

PASTORAL AND SOCIAL ETHICS

Lecture Outline, part 1: Preface; Introduction and Apologetic Orientation

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Preface: Importance of Christian Ethics

1. A covenant servant of the Lord is one who has the word of God and does it, John 14:21.
2. All theological issues are questions of obedience and disobedience: What doctrine faithfully communicates the truth?
3. The purpose of Scripture is ethical: Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16-17
4. Importance for our witness to the world: the obvious bankruptcy of non-Christian ethics, modernist ethics, in the face of great cultural preoccupation with ethical issues; witness of life, Matthew 5:16.

Part One: Introduction and Apologetic Orientation

- I. Terminology (Not a matter of life and death, but important for clarity of communication)
 - A. Ethics and Theological Encyclopedia
 1. Knowledge of God: A personal, covenantal relationship with God, involving awareness of His self-revelation, an obedient or disobedient response to that revelation, and the divine blessing or curse upon that response. [Biblical references in DKG connecting knowledge with the ethical dimension]
 2. Doctrine (*didache, didaskalia*): The word of God “in use” to create and deepen that relationship. Application of the word to all of life. The point of this is not to emphasize practice at the expense of theory, but to bring theory and practice together as different forms of application.
 - a. Theory is not the basis of practice.
 - b. Theory, as opposed to practice, is not theology par excellence.
 3. Theology: Doctrine.
 4. Systematic Theology: Approach to theology that asks and answers questions of the form “What does the whole Bible teach us about x?” As a theological discipline, it involves application of Scripture, of both theoretical and practical sorts.
 5. Biblical Theology: Approach to theology that asks and answers questions of the form “What can we learn about x from the History of Redemption?” Application of the history of redemption to the Christian life.
 6. Exegetical Theology: Approach to theology that asks “What can we learn about x from this passage?” Also applicatory.
 7. Ethics: Theology, viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts, and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not.

- a. Not a branch of theology, but equivalent to theology; for all theology answers ethical questions. Often, however, theologians fail to emphasize adequately the ethical dimensions of their work. Hence, ethics as a distinct discipline. But it's best not to think of it as distinct.
- b. Alternative Definitions: "Study of right and wrong," etc.
 - i. Advantage: Such definitions include non-Christian ethical systems within their scope. It does seem odd to say, as our definition implies, that Plato and Aristotle were not teachers of ethics.
 - ii. Reply: There is nothing wrong with using a broader definition of ethics in certain contexts. For this course, however, I prefer a definition which sets forth the essential nature of Christian ethics, and which exposes non-Christian substitutes as debased, not only in content, but in method and general concept as well.

B. Value-terms

1. Moral, ethical

- a. These terms will be used synonymously in this course.
- b. Each may be used in two ways:
 - i. Descriptively: Pertaining to the discipline of ethics ("That is an ethical, not an aesthetic question.")
 - ii. Normatively: Conforming to ethical norms ("There is an ethical politician.")

2. Immoral: Ethically bad or wrong.

3. Amoral:

- a. Without moral standards.
- b. Unwilling to think about moral issues in making life decisions.

4. Non-moral: Not a question of morality.

5. Moralistic: a very ambiguous term, which I shall almost never use. It tends to have little purpose other than expressing disdain.

- a. Trite or provincial in ethical attitude.
- b. Self-righteous.
- c. Legalistic: putting law in the role reserved for grace. (Legalism is also a term that is often used imprecisely and as a club to beat up on others who merely want to express a positive appreciation for God's law.)
- d. Putting too much emphasis on ethics or on the law.
- e. Preaching ethics without adequate appreciation for the History of Redemption.
- f. Failing to follow the methodology of biblico-theological extremists (as expressed in publications such as the *Kerux* journal). Such extremists teach that
 - i. In preaching or teaching you should never use a biblical character as a moral example.

A) But in my judgment Scripture often intends its characters to be exemplary, as in Heb. 11.

- B) We must, of course, remember that every biblical character save Jesus is fallible, not exemplary in every respect.
 - ii. You should never try to “apply” a biblical text to ethical issues, but should let the Holy Spirit do that in the hearts of your hearers.
 - A) But Scripture’s purpose is application, John 20:31, 2 Tim. 3:16-17.
 - B) All biblical writers and preachers seek to apply biblical teaching to the lives of their hearers. How can we exclude this emphasis?
 - C) All preaching and teaching necessarily is application, whether it be relatively theoretical or relatively practical. Its purpose is to answer human questions, to meet human need.
 - D) The goal of the preacher should be the goal of the Holy Spirit. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together.
 - iii. You should always make soteriology and eschatology the primary themes of your teaching, whatever the text.
 - A) In my judgment, this approach leads to many arbitrary, even bizarre interpretations of Bible texts.
 - B) Preachers who follow this method also tend to miss many other themes of Scripture, particularly the ethical ones.
6. Value: Quality of worth or merit
- a. There are many kinds of value: economic, aesthetic, etc., of which ethical value is one.
 - b. Thus ethics is often regarded as a subdivision of value-theory.
7. Virtue
- a. Worth, value, ground of praise for someone or something.
 - b. Non-moral virtues: efficiency, skill, talent, etc.
 - c. Moral virtue: morally good character.
 - d. “Virtue ethics:” focusing on the virtues, rather than norms or consequences.
8. Good: General adjective of commendation
- a. Non-moral uses — to refer to non-moral values or virtues
 - i. “Teleological goodness”: good for something; e.g., “good hammer”.
 - ii. Skillful, e.g., “good plumber”
 - a) Although occasionally such an expression will carry a moral nuance, it is usually assumed that one can be a good plumber, teacher, businessman, etc., without being morally good.)
 - b) Of course, moral issues affect skills. A plumber who gets drunk on the job will not be a good plumber even in the non-moral sense.
 - iii. It is important to recognize analogies between moral and non-moral goodness
 - a) In both cases, God determines the grounds of commendation and the means of achieving it.
 - b) Both kinds of goodness are teleological in a broad sense: even moral goodness is “good for” the kingdom of God.

- c) Both kinds of goodness involve capacities or skills.
 - d) Even non-moral values and virtues should be used to the glory of God.
So ethical and non-ethical goodnesses interact in important ways.
 - b. Moral goodness: A human act, attitude or person receiving God's blessing.
9. Right
- a. Often roughly synonymous with "good": a "right" act is a "good" act.
 - b. Tends to be more legally colored than "good": "righteousness" and "justice" are close synonyms.
 - c. "Right" tends to be used mostly of actions, "good" of persons or attitudes.
 - d. Some philosophers make arbitrary distinctions between these terms for their own purposes.
10. Ought: Verb of obligation. Indicates an action mandated by an ethical norm.
11. Obligation, Duty: Something we ought to do.
- a. Prima facie duties: falling under a general norm that has some exceptions. ("Thou shalt not kill" allows for killing in just war and proper capital punishment.).
 - b. Actual: Our actual obligation, taking all exceptions into account.
 - c. Present: duties we must perform at this moment.
 - d. Eventual: duties that can be postponed, but are nevertheless mandatory.
12. Justice
- a. Moral rightness.
 - b. Fairness, equality.
 - i. Conservatism: equality of opportunity.
 - ii. Liberalism: equality of condition.
13. Ethical Justification: reasoning attempting to show the rightness of an action.
- a. Subjective: the reason we believe our action is justified.
 - b. Objective: the reason why it is actually justified (in the sight of God).
 - i. Prima facie
 - ii. Actual
14. Levels of Ethical Justification
- a. Obligation, duty, obedience to command (*must, ought, should*).
 - i. Corporate
 - ii. Individual
 - b. Prohibition: a negative obligation.
 - c. Permission
 - i. By approved biblical example.
 - ii. By express permission (eating meat).
 - iii. By biblical silence (when the act is not in a category that Scripture declares to be sinful).
 - d. Commendation, praise
 - i. As David's mighty men, the widow's mite, the sharing of Acts 4.

- ii. Are such acts obligatory?
 - A. Scripture does not seem to command them for every person. Nobody should be charged with sin for failure to perform acts of moral heroism.
 - B. Yet the ultimate standard of obligation is the self-giving love of Christ (John 13:34-35).
 - C. Do you doubt that David's mighty men *felt* an obligation?
 - D. We should be thankful that we are saved by grace, rather than by carrying out God's ethical standards!

C. The Triangle (Structure of Part One of the course)

1. The "Lordship Attributes": Characteristics of God that define His covenant relationship to us. (Note "Yahweh" treaty pattern).
 - a. Control: Works all things according to the counsel of His will.
 - b. Authority: His word is unconditionally binding.
 - c. Covenant solidarity or presence: "I will be with you;" "I will be your God and you shall be My people." God commits Himself to us so that we live in His presence. Results in blessing or judgment.
2. Lordship and Ethics: How does God govern our ethical life?
 - a. Control: He plans history so as to determine what means are conducive to His ultimate purposes, our ultimate blessing.
 - b. Authority: He speaks to give us the norms for behavior.
 - c. Presence:
 - i. He, Himself, is our example of righteousness.
 - ii. It is His presence by which we gain the power to become righteous.
3. Necessary and Sufficient Criteria of Good Works
 "Problem of the virtuous pagan": Non-Christians do conform to the law externally at times. Why does Scripture declare them to be depraved? Because they altogether lack the following (WCF 16.7):
 - a. Right Goal: The glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:23; Matthew 6:33).
 - b. Right Standard: Sin is lawlessness, and obedience is the criterion of discipleship. John 14:21, 1 John 3:4, etc.
 - c. Right Motive: I Corinthians 13; Romans 14:23 [faith / love], by grace, by God's Spirit.
4. Factors in Ethical Judgment: World, Law, Self [Consider yourself in a counseling session]
 - a. What is the situation, the problem?
 - b. What does God's Word say?
 - c. What is my attitude? Do I have the maturity to make the right decision, the spiritual capacity to apply God's Word to the situation?
5. Ethical teaching of Scripture itself
 - a. Appeal to the events of redemption, imitation of God, Jesus, and others: John 13:34-35, Rom. 6:1-23, 13:11-12, 1 Cor. 6:20, 10:11, 15:58, Eph. 4:1-5, 25,

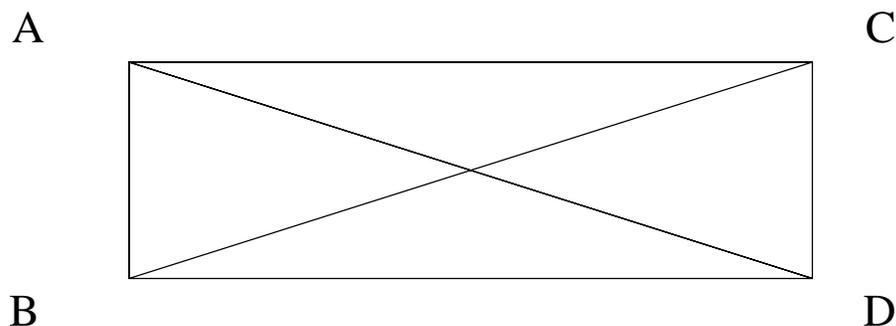
- 32, 5:25-33, Phil. 2:1-11, Col. 3:1-4 (and judgment, 2 Cor. 5:10), Heb. 12:1-28, 1 Pet. 2:1-3, 4:1-6
- b. Appeal to commandments (of the OT law, Jesus, and Paul): Matt. 19:18-19, Luke 10:26f, John 14:15, 21, Rom. 12:19, 13:8ff, 1 Cor. 5:13, 14:34, 2 Cor. 8:15, 9:9, Eph. 4:20-24, 6:1-3, 1 Thess. 4:1, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Tit. 2:1, James 1:22-25, 2:8-13, 1 Pet. 1:16, 1 John 2:3-5, 3:24, 5:2
 - c. Appeal to the Spirit, who gives new life within: Rom. 8:1-17, Gal. 5:16-18, 22-26, Eph. 5:8-21.
6. Perspectives on the Discipline of Ethics: In general, ethical judgment always involves the **application** of a **norm** to a **situation** by a **person**. [May be useful to structure your paper like this]. One can look at the discipline from any of these three vantage points.
- a. The Situational Perspective (*teleological*)
 - i. Focuses on nature and history as under God's control.
 - ii. Notes relations of means to ends in God's economy.
 - iii. Asks "What are the best means of achieving God's purposes?"
 - b. The Normative Perspective (*deontological*)
 - i. Focuses on Scripture as the source of ethical norms.
 - ii. Asks "What does Scripture teach about this question?"
 - c. The Existential Perspective (*existential*)
 - i. Focuses on the self in confrontation with God.
 - ii. Asks "How must I change if I am to be holy?"
7. Interdependence of the Perspectives
- a. The "situation" includes Scripture and the self. You don't truly understand the situation until you see it in the light of Scripture and until you see its bearing upon yourself.
 - b. The "norm" must be applied to the situation and to the self, or else it is not adequately understood. (No difference between "understanding" and "application".) Scripture is rightly seen only when it is properly related to the world and to the self.
 - i. Does someone understand the meaning of the eighth commandment if he does not know how the commandment applies to embezzling or tax evasion? Not adequately, at any rate.
 - ii. Every attempt to "understand" or to "find meaning" is an attempt to answer some question or meet some need.
 - c. The "self" cannot be rightly understood until seen in the context of its situation and rightly interpreted by the Word of God.
 - d. Each perspective, then, necessitates consideration of the others. None of the perspectives can be treated adequately unless the others also are considered. Thus, each "includes" both of the others.
 - e. Each perspective, then, is a way of viewing the whole of ethics.

- f. The faithfulness and sovereignty of God insure that the three foci will be consistent with one another. A right interpretation of the situation will be consistent with a right interpretation of the law and of the self, etc.
 - g. Though the perspectives are ultimately identical, they do view the whole from genuinely different angles. Thus they provide us with checks and balances.
 - i. Wrong interpretations of the situation can be corrected by right interpretations of the law.
 - ii. But the opposite is also true. Wrong interpretations-applications of the law can be corrected by right interpretations of the situation.
 - iii. This is not relativism, but only a reminder about the importance of right interpretation. The law of God is our absolute norm, but it must be rightly understood. We are not responsible to do what we falsely imagine Scripture to teach.
8. Apologetic Use of the Perspectives
- a. Non-Christian ethical systems tend to lose the balance of the three perspectives. Only Christian ethics brings these together in a mutually enriching manner.
 - i. Teleological ethics: (utilitarianism) absolutizes a wrongly conceived situational perspective.
 - A) Tries to derive norms from empirical study of the situation.
 - B) But Hume's question is important: how do you get from "is" to "ought?" The naturalistic fallacy (Moore).
 - ii. Deontological ethics: (e.g., Kant) denies the situational perspective in the interest of a wrongly conceived normative perspective (and existential).
 - iii. Existentialist ethics: Absolutizes a misconceived existential perspective and virtually denies the other two.
 - b. Contrary to some critics, Reformed ethics need not be a mere "ethics of law." The genius of the Reformed faith is its view of the comprehensiveness of God's covenant lordship. This view implies a broad vision of the many elements of the ethical situation, of the many factors influencing ethical judgment and action.
 - i. A strong view of biblical authority, clarity, and sufficiency (normative).
 - ii. A strong view of general revelation (situational).
 - iii. A strong view of the importance of self-knowledge (existential). Calvin's *Institutes*, 1.1.1
 - c. Reformed ethics can account for all the nuances, the subtleties involved in ethical decision-making, without compromising the straightforward, simple unity of our obligation, namely obedience to God as He has revealed His will in Scripture. Unity and diversity.

D. The Square

1. Purpose

- a. Pedagogical device to explain and illustrate Van Til's teaching concerning the dialectical structure of non-Christian thought: one / many; rationalist / irrationalist; determinism / autonomy, etc.
- b. Another way to summarize the basic character of Christian ethics in contrast with non-Christian systems.



2. Basic Structure

- a. Left side (A, B) represents Christian views.
- b. Right side (C, D) represents non-Christian views.
- c. Upper corners (A, C) represent views of transcendence—i.e., recognition that the source of moral obligation is in some sense “beyond” man.
- d. Lower corners (B, D) represent views of immanence—i.e., recognition that moral norms are in some sense relevant to, involved with human life.
- e. Diagonal line AD represents direct contradiction between the Christian view of transcendence and the non-Christian view of immanence. Similarly BC, *mutatis mutandis*.
- f. Line AC represents formal similarity between the two views of transcendence: they can be expressed in similar language, even fortified with the same Scripture texts. Same for line BD in respect to immanence.
- g. Line AB concerns the relation of assertions within the Christian system, and CD same for the non-Christian assertions. The latter are mutually contradictory, while the former are not, mysterious as their relationships may be.

3. Interpretation

a. Transcendence and Immanence

- i. Christian transcendence: The God of Scripture is Lord over all factors in the moral situation. He is the controller of situations, the supreme moral authority, the ultimate cause of all human righteousness.
- ii. Christian immanence: This Lord is covenantally with us. Thus he is deeply involved in all created events, he reveals his law clearly, he works in us and among us to perfect holiness in his people.
- iii. Non-Christian transcendence: The non-Christian either denies that there is any God or else deifies something created. The former alternative can be

stated as a sort of belief in transcendence: no final answers in morality are available to man; they are entirely beyond us.

- iv. Non-Christian immanence: The latter of the alternatives noted under iii. can be stated as a belief in immanence: the truth is available to us, because we ourselves (or something in creation) are the final authority, the final controllers of moral situations, etc.
- v. Compare 3a with 2 to see how the various statements are related.
 - a) AD contradictory: God is Lord / something created is Lord.
 - b) BC contradictory: God reveals his will clearly / he does not.
 - c) AC formal similarity: both speak of ethics as sublime, beyond human devising, frustrating all human attempts at manipulating, modifying, using to selfish advantage.
 - d) BD formal similarity: both speak of ethics as relevant, practical, as engaging human responsibility.
 - e) Note inconsistency of CD, harmony of AB.
- b. Irrationalism and Rationalism: The square may also be interpreted from a more epistemological point of view. Epistemology is also an important area for ethical discussion. Epistemology may be regarded as an aspect of ethics (a study of what we ought to believe, granted certain data—cf., “Doctrine of the Knowledge of God”), or *vice versa* (ethics in that case being one particular area of knowledge).
 - i. Christian irrationalism (A on diagram): God, not man, determines truth and falsehood. Thus our knowledge is always subordinate to his authority. Thus man’s reason is limited in what it can achieve; it can never be the ultimate source of truth.
 - ii. Christian rationalism (B): But God has spoken to us and given us a sure and certain knowledge upon which we may and must base all the decisions of our lives.
 - iii. Non-Christian irrationalism (C): There is no sure and certain knowledge; no final truth.
 - iv. Non-Christian rationalism (D): There is a sure and certain knowledge, because we (or something else in creation) are the ultimate judge of truth.
- c. Absoluteness and Relevance of the Moral Law:
 - i. Christian absoluteness (A): The moral law is absolutely binding because God is its author.
 - ii. Christian relevance (B): The law is relevant to human life because God, the author of both, has fitted human life to suit his standards, has revealed those standards clearly, and has given us the ability to apply them.
 - iii. Non-Christian absoluteness (C): The law is binding insofar as it is unknowable, transcendent. (Note later examples in Plato, Kant.)
 - iv. Non-Christian relevance (D): The law is relevant insofar as it is derived from creation and therefore non-absolute.
- d. Sovereignty and Responsibility:

- i. Christian sovereignty (A): God is sovereign as creator and controller of all aspects of moral life.
 - ii. Christian responsibility (B): Because God is sovereign, he rightly imposes upon us the responsibility to obey, and he sovereignly uses our choices as significant, meaningful historical forces.
 - iii. Non-Christian sovereignty (C): Ultimately the world is governed by fate or chance, and so human choices don't make any difference.
 - iv. Non-Christian responsibility (D): We are responsible because we are the creators of morality. We create our own moral meaning. There is no sovereignty over us.
- e. Objectivity and Inwardness:
- i. Christian objectivity (A): The meaning of the moral law does not depend on my response to it, but wholly upon God's word.
 - ii. Christian inwardness (B): The law is revealed in my inmost being and demands obedience at the most profound level—obedience from the heart.
 - iii. Non-Christian objectivity (C): The good is so far beyond us that it can never be known, described or attained.
 - iv. Non-Christian inwardness (D): Since we are the ultimate judges of moral good, there can be no standard external to ourselves.
- f. Humility and Hope:
- i. Christian humility (A): We have no claim on God in ourselves. As creatures and sinners we do not deserve blessing.
 - ii. Christian hope (B): But God has redeemed us by his sovereign grace. Blessing is assured in Christ.
 - iii. Non-Christian humility (C) [despair]: There is no redemption, no hope of ever achieving blessing.
 - iv. Non-Christian hope (D) [pride]: We can save ourselves through our own efforts.
- g. Freedom and authority in society:
- i. Christian freedom (A): Since God is the only ultimate ruler, all human authority is limited. The sovereignty of God thus guarantees human freedom.
 - ii. Christian authority (B): Yet God has clearly revealed that kings, fathers, ministers, etc. have genuine, though limited, authority in their respective spheres.
 - iii. Non-Christian freedom (C): Since there is no final truth, I owe allegiance to no one (anarchy).
 - iv. Non-Christian authority (D): Since we are the creators of moral obligation, we may demand absolute allegiance from others in all spheres of life (totalitarianism).

II. Survey of Non-Christian Ethical Systems

A. More Explicitly Religious

All non-Christian systems, even the purportedly secular ones, are religious in the sense of being governed by “basic commitment”. Some, however, are more explicitly religious than others, employing alleged revelations, liturgical rites, etc. These we consider here. Three themes appear particularly prominent:

1. Ethics Based on Impersonal Cosmic Law [Ancient Egyptian *maat*, Babylonian *me*, Greek *moira* or *ate* (fate), Confucian *tien* (heaven)].
 - a. The law is beyond gods and men. Both gods and men must look beyond themselves to ascertain the content of the law. In this sense, the law is transcendent and objective (cf. above).
 - b. In Confucian and some expressions of Greek religion, the law is powerful in its own right, working vengeance against those who defy it. In Egypt, Babylon, and some other Greek sources, there is more emphasis upon enforcement of the law by gods and human rulers.
 - c. In the latter two, and to some extent in the others, there is a tendency toward hierarchicalism—a chain of authorities from the law to the gods through various human authorities. The Egyptian Pharaoh is the link between heaven and earth, the absolute arbiter of right and wrong.
 - d. In general, the ethical precepts of these systems remind one of the Scriptural precepts; this is to be expected on the basis of Romans 1 and 2. However, “fate” is often something less than a distinctively moral force, and in some systems (Egypt, animism), the cosmic forces can be manipulated by men (magic) for their own selfish purposes. Relation between the moral law and these non-moral forces is unclear.
 - e. How do we get to know the law? Through human experts (the Pharaoh, above, c; the Confucian scholar). How do they know it? By observing its workings in human experience. In this sense the law is more immanent than transcendent. Formulation of it boils down to man’s analysis of his own experience.
 - f. Critique:
 - i. Autonomous analysis of experience will not yield precepts which are universal and necessary (i.e., ethically obligatory). Cf. above material on rationalism.
 - ii. Even if the universe is programmed to reward certain actions and punish others, why does this fact impose any obligation upon the individual? Why would it not be virtuous to struggle (even if vainly) against this impersonal tyranny?
 - iii. These systems tend toward authoritarianism because they have lost the balance between one and many found in Scripture.
 - iv. Summary: Not clear how this scheme furnishes an ethical norm, or how we can know it. The knowledge offered by human expertise provides only a relative norm, or one arbitrarily said to be absolute.
2. Ethics as a Quest for the Transethical

- a. This emphasis is particularly characteristic of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and ancient Gnosticism. Hinduism and Taoism also have strong elements of the first emphasis (Hindu, karma, caste, the Taoist way of nature) as do most all religions in their less sophisticated forms.
- b. This sort of thought is essentially monistic. i.e., it holds that ultimate reality is one, not many.
- c. The pluralities of our experience, the distinctions (including the distinction between good and evil) are ultimately illusory. On this principle, all elements of ethics in its normal sense are eliminated:
 - i. Normative perspective: the distinction between good and evil is ultimately illusory. Reality is beyond good and evil, transethical.
 - ii. Situational perspective: the world as experienced by the senses does not exist. History is an illusion. One seeks detachment from things, not a God-glorifying use of them.
 - iii. Existential perspective: the self also is illusion, and other selves are illusory as well. Thus the concepts of personal and social ethics are ultimately meaningless.
- d. Ethics enters as part of man's quest for union with the One. Right living is part of the discipline by which one escapes the continuous cycle of rebirth and achieves Nirvana, that union with the ultimate which is also characterized as annihilation.
 - i. Often this principle puts ethics on a thoroughly egoistic basis, though in some cases (e.g. Mahayana Buddhism) there are elements of altruism (the Buddha, about to achieve Nirvana, returns to the world to help others). It is not, however, clear in these systems why one ought to be altruistic.
 - ii. Though ethics plays an important role in these systems, it is ultimately negotiable. Our goal is to reach a state of mind in which ethical distinctions no longer have meaning.
- e. Ethical standards on these views:
 - i. To a great extent [as was the case with #1] the concrete norms resemble the laws of Scripture.
 - ii. The overall goal, however, in these religions, is detachment—from things, the world, other people. This theme contrasts sharply with the biblical teaching that love is the central commandment.
 - iii. The stress on detachment plus the exaltation of nature to the status of ultimate ethical authority (particularly in Taoism and Hinduism) often leads to a passive acceptance of natural and social evil.
 - iv. The vagueness of detachment as an overriding ethical norm is illustrated by the differences among Gnostics, who also held to a monistic worldview.
 - A) Some were ascetics (wishing to get free of the body and its wants),
 - B) Others libertines (feeling that what happens to the body is of little importance).

v. The sense of “oneness with nature” found in these religions has been praised by contemporary ecologists. However, the *laissez-faire* attitude toward nature is as dangerous as the grasping, exploitative attitude common in the West. India’s problems with disease, starvation, overpopulation are compounded by the attitudes of Hinduism toward cattle, insects, etc.

f. Summary

- i. Monism leads to an empty absolute—an ultimate reality with no rational or ethical character.
- ii. Ethics is subordinate to metaphysics. Man’s quest for metaphysical union with the One takes precedence over all ethical considerations. Salvation is metaphysical transcendence, not redemption from sin.
- iii. As such, there is no basis for ethical action or ground for ethical hope.

3. Ethics as Law Without Gospel

- a. All religions except Christianity are religions of works-righteousness, religions in which one seeks to gain stature through his good works. Even religions that resemble Christianity greatly in their view of God and Scripture (unlike those above) may be faulted in this area.
- b. Under this category we include non-Messianic Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, many cults, as well as the religions noted above.
- c. The principle of works righteousness feeds man’s pride on the one hand and his despair on the other. One either deceives himself into believing that he is keeping the commandments perfectly, or (with clearer self-understanding) he loses hope of ever meeting God’s standard.
- d. Having said all this, it must be recognized that Judaism, Islam and similar religions do often derive their ethics from (alleged) word-revelation of a personal God. In these and other ways they are influenced by Scripture.
 - i. However, denial of the Gospel of Christ drives a wide chasm between these and Christianity.
 - ii. The consequences of Unitarianism must also be noted:
 - a) The elimination of distinctions in God leads to a god without moral character (liberal Judaism and Christianity) in many cases.
 - b) The governance of God over the world is fatalistic, more mechanical than personal, in Islam. There is a tendency there to make God an abstract principle as in Eastern religions. Fatalism is devastating to moral responsibility.
 - c) Note also the tendency toward statism in Islam due to the primacy of the one over the many (Rushdoony, *The One and the Many*).

B. Less Explicitly Religious (“secular” ethics)

1. Major Tendencies

Ethical systems (Christian and non-Christian both) attempt to do justice to various concerns of which the following are prominent. Generally a thinker will try to incorporate more than one of them into his system. Although these matters are of

concern both to Christians and non-Christians, both being in contact with God's law, the non-Christian systems are inevitably unsuccessful in implementing these concerns without distortion and conflict.

- a. Deontological (focusing on the normative perspective)
 - i. The ethical norm must be transcendent, sublime
 - a) It must be beyond ourselves, not a mere expression of our self-interest. It must be capable of motivating self-sacrifice—the opposite of selfish concern.
 - b) It must not be derivable from mere sense-experience. Sense-experience can tell us facts, but from those facts alone no obligation may be derived. (The claim that facts imply obligation is sometimes called the “naturalistic fallacy”.) The basis of duty must come from somewhere “beyond”.
 - ii. The ethical norm must be authoritative, must bind us, must impose duty upon us. We must have no right to disobey. There is no excuse for disobedience. Else there is no ethical norm, properly speaking.
 - iii. The ethical norm must be universally binding. A principle that binds me must be binding also on anyone else in the same situation. If it is wrong for me to rob a bank, it must be wrong for you also. Ethics is no respecter of persons. Obligation does not change when the only variable factor is the person involved.
 - iv. Summary: Ethics is something God-like. It comes from above, calls us all to account.
- b. Teleological (focusing on the situational perspective)
 - i. Immanence: Ethical obligation is part of ordinary life, not something spooky, or something that appears only in crisis situations. We make moral decisions every day, moment by moment.
 - ii. Practicality: The content of the ethical norm is clear, definable.
 - iii. Doing good brings happiness. It is in our best interest, at least in the long run. The moral life is the good life.
 - iv. One may even answer moral questions by determining the consequences of an action—the happiness produced, etc. Happiness is the end; the moral task is to determine and accomplish the means to that end (teleology).
 - v. Specificity: The moral law applies to each specific case and takes the distinctive nature of each case into account.
 - vi. Righteousness is never merely internal. It gets involved in the world as much as it is able, adapting means to ends (the tree and its fruits).
 - vii. Righteousness is part of the causal order of nature (cf. iv.). Moral goodness is not an arbitrary decision arising in the soul by chance, but is a response to situations as reasons. The best people are consistently, predictably good.
- c. Personalist (or “existential,” focusing on the existential perspective)
 - i. Immanence: Ethics is something profoundly inward, a matter of the heart.

- a) True righteousness is never hypocritical—never merely pretending to do the right.
 - b) To do what appears right with a grudging, hating inner motive is always wrong.
 - c) Thus it is wrong to judge people merely on the basis of external conduct.
 - d) The ethical norm must be affirmed from within, or it does not produce goodness. The moral law must not be merely external; it must become my law, my standard.
- ii. Ethical behavior is self-realization. It expresses what I am.
 - a) An expression of human nature (Aquinas, etc.).
 - b) An expression of human freedom (Sartre, others who deny that man has any nature).
 - iii. Responsibility implies freedom. My ethical choices are not simply determined by my heredity or environment or by my past choices.
 - iv. Persons are ends in themselves—not to be sacrificed for principles or things.
- d. Problems
- i. Though some of the above formulations may generate some controversy, I believe that most everyone will see some truth in all of them.
 - ii. Non-Christian thought, however is unable to integrate these concerns without conflict. Conflicts lead to redefining or denying one or more of these propositions.
 - a) How can the law be beyond us [a.i.a); a..iv.] and also in our midst [b.i.] or even within us [c.i.]?
 - b) How can obedience be unselfish [a.i.a)] and also in our best interest [b.iii.] and self-expressive [c.i.d); c.ii.]?
 - c) How may we determine ethical obligation from circumstances [b.iv.] when it is neither derivable from sense-experience [a.i.b)] nor external to ourselves [c.i.]?
 - d) How can the norm be authoritative [a.ii.] over me if its taking effect presupposes inward acceptance [c.i.d)]?
 - e) How can the norm be universally binding [a.iii.] if it must take account of the distinctive nature of each particular case [b.v.]?
 - f) How can its content be clear and definable [b.ii.] if it comes from beyond our experience [a.i.]?
 - g) How can righteousness be both profoundly external [b.vi.] and profoundly internal [c.i.]?
 - h) How can moral conduct be both free [c.ii.b); c.iii.] and also rationally and causally motivated [b.ii.]?
 - i) If the moral law is God-like [a.iv.], why should persons not be sacrificed to it [c.iv.]?

- e. Christian Response
- i. Cf. “the square”. Problems are generated because of false concepts of transcendence and immanence.
 - ii. Specific replies to problems under d.ii.:
 - a) The law is beyond us because God is beyond us as Lord; it is near because God is near and his law is near (Deuteronomy 30)
 - b) Obedience is in our best interest because God has created and directed history to make it so. When we give up our own schemes to serve him, we gain happiness and fulfillment, and *vice-versa* (Matthew 10:39; 16:25, parallels).
 - c) We may derive ethical obligation from circumstances because we presuppose the normative interpretation of those circumstances given in God’s Word.
 - d) The norm is binding whether or not I accept it; but unless I affirm the law from the heart, nothing else I do will be truly obedient.
 - e) Scripture presents God’s will in such detail that its teaching is applicable to all situations.
 - f) The law comes from God who speaks it clearly in human experience.
 - g) God has created men in an organic relationship with the world and other men. Individual purity of heart coincides with outgoing love for others in the world.
 - h) God has organized the moral order so that acts are motivated, but so that man’s environment and past choices never constitute excuses for sin.
 - i) The moral law is itself personal—the word of the living God. Our attitude toward it is our attitude toward him. The law, further, never requires, ultimately, a sacrifice of person to principle. Obedience is happiness and fulfillment [e.ii.b)] (cf. Mark 2:27).
2. The Milesians: Thales: “All is water.” Anaximander: “All is indefinite.” Anaximenes: “All is air.” (6th century BC)
 - a. Denies creator / creature distinction.
 - b. Rationalism (man determines ultimate nature of everything); irrationalism (mind reduced to water, air, indefinite).
 - c. Thus moral distinctions also reduce to the chance developments of physical reality. Moral standards are mere movements of water, etc., which cannot obligate.
 3. The Eleatics: Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno (6th and 5th centuries)

All reality is static, undifferentiated being.

 - a. Attempts to be purely rationalistic, but must invoke irrationalism to account for the appearance, or illusion of change.
 - b. On this view, too, moral distinctions disappear. The moral quest, the need for moral decision, is ultimately illusory. Cf. Eastern religions, [II.A.2.].
 4. Heraclitus (535-475)

- a. Irrationalism: “Everything changes.” “You cannot step in the same river twice.”
 - b. Rationalism: The *logos* governs all by a constant, rational pattern. (Is this the one thing that does not change?)
 - c. Heraclitus is the first philosopher to have addressed moral issues specifically. Ethics, to him, is living rationally, according to the *logos*. Self-discipline and constancy of character are his chief principles.
 - d. But how can this be done if “everything changes”? And how can we make any contact with the *logos* if everything changes?
 - e. In all of the Greek systems, ethics boils down to “living rationally.” But there is no adequate recognition of the problematic nature of reason itself, nor reflection on the presuppositions on which reason must function.
 - f. On many ethical questions, there is no obvious, generally accepted rational answer.
5. The Atomists: Leucippus; Democritus (460-370); Epicurus (341-270); Lucretius (94-54)
- a. Reality is reducible to tiny pieces of matter (atoms) in motion.
 - b. Knowledge begins in sense-perception, but must be refined by reason.
 - c. For Democritus (cf. later on Epicurus), ethics is living rationally, in search of the truest and highest pleasure (hedonism: pleasure as the supreme goal). An early form of teleological ethics.
 - d. The highest pleasures result from the moderating of desire.
 - e. Critique: cf. Heraclitus
 - i. What moral obligation is possible if all reality reduces to matter and motion?
 - ii. On what basis do we declare what is or is not rational?
6. The Sophists: Protagoras (490-??); Gorgias; Thrasymachus; others: the birth of existential ethics.
- a. No objective standards of truth and falsity or right or wrong. There is no “objective truth,” only “truth for me.”
 - b. Thrasymachus: “Justice is the interest of the stronger.” Moral norms are devised by various people in society to gain power for themselves.
 - c. Thus there are no moral constraints; “Man is the measure of all things.”
 - d. The above represents irrationalism. Yet sophism is also rationalistic in that it claims critical discernment, claims to teach people how to be successful.
 - e. Thus sophism, like the other systems, denies all moral distinctions while claiming to maintain them in some form. The result is no moral guidance whatever.
 - f. All of these systems, however, rightly demand a basis for ethics, rather than blind adherence to tradition.
7. Plato (427-347): mostly deontological, though with some existential elements. Rejects teleology in ethics.

- a. Vs. Sophists: There is objective truth. Our knowledge is based upon our pre-birth experience of the world of Forms, which is eternal and unchanging.
 - b. “Good” is the highest of the Forms. All reality partakes of goodness to some extent. Evil results from non-being. (Plato’s argument for the primacy of good over evil is not convincing.)
 - c. “Good,” therefore, is higher than any god. In *Euthyphro*, he seeks to discover what piety (and, by extension the Good) is in itself, apart from anything gods or men may say. Good is an abstract principle [cf. Ancient Religions, II.A.1.].
 - d. Only “the good” is truly good.
 - i. Lesser “goods” can be bad—some situations—pleasure, peace, boldness, etc.
 - ii. Apparent “evils” can sometimes be good—war, pain, sorrow, fear.
 - iii. So none of these fully capture the meaning of goodness as such. Only knowledge does this—for it is never wrong to act knowledgeably.
 - e. For man, virtue is knowledge and *vice-versa* (cf. earlier philosophers). No one ever does wrong knowingly. Again, here he engages in dubious argumentation.
 - f. Reason, therefore, must govern all other “parts” of the soul.
 - g. Pleasure is not an end in itself, but it does motivate us to live according to reason (consistent?).
 - h. Politics: As reason must rule the individual, so the most rational men (philosophers) ought to govern the state (*Republic*).
 - i. People are divided into different categories (cf. Hindu caste system) and educated for the work of their class.
 - ii. For upper castes, communism, community of wives and children.
 - iii. Less totalitarianism in *Laws*.
 - i. Comments:
 - i. In seeking an objectively authoritative norm, Plato made it independent of gods and men, but he thereby also made it abstract, devoid of specific content.
 - ii. If all reality is good, how is good distinguished from evil?
 - iii. If the moral norm is the most abstract of principles, then its authority is proportional to its irrelevance. No specific norm is truly authoritative.
 - iv. Having made goodness an abstract principle, he was unable to show why we ought to emulate it.
 - v. Why, then, ought we to follow reason? And what does reason tell us to do?
 - vi. Note the connection between rationalism and political totalitarianism: If reason is to rule, and reason is defined by man, man must rule and rule with ultimate authority. The greater emphasis on freedom in the *Laws* corresponds with concessions to irrationalism.
8. Aristotle (384-322): For a non-Christian, Aristotle presents the best balance between deontological, teleological, and existential approaches.

- a. For Aristotle, the Forms are not found in some other world. They are found in this world, in things: The form of treeness is in every tree, etc.
- b. Except for the divine Prime Mover, the forms always exist in things together with matter.
- c. Aristotle, thus, “demythologizes” Plato—brings him down to earth. Similarly in ethics, Aristotle is less interested than Plato in the sublimity, the transcendence of the moral law, more interested in its immanence, its relevance. He is more “teleological” and “existential” while Plato is more “deontological,” though neither is a pure example of either tendency.
- d. The highest good for any being is the realization, actualization of its particular nature (existential). Man’s highest good, therefore, is the life of reason.
- e. Complete, habitual exercise of man’s rational nature constitutes “happiness” (*eudaimonia*). Happiness is not pleasure, though pleasure accompanies it as a secondary effect. Teleological.
- f. The life of reason involves moderation in bodily appetites, ambitions, etc. Often this involves choosing the “mean” between two extremes—courage as the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness, etc.
- g. This ethic is egoistic, in the sense that the highest goal is self-perfection, self-realization. Realizing one’s true nobility, however, will sometimes involve self-sacrifice, even giving one’s life for others.
- h. The highest authority is the virtuous man—the rational man, to whom the things which appear honorable are really honorable, etc.
- i. vs. Socrates, Plato: For virtue, it does not suffice to know what is right; one must also endeavor to do it. So laws, other inducements, are needed, as well as education.
- j. The state is more important than the individual as in general the whole is more important than its parts. But the purpose of the state is to help individual citizens to lead a happy life.
- k. Prefers aristocracy to tyranny, democracy: it recognizes differences in qualifications for citizenship, but rests on a broad base.
- l. Comments:
 - i. As with Plato, goodness here is an abstract form, though found in things. All specific moral norms are relative to it; it alone is absolute, universal, necessary. Yet it has no specific content. Or rather, once one spells out its content, he is left with a relative norm.
 - ii. On what basis do we assume that our supreme good is to be governed by reason?
 - iii. If happiness is the end which we naturally pursue (as an acorn naturally becomes a tree because of its innate form), why must we be exhorted to seek it?
 - iv. Granted that it is our natural end, why ought we to pursue it? (“Naturalistic fallacy” argument)

- v. How are specific norms to be deduced from the concept of happiness? The relation of these is unclear in Aristotle. One ought to exercise moderation if one wishes to live a certain kind of life. But why ought one to make that choice? If one chooses otherwise, then other courses of action are more rational. Aristotle fails to recognize the presuppositions upon which his notion of “rational” is based.
 - vi. There are some statist tendencies in Aristotle as in Plato, and for similar reasons (cf. above, 8.j.). Though he balances carefully the concerns of the state and the individual, the state in the end has the priority.
9. Early Teleological Theories
- a. Cyrenaicism (Aristippus, b. 435BC): crude teleological ethics.
 - i. Highest good: greatest amount of pleasure and avoidance of pain.
 - ii. Best pleasures are the most intense; quantity, not quality, is the significant variable.
 - iii. Hegesius the pessimist: For most people, there is more pain than pleasure. The more we seek pleasure, the more we attain boredom and frustration. Suicide is the most rational course.
 - b. Epicurus (341-270): more sophisticated teleological ethics.
 - i. General philosophy: atomism; [cf. 5. above]. Epicurus modifies the traditional atomism by saying that atoms occasionally “swerve” from their vertical path. This swerve explains the formation of objects and human free will.
 - ii. All people by nature seek pleasure and avoid pain; therefore these are the goals of life; these are what we ought to do.
 - iii. Unlike the Cyrenaics, Epicurus distinguishes among the qualities of pleasure: We ought to endure short-range pains for long-range pleasures; we should prefer mental to physical pleasures, etc.
 - iv. To make such judgments, we need to know the causes of things. Philosophical contemplation, thus, is the highest pleasure (cf. Aristotle).
 - v. Society begins in a social contract—for mutual self-interest. There is no absolute justice apart from such self-interest.
 - vi. Laws are good if they are useful, if they protect, bring pleasure, etc. [Cf. sophists].
 - vii. One ought to avoid involvement in public affairs as much as possible.
 - c. Comments:
 - i. Same problems as in atomism, compounded by the notion of pure chance (“the swerve”).
 - ii. Does everybody seek pleasure and avoid pain? What about self-sacrifice?
 - iii. Or do we simply define pleasure as “what anyone seeks”? Then we have a meaningless norm, as abstract as Plato’s good.
 - iv. Granted that everyone does seek pleasure and avoid pain, why ought we? (Question of the “naturalistic fallacy”).

- v. Determining what to do in any situation seems hopelessly complex. There are so many different kinds of pleasure and pain to be measured against one another. Further, one cannot measure any of them until one knows their effects indefinitely into the future. (What future pains and pleasures will there be if I choose X?) The principle seems at first to be simple and practical, but on reflection it appears otherwise.
- vi. Note, then, the tension between the meaningless absolute [iii.] and the hopelessly disjointed particulars [v.].
- vii. Note also the lack of a revealed standard to set forth specifically and authoritatively the whole duty of man.
- viii. Social contract idea leads to a dialectic of anarchy and totalitarianism: Absolute right of private self-interest on the one hand and collective self-interest on the other.

10. Early Deontological Theories

- a. Cynicism (Antisthenes, d. 366BC)
 - i. Virtue is knowledge (Socrates), and is worthwhile for its own sake, apart from any pleasure that may attend it. Doing good to achieve pleasure is morally worthless.
 - ii. Man must, then, become independent of the desire for pleasure.
 - iii. The Cynics sought self-discipline, renunciation of possessions, even rejection of civilization.
- b. Stoicism (Zeno of Citium, 336-264)
 - i. Knowledge is based on sense-perception, conceptualized so as to reflect the rational order of the world itself (*logos*).
 - ii. Form and matter, body and soul, are all material.
 - iii. God is the world-soul (pantheism).
 - iv. Determinism, fatalism, eternal recurrence. Freedom is rational self-determination (vs. Epicureans).
 - v. Man's goal: to act in harmony with the universal reason, to live according to nature. Self-realization.
 - vi. Pleasure, health, life, etc. are good only as they contribute to virtuous character. In themselves they are nothing.
 - vii. As there is one universal reason, there is one universal society of which all are members. Its laws are objective, universally binding (vs. Epicureans).
 - viii. All are brothers; all have equal rights.
 - ix. We ought to sacrifice ourselves for the general welfare.
 - x. It is our duty to participate in public affairs to promote the general good (vs. Epicureans).
- c. Comments:
 - i. Why ought we to live according to reason? Pleasure has been rejected as a motive. What other is there?

- ii. Materialism, determinism, fatalism reduce ethics to physical, causal process. Cf. Milesians, Atomists.
- iii. What is the demand of reason? Any specific norm is relativized with respect to the general demand of rationality. Thus it is impossible to say specifically what reason requires.
- iv. Problems of philosophical empiricism, materialism, rationalism, pantheism.

11. Neoplatonism (Plotinus, 204-269 AD)

- a. God is “the One” — devoid of all plurality and diversity — from which all reality emanates of necessity, like light from a lamp.
- b. Man, therefore, is essentially divine. At one time he pointed toward God, contemplating the eternal mind (*nous*) in mystical intuition. He fell by directing his gaze toward the body.
- c. Salvation comes through turning the mind away from sensuous life to thought, and thence to God.
- d. Three stages of self-redemption:
 - i. Purification: moderation of impulses to the point of complete freedom from all sensual desire.
 - ii. Theoretical contemplation: Purification is only preparation for intuitive contemplation of ideas.
 - iii. Ecstasy: Transcends even the most exalted thought. Here one loses oneself entirely, becomes one with God.
- e. Comments:
 - i. Philosophical monism and rationalism. In seeking exhaustive explanatory principle. Plotinus finds a God who is “beyond” all. He must be beyond everything in order to explain everything; but since he is beyond everything, nothing can be said about him. Classic picture of non-Christian transcendence.
 - ii. Non-Christian immanence: to the extent that anything is real, it is divine. To the extent that anything is distinct from God, it is unreal.
 - iii. Cf., therefore, earlier critique of religious ethical systems which annihilate ethical distinctions, persons, situations [(II.A.2.).]

12. Transition to Modern Period

- a. Since Medieval ethical philosophy is dominated by Christianity (with, to be sure, considerable synthesis with non-Christian thought), we will discuss them somewhat in connection with our exposition of biblical ethics.
- b. The Renaissance marks a return to more unambiguous non-Christian patterns of thought:
 - i. Recovery of and admiration for Greek and Roman thought, apart from their use in the church’s ideology.
 - ii. The spirit of autonomy over against all revealed truth.
 - iii. Liberation, therefore, from the restraints of the “Medieval synthesis” by which the relative rights of individuals, rulers, church, God had been understood with relative clarity. Two directions:

- a) Individualism: authority derived from the individual person (nominalism - the many prior to the one).
 - b) Absolutism: the unlimited power and authority of the sovereign (from realistic or nominalistic assumptions).
 - iv. Influence of modern science and mathematics:
 - a) Reduction of all to physical causation.
 - b) Power of reason (unaided) to understand all phenomena of interest to science and philosophy.
13. Continental Rationalism (R. Descartes, 1596-1650; B. Spinoza, 1632-1677, G. W. Leibniz, 1646-1716)
- a. Descartes wrote little directly bearing on ethics. He did develop a theory of the emotions in which the passions and their effects on the soul are described as stemming from physical causation and mental states. The soul has an inner satisfaction when it is virtuous, so that external influences have no troubling influence [Cf. Stoics]. Descartes maintained free will.
 - b. Spinoza's metaphysic culminates in ethics; the title of his major philosophical work is *Ethics*.
 - i. The overall system: rationalist, determinist, pantheistic in a way ("God or nature"), monistic.
 - ii. Ethics: egoism modified by rational judgment.
 - a) I have a right to do anything I have power to do.
 - b) But reason shows what is truly useful to me—rational contemplation, universal accord among men, knowledge of God ("God or nature," that is).
 - c) Hence social contract, voluntary relinquishment of natural rights for the sake of social existence.
 - c. Leibniz
 - i. General: the world consists of many indivisible, mind-like entities ("monads") which develop according to their own internal laws without mutual influence (some inconsistency here).
 - ii. Organisms, as opposed to other bodies, are organized around a "queen monad" or soul, with which they work in harmony.
 - iii. God is the supreme monad of the universe. His relation to the other monads is somewhat unclear.
 - iv. This is the best of all possible worlds. The evils are necessary to maximize the good. God could not have made a better world.
 - v. God and the other monads are bound by moral principles which are innate to them. Reason enables us to become conscious of them and to follow them, overcoming the corruption of evil appetites. "Intuitionism."
 - vi. Each monad is autonomous, constrained by nothing outside itself (free will); but it is fully determined by its own nature, which is programmed to operate in "pre-established harmony" with other monads (determinism).

- d. Summary: note rationalism, autonomy. Sin tends to be rationalized as mere failure to understand, inner conflict between reason and appetite.

14. British Empiricism

- a. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
 - i. Some rationalistic tendencies often separate him from the later “empiricists”. The label does not matter much.
 - ii. Knowledge begins in the senses, but seeks the causes of things, universal and necessary properties.
 - iii. All can be explained as bodies undergoing various sorts of motion.
 - iv. Cf. Spinoza: We have the right to do anything that we are able to do.
 - v. Man by nature, thus, exists in a “state of war” with all others. In such a state, “justice,” “law” have no meaning. But in that state, man cannot preserve himself.
 - vi. Thus man relinquishes his natural right, agrees to claim only equal liberties with others, for the sake of self-preservation.
 - vii. Once such a covenant is made, it must be enforced by threat of punishment; else the state of war remains. Hence the commonwealth.
 - viii. Sovereignty, once conferred by majority agreement, is absolute, though the right to self-preservation is inalienable.
 - ix. Moral philosophy discovers the laws of mankind’s self-preservation (natural laws, divine laws).
 - x. Comments:
 - a) Note deviations from Scripture: man’s fallen state Hobbes calls natural, man’s autonomous selfishness is called natural right, all obligations are bestowed by autonomous man.
 - b) Note anarchy (the natural state, which is always the basic state) and totalitarianism (the absolute sovereignty of the commonwealth).
- b. John Locke, 1632-1704
 - i. Empiricism: the mind begins as a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), learns through experience. All knowledge is merely probable (irrationalism), but the principles of reason are more certain than any other alleged knowledge, such as revelation (rationalism).
 - ii. No free will, but the person is free from external constraint.
 - iii. No innate moral truths (as in Leibniz, e.g.). Moral knowledge is inculcated by parental and other teaching.
 - iv. This teaching, in turn, derives from the experience that virtuous conduct brings pleasure and vicious conduct brings pain.
 - v. Divine law, civil law, and “law of opinion” (informal social sanctions) enforce these rules with appropriate punishments.
 - vi. Man by nature can do as he sees fit, and is obligated not only to preserve himself, but others also, insofar as his own preservation is not endangered.

In the state of nature, he may and ought to punish violations of this principle by others.

- vii. The state of nature, therefore, is not a state of war as in Hobbes. It can be peaceful, kindly. But it lacks an established, known law and generally acknowledged, impartial authority. Hence: the social contract.
- viii. The power of society extends no farther than necessary for protection of life, liberty, property, and no farther than is determined by the consent of the governed.
- ix. Thus absolute monarchy is wrong; and even the legislative system must be kept from capricious and arbitrary power, though it is always superior to the executive. And the people are superior to the legislature.
- x. Comments:
 - a) Note autonomy of the people, ultimately of the individual. Revelation plays a subsidiary role.
 - b) The derivation of rights and responsibilities on the basis of Locke's empiricism is dubious. "Naturalistic fallacy."
- c. Later Empiricists
 - i. George Berkeley (1685-1753) said little of note in the field of ethics.
 - ii. David Hume (1711-1776)
 - a) Developed empiricism to the point of skepticism on various matters. He denies "necessary connection" between cause and effect, but remains a determinist because of the "constant conjunction" observed between causes and effects.
 - b) One major contribution to ethics is his argument on "ought" and "is," for which see G.E. Moore, below.
 - c) He was skeptical on the notion of a "social contract" as the basis of government.
 - d) He bases all ethical judgments on feelings of approbation and disapprobation. But this destroys normativity.
 - iii. See Mill below in the discussion of nineteenth century utilitarianism.
- 15. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) "Romanticism"
 - a. Deistic religion, demonstrable by reason, but based on feeling—a matter of the heart, not the head.
 - b. By nature, man is innocent and good (the "Noble Savage"). Ethics, like religion, is essentially the outworking of the good will, the good feelings that we have toward one another (existential perspective).
 - c. By nature, all are equal.
 - d. Evil comes through social institutions (such as property), corruption of our natural feelings through civilization. (Note reversal of the evaluations of Hobbes.)
 - e. Though we cannot eliminate social institutions, we ought to purify them by cultivating natural feeling.

- f. Civil states ought to be based on the will of all the people, not merely the bourgeoisie, but also laborers and peasants.
- g. Freedom lies in obedience to self-imposed law. We must learn to conform our desires to the “general will” which alone is ultimately authoritative.
- h. Comments:
 - i. Note extreme egalitarianism, coupled with totalitarian tendencies. Much of this influences Marxism and other later thought.
 - ii. Note denial of the doctrine of the Fall, the autonomous authority of the masses.
 - iii. Note attempt to do justice to the positive role of feeling. In some ways this is good (cf. existential perspective); but an ethic based on autonomous feeling alone loses normativity. Cf. above under Hume.

16. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- a. Recall phenomena / noumena distinction: the world of appearances (exhaustively knowable) vs. the world as it really is (utterly unknowable).
- b. Despite the skepticism implicit in the above distinction, Kant defends science and mathematics by basing them in categories which the mind imposes upon its experience. Similarly in ethics, Kant derives moral truth from the autonomous moral self.
- c. Kant is one of the purer examples of deontological ethics. There is also a large element of “existential” ethics in Kant, due to the role played by the moral self. At any rate, he has little sensitivity to the concerns raised by teleological ethics, little appreciation for the situational perspective.
- d. He argues that the only thing that is good unequivocally, i.e., good at all times and places, is a good will.
- e. A good will is a will which does its duty for duty’s sake—i.e., neither from personal inclination nor for its own benefit (here Kant’s deontologism comes to the fore.)
- f. Duty always involves obedience to a categorical imperative.
 - i. The categorical imperative is distinguished from hypothetical (“if . . . then . . .”) imperatives, e.g., “If you want to build a cabinet, you must have nails,” or even “If you want happiness, you must keep your promises.”
 - ii. If morality were derived from merely hypothetical imperatives, in Kant’s view, it could not be absolutely and universally binding, for it would be subject to conditions that might or might not exist.
 - iii. Therefore duty is not derivable from experience, any more than the basic truths of mathematics and science are so derivable. Like them, the truths of ethics are based on synthetic *a priori* judgments—judgments held prior to experience.
- g. An ethical principle is categorical if it is meaningful for someone to will its universal application.
 - i. Example: you cannot will that everyone should make lying promises. If everybody did, no one would believe anybody, and thus the whole concept

- of a promise would become meaningless. To make a promise while rendering meaningless the whole concept of promising is contradictory.
- ii. Nor can you will universal cruelty, for this would involve willing cruel treatment for yourself, desiring the undesirable, which is a contradiction.
 - iii. Summary: Act so that you can want everybody to follow the principle of your action.
 - iv. Another Summary: Act so as to treat each rational creature as an end in itself, not merely as a means. (It is contradictory to want this for yourself while denying it to others.)
 - v. A Third Summary: Act so that your principles could be used to govern the whole universe of rational persons.
- h. Autonomy of ethics: In ethics, the self acts as an autonomous legislator [cf. g.v.]. The moral law is essentially self-imposed.
- i. Implications of ethics:
- i. Since the ethical self is autonomous [h], and since obligation implies ability, we may assume that the moral self is free. This fact cannot be proved, for in our experience (phenomena) all events are caused. But the nature of morality leads us to suppose that freedom exists in the real (noumenal) world.
 - ii. God and immortality: Reason teaches that the good will deserves happiness. Since virtue and happiness are not always linked in this life, there must be a perfectly good, wise and powerful being who apportions fitting rewards and punishments in a later life. A future life is also needed so that the end of morality, the attainment of holiness, may be achieved. God and immortality, like freedom, are not known to exist, only supposed.
- j. Comments:
- i. Note sharpness of difference with Christianity
 - a) Autonomy of the ethical self—both freedom from causation and ultimate ethical authority.
 - b) God is not the ultimate authority of ethics, but the one who rewards those who obey their own autonomous will.
 - c) We do not even know that God exists, and Kant's system does not require the existence of God.
 - d) Kant's formulations and language suggest that the moral self ought to act self-consciously as if he himself were God—"legislating" principles not only for himself, but also for the whole universe of rational beings (implying omniscience).
 - e) In Christian ethics, we are not called to do our duty merely for the sake of duty. Self-interest, gratitude, love, etc., are also legitimate motives for ethics.
 - ii. The problems of Kant's overall dialectic (phenomena / noumena) invalidate his ethics as well. If the noumenal world is wholly unknown, then it cannot even be said to exist. If it does not exist, then it calls in question even our

knowledge of phenomena (what are the phenomena really like?). If it does not exist, then there are no limits on reason at all, no means of restraining speculation.

- iii. At best, Kant provides a law without a gospel [cf. II.A.3]—a norm without power to make us obedient.
 - iv. Kant makes arbitrary assumptions all along the line without nearly enough argument to sustain them:
 - a) that only actions are right which are done for duty's sake,
 - b) that categorical duties can and must be derivable from the principle of universality alone
 - c) that morally right acts are always acts which are derived from universal principles, etc.
 - v. Unclarity of the categorical imperative.
 - a) In one sense, I can will, meaningfully, without contradiction, that everyone wear brown shoes. Does that mean that we have a duty to wear brown shoes? If so, may any number of trivial duties be derived from the categorical imperative?
 - b) I can also will, without obvious problem, that everyone refuse to wear brown shoes. Does the categorical imperative, then, lead to contradiction?
 - c) I can also justify obvious sins by careful phrasing: I can will that anyone with my name and social security number may steal (the "anyone" makes it a universal principle).
 - d) Is there some special kind of contradiction created by the above examples? It is not always clear what Kant regards as a contradiction.
 - vi. Kant intends his categorical imperatives to be strictly non-empirical and in particular not derived from the consequences of actions. But how can we tell whether keeping promises is a universal duty [above, g.i.] unless we know the consequences of not keeping promises? Is Kant, then, in a roundabout way, telling us after all to judge our actions by their consequences? Is it possible to have deontology without some teleology?
 - vii. Another way to put this point: We don't really know what a promise is, apart from its applications. We don't know the universal without the particulars. But we observe the applications, the particulars, in experience.
 - viii. Summary: The absoluteness of Kant's norm is empty; it says anything we want it to say, and it says nothing. The immanence of the norm, the autonomy of the moral self, also lets us do whatever we want, provided that reason guides. Kant has failed to establish any principle which obligates us to transcend self-interest.
17. Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Green, Bradley, Bosanquet, Royce, Blanshard).
- a. Rejects the Kantian noumenal ("thing-in-itself"). All of reality is interconnected in such a way as to be knowable by man.

- b. Morality is irreducibly personal. Only persons have obligations, obey or disobey.
- c. In ethics, then, one is concerned primarily with developing that innate moral character. How one changes the world or relates to abstract principles are secondary considerations. When I paint a fence, what I'm really seeking is inward, satisfaction in completing a task.
- d. Ethics, therefore, is essentially self-realization. (Cf. Aristotle). When we make a moral decision, we are seeking not so much to change the world as to change ourselves, to express ourselves in some way. As in Kant, the only unequivocal good is the good will.
- e. Unlike Kant, though, idealists see the good will not as looking toward its duty in the abstract, but also as taking into account its inclinations and environment.
 - i. Would a truly good will ignore the consequences of its actions upon others and upon the environment?
 - ii. Why must duty always be set over against inclination? Is it not better to enjoy doing good than to do it merely for duty's sake?
 - iii. Self-expression cannot be fulfilled unless external and internal barriers are removed.
- f. Self-realization, then, involves relating oneself to the whole universe, to the "universal reason".
 - i. Individual and universal will are one. In willing the will of the universal reason, I am willing my own will,, and thus am free.
 - ii. Freedom, then, involves absolute submission to the state and to the duties of my "station in life".
- g. Wars are essentially conflicts of ideas. The stronger inevitably win out in the long run.
- h. Comments:
 - i. A more balanced approach than many secular systems.
 - ii. Here, as in Kant, the self is an autonomous moral legislator.
 - iii. Since the moral self is ultimately one with the universal reason (God, the absolute), the moral self is deified in idealism.
 - iv. For idealism, we cannot know particular duties without relating them to the whole universal process. Thus we must be either omniscient or incapable of moral choice.
 - v. The doctrine of submission to authority [f.ii.] and the inevitable triumph of right ideology [g] suggests a kind of fatalism that is damaging to ethical motivation.
 - vi. The concept of war and political change [g] suggests that might makes right when motivated by superior ideology. One who is right can do anything he likes.

18. Karl Marx (1818-1883)

- a. The most basic forces in history, to Marx are not ideas, as Hegel thought, but economic relationships, specifically “relations of production” (relations between owners and workers).
- b. The duality between owner and worker inevitably produces class struggle, since the interests of the two groups are incompatible.
 - i. Owners inevitably accumulate capital at the expense of the workers, who get poorer and poorer.
 - ii. The discrepancy provokes revolution of the lower class against the higher class, which in turn produces a new social order.
 - iii. Master-slave, Lord-serf, bourgeois-proletariat: past stages.
 - iv. The communist revolution seeks to bring about a dictatorship of the proletariat, and hence ownership of the means of production by the worker-state.
 - v. The ultimate goal is the classless society in which the state “withers away”, no longer needed.
- c. Ethical systems attempt to justify interests.
 - i. The upper class advocates and imposes standards that rationalize and promote its goals.
 - ii. As the exploited class becomes self-conscious, it develops its own revolutionary morality. “Good” is what promotes the revolution; “evil” is what hinders it.
 - iii. In the dictatorship of the proletariat, “good” is what promotes progress to the classless society; “evil” is what hinders it.
- d. As the interests of one’s class change, so morality changes. What is “good” today may become “evil” tomorrow.
- e. Christianity (and other religions) represent ideologies concocted to keep the workers in their place, to make them satisfied with their lot. Even the more “prophetic” moralists do more harm than good, since they postpone the revolution by kindling false hopes of reform.
- f. Comments:
 - i. Good insights into the process by which the poor are exploited in the fallen world. Traditional aristocracies are the best example, but to some extent western nations also stack the deck against poor and laboring people.
 - ii. Confidence in the proletariat as revolutionary force, utopianism, often criticized by contemporary Marxists.
 - iii. Ethical relativism in Marxism as among the Sophists [6., above]: “Justice is the interest of the stronger.”
 - a) This blunts the force of the Marxist critique of exploitation. If the “justice” demanded by the Marxist is simply a justice promoting his self-interest, why should his critique be listened to by anyone else.
 - b) The rejection of any objective meaning to “justice,” together with the impassioned use of the rhetoric of justice, shows the inseparability of relativism and absolutism, rationalism and irrationalism. To the Marxist,

the ethic autonomously developed by his class-interest is the only ethic, the absolute presupposition.

- c) In the final analysis, no ethical norm. Man does what is right in his own eyes, and gives himself pseudo-absoluteness.
- iv. Here as in idealism, might makes right. And unlike idealism, the progress of might in history is not accompanied by an objective process of thought; so the process is irrational.
- v. The pseudo-absoluteness of class values leads to totalitarianism; the prominence of economics over thought leads to cultural impoverishment.
- vi. The lack of private economic incentive also feeds the totalitarian impulse: if people don't want to work, they must be forced to.
- vii. We shall see that the biblical model of society is neither *laissez-faire* capitalism (with unrestricted accumulation of capital) nor totalitarian Communism. Exploitation of the poor is not only preached against in the Bible; there are institutional structures which, properly engaged, prevent such exploitation while maintaining a overall free society.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

- a. Man's most basic desire is not pleasure, but power—its possession and creative exercise. The 'will to power' is the basic drive to which all others are reducible.
- b. Moral codes are subordinate to the will to power. They are developed out of the customs of social groups seeking to keep and increase power.
- c. Christianity is essentially a "slave morality"—arising from the self-interest of the weak and oppressed, from the secret hatred and envy of those more favored (*ressentiment*).
 - i. It is therefore dishonest, because while professing love it is built upon hatred.
 - ii. It favors the weak and there impedes the production of truly superior beings. Nietzsche finds this contemptible.
- d. Nietzsche favors a stance "beyond good and evil," being honest and joyful about the will to power, recognizing that God is dead and that morality must be built upon against without him.
- e. Comments: Nietzsche is similar to Marx in his view that moral ideas are built on the self-interest of social groups. His atheism and acceptance of nihilism have been influential upon the existentialists.

20. Utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham, 1748-1832), John Stuart Mill, 1806-1873)

- a. Utilitarianism is a frankly teleological system, founded (like ancient Epicureanism) on the premise that pleasure is the supreme good.
- b. It differs from Epicureanism chiefly in that it states as the goal of ethics not only the pleasure of the individual, but the "greatest pleasure for the greatest number." For Bentham, this broader goal is a consequence of individual self-interest. For Mill, it is based upon the social instinct in mankind.

- c. Bentham measures pleasures in mainly quantitative ways, as did the ancient Cyrenaicists. Mill distinguishes various qualities of pleasure, as did Epicurus.
- d. In theory, utilitarianism is a simple, practical system. There is one principle—the greatest pleasure for the greatest number. A good act furthers that principle; an evil act impedes it. One may, then, simply “calculate” the goodness or badness of an act by calculating the pleasures and pains produced by it. The “hedonistic calculus.”
- e. Act (Bentham) vs. rule (Brandt) utilitarianism (Mill is intermediate): should the principle of utility be applied to particular acts, or to rules?
- f. Utilitarianism has had considerable influence upon legislation.
- g. The democratic process encourages utilitarian thinking to some extent. It is tempting to think that quantities and qualities of pleasures can be measured by votes and polls.
- h. Comments:
 - i. Both Bentham and Mill assumed as a matter of course that everyone by nature seeks pleasure and flees from pain. But is that true? People do sometimes sacrifice themselves for others. Cf. Nietzsche who argued that power was more central than pleasure.
 - ii. One way to overcome the above objection is to define pleasure as “whatever someone seeks,” whether it be ice cream or a martyr’s death. That introduces a circularity into the system. (Pleasure is what we seek. Anything we seek is pleasure.) More seriously, the circularity leaves unclear just what we are trying to calculate when we seek to calculate pleasure.
 - iii. Even if we do seek pleasure and avoid pain in some intelligible sense, does this imply that we ought to? (“Naturalistic fallacy” question.)
 - iv. Even if we seek pleasure for ourselves, is it obvious that we seek it for others? Is it obvious that we ought to seek it for others?
 - v. The principle of utility is, in the end, like Kant’s categorical imperative, an “empty,” contentless norm, which gives no ethical guidance, but which relativizes all concrete decisions. Thus it leaves us free to do what is right in our own eyes—to be autonomous. In effect, utilitarianism tells us that we ought to seek whatever we seek.
 - vi. It seems that maximizing happiness is always right. But is it? What if the majority in a country would take great pleasure in the murdering off of a minority? Sidgwick, a later utilitarian, dealt with this problem by adding a new principle to the utilitarian scheme, a principle of “justice,” equal distribution of happiness.
 - a) But this principle has no basis in the overall utilitarian system.
 - b) It is certainly not intuitively obvious. Many people prefer freedom of opportunity to the forced equal distribution of benefits (capitalism vs. socialism).

- vii. The difficulty of calculating the pleasures and pains produced by an act is so enormous as to require virtual omniscience.
 - a) There are so many kinds of pleasure and pain.
 - b) Most pleasures are not easily measurable at all, because many are not simple body sensations.
 - c) To complete the calculation, one would have to trace the effects of an action into the indefinite future, throughout the universe.
 - d) Note then, as in Kant, Hegel, the ethicist acting as if he were God.
 - e) The discussion between act- and rule- schools reveals another problem: that the kind of behavior that brings the most pleasure as an individual act may not maximize pleasure when made into a general rule. (Cf. Kant's insistence that moral principles be generalizable.)
- viii. Summary: The principle of utility, therefore, provides no concrete ethical guidance at all. Its meaning is unclear, its justification weak, its implementation impossible. Empty transcendence, relativistic immanence.

21. Intuitionism (G. E. Moore, 1873-1958, H. Prichard, W. D. Ross)

- a. Moore agrees with the utilitarians that the good is something beyond us, objective to us, not a quality of the will or mind as in Kant and the idealists. However, he agrees with Kant that the sublime, unique quality of the moral law cannot be derived from sense experience.
- b. Goodness, according to Moore, is indefinable. It is not pleasure, because it always makes sense to ask whether a pleasure is in fact good. All other definitions of "good" similarly fail, including definitions in terms of God's will. ("The open question argument").
 - i. Reply: Definitions are of many different kinds and serve many purposes. If indeed a definition must reproduce exhaustively all the meaning and connotations of the term it defines, then of course "goodness" is indefinable. But so is every other term on that basis. But definitions ordinarily claim to be no more than a guide to usage. Moore has not shown that goodness is indefinable in that sense.
 - ii. Reply 2: It seems that we can always ask whether pleasure, God's will, etc., are in fact good, because our age is in great confusion about the basis of morality. If everyone agreed that pleasure was the highest good, it would not make sense to ask if some pleasure were good. Same for the will of God.
 - iii. Reply 3: It is sometimes suggested that if we define the good as God's will, it is then meaningless to say that God's will is in fact good. (If I define "shortstop" as "whatever I am," then the assertion that I am a shortstop becomes true, but misleading and trivial.) Answer: such problems arise in the case of definitions which misuse language. It is not such a misuse to speak of God as the standard of goodness; rather this definition is required by revelation.
- c. Not only is goodness indefinable, according to Moore, but it is impossible to derive such goodness from any "natural" state of affairs. Moore accepts

Hume's argument that "is" does not imply "ought". "Naturalistic fallacy" is his name for the mistake involved.

- i. Moore never clearly defined what he meant by "natural" in this context.
 - ii. Moore's only ground for the distinction between "natural" and "nonnatural" was intuition; but the distinction is supposed to be the ground for the appeal to intuition (see below).
 - iii. The "naturalistic fallacy" is a fallacy only if indeed goodness cannot be defined in terms of natural properties; but Moore has not shown adequately that these assumptions are true.
 - iv. Nevertheless, the argument about the naturalistic fallacy is important. A system of ethics does need to show why its observations yield moral conclusions. It is, e.g., proper to ask a utilitarian why we ought to seek pleasure, even granting that we do.
- d. Since goodness is not defined by or derived from any "natural" state of affairs, it is to be regarded as a "nonnatural" property of various states of affairs, simple and unanalyzable (because not definable).
- e. This nonnatural property is discovered by "intuition".
- i. Moore is not clear as to just how this is done. He speaks of holding something before the mind, contemplating it, identifying it as good or bad.
 - ii. Is this merely another kind of experience, by which we perceive special "is" factors from which "oughts" may be derived?
 - iii. At any rate, it seems to remove goodness from the area of that which is publicly discussible. It is hard to imagine how anyone could argue that something is good. But if such arguments are impossible on Moore's view, he would seem to be doing injustice to common sense.
 - iv. At one point, he says that these "nonnatural properties" "depend on" natural properties, thus compromising the purity of his conception.
 - v. We have here another example of an empty norm—a norm so transcendent, so unique, that no one can establish what it says.
 - vi. Intuitionism prospered in Britain at a time when there was a strong moral consensus. It was plausible to say that simply "looking at" a moral question would magically generate agreement. The advent of sharply conflicting moralities (D. H. Lawrence, e.g.) weakened the consensus.
- f. Once the good has been intuited, according to Moore, we can determine what is right simply by choosing the best means of attaining the good.
- i. At this point, Moore's position is close to utilitarianism. Intuition grasps the goal; the means are determined by calculation. Henry Sidgwick, a utilitarian, developed a similar approach.
 - ii. Other Intuitionists (H. Prichard, e.g.) felt that Moore was not consistent at this point. Does the end automatically justify the means, as Moore's view suggests? Or must we intuit the goodness of means as well as that of ends? Prichard thought that the goodness of means must also be intuited.

iii. But to postulate a multitude of intuitions merely compounds the problems noted under e., above.

22. Pragmatism, Naturalism (John Dewey; cf. R.B. Perry, William James, many others)

- a. Ethics begins by surveying our likes and dislikes, but does not stop there. Through critical study of the effects of various choices, we discover what we really want. (So far, a straightforward teleological system.)
- b. It is not simply a matter of choosing a goal and then enduring any means to achieve it. Some goals are highly desirable, but the means are so difficult or unpleasant that the goal is not worth the effort. One must, therefore, evaluate the proposed means, then re-evaluate the proposed goal in the light of that analysis.
- c. All desires must figure in the calculation—not only our desires for the distant future, but our desires for the short term. Even desires normally called “evil” (desire for unjust revenge, etc.) must be counted in the equation.
- d. Though Dewey is very critical of idealism for its *a priori* thinking and its unclear language, his own ethic turns out to be, like idealism, an ethic of self-realization. “Good” is “the meaning that is experienced to belong to an activity when conflict and entanglement of various incompatible impulses and habits terminate in a unified orderly release in action.”
- e. There are no fixed goals. Goals may be altered in the process of deliberation and choice. Even self-realization is not a fixed goal, but a criterion for determining what goal is really ours at a given moment. (That distinction is not entirely clear to me.)
- f. Different people may have radically different goals. There is no reason, in Dewey’s system, to assume that deliberation might not lead some to cannibalism, genocide, suicide.
- g. Comments:
 - i. Note rationalism (the emphasis on calculation), irrationalism (the lack of any fixed standards).
 - ii. In this system, good behavior amounts to successful behavior. Is this even a plausible account of what morality is? (Other questions: Is this a “typical American” ethic? Is it parallel to Dewey’s “operationalist” view of science? Are we obligated at all to be successful?)
 - iii. Dewey makes frequent appeal to “fair-mindedness,” “freedom of inquiry,” etc., as if these were fixed ethical norms. But they cannot be on his basis.
 - iv. The difficulty of moral “calculation” is even more severe here than in utilitarianism. There are even more factors to take into account. As in comment d., we have here a reason why the content of morality for Dewey is impossible to specify.

23. Emotivism (A. J. Ayer, C. L. Stevenson)

- a. Logical positivism insisted that all statements of fact were “verifiable” by methods akin to those of natural science. The positivists felt that ethical statements (e.g. “It is wrong to steal.”) could not be so verified: therefore, they

said, ethical statements cannot be statements of fact; they must be something else.

- b. Different positivists adopted different analyses: M. Schlick said that ethical statements were “rules” for behavior, analogous to rules of procedure in science. R. Carnap said that ethical statements were imperatives, commands, disguised as indicative statements of fact.
- c. The prevalent positivist view, however, was that ethical statements are characterized by two distinctive elements:
 - i. They are expressions of feeling. Since those feelings are often feelings about empirical facts, empirical facts do play a role in ethical discussion. But ethical statements are not statements of fact.
 - ii. They also recommend to others the feelings expressed.
- d. The feelings expressed cannot be debated as such. Ethical debate centers around the facts concerning which the feelings are expressed, trying to bring to attention features of the facts which will change attitudes.
- e. Comments:
 - i. There is an element of emotive expression in ethical language, and these men are right to point this out.
 - ii. On this basis, the ethical feelings themselves cannot be judged as right or wrong. They are responsible to no standard beyond themselves.
 - iii. Once an ethical debate is reduced to fundamental differences in feeling, no further debate is possible. In the final analysis, then, the emotivist claims the right to whatever, upon reflection, he feels like doing.
 - iv. On this basis, it is difficult to understand why anyone would ever wrestle with a moral question. How can you wrestle with a feeling? Once we know how we really feel about a matter, what further question is there? On the emotivist basis, then, people are simply confused when, even though knowing how they feel, they continue to ask what is right. This is an implausible account of the moral life.
 - v. Irrationalism, then, is manifest here in the relativism of the emotivist approach. Rationalism is evident in the dogmatic manner in which ethical statements are reduced to feeling-expressions and the latter rendered incorrigible.
 - vi. The defects in the positivist view of meaning have bearing here. Cf. Frame, “God and Biblical Language”.

24. Other Recent Analyses of Ethical Language

- a. R. H. Hare: Ethical judgments (“It is wrong to steal.” “One ought to keep his promises.”) are prescriptions. That is, they are not descriptions, nor are they mere imperatives or expressions of feeling. Their force is to tell someone what to do, not necessarily to influence him to do it.
- b. J. O. Urmson: Ethical judgments are a kind of grading. They do not describe qualities of things or merely express attitudes toward those qualities. Rather, they put things into various categories, based on prior descriptive analysis.

- c. S. Toulmin, K. Baier: Moral language states socially-based rules of conduct, implications of those rules and justifications for them.
- d. H. N. Castaneda: Imperatives and their justification.
- e. R. B. Braithewaite: Personal subscription to a particular kind of conduct.
- f. P. H. Nowell-Smith: Ethical language includes many uses of language of different sorts which are interrelated in many different ways.
- g. Comments:
 - i. This literature is useful in showing us the variety of ways in which ethical language is used. My own view is close to Nowell-Smith: We cannot simply reduce ethical language to any single form of non-ethical language.
 - a) Look at all that we do using ethical language: advise, exhort, implore, command, condemn, deplore, resolve, confess, profess, criticize.
 - b) At different times, different functions are prominent. Scholarly papers on ethics are more like descriptions; sermons (good ones) more like exhortations.
 - ii. Note that in this tradition, the traditional concerns of ethics are abandoned in favor of “meta-ethics”. These philosophers make no attempt to tell us what acts are right, or even how to find out what acts are right. They merely try to tell us what sort of language we are speaking when we discuss these issues.
 - iii. This last-named problem can be traced back to G. E. Moore, but in a more basic way it reveals the overall bankruptcy of non-Christian ethics. Non-Christian ethics has reached the point of admitting that it has no power to tell us what we ought to do.
 - iv. Balancing this irrationalism is the general agreement [see above under Moore, 21.b.] that goodness may not be defined in terms of God’s will. Thus, the general admission of ignorance is qualified by a dogmatic, rationalistic denial of divine authority.
 - v. These men all agree that at some point ethical discussion must cease—either with private feelings or social codes or something else. In a sense, this admission is perceptive. Ethical thought, like all human thought, is governed by religious presuppositions. And yet most all people are prompted by conscience to realize that their own feelings, or the will of society, cannot adequately serve as ethical presupposition. Feelings can be wrong, or bad. Thus, these modern theories are never fully persuasive, even to non-Christians themselves.

25. Existentialism (Jean-Paul Sartre; cf. M. Heidegger, K. Jaspers)

- a. As an approach to ethics, existentialism is chiefly a kind of moral psychology—an analysis of the experienced phenomena of moral decision making.
- b. The British analysts tend to reduce the difficult moral choices to the simple: a hard moral choice is like grading apples or following rules, etc. The existentialists do the opposite: They analyze even “simple” moral choices in terms of our experiences of deep anguish, despair, etc. (E.g., Sartre: Why do

we hate to touch something? Because stickiness is emblematic of every obstacle to our freedom to control reality.)

- c. Comparison with idealism, which is also a kind of “existential” ethic:
 - i. Both are ethics of self-realization.
 - ii. For Sartre, ethical choices are realizations of human freedom, not human “nature” as in idealism. Sartre denies that there is any human “nature” prior to our concrete life.
 - iii. Idealism identifies thought and action; existentialism sharply distinguishes them.
 - iv. In Idealism, the goal is to become one with the universe. In Existentialism, the goal is to distinguish oneself from it.
- d. Existentialism is consistent atheism, according to Sartre.
 - i. Therefore, there is no human “nature”. Man has no essence, no definition. Essence and definition presuppose the work of a designer, making things for a purpose. Unlike the paper knife, or any other “object,” man has no designer, and therefore no design.
 - ii. Atheism also implies that no ethical principle may be accepted on the authority of someone else. Even if an angel speaks to me, I must decide whether to obey or not. And I must decide to interpret his words in one way rather than in another.
- e. Man is unique in that he incorporates non-being within himself.
 - i. Whence comes the concept of non-being? It is not part of “being”! (Parmenides thought the very idea was contradictory—something which is nothing.) Sartre answers that non-being is a unique property of man. Man alone is able to represent to himself things which “are not” (History, the future, the imaginary). Most significantly, he distinguishes himself from what he “is not”, his environment.
 - ii. In moral choice, we seek to express this non-being, particularly the discontinuity between ourselves and the world.
 - a) The world exists *en soi*, “in itself.” It is something “solid,” definable.
 - b) Only man exists *pour soi*, “for himself”—self-conscious and conscious of his uniqueness.
- f. Therefore, man is radically free.
 - i. We are never forced by our past to choose a certain way. Our occupations, heredity, race, sex, age, etc., never relieve us from the responsibility of choice. At every moment we choose to be what we are.
 - ii. There are limits, of course. But those limits themselves are chosen. If I choose to go to medical school and the admission requirements are too high, that is a limit. But it is a limit because it frustrates my desire which I have freely chosen. Even death is a limit insofar as I freely choose to value life. Interesting insight here.
 - iii. We are also free in the sense of being responsible to nothing outside ourselves. There is no universally binding ethical code.

- g. Freedom means that I am ethically responsible.
 - i. I have no excuses for the things I do. All I do has been freely chosen.
 - ii. In every choice I choose a certain image of man. I alone am responsible for the effects of this choice upon others. This is dreadful freedom.
- h. Yet, there are limits.
 - i. Inevitably, we seek union between the *pour soi* (ourselves) and the *en soi* (the world). For the world limits, opposes our ability to accomplish what we have chosen to do.
 - ii. We would like to become both *pour soi* and *en soi*—to have both pure being and freedom, both essence and existence; in other words, we would like to be God (in whom essence and existence are one). But the concept to God is self-contradictory.
 - iii. We want to control the world, but we cannot. Hence, nausea, anguish. The “other” is the enemy.
- i. “Bad Faith”
 - i. To avoid this anguish, we deny our freedom. We pretend that we are mere objects, determined by our past or our station in life. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we re not responsible in the above sense.
 - ii. To live in this way is “inauthentic existence”.
- j. Comments:
 - i. Sartre is perceptive about the freedom of moral choice. To be sure, on a Christian basis, sin is a result of divine foreordination and man’s fallen nature. But there is no excuse. Every actual sin results from a choice for which man is responsible before God.
 - ii. In other odd ways, Sartre’s approach mirrors the Christian system, possibly because the former is such a self-conscious negation of the latter. The Christian would agree, e.g., that man’s problem arises from his attempt to be God, to control all things, to evade responsibility.
 - iii. Sartre’s ethic is based on human autonomy more explicitly, perhaps, than any other ethic. The Christian must attack this assumption head-on.
 - iv. Sartre reduces ethics to metaphysics, though he would claim to be averse to metaphysics. Ethics is a matter, ultimately, of the relations between being and non-being. Contrary to his claim, this is devastating to moral responsibility.
 - v. Sartre’s concept of responsibility is precisely opposite to that of Christianity. Sartre’s autonomous man is responsible to no one. On a Christian view, this is a virtual definition of irresponsibility.
 - vi. Sartre claims on the one hand to free us from all ethical rules (irrationalism); yet, he stigmatizes a certain kind of behavior as inauthentic and claims for himself the authority to legislate in the field of morals (rationalism). He defines man as undefinable, etc.

26. Some More Recent Ethicists

- a. Stephen Toulmin (1922-)

- i. The “good reasons” approach: Follow principles that bring the least amount of avoidable suffering (negative utilitarianism)
- ii. Generally, however, better to use a case method than any universal rule.
- b. John Rawls (1921-)
 - i. Anti-utilitarian, because following the principle of utility can lead to horrible results for some and, therefore, for yourself.
 - ii. Justice as “Fairness”
 - A) Each person entitled to the most extensive liberty compatible with the same liberty for others.
 - B) Inequalities are justified only to the extent that they are necessary to help the disadvantaged.

27. Summary

- a. Non-Christian ethics fails to separate the three perspectives (normative, situational, existential).
 - i. Deontological ethics (Plato, Stoicism, Kant) tries to determine duty without reference to the consequences of actions. However, without reference to those consequences it is unclear how our duty in a given situation can ever be defined.
 - ii. Teleological ethics (Aristotle, Epicurean, Utilitarian) tries to avoid the notion of an absolute duty transcending experience. Yet, its own concept of the ethical goal (pleasure, the greatest happiness for the greatest number) cannot be shown to be obligatory through experience apart from transcendent presuppositions.
 - iii. Existential ethics (Sophism, Aristotle, Kant, Idealism, Pragmatism, Existentialism) tries to make ethics a purely inward matter. But it cannot avoid making reference to transcendent duties (cf. ii. above) and external situations.
- b. No system of non-Christian ethics even does justice to its own favorite perspective.
 - i. Deontological ethics advocates an empty norm—a norm without clearly definable content. The norm gives us no clear guidance, and it prevents the lesser principles from giving us clear guidance, since they are relativized by the ultimate norm. Thus, there is really no norm at all.
 - ii. Teleological ethics tries to be empirical, concrete, to avoid reference to mysterious or transcendent principles. But the basis for obeying their principles is an ultimate mystery. And the calculation involved in making ethical choices requires superhuman insight.
 - iii. Existential ethics tries to do justice to the inner life, but winds up making man an insignificant cog in some rational (Hegel) or irrational (Sartre) cosmic process.
- c. All non-Christian systems involve rationalism and irrationalism.
 - i. They claim that autonomous reason is able to determine moral obligation without divine aid (rationalism).

- ii. They claim that moral obligation has no higher basis than the workings of chance, and that therefore there is no absolute truth available to man (irrationalism).
 - iii. The rationalism, then, can produce only a formal principle—the good in general, duty in general, the principle of utility, ethical intuition, etc.—which turns out to tell us nothing specific and to be without basis.
 - iv. The radical differences among these thinkers as to the standard of ethics, the goal (pleasure? power? self-realization? contentment?) and the motivation call in question the rationality of the project.
 - v. The irrationalism relativizes not only the alleged norms, but even its own assertions. Thus, if irrationalism is true, it cannot be true.
- d. The non-Christian approach leads to the abandonment of ethics itself.
- i. Without any norm or duty, available to human knowledge, ethical study is not possible.
 - ii. If there is no moral order in creation, choice is without meaning.
 - iii. If man is merely a product of chance, decision is without meaning.
 - iv. Thus, in non-Christian thought, ethics becomes speculation (deontology), technology (teleology) or psychology (existential).
 - v. Note, therefore:
 - a) Abandonment of ethics in favor of meta-ethics in modern language-analysis philosophy.
 - b) Abandonment of any attempt to give ethical guidance in existentialism, while retaining the vocabulary of ethical responsibility.
 - c) Modern discussions of ethical issues (abortion, capital punishment, etc.) without any distinctively moral concern, social utility being the only principle.
- e. Since non-Christian ethics is helpless to do justice to its own concerns, it is wholly unable to raise objections against Christianity.
- i. Objections to the morality of the Bible.
 - ii. Objections to God's actions in Scripture—killing the Canaanites, etc.
 - iii. Objections to the imputation of Adam's sin, to election, to the substitutionary atonement, to reprobation and Hell.
 - iv. Objections based on the problem of evil:
 - A) On a non-Christian basis, good and evil cannot be meaningfully discussed; therefore, no problem can be spoken of.
 - B) Put differently: If a Christian has a problem with evil, the non-Christian has a problem with good.
 - C) How, on his basis, can good exist and be distinguished from evil?
 - D) Yet, as a man in God's image, he knows at some level of his thought and life that good exists and has a claim upon him.

- f. Yet, there are elements in non-Christian ethical systems which can be of use to Christians. The non-Christian has, though he opposes it, considerable knowledge of morality.
 - i. Specific precepts (Romans 1:32; 2:14f.).
 - ii. He attempts to do justice to the three perspectives, which is important even to Christian ethics.
 - iii. He explores the complexity of ethical life.
 - a) The many elements of ethical language.
 - b) The difficulty of applying norms to situations.
 - c) The difficulty of ethical growth in the fallen world.
 - d) The problems of organizing society into a coherent order.
 - iv. In recognizing the complexities of ethical decision, the non-Christian is often more perceptive than the Christian.