should I be moral as a Hindu?

4. What problems are associated with secular ethics?

5. Christian ethics has nothing to learn from other types of ethics. Agree or disagree and justify your answer.

## Text for Further Reading

1. Geisler, Norman; Christian Ethics: Options and Issues; Zondervan Publishers; U.S.A; 1989

2. Geisler L. Norman and Abdul Saleeb; Answering Islam; Grand Rapids: Baker

Books, 1993.

3. Haselbarth, Hans; Christian Ethics in the African Context; Uzima Press; Kenya; 1994

4. Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje; African Christian Ethics; Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2008.

5. Mbiti, John; African Religions and Philosophy; London: Heinemann, 1982.

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# Lesson 6: The role of character and virtue in Christian ethics

# Introduction

No study of Christian Ethics would be complete without a look at the role of character and virtues. We could have easily discussed this at the very front end of the course when we were studying the relationship being between “being and doing” in Christian Discipleship. For the two themes are very closely related.

## Intended learning outcomes

**As a result of this lesson, you should be able to:**

1. Articulate the role of Character and Virtue in Christian Ethics

2. Appreciate the place of character in nation building

3. Highlight some of the people with character in our world.

**Question of Action: How ought I to act?**

**Question of Character: What kind of person ought I to be?**

**Ethics places its trust in**

1. Theories: which provide rules of conduct

2. Virtue: which provides the wisdom necessary for applying rules in particular instances.

Quote: “For Christians, another division that breaks down when we make character central to ethics is that between ethics and spirituality. The spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and the rest, are just essential ways of developing and practicing the Christian virtues.” NDCEPT,

66.

But we wanted to wait until now to discuss the role of character and virtue after we had looked at the different theories of ethics it is true that all the theories in the world won’t help a person make moral decisions as much as one milligram of character. So if you really want to know what will help you

make good moral decisions in life then you need to sit up and pay attention in this lecture.

# 6.1 Definition of “character”

What do we mean when we use the word “character”?

1. “He’s a real character.”

2. “She really has character.”

3. A character in a play

4. A character in the alphabet

The word “character” comes from the Greek *charassein* which means “to engrave or scratch into something.” A person who has character has had certain traits scratched or engraved into them.

ILL: a tombstone: so deeply engraved that people will always be able to read what is one the tombstone. At Langata cemetery in Nairobi there are graves nearly as old as 100 years, names of those buried there are still visible.

This means character has a permanence to it. We might say a person is “characterized” by a certain quality. Again, he/she has had that quality deeply engrained into them, so much so that it is now just a part of who they are. He is characterized by compassion or fairness.

# 6.2 Virtues as character traits

Well, what are those character traits which are good and which we want to have engraved into us? What do we call them: we call them virtues. And what do we call those character traits which are bad and which we do not want to have engraved into us: we call those vices.

## 6.2.1 Definition:

“Virtue” comes from the Greek word, *arête* which simply means any kind of excellence.

ILL: a knife’s arête is it sharpness

ILL: an athlete’s virtue is his skill in his sport.

The word, “Virtuous” then refers to an object’s ability to accomplish its intended purpose with excellence.

ILL: knife is virtuous if it very sharp and cuts well.

ILL: athlete is virtuous if he is very skilled in his sport

So when we talk about moral virtues, we are saying that a person is virtuous if she has moral excellence. But more than that we are talking about the person’s ability to function consistently with her nature. And we would want to say, his/her created nature from God, not her fallen nature warped by sin.

## 6.2.2 Virtues are learned

Virtues are learned traits, and they are not genetically inherited. Good parents do not always have good children, unless they take the time and effort to nurture them in their ways.The *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* says “In some psychological literature, ‘trait’ denotes supposedly genetically fixed personal tendencies such as introversion or extraversion. But virtues, as discussed in ethics, are learned traits, resulting from moral and religious upbringing, from interaction with God and fellow humans, and from individual choices and self- discipline.” NDCEPT, 66

## 6.2.3 Difference between “virtue” and “virtues”

The difference between virtue and virtues is not the difference between singular and plural. When we say, “he has virtue” we are using it very closely to the way we would use, “character.” And in this way it is used as a commendation for someone who is seen as being upright or good, or having a strength of character. The virtues, on the other hand, are specific dispositions or traits that are relied upon in specific situations and that society or culture or religion sees as praiseworthy. It has been said that a person’s virtue (that quality of character within them) is what coordinates the virtues and dictates that the virtues are employed in a virtuous manner.

ILL: Courage is not a virtue when it merely leads to a foolish death that serves no purpose.

## 6.2.4 Virtue and vice

If virtues are the good traits we seek to inculcate within ourselves, vices are the bad or sinful traits we seek to expunge from ourselves

Expunge: like wringing a sponge of all its water.

If virtues are those traits which enable us to function consistently with our nature, then we would look upon vices as those traits which prevent us from acting according to our nature, or in theological terms: those traits or behavioural patterns which cause us to fail to be creatures God created us to be. Vice is a form of failure to be the image of God.

ILL: A warp in the mirror of our lives that prevents an accurate reflection

Westminster Dict. 647: Vice is a settled disposition to do what is wrong, bad, or sinful. Vices are habits acquired by repeated actions.

Often we speak of sin as almost synonymous with vices: 7 Deadly sins are really vices—dispositions, not merely actions**: pride, avarice, lust, gluttony, envy, anger, and sloth.**

For every virtue there is a corresponding vice: honesty-deceitfulness; hope- despair; peace-anxiety.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Vice | Virtue | Examples |
| Lust | Chastity |  |
| Gluttony | Temperance |  |
| Greed | Charity |  |
| Sloth | Diligence |  |
| Wrath | Patience |  |
| Envy | Kindness |  |
| Pride | Humility |  |



It has been said we cannot conquer what we do not know. Take a moment to think about the sin that tempts you the most! Ask someone who knows you best about your deadly sin!

# 6.3 Social sins

Mohandas Gandhi observed the state of the fallen world and described it as such in his “Seven Social Sins”:

• Politics without Principle

• Wealth without Work

• Commerce without Morality

• Pleasure without Conscience

• Education without Character

• Science without Humanity

• Worship without Sacrifice”



Evaluate your country of origin in light of these social sins. Give examples of how these sins manifest themselves in your society. What virtues would say characterise people in your community? What does your society emphasize as important virtues?

# 6.4 History of virtue ethics

The Greek Philosopher, Plato and even more so Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* were the first to really make virtue and virtues central to ethics. This was picked up by Arab philosophers and who were studied by Medieval Catholic scholars who then went back to study Plato and Aristotle for themselves. The integration of virtue ethics into Christian ethics found classic expression in St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologia*.

Protestants put the ideas of virtues and character on the shelf for several centuries because they suspected that such talk would undermine their emphasis on justification by faith through grace. But it was picked up again by Protestants in the 20th century by persons like Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon. To their credit, Catholics kept on talking about virtues all along.

# 6.5 Classical or “cardinal virtues”

We don’t have time here to mention, define and discuss everything that could be considered a virtue. (See Paul’s list in Gal.5:22; 2 Peter 1:4-9) But down through the centuries the discipline of ethics and the Church have recognized some particular virtues. And so out of deference to tradition I want to just mention these. The first group is what has been known as “the cardinal virtues.”

A. Temperance (self-control)

Today refers mainly to the moderate or restrictive use of alcohol—The Temperance Movement in the US was a movement to do just that to restrict the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Aristotle’s mean: between self-indulgence and insensible self-denial

Self-control: Proverbs 25:28; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:2,6; Gal. 5:23; 2 Peter 1:6;

1 Peter 5:8

Refers almost exclusively to an individual’s relation to the physical world:

eating, drinking (especially alcoholic beverages), and sexual intercourse

B. Courage

It was seen as necessary to all truly moral conduct in Greek thought. A mean struck between the extremes of rashness and cowardice

Christian conceptions of courage were greatly influenced by the experience of martyrdom in the early centuries of the church. Christian images of courage had much to do with stressing the passive elements in courage. In other words, courage was not so much the bravery to go and fight as a soldier. (Early Christians were pacifists.) Rather it was the internal strength to be willing to go to be fed to the lions rather than deny one’s faith.

o Foxe’s Book of Martyrs: Death of Polycarp

C. Prudence (practical wisdom)

An intellectual virtue which directs the person to the choice of right means for an end. ILL: Is more prudent for me to start walking now, or to wait here for ANU bus to come.

• Proverbs 15:5

D. Justice

An operative habit setting the will in the direction of impartially rendering to each his or her due or desert.

Evaluate your society in light of these cardinal virtues.

Again, these cardinal virtues were first set forth by Plato and then later taken up by the Church and reinterpreted somewhat. St. Thomas Aquinas placed these cardinal virtues in subordination to what he calls the Theological Virtues.

# 6.6 Theological virtues

Paul: 1 Cor. 13:13

Strictly speaking, not virtues, but may be thought of as introducing new dimensions into the moral life with its natural virtues

A. Faith

• Hebrews 11:1

B. Hope

C. Love

Faith might sometimes require action that seems imprudent. Dropping your fishing nets and following an unknown wandering teacher sounds like a prescription for poverty. Love might require the same: dying on a cross.

**A Word of Caution:** Georgia Harkness: “There are Christian virtues. Yet making a list of them and adding them together does not add up to being a

Christian. These virtues, in greater or lesser degree, are found among those who are not Christians, and no Christian possesses them in unlimited degree. These virtues are not traits that can be put on one at time or analysed atomistically [as we have done].” Nevertheless, they exist as qualities of a God-centered life, as one seeks, in the totality of one’s being to follow the will of God”.

The Relation of These Virtues with Christian Faith

Problem of Christians with no character, no virtue

Georgia Harkness: “The crux of personal Christian character is at this point,

for if believing what a Christian ought to believe and calling oneself a Christian makes no difference in one’s personality or behaviour, Christianity as a whole is bound to be discredited. The stock charge against the Church is that it is full

of hypocrites, less sensitive to human need than many outside it. While this is doubtless an overstatement based on too hasty generalization, every ‘bad’ Christian who can be set over against a ‘good’ non-Christian is a barrier to gospel.”

**Small Group Sharing on Someone in Your Life with Character: for contact session**

* Piece of paper
* Your Name
* Write a paragraph about someone in your life who has “character” in the good sense or whose life is characterized by one of these virtues.

Now share paragraphs with the person to your left. Comment on the paragraph you have received and then again pass to the left.

Keep doing this until your own example comes back to you.

Now discuss what you learned from this exercise.

# 6.7 Character formation

How is character formed? How are these character traits, these virtues engraved and chiseled into the life of an individual?

1. By What Means?

a. The Transforming power of God’s grace

i. Character formation “relies on the traditional Christian claim that faith in Christ along with God’s grace have a transforming effect on human nature in general and on each Christian in particular, and that such transformation is at least potentially visible over time in individuals and communities.” Westminster Dict. 83.

ii. Bible: Romans 12:1-2—“do not be conformed…but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

2. In What Manner?

a. Instantaneously—In some cases.

i. Various testimonies eg John Newton

ii. Sinners stop sinning when they get to know Christ and in some cases their lives are forever changed by that one moment of conversion.

iii. But generally the shaping of character does not happen in an instant. We may cease doing wrong, but that does not mean that good is etched into the very heart of our being.

b. Gradually

i. Church of the Nazarene Manual statement on Entire

Sanctification

We believe that there is a marked distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. The former is obtained in an instant, the result of entire sanctification; the latter is the result of growth in grace.

We believe that the grace of entire sanctification includes the impulse to grow in grace. However, this impulse must be consciously nurtured, and careful attention given to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christ’s likeness of character and personality.

ii. Through Spiritual Disciplines and Means of Grace iii. Through practice

iv. This leads to “habituation”

Habits are “well-defined patterns of behaviour or modes of thought in which a person engages without having consciously to initiate the process on each occasion or to give assent to each step in the process. We do them “without thinking.” They become habits. Good habits become character traits; bad habits become addictions. It is important to note that a life of habituated sin (repeated sin, sin engrained) is difficult to break out of; a life of habituated righteousness is difficult to break from as well. The longer you walk with God and the more you make right decisions, the easier it will be to make the next right decision. Why, because you are becoming habituated in righteousness.

ILL:

Sow a thought, reap a deed. Sow a deed, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a trait.

Sow a trait, reap a character.

v. Romans 6

1. The Power of Sin and Vice is broken: v.6

2. The Habituation of Sin: Sin leads to ever increasing wickedness (vice) which leads to “slavery to sin” (addiction), which leads eventually to death

3. The Habituation of Righteousness: Obedience which leads to righteousness, which leads to holiness and eternal life.

4. “Offering yourselves” is in a present tense: keep on offering yourselves

vi. In Community

\In the community, we hear the stories of what good character looks like. That is why I had you do the exercise of writing the paragraph about someone of character.

**“The formation of character thus involves the response of the heart to stories of the good life and the virtues and convictions they contain.”** Westminster, 83.

Stanley Hauerwas: A Community of Character…retells part of the novel entitled “Watership Down” about a community of rabbits and how those rabbits relied on each other’s unique talents to survive all the adversities that came their way. And the point of the whole story was to show how stories handed down by the communities of which we are a part shape our character and identity.



What would you say is the process for character development/ spiritual formation in your community?



� Character and virtue are one and the same thing.

� The crucial question in Character is who ought I to be.

� Cardinal virtues: temperance, prudence, justice, courage

� Theological virtues: faith, hope and love

� Character formation takes place by the transforming power of God’s grace

**Reflection Questions**

1. How important is the connection between a person’s private life and their public life?

2. Should a person’s past moral lapses disqualify them from certain jobs and offices?

3. Should we care what people do after hours if they get the job done between

8am to 5pm?



**It is important to realize that leaders have the capacity to build or destroy lives, Leadership is influence, a leader influences by simply being who they are.**

**That is the kind of influence and impact you will have on people if you become a person of character.**

If we could wish anything for you as a result of this course it would be that you would be committed to become a person of character.

## Text for Further Reading

1. Atkinson, David John, et al. New dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral

Theology. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

2. Geisler, Norman; Christian Ethics: Options and Issues; Zondervan Publishers; U.S.A; 1989

3. Harkness, Georgia Elma. Christian ethics. New York: Abingdon Press, 1957.

4. Haselbarth, Hans; Christian Ethics in the African Context; Uzima Press; Kenya; 1994

5. Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje; African Christian Ethics; Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2008.

# Lesson 7: Applied ethics

# Introduction

This section is where the rubber meets the road. This is when we get to apply our ethical principles that we have learnt to real life situations. Some of the issues that could be highlighted in this section include abortion, racism, war, euthanasia, HIV AIDS, Genetic Engineering, Land Reform etc.

In this section students are the ones responsible for researching and delivering the various issues. This can be done through online discussion forums, research paper etc.

Examples- racism and abortion

## Intended learning outcomes

**As a result of this lesson you should be able to:**

1. Relate Christian ethics to various ethical issues facing Africa and the world.

2. Make decisions in various situations from a Christian perspective

# 7.1 Christian ethics and racism





Relate Dr King’s ethics of integration to the work of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission in Kenya.

**The ethical demands for integration by Martin Luther King Jr**

Dr. King offered this eloquent defence of his philosophy of integration in his speech he delivered in Nashville, Tennessee, on 27 December 1962, before a church conference.

## 7.1.1 Introduction

“The price that America must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro is its own destruction. The hour is late; the clock of destiny is ticking; we must act now before it is too late”.

Dr King acknowledges the progress that was made at that time in breaking down the barriers of racial segregation.

In his thought desegregation is not good enough, “it is empty and shallow. We must always be aware of the fact that our ultimate goal is integration, and that desegregation is only a first step on the road to the good society.”

In Dr King’s understanding desegregation was only the ‘letter of the law,’ but he wanted to go beyond to be equally concerned with the ‘Spirit of the law’.

King saw the effects of a desegregated society without integration. He writes, “it leads to physical proximity without spiritual affinity. It gives us a society where men are physically desegregated and spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts apart.” (118)

**Dr King goes on to give the basic ethical demands of integration.**

**Why Integration in the context of justice, freedom, morality and religion?**

**1. The worth of Persons**

Dr King affirmed the dignity and inherent worth of every human being. The idea of the Image of God was very important for this affirmation.

He quotes the American Declaration of Independence, “All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.:

He quotes Fredrick Douglas in his lecture on the Constitution of the United States, “ Its language is, ‘We the people’; not we the white people, not even we the citizens, not we the privileged class, not we the high, not we the low,

but we the people…we the human inhabitants, and if Negroes are people they are included in the benefits for which the Constitution of America was

ordained and established.” (119)

In Dr King’s estimation Segregation, “stands diametrically opposed to the principle of the sacredness of human personality.”

He quotes Emmanuel Kant in his Categorical Imperative , “All men must be treated as ends and never as mere means.” The problem with treating men and women as means is that, “the only concern is performance, not well being.”

He concludes this section by saying, “…man is not a thing. He must be dealt with, not as an ‘animated tool,’ but as a person sacred in himself.” (119)

**2. Life Demands Freedom**

Dr King declares, “…a denial of freedom to an individual is a denial of life itself. The very character of the life of man demands freedom.” (119)

He quickly defines the kind of freedom he is referring to, “it is the freedom of

man, the whole man and not one faculty called the will.” (120)

He quotes Paul Tillich when he says, “man is man because he is free.” (120) Answering the question what is freedom,

a) It is first, the capacity to deliberated or weigh alternatives. ‘Shall I be a teacher or a lawyer?’ Shall I vote for this candidate or the other’…

b) Freedom expresses itself in decision

c) A third expression of freedom is responsibility. This is the obligation of the person to respond if he is questioned about his decisions

King says if I cannot choose I have been reduced to an animal, I do not live, I merely exist. This is because, “I cannot adequately assume responsibility as a person because I have been made a party to a decision in which I played no part in making.” (120)

King was clear on the fact that one’s ability to flourish in society was at stake in a segregated society. He writes, “ I may do well in a desegregated society but I can never know what my total capacity is until I live in an integrated society.” (121)

He concludes, “Integration demands that we recognize that a denial of freedom is a denial of life itself.”

**3. The Unity of Humanity**

King says, “Integration seems almost inevitably desirable and practical because basically we are all one.” (121)

King believed that the physical differences between the races are insignificant when compared to the physical identities. “The world’s foremost anthropologists all agree that there is no basic difference in the racial groups of the world.” (121) King supported this by the fact that there are four major blood types and all four are found in every racial group. In that case there no superior and inferior races.

The other fact that King draws on to support the unity of mankind is the fact that man is by nature a societal creature. Man has been working from the beginning at the great adventure of “community.” (122)

Without community man cannot survive, he needs his brothers and sisters. The self cannot be self without other selves. King says, “All life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,

tied in a single garment of destiny…” (122)

**4. …Because it is Right**

King told his fellow Americans to obey the mandate of the Court because it is right.

“Desegregation is the necessary step in the right direction if we are to achieve integration. Desegregation will not change attitudes but will provide the contact and confrontation necessary by which integration is made possible and attainable.” (123)

It was also important to King to note that fact that, “the demands of Desegregation are enforceable demands while the demands of integration fall within the scope of unenforceable demands.” (123)

This is the case because unenforceable demands concern inner attitudes, genuine person to person relations, and expressions of compassion which law books cannot regulate and jails cannot rectify. (123)

An example: The law court may force a father to provide bread for the family but it cannot make him provide the bread of love. A good father is obedient to the unenforceable.

Yet it is also important to note that in King’s understanding the law can help to a certain extant. “Morality cannot legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but the can restrain the heartless. The law cannot make an employer love an employee but it can prevent him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin.” (124)

King writes, “…we must admit that the ultimate solution to the race problem lies in the willingness of men to obey the unenforceable …those dark and demonic response will be removed only as men are possessed by the invisible, inner law which etches on the hearts the conviction that all men are brothers and that love is mankind’s most potent weapon for personal and social transformation. True integration will be achieved by true neighbours who are willingly obedient to unenforceable obligations.” (124)

King concludes by reiterating the importance of nonviolence as the means for gaining total emancipation for the Negroes. This discipline will help the Negro to have a new image of himself and it helps to thwart the growth of bitterness. **Non-violence exalts the personality of the segregator as well as the segregated. What do you think King means by this?**

In Kenya and most African countries even though traces of racism can be found, our major problem is the one of tribalism or negative ethnicity.

# 7.2 Christian position on abortion

Abortion is the termination of pregnancy before the time of birth. The ethical issue concerns whether life begins at birth, or at conception. Those who believe that life begins at birth argue that what happens before birth is not

actually taking away life, they even argue that what we have is actually “just tissue”. These people also look at the woman who is carrying the foetus. They argue that a woman ought to have freedom over her body, including flushing the foetus when it is convenient for her. This line of argument borders on feminism, since some say giving birth has been used as way to keep women controlled by men. Those who hold this school of thought are usually called the “pro-choice” group.

On the other hand we have the “pro-life” group who look at this issue from the perspective of the foetus. They say what we have growing in the womb is a potential human being, that if left to grow we will become a human person. They hold that life begins at conception, and anything done after conception is tantamount to murder.

## 7.2.1 Approach to the abortion issue: Wesleyan Christian

Sources of Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience

o Bible

• Exodus 21:22-25 (unclear as to whether stillborn or live

healthy birth)

**22**“If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+21:22-25#fen-NIV-2100a)**]** but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. **23**But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,**24**eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, **25**burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

• Psalm 139:13-16

For you created my inmost being;  
    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
**14**I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
    your works are wonderful,  
    I know that full well.  
**15**My frame was not hidden from you  
    when I was made in the secret place,  
    when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.  
**16**Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
    all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
    before one of them came to be.

• Jeremiah 1:4-5

**4**The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

**5**“Before I formed you in the womb I knew**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jeremiah+1%3A4-8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-18952a)**]** you,  
    before you were born I set you apart;  
    I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

• Job 31:15

Did not he who made me in the womb make them?  
    Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

• Isaiah 44:24

**24**“This is what the Lord says—  
    your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb:

I am the Lord,  
    the Maker of all things,  
    who stretches out the heavens,  
    who spreads out the earth by myself,

None of these scriptures can be called upon to decisively answerthe question as to the moral legitimacy of abortion, but

they can be called upon to demonstrate:

• That God values pre-born life; it is his creation

• Pre-born human life seems to be ascribed

“personhood” by God.

**Christian Tradition**

The Church has been historically opposed to. We must be very careful not to throw out the historical wisdom of the Church. Only recently has there been a significant tradition developing within Christianity that accepts Abortion. Yet this must be counterbalanced by the fact that modern technologies have made it possible to know more about the condition of the preborn than it was before and in the past abortion was simply not an option logistically or medically for many and it still isn’t for many today. However we must pay attention to the value the church has placed on life. This is demonstrated by the fact that the church refused the killing of offspring’s what is now commonly known as infanticide.

**Reason**

Here we are asking the question what does the best of human reason tell us about the issue of abortion. Frankly speaking this is what we have been doing the question we have already asked concerning when life begins—depending on when one says life begins they will form their opinion on abortion based on that. The other question is whether or not the foetus should be given the same rights as a human person. What do you think proper reason say about abortion?

**Experience**

Here we ask, what has our experience of abortion taught us? Cases trauma have been reported—medical evidence on both sides, either the one abortion is done on or even the men who father these children or those who do the procedures that is the doctors and the nurses.

ILL: Bernard Nathanson, the doctor who more than any other championed the cause of abortion rights in America and his guilt and conversion led him to a position of opposition to abortion. But in all fairness, one would have to put beside that the testimonials of many women who have had abortions and feel like it was the right thing for them to do.

• Teleology: What is the purpose of humanity and human sexuality?

To glorify God: God is a God of life, of love, of concern for the marginalized and vulnerable. Our attitude toward abortion must not violate these characteristics of God or God could not be the author of such attitudes. Some will argue that abortion is a “life- giving” decision—quality of life, not mere quality is of concern. They will argue that it is a loving decision. They will argue that women are among the most marginalized and vulnerable class of humans. But in the vast majority of cases in which an abortion is sought, it is out of concern for self that it is chosen. It is not a decision made out of love, not out of a desire to protect and give life, not out of a desire to protect the most marginalized and vulnerable: the unborn.Purpose of sexuality is both pleasure/intimacy and procreation.You should not be engaging in sexual activity unless you are willing to accept both of those aspects of the purpose of human sexuality.

Taking Responsibility for our sexuality—If you are not willing to accept the risk that comes with sexual activity even if you have all the protection/contraception in the world, then you have no business engaging in sexual activity.

“Pro-choice before conception. Pro-life after.”

This is why marriage is so important when it comes to sexual activity. Marriage, a covenant relationship between a man and woman, is the proper context for sexual activity because in it both purposes of sexual activity can be fulfilled in a secure manner.

Christianity is not a religion of rights but of grace. Al Truesdale (God in the Lab., 56), “The developing foetus in the womb ought to be protected, not in the grounds that it can claim legal or physiological humanity, but because of the way God’s grace and mercy toward the world teaches us to treat those who are unable to speak for or defend themselves.”

• Graded/Hierarchical Absolutism:

o Conflicting situation (perhaps)

o Choose to defend the higher moral value and acknowledge regret over the violation of the lesser value: That is how I would feel if I had the opportunity to cast a vote to make a law

restricting abortion

• The Exception Cases

o Life of the mother: this clearly places the “conflict” on a different level—not just “privacy v. life,” but “life v. life.”

o Rape/Incest: it is still created life, but there was not the

“accepted responsibility” that comes with freedom of choice. In this case, a child can be born and be given up for abortion.

* Severe deformity or retardation

what do you think about these exeception cases? Should abortions be done in these case?

• Being “Pro-life” throughout life.

o Putting our life-style where our mouths are.

o It is not enough just to ensure that a child is born. We must follow that with concern for the mother, concern for the on-going welfare of the child. This is where the church is so important.

# 7.3 A Model for Making Moral decisions from a Christian perspective

1.0 You Find Yourself in a Moral Dilemma!

2.0 State the Dilemma

3.0 Ask the Teleological Question: What are God’s purposes in this issue?

How can my behaviour best glorify God? What is God’s will?

4.0 Pray About It.

5.0 Consult Your Sources of Authority: The Bible and Tradition

A Series of Questions:

5.1 What individual scripture passages shed light upon this dilemma, and what conclusions can I draw?

5.2 What “main themes” of the Bible shed light upon this dilemma, and what conclusions can I draw?

5.3 What would others, especially Christians, whose wisdom and opinions I trust say about this?

6.0 Consult Your Sources of Authority: Reason and Experience

A Series of Questions:

6.1 Are there any absolutes in question here?

6.2 If yes, are there more than one absolutes in conflict?

6.3 If yes, does one represent a greater value?

6.4 What kind of virtues and values will it take to follow God’s will?

6.5 If after the above questions are answers there still remains more than one acceptable option, calculate the consequences of each remaining course of action.

6.6 What experience do I or others have that can shed light upon this dilemma?

7.0 Pray more.

8.0 Plan a Course of Action.

9.0 Pray more.

10.0 Implement the Plan

11.0 Evaluate Results



“You have been married for 25 years and your spouse is terminally ill and is on a life support machine. He/she tells you she has lived a good life and has had enough of this life, he/she requests you to pull her off the machine because of her suffering. Use the above model for decision making to make a decision.

**Other ethical issues that could studied are:**

**a. HIV and AIDS: Should Christian Educators promote the use of condoms.**

**b. Female Genital Mutilation: Is it ethical?**

**c. Contraception: Should Christians use contraceptives?**

**d. Capital Punishment: Should Christians support death penalty?**

**e. Reproductive Technologies: Should Christian who fail to get children use Reproductive Technologies?**

**f. Transgender: Should individuals who feel trapped in the wrong**

**body change themselves to suit how they feel?**

# Appendix

# Introduction

The appendix section has extra reading for various lectures; the instructor shall require this material to be read in preparation for the lectures concerned.

# Capital punishment readings

Is the Death Penalty Christian? Part 1 Dr. Gregory Crofford. Article used with permission.

Extremism is loose in the land. On May 15, 2010, a Christian punk rock group from Minnesota, You Can Run But You Cannot Hide, caused a stir when their front man, Bradlee Dean, opined that Muslims who execute homosexuals “…seem to be more moral than even the American Christians…” The full context of his on-air radio comments – via audio clip – is available here.

Bradlee Dean’s remarks have been roundly condemned, and none too soon. Exodus International, a Christian ministry to gay individuals seeking another path, characterized his comments as “powerfully irresponsible” and “incomplete theology.” While most Christians – including my own denomination, the Church of the Nazarene

– interpret the Bible as prohibiting sexual acts between those of the same gender (Romans 1:26-32), the apostle Paul also holds out the possibility of a God-given new start for those wanting one, including the gay individual (1 Cor. 6:9-11). On the other hand, Dean’s rant knows nothing of gospel, of good news. Instead, his version of Christianity is bad news, singling out one class of persons for special judgment, misusing Leviticus 20:13 as a none-too-subtle call to target gays.

In his misguided focus on homosexuals, what Mr. Dean fails to mention are other offenses that Leviticus 20 cites as equally worthy of capital punishment. According to the Holiness Code, all who curse their father or mother must die (20:9). Also punishable by death are adulterers (20:10). To the modern ear, cursing a parent sounds suspiciously like teen-age rebellion. Instead of taking away the car keys, maybe we should impose lethal injection? As for adultery, rather than heading to divorce court, perhaps we should consign offenders to death row? Most Americans – whether they profess Christian faith, another faith, or no faith at all – recoil at the thought of the blanket application of Leviticus’ ancient Holiness Code to the complexities of life at the beginning of the 21st century.

Yet the discussion begs to be pushed back one step. For the follower of Jesus

Christ, a broader question is at-stake: Is capital punishment Christian? Both the New Testament ethic and Christian theology give good reasons to answer the question with a firm “no.”

Holy Scripture is not limited to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, of which the book of Leviticus is a part. For Protestants, God’s revelation includes the last third of the Bible, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. How to relate the two portions of the Bible to each other has historically been a knotty problem. Nevertheless, a Christian consensus exists that the Old Testament must be read in- light of what it has become in Christ. In other words, one must carefully consider what the New Testament has done with the teachings found in the Old Testament.

A student in a Jewish seminary in Kansas City once told a group of visitors from a Christian seminary: “You Christians read your Bible backwards.” What that rabbi-in- training said was true. Having carefully studied an Old Testament passage on its own terms, we bring it – in Old Testament scholar John Bright’s words – to the New Testament for a “verdict.”

How shall we apply John Bright’s principle to the question of capital punishment? John 8:1-11 is the clearest New Testament word on a specific application of the death penalty as prescribed in the Holiness Code of Leviticus 20. It is the familiar story of the woman caught in adultery dragged before Jesus by the religious authorities. Their intention is clear: They hope to trap Jesus. How so? Only two

options are apparent. Either 1) Jesus must join them in punishing the woman, and so lose his popularity among the crowds who love him for his generous spirit, or 2) he will ignore the law of Moses at his own peril, giving leniency to the adulteress and thereby shattering his credibility as a rabbi. The Lord seemed caught between the proverbial “rock and hard place.”

Most preachers focus on the unlikely third option that Jesus ingeniously found, his writing something on the ground, then challenging the woman’s accusers:

“Let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!” (v. 7, NLT).

Jesus ends his encounter with the woman by urging her to “go and sin no more” (v.

9). What most interpreters neglect is to connect the dots regarding Jesus’ verdict on capital punishment. The Lord refused to ratify the punishment prescribed by Moses! To use John Bright’s terms – though Bright himself does not use John 8 to illustrate the point – this is arguably an instance of abrogation, an overturning by the New Testament of an Old Testament teaching.

Jesus of course did not always overturn laws from the Old Testament. He often merely ratified what the Old Testament prescribed. For example, in Mark 12:28-34, Jesus affirmed the enduring value of the two greatest commandments, of loving God and neighbor. Interestingly, the second of these commandments came from

Leviticus 19:18, the same Holiness Code where offenses meriting capital punishment were laid out. By his actions in John 8:1-11, Jesus struck down one section of the Holiness Code, and by his words in Mark 12, he upheld another provision of the same Code.

This points us to the birth of a new and radical ethic, an ethic of non-violence that appears elsewhere in the teaching of Christ. This ethic of love is famously detailed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). If someone strikes us on one cheek, we are to turn to them the other as well (5:39). Should someone steal our shirt, we must not seek to get even. Instead, we should also offer him our coat (5:40). Paul affirms the same ethic, extolling a “love that endures through every circumstance” (1 Cor. 13:8, NLT). John – sometimes dubbed the apostle of love – insisted that Christians must show love by their actions (1 John 3:18). Capital punishment – while acceptable in

the Old Testament – fails the test of New Testament scrutiny. It is explicitly overturned by Jesus in John 8 and implicitly disallowed by the whole tenor of New Testament teaching, particularly the ethic of love, a love that Paul says “always hopes” and “never gives up” (1 Cor. 13:7).

Beyond the New Testament ethic, the teachings of Christian theology also undermine the rationale for the death penalty. Specifically, the doctrine of regeneration teaches that God is in the business of changing evil people – no matter how far gone – into new and better individuals. The apostle Paul, once a rabid murderer of Christians, writes in one of his letters: “What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life has gone. A new life has begun!” (2 Cor. 5:17, NLT).

Then Senator Obama titled one of his books The Audacity of Hope. His positive message encouraged many on the brink of despair, yet a far greater Book spoke of hope long before the Senator’s rolled off the press. The New Testament is radically optimistic, insisting that what seems ruined can be restored. Yet some of the same Christians who see hope for a poor, unwed mother, encouraging her not to abort her baby, will despair of the convict. In a maddening inconsistency, they are pro-life, but only incompletely. They rightfully defend tooth-and-nail the physical life of the unborn, but are willing to abort the potential spiritual life of the murderer. These

incarcerated men and women may have yet turned from evil, but we will never know. Their secret ripening perhaps visible only to God the Holy Spirit may have already been underway. Trimesters of spiritual gestation could have ended in them being born into God’s family, to all of Heaven’s applause. Now their time is cut short and that day will never come. Surely the Holy Spirit grieves at what could have been! After all, dead men and women do not repent. In our zeal for vengeance in this

world, have we unwittingly divulged our deep-down doubts about the reality of a future judgment where a righteous, merciful, and all-knowing God can and will fairly settle all accounts (Hebrews 10:30-31)?

**Is the death penalty Christian? (part 2)** Dr. Gregory Crofford Article used with permission from the author.

Any argument against the death penalty sooner of later must stare-down the “tough cases.” None is tougher than Timothy McVeigh. On April 19, 1995, at 9:02 a.m., he detonated a truck bomb outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in downtown Oklahoma City. The explosion killed 168, including 19 children in an on-site daycare center. When all was said and done, more than 680 were injured. Damage to

buildings, vehicles and other property was estimated at $ 652 million dollars.

McVeigh was executed by lethal injection on June 11, 2001, never having shown any remorse for his heinous act.

The purpose of this essay is not to cause grief or pain to the many who lost loved ones on that tragic day. Rather, it is to question whether any punishment meted out by authorities could ever be sufficient in such cases. Can the execution of one man ever balance out the scales of justice in the face of such suffering? Surely it cannot. If this be true, then the door is open to asking a Christian question: What other form of response can speak a word of Gospel without at the same time condoning sin of the highest order, or taking the grief of the grieving lightly?

The first part of this two-part essay examined the question of the death penalty from a biblical perspective. Rather than quoting isolated passages from Leviticus and its Holiness Code, it was argued that we must understand any Old Testament teaching in-light of what it has become in Christ. The New Testament ethic of love – especially as laid out in the Sermon on the Mount – calls us to the radical view that hate is not overcome with more hate, but by stubborn love, a love that “hopes all things,” in the words of the Apostle Paul. Further, the doctrine of regeneration holds out hope for even the most hardened, that Jesus is still in the business of changing lives, of making “all things new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The death penalty represents the abortion of hope, a killing of what God the Holy Spirit might be doing in silent ways in the hearts of those whom we deem most hopeless.

Christians who support the death penalty often point to Romans 13:1-7 as a NT teaching authorizing the State to execute murderers. The passage does appear to give sweeping powers to the government. The “governing authorities” (v. 1) are described as “ministers of God” (v. 6) who are responsible to “execute his wrath on the wrongdoer” (v.4). Capital punishment – it is argued – is one expression of this “wrath” of which the State is merely the instrument.

Whatever “wrath” might mean in this passage, it cannot contravene what other NT passages clearly teach. Earlier , we saw that Jesus overturned the death penalty in John 8:1-11, refusing to participate in the stoning of the woman caught in adultery. Would God now turn around – through the word of his servant, Paul – and contravene a teaching given from Christ himself? That stretches credulity.

God is the giver of life, and only He is the one who can decide when it will end. This logic is understood when we condemn suicide, as it is taking into human hands (in this case, the hands of the one ending his or her own life) powers of decision reserved for God alone. As the Apostle Paul said in Acts 17:28, “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the End” (Rev. 22:13), implying that it is the divine prerogative to decide when our time on this earth will begin and when it will end (Ps. 139:16). Yes, Jesus said to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Matt. 22:21). On the other hand, are we to

render to Caesar what rightfully belongs to God? Condoning the death penalty does exactly that, wrongfully re-directing divine authority into human hands. Barred in our disobedience from eating of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24), is our hubris so complete that we would rip from God’s hands jurisdiction over death?

But back to Timothy McVeigh. Many times in tough cases like his, where offenders show no remorse and would almost certainly kill again, the death penalty seems unavoidable. After all, why should the State pay for this person to live in a prison, tens of thousands of dollars over the course of a life-sentence? The simple answer is this: Doing what is right isn’t always cheap. A single missile fired in a war can cost the taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars. We spend the money because we are defending something important, namely, freedom. By paying tens of thousands to keep a prisoner alive, even a heinous and remorseless one, we are also defending something important, the sanctity of human life, innocent or guilty. We are saying to the guilty: You were wrong to take life, and we will not validate your offense by offending in-turn. If the intent is to prohibit them from ever murdering again, then that objective is accomplished with spades when they are permanently exiled behind prison walls, with no possibility of parole.

In 1994, in a reversal of an earlier opinion, Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun came out strongly for the abolition of the death penalty. Blackmun studied the death penalty track-record since the 1972 ruling allowing it, then wrote: “I will no longer tinker with the machinery of death.” He was only echoing with words what Jesus demonstrated with actions two thousand years earlier. When it comes to capital punishment, isn’t it time Christians in America were on the Lord’s side?

Yes, extremism is loose in the land. It is time for Christians who subscribe to the New Testament ethic of love and the stalwart belief that God can change people to make their voices heard. Private and public misapplication of a few Old Testament verses will inflict much damage on the cause of Christ, making a mockery of our faith, wrongly adding it in the public’s mind to the list of “religions of hate.” When it comes to the death penalty, we need not ask: “What would Jesus do?” We need only remind ourselves what Jesus has already done. It is high time to say a courageous and firm “no” to the death penalty.

The articles are available on Dr. Gregory Crofford’s personal blog <http://gregorycrofford.com/2011/05/15/is-the-death-penalty-christian-part-2/>

Scripture passages on ethics **Genesis 18:19**

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household

after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

**Exodus 18:21**

But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—

**Exodus. 20:16**

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

**Exodus 23:1**

Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.

**Exodus 23:7**

Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

**Deuteronomy 16:19-20**

Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow

justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD

your God is giving you.

**Deuteronomy 25:15-16**

You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. For the LORD your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly. **Leviticus 19:11**

Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.

**Leviticus 19:35**

Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity.

**Leviticus 25:** Principles of Jubilee

**Leviticus 25:14**

If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other.

Job 27:4

My lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit.

**Psalm 15**

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the

truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbour no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

**Psalm 24:3-5**

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.

**Psalm 51:6**

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

**Proverbs 4:23-27**

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

**Proverbs 6:12-15**

A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, who plots evil with deceit in his heart— he always stirs up dissension. Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy. **Proverbs 6:16-20**

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

**Proverbs 10:9**

The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.

**Proverbs 11:1,3**

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

**Proverbs 12:17**

A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.

**Proverbs 12:22**

The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.

**Proverbs 13:5**

The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace.

**Proverbs 14:5**

A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.

**Proverbs 16:8**

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.

**Proverbs 19:1**

Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse.

**Proverbs 19:5**

A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.

**Proverbs 21:3**

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

**Proverbs 21:15**

When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

**Proverbs 25:18**

Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbour.

**Isaiah 33:15-16**

He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil-this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.

**Isaiah 56:1**

This is what the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed." **Micah 6:8**

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

**Zechariah 7:9**

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another."

**Matthew 20:1-16:** Parable of the Complaining Workers

**Luke 3:12-13**

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

**Luke 12: 13-21**: Parable of the Rich Fool

**Luke 16:1-13:** Parable of the Unrighteous Steward

**Luke 16:10**

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

**Acts 24:16**

I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

**Romans 9:1**

I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the

Holy Spirit

**Romans 12:17**

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

**1 Corinthians 13:6**

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

**2 Corinthians 4:1-2**

Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the

sight of God.

**2 Corinthians 8:21**

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

**2 Corinthians 7:2**

Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one.

**Ephesians 4:14-16**

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. **Philippians 4:8**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

**Colossians 3:9-10**

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-6**

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.

**1 Timothy 3:8-9**

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

**Titus 1:7**

Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

**Hebrews 13:17-18**

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.

**1Peter 2:12**

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

**2 Peter 2:1-3**

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

**1 Peter 3:10-12**

Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

**1 Peter 3:16**

Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

**1 John 1:8-10**

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

**1 John 2:20-21**

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

**Revelation 21:23-27**

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.



Choose 5 scriptures that are most meaningful to you in their message on ethics (see Appendix 1 for a list).For each of these scriptures, explain:

1. How it is illustrated (or not) in your society.
2. How it is illustrated (or not) in your own life.
3. What could you to make these teachings more central you your society and your own life?

# UCC 204 CHRISTIAN ETHICS GLOSSARY

1. Philosophy: “the search for a comprehensive view of nature, an attempt at a universal explanation of things.” (Oniango,1994, p 1)
2. Metaphysics: deals with the question of reality.
3. Epistemology: it is the study of methods of acquiring knowledge.
4. Axiology: is the systematic study of values.
5. Logic: “the science or art of reasoning as applied to a department of knowledge.” (Oniango, 1994, 39).
6. Worldview: “framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it.” James H. Olthius
7. Ethics: A disciplined reflection on the formation of a healthy character and its relationship to virtuous action.
8. Christian Ethics: “critical evaluation of human conduct from a Christian perspective”. Roger H. Crook
9. Grace: the help that God gives people to know and live more truthful, holy, and virtuous lives in a manner directed ultimately toward union with God. (William C. Mattison III)
10. Means of Grace: Ways in which God mediates his grace to us or simply outward signs of inward grace.
11. Morality: the end result of moral deliberation.
12. Descriptive ethics: this is ethics concerned with studying human behaviour without placing moral judgments on the behaviours.
13. Prescriptive ethics: this is ethics that is concerned with prescribing human behaviour, in other words what humans ought to do.
14. Consequentialism: an ethical theory that bases the rightness or wrongness of action sorely based on the consequences of performing it.
15. Egoism: A type of consequentialist theory that makes decisions based on impact of that decision on the person making it.
16. Utilitarianism: A type of consequentialist theory that makes decisions based on the impact of that decision on many people. Greatest good for the greatest number of people.
17. Situation Ethics: An ethical theory that considers only one absolute namely love. Actions are judged on whether or not they are loving actions.
18. Deontology: A rule based ethical theory.
19. Behaviourism: Our actions are just predispositions to behave in certain ways as the result of physical causes.
20. Absolutism: A view that hold that there are absolutes upon which moral decisions are based.
21. Relativism: The belief that there is no moral truth that applies to all people at all times.
22. Cultural Relativism: says it is not each person, but each person’s culture, that is the standard by which actions are to be measured.
23. Conflicting Absolutism: A view that says that absolutes conflict with one another and one must choose a lesser evil in a conflicting situation and one is guilty whichever choice one makes.
24. Non Conflicting Absolutism: Argues that absolutes never conflict with each other, The conflicts are only apparent, not real. It also says that one must choose a third alternative in a seemingly conflicting situation.
25. Graded/Hierachical Absolutism: A view that holds that absolutes conflict with one another and one must determine which obligation has greater weight and act accordingly, there is no culpability if one makes a choice that has greater weight.
26. Teleological Ethics: it is concerned about the end of an action and from a Christian perspective we trace that to the purpose giver God. Actions are judged right if they bring glory and honour to God.
27. Church of the Nazarene: is an [evangelical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelicalism) [Christian denomination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination) that emerged from the 19th-century[Holiness movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holiness_movement) in North America. With its members colloquially referred to as Nazarenes, it is the largest [Wesleyan-holiness denomination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyanism) in the world.
28. Wesleyan Quadrilateral:  is a methodology for [theological reflection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_theology) that is credited to [John Wesley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley), leader of the [Methodist movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodism) in the late 18th Century. The term itself was coined by 20th century [American Methodist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Methodist_Church) scholar [Albert C. Outler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_C._Outler), it consists of Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience.
29. Secular: simply means not religious
30. Secularism: is the term used to define the state of society when a secular or non-religious understanding of reality is pervasive.
31. Secular Ethics: Formulation of a rational basis for moral decision-making that makes no recourse to God or divinity of any kind.
32. Character/Virtue: is the predisposition to do good, an internal motivation that not only does the right but also loves what is right.
33. Vice: is the predisposition to do evil, or the bad character traits.
34. Cardinal Virtues: the four virtues in this list are Justice, Courage, Temperance, Prudence
35. Theological Virtues: Thomas Aquinas termed these three theological virtues and they are faith, hope and love
36. Applied Ethics: is the philosophical examination, from a moral standpoint, of particular issues in private and public life that are matters of moral judgment. It is thus the attempts to use philosophical methods to identify the morally correct course of action in various fields of human life such as [abortion](http://www.iep.utm.edu/abortion), infanticide, [animal rights](http://www.iep.utm.edu/anim-eth),[environmental concerns](http://www.iep.utm.edu/envi-eth), [homosexuality](http://www.iep.utm.edu/sexualit), [capital punishment](http://www.iep.utm.edu/punishme), or nuclear [war](http://www.iep.utm.edu/war).
37. Abortion: is the termination of [pregnancy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pregnancy_(mammals)) by the removal or expulsion from the [uterus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uterus) of a [fetus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fetus) or [embryo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embryo) before [viability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fetal_viability).
38. Euthanasia: (from [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language): εὐθανασία; "good death": εὖ, *eu*; "well" or "good" – θάνατος, *thanatos*; "death") refers to the practice of intentionally ending a life in order to relieve [pain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pain) and [suffering](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffering).
39. Corruption: In [philosophical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy), [theological](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theology), or [moral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) discussions, corruption is [spiritual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirtuality) or [moral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral) [impurity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impurity) or deviation from an [ideal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideal_(ethics)). Corruption may include many activities including [bribery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bribery) and [embezzlement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embezzlement). [Government, or 'political', corruption](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_corruption) occurs when an office-holder or other governmental employee acts in an official capacity for personal gain.
40. Reproductive Technologies: encompasses all current and anticipated uses of technology in human and animal [reproduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reproduction), including [assisted reproductive technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assisted_reproductive_technology), [contraception](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contraception) and others.
41. Capital Punishment:  or the death penalty is a legal process whereby a person is put to death by the [state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(polity)) as a punishment for a crime.