

Relativism and Situation Ethics

God's perfect creation

⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart – Genesis 6

God did perfect job in creation, yet still disappointed people who grumble daily

Two 'moral codes' are behind every sin

Relativism:

basis of moral judgment is relative; differs according to events, persons, etc.

Situation ethics:

circumstances determine conduct; end justifies means; based on naturalism.

In both: religion does not depend on supernatural experience / divine revelation, etc., but rather on current 'wisdom'

Joseph Fletcher

“Jesus was a simple Jewish peasant. He had no more philosophical sophistication than a guinea pig, and I don’t turn to Jesus for philosophical sophistication.”

Q: “In situational ethics, what authority does the Bible have?”

A: “None, unless the situationist is a Christian.”

I. Naturalism offers no
standard to govern conduct

How can limited intelligence know long-term consequences of actions based on situational judgments?

- In trouble with boss...
 - Tell truth? Lose job? Better job? Worse?
 - Lie? Detected? Fired? Others find out?
- If we can't determine outcome of 'little things,' what if we convince all of society they are not guilty for their sins? ...
 - Indian raid...
 - Jesus – Jn.8:44

The truth about lying

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” – Jn.8:44

- Contrast: “Lying could be more Christian than telling the truth” – Fletcher
- Postmodern U.S.: “no moral absolutes” – Barna

Naturalism cannot establish ethics

Three Hurdles:

1. Definition: 'Being kind, gentle, helpful, and tolerant...is good.' How to know?
 - Epicurus: 'That which is good promotes human happiness.'
 - Moral blank check!!
 - One is happy picking violets...
 - Another enjoys killing people...

What cruelty cannot be justified by this rule?

1. Definition

2. Motivation: Why do good?

- **'Should / ought'**: where do these come from?
 - If man is result of blind chances of amoral universe...where do ethics come from??
 - E.g.: keeping promises.

1. Definition

2. Motivation: why do good?

3. Comparison

- **Only after** crossing first two hurdles can naturalism pretend to offer an ethical system ... much less claim superiority to other systems.

A test:

- “God authorized killing – 1 Sm.15.”
- If it made Saul happy what’s wrong with it?
(Epicurus)

Major premise:

If it brings
happiness,
it is good.

Minor premise:

Killing Amal.
brings
happiness.

Conclusion:

Killing
Amalekites
is good.

- But Saul also killed Gibeonites – 2 Sm.21
 - Good or bad?
 - What determines it? God’s word...

Nuremberg trials: how bad does it get when God is ignored? Nazi defense –

1. Our society had its own needs and desires.
2. Our society made its own laws, based on those needs and desires.
3. Our society commanded us to exterminate the Jews.
4. It would have been wrong for us not to obey.
5. Now you try to condemn us by the law of an alien society – a value system which had nothing to do with the Nazis.

Nazi defense = ethical relativity

- **Nazis:** actions are morally right (murders ... torture...).
- If Hitler had lived ... should he have been set free??
- **Jews: ethical accountability** – Nazis are morally wrong
- Are both right??? Matter of opinion?
- Robert Jackson, closing address made appeal to a higher law which ‘transcends the provincial and transient...’

I. Naturalism offers no standard to govern conduct

II. Bible claims to be our standard

Bible's claims are God's claims

- Mt.5:19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven
- Jn.8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Bible's claims are God's claims

- Ga.6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.
 - Rule: rod, measuring rule, standard.

Bible's claims are God's claims

- 2 Th.2:10-12 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
 - [-----] ¹Length? ²Standard?
 - 2 Tim.3:16-17

I. Naturalism offers no standard to govern conduct

II. Bible claims to be our standard

III. What does Bible say
about situation ethics?

When God's way "doesn't work" unbelievers seek their own way

- Hosea 10¹³ You have plowed wickedness;
You have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the
fruit of lies, Because you trusted in your own
way, In the multitude of your mighty men.
- Prov.14¹² There is a way that seems right to
a man, But its end is the way of death.

Illustrated

- 1 Sm.13:7-9, King Saul
 - God's way was not working
 - Situation called for 'Saul's way'
 - How did God view this course?

Illustrated

- 1 Sm.15:...11ff, Saul blamed others
 - Moderns blame
 - Parents...
 - Society...
 - Friends...
 - Everyone but 'self'

Illustrated

- 2 Sm.6:3ff, sincere; good intentions
 - But: good intentions did not transform sinful practice in acceptable one
 - A costly 'mistake'

Illustrated

- 2 Sm.11-12
 - Fletcher argued as if there is no difference in 'love' and 'lust.'
 - What did God say?

Illustrated

- Mt.26:69ff
 - Wasn't it good for Peter to deny Jesus out of sense of self-preservation?
 - He taught many people because he lived...
- Ro.3:...5-8

8: And why not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

I. Naturalism offers no standard to govern conduct

II. Bible claims to be our standard

III. What does Bible say about situation ethics?

IV. Some practice situation
ethics religiously

Baptism

- Mk.16¹⁶ ...He who believes and is baptized will be saved.
 - Monkey kills man on way to be baptized...
 - “Surely he is saved . . . without baptism”
 - Monkey kills man on way to mourner’s bench...

Worship

- Jn.4²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth
 - “Our organ / choir makes me feel so good, it could not be wrong”
 - Does God get a vote?

Attendance

- Hb.10²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more
- Ox in the ditch overrides spiritual obligations

Morals

- Rv.21:8
 - Abortion
 - Does baby get a vote?
 - “Everyone is doing it” (Gn.6)
 - “Natural to sow wild oats” (Prov.5-7)
 - “Wrong to judge, Mt.7:1” [this is judging]
 - If absolute, no Judgment day
 - Jn.7:24
 - 1 Co.5:3

'New morality' is neither new nor moral

- Situation Ethics = end justifies the means
- "What would you do if asked to reveal hiding place of victim so enemy can kill him?"
 - Could not justify lying – it is sin.
 - If I lie, I must repent.
 - Situationist – 'you did nothing wrong.'
 - Sarah, Gn.18
 - Old prophet, 1 K.13
 - Peter, Mt.26

A 'lesser evil' is still an evil

- Prov.28⁴ Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But such as keep the law contend with them.
- 1 John 1⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.