

Christian Worldview and Apologetics

III. How Ought We To Behave? (Ethics)

- Asks, “How ought we to live our lives?” What is “the good?” What is the basis for morality?” These are not settled questions among ethicists and philosophers.
- Christians and non-Christians disagree on many ethical questions
 - Fox program on results of new sex survey
 - Paul Kurtz called Margaret Sanger a hero in American history and said that she led an ethical life even though she rejected biblical morality. Sanger was the founder of Planned Parenthood, an early champion of birth control, a committed Darwinist, and a promoter of eugenics. She advocated the removal of all moral restraints in favor of what she deemed was healthy sexual expression. Sanger wrote, “Through sex, mankind will attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world, and light up the only path to an earthly paradise.” (Total Truth, 143).

A. The Futility of Autonomous Ethics

- (Most of this material is dependent on the work of John Frame, especially his forthcoming work, “The Doctrine of the Christian Life”.)

1. Three Principles in Ethics

- **Deontological:** From the Greek verb translated “owe, ought, or must.” A good act is a response to duty, even at the price of self-sacrifice. Emphasizes duty and obligation.
 - Obligations are transcendent and have universal application
 - Obligations seem “godlike”

- Not established by observation
- **Teleological:** From the Greek word translated “goal, end.” A good act maximizes the happiness of living creatures. “A good act does good.”
 - The “good” is inferred from observation of consequences
 - Often the choice of empiricists
- **Existential:** A good act comes from a good inner character
 - It’s important not to be hypocritical

2. Non-Christian Worldviews Hold These Principles in Tension

- “The **teleological** principle says that ethical action leads to happiness. Yet the **deontological** principle says that in order to do our duty, we must sometimes sacrifice our happiness.”
- “The **teleological** and **deontological** principles say that our ethical responsibility is objective, grounded outside ourselves. But the **existential** suggests that our goodness is inward, and therefore subjective.”
- “The **deontological** principle says that we are subject to a moral law that declares our duty, apart from inclination or the consequences of our acts. But the **teleological** and **existential** principles measure our goodness by the consequences of our actions and our inner life, respectively.”
- “The **existential** principle says that it’s wrong to measure a person’s goodness by anything external to himself. But the teleological and **deontological** principles say that one may measure goodness by the consequences and norms of actions, respectively.”
- Consequently, non-Christian thinkers tend to polarize to one of these three principles; but this brings serious criticisms as well.

- **Deontological** Problems: How do you prove that such universal obligations exist? Also, how do universal moral obligations apply to the real world—**too abstract**? Do universal obligations make sense without God?
- **Teleological** Problems: Whose happiness should determine what is good? How do you measure or quantify “units” of happiness in order to determine what is good—**requires superhuman knowledge**? If teleological ethics is true, then there are no moral principles that are universal in their application and unchangeable in their duration. The teleological principle itself needs a transcendent norm to be obligatory.
- **Existential** Problems: Cannot avoid making reference to norms and situations.

3. Non-Christian Worldviews Cannot Ground Absolute Moral Obligation: Reality is ultimately impersonal rather than personal

B. The Resolution of Divine Revelation

1. Christians Depend on Revelation for Ethics

- Natural Revelation

Romans 2:12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13 for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

- Special Revelation

2. The Christian Worldview Harmonizes the Three Principles of Ethics

- “In general, ethical judgment always involves the application of a norm to a situation by a person”
 - Norm (criteria or standards): God’s Law = Love
 - Situation (facts of our experience): God’s Law applied with our chief end in view: Glorify God and Enjoy Him
 - Existential: God’s Law internalized
- “Christians can gladly accept all three of the principles, insights or intuitions listed above. The God of Scripture is the author of the situation, the Word, and the moral self, so that the three are fully consistent with one another. He ordains history so that people will find their ultimate blessing in doing their duty. He has made us in his image, so that our greatest personal fulfillment occurs in seeking his glory in history, as his word declares.”

3. The Christian Worldview Grounds Absolute Moral Obligation

- God is an absolute Person whose character is the standard of goodness
- God reveals His character—and the moral obligation grounded in Him—through His Word
- The good life is imitation of God’s character:

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."