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CHRISTIAN ETHICS

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES & OPTIONS

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GEISLER

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PREFACE

This book is a thorough revision of its precursor of two decades ago. All chapters have been updated, and new chapters and appendixes have been added. With moral decay inside and outside the church, never has there been a greater need for an understanding and application of sound ethical principles. I wish to thank my able assistant Bill Roach, who greatly assisted in research and in writing of the extensively revised sections and new chapters in this book. Also, I want thank my faithful wife, Barbara, for help in preparation of the manuscript, especially for her meticulous proofreading. While deeply grateful for their contributions, I take responsibility for the contents.

Part 1

ETHICAL OPTIONS

1

ALL THE OPTIONS

Ethics deals with what is morally right and wrong. Christian ethics deals with what is morally right and wrong for a Christian. This is a book on Christian ethics. Since Christians base their beliefs on God's revelation in Scripture, the Bible will be cited as an authority for conclusions drawn here (see chap. 8).

God has not limited himself to revelation in Scripture; he also has a general revelation in nature (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:12-14). Since God's moral character does not change, it should be expected that there will be similarities and overlaps between God's natural and supernatural revelations. However, the focus of this book is not God's natural law for all people, but his divine law for believers.

Definitions of Ethics

Ethics deals with what is right and wrong morally. Numerous theories have been proposed concerning what is meant by a morally good action (see chap. 8). But it is sufficient here to note the distinguishing characteristics of Christian ethics, each of which will be briefly discussed here.

Christian Ethics Is Based on God's Will

Christian ethics is a form of the divine-command position. An ethical duty is something we ought to do. It is a divine prescription. Of course, the ethical imperatives that God gives are in accord with his unchangeable moral character. That is, God wills what is right in accordance with his own moral attributes. "Be

holy, because I am holy," the Lord commanded Israel (Lev. 11:45). "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect: Jesus said to his disciples (Matt. 5:48). "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). So we should not lie either. "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and so Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). In brief, Christian ethics is based on God's will, but God never wills anything contrary to his unchanging moral character.

Christian Ethics Is Absolute

Since God's moral character does not change (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17), it follows that moral obligations flowing from his nature are absolute. That is, they are always binding everywhere on everyone. Of course, not everything God wills flows necessarily from his unchanging nature. Some things are merely in accord with his nature but flow freely from his will. For example, God chose to test Adam and Eve's moral obedience by forbidding them to eat a specific fruit on a tree (Gen. 2:16-17). Although it was morally wrong for Adam and Eve to disobey that command, we are no longer bound by that command today. That command was based on God's will and did not flow necessarily from his nature.

On the other hand, God's command not to murder (Gen. 9:6) applied before the law was given to Moses, under the law of Moses (Exod. 20:13), and also since the time of Moses (Rom. 13:9). In brief, murder is wrong at all times and all places and for all people. This is true because humans are created in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:27; 9:6). This includes a moral likeness to God (Col. 3:10; James 3:9). And whatever is traceable to God's unchanging moral character is a moral absolute. This includes such moral obligations as holiness, justice, love, truthfulness, and mercy. Other commands flowing from God's will, but not necessarily from his nature, are equally binding on a believer, but they are not absolute. That is, they must be obeyed because God prescribed them, but he did not prescribe them for all people, times, and places. Absolute moral duties, on the contrary, are binding on all people at all times and in all places.

Christian Ethics Is Based on God's Revelation

Christian ethics is based on God's commands, the revelation of which is both general (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:12-15) and special (2:18; 3:2). God has revealed himself both in nature (Ps. 19:1-6) and in Scripture (19:7-14). General revelation contains God's commands for all people. Special revelation declares his will for believers. But in either case, the basis of human ethical responsibility is divine revelation.

Failure to recognize God as the source of moral duty does not exonerate anyone, even an atheist, from their moral duty. For "when Gentiles, who do not have the law [of Moses], do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14-15). That is, even if unbelievers do not

have the moral law in their minds, they still have it written on their hearts. Even if they do not know it by way of cognition, they show it by way of inclination.

Christian Ethics Is Prescriptive

Since moral rightness is prescribed by a moral God, it is prescriptive. For there is no moral law without a moral Lawgiver; there is no moral legislation without a moral Legislator. So Christian ethics by its very nature is prescriptive, not descriptive. Ethics deals with what ought to be, not with what is. Christians do not find their ethical duties in the standard of Christians but in the standard for Christians—the Bible.

From a Christian point of view, a purely descriptive ethic is no ethic at all. Describing human behavior is the task of sociology. But prescribing human behavior is the province of morality. The attempt to derive morals from mores is, as we have already noted, the "is-ought" fallacy. What people actually do is not the basis for what they ought to do. If it were, then people ought to lie, cheat, steal, and murder, since these things are done all the time.

Christian Ethics Is Deontological

Ethical systems can be broadly divided into two categories, deontological (duty-centered) and teleological (end-centered). This is sometimes called consequentialism since the value of an act is determined by its consequence. Christian ethics is deontological. Utilitarianism is an example of a teleological ethic. The nature of a deontological ethic can be seen more clearly by contrast with a teleological view (see table 1.1 on the next page).

A couple of illustrations will clarify this point. Someone tries to rescue a drowning person but fails. According to one form of teleological ethic, this was not a good act because it did not have good results. Since the results determine the goodness of the act, and the results were not good, then it follows that the attempted rescue was not a good act.

Yet a more sophisticated form of teleological (utilitarian) ethic might argue that the attempt was good, even though it failed, because it had a good effect on society. People heard about it and were encouraged to help rescue others in the future. But even here the attempted act of rescue that failed was not good in itself. Rather, it would have been good if and only if it had brought some good results, either for the drowning person or for someone else.

By contrast, the Christian ethic is deontological and insists that even some acts that fail are good. Christians believe, for example, that it is better to have loved and to have lost than not to have loved at all. Christians believe that the cross was not a failure simply because only some will be saved. It was sufficient for all even if it is efficient only for those who believe. The Christian ethic insists that it is good to work against bigotry and racism, even if one fails. This is so because moral actions that reflect God's nature are good whether they are successful or

not. Good for the Christian is not determined in a lottery. In life the winner is not always right.

TABU 1.1
Two Views of Ethics

Deontological Ethic	Teleological Ethic
Rule determines the result.	Result determines the rule.
Rule is the basis of the act.	Result is the basis of the act.
Rule is good regardless of result.	Rule is good because of result.
Result is always calculated within the rules. Result is sometimes used to break rules.	

However, Christian ethics does not neglect results. Simply because results do not determine what is right does not mean that it is not right to consider results. Indeed, results of actions are important in Christian ethics. For example, a Christian should calculate in which direction a gun is pointing before he pulls the trigger. Drivers need to *estimate* the possible consequence of their speed in relation to other objects. Speakers are responsible for calculating the possible effects of their words on others. Christians have a duty to anticipate the results of not being immunized to serious diseases, and so on.

In all the foregoing illustrations, however, there is an important difference between the deontological use of results and a teleological use of them. In Christian ethics these results are all calculated within rules or norms. That is, no anticipated result as such can be used as a justification for breaking any God-given moral law. Utilitarians, on the other hand, use anticipated results to break moral rules. In *fact*, they use results to make the rules. Existing rules can be broken if the expected results call for it. For example, while Christian ethics allows for inoculation for disease, it does not allow for infanticide to purify the genetic stock of the human race; in this case the end result is used to justify the use of an evil means. In brief, the end may justify the use of good means, but it does not justify the use of any means, certainly not evil ones.

Various Views on Ethics

There are only six major ethical systems, each designated by its answer to the question Are there any objective ethical laws? That is, are any moral laws not purely subjective but actually binding on humans in general?

In answer, *antinomianism* says there are no moral laws. *Situationism* affirms there is one absolute law. *Generalist*?! claims there are some general laws but no absolute ones. *Unqualified absolutism* believes in many absolute laws that never conflict. *Conflicting absolutism* contends there are many absolute norms that sometimes conflict, and we are obligated to do the lesser evil. *Graded absolutism* holds that

many absolute laws sometimes conflict, and we are responsible for obeying the higher law.

Differences between Various Views

Of the six basic ethical views, two deny all objectively absolute moral laws. Of them, antinomianism denies all universal and general moral laws. Generalism, on the other hand, denies only universal moral laws but holds to general ones. That is, there are some objective moral laws that are binding most of the time but not necessarily all the time.

Four ethical views claim to be forms of absolutism. Of these, situationism believes in only one absolute, while the others believe in two or more absolutes. Of them, unqualified absolutism contends that these absolute moral principles never conflict, while the other two believe that they sometimes do conflict. Of the two that believe these moral principles sometimes conflict, conflicting absolutism contends that we are responsible to do the lesser evil but guilty for whichever one we break. On the other hand, graded absolutism holds that our responsibility is to obey the greater commandment. Consequently, we are not guilty for not following the lesser commandment in conflict with it.

Examples of the Six Major Ethical Views

Corrie ten Boom tells how she lied to save Jews from the Nazi death camps. During *U.S.* Senate hearings on the Iran-Contra issue, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North testified that, in the process of performing his duties, he had lied to save innocent lives. North said, "I had to weigh lying and lives."

In a number of biblical stories, people lied to save lives. The Hebrew midwives lied to save the baby boys Pharaoh had commanded them to kill (Exod. 1:15-19). Rahab lied to save the lives of the Jewish spies in Jericho (Josh. 2).

Is it ever right to lie to save a life? This issue will serve to focus the differences among the six basic ethical positions.

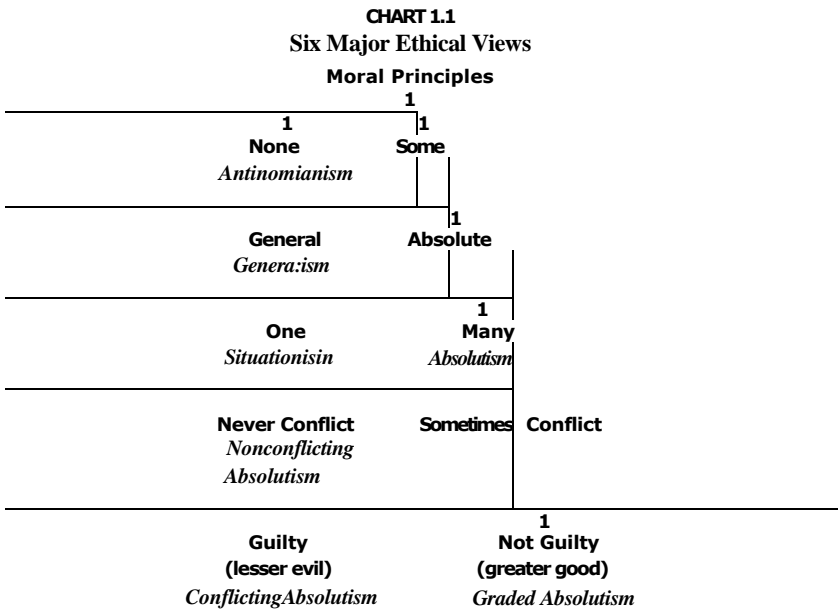
1. ***Lying is neither right nor wrong: there are no laws.*** Antinomianism asserts that lying to save lives is neither right nor wrong. It affirms that there are no objective moral principles by which the issue can be judged right or wrong. The issue must be decided on subjective, personal, or pragmatic grounds, but not on any objective moral grounds. We are literally without a moral law to decide the issue.
2. ***Lying is generally wrong: there are no universal laws.*** Generalism claims that lying is generally wrong. As a rule, lying is wrong, but in specific cases this general rule can be broken. Since there are no universal moral laws, whether a given lie is right will depend on the results. **If** the results are good, then the lie is right. Most generalists believe that lying to save a life is right because

in this case the end justifies the means necessary to attain it. However, lying in general is wrong.

3. *Lying is sometimes right: there is only one universal law.* Situationism claims that there is only one absolute moral law, and telling the truth is not it. Love is the only absolute, and lying may be the loving thing to do. In fact, lying to save a life is the loving thing to do. Hence, lying is sometimes right. Indeed, any moral rule except love can and should be broken for love's sake. Everything else is relative; only one thing is absolute. Thus the situationist believes that lying to save lives is morally justified.
4. *Lying is always wrong: there are many nonconflicting laws.* Unqualified absolutism believes that there are many absolute moral laws, and none of them should ever be broken. Truth is such a law. Therefore, one must always tell the truth, even if someone dies as a result of it. Truth is absolute, and absolutes cannot be broken. Therefore, there are no exceptions to telling the truth. Results are never used as a rationale to break rules, even if the results are desirable.
5. *Lying is forgivable: there are many conflicting laws.* Conflicting absolutism recognizes that we live in an evil world, where absolute moral laws sometimes run into inevitable conflict. In such cases it is our moral duty to do the lesser evil. We must break the lesser law and plead mercy. For instance, we should lie to save the life and then ask for forgiveness for breaking God's absolute moral law. Our moral dilemmas are sometimes unavoidable, but we are culpable anyway. God cannot change his absolute moral prescriptions because of our moral predicaments.
6. *Lying is sometimes right: there are higher laws.* Graded absolutism holds that there are many moral absolutes, and they sometimes conflict. However, some laws are higher than others, so when there is an unavoidable conflict, it is our duty to follow the higher moral law. God does not blame us for what we could not avoid. Thus he exempts us from responsibility to follow the lower law in view of the overriding obligation to obey the higher law. Many graded absolutists believe that mercy to the innocent is a greater moral duty than telling truth to the guilty. Hence, they are convinced that it is right in such cases to lie in order to save a life.

The diagram on the next page is a logical summary of the six major views.

In summary, antinomianism sets forth its view to the exclusion of all objective moral laws. Generalism claims that there are exceptions to moral laws. Situationism holds one moral absolute to the exclusion of all others. Unqualified absolutism insists that there is always an escape from the apparent conflict in absolute moral laws. Conflicting absolutism contends that when moral laws conflict, doing the lesser evil is excusable. And graded absolutism holds that when moral laws conflict, God grants an exemption to the lower law in view of our duty to obey the higher law. Each of these views will be examined in the next several chapters.



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2

ANTINOMIANISM

Broadly speaking, ethical systems fall into two categories: nonabsolutisms and absolutisms. In the first category are antinomianism (chap. 2), situationism (chap. 3), and generalism (chap. 4). In the second category are unqualified absolutism (chap. 5), conflicting absolutism (chap. 6), and graded absolutism (chap. 7). Since Christian ethics is firmly rooted in the unchanging moral character of God (Lev. 11:45; Mal. 3:6), the first three are not options for the Christian. Nonetheless, since they challenge Christian ethics, they must be addressed.

Background of Antinomianism

Antinomianism, which literally means "against/instead of law," holds that there are no binding moral laws, that everything is relative.

Antinomianism in the Ancient World

Ethical antinomianism has a long history. There were at least three movements in the ancient world that influenced the rise of antinomianism: processism, hedonism, and skepticism.

Processism. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "No man steps into the same river twice, for fresh waters are ever upon him." Everything in the world, he believed, is in a constant state of flux. A later Greek thinker, Cratylus, carried this philosophy one step further, contending that no one steps into the same river once. He argued that the river and everything else have no "sameness"

or unchanging essence. So convinced was Cratylus that all is flux that he was not even sure that he existed. When asked about his existence, he would simply wiggle his finger, indicating that he too was in flux. It is clear that if this is applied to the realm of ethics, there can be no abiding moral laws. Every ethical value will change with the situation.

Hedonism. The ancient Epicureans gave impetus to a relativistic ethic, which makes pleasure the essence of good and pain the essence of evil, known as hedonism (from the Greek *Wane*, pleasure). But pleasures are relative to persons, places, and periods. An airplane ride is pure pleasure for some and sheer agony for others. Sometimes the same music is relaxing, and at other times annoying. Applied to the realm of morals, this view contends that what is morally good for one person may be evil for another.

Skepticism. The central thesis of skepticism is to suspend judgment on all matters. Sextus Empiricus was a famous skeptic in the ancient world, as was David Hume in modern times. The skeptic insists that every issue has two sides and every question can be argued to a stalemate. Since no firm and final conclusion can be drawn, we must suspend judgment in all matters. In ethics this would mean that nothing should ever be considered absolutely right or wrong.

Antinomianism in the Medieval World

Although the medieval Western world was dominated by a Christian point of view, it still generated several strains of thought that contributed to antinomianism. The most notable among these were intentionalism, voluntarism, and nominalism.

Intentionalism. In the twelfth century, Peter Abelard argued that an act is right if it is done with good intention and wrong if done with bad intention. Hence, some acts that seem bad are really good. For example, someone who accidentally kills another is not morally culpable. Neither is giving money to the poor a good act if it is done for the wrong motives (e.g., to be praised by others). This being the case, it would seem that the rightness or wrongness of an act is relative to a person's intentions.

Voluntarism. The fourteenth-century thinker William of Ockham argued that all moral principles are traceable to God's will. Thus God could have decided differently about what is right and what is wrong. Ockham believed that something is right because God wills it; God does not will it because it is right. If this is so, then what is morally right today may not be so tomorrow. Although Christian voluntarists took comfort in the belief that God would not change his will on basic moral issues, they could not be sure that morals would not change. In this way voluntarism helped pave the way for antinomianism.

Nominalism. Another aspect of Ockham's thought was called nominalism, or the denial of universals. Nominalists believe there are no universal forms or essences, that only particular things exist. Universals exist only in the mind, not in

reality. The real world is radically individual. There is, for example, no such thing as the essence of "humanness!" Individual humans exist in the real world, but "humanness" exists only as a concept in the mind. It is not difficult to see that if the same reasoning is applied to ethics, then there is no such thing as goodness or justice. There are only individual acts of justice that differ from others, but no such thing as justice itself.

Antinomianism in the Modern World

The growth of relativism in the modern world is manifest in three movements: utilitarianism, existentialism, and evolutionism. Each of these contributes in its own way to antinomianism.

Utilitarianism. Building on ancient hedonism, Jeremy Bentham (d. 1832) laid down the principle that one should act so as to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of persons in the long run. This is sometimes called the "utilitarian calculus." He understood this in the quantitative sense of what brings the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain.

John Stuart Mill (d. 1873) used the same utilitarian calculus, only he understood it in a qualitative sense. He believed that some pleasures were of higher quality than others. He even went so far as to say it would be better to be an unhappy human than a happy pig, for the intellectual and aesthetic qualities of human life are qualitatively superior to the mere physical pleasures of an animal. In any event, there are no absolute moral laws. It all depends on what brings about the greatest pleasure. And this may differ from person to person and place to place.

Existentialism. Soren Kierkegaard (d. 1855) is the father of modern existentialism. Although he was a Christian thinker, many believe that he opened the door for antinomianism by claiming that our highest duty goes beyond moral law. Kierkegaard earnestly believed the moral law, which says, "Thou shalt not kill"; yet he also believed that God told Abraham to kill his son Isaac (Gen. 22). He believed there was no moral reason or justification for such an act, but that it was necessary in this case to transcend the ethical by "a leap of faith."

Following Kierkegaard, non-Christian thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre (d. 1980) took existentialism a step closer to antinomianism. Sartre argued that no ethical acts have any real meaning. He concluded *Being and Nothingness* by saying, "It amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations"

Evolutionism. After Darwin (d. 1882), men like Herbert Spencer (d. 1903) expanded evolution into a cosmic theory. Others, such as T. H. Huxley (d. 1895) and Julian Huxley (d. 1975), worked out an evolutionary ethic. The central tenet is that whatever aids the evolutionary process is right and whatever hinders it is

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 627.

wrong. Julian Huxley laid down three principles of evolutionary ethics: it is right to realize ever-new possibilities in evolution; it is right to respect human individuality and to encourage its fullest development; it is right to construct a mechanism for further social evolution.

Adolf Hitler (d. 1945) worked out an evolutionary ethic in *Mein Kampf* (1924). Applying Darwin's principle of natural selection or survival of the fittest to human ethnic groups, Hitler concluded that since evolution has produced the superior (Aryan) stock, we must work to preserve it. Likewise, he believed that inferior breeds must be weeded out. On this basis he killed six million Jews and about five million other non-Aryans.

Antinomianism in the Contemporary World

Several movements in the contemporary world contribute to a lawless morality. Three that stand out are emotivism, nihilism, and situationism. In their extreme forms, all of these are antinomian.

Emotivism. A. J. Ayer (d. 1989) argued that all ethical statements are emotive. That is, they really only express our feelings. Thus statements like "Thou shalt not kill" really mean "I dislike killing" or "I feel killing is wrong." Ethical statements are merely expostulations of our subjective feelings. There are no divine imperatives. Everything is relative to one's individual feelings. Hence, there are no objective moral laws that are binding on all persons everywhere.

Nihilism. The famous German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) said, "God is dead and we have killed him." When God died, all objective values died with him?. The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (d. 1881) noted correctly that if God is dead, then anything goes. For Nietzsche, the death of God meant not only the death of God-given values but also the need for humans to create their own values. In doing so, he argued, we must go "beyond good and evil." Since there is no God to will what is good, we must will our own good. And since there is no eternal value, we must will the eternal recurrence of the same state of affairs. In the last line of *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche said that he would rather will nothingness than not to will at all. This willing of nothingness is what is called nihilism (nothingness-ism).

Situationism. According to this view, everything is relative to the situation in which one finds oneself. Although the ethicist Joseph Fletcher (d. 1991) claims to believe in one absolute ethical norm (see chap. 3), he has no absolute moral principles with substantive content. In this sense, his view contributes heavily to antinomianism. Fletcher says we should avoid words such as "never" and "always." There are no moral principles that apply to all people at all times. All ethical decisions are expedient and circumstantial.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1960,95).

Basic Beliefs of Antinomians

Antinomians are without moral law. This can be understood in an absolute or in a limited sense. In an absolute sense, they are without any moral law whatsoever, though few claim to hold this view. This is usually something said of ethical relativism byway of critique. It is a view that they are charged with holding byway of inference, not by their explicit confession.

Limited antinomianism is more widely held. This is a form of ethical relativism that denies any objective, absolute, or God-given laws. It does not deny all moral laws, but it does deny all laws anyone might impose on others. Let us examine some of the basic beliefs of antinomianism in more detail.

There Are No God-Given Moral Laws

Antinomians are either theoretical or practical atheists because they do not believe that any moral principles have divine sanctions. Either there is no God, or else there is none that has enjoined universal moral laws on us.

There Are No Objective Moral Laws

Most antinomians do not deny that persons can choose to live by some moral standards. They simply refuse to accept that these are more than the subjective choices of the individual. Whatever moral laws there may be are relative to individuals who choose to live by them. There are no objective moral laws binding on all human beings.

There Are No Timeless Moral Laws

Antinomians are also opposed to any timeless moral laws, whether they derive from some God or are just there. Whatever moral laws there may be are temporal, not eternal. Humankind is literally without any abiding laws. Morals are simply mores, and they change from place to place as well as from time to time.

There Are No Laws against Laws

Most antinomians are not against law but simply without law. They are not necessarily opposed to laws but feel that there are not any objective moral laws. This does not mean that they are without any kind of law. Most antinomians accept the need for family rules as well as civil laws. They realize that without some kinds of laws, society cannot operate. But while they accept positive social law, they insist that it is not based on any divine or natural law. It is this kind of moral law behind the civil law that they believe human beings are without. And in this sense, they are antinomian, or without law.

Positive Contributions of Antinomianism

Few positions are totally without any merit. There is usually enough truth in any false view to make it float. Hence, even the antinomian view contains some fragments of truth. Different forms of antinomianism make different contributions, but all of them make some contribution. These positive aspects of antinomianism include the following.

It Stresses Individual Responsibility

In taking their focus off the universal, antinomians often place emphasis on the individual. This points out the truth that ethics is ultimately a matter of personal responsibility. No reference to God as the source of moral principles can be used to excuse humans from taking responsibility for their own actions.

Likewise, stress on the individual avoids absolving personal responsibility in a collectivity. The individual cannot escape into the group. The individual cannot hide in the crowd. No one can rightfully blame society for their own moral actions.

It Recognizes an Emotive Element

Some antinomians rightfully point to an emotive dimension in much of what passes for moral prescription. Not everything that takes the linguistic form of "Thou shalt not" or "You ought not" is really a divine imperative. Many such statements are merely expressions of some individual's feelings. Not all alleged imperatives are really prescriptive; some are merely emotive. We often couch our own personal feelings in the more powerful language of divine injunctions. The antinomians can be thanked for helping us to be conscious of such abuses.

It Stresses Personal Relations

Some forms of antinomianism, existentialism for example, stress personal relations instead of merely prescriptive regulations. In so doing, they focus on an important dimension of morality. After all, our primary ethical responsibility is to persons, not to mere laws. Jesus made this point when he said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27; man = humankind). Persons are ends, not means to an end. By putting the focus on persons rather than on mere prescriptions for persons, the antinomian has served to refocus an important aspect of moral responsibility.

It Stresses the Finite Dimensions of Ethics

Absolutists often overstate their case, acting as though they have an absolute understanding of absolutes. Antinomians make a contribution to ethics by stressing the relative dimension. Finite humanity does not have an infinite understanding of the infinite. Paul said, "Now I know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). The basic ethical

principles are absolute, but our human perspective on them is less than absolute. In pointing to our changing understanding of God's unchanging moral law, antinomians have rendered an unwitting service to Christian ethics.

Some Criticisms of Antinomianism

Although many antinomians are not necessarily irresponsible in their actions, there are nonetheless some irredeemable difficulties with the view as a whole. A number of views from ancient times to the present gave rise to antinomianism. Each was discussed earlier, and a brief response will be made to each here.

A Response to Processism

Two points can be made in response to the view, springing from Heraclitus, that all is in flux. First, Heraclitus himself did not believe that everything is relative. In fact, he held that there was an unchanging *logos* beneath all change, by which change could be measured. He saw this as an absolute law by which all humans should live.

Second, if one carries the idea of change all the way, as Cratylus tried, then he uses change to destroy change. For if everything is changing and nothing is constant, then there is no way to measure the change. Everything cannot be changing, or we would not be able to know it.

A Response to Hedonism

Claiming that pleasure is the essence of good is subject to several criticisms. First, not all pleasures are good. For example, the sadistic pleasure some deranged individuals get from sexually abusing or torturing little children is not good; instead, it is grossly evil. Second, not all pain is bad. Pains that warn of impending disease or damage, for instance, are good pains. Third, it is a confusion of categories to reduce good to pleasure. A person is not virtuous because of feeling good, nor is one necessarily sinful because of suffering pain. Finally, personal happiness maybe relative to happenings, but values are not. Many martyrs have suffered adversely for their values. Hence, the good cannot be equated with the pleasurable.

A Response to Skepticism

There are numerous problems with skepticism. First, consistent skepticism is self-defeating. If skeptics were really skeptical about everything, then they would be skeptical about skepticism. If they do not doubt their own doubting, then they really are not skeptics but are dogmatic and want us to suspend judgment on everything except their skeptical views. Second, some things ought not to be doubted. Why, for example, should I doubt my own existence? Some things are

obvious, and it is frivolous to deny the obvious. Third, ethics has to do with the way we live, but no skeptic can consistently live out real skepticism. Skeptics cannot suspend judgment on whether they need food and water—at least not for long. And if they are married, they dare not suspend judgment on whether they love their spouse!

A Response to Intentionalism

Perhaps the easiest way to state the fundamental objection to intentionalism is to point out that the road to hell is paved with good intentions." Furthermore, even Hitler had what he considered good intentions for the Holocaust: he wanted to weed out "Inferior" strains of the human species. In addition, intentionalism wrongly assumes that because bad intentions are always bad, good intentions are always good. Bad intentions are always bad, even if they do not result in bad actions. Trying to kill an innocent person is surely bad, even if the attempt does not succeed. However, killing handicapped people to alleviate the financial burden on society is not good no matter how noble the intention may be.

A Response to Voluntarism

Contrary to voluntarism, an act is not good simply because God wills it. First, this would make God arbitrary and not essentially good. Second, it exalts God's will above his nature and allows it to operate independent of his nature. This is questionable theology at best. Third, voluntarism provides no security that God will remain constant in his ethical concerns, since he could change his mind at any time and will (decide) that hate is right rather than love. Fourth, an act is not good simply because it flows from the choice of some sovereign being. As we all know, sovereigns can be capricious about their will. Something is not good simply because someone else has the power to perform it. For something to be a good act, it must come from a good power. A will alone is not a sufficient basis for good; it must be a good will.

A Response to Nominalism

First, if nominalists are correct in saying there is no universal form or essence of meaning, then meaning could not be translated from one language to another. But translation of meaning from language to language occurs daily around the world. Thus there must be some universal basis for meaning that transcends any given language. Second, when applied to ethics, this means that all good acts must participate in some universal goodness by which they are designated good acts. So there must be some universal good that is common to all good acts. Third, for the Christian this universal good is the moral character of God. To deny that God has such a transcendentally good nature that it is the basis of all creaturely good is contrary to the Christian view of God.

A Response to Utilitarianism

The first problem with utilitarianism is that it implies that the end justifies any means necessary to attain it. If this were so, then Stalin's slaughter of some eighteen million or more could be justified in view of the communist utopia he hoped would eventually be achieved. Second, results alone do not justify an action. When the results come, we must still ask whether they are good results or bad ones. The end does not justify the means; the means must justify themselves. Infanticide of children thought to be carriers of genetic Impurities" is not justified by the goal of a purified genetic stock. Third, even utilitarians take the end as a universal good, showing that they cannot avoid a universal good. Otherwise from whence do they derive the concept of a good that should be desired for its own sake? Finally, desired results alone do not make something good. Often we desire what is wrong. Even desires for ends thought to be good are subject to the question Are they good desires? So even here there must be some standard outside the desires by which they are measured.

A Response to Existentialism

Many criticisms can be leveled at an existential ethic. First, if everyone literally "did their own thing; there would be chaos, which would hinder anyone from doing their own "thing." Second, even free choices need a context or structure. Absolute freedom for two or more persons is impossible, for if one person chooses to do to others what they choose not to have done to them, then an unavoidable conflict emerges. This is why law is necessary to structure free choice, thus maximizing the freedom of all without negating the freedom of any. Third, no free act is without justification; otherwise one is unjustified in performing it. No action escapes the first principle of justice any more than a thought can escape the first principle of noncontradiction. Both thought and action are justified by first principles, and whoever breaks first principles will in the end be broken by first principles.

A Response to Evolutionism

The response to an evolutionary ethic is similar to the response to a process ethic. First, on what basis do we decide what the goal is? What is meant by "development"? Is this to be understood biologically, politically, culturally, or morally? Second, how do we know that the desired development is really good development? One can also develop in an evil direction. Third, who decides what will hinder or help the evolutionary process? Some standard outside the evolutionary process must be assumed in order to measure it. Otherwise, we could not know whether the change is for better or for worse. Since no stage in the process is final or perfect, there must be some standard beyond it by which we can measure the progress. Otherwise we do not know the difference between mere change and real progress.

A Response to Emotivism

The first difficulty with emotivism is that it tries to prescribe that ethical statements are not prescriptive. It dictates that "ought" statements do not mean one ought to do such and such, but simply, "I feel it is wrong." This is legislating meaning rather than listening to meaning. It prescribes what an ethical statement should mean, rather than listening to what it does mean. Second, even emotivists do not really believe that everything is a matter of subjective feeling. Like everyone else, emotivists believe some things really are wrong, such as robbing humans of their freedom of thought and expression. Third, the way emotivists react to being cheated, robbed, assaulted, or tortured reveals that they really believe these are wrong.

A Response to Nihilism

Nihilism is hard-core antinomianism. It negates all objective value. Such a view is subject to severe criticism. First, it is self-destructive, for nihilists value their right to negate all value. They value their freedom to hold their view and not to be forced to hold another position. Second, even Nietzsche could not help making value judgments, both negative and positive. For example, he considered Christianity to be "the highest of all conceivable corruptions,"³ but by what standard did he make this judgment?

A Response to Situationism

A situational ethic that denies all absolute norms is vulnerable to the same criticisms that all total relativisms are. First, situationists have no place to stand to make value judgments. They cannot relativize everything else unless they have some nonrelative place to stand. It is clearly self-destructive to make an absolute claim that there are no absolutes. Second, even situationists cannot avoid making such universal ethical statements as "No unwanted baby should ever be born" or "Love only is always good.:" Third, situationism is really a form of utilitarianism and as such is subject to the same criticisms.

Criticisms of Antinomianism in General

In addition to the criticisms that can be leveled at the particular views that have contributed to antinomianism, several general criticisms can be made of antinomianism as a whole. Let us examine them in turn.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *Portable Nietzsche*, 655.

4. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 39, 57.

It Is Self-Defeating

The denial of all moral value is self-destructive. One cannot deny all value without presupposing some value. There is no way to be consistently total relativists, for they cannot move the world unless they have some place to put their fulcrum. Relativists really stand upon their own absolutes in their attempts to relativize everything else. This becomes more obvious when one reduces to its common denominator their basic claim, which amounts to saying, We should never use the word *never*," or ^{awe} should always avoid the word *always*!" But if they are absolutely sure there are no absolutes, then there must be some. Moral absolutes cannot be denied unless they are implied. Everyone who denies all value believes there is value in the denial, or they would not take the trouble to make the denial.

It Is Too Subjective

There may be a subjective element in much of ethics, but this does not mean that all ethical statements are subjective. There no doubt is a subjective element in the application, but the principle itself is objective. For example, the understanding of love varies from person to person, but love itself does not change. There may be progress in a society's application of justice to its members, but justice is not purely subjective. A purely subjective ethic is like a game without rules. In fact, it is not a game at all; it is a free-for-all.

It Is Too Individualistic

Not only is an antinomian ethic like a ball game without rules; it is also like a game without umpires. Everyone is really their own umpire, since there are no objective moral laws that bind everyone. Each individual is really their own authority, because there is no binding external moral authority. Each person can literally do what is right in their own eyes, and there is nothing that everyone ought to do.

It is one thing to stress the value of each individual's responsibility but quite another to say there is no real responsibility for any individual. In such an atomistic ethic, each situation is distinct. There is no real community of value that transcends the individual, no meaningful moral milieu for interpersonal relations. Each individual lives in a hermetically sealed moral vacuum jar perched on their own isolated shelf.

It Is Ineffective

As long as there are two or more persons in the world, there will be conflicts. But if there are no objective moral laws, there are no ways to adjudicate these clashes. Moral laws regulate the ways in which persons relate to each other. Even antinomians want to be treated with respect. But why ought anyone else treat them with this respect, unless there is a moral law that says they ought to do so?

Unless there is a moral standard outside of two individuals in conflict, there is no way to resolve their moral conflict. It is simply insufficient to appeal to a different standard within each individual in order to judge between them. Voluntarily assumed moral standards are no moral standards at all. Amoral duty is an obligation, not an option. People cannot simply choose whether they will be just and loving; they are *obligated* to be just and loving.

It Is Irrational

Antinomianism does not make peace with such laws of rationality as, for example, the laws of noncontradiction. It makes no sense to say everything is right for people to do, even opposites. If love is right for one person, hate cannot be right for another person. If kindness to children is right in one culture, then cruelty to them cannot be right in another. These are contradictory actions, and contradictions cannot both be true. It is irrational to contend that opposite moral duties can both be equally binding.

Summary and Conclusion

Antinomianism is a radical form of ethical relativism. It denies not only that there are any valid ethical absolutes, but also that there are any binding moral laws whatsoever. It is literally "without law." This does not mean that it is without any value. Antinomians do stress the value of the individual in making ethical decisions, as well as the value of personal relations. Furthermore, they often point out an obviously emotive dimension in much of our ethical exhortation.

However, as an adequate ethical system, antinomianism falls far short of the mark for many reasons. First, it is self-defeating to deny all binding moral values. The one denying all values certainly values their right to deny them. Second, it is also purely subjective, providing no objective rules for the game of life. For antinomians life actually turns out not to be a serious game at all; it is a free-for-all. Third, it is too individualistic. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. Fourth, it is ineffective, since two or more people cannot function in a society without objectively binding rules. Finally, it is irrational, since it entails the belief that opposing views are both right.

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3

SITUATIONISM

Contrary to what the word *situationism* might seem to imply, it is not a completely normless ethic. According to one of its most vigorous proponents, Joseph Fletcher, author of *Situation Ethics*, situationism is located between the extremes of legalism and antinomianism. The antinomians have no laws, the legalists have laws for everything, and Fletcher's situationism has only one law.

There are a number of situationists whose works might have been examined here, among them Emil Brunner (*The Divine Imperative*), Reinhold Niebuhr (*Moral Man and Immoral Society*), and John A. T. Robinson (*Honest to God*). But Fletcher's position has been more influential than these.

Situationism Explained

Since Fletcher's situationism claims allegiance to one unbreakable norm, it will be treated here as a one-norm absolutism. According to Fletcher, his position is neither a lawless relativism, which says there is no law for anything, nor a legalistic absolutism, which has laws for everything. Rather, he contends that there is one law for everything, the law of love.

Avoiding the Extremes of Legalism and Antinomianism

Fletcher fears both the radical right and the radical left in ethics. However, his position yields more readily to the criticism that it, too, is not distinguishable from

antinomianism. Between these two poles, he tries to firmly establish one absolute norm that can be applied to every ethical situation.

The legalist is one who enters every decision-making situation encumbered with a bundle of predetermined rules and regulations. For such, the letter and not the spirit of the law prevails. The post-Maccabean Pharisees can be singled out as classic examples of legalists. With their 613 (or 621) laws, they were pre-armed for any moral predicament. They had a preset and prescribed manual for morality. Fletcher considers Judaism, along with both classical Catholicism and Protestantism, to be legalistic, though Judaism is less so than the latter two. The Jews stoned homosexuals and the church burned them, says Fletcher. Both put law over love. The legalist believes in the love of duty; the situationist holds to the duty of love.

At the other end of the ethical spectrum, Fletcher locates the antinomians, who are complete libertines, with no norms whatsoever. Each of their moral decisions is spontaneous and unprincipled, based only on the situation of the moment. Some antinomians claim to have a clairvoyant conscience, a kind of direct moral insight into right and wrong. As examples of the antinomian view, Fletcher cites the New Testament libertines, with their lawlessness; the early gnostics, with their 'special knowledge'; the modern Moral Rearmament movement, with its 'spiritual power'; and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism (discussed here in chap. 2). Common to all these views, says Fletcher, is the rejection of all moral rules, even any generally valid ones. No norm is accepted, not even a norm of love. From Fletcher's point of view, the antinomians throw out the ethical baby (love) with the legalistic bathwater.

Between the polar opposites of legalism, with laws for everything, and antinomianism, with its lack of laws for anything, Fletcher posits his situational absolutism, with its one law for everything. The situationist comes into every ethical battle armed with but one moral weapon—love: "Only the command to love is categorically good." Every other decision is hypothetical: do this *if* it is loving. "We are 'obliged' to tell the truth, for example, only if the situation calls for it; if a would-be murderer asks his victim's whereabouts, our duty might be to lie. As far as other moral rules are concerned, they are helpful but not unbreakable. The only ethical imperative one has is "Act responsibly in love." Literally "everything else without exception, all laws and rules and principles and ideals and norms, are only *contingent*, only valid *if they happen* to serve love in any situation" (emphasis original)?

The situationist has the one law of love (*agape*); many general rules of wisdom (*sophia*), which are more or less reliable; and the particular moment of decision (*kairos*), "in which the *responsible self in the situation* decides whether the *sophia*

1. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 26. 2. *Ibid.*, 27.

3. *Ibid.*, 28, 30, emphasis original.

can serve love there or not." The "legalists make an idol of the *sophia*, antinomians repudiate it, situationists use it," writes Fletcher.⁴ The solidification of these generally valid rules into absolute norms is legalism, and the rejection of all value in them is antinomianism.

There are at least two basic reasons for accepting only one universal norm. First, universals cannot be derived by deduction from other universals like "middle axioms"—one cannot derive an underived norm. Second, each situation is so different from every other situation that it is questionable whether a rule that applies to one situation can be applied to all situations like it, since the others may not really be like it. Only the single axiom or norm of love is broad enough to be applied to all circumstances and contexts.

Setting Forth the Presuppositions

According to Fletcher, there are four working principles of situationism: pragmatism, relativism, positivism, and personalism. He does not, however, intend that we should conclude that situationism is totally relativistic and nonnormative. He means, rather, that within the framework of this absolute norm of love, everything else is pragmatic, relativistic, positivistic, and personalistic.

1. **Pragmatism.** By a pragmatic approach Fletcher means that "the right is only the expedient in our way of our behaving." It is what "works" or "satisfies" for love's sake. He wants to put love to work in order to make it successful and to realize its "cash value."⁵ The pragmatic approach disdains abstract, verbal solutions to ethical problems; it seeks, rather, concrete and practical answers.
2. **Relativism.** There is only one absolute; everything else is relative to it. As the strategy is pragmatic, the tactics are relativistic.⁶ "The divine command of love is changeless in its why, but contingent in its specific what and how. "The situationist," writes Fletcher, "avoids words like 'never' and 'perfect' and 'always' and 'complete' as he avoids the plague, as he avoids 'absolutely's Yet it is impossible to be "absolutely relative "There must be an absolute or norm of some kind if there is to be any true relativity." "In Christian situationism the ultimate criterion is ... 'agapic love:"⁷ But Christians should constantly remind themselves that everything else is relative to this one norm.
3. **Positivism.** A positivistic position, as opposed to a naturalistic view, holds that values are derived voluntaristically, not rationally. A person decides

4. Ibid., 33, emphasis original.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 41, 42.

7. Ibid., 43.

8. Ibid., 43, 44.

9. Ibid., 45.

on their values; one does not deduce them from nature. This is also called "emotivism" because moral values are thought to be expressions of one's feelings rather than prescriptions for one's life. A positivistic or emotive ethic places art and morals in the same camp: both call for a decision or leap of faith. Ethical statements do not seek verification; they look for justification. And only in the one norm of Christian love do all other moral expressions find their ultimate justification.

4. *Personalism*. Moral values are not only what persons express; persons are the ultimate moral values. There are no inherently good things; only persons are inherently valuable. Value only "happens" to things. Things are of value only to persons. "Things are to be *used*; people are to be *loved*."¹⁰ The reverse of this—loving things and using people—is the perversion of morality. According to Fletcher, considering only persons to have intrinsic value is what Kant meant by treating persons always as ends and never as means. So this is the meaning of love: relating everything to the good of persons, who alone are good as such.

In brief, situationism is an ethic with a pragmatic strategy, a relativistic tactic, a positivistic attitude, and a personalistic value center. It is an ethic with one absolute, to which everything else is relative and which is directed toward the pragmatic end of doing good to persons.

Explaining the Propositions

The situational position in ethics can be explained by six basic propositions. Each proposition is an elaboration of what it means to live situationally with only the one absolute norm of love. Let us examine them in the order in which they are presented by Fletcher.

"Only one thing is intrinsically good; namely, love: nothing else at all." The realist argues that God wills something because it is good. Fletcher follows the voluntarists like Duns Scotus and Ockham, who say that something is good because God wills it so. Nothing is good in and for itself. It is good only if it helps persons and bad if it hurts persons. The person "finding" the value may be divine or human, but only persons—God, self, neighbor—determine something to be valuable. No act has intrinsic value. It gains its value only as it relates to persons. Apart from helping or hurting persons, all ethical acts are meaningless. All value, worth, goodness, and rightness are predicates, not properties. They may be predicated about persons, but they are not real things in themselves. God is goodness and love; all other persons merely *have* or *do* good.

Love is an attitude, not an attribute. Love is something that persons give and something that persons should receive, because only persons have intrinsic value.

10. Ibid., 51.

According to Fletcher, the image of God in the human being is not reason but love. Love and personhood constitute humankind's characteristic similarity to God. This is why the only human thing with intrinsic value is love—it makes the human like God.

The other side of the proposition that only benevolence (love) is inherently good is that only malevolence is intrinsically evil. However, for Fletcher the opposite of love is not hate, which is really a perverted form of love, but rather *indifference*. *Hate* at least treats the other as a *thou*, or person. Indifference treats others as inanimate objects. To totally ignore others and their needs is to depersonalize them. It is worse than attacking them, for an attack presupposes at least that the attacker considers the other person worth attacking.

Fletcher is opposed to calling some acts lesser and, therefore, excusable evils. A spy's lie, for example, is not wrong at all. "If it [a lie] is told in love it is good, right?" "It is not an excusable evil; it is a positive good." "If love vetoes the truth, so be it." "Whatever one must do for love's sake is good, for only love is intrinsically good; nothing else whatsoever is good. Whatever is the loving thing to do in a given situation is the right thing to do, even if it involves sacrificial suicide while suffering torture, to avoid betraying one's comrades to the enemy.

"The ruling norm or Christian decision is love; nothing else." Love replaces the law. The spirit replaces the letter. "We follow law, *if at all*, for love's sake."² One does not follow love for the law's sake; one follows the law only for love's sake. Traditionally, people believed that they kept love by obeying the law because the two were identical. But love and law sometimes conflict, and when they do, it is the Christian's obligation to put love over the law. It is not the love of the law but the law of love that one ought to follow.

According to Fletcher, Jesus summed up the Mosaic law and the Ten Commandments in one word: *love*. Indeed, there is no one of the commandments that may not be broken in some situation for love's sake. "There are no 'universal laws' held by all men everywhere at all times, no consensus of all men."³ For 'any precepts all men can agree to are platitudes such as 'do the good and avoid the evil' or 'to each according to his due?'" There are no universal laws except love. Every other law is breakable by love. As Augustine put it, "Love with care and then what you will, do." He did not say, adds Fletcher, 'Love with desire and do what you please?'"

Christian love is a giving love. Christian love is neither romantic (erotic) love nor friendship (philic) love. Christian love is a sacrificial (agapic) love. And it is also a responsible love, which is no more subject to exploitation than to the evasive motives of legalism. A legalistic refuge in the safety of universal laws can even be a retreat from individual responsibility. One may wish for the security

11.Ibid., 65.

12.Ibid., 70, emphasis original.

13.Ibid., 76.

14.Ibid.

15.Ibid., 70.

of absolutes rather than the responsibility of relatives. The classical pacifist is, for Fletcher, escaping the responsibility of deciding which wars are just. It is an easier ethic if someone else decides what is right or wrong and simply tells us what to do.

"Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed; nothing else." Love and justice are identical. Love does more than take justice into account; love becomes justice. Justice means to give others their due, and love is their due. Fletcher quotes the apostle Paul's injunction, "Owe no man anything except to love" (Rom. 13:8). Even if love and justice differed (and they do not), the least love could do would be to give justice to every person. In loving, in being just, one must be multidirectional, not just one-directional. The command is to love one's neighbors.

Love is not merely a present activity toward one's immediate neighbor. Love must have foresight. It must borrow the utilitarian principle and try to bring the greatest good (love) to the greatest number of people, for if love does not calculate the remote consequences, it becomes selfish. In short, justice is love using its head. Christian ethics welcomes law and order for love's sake and even foresees the need at times for a loving use of force to protect the innocent. It makes "rights" practical. Sometimes one may have the moral (loving) responsibility to disobey unjust civil law. And on occasion love may demand a revolution against the state—if the state has gone beyond love's pale.

"Love wills the neighbor's good whether we like him or not." Fletcher's fourth proposition stresses that love is an attitude and not a feeling, and in so doing it stresses the distinctive characteristics of Christian love. In *eros* desire is the cause of love, while in *agape* love is the cause of desire. Agapic love is not reciprocal. A comparison of the three kinds of love reveals what Fletcher has in mind here. Erotic love is egoistic. It says, "My first and last consideration is myself." Philic love is mutual. It says, "I will give as long as I receive? Agapic love, on the other hand, is altruistic, saying, *¶*I will give, requiring nothing in return? This kind of love is the ruling norm in situational ethics. Agapic love holds that one ought to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Fletcher sketches four interpretations of the command to love one's neighbor as oneself. First, some say it means to love your neighbor just *as much as* you love yourself. Second, it may mean to love others *in addition to* loving yourself. Third, thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard hold that it means to love your neighbor in the *way you ought* to love yourself—rightly and honestly. Fourth, it is said that the command is to love your neighbor *instead of* loving yourself (as you have been doing but must now stop doing). Which is the true meaning of self-love?

Following the ladder of self-love suggested by Bernard of Clairvaux—which ascends from love of self for self's sake, to love of God for self's sake, to love of God for God's sake, to love of self for God's sake—Fletcher outlines his own understanding of loving one's neighbor as oneself. We move, he says, from love of ourselves for our own sake, to love of our neighbor for our own sake, to love of our

neighbor for the neighbor's sake, to love of ourselves for the neighbor's sake. The last is the highest and the best. It is the right kind of self-love: the love of oneself for the sake of loving others.

When self-love and neighbor-love conflict, "the logic of love is that self-concern is obligated to cancel neighbor-good whenever *more* neighbor-good will be served through serving the self."¹⁶ Ship captains and airplane pilots, for example, are to keep themselves alive, even at the expense of some passengers, if need be, for the sake of the safety of the rest of the passengers. In actuality, there is no real conflict between self-love and neighbor-love. One is to love oneself only to the degree that it maximizes neighbor-love.

All love is self-love, but it is the self loved for the sake of loving the most people possible. Love is one, but there are three objects: God, neighbor, and self. Self-love maybe either right or wrong. 'If we love ourselves for our own sakes, that is wrong. If we love ourselves for God's sake and the neighbor's, then it is right. For to love God and the neighbor is to love one's self in the right way ... ; to love one's self in the right way is to love God and one's neighbors!'" And in no case does loving one's neighbors imply that we must *like* them.

Love does not even necessarily involve *pleasing* our neighbor. Love demands that we will our neighbor's good, whether or not the neighbor pleases us, and whether or not our love pleases the neighbor. Calculating the neighbor's good, even if it displeases them, is not cruel. A military nurse, for example, may lovingly treat patients roughly so as to hasten their recovery and return them to *battle*.

"*Only the end justifies the means; nothing else.*" If this were not true, no act would be justified. There are no intrinsically good acts except the act of love. Hence, the only thing that can justify an act is if it is done for loving ends or purposes. This is not to say that any end justifies any means, but only that a *loving* end justifies any means. For example, it might be the loving thing to steal a murderer's gun or to lie to a schizophrenic patient to keep him calm for treatment. What, asks Fletcher, justifies slicing into a human body with a knife? Surely not hatred of him as one's enemy. But would not the act of mutilating his body be justified if the end in view is to save his life from a disease or a cancerous organ? Does not the end justify the means in this situation?

In fact, what other than the end could possibly justify the means, asks Fletcher? The means cannot justify themselves. Only ends justify means. Indeed, "no act apart from its foreseeable consequences has any ethical meaning whatsoever." is The meaning of the act comes from its purpose or end. And the only justifiable purpose for performing ethical acts is agapic love. Any means that is sought for its own sake is wrong. All ends are actually only means to higher ends, until one arrives at last at the ultimate end of love itself.

16. *Ibid.*, 113.

17. *Ibid.*, 114.

18. *Ibid.*, 120.

In response to those who challenge, on the basis of the "wedge" principle (i.e., that it is dangerous to have exceptions to moral norms like telling the truth and saving lives), Fletcher argues that "abuse does not bar use." The fact that some people will abuse the situationist position of responsible love by irresponsible actions does not disprove the value of the love norm itself. And the so-called generalization argument—"What if everyone did it?"—is no more than obscurantism, a delaying tactic of static *morality*.

"Love's decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively." The final expository postulate of situation ethics strongly marks the difference between the basic ethical principle of the love norm and the application of that principle in a given circumstance. The love principle is a universal but formal norm. It does not prescribe in advance what specific courses of action will be loving. For the precise prescription of love, a person will have to wait until they are in the situation. Love is free from specific predefinition. One cannot know in advance the "existential particularity" that love will take in a given situation. Love operates apart from a system of pretailored, prefabricated moral rules. Love functions circumstantially and neocasuistically. Love does not make up its mind before it has seen the facts, and the *facts* come from the situation.

What the situationist does have in advance is a general (though not specific) knowledge of what one should do (love), why one should do it (for God's sake), and to whom it should be done (one's neighbors). The situationist surely knows that love is altruistic and not egoistic. And one knows that love should be exercised toward as many neighbors as possible. The situationist knows in advance how this love will probably operate in a general way by means of *ofsophia*, or wisdom. But one cannot say for sure what the loving thing to do will be in a particular case until all the particulars are known. For example, if Fletcher is asked, "Is adultery wrong?" he answers, "I don't know. Maybe. Give me a case." (In fact, Fletcher himself provides a case where adultery can be right if it is done in love; see below.)

In brief, the situationist holds that the general what and why are absolute, but the how is relative. There is an absolute prescription, but it is only worked out in the relative situation. Love is ultimate, but just how one is to love is dependent on the immediate circumstances. By a closer examination of some difficult moral situations, we will be able to understand even better just how Fletcher's one-norm absolutism functions in different contexts.

Applying the Love Norm

By the use of provocative illustrations throughout his book, Fletcher is able to explain more fully just why he holds to only one absolute norm and how it would probably be applied under differing conditions. Some of these marginal moral cases merit further examination.

Altruistic adultery. A German mother of two was captured by the Russians near the end of World War II. The rules of her Ukrainian prison camp allowed her release

to Germany only in the event of pregnancy, in which case she would be returned as a liability. So the woman asked a friendly camp guard to impregnate her. She was sent back to Germany, was welcomed by her family, gave birth to the baby, and made him a part of their reunited family. Was her adultery justified? Fletcher does not say explicitly that it was, but he implies the same by calling it "sacrificial adultery." Elsewhere, however, Fletcher speaks approvingly of mate-swapping for consenting adults, of a woman seducing a man pathologically attracted to a little girl, and of a young couple forcing parental approval of their marriage by engaging in intercourse. The direct implication is that all of these things can be done lovingly and can, therefore, be morally right.

Patriotic prostitution. A young woman working for a United States intelligence agency was asked to lure an enemy spy into blackmail by using her sexuality. In the guise of a secretary, she was to become involved with a married man working for a rival power. When she protested that she could not put her personal integrity on the block by offering sex for hire, she was told, "It's like your brother risking his life or limb in Korea. We are sure this job can't be done any other way." She was patriotic and wanted to serve her country. What was the loving thing to do? Here again Fletcher does not give his answer, but in view of the fact that he elsewhere approves of spies lying and men dying for their country out of love, for him there seems to be no reason why one might not be able to justify committing fornication for the fatherland, too.

Sacrificial suicide. Is taking one's own life always morally wrong? According to situation ethics, it is not; suicide can be done in love. For example, if a man has only the two choices of taking an expensive medicine—a course of action that will deplete his family's finances and cause his insurance to lapse—in order to live three more years, or else refusing the medicine and dying in six months, thereby leaving ample financial provisions for his family, which is the loving thing to do? It is not difficult to see how a situationist could approve of this rather indirect kind of sacrificial suicide. In fact, Fletcher speaks with approval both of Mother Maria's substitutionary death in the Nazi gas chambers for a young Jewess, and of a captured soldier's taking his own life to avoid betraying his comrades to the enemy. Suicide can be done for love's sake, in which case it is morally right according to a situationist ethic.

Acceptable abortion. Even though Fletcher favors birth control over abortion as a means of controlling the population, nonetheless there are circumstances when he comes out clearly in favor of abortion. He gives the example of an unmarried schizophrenic patient who became pregnant after being raped. Her father requested abortion but was refused by the hospital staff on the grounds that it was not a therapeutic abortion and was, therefore, illegal. Fletcher castigates this refusal as legalistic. "The situationist ... would almost certainly, in *this case*, favor abortion and support the girl's father's request?"⁹

19. Ibid., 38.

In another case, Fletcher gives tacit approval to a Romanian Jewish doctor who aborted three thousand babies of Jewish mothers in concentration camps because, if pregnant, the mothers were to be incinerated. That means that the doctor saved three thousand lives. And from the standpoint that the embryos were human lives (which Fletcher rejects), the doctor, by "killing" three thousand, saved three thousand and prevented the murder of six thousand. Surely this was the loving thing to do, according to situationism.

Merciful murder. Should we actually turn our back on someone who is hopelessly caught in a burning airplane and begs to be shot? Would it not have been right to assassinate Hitler? Fletcher offers both illustrations and seems to indicate that either one could be a merciful, and therefore justifiable, murder. He seems to favor the act of a mother smothering her crying baby in order to save her group from being detected and killed by hostile Indians. The direct implication is that such an act might be performed in sacrificial love for the good of the whole group.

Fletcher clearly approves of throwing some men out of an overloaded rescue boat to save them all from sinking. In 1841, the first mate of the ship *William Brown* of Liverpool was in charge of an overcrowded lifeboat and ordered most of the males thrown into the sea to save the rest. Later, the seaman who threw them into the sea was convicted of murder, with mercy recommended. "Situation ethics says it was bravely sinful, it was a good thing." According to Fletcher, the first mate actually acted in love for the greater number of lives.

There are many other marginal cases that Fletcher offers, including refusing to resuscitate a monstrously deformed child and carrying the inventor of a cancer *cure* out of a burning building rather than one's own father. He also recommends sterilizing someone marrying a syphilitic and providing motherhood for single women by artificial insemination. I will not take space here to discuss more cases. One point, however, arises from all of these situations and needs emphasis here: in each situation there is a conflict of moral norms that the situationist feels can best be resolved by appeal to a single higher norm.

Often the norms that conflict are held by some people to be unbreakable and universal. But how can two or more norms be universal and unbreakable if they conflict? One cannot follow two opposing paths; one must choose. Surely persons cannot be held responsible for obeying two conflicting norms when they can obey only one, can they? At this point the situationist's solution shines. There is really only one universal and unbreakable norm: love. All the other norms are at best general and can be broken for love's sake. The simplicity and logic of the solution has strong appeal, but there are also some grave difficulties. Let us turn our attention now to an evaluation of the one-norm absolutism of situation ethics.

Situationism Evaluated

The goal in what follows is not to evaluate the whole of situational ethics comprehensively, but only insofar as it bears on the question of moral laws. In this respect the evaluation will be both positive and negative. First, there are some clear merits to holding only one absolute norm such as love.

Some Advantages of the Situational Position

Critics from more traditional and absolutistic viewpoints tend to overreact to Fletcher's relativism, pragmatism, emotivism, and radical examples. But what is sometimes forgotten is that all of this is in the context of a clear claim that his ethic is an absolutism, a one-norm absolutism. In this latter regard, many of the merits of the situational position emerge.

It is a normative position. First to be commended is Fletcher's attempt to lay down a *normative* approach to ethics. His second proposition states, "The ruling norm of Christian decision is love; nothing else." In view of the fact that he spends a whole chapter elaborating this, as well as repeatedly referring to this one absolute throughout the book, it seems quite unfair to summarily dismiss Fletcher as totally normless and antinomian. Indeed, Fletcher spends much of his first chapter explaining that his view is not antinomian but rather a one-norm absolutism. (In "What Is a Rule?" Fletcher later denies that his approach has any universal norms)"

Fletcher distinguishes between *formal* principles, such as "Act as lovingly as possible"; *substantial* principles, such as "The good which should be sought or done is utility"; and *normative* principles, such as "Loving concern for our neighbors calls for telling them the truth." Only formal principles, he says, are universal." Possibly Fletcher means that there are no universals with substantive content, and that the love principle, which he calls "the ruling norm of Christian ethics," is only formally universal."

The reasons for commending a normative approach to ethics have already been given and need not be repeated here. It is sufficient to note in passing that norms are both inescapable and essential to a meaningful ethic. Without them, one has no objective basis or guide for ethical decisions.

It is an absolutism. Fletcher's view is not only normative; it is also *absolute*. There is one unbreakable law, the law of love. And even though Fletcher deliberately avoids such words as "never" and "always" with regard to every other norm, he does not hesitate to emphasize that there are no exceptions to the love norm. Only love and nothing else justifies what one does, he argues. Furthermore, there

21. Joseph Fletcher, "What Is a Rule? A Situationist's View; in *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics*, ed. Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Scribner's, 1960), 325.

22. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 337-38.

23. *Ibid.*, 69.

is no such thing as total relativity. Relative norms must be relative to a norm that is not relative. What, why, and who are the Christian's three universals, Fletcher says. That is, the Christian knows that the neighbor should be loved for God's sake. These three universals are absolute; only the circumstances are relative. He clearly holds that one ought *always* to love and should *never* hate or be indifferent to one's neighbors. "*Christian situation ethics has only one norm ... that is binding and unexceptional, always good and right regardless of the circumstances*": agapic love."

It resolves the issue of conflicting norms. Whatever one may think of the situationist's solution to the marginal cases where conflicting norms are involved, at least it presents a logical possibility. All other ethical norms are subordinate to the one absolute norm, in view of which it is ethically right to break any of them for the sake of this love norm. This solution is both logical and simple. It is simple because it does not involve a complicated series of exceptions to norms, nor does it present a pyramid of moral values. It posits a single norm that takes precedence over all others. It is logical in the sense that it is not internally contradictory. It never leaves any ethical dilemmas in conflict or tension; they are always resolvable (at least in theory) by appeal to the single law of love. In other words, situationism is never faced with the dilemma of having two absolute or universal norms in conflict, since it does not have two absolute norms. There is *one* absolute norm, no more and no less.

It gives due value to differing circumstances. Another merit of situationism not to be undervalued is its emphasis on the fact that the circumstances or context of an ethical decision have a bearing on the rightness or wrongness of the act. However morally wrong falsifying may or may not be, surely it differs from context to context. Falsifying in fun to a friend is probably amoral, whereas serious falsifying before a judge and a jury is not. The circumstances do make a difference in the moral rightness or wrongness of the act. Likewise, taking another life accidentally, or in self-defense, or letting one die as an act of mercy are all markedly different situations from an intentional and malicious murder of another human being. The situation does condition the way one's norm (or norms) should be applied. Without due stress on the conditioning influence of the moral situation, one's ethics become legalistic and *even* inhuman.

Indeed, as will be seen later, it is very difficult (if not impossible) to contend for a many-norm absolutism of any kind, unless contextual qualifications become part of the definition of the norm. Truthfulness and the duty to avoid or prevent taking life (or at least letting someone die) invariably come into conflict unless one has the prerogative to say that lying and taking life in *certain contexts* are wrong. This will be discussed more fully later. For now it is sufficient to note that giving attention to the circumstances or context of ethical decisions is both unavoidable and desirable in elaborating a good ethical position.

It stresses love and the value of persons. From a Christian point of view (and even from many non-Christian perspectives), the stress on agapic love as the ruling norm is certainly commendable. Bertrand Russell wrote *Why I Am Not a Christian*, but he also said elsewhere, "What the world needs is Christian love or compassion."²⁵ Seldom do strong voices arise in defense of selfish love, that is, self-love, or self-centered love. And from the Christian point of view, love is the absolute moral character of God. "God is love" and love is of God," the New Testament says (1 John 4:7-8). And when all else fades, love will abide forever. Jesus summarized the whole of the Old Testament in the one word *love*. Indeed, according to Jesus, love was to be the earmark of his disciples. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

In view of this and from a Christian point of view, it is quite difficult to criticize the preeminence Fletcher gives to Christian agapic love. Implied in this stress on loving others is the fact that they are to be treated as persons in the image of God and not as mere things. The neighbor is a thou, not an it. The other is a person to be loved, not a thing to be used. Others are ends in themselves and not merely means for our own ends. Fletcher's emphasis that humans are persons (like God) who have God-given value is commendable from a Christian perspective.

Some Inadequacies of One-Norm Situationism

From both a moralistic viewpoint in general and a Christian perspective in particular, not everything in Fletcher's situationism is praiseworthy. We will not take time here to elaborate on his critical and inconsistent view of the Gospel records of the New Testament,²⁶ nor the implications of holding that God can be loved *only* through one's neighbor. We will rather center our attention on the inadequacy of having only one norm for an ethic.

One norm is too general. A one-norm ethic, especially when the norm is as broad and general as Fletcher's love norm, is in most (though not all) cases little better than having no norm at all. By its very nature, a single universal norm must be broad and adaptable, or else it could not apply to all circumstances. But its versatility is also a liability, for it necessitates an ambiguity about what the norm means as far as concrete relationships are concerned. And if the absolute love norm is without concrete content apart from the relative situation, then the specific meaning of love is relative and not absolute.

Indeed, Fletcher admits that the content of love varies from situation to situation. Therefore, the command "Love in all cases" means little more than to X in all cases.' For unless there is advanced cognitive content to the term *love*, then one does not really know what one is being commanded to do. Fletcher clearly

25. Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961), 579.

26. See Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), chap. 2.

confesses that the love principle is empty of factual content: "This is why I say it is a 'formal' principle, which rules us and yet does so without content."

In actual practice, Fletcher does seem to imply that there is *some* understanding of what love means in advance of the situation. But the question is How much understanding? Is there enough content in the universal love norm to raise it above a mere platitude? "Do the *loving* thing" is scarcely more specific than "Do the *good* thing." In both instances the question is What kinds of acts are good or loving? So his one moral law is too general to be helpful.

Fletcher's one-norm ethic of love is not more helpful than a view that says "Follow nature" or "Live according to reason." Instead of "What does 'love' mean?" the question becomes "What does 'nature' mean?" The result is the same, and one is left without any specific ethical direction. An appeal to the situation to provide content or meaning for love will not suffice. Fletcher admits that situations are relative and even radically different. If the meaning of love is dependent on the circumstances, then the significance of love is really relative to the situation and therefore not absolute. This leads to a second criticism.

The situation does not determine the meaning of love. The meaning of the love norm is not completely determined by the particulars of the situation but is merely conditioned by them. Circumstances do not effect (determine) norms; they only *affect* (influence) them. The context in which a norm is applicable does not dictate how the norm will be applied but only influences its application. If the complete determination of meaning came from the situation, then the alleged ethical norm would not really be normative at all. The situation would be determining the norm rather than the norm being determinative for the situation. Actually, the situation does not determine what is right; God does. The situation simply helps us discover which of God's laws is the one applicable there.

Fletcher does not claim that the situation completely determines what the norm means. He *says* only that what love will mean in advance of the situation cannot be known with any "existential particularity"; it can be known only in general. However, what is known in advance, "in general: may turn out to be the wrong meaning of love in a particular circumstance. No general wisdom (*sophia*) or norms are universal and unbreakable. There is no rule apart from the general (and ambiguous) rule of love, which ought never be broken. But this is precisely the problem. The meaningful norms are breakable, and the only unbreakable norm is not meaningful in any specific or practical sense of the word. Perhaps Fletcher should not have so summarily dismissed the possibility that there are many universal and unbreakable norms.

The possibility of many universal norms. There seem to be several reasons why situationism dismisses the possibility of having many universal norms, though none of these reasons is definitive. First, Fletcher argues that the many-norm position would be legalistic. This does not follow. A many-norm ethic may be legalistic, but

there is no reason why it must be legalistic. Whether or not the view is legalistic all depends on what the norms are, how they are related to each other, and how they are applied to life. One could actually be legalistic with one absolute norm such as *Keep the Sabbath*?

Second, it is implied that there is no other way to resolve the conflict of norms unless there is one absolute norm to which all other norms are only relative. But this is not so. There are at least three other ways to relate many universal norms: show how they really do not conflict, show why it is wrong to break either when they do conflict, or show how one of the norms is of a higher order and takes priority over those of a lower order.

Third, Fletcher sees no way to derive universal norms from a universal norm. He thinks that the concept of "middle axioms" is a contradiction in terms; they are "derived underiveds." But there is no reason why a deduction cannot be as universal as its premises. Apart from whether there really *are* many universal norms, Fletcher certainly does not eliminate the possibility that there are such. He does not disprove that they can be arrived at by deduction the way postulates are derived from axioms in geometry. He does not disprove that they could come from revelation such as many Christians find inscripturated in the Bible. Nor does Fletcher definitely dismiss the possibility that many universal norms could be known intuitively to have a separate status of their own.

In brief, the possibility of there being many universal norms should not be given up until either it is shown to be logically impossible, or no universal norm other than love is ever found. In view of the fact that candidates for universal norms will be introduced and evaluated in subsequent chapters, we will withhold judgment until then whether or not there really are many universal norms. At this point, it is enough to observe that Fletcher does not prove that "there is *only* one universal norm," since he does not prove that it is impossible that there may be many universal norms.

A different universal norm is possible. Not only is it possible that there are many universal norms in contrast to Fletcher's single norm, but it is also possible to opt for a different single norm than the love norm Fletcher uses. Why not a one-norm ethic built on hate instead of love? Why not Buddhist compassion instead of Christian love? Why not a Confucian "negative Golden Rule" that mandates, "Do *not* do to others what you do not want them to do to you," rather than the positive one? Or a New Age principle of harmony with nature? Surely Fletcher has not demonstrated that all ethical principles mean exactly the same thing (at any rate, not those as different as love and hate). Then on what basis is one to choose the single norm on which to build a whole ethic? There must be some way to justify one's basic ethical presupposition if it is not to be entirely arbitrary.

In brief, the problem of a one-norm ethic arises: *Which* norm? *Prima facie*, there are many ethical norms that claim obedience. Which one should be given the special position of being absolute and unbreakable? Could not a case be made for using truthfulness at any cost as the single absolute? Could not such a position be worked out

with internal consistency in the same way as Fletcher's love norm can be developed? And if one absolute norm can be just as internally consistent as another, then on what basis is one norm to be preferred over another? By evaluating the consequences of each? If the one absolute norm is chosen on the ground that it brings the best consequences for most people in the long run, then there are several problems.

First, we do not know the long run, and some things that are not really best in the long run work well for many people in the short run (e.g., dishonesty and dictatorships). Many things distinctly wrong on almost any ethical basis obviously work too well for too many people for too long a time (e.g., cheating, lying, and stealing).

Second, to choose the norm on the basis of its consequences (if this were possible) would be to depart from a normative basis for ethics in favor of a utilitarian basis, with all the problems that view entails. Yet utilitarianism actually depends on norms for its own operation, which brings the argument full circle. This would thus be saying that ends are needed to justify norms, and these ends in turn depend on norms to establish them. But this really demonstrates that norms are the basis of ethics in either event. Norms are necessary. The questions remain: *Which* norms? *How many* are there? Next we turn to an examination of the many-norm view to seek an answer to these questions.

A many-norm ethic is defensible. A number of contemporary writers have shown how one may defend the validity of many ethical norms. On a popular level this has been done by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* and in a philosophical way by William K. Frankena in *Ethics*. In this latter category one may also place the works of Paul Ramsey (see *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics*). Indeed, there do seem to be many universally binding moral laws. Rape, cruelty, hatred, and genocide are universally frowned upon. And even if all do not practice them toward others, nevertheless all do seem to believe that others should treat them in accordance with these norms. (For an answer to this problem from a Christian point of view, see chap. 7.) And in view of the fact that Fletcher frankly but reluctantly admits that his view is utilitarian, perhaps this criticism should be stressed more.

Fletcher is really a utilitarian. Fletcher admits that his view is utilitarian. As such, then, it is not really a one-norm absolutism but a form of generalism. This being the case, it is subject to the criticisms of utilitarianism (see chap. 4). As he says, the end justifies the means. He believes in the greatest love (good) for the greatest number of people in the long run. Not only do we not know the long run, but what is good for many may rob the minority of rights. Furthermore, just because an end is good does not make an act good. There are evil acts, such as rape, cruelty, child abuse, and murder. No amount of good intentions can make an evil act good.

Summary and Conclusion

Situationism claims to be a one-norm absolutism. It believes that everything should be judged by one absolute moral law: love. However, it turns out that this one moral

principle is really only formal and empty. It has no content that can be known in advance of or apart from the situation. Different situations really determine what it means. So in the final analysis the one moral law turns out to be no moral law. Situationism reduces to antinomianism, for in practice one empty absolute moral law is no better than no absolute moral law. And the denial of all value is self-defeating. It values the right to say that there are no values.

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4

GENERALISM

Ethical positions can be divided into two broad classes: those that believe in binding ethical rules and those (such as antinomianism) that do not. The first group can be subdivided into those who believe that there are universally binding ethical laws, and those who believe they are only generally binding. This latter position is called generalism, and traditional adherents of this view include utilitarians.

Generalism Explained

Utilitarians are not antinomians, since they believe in the value of ethical laws in helping individuals determine which action will probably bring the greatest good for the greatest number of people. On the other hand, utilitarians are not absolutists, since they usually deny that there are universally binding ethical norms that represent intrinsic values.

It is true that some utilitarians (e.g., Rule Utilitarians) say that rules should not be broken, but this is only because of the extrinsic value of the good results from keeping rules. The rule is kept, not because it is really intrinsically wrong to perform the forbidden act, but only because making exceptions to any ethical law is a practice that leads to greater evil than good. In other words, the act is judged not by its intrinsic and universal value, but by its results. Even the utilitarians who value rules, then, have no universal norms in the deontological and normative senses discussed in chapter 1.

Yet this does not mean that utilitarians have no absolutes. They may have absolute ends, but they claim to have no absolute norms. They may have an absolute or ultimate result by which they judge all actions, but they confess no absolute rules enabling one to realize this ultimate end of the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Jeremy Bentham: Quantitative Utilitarianism

Modern generalists is heir to ancient hedonism, which believed that pleasure is the greatest good (*summum bonum*) for humans. Although the popular "Eat, drink, and be merry" is a perversion of what Epicurus himself taught, his ancient followers set forth the classic doctrine that seeking physical pleasure and avoiding physical pain is the chief aim in life.

The pleasure calculus. Jeremy Bentham (d. 1832) developed this ancient hedonistic pleasure calculus into a utilitarian position in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789). According to Bentham, "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure," and "it is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as what we shall do." These are summed up in the principle of utility, which affirms that "the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question ... is the right and proper, and only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action:*

In view of this, "an action then may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility... when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it." Furthermore, "when thus interpreted, the words *ought*, and *right* and *wrong*, and others of that stamp, have a meaning: when otherwise, they have none." That is, no acts or words have any ethical meaning apart from their consequences. Everything is to be justified by its end, by whether it brings more pleasure than pain. But how is the principle of utility itself to be justified? Bentham answers that it is not susceptible to any direct proof, "for that which is used to prove everything else, cannot itself be proved." People everywhere naturally tend to embrace the principle of utility, although some have inconsistently rejected it. However, "when a man attempts to combat the principle of utility, it is with reasons drawn, without his being aware of it, from that very principle itself

Further, if a person rejects the utilitarian principle in favor of his own feeling, "in the first case, let him ask himself whether his principle is not despotical, and

1. Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (reprint, New York: 1-lafner, 1965), 1.
2. Ibid., 5, note added by Bentham, July 1822.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. Ibid., 4.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 4-5.

hostile to all the rest of the human race," and "in the second case, whether it is not anarchical, and whether at this rate there are not as many different standards of right and wrong as there are men?"

Calculating pleasure. If pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the ends of ethically good acts, then it is reasonable to ask how one is to measure relative amounts of these two elements. Bentham divides his answer into two parts, one for individuals and one for groups.

To an individual person, the value of pleasure or pain in itself will be determined by six factors: intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, propinquity or remoteness, fecundity (the chances of producing others of its kind), and purity (the chances of not producing the opposite kind of sensation). When applying the pleasure calculus to a group of people, a seventh factor of extent (the number of persons to whom it extends) must be considered in determining the value of pleasure or pain. So, to make a final calculation of the good of an act for a group, one must first determine how much more pleasure than pain it will give to each individual and then add all these together. The total balance of pleasure over pain will give the general good tendency of the act. If there is more evil than good, then the general evil tendency will be revealed.

Bentham admits that "it is not to be expected that this process should be strictly pursued previously to every moral judgment, or to every legislative or judicial operation. Presumably this is because it is too psychologically and mathematically complex to be practical. At this point the need for some kind of general norms is most obvious in Bentham's position. For if one cannot always calculate the balance of pleasure, then how is one to determine a course of action? The answer becomes more explicit in the utilitarian position of Bentham's successor.

John Stuart Mill: Qualitative Utilitarianism

John Stuart Mill (d. 1873) made at least one modification to Bentham's position concerning how pleasure (the end) is conceived and developed a fuller statement regarding how general moral laws could function in a utilitarian context.

Pleasure is defined qualitatively. Bentham's hedonistic calculus (or pleasure principle) lends itself easily to a materialist interpretation. He seems to be speaking of physical pleasure and pain, since they are measured by intensity and duration. Although in later years Bentham tried to soften the hedonistic implications of this by noting that "happiness" or "felicity" may be better words for describing what he meant by "pleasure," he did not deny the materialist way this "happiness" was to be measured nor the mathematical way it was to be calculated.

Mill, on the other hand, argued that pleasures differ in kind, and higher pleasures are to be preferred over lower ones (*Utilitarianism* [1863]). Pleasures do not differ merely in their amount or intensity. One is higher and more valuable

7. Ibid., 6.

8. Ibid., 3i.

than another simply because most people who experience both decidedly prefer one over the other.

The reason humans give marked preference to some pleasures is that they have higher faculties than animals. "No intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs."⁹ Indeed, says Mill, "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.' And if the fool and the pig are of a different opinion, says Mill, it is because the pig knows only one side of the question; the fool knows both sides.

Cultured pleasures are higher than uncultured pleasures. Intellectual pleasures are higher than sensual pleasures, and so on. There is a qualitative difference between them, and one is obligated to seek the highest kind of pleasure for the greatest number of people. But again it maybe asked How can one know what will bring about the highest good for the greatest number unless there are some guides or norms for the decisions? Surely the individual is seldom if ever in a position of being able to foresee the long-range results of his actions. Mill's answer to this question leads to the need for norms.

Pleasure is determined normatively. The utilitarian position is not without norms. Mill refers to the great usefulness of the veracity norm. "Yet that even this rule, sacred as it is, admits of possible exceptions is acknowledged by all moralists" Truthfulness is a general rule, with some exceptions (lying is right to save a life), that can guide one in doing what will bring the greatest good to the greatest number of people.

Mill admits that one cannot always calculate the consequences of one's actions. This is precisely why rules and norms are needed. Humankind has had ample time to formulate a fund of human experience on which one may draw to help calculate the consequences of actions. "During all that time, mankind have been learning by experience the tendency of actions," Mill writes.¹² And unless we assume humans to be complete idiots, they "must by this time have acquired positive beliefs as to the effects of some actions on their happiness." And "the beliefs which have thus come down are the rules of morality for the multitude, and for the philosopher until he has succeeded in finding better."

In short, there are valid moral rules, beliefs, and codes to guide human decisions toward maximizing the good in society, but none of these are universal rules. None of these is exceptionless; all of them can and should be broken for the principle of

9. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *The Utilitarians* (Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, Doubleday, 1960, 409.

10. *ibid.*, 410.

11. *ibid.*, 424.

12. *ibid.*, 425.

13. *ibid.*, 425-26.

14. *ibid.*, 425.

utility when the greater good is in jeopardy. For "the received code of ethics is by no means of divine right.."'s It admits of indefinite improvement. 'But to consider the rules of morality as improvable is one thing; to pass over the intermediate generalization [i.e., rules and codes] entirely and endeavor to test each individual action directly by the first principle [of utility] is another.'" Just because there is only the one ultimate goal of happiness, toward which all morality is directed, does not mean there cannot be many moral norms directing us toward that one goal. It means only that these many norms are not absolute, and when they conflict, the conflict must be resolved by the utilitarian principle. There is only one fundamental principle of morality, and all others are subordinate to it.

The problem with exceptions. Mill admits that his position is open to the criticism that exceptions to moral rules will present a temptation to break moral rules indiscriminately for the supposed utility of it. His reply is twofold. First, this same criticism may be made of all moral systems. "It is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that the rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions."" And "there is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws by giving a certain latitude ... for accommodation to peculiarities of circumstances; and under every creed, at the opening thus made, self-deception and dishonest casuistry get in."" The utilitarian no more than other moralists must overcome the misuse of exceptions by intellect and virtue. To be utilitarian has a standard of morality, and though the application of it may be difficult, it is better than none at all. "While in other systems the moral laws all claim independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them."

Second, Mill acknowledges that exceptions ought to be recognized as exceptions and have their limits defined. The reasons for this, he says, are so that exceptions will not be multiplied beyond their need and so that they may not weaken one's confidence in the general rule. Mill merely mentions but does not elaborate on these points. Other utilitarians have adopted an alternate approach to that of Mill, arguing for exceptionless moral rules, or at least rules, though not exceptionless in themselves, that should never be broken for utilitarian reasons.

G. E. Moore: General Rules and Universal Obedience

Utilitarians handle the problem of exceptions in two basic ways. One school, sometimes called act-utilitarians, holds that each particular ethical act must be judged by its consequences. Hence, there may be exceptions to any ethical rule or norm that in a particular case would justify breaking it. Another group, known as

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 426.

17. Ibid., 427.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

rule-utilitarians, argues that rules should never be broken (unless there is a conflict between them), since the consequences of rule breaking are bad. In some respects, the position of G. E. Moore (d. 1958) seems to combine a bit of each view.

Rules are only generally valid. According to Moore the assertion "I am morally bound to perform this act" means that the action will produce the greatest possible amount of good in the universe. The results of acts thus determine their morality. Furthermore, "with regard then to ethical judgments which assert that a certain kind of action is good as a means to a certain kind of effect, none will be *universally* true; and many, though *generally* true at one period, will be generally false at others... Hence we can never be entitled to more than a *generalization*—to a proposition of the form 'This result *generally* follows this kind of action: And even this generalization will only be true, if the circumstances under which the action occurs are generally the same.'" Rules and norms are generally useful but are not really universal.

In fact, ethical rules are not really categorical but prove to be only hypothetical. They say that if we act this way under these circumstances, then the greatest good will probably result. But since other circumstances may interfere, it is not possible to know this with any more than probability. So then "an ethical law has the nature not of a scientific law but of a scientific prediction: and the latter is always merely probable, although the probability may be very great"²¹

Murder, for example, cannot be known to be universally wrong, since we do, as a matter of fact, only observe its good effects under certain circumstances; and it may be easily seen that a sufficient change in these would render doubtful what seem the most universally certain of general rules." Thus, the general disutility of murder could be proved only if the majority of the human race persists in believing that life is worthwhile. "In order to prove that murder ... would not be good as a means, we should have to disprove the main contention of pessimism—namely that the existence of human life is on the whole an evil."²³ So "when... we say that murder is in general to be avoided, we only mean that it is so, so long as the majority of mankind will certainly not agree to it, but will persist in living."²⁴ However, as long as most people continue to value life, the ethical consideration that "it is generally wrong for any single person to commit murder seems capable of proof."²⁵ The same holds true for other rules such as temperance and keeping promises.

Chastity, likewise, is only a general rule whose universal utility depends upon certain conditions that are considered necessary for the conservation of society. For instance, it is usually presupposed that chastity is necessary to avoid conjugal jealousy and to preserve paternal affection, and that both of these are necessary

20. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 22.

21. *Ibid.*, 155.

22. *Ibid.*, 156.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

conditions to preserve society. "But it is not difficult to imagine a civilized society existing without them"²⁶ Hence, the rule of chastity is only a general and conditional rule, which could be relinquished if society could survive without it.

Some general rules should never be broken. Notwithstanding the fad that moral norms are only general rules that have individual exceptions, Moore argues that the individual ought never disobey a rule that is held by most people to be true in general. He gives the following reasons. First, "if it is certain that in a large majority of cases the observance of a certain rule is useful, it follows that there is a large probability that it would be wrong to break the rule in any particular case?"²⁷ Further, "the uncertainty of our knowledge both of effects and of their value, in particular cases, is so great, that it seems doubtful whether the individual's judgment that the effect will probably be good in his case can ever be set against the general probability that that kind of action is wrong."²⁸ Also, "added to this general ignorance is the fact that, if the question arises at all, our judgment will generally be biased by the fact that we strongly desire one of the results which we hope to obtain by breaking the rule."²⁹ In view of these factors, "it seems, then, that with regard to any rule which is generally useful, we may assert that it ought *always* to be observed: wrote Moore. This observance is "not on the ground that in every particular case it will be useful, but on the ground that in any particular case the probability of its being so is greater than that of our being likely to decide rightly that we have before us an instance of its disutility.... In short, though we may be sure that there are cases where the rule should be broken, we can never know which those cases are, and ought, therefore, never to break it"³⁰

Even if one were to perceive clearly that in one's own case breaking the rule would be advantageous, yet insofar as such a rule-breaking action tends to encourage other unadvantageous breaches of the rule, it has a bad effect. For "in cases ... where example has any influence at all, the effect of an exceptional right action will generally be to encourage wrong ones."³¹ According to Moore, the logic of this should be carried even one step further. For "it is undoubtedly well to punish a man, who has done an action, right in his case but generally wrong, even if his example would not be likely to have a dangerous effect. For sanctions [punishments] have, in general, much more influence upon conduct than example; so that the effect of relaxing them in an exceptional case will almost certainly be an encouragement of similar action in cases which are not exceptional?"³²

The position that one ought always obey rules that are admittedly only generally applicable is limited only to the rules or norms known "certainly" to be of

26. Ibid., 158.

27. Ibid., 162.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 163.

32. Ibid., 164.

general usefulness. In cases where there is doubt of the general utility of a rule, Moore appears to agree with the approach of the act-utilitarians. He says, it seems that, in cases of doubt, instead of following rules, of which he is unable to see the good effects in his particular case, the individual should rather guide his choice by a direct consideration of the intrinsic value of vileness of the effect which his action may produce."³³

In either event, there are no actions or kinds of action that really are universally wrong; there are only some things generally wrong, which one ought (for utilitarian reasons) to avoid universally. So there are at least two ways in which Moore's position does not provide any truly universal norms. First, the norms that one should always follow do not represent acts really universally right or wrong, but only acts that are generally wrong. In specific cases an exception may be justified. But since it brings more evil than good to claim that any given case qualifies as a legitimate exception, it follows that the rule should never be broken.

Second, Moore's general rules that should always be obeyed are not really normative universals in a categorical sense, since they are norms justified only by their results. They are not deontological. They do not represent kinds of actions with intrinsic value. Moore is very clear in holding that no acts have intrinsic value; all acts are to be judged by their results.³⁴

John Austin: No General Rules Should Be Broken

In the rule-utilitarianism of John Austin, the question of unbreakable rules is carried one step further than in the thinking of G. E. Moore. Moore argued only that some rules ought never to be broken, because of their general utility and because one could not be sure a certain case was a legitimate exception, and even if it were, other offsetting bad consequences and influences would result from making an exception of it. Austin, on the other hand, argues that certain rules involve a class of actions that if generally done would bring bad results; such rules should never be broken.

Rules are justified by general results. Austin's position is decidedly utilitarian because the only justification for keeping the rules is the good result that keeping rules brings. In *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (1832), he says, "Our rules would be fashioned on utility; our conduct on our rules!" According to Austin's view, "our conduct would conform to *rules* inferred from the tendency of actions, but would not be determined by a direct resort to the principle of general utility."³⁵ **Hence,** "utility would be the test of our conduct, ultimately, but not immediately!"

33. Ibid., 166.

34. See *ibid.*, 92-93, 104-5.

35. John Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (1832; reprint, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1954), 47.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

Rules are justified if keeping them brings greater good, or if breaking them brings greater evil, on society. However, rules are not about specific or individual acts but about classes or kinds of acts.

Universal rule-keeping is justified by general results. Each individual act is not to be justified by its specific results as in act-utilitarianism. But the whole class of acts of that kind is judged by the results that those kinds of acts bring. As Austin states it, "If we would try the tendency of a specific or individual act, we must not contemplate the act as if it were single and insulated, but must look at the class of acts to which it belongs." Further, "we must suppose that acts of the class were generally done or omitted, and consider the probable effect upon the general happiness or good?" For "the particular conclusion which we draw, with regard to the single ad, implies a general conclusion embracing all similar acts.""

The only exception to this is when rules conflict or when a particular act falls under no rule. Furthermore, these general rules are always to be obeyed only if they are generally observed and generally useful. If either (or both) ceases to be a fact, then they lose their force and need not always be obeyed. Austin gives a number of examples of his position. A poor person should not steal from the rich neighbor on the grounds of the utility of this particular act (as an act-utilitarian would say), for if stealing were general, the effect on society would be disastrous. Nor should one evade the payment of a tax to devote the money to some good purpose, for "regular payment of taxes is necessary to the existence of the government. And I, and the rest of the community, enjoy the security which it gives, because the payment of taxes is rarely evaded.""

In a similar way, the punishment of an individual as a solitary event may do more harm than good. "But, considered as part of a system, a punishment is useful or beneficent. By a dozen or score of punishments, thousands of crimes are prevented:" The individual punishment is justified by the good results of the general practice. Exceptions should not be made because the general results of disobeying general rules is generally bad.

Traditionally, utilitarians argued that an action should be judged on whether it would bring the greatest good to the greatest number of people. Professor Joseph Barnhart offers a modification to this utilitarian calculus. He believes we should act so as to bring the greatest good (happiness) to *every* individual, *including* oneself:" From a libertarian perspective, he believes this will better safeguard each individual's rights.

38. Ibid., 47-48.

39. Ibid., 48.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 39.

42. Ibid., 40.

43. Joseph E. Barnhart, "Egoism and Altruism; *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 7, no.1 (Winter 1976): 101-10.

Generalism Evaluated

There are some positive values as well as serious drawbacks to generalism. Let us first consider some of the positive features of the generalist approach to ethical norms.

Some Values of Generalism

The values of generalism vary with its representations. But taken as a whole, there are at least three that relate to a normative approach to ethics such as that taken by Christians. First, generalism reflects a need for norms. Second, it offers a possible solution to conflicting norms. Finally, some generalists even argue for "unbreakable" norms.

The need for norms. Generalists are not antinomial. They recognize the need for norms, for even utilitarian ends need normative means for attaining them. There must be a road map to one's ultimate goal. Moral ends are not self-attaining, and there is an evident need for criteria to guide one's conduct. To the credit of the utilitarians, they have recognized that without norms or other normative bases taken from the fund of human experience, there is no way of determining the long-range results of one's actions. They thus are aware of the fact that in the absence of predictive powers, people must draw upon principles that are known to produce good results when followed.

Moore argued that in view of the fact that a person does not know the long-range future, one must gauge one's actions on the basis of the known short-range future, assuming they will be the same. But he frankly acknowledges that this is an unproved assumption. He adds, "It will be apparent that it has never yet been justified—that no sufficient reason has ever yet been found for considering one action more right or more wrong than another [via results]."⁴⁴ In view of this, it is understandable that utilitarians resort to norms to save their position from collapsing.

A solution to conflicting norms. Generalism offers a solution to the problem of what to do when there is a conflict of duty, such as that between truthfulness and saving lives. For apart from rule-utilitarians, generalists believe that there are no universal rules that are really exceptionless. At best they are only general norms that maybe broken if the occasion calls for it. In this way, lying to save a life can be right, even though lying is generally wrong. There is only one absolute end ("the greatest good"), and all the means (rules, norms) are relative to that end. In any given instance, when there is a conflict of means or norms, it maybe resolved by a direct appeal to the utilitarian end. If lying in a situation would be more useful or helpful to most people, then one ought to lie.

As has been mentioned, the generalistic solution is neither antinomial nor situational. Antinomians admit of the value of no laws at all, not even general ones.

44. Moore, *Principia ethica*, 153.

Situationists such as Joseph Fletcher claim to have one absolute norm, whereas generalists claim no absolute norms at all. Yet generalism has one absolute end that functions like a norm in helping to determine a given course of action when there is a conflict of general norms. Technically, the greatest good for the greatest number is not considered by generalists to be a norm by which the best end can be attained, but it is the end itself in view of which the best norm should be chosen. So generalism evades the no-norm position and offers a reconciliation when there is a conflict among accepted norms. Its answer is simple: when moral principles conflict, the conflict is not absolute; there is always a possible exception. Moral duties are only general, not universal. And general principles admit of exceptions.

Some generalists have a "universal" norm. Some generalists offer a case for rules or norms that should never be broken. Even though they admit to exceptional cases that might in isolation justify breaking a general rule, they offer practical arguments for never breaking a rule such as saving lives or keeping promises (unless there is a conflict of norms). The very desire to have meaningful and unbreakable norms for conduct is a commendable aspect of their ethic. It is a recognition of the many difficulties of an exceptive approach on the practical level.

Furthermore, generalists are not complete relativists. They have an absolute, even though it is not always considered to be an absolute norm. It is an absolute end, and it is used by them to discern among their relative means. Without an absolute end, it certainly is difficult to see how generalists could justify their choice among means or how they could argue that some rules should never be broken. For if there is no ultimate criterion for deciding on these issues, then how could one relative means be chosen over another? Ranking separate actions by intrinsic value is not something that generalists of the utilitarian stripe are prone to do, for it is contrary to their premise of judging things by their extrinsic value (namely, their usefulness).

Some Inadequacies of Generalism

Despite some positive things that maybe said of generalism, there are some serious problems with the position. Several of these will be briefly considered here.

The end does not justify the means. Utilitarianism believes that the end justifies the means. But this is clearly wrong. Hitler's goal to have a more perfect race was good, but his means of attaining it were evil. President Nixon's goal of national security was a noble one, but the criminal and unethical activity of Watergate was not justified to reach it. The end never justifies the means; the means must justify themselves. Thus, an act is not automatically good simply because it has a good goal. The means to achieve it must be judged good by some objective standard of good. The road to destruction is paved with good intentions (Prov. 14:12). Something is not good because the intentions underlying it are good; it is good only if the actions are also good. From a Christian perspective, we must agree

with Paul when he writes, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Generalism has no universal norms. There is a distinct difference between a general norm, which for practical reasons one ought always to obey, and a truly universal norm, which is always intrinsically right to follow. The latter represents an intrinsically good act. But the generalist offers only norms that have less than universal extension. There are always unspecifiable exceptions or else cases that are not covered by the rules. And even though generalists sometimes opt not to break these rules because of general utility, nevertheless the rule itself is not essentially unbreakable.

If a person is in search of meaningful norms for conduct that one ought always to follow because they will be a guide toward performing acts that are always the right thing to do, then this person will be disappointed in generalism. The best a generalist can offer is a set of general norms that neither cover all cases nor are nonconflicting; in order for these norms to be effective, one must have some other means of applying them in specific and often crucial cases.

Utilitarian acts have no intrinsic value. Another criticism maybe directed toward the utilitarian generalists: the norms that they do have do not represent any acts with intrinsic value. For example, the attempt to save a life is not an intrinsically valuable act. It has value only if the person is actually saved or if some other good comes from the futile attempt. According to the utilitarian premise, a gift of charity that never reaches the poor or an act of kindness to which there is no favorable response is not a good act. Indeed, no act is good in and of itself unless good results from it. And no act is morally right unless it brings the greatest good to the greatest number of people. No benevolence, no sacrifice, no love has any value unless it happens to have good results. And conversely, if an act brings about good, it is a good act, whether it was intended that way or not.

Thus the utilitarian position reduces the ethical value of acts to the fates and fortunes of life. All is well that ends well. And what ends well is good. This would mean that the intentions of one's actions have no essential connection with the good of those actions. Presumably, one could will and perform an evil act that by chance turns out for good and hence be credited with performing a good act. Surely fortuity and morality do not belong in such proximity.

The need for an absolute norm. It is not possible to consistently maintain a group of general norms that may and do conflict without having an absolute norm by which the conflict can be resolved. This point seems to be evidenced by the need among utilitarian generalists to appeal to the end to resolve the conflict between norms. But when the end is so used, it serves a normative function. The end (the greatest good) becomes the norm for determining which means will be best for attaining the end. Not only is there a manifest circularity in appealing to the end; there is also an obvious need for an ultimate principle to resolve the tension among the less-than-ultimate principles or norms. To state the point another way, relative norms do not stand alone. They must be relative to something that is not relative.

So unless there is an assumed nonrelative standard, the relative standards cannot function properly. General rules presuppose a universal norm or norms.

Whether the number of absolute or universal norms is one or many will be discussed more fully in the next three chapters. For now it is sufficient to note that there must be *at least* one norm that is true under all conditions if the other norms are to be true under any conditions.

The "end" is an ambiguous term. The generalist's ethic is based on what will bring the best results in the long run. But how long is "long"? A few years? A lifetime? Eternity? Anything beyond the immediate present is outside the human purview. Only God knows the future. Hence, only God could be a utilitarian, and he is not.

Certainly God knows that his moral principles will bring the best results in the long run. But he does not will them for this reason. Rather, God wills what is right because it is right. And it is right because it is in accord with his own unchangeable moral character. So appealing to long-range consequence as the basis for determining what rules we follow is out of the range of humans and out of the question for a morally perfect God.

The debate about whether the "greatest good" should in the end be understood quantitatively or qualitatively brings an ambiguity in the phrase into focus. How do we determine what is meant by "good"? As we saw in chapter 1, unless good has a divinely determined meaning, there is no real basis for holding that anything is objectively good. And if moral good is not objective, then we are left with antinomianism.

The further ambiguity in the word end is brought to light by the disagreement about whether it means "for the greatest number" or "for *all* individuals," as some have suggested. Which view is taken will make a significant difference, particularly with respect to minority rights. For in many cases, more good could be achieved for the most people if basic rights were denied to some people.

The need for absolute ethical norms. Even generalism does not avoid the need for some absolute norm or norms. First, without some basic value standard, there is no means by which to measure the consequences to determine whether ethical norms are really good or bad. How can we know whether the results are better or worse unless we have some standard for what is best?

Second, the fund of human experience cannot serve as the ultimate measure. We cannot know what to put in this fund unless we have some moral standard outside of the fund by which to measure it.

Third, in utilitarianism the end serves as a norm by which actions are measured. It is the ultimate by which all else is measured, and hence its role is normative.

Summary and Conclusion

Generalism, in contrast to antinomianism, argues that there are some binding moral principles. But in contrast to absolutism, generalism insists that none of these

moral laws is really absolute. Since every moral principle admits of exceptions, the generalist has an easy solution to moral conflicts. However, since generalists have no absolute moral principles, their view tends to be reducible to antinomianism. Unless there are some objective moral prescriptions of substantive content that are binding on all persons at all times, then at any given time any action could be justified.

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5

UNQUALIFIED ABSOLUTISM

There are two basic kinds of ethical views: absolutism and relativism. The preceding three chapters (2-4) have examined ethical relativism. The next three chapters (5-7) will look at three forms of ethical absolutism.

Perhaps the most influential and widely held view among Christians is unqualified absolutism. The position was given its classic presentation by Augustine of Hippo and has been defended by the notable philosopher Immanuel Kant and the noted theologians John Murray and Charles Hodge.

An Exposition of Unqualified Absolutism

The basic premise of unqualified absolutism is that all moral conflicts are only apparent; they are not real. Sin is always avoidable. There are moral absolutes that admit of no exceptions, and these never actually come into conflict with one another. On the classic question as to whether or not one should ever lie to save a life, the unqualified absolutist answers with an emphatic "No!" The importance of this issue to Augustine can be measured by the fact that he dedicated two works to it, *Against Lying* and *On Lying*, and made numerous other references to it throughout his writings.

Augustine's Unqualified Absolutism

The bishop Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) has sometimes been misunderstood to be a situationist because of his statement "Love [God], and do what you will"

(*Tractates on 1 John* 7.8). While it is true that Augustine cast his whole ethical system in terms of love, it is not true that he based that system only on the one command of love. Augustine believed that love consummates the virtues, but it does not consume them. Rather, charity implies the other virtues.

Augustine's arguments against lying. There are many arguments offered by Augustine against ever telling a lie. For him, telling the truth is an absolute, and absolutes cannot be broken. Augustine is quick to point out that not all falsifications are lies. Only those falsifications with intention to deceive qualify as lies. A person is to be judged as lying or not lying according to his intention, not by the truth or falsity of his expressions. Thus something said in jest or even something false, spoken by one who intends the hearer to understand something true by it, is not a lie. For example, if a man wants to reach a certain city and asks directions of a friend he knows is a perpetual liar, the liar would give him directions that take him along the bandit-infested route. Hence the friend will take the opposite route and avoid the robbers and possible death. This is not a lie.

Lying to ward off rape, or even to save a life, is strictly forbidden by Augustine's unqualified absolutism, for one's choice is really between the permission of another's sin or the commission of one's own sin. Of a certain heretical group, the Priscillianists, who were lying to keep themselves from being discovered, Augustine insisted that Christians ought to condemn the impiety of lying as well as the heresy. Further, Christians ought not to lie to expose liars. In short, committing one sin to avoid another sin is still a sin.

Some had suggested that lying would be permissible as a means of getting another to heaven. But Augustine maintained that no eternal good could be accomplished by a temporal evil. He insisted that no one for any reason whatsoever ought to be deceived into the kingdom of Truth. Christian teaching is truth, and no falsehood should be part of Christian teaching.

Augustine insists that lying breaks down regard for the truth because lying destroys all certainty. When regard for the truth has been broken down or even slightly weakened, all things will remain doubtful. In brief, without truthfulness there is no integrity, and without integrity there can be no certainty. Once falsity is admitted into communication, then one can never again be certain that the speaker is telling the truth.

Lying is a web that entangles more and more because lying necessitates more lying to explain and cover up for itself. Eventually, argued Augustine, this will lead to perjury or even blasphemy. One who becomes a habitual liar might lie even to God.

Lying would weaken the Christian faith, for if we are untruthful in one area, then how can people believe us when we teach them Christian doctrine? When we are teaching the faith to them, they will say, "How do I know whether you are not lying to me now?"

Augustine borrowed a Platonic premise as a basis for his argument that one should never lie, even to avoid rape. He contended that one should endeavor to

preserve chastity in both soul and body, but when both cannot be protected, he insisted that the latter must give way to the former because everyone knows intuitively that the soul is to be preferred to the body, and sins of the soul are worse than sins of the body.

Augustine cites numerous passages from the Bible and Apocrypha to support his unqualified absolutism. Psalm 5:5-6 is rendered, "Thou dost hate, O **Loan**, all who work iniquity; thou shalt destroy all who speak a lie." Wisdom 1:11 is also quoted by Augustine: "The mouth that lies slays the soul" (*On Lying* 6). Thus Augustine concludes that since eternal life is lost by lying, a lie should not be told for the preservation of the temporal life of another. In short, why lose eternal life in order to save a temporal life?

Augustine admitted that some acts are not good or bad in themselves. For example, giving to the poor is good at some times and bad at other times, depending on the motive for giving. But when the works themselves are already sin, such as theft, impurity, blasphemy, and the like, who would say that these evil acts should be done for good reasons? Some moral acts are intrinsically good, and hence their violation can never be for a good purpose.

In his *Retractions*, Augustine confessed that some of his arguments were "obscure," but he never revised or corrected them. He apparently went to his reward firmly believing in an unqualified moral absolutism.

Augustine's treatment of difficult passages. On the face of it, the Bible seems to record many cases of justified lying. Augustine was aware of these passages and tried to explain them in terms of his unqualified absolutism. Let us examine his interpretations of the stories about Rahab, the Hebrew midwives, Lot, David's oath to kill Nabal, and the alleged falsehoods and deceptions of Abraham, Jacob, and Jesus.

The Hebrew midwives lied to Pharaoh, and yet God apparently blessed them for it (Exod. 1). Rahab's lie saved the Jewish spies (Josh. 2), and she is commended for her faith in the hall of fame found in the Letter to the Hebrews (11:31). Augustine's answer was that God blessed these women for their mercy but did not condone their impiety. God did not praise them because they lied but because they were merciful to the people of God. So it was not their deception that was rewarded, but their kindness. God blessed in spite of their lie, not because of it.

Lot faced a moral conflict when the Sodomites demanded his guests for immoral purposes (Gen. 19:1-11). To some, Lot's action of giving his daughters to appease the Sodomites seemed like an avoidance of a greater sin (homosexuality) by allowing a lesser one (rape). But Augustine emphatically rejects this position. His answer to this dilemma is to observe two things. First, a person must never commit a great crime of one's own in order to avoid someone else's greater crime. Second, and more directly to the point of the dilemma, Augustine insisted that Lot himself did not sin; he was merely allowing the Sodomites the opportunity to sin by raping his daughters.

The Bible seems to say that an oath before God is inviolable (see Eccles. 5:1-6), and yet the Bible (and common sense) suggests that one should not keep a foolish

or sinful oath. Augustine's response is that not everything done by righteous people of the past should be taken as normative. In short, the Bible records but does not approve of David's making such a sinful oath (1 Sam. 25:21-22; *To Consentius, Against Lying* 22).

The Scriptures say that Abraham claimed Sarah to be his "sister" (she was his half sister) in order to protect himself from being killed if the king discovered she was his wife (Gen. 20). Augustine insisted that Abraham was not lying here since he only concealed something of the truth but did not really say anything that was false. As to Jacob's alleged deception of his father, Isaac, in order to obtain God's blessing, Augustine argues that what Jacob did at his mother's bidding in seemingly deceiving his father was not a lie but only a "mystery" (Gen. 27:1-29; *To Consentius, Against Lying* 24).

The Gospel account tells us that Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" as though he didn't know (Luke 8:45). Later he indicated to the two disciples on the Emmaus road that he would go farther when he had not mentioned doing so (Luke 24:28). Augustine's answer here is that this was not really deception but instruction. Jesus pretended not to know who touched his garment in order that he might teach his disciples something they did not know. Since this teaching was true, no lie was involved. This answer seems to imply that as long as a person conveys what is true in the light of one's intentions, even if some deception is necessarily involved in doing so, then the person has not lied.

Kant's Unqualified Absolutism

Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) was one of the most influential thinkers of modern times. He was agnostic about knowing reality in itself, but he was a devout believer in God and was a moral absolutist.

A universal moral duty. Kant called the universal moral obligation a categorical imperative. By that he meant that the duty was unconditional, not conditional. He eschewed any hypothetical ethics such as if one does this, then this or that will result. He favored a categorical (deontological) ethic where "one ought to do thus and thus." Duties are duties regardless of the consequences. Kant stated the categorical imperative several ways. First, we should always treat others as an end and never as a means to an end. And second, we should act so that we could will our action a rule for all people.

Kant gave both proclaiming truth and protecting life as examples of the categorical imperative. That is, both lying and murder are universally wrong. His justification for this position is as follows. If one were to will lying as a universal rule, then there would be no more truth to lie about. Hence, it would be self-destructive to lie. **But** whatever we cannot will as a universal rule, we should never do, for this is what the categorical imperative demands. Likewise, we should never kill, for if we do so, then we must will that all can kill. But if all kill, then there will be no one left to kill. Therefore, murder should never be permitted in even one instance.

The defense of universal moral duties. There are at least three reasons stated or implied by Kant for his unqualified absolutism. All of them reveal his strong commitment to a deontological (duty-centered) ethic.

Moral duties by their nature admit no exceptions, since any exception to a moral law would indicate that it was not truly a rule. Kant believed that moral laws, like Newton's law of gravitation, have no exceptions. God does not tolerate the breaking of any of his laws, whether ethical or natural. The universe runs according to universal law.

Moral duties are intrinsic, not extrinsic, and whatever is intrinsically good cannot be evil. It is as absurd to call an intrinsically good act evil as it is to call light darkness. Only what is neither good nor bad in itself but dependent on something else for its goodness or evil can be called evil at one time and good at another. Intrinsically good actions are not like this; they are always good in and of themselves. Since telling the truth is an intrinsic good and a lie is an intrinsic evil, it follows that there can never be a good lie.

Kant's defense of universal moral laws is a kind of transcendental argument. He argues that it is absolutely necessary to posit moral duties as categorical and universal in order to live moral lives. Society cannot function without law, and law must be universal in order to be law. If it does not apply to everyone, then it is not a law. Hence, universal moral law, not what is simply socially or personally desirable, is rationally necessary to posit for *life*.

Lying to save a life is always wrong. The fact that one should neither lie nor murder leads to the dilemma that Kant addressed in his tractate "On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives" (1787). His response to that supposition, like Augustine's response, was a categorical no. He wrote, "Whoever then tells a lie, however good his intentions may be, must answer for the consequences of it ... however unforeseen they may have been?" For "to be truthful (honest) in all declarations is therefore a sacred unconditional command of reason, and not to be limited by any expediency."¹ Kant makes several points in elaborating his view.

All social duties are moral contracts, and truth is the basis of all contracts. Unless there is mutual trust in each other's word, there can be no contract. Therefore, truth is the very foundation of all social duties. Without it, all law is rendered useless and uncertain.

Kant is strongly opposed to the view that it is a duty to tell the truth only to those who have a right to it. First, he insists that truth is not a possession the right of which can be granted to one person and refused to another. Second, the duty to tell the truth makes no distinction between persons but is an unconditional duty that holds in all circumstances. Therefore, it is a duty to be truthful to everyone.

1. Immanuel Kant, 'On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives', in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kinsman Abbot, 6th ed. (London: Longman Green, 1963), 363.

2. Ibid.

By lying to one person, we do injury to all persons, for falsehoods violate the principle of justice, which protects all from harm. Veracity constitutes the condition of justice in utterances, and by lying one offends all persons through violating the principle necessary for justice in general.

Kant argues, it is possible that while you have honestly answered Yes to the murderer's question, whether his intended victim is in the house, the latter may have gone out unobserved, and so not have come in the way of the murderer." Or, if you had spoken the truth as well as you knew it, perhaps the murderer while seeking for his enemy in the house might have been caught by neighbours coming up and the deed been prevented." Consequently, lying may not be necessary to protect the innocent.

John Murray's Unqualified Absolutism

One of the best modern examples of unqualified absolutism in the evangelical tradition is that of John Murray (d. 1975) of Westminster Seminary. In *Principles of Conduct* (1957), Murray elaborates how he would maintain "the sanctity of truth" even in situations that would seem to call for a justifiable lie. There are two basic reasons for this: God is absolute, and truth is of the essence of God.

God's law is absolute. Like Augustine, Murray believes that God's law is absolutely binding. The will of God is a sovereign reflection of his unchanging character. Since God is truth and cannot ever lie (Heb. 6:18), then neither should we. The moral standard in Scripture is "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48 KJV).

Lying is always wrong. Because the command to tell the truth flows from the absolute law of God, no exceptions can be made to it. Murray writes, "The necessity of truthfulness in us rests upon God's truthfulness. As we are to be holy because God is holy, so we are to be truthful because God is truthful."⁵

The explanation of alleged biblical lies. Murray offers an explanation for some of the difficult biblical passages, along the same lines as Augustine. With regard to Rahab's lie, he says, "Although our purpose be to assist our brethren, to consult for their safety and to relieve them, it never can be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the nature of God."⁶ After reviewing several biblical examples of lying, Murray concludes, "We see, therefore, that neither Scripture itself nor the theological inferences derived from Scripture provide us with any warrant for the vindication of Rahab's untruth and this instance, consequently, does not support the position that under certain circumstances we may justifiably utter an untruth.."

3. Ibid., 362-63.

4. Ibid., 363.

S. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 127.

6. Ibid., 139.

7. Ibid.

One significant qualification. Murray believes all lying is wrong, but he does not hold that every intentional deception is a lie. For example, a general's troop maneuver may lead his enemy to an erroneous conclusion without lying. For according to Murray, it is a "fallacious assumption [to hold) that to be truthful we must **under all circumstances** speak and act in terms of the data which come within the purview of others who may be concerned with or affected by our speaking or acting."⁸ In brief, we may without lying intentionally act or speak in a way that we know will be misunderstood by others.

The Providence of God

Implied in unqualified absolutism is another premise: the providence of God. Deontologists believe that the result does not determine the rule; unqualified absolutists stress that in God's providence he always makes "a third alternative" in every apparent moral dilemma.

Several examples supplied from Scripture and elsewhere are used to show that God delivers his faithful from these dilemmas. The implication (seldom, if *ever*, stated) is that there are no real, unavoidable moral dilemmas. Daniel is often used as a prime example. The pagan king commanded Daniel to violate the law of God by partaking of forbidden meat and wine. But Daniel proposed "a third alternative" of vegetables and water, which God blessed and which thus brought him into the king's favor (Dan. 1).

It is also said that Sarah followed God's law and obeyed her husband's command, trusting that God would intervene and save her from having to commit adultery. This God did (Gen. 20). Of the many biblical examples where God did not intervene, it is implied that he would have intervened if the believer had asked in faith for the deliverance, since "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" (1 Cor 10:13). Those who admit there are some cases in which God does not intervene claim that this is because there was antecedent sin in the person's life. For example, someone driving too fast might have to choose between hitting a school bus or hitting a pedestrian when there is no waybetween or around them. But the dilemma arises from the driver's own evil choice of fast driving.

In short, sometimes we make our own moral bed and then have to lie in it. But many of God's people do (and all could) manifest the kind of faithfulness that says, "I will tell the truth and leave the consequences to God." A case in point can be found in the story of Corrie ten Boom's life (*The Hiding Place*). When the ten Boom family told the truth to the Nazis, they said the Jews were hiding "under the table," but the Nazis did not see the fugitives because they were under the floor under the table. This, say some unqualified absolutists, is the sort of protection God will give if we trust him and never lie. Hence, there is never a need to lie or break any moral law in order to save a life or do any other moral good.

8.1bid., 145, emphasis original.

Summary of Unqualified Absolutism

There are several major premises that make up the unqualified absolutist's position, at least as it is held by Christians. Briefly stated, they include the following:

1. God's unchanging character is the basis of moral absolutes.
2. God has expressed his unchanging moral character in his law.
3. God cannot contradict himself.
4. Hence, no two absolute moral laws can really conflict.
5. **All** moral conflicts are only apparent, not real.

Positive Aspects of Unqualified Absolutism

Unqualified absolutism has much to commend it as a Christian ethic. It is based in God's unchanging character, its nature is deontological, it has trust in God's providence, and it holds the belief that there is always a way to avoid sinning. Let us examine these in a little more detail.

It Is Based in God's Unchanging Nature

Most unqualified absolutists realize the need to anchor their universal moral duties in the unchanging character of God. Indeed, it is difficult to see how there can be any absolute moral prescriptions unless there is an absolute moral Prescriber. Absolutely binding moral laws come only from an absolute moral Lawgiver. This most commendable emphasis of unqualified absolutism points up the inconsistency of any form of moral relativism, such as antinomianism (chap. 2), situationism (chap. 3), or generalism (chap. 4).

It Stresses Rule over Result

Unqualified absolutism is a deontological ethic (see chap. 1). As such it rightly holds that the rule determines the result, and not the reverse. Here again, this is a necessary ingredient in an adequate Christian ethic. Something is not good simply because it brings about desired results. An act is good because it is good, regardless of the results. Surely God designed good acts so that they would bring about good results. Moses told Israel "to observe the LoRD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good" (Deut. 10:13). However, even though doing good is intended to bring good, nonetheless good is good no matter what evil may come from it. And evil is evil no matter what good may result from it.

It Shows Trust in God's Providence

Another positive dimension of unqualified absolutism is its manifest confidence in the providence of God. This is revealed clearly in the attitude of believers who,

in the face of death, can say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16), or with the three Hebrew young men, "The God we serve is able to save us from it [the fiery furnace].... But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18). Since an absolute ethic is based in a God who is in absolute control, the believer can trust him absolutely. God's providence makes it unnecessary to take things into our own hands. The Christian can confidently believe that since God made the rules, it is simply our duty to keep them and leave the results in his hands.

There Is Always a Way to Avoid Sinning

Another commendable feature of unqualified absolutism is its belief that it is not necessary to sin. God has so designed our moral laws and our duty that it is never necessary to sin. Ultimately, there is no moral conflict in the self-consistent God, nor are there any unresolvable conflicts in this moral world. There is always "a way to escape" (1 Cor. 10:13 KJV). It is never necessary to literally do the lesser evil. There is always "a third alternative." That is to say, the believer is never duty-bound to sin in order to avoid sin. God has set it up that way.

Negative Aspects of Unqualified Absolutism

Critics have pointed out a number of difficulties with unqualified absolutism. Since not all unqualified absolutists hold identical views, not all of these criticisms are applicable to all proponents. However, many of them will apply to all forms of the position.

Some Disputable or False Premises

Let us begin by examining presuppositions that are either unnecessarily or unjustifiably held by some proponents of unqualified absolutism.

Are sins of the soul greater? This Platonic premise held by Augustine has by no means experienced a universal acceptance. To be sure, many Christians still adhere to a dualistic hierarchy of this variety. This has led, not without justification, to the charge that such Christians neglect social concern because they are more interested in saving souls than helping bodies. The biblical teaching on the unity of the human being is the best corrective to this false dichotomy.

If Augustine were correct in this ethical dualism, then a "white lie" or minor "evil thought" would be worse than rape or murder, *for* any spiritual offense would be worse than a physical one. Furthermore, Augustine was not consistent in applying this principle. Otherwise he would not have rejected the view that David should have killed Nabal (the body) in order to keep his oath (the soul).

Can the lie to save lives be separated from mercy? Augustine says that God blessed the mercy but not the lie. However, it was by means of the lie that Rahab's mercy was expressed and the spies were saved. The same is true of the Hebrew midwives' lie (Exod. 1:15-16). There was no actual separation between the lie and the act of mercy. And a mere formal distinction will not suffice as an explanation, since in actuality there was only one act (which included the lie) under consideration, and this act was praised by God.

Are acts intrinsically good? Augustine argued that some acts are intrinsically good, apart from one's intentions or motives. If this is so, then theft or lying would indeed always be wrong. However, there are several objections to this view. First, if some acts were intrinsically good or evil, then an act of killing committed by an animal or an imbecile would have to be considered morally wrong. It will not suffice to add that only human acts of killing could be morally wrong, or else we would have to deny that imbeciles are human, since they are not morally culpable for their acts. Furthermore, this would mean that they were wrong only because they were so intended by someone, which is tantamount to saying that the act as such is not evil, but only the act as intended is evil. But this is contrary to their view that the act as *such* is evil.

Can a lie be defined without intention? Augustine defined a lie as an intentional falsehood. But if intention needs to be added to the act of falsifying in order to make it a lie, then it follows that the act of falsifying as such is not a lie. Further, if acts are intrinsically evil apart from intentions or motives, then any falsification or action contrary to a moral prescription in Scripture would be an evil. This would include unintentional falsehoods as well as accidental injury or death inflicted on persons. But this is not so. Finally, Augustine admitted that not all acts are intrinsically good or evil, as, for example, giving to the poor. If so, then he has already qualified his absolutism; perhaps the other acts, such as lying, are not intrinsically evil either.

Does lying destroy all certainty? Augustine argued that lying would destroy all certainty. At best, this argument only proves that lying undermines some certainty, undermining information based on the testimony of one known to have lied. Furthermore, the same argument could be made against anyone known to have made unintentional mistakes, which we all do. So Augustine's argument would prove to be too much. It would prove that one cannot be certain of anything that depends on any person. But his own Christian beliefs depended on the testimony of the apostles, which Augustine did not consider uncertain.

Is the choice between permission and commission? Unqualified absolutists believe there is no real moral dilemma in the case of lying or permitting a murder. They believe there is really only one moral obligation in this situation: to tell the truth. The only other duty, they say, belongs to the person threatening to do the killing. Such threatening persons are responsible for what they do with the truth we give them. But is this overlooking the fact that there is also a duty to save innocent

lives, to show mercy? In short, is there a real conflict between truthfulness and mercifulness? In other words, the choice is really between an act of commission and one of omission. And a sin of omission can be just as much a sin as a sin of commission (James 4:17).

Does lying condemn a person to hell? Few Christians really believe, as Augustine suggests, that a single lie (even a few lies scattered through one's life) will send a believer to hell. Indeed, anyone who believes in salvation by grace alone, as Scripture teaches (Eph. 2:8-9), will not trouble themselves long with this point. It is only those lives characterized by untruthfulness that eventuate in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). And these unsaved find themselves right alongside those who are "fearful." Yet who would say that everyone who has ever (or even occasionally) been fearful will be in hell?

Will God always save us from moral dilemmas? There are several reasons to suppose that divine intervention is not the solution to all moral dilemmas. First, nowhere does Scripture promise this to every faithful believer all the time. First Corinthians 10:13 is only a promise for victory in temptation—not a guarantee of divine intervention to avoid moral conflicts. Second, neither Scripture nor the history of the martyrs supports the position that God always delivers the faithful from moral conflicts. God did deliver Daniel and Sarah, but he did not deliver Abraham (Gen. 22), the midwives (Exod. 1), Rahab (Josh. 2), the three Hebrew youths (Dan. 3), or the apostles (Acts 4). And yet the conflicts were just as real and the believers were just as faithful in these cases.

Further, not all real moral conflicts are brought on by a person's prior sin(s). Jesus seemed to face real conflicts between obeying his heavenly Father and obeying his earthly parents (Luke 2), between showing *mercy* and keeping the Sabbath (Mark 2:27), and even between justice and mercy on the cross; yet he was without sin (Heb. 4:15). In fact, moral conflicts are often brought on by one's faithfulness to God. This was so of the midwives, of Daniel, of Abraham, of the apostles, and even of Corrie ten Boom. If she had not cared so much about those innocent Jews, she would never have found herself in the dilemma of needing to lie to save their lives.

Was Abraham's concealment a lie? Augustine insisted that Abraham's concealment of Sarah's identity as his wife was not a lie, since she was really his half sister. But what about Isaac, who also claimed Rebekah was his sister, though she was not (Gen. 26:7)? Surely this was not even half true. Augustine does not address this problem, nor would his explanation for Abraham suffice for Isaac.

While one can agree that there is not always an obligation to tell the whole truth, as we have in the divinely approved case of Samuel's half truth (1 Sam. 16), nonetheless concealment sometimes is a lie. If one knows exactly what the questioner wants and yet conceals the information by intentionally misleading him (though without direct falsification), is this not intentional deception? And an intentional deception is a lie.

Fatal Qualifications

Unqualified absolutism does not need a thousand qualifications to kill it; it can die "a death by one qualification?" As Kant acknowledged, even one exception to a rule proves that the rule is not genuinely universal. By the absolutists' own definition, an absolute rule has no exceptions, and yet there are many ways the proponents of unqualified absolutism have qualified their view or made exceptions to it.

Augustine's exceptions. Augustine admitted many exceptions to divine commands. He excused Abraham from the charge of intending to murder Isaac because Abraham was going to sacrifice his son "in obedience to God." Likewise, sacrifice of his daughter and Samson's sacrifice of his own life are "justified only on this ground, that the Spirit, who wrought wonders by him, had given him secret instructions to do this."⁹ But even one exception kills a universal rule as unqualified absolutists understand it; it is shown not to be genuinely universally binding, without exception. Likewise, Augustine argues that there were exceptions to the divine command to obey human government. It should be noted in this connection that the Bible not only enjoins submission to the consequences of a law (for example, going to prison for disobedience, as in Dan. 6) but also demands obedience to the rules of government (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Paul enjoins both submission and obedience, saying, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient" (Titus 3:1).

John Murray's qualification. Murray contended that an intentional deception is not a lie. He claimed that it is a "fallacious assumption [to hold] that to be truthful we must *under all circumstances* speak and act in terms of the data which come within the purview of others who maybe concerned with or affected by our speaking or acting."¹⁰ But once this qualification is made, there are two momentous problems. First, how do we keep from allowing a thousand similar qualifications? At least Augustine limited the allowable instances of intentional deceptions to special cases involving supernatural intervention; Murray leaves the door wide open to all kinds!

Second, if a lie by definition is an intentional falsification, as Augustine said, then Murray is playing ball in another park, since he no longer defines a lie in the same way. But if one allows Murray this new definition of a lie, then Murray is no longer an unqualified absolutist in the original Augustinian sense. What is more, Murray, by virtue of his tactic of redefinition, is subject to the criticism that he salvages "unqualified absolutism" by stipulative redefinition. But is this move really justified? Would it not be more honest to admit that there are actually times when one believes that a lie (an intentional deception) is justified, rather than redefining a lie to avoid admitting that lies are sometimes justified?

9. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 2:15.

10. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 145, emphasis original.

Hodge's limitation. Charles Hodge makes a distinction that would rescue Augustinian unqualified absolutism from collapse. He suggests limitations on what counts as a lie. These limits are contextual. That is, an intentional deception counts as a lie if and only if it is told in a context in which the truth is expected." Since one does not expect a spy to tell the truth, it would follow that lying" in spying is not really lying.

However, this solution presents unqualified absolutism with several serious problems. First, once this qualification is made, the view is no longer an unqualified absolutism. It is an admission that there are exemptions from the moral rule "Thou shalt not intentionally falsify," which is what Augustine originally meant by a lie. Second, the only way one can know which moral law should be qualified is if one has knowledge of which is higher and which is lower. But this is a form of graded absolutism (see chap. 7), not unqualified absolutism.

Unsuccessful Qualifications

"Unqualified" absolutism is not really unqualified. It always seems to find some way to qualify divine commands. So-called absolutists reduce certain divine commands to less than an absolute level either by insisting that they flow only from God's will, not from his nature, or by saying that some are purely civil or ceremonial in nature and not moral, or by claiming that the command applies only *ceteris paribus*, other things being equal.

There are, however, several problems with these solutions. First, not all moral commands fit into these categories. Some are between two moral principles reflective of God's nature, such as truth and mercy. Second, even civil commands (such as "Obey government") are a moral duty. Third, such a move to subordinate some commands to others is not an unqualified absolutism but is a form of graded absolutism (see chap. 7). Finally, subordination or qualification of any kind is a capitulation of unqualified absolutism, since it admits there are occasions when moral commands must be qualified.

Punting to Providence

An appeal to the providence of God to avoid moral conflict is ill-advised for several reasons. First, God does not always intervene and spare all the faithful from moral dilemmas. There is no evidence for this premise of unqualified absolutism either inside or outside the Bible. Indeed, the premise of supernatural intervention is in conflict with other premises held by these absolutists. To begin with, what need is there for divine intervention if all conflicts are only apparent and not real? The need for divine intervention is a concession to the position that there are real conflicts, which is contrary to the tenets of unqualified absolutism. For once one admits that there are real moral conflicts and that they can be resolved by divine

11. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 3:439-44.

intervention, then one is no longer an unqualified absolutist but is some kind of graded absolutist.

Further, why the need for intervention if all moral dilemmas are caused by antecedent sin? Sometimes in his mercy, God may desire to intervene, but there is no reason to believe that he must (or will) always do so. We should not always *expect miracles* to help us out of real moral conflicts.

Many unqualified absolutists "solve" the ethical dilemma with recourse to the belief that God will always spare the faithful. This, however, meets with several serious objections.

1. God nowhere promises that he will always intervene to save us from moral conflicts.
2. The three Hebrew youths did not expect God to bail them out of their moral dilemma (Dan. 3).
3. Jesus spoke against expecting a miracle to get one out of difficult situations (Mat. 4:7).
4. Expecting a miracle shifts the responsibility from us to God. It is an ethic of "If in trouble, punt to God."
5. We should not base the reality of a present decision on the possibility that God may perform a miracle in the future.
6. Believing that God will intervene if we do right begs the question. It assumes that there is always a way to do right without real moral conflict.
7. Such a view would demand frequent miraculous intervention. But frequent miraculous intervention would make both life and miracles impossible, since both depend on regular patterns of activity for their operation.
8. Finally, there are some pertinent questions to answer if one always expects God to intervene. In the case of the Christian called upon to reveal the whereabouts of an innocent victim to a would-be assassin, why not trust God to intervene before speaking the truth (by making us temporarily mute)? That way the hiding place of the innocent is not disclosed. Or why not trust God to intervene and cause deafness in the would-be assassin?

Third Alternatives Are Not Always Available

It is both unrealistic and unbiblical to assume that moral obligations never conflict. Real life reveals this kind of conflict daily in hospitals, courtrooms, and battlefields. Sometimes one must kill or be killed. Other times the baby must die, or both the mother and baby will die (as in tubal pregnancies). Likewise, the Bible tells of no third alternative for Abraham in killing Isaac (Gen. 22), or for the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1), or the three Hebrew youths (Dan. 3). It is naive to assume that these kinds of situations never happen. And if the Christian ethic is adequate for all situations, it must have an answer for these real moral conflicts.

Not All Moral Conflicts Are Self-Made

Further, prior personal sin does not cause all moral dilemmas. Even if Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12) is the ultimate cause of original sin and imputed sin, it cannot be blamed for each personal sin since then. And it is certainly not the cause of every individual moral dilemma since then; otherwise there would be no need for confession of personal sins (1 John 1:9). To argue to the contrary would be to confuse total depravity and ethical responsibility. At best, prior personal sins cause only some of one's personal moral conflicts, not all of them. Some are caused by others who force the conflict on the innocent. Indeed, sometimes just the opposite is true: personal moral dilemmas are precipitated by one's faithfulness or righteousness.

A Basic Inconsistency

Most unqualified absolutists are inconsistent. For while they condemn lying to save a person, they engage in intentional deception to save their property. Most people, for example, leave their lights on while away from home in order to deceive potential thieves. But if one will lie to save his property from a potential thief, then why not lie to save an actual life from a murderer? While condemning Corrie ten Boom for lying to protect Jews from being killed, they lie to save their jewels from being stolen. But persons have more value than things.

Falling into Sins of Omission

Another problem is that the unqualified absolutist often ends up committing unmerciful *acts*. Absolutists perform greater sins of omission to avoid what they believe to be sins of commission. Plato's example is instructive.¹² Who would return a weapon one had borrowed from a man if he requested it back in order to kill someone with it? The law of mercy is higher than the law of property. Likewise, Scripture indicates that saving the lives of the innocent (mercy) is a greater duty than telling the truth to the guilty (Exod. 1:15-16). So, in failing to show mercy to the innocent by withholding truth from the guilty, the unqualified absolutist falls into a sin of omission while trying to avoid a sin of commission.

The Tendency to Legalism

Another difficulty with unqualified absolutism is that it often tends toward legalism by neglecting the spirit of the law in order to avoid breaking the letter of the law. This attitude is precisely what Jesus condemned when he said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27; man = humankind). After Corrie ten Boom's torturous internment experience, is it not a

12. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Francis Macdonald Comford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1.330.

cold indifference to demand that she not sign the prison release stating that she had been "treated humanely"? When lying and lives are weighed, are not lives more important?

Silence Is Not Always Possible

It is not always possible, as some unqualified absolutists suggest, to avoid falsification by partial truths or silence. Samuel was able to avoid Saul's wrath by the partial truth that he had come to offer a sacrifice, when he had really come to anoint David as king. But what if Saul had asked him what other mission he had in mind? At that point he would have had to either lie, be silent (which would have implied that he had another purpose for coming), or else risk the death of the innocent and be unmerciful. Even silence before an interrogator who says, will kill these people unless you speak," can be an unmerciful sin of omission.

Summary and Conclusion

Despite the positive aspects of unqualified absolutism, and its noble efforts to preserve unmodified absolutes, there are some serious deficiencies in the position. It is unrealistic, unmerciful (even legalistic at times), and unsuccessful in avoiding the inevitable modification of its absolutes in order to give an adequate answer to numerous biblical and real-life conflicts of divine commands.

Though it is no doubt true that moral conflicts are not God's ideal, it is also a fact that this is not an ideal world. It is a real and fallen world. And if the Christian ethic is adequate for this real world in which we live, then it must not retreat into unqualified absolutes. It must find a morally acceptable way to preserve absolutes while honestly and adequately providing an answer for every moral situation.

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6

CONFLICTING ABSOLUTISM

Evangelicals have generally held to some form of ethical absolutism. In contrast to situationism, they have claimed that there are many moral absolutes. Within the camp of those holding to two or more absolutes, a special problem arises: What about moral conflicts? What should one do when two or more of one's absolute obligations come into unavoidable conflict?

Basically, there are three answers to this question. First, unqualified absolutism affirms that all such conflicts are only apparent, not real. In short, no two absolute obligations ever come into unavoidable conflict. Second, conflicting absolutism admits to real moral conflicts but claims that a person is guilty no matter which way one goes. Third, graded absolutism (or the greater-good position) agrees with the view that real moral conflicts do sometimes occur, but maintains that one is personally guiltless for doing the greatest good and choosing the lesser evil in that situation. This chapter will consider the second view.

An Explanation of Conflicting Absolutism

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

The Historical Background of Conflicting Absolutism

Conflicting absolutism has roots in the Greek world, was incorporated into Reformation thinking, and finds expression in both modern existential and popular thought. The colloquial "I did the lesser of two evils" is an expression of it. It can even be called the lesser-evil view.

Although there are Christian roots for conflicting absolutism, they grow in Greek soil. The ancient Greek tragedies often portrayed lesser-evil situations. In the fifth century BC, Sophocles and Euripides wrote dramas about heroes who contended against forces of fate they could not avoid. These dramatized dilemmas reflected the nature of the real world of moral conflicts, with which conflicting absolutism struggles.

The concept of lesser evils was given a new dimension with the Reformation doctrine of depravity, particularly as that was developed by Martin Luther (d. 1546). Two things embedded in Lutheran thought give rise to a form of conflicting absolutism, the first being Luther's theory of two kingdoms. He believed that Christians live simultaneously in two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Since they are opposed and since Christians have responsibility in both, it is inevitable that there will be conflicts.

Second, Luther's famous statement to Melanchthon that we must "sin boldly" is amenable to a lesser-evil interpretation. Luther wrote: "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe even more boldly and rejoice in Christ, who is victor over sin, death and the world:" The Lutheran scholar Helmut Thielicke (d. 1986) comments on this quote: "It is not a case of compromise being justified.... The truth is rather that Christ conquers and overcomes the *schema* [form] of the world, the structure within which such compromise is necessary. In short, even though sin is sometimes unavoidable, it is conquerable through the cross. In a fallen world sin is inevitable, but in a redeemed world it is also forgivable.

Helmut Thielicke

Perhaps the most comprehensive contemporary exposition of the conflicting absolutist view is found in Thielicke's works. There are several elements in Thielicke's form of conflicting absolutism. Fundamental to his view is the belief in real, unavoidable moral conflicts, for "to deny the conflict situation is to deny decision."³ In conflict situations, says Thielicke, "I may have to face the possibility that what is involved here is a borderline situation which does not allow of any easy solution. And "I can reach such a decision only by going

1. Letter to Melanchthon, August 1, 1521, in *Letters I*, vol. 48 of *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 282.

2. Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, ed. William H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 1:504.

3. *Ibid.*, 610.

through the conflict and enduring it, not by evading it in the name of some kind of perfectionism."

In the conflict situation sin is unavoidable, for we "constantly fall into sin in the borderline situation." In view of human depravity, these kinds of conflicts should be expected, since "the form of this world is no more able to produce absolute righteousness than our human heart" The consequence is that in this fallen world "conduct is *de facto* a compromise *between* the divine requirement and what is permitted by the form of this world, ... by the manifold conflicts of duty" Even the so-called just war unavoidably involves injustices. For "there is no such thing as a wholly just war, and my decision to endorse a given war and participate in it can be made only from the standpoint that I see, or think I see, greater wrong on the one side than the other."

Moral depravity is the cause of moral dilemmas. A moral conflict is "not due to the character imparted to the world by creation, as though 'from the beginning' (Matt. 19:8)⁷ No, "it is due rather to the complex of wrong decisions which lie behind us, which have their ultimate root in that primal decision recorded in the story of the fall's In brief, moral conflicts arise out of the fact that this is a fallen world. In a sinless world there would be no moral dilemmas. There will be none in heaven. God did not design, nor does he desire, moral dilemmas. They are not his ideal. But on the other hand, this is not an ideal world; it is a real and fallen world. In such a world, there will be times when we cannot avoid evil.

When decisions are made in conflict situations, we must choose the lesser evil, for "there are heavier sins and lighter sins:' They both are sins, but "they do not have the same weight." Thieliicke makes it clear that there is no justification for doing the lesser evil.⁸ Neither is there any pragmatic justification. For "the slogan 'to prevent something worse' is always ethically destructive because it subjugates our action to a non-Christian pragmatismf " In fact, "readiness to do wrong in order to 'prevent something worse' is a very dubious principle, because it implies that the end justifies the meansf ¹²We must simply recognize that in conflict situations both commands are our moral duty and that sin is inevitable." Nonetheless, since there are lesser and greater sins, the Christian should do the lesser sin, knowing that forgiveness is available. "He knows that here in this world there is no perfect righteousness, but he does not therefore draw the conclusion

4. Ibid., 612.

5. Ibid., 653.

6. Ibid., 499.

7. Ibid., 414-15.

8. Ibid., 596.

9. Ibid., 620.

10. Ibid., 602.

11. Ibid., 625.

12. Ibid., 590.

13. Ibid., 488.

that everything is under the same condemnation and that everything is equally permissible? On the contrary, a Christian realizes that there is a "quantitative distinction between reprehensible and less reprehensible, between good and less good possibilities?"

According to Thielicke, "we can undergo and endure borderline situations and ... inescapable conflicts only under forgiveness?" The Christian knows "that even in a war which—given things as they are—is 'just,' [one] must always stand in need of forgiveness."¹⁴ Thus our "certainty that acts done under the guidance of the Spirit are, despite their 'crooked' form, done in God's name as *his* affair, and that at the same time they nonetheless stand in need of forgiveness."¹⁵ In the conflict situation, the Christian "acts in the knowledge that even those actions which conform to the ultimate norms perceptible in this aeon must stand under forgiveness."¹⁶ In short, even our best effort in obeying God's commands is an evil that needs to be forgiven.

The Basic Tenets of Conflicting Absolutism

There are four basic premises in conflicting absolutism. First, God's law is absolute and unbreakable. Second, in a fallen world unavoidable conflicts between God's commands occur. Third, when moral conflicts happen, we should do the lesser evil. Fourth, forgiveness is available if we confess our sins.

God's Moral Law Is Absolute

"The law of the LORD is perfect" (Ps. 19:7). The psalmist confessed to God, "Every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever" (119:160 RSV). God has not made his law to be broken. The psalmist exclaims, "Thou [God] hast commanded thy precepts to be kept diligently" (119:4 RSV). "The ordinances of the Law" are true, and righteous altogether"; and "in keeping them there is great reward" (19:9, 11 RSV). Further, "the LORD will not hold him guiltless" who breaks his commands (Exod. 20:7 RSV).

In short, God is absolutely perfect, and his law is a reflection of his character. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48 RSV). Anything that does not measure up to the absolute perfection of the law of God is sin. Whenever God's law is broken, the lawbreaker sins, for "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). God does not change (Mal. 3:6), nor does the moral law that

14. Ibid., 501.

15. Ibid., 654.

16. Ibid., 655.

17. Ibid., 659.

18. Ibid., 431.

reflects his character. "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). Therefore, it is inexcusable for us to lie, even if it is necessary to save a life.

Moral Conflicts Are Unavoidable

The second premise of conflicting absolutism springs from the depravity of humanity. Humans have broken God's law and find themselves inextricably bound in a web of sinful relationships, in which sin is unavoidable. Before the fall of humankind, Adam was able not to sin, but since the fall, humans are unable to avoid sin. Not only can humankind not avoid sinning in general; there also are tragic moral dilemmas in this fallen world in which all alternatives are wrong. Sometimes no matter what we do, we cannot avoid breaking one of God's laws. That is the reality of a fallen world. Sometimes one must sin. Certainly one must choose the lesser evil, but one must sin, regardless.

Conflicting absolutism runs contrary to the Kantian dictum: "Ought implies can." Humans are always called upon to obey a standard of perfection they cannot reach: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48 RSV). Further, in moral dilemmas a person is morally obligated to keep both laws, even though one of them must be broken. Such it is in this sinful world, says the conflicting absolutist. Ideally, God did not design it this way. But then again, this wicked world is far from ideal.

The Duty to Do the Lesser Evil

Not all sins are created equal. Jesus said to Pilate, "The one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:11). One sin is so bad that it is unpardonable: the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32). This being the case, there is an obligation to do the lesser evil. Whenever our moral duties conflict, we should obey the greater one, realizing that breaking the other is a sin. Nonetheless, it is the lesser sin in the situation. It is always our responsibility to do our best, even when it is not good. We must maximize the good even when it is minimal.

Forgiveness Is Available

The fourth premise associated with conflicting absolutism is that even though sin is sometimes unavoidable, God's forgiveness is always available through the cross of Christ. One of the happy by-products of this sad world is that the unavoidability of sin drives people to the cross for forgiveness. There is a way out of the dilemma. It is not a way to avoid sin; by the nature of the case, sin is unavoidable. Rather, it is a way to avoid bearing the guilt of the sin for long. In brief, the way out is, on our part, confession, and on God's part, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. All we need to do in lesser-evil situations is to do the lesser evil, confess

that we have broken God's law, and receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Sin is unavoidable, but salvation is available.

Some Positive Contributions of Conflicting Absolutism

Conflicting absolutism has many merits as a form of moral absolutism, but it is subject to some serious objections as well. First, let us consider four of the positive contributions it makes to Christian ethics.

It Preserves Moral Absolutes

Whatever its weaknesses, conflicting absolutism preserves moral absolutes intact. God's law is absolute, and there are absolutely no occasions when it is morally justifiable to break it. God is absolutely good, and his law is a reflection of his nature. This being so, the breaking of a moral law is an attack upon his character. Hence, God can no more allow a moral law to be broken than he can allow his character to be violated. Conflicting absolutism is to be commended for this strong stand upon the unchangeable and unbreakable nature of moral absolutes.

It Has a Moral Realism

In spite of their tenacious grip on transcendent moral values, conflicting absolutists are in touch with the real world of moral conflicts and borderline cases. Not every decision is neat and clean. Everything is not black or white. There are real moral conflicts. This realistic recognition of moral dilemmas is commendable. There is no effort to explain away all conflicts as apparent, not real. Conflicting absolutists may have their heads in a heavenly cloud of moral perfection, but their feet are planted solidly in the clay of earthly imperfection.

It Sees Moral Conflicts as Rooted in Humanity's Fallenness

Another important dimension of conflicting absolutism is its attempt to explain the nature of moral conflicts. It sees moral dilemmas as rooted in moral depravity. In an unfallen world there would be no unavoidable moral conflicts. It is only because of sin that such conflicts occur. There are no moral conflicts in God, and there will be none in heaven. So conflicting absolutism claims that moral dilemmas are of humankind's own making. This does not mean that each individual makes his or her own moral bed and has to lie in it. Some moral dilemmas result from Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12), some from the sins of others, and some from our own sins. However, sin lies at the root of moral conflicts. God did not design the world this way.

It Is a Solution without Exception

There is an unadulterated simplicity about conflicting absolutism. It is a solution without exceptions. It cannot be accused of casuistry. It is simply *always* wrong to break an absolute moral law of God. There are no exceptions, exemptions, or divine immunity. Absolute moral laws are absolute, and that is that. In a complex world of confused circumstances, there is an admirable simplicity about conflicting absolutism. In this respect it has an uncluttered and unadorned appeal.

Some Criticisms of Conflicting Absolutism

In spite of its many appealing features, a number of objections have been leveled against the lesser-evil view. We will consider four of them here. The first two may be called moral and the latter two christological.

A Moral Duty to Sin Is Morally Absurd

According to conflicting absolutism, in real moral conflicts we have a moral duty to do the lesser of the two evils. That is, one is morally obligated to do evil. But how can there ever be a moral obligation to do what is immoral? It seems to be a morally absurd claim.

There are three basic alternatives for the proponent of the lesser-evil position in view of this criticism. First, a Christian might claim that there is no moral obligation or divine command to do the lesser evil. It is simply what one "ought" to do, on some kind of pragmatic or utilitarian grounds, for personal or social reasons. This alternative would seem to be particularly embarrassing for biblical Christians, since they would be faced with some of life's most difficult situations without any direction or command from God. Christianity would have an incomplete ethic. It would be able to handle the ordinary situations, but for the really difficult ones—the ones involving tragic moral choices—it would give absolutely no divine direction.

There is another way out of the dilemma for the lesser-evil proponents. They may admit that there is a moral obligation—an obligation not to do evil, but simply to maximize good or minimize evil in an evil situation. But if they take this route, then their position really collapses into the greater-good view. For if they are actually obligated to do a maximal good, then why call it evil? For example, the doctor who amputates a leg to save the patient's life is not guilty of the sin of mutilation, but is to be commended for doing the maximal good. As tragic as amputation is, surely there is no basis in Christian ethics to consider amputation done to save a life as a culpable act. Likewise, why call the act evil, as the lesser-evil view would seem to do, when it is the greatest good under the circumstances?

Finally, surely the proponent of the lesser-evil view could simply admit the absurdity and unavoidability of sin and claim that one is morally obligated to do what is morally wrong, absurd as this is.

The Unavoidable Is Not Morally Culpable

This leads to a second criticism, that conflicting absolutism holds that one is personally responsible for what is personally unavoidable. Those who espouse this view challenge the underlying premise of their opponents that responsibility implies ability, that "ought implies can." They may point to biblical instances where God commands the impossible, such as "Be perfect, ... as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). They may point to the doctrine of depravity, which declares it to be impossible for a human not to sin even though God commands humankind not to sin.

But in these cases one need simply note that "ought implies can" only in the sense that one can, by the enabling grace of God, do what is utterly impossible by human standards. In this sense, the ought-implies-can thesis is not a violation of these biblical truths. Furthermore, to focus on the ought-implies-can principle misses the real issue. The moral absurdity of the lesser-evil position is not based on the truth or falsity of "ought implies can." From a Christian standpoint it is morally absurd to say, "One ought to do an evil," since "ought" means "God has commanded it"; and God does not (I would say, *cannot*) command one to do what is morally evil. God is good, absolute good, and as such he can neither perform nor promote anything evil. For God to command one to do evil would contradict his very will, his very nature.

Yet one might respond here by claiming that whatever God commands is ipso facto good and not evil, since one could define good as that which God commands. However, this response would be fatal to the lesser-evil view, for if what God commands in so-called lesser-evil situations is really good simply because he has commanded it, then it is not an evil. Actually, if the act is good in this conflict situation because God has commanded it, then the lesser-evil view has really collapsed into the greater-good view. The good act one performs at the command of God is not sinful but commendable because it is done in obedience to God.

Before we leave this point, we notice making a distinction between good and right does not help the lesser-evil position. One cannot simply claim that the lesser evil is the "right" thing to do in a given situation, for one can always ask Was the "right" act morally good or evil? Was the act culpable or not? If it is a morally evil or guilt-inducing act, then we are back where we started, and the preceding criticisms apply. If, on the other hand, the "right" act was good or guiltless, then the view has collapsed into the greater-good view.

The essential difference between these two positions is that according to conflicting absolutism, the tragic moral act is guilt-inducing and calls for confession and forgiveness, whereas according to the greater-good view the tragic moral act

is guiltiness. A person may regret having to make the decision, but one need not repent of it. Indeed, according to the greater-good view, doing the greatest good leads to reward, not to punishment. At any rate, the lesser-evil view is not redeemed from its difficulties by calling the lesser evil the "right" act in contrast to a "good" act. The question still remains: Is one personally guilty or not guilty for performing this act? If one is guilty, then God is commanding an act that is unavoidably sinful. If one is not guilty, then the act is morally acceptable, and we are driven to the greater-good position.

Another distinction is sometimes made in an attempt to rescue the lesser-evil position. It is occasionally claimed that people are not blamed for doing their best in conflicting situations, but rather they are blamed in doing their best, for even the most faithful servant is unworthy (Luke 7:6-10). In this sense some might claim that it would be morally absurd to blame people for doing their best, but it is not necessarily absurd to blame them for doing evil in the process of doing their best. Might it not be that the act of lying is evil but that the whole process of showing mercy to the innocent is the greater good? Hence, a person should confess the lie in particular even though the act as a whole was the greater good. Perhaps God blames a human for whatever sinful acts are part of an overall good performance.

In response to this distinction, we simply observe that the ethical complex must be thought of as a whole. Certain things done in one context are morally good and in another are morally evil. For example, cutting off a person's leg is good if done by a doctor as a necessary means to save a life, but evil if done as an act of sadism. It is the moral context as a whole that gives meaning to the act. Hence, one cannot separate specific evil parts from an overall ethical performance and call the whole act good. As an intention-act complex, amputation is either good or evil. One cannot claim that the overall amputation process was good but actually cutting off a human leg was evil.

This discussion brings up a more principled issue beneath the whole discussion: the relation of intention to action in judging the morality of an act. The difficulty with much of the discussion on these issues seems to hinge on the question of whether an act is intrinsically good or evil, or whether it is the intention-act complex that must be considered. An adequate discussion of this is beyond the scope of this volume. Suffice it to say here that it seems reasonable to assume that we must consider the intention-act complex. Good intentions alone are not sufficient to make an act morally right. Hitler may have intended to produce a better world by enacting genocide, but the murder of millions of Jews and others was not made morally good by admirable motives. Likewise, an act as such apart from its motive or intention is not necessarily good. For instance, those who give to the poor in order to receive the praise of others are not to be morally commended. If this is the case, then the lesser-evil position is wrong in separating an act from its total intention-act complex, pronouncing that act evil, and then declaring the overall process good.

Jesus Must Have Sinned

According to conflicting absolutism, sin is unavoidable in real moral conflicts. However, according to the Bible, Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin" (Heb. 4: Is). So if there are real moral dilemmas; then either Jesus faced them or else he did not. If he did face them, then according to the lesser-evil view, which states that evil is indeed unavoidable, Jesus must have sinned. But the Bible says that Jesus did not sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). Hence, the only alternative here is that Jesus never faced real moral conflicts. If we assume that there are real moral conflicts, several explanations for this dilemma can be offered. First, perhaps the lesser-evil view is incorrect, and Jesus never sinned when he faced real moral conflicts because one is not held to be sinful when doing the greatest good in a moral conflict. Perhaps "stealing" bread from the temple (taking it without permission from the proper authority) is not morally wrong when starvation of God's servant is the other alternative. Is this not what Jesus implied in Matthew 12:3-8?

But let us not so readily assume that conflicting absolutism is defenseless in the face of this charge. Perhaps Jesus never sinned in the area of moral conflicts simply because he never faced any moral conflicts. There are two explanations for this position. First, it maybe that God providentially spared Jesus from facing moral conflicts in order to preserve his sinlessness. But if this is the case, then Christians may ask why they, too, are not spared from moral conflicts if they are faithful to God. In fact, this is precisely what many nonconflicting absolutists hold: there is always a third alternative for the faithful. Daniel did not have to either eat the pagan meat and drink the pagan wine or suffer the consequence of his disobedience (Dan. 1). There was a prayerful third way out. Is this not what 1 Corinthians 10:13 seems to imply, that there is always a "way of escape" (RSV)? If the conflicting absolutists wish to take this alternative of arguing that God will always provide a way out for those who are faithful to God's will, as Jesus was, then their view really collapses into nonconflicting absolutism. For in the final analysis, the lesser-evil view is saying that there never is an unavoidable moral conflict for those who do God's will. It would be special pleading to declare that the providential way out applies only to Christ but not to other servants of God who are faithful to his will.

Another suggestion is that Jesus never faced any moral dilemmas simply because he never committed any antecedent sin to get himself into these tight spots. Only those who make their moral beds have to lie in them. Jesus never sinned, and hence he never found himself in unavoidable moral conflicts. On the face of it, this view has merit. Often our previous sins seem to get us into a moral pickle. We do reap what we sow. However, in order for this obvious truth to rescue the lesser-evil position from collapse, it must be universally true: it must always be true that moral dilemmas we face are created by our own antecedent sins. This seems patently false by counterexample. Sometimes even the innocent are faced with moral difficulties. What sin did innocent German Christian families com-

mit that placed them in the dilemma of either lying or watching Jews go to the gas chamber? Were these believers more sinful than others in the world? One is reminded here of Jesus's statement about those on whom the tower fell: to you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?' (Luke 13:4 RSV).

Indeed, not only is it not true that moral dilemmas are always brought about by antecedent sin: sometimes it also is antecedent righteousness that precipitates the dilemma. Daniel and the three Hebrew youths were not confronted with their dilemma because they were backslidden (Dan. 1, 3, 6). Nor were the apostles doing evil when religious authorities commanded them not to preach, thus forcing a choice between the command to obey government and the command to preach the gospel (Acts 4). The same is true of Abraham's dilemma over whether to kill his son or to disobey God (Gen. 22). Indeed, many times in life it is one's dedication to God that precipitates moral conflicts. It may be a person's righteousness, not antecedent sin, that occasions the moral conflict. If this is the case, then the lesser-evil position has not redeemed itself against the criticisms. It has not explained away the christological dilemma. It has not shown that Jesus never faced moral dilemmas simply because he never committed any previous sins.

Before the opponents of the lesser-evil view rejoice too quickly, there is another point to consider. Perhaps there is always antecedent sin in our case, but never in Christ's case—because we are fallen and he is not. Adam's sin is antecedent in the case of all humankind except Christ. Hence, because we are part of a fallen world, previous sin (that is, Adam's; see Rom. 5:12) is responsible for subsequent moral dilemmas that we will face but that Christ did not.

There is a certain plausibility about this suggestion that cannot be denied. It seems to point to a clear difference in Christ's case, as well as to recognize antecedent sin in our case. There are, however, at least two problems here. First, moral conflicts due to the antecedent sin of Adam are not unique to fallen humanity; Christ also lived in this fallen world. And even though he never personally sinned, Christ was nevertheless immersed in a world of moral conflicts due to Adam's and others' sins. Anyhow, not all moral conflicts are due to one's own antecedent sin. The sins of others can force a dilemma on those who did not personally create the tragic situation. Thus a key question appears: Why did Christ not face any moral conflicts forced on him by the sins of others?

Second, the attempt to explain why Christ did not face moral conflicts by way of Adam's fall confuses collective and personal guilt. There is a corporate sense in which everything done by fallen humanity is sinful. In this sense, sin is inevitable for all fallen people. This, however, is quite different from saying that a person is personally guilty for creating the situation or that any particular sin is unavoidable. The immediate moral choice may not induce guilt because it is unavoidable. However, if it were not for Adam's fall, that kind of situation would never have occurred. For example, one would never have to kill in self-defense if it were not for Adam's fall. In a paradise, presumably there would be no need to kill for any

reason. Nonetheless, killing in self-defense is not a personally culpable act according to the law of God (Exod. 22:2).

We may still ask: Did Jesus really face moral dilemmas in which two or more commands of God came into unavoidable conflict? An examination of the Gospels yields several illustrations. At age twelve Jesus faced a conflict between his earthly parents and his heavenly Father. Although he later submitted to his earthly parents, initially he left them in order to fulfill God's will (Luke 2). Also, Jesus justified his disciples' action of taking grain by approving David's "stealing" of the consecrated bread in the tabernacle (Matt. 12:3-4). In this regard Jesus said to others, "[Whoever] loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). On many occasions, Jesus faced conflict between obeying the religious authorities, which he taught his disciples and others to do (Matt. 23:3), and following the law of mercy by helping those in need (Luke 14:1-6). For example, he chose to heal a man on the Sabbath. When challenged, he said that the law of the Sabbath should be subordinated to humankind, not vice versa. On another occasion Jesus approved of the disciples' plucking grain on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-5).

The greatest moral conflict that Jesus faced, however, was his trial and cross, where mercy and justice came into direct and unavoidable conflict. Should he speak in defense of the innocent (himself), as the law demands (Lev. 5:1), or should he show mercy to the many (humankind) by refusing to defend himself? Further, should he take his own life in a self-sacrifice for others (cf. John 10:10), or should he refuse to die innocently for others? In both cases, Jesus chose mercy over justice. But did he sin in so doing? God forbid! The cross was not the lesser of two evils; it was the greater good ("Greater love has no one .. 7 [John 15:13]). It appears that the lesser-evil view, then, literally stands at the crossroads. If it is a sin to do the greatest good in a morally conflicting situation, then Jesus would have been perhaps the greatest sinner who ever lived. Perish the thought! Indeed, God himself faced a moral conflict in the cross: Should he sacrifice his Son, or should he allow the world to perish? Thank God, mercy triumphed over justice. Surely the sacrifice of Christ was not a lesser evil; it was indeed the greatest good that God could do (cf. John 15:13; Rom. 5:8-9).

Christ Must Have Faced Moral Conflicts

The fourth objection is another christological problem with the lesser-evil view. If Christ is our complete moral example, then he must have faced morally conflicting situations in which both alternatives were sinful. But if Christ never sinned, then Christ never faced them. Hence, we have no example from Christ to follow in some of life's most difficult moral decisions. But does not Hebrews say Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are" (4:15)? Does not Paul exhort us to be followers of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1-2)? How can we follow Christ in ethical dilemmas if he never faced ethical dilemmas?

Some proponents of conflicting absolutism frankly admit that Christ is not our complete moral example. But it is unacceptable to grant this point. It concedes that the ethic of following Christ is incomplete for the followers of Christ. Indeed, a proper understanding of the New Testament would dictate that we give up claims of the lesser-evil view rather than sacrifice the completeness of Christ's moral example.

The proof that one can face real moral dilemmas without sinning is that Jesus faced them but never sinned. If this is so, then it follows that moral dilemmas do not necessitate personal guilt. There is always a "way of escape" through doing the greater good. In conflicting situations, keeping the higher law (for example, obedience to God over government) is the guiltless way out.

Summary and Conclusion

Conflicting absolutism believes that there are many moral absolutes that sometimes conflict. This view is rooted in the premise that God's laws are absolute and hence can never be violated. On the other hand, it recognizes that this is a fallen world. And in such a world there are real moral dilemmas. When such a real, unavoidable conflict occurs, it is our obligation to do the lesser evil. However, we must recognize such an act for what it is, confess our sin of breaking God's law, and *accept* his forgiveness.

Conflicting absolutism has the merit of retaining absolutes and yet being realistic about the fallen world in which we live. However, it does not appear to have successfully defended itself against either the moral or the christological charges leveled against it. It seems morally absurd to say that there is a moral duty to sin or to blame someone for what was unavoidable. Furthermore, if Christ was tempted in all ways as we are, then he must have faced moral dilemmas. But if he did face moral dilemmas, then he must have sinned, because either alternative was sinful according to this view. If he did not face moral dilemmas, then he is not our perfect moral example. In short, when pushed to the wall, this position seems to collapse into either nonconflicting absolutism by claiming special providential intervention for Christ to save him from moral dilemmas, or into graded absolutism by claiming that one is morally obligated to maximize good. In short, in spite of its helpful insights, it seems to have no firm ground of its own on which to stand.

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7

GRADED ABSOLUTISM

Total ethical relativism is not an option for an evangelical. God's character is unchanging, and his law reflects his character (see chap. 1). Of the options within ethical absolutism, evangelicals must choose between unqualified absolutism (see chap. 5), conflicting absolutism (see chap. 6), or graded absolutism (see chap. 7). Our previous analysis, however, has indicated serious problems with the first two of these views. There remains one alternative to discuss: graded absolutism.

The Historical Roots of Graded Absolutism

Of the three forms of absolutism held by evangelicals, unqualified absolutism is associated with the Anabaptist tradition, conflicting absolutism with the Lutheran tradition, and graded absolutism with the Reformed tradition. Before we examine the basic premises of graded absolutism, a brief look at some of its roots is in order.

Augustine of Hippo

Like most Reformed traditions, the roots of graded absolutism can be traced to Augustine of Hippo (d. 430). Although he defends the unqualified absolutist position on the issue of lying (see chap. 5), at times Augustine's answers to conflicting situations are similar to those of graded absolutism. For example, both views hold that there is a hierarchy of virtue, that moral duties sometimes conflict, and that we are not culpable for obeying the higher duty.

Like graded absolutists, Augustine believes there is a hierarchy of sins, some being worse than others.¹ Since Augustine's ethic is centered in love, he sees an ordered priority in the things we are to love. God is certainly to be loved more than humans, and humans more than things? Thus, there is a pyramid of value with God on the top, persons in the middle, and things on the bottom.

Augustine also believes that moral duties sometimes come into conflict. Even in his advocacy for never telling a lie (see chap. 5), Augustine recognizes the class of different duties, which is one of the central premises of graded absolutism. Likewise, he sees moral conflicts in other life-and-death situations. Even though he views suicide as morally wrong, Augustine nevertheless justifies Samson's suicide: "However, there are some exceptions made by the Divine Authority to its own law, that men may not be put to death. These exceptions are of two kinds, being justified either by a general law, or by a special commission granted for a time to some individual.." In this latter category Augustine places Abraham, Jephthah, and Samson, all of whom he believes were given a divine command to kill that overrode the general moral law against intentionally killing another human being.

In harmony with graded absolutists, Augustine believes that it is the greater good, not the lesser evil, to follow the higher moral duty in conflicting situations. For example, Abraham and Samson are commended for their willingness to kill at God's command. When two moral duties clash, the believer is exempt from the lower duty by virtue of obedience to the higher. In this sense, Augustine is a precursor to the graded absolutist.

Charles Hodge

In his *Systematic Theology*, Charles Hodge (d. 1878) defends a form of graded absolutism, as is illustrated by his discussion of uttering intentional falsehoods. In spite of the fact that Hodge holds that truth is absolute, being based on God's very nature, he still believes that it sometimes is right to intentionally falsify. He believes that "truth is at all times sacred, because it is one of the essential attributes of God, so that whatever militates against or is hostile to truth is in opposition to the very nature of God." However, there are occasions when one is justified in intentionally deceiving another: An "intention to deceive, therefore, is an element in the idea of falsehood. But even this is not always culpable."³ Hodge uses both

1. Augustine of Hippo, *Enchiridion*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 3:245.

2. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, in *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2:530.

3. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, in *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2:15.

4. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 3:437. S. Ibid, 440.

the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1) and Samuel (1 Sam. 16) as examples of justifiable deception. (The latter is a divinely appointed falsehood.)

Hodge also believes "it is lawful not only to conceal intended movements from an enemy, but also to mislead him as to your intentions"⁶ He reasons that "there maybe any combination of circumstances under which a [hu]man is not bound to speak the truth, [and] those to whom the declaration or signification is made have no right to expect ... [one] to do so." For example, "if a mother sees a murderer in pursuit of her child, she has a perfect right to mislead him by any means in her power, because the general obligation to speak the truth is merged or lost, for the time being, in the higher obligation." According to Hodge, "the principle that a higher obligation absolves from a lower stands fine"

Hodge believes this kind of graded absolutism is a "dictate even of the natural conscience." For example, "it is evidently right to inflict pain in order to save a life. It is right to subject travellers to quarantine... to save a city from pestilence." Indeed, he believes that "the principle itself is clearly inculcated by our Lord when He said, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice;' and when he taught that it was right to violate the Sabbath in order to save the life of an ox, or even to prevent its suffering."¹⁰

Furthermore, Hodge contends that when one subordinates a lower moral duty to the higher, he has not sinned. He rejects the position that "it is ever right to do a wrong. However, he believes that it is right to intentionally deceive in order to save a life. And even though Hodge does not wish to call this a "lie," a term he reserves for an unjustified intentional deception, he does believe it is morally right to intentionally falsify in these circumstances. It is right because there is "no right for expectation" and "no obligation to speak the truth" in those cases where there is a greater duty.³¹

Soren Kierkegaard

Soren Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical" in his book *Fear and Trembling* also serves as a forerunner of graded absolutism. For in it he speaks of Abraham facing the dilemma of God saying through the law "Thou shalt not kill," and yet God commanded him to kill his son Isaac. In this case, Kierkegaard (d. 1855) held that Abraham was supposed to transcend his lower duty by his higher religious obligation of obeying God. The only difference was that Abraham did not see this as a higher moral obligation but as a religious one that went beyond the ethical (by temporally suspending one's duty to it) while he fulfilled

6. *Ibid.*, 441.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 442.

9. *Ibid.*, 441.

10. *Ibid.*, 442.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 447.

his transcendent duty to God by faith. This difference noted, Kierkegaard's main point is the same: obeying the higher duty does not negate the lower duty. It is still there and still binding (thus causing the tension). Further, a person facing this transcendent duty is only to temporarily suspend one's duty to the universal ethical command not to kill an innocent person. As soon as the conflict with the higher duty is resolved (by obeying the higher duty), one immediately falls back on the universal rule against murder.

W. David Ross

In his book *The Right and the Good*¹³ David Ross (d. 1971) also embraces a kind of graded absolutism. Ross lists seven prima facie obligations, which he does not claim are all-inclusive: fidelity, reparation, gratitude, nonmalfeasance, justice, beneficence, and self-improvement. In the case of ethical dilemmas, these duties may conflict with one another, but there can never be a true ethical dilemma. There is always a higher obligation, which means a deontological (not a utilitarian) sense. It is one's absolute obligation to follow this over lower duties. One does not decide which is higher in the utilitarian sense of which will bring the greatest good in the long run. In short, Ross was not a consequentialist (see chap. 4 above). He believed in a kind of graded absolutism.

The Essential Elements of Graded Absolutism

Hodge's analysis sets forth the essential elements of a graded absolutism or ethical hierarchicalism. There are three essential premises in the biblical argument for graded absolutism, and each is based on relevant Scripture.

There Are Higher and Lower Moral Laws

Not all moral laws are of equal weight. Jesus spoke of the "weightier" matters of the law (Matt. 23:23 RSV) and of the "least" (5:19) and the "greatest" commandment (22:36). He told Pilate that Judas had committed the "greater sin" (John 19:11). Despite a rather widespread evangelical distaste for a hierarchy of sins (and virtues), the Bible does speak of the "greatest" virtue (1 Cor 13:13) and even of "greater" acts of a given virtue (John 15:13).

The common myth that all sins are equal is often based on erroneous interpretations of James 2:10, which does not speak of the equality of all sins but rather of the unity of the law: "Whoever ... fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (RSV). It does not say that the transgressor is *equally* guilty of all, nor that all infractions bring equal guilt (cf. 3:1). However, it is true that any violation of the law brings some guilt.

13. Oxford: Clarendon, 1930.

Others have wrongly supposed that simply because Jesus said that one can lust and even murder "in his heart" (Matt. 5:28), this means it is equally evil to imagine a sin as it is to do it. In the same sermon, Jesus rejected this view, indicating there are at least three levels of sins with corresponding judgments (5:22). Indeed, the whole concept of degrees of punishment in hell (5:22; Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12) and graded levels of reward in heaven (1 Cor. 3:11-15) indicates that sins come in degrees. The fact that some Christians' sins call for excommunication (1 Cor. 5) and others for death (1 Cor. 11:30) also supports the general biblical pattern that all sins are not equal in weight. There actually is one sin so great as to be unforgivable (Mark 3:29).

Perhaps the clearest indication of higher and lower moral laws comes in Jesus's answer to the lawyer's question about the "greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:34-40). Jesus clearly affirms that the "first and greatest" is above the "second," that loving God is of supreme importance, and then below that comes loving one's neighbor. This same point is reaffirmed when our Lord says, "[Whoever] loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37 RSV). Numerous other scriptural passages maybe cited to support this same point (see Prov. 6:16-18; Matt. 5:22; 1 Tim. 1:15; James 2:13; 1 John 5:16). The popular belief is wrong; all sins are not created equal, for there are clearly higher and lower moral laws.

It is significant that both other Christian options admit the truth of this same point. The conflicting absolutist speaks of the lesser evil, plainly implying that not all evils are equal. Likewise, the unqualified absolutist admits that moral laws are higher than civil or ceremonial laws commanded by God, and that many laws are binding only if all things are equal, which they sometimes are not. The real question, then, is this: Are the moral laws hierarchically graded?

The answer is affirmative for several reasons. First, all ethical obligations are moral laws, and Christians do have an ethical obligation to obey civil laws (see Rom. 13:1-6; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). It is not simply a civil duty to obey civil laws, since such obedience is enjoined by the moral Lawgiver (God) "for conscience' sake" (Rom. 13:5 NASB). Second, even the commands to obey government or perform ceremonial duties are divine commands and, as such, involve a moral duty. By its very nature, a divine command is one that we ought to obey; it is an ethical responsibility. Otherwise it would be a merely declarative or descriptive statement, not an imperative. Third, the distinctions between civil, ceremonial, and moral laws are not rigid. The law of God is unified and interpenetrating, so that there are moral implications to civil and ceremonial commands. Whatever God commands his children to do—whether to love their neighbors or offer sacrifices—demands moral obedience. Finally, some of the conflicts in commands are clearly between two commands that are both moral in nature, which is true even for those who distinguish between moral and civil or ceremonial laws (Gen. 22; Exod. 1; Man. 22). We conclude, then, that there are graded levels of moral commands in Scripture.

There Are Unavoidable Moral Conflicts

Some personally unavoidable moral conflicts exist in which an individual cannot obey both commands. The arguments in support of this observation come from many sources—both inside and outside the Bible. Several of them will suffice to establish this point.

First, the story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22) contains a real moral conflict. "Thou shall not kill" is a divine moral command (Exod. 20:13 KJV), and yet God commanded Abraham to kill his son Isaac. That Abraham intended to kill Isaac is clear from the context (and from Heb. 11:19, which informs us that Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from the dead). Further, the fact that Abraham was not required to go through with the act does not eliminate the reality of the moral conflict, since the intention to perform an act with moral implications is itself a morally responsible act (cf. Matt. 5:28). Neither will it suffice to say that this is a specially approved divine exception, because the "exception" (or exemption) must be made in view of some higher moral law; this is precisely the point that graded absolutism wishes to make. Furthermore, the very fact that an "exception" (or exemption) is called for indicates that the two laws are in genuine conflict.

Second, the story of Samson contains a conflict of two divine commands. Samson committed what appears to be a divinely approved suicide (Judg. 16:28-30) despite the moral prohibition against killing a human being, including oneself. The commands were divine and moral—"You shall not kill" (Exod. 20:13 RSV) and "Take your life" (inferred from the fact that God answered Samson's prayer)—yet when there was a real conflict between commands, God apparently approved of Samson disregarding one in order to obey the other.

Third, there are several biblical illustrations in which individuals had to choose between lying and not helping to save a life (that is, not showing mercy). The Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1) and Rahab (Josh. 2; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25) will suffice as examples. Regardless of whether they were right or wrong in lying, the point here is that the conflict was genuine and both obligations were moral ones. It is not sufficient to claim silence as a "third alternative," because even silence can lead to murder when deception is necessary to ward off an assassin. This is often the case, and it is unmistakably the case if the assassin says of the victim, "Either speak up or I will kill him." Nor will it do to claim that there is no real conflict in these cases on the grounds that in telling the truth, the midwives would not be murdering the babies (Pharaoh would). For in the very act of telling the truth, the midwives would be unmerciful. To avoid what they believed to be the lesser sin of commission (lying), they would be engaging in a greater sin of omission (not showing mercy).

Fourth, there is a real moral conflict in the cross, one so great that many have considered the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement to be essentially immoral. The two moral principles are that innocent persons should not be punished for sins they did not commit (Ezek. 18:20), but Christ was punished for our sins (Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). Some have tried to solve the problem by

suggesting that Christ submitted to this punishment voluntarily, and hence the moral responsibility for the conflict disappears. But this is like saying that it was not immoral for Jon Jones to order the Jonestown suicide because his followers did it willingly! Other attempted explanations make God's actions in relation to the cross entirely arbitrary, with no necessary basis in his unchanging moral character. But this reduces God to an unworthy being and takes away the need for the cross. If God could save humankind apart from the cross, then Christ's death becomes unnecessary (Rom. 3:21-23).

Fifth, in Scripture are numerous cases in which there is a real conflict between obeying God's command to submit to civil government and keeping one's duty to some other higher moral law. For example, the Hebrew midwives disregarded Pharaoh's command to kill all male infants (Exod. 1); the Jewish captives disregarded Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship the golden image of himself (Dan. 3); Daniel disregarded Darius's command to pray only to the king (Dan. 6). In each case there was plainly no other alternative; those involved had to follow one or the other of the two commandments. Even unqualified absolutists admit the unavoidability of the conflict, since they reduce one command (the civil one) to a lower level. This maneuver, however, does not take away from the *fact* that both (higher and lower directives) are commands of God, with moral implications, and that the situations were personally unavoidable. That is, there was no prior sin on the part of those in the dilemmas that precipitated them. In *all* these cases, it was because they were moral, godly people that they found themselves in the dilemmas.

There are many other biblical examples of genuine, unavoidable moral conflicts, but the foregoing examples suffice. Even one clear case of an unavoidable conflict is enough to prove the point. Let us move, then, to the next premise.

No Guilt Is Imputed for the Unavoidable

God does not hold the individual responsible for personally unavoidable moral conflicts, providing that one keeps the higher law. There are a number of ways of seeing the truth of this point. First, reason dictates that a just God will not hold a person responsible for doing what is actually impossible. And it is actually impossible to avoid the unavoidable. It is impossible to take two opposite courses of action at the same time.

Second, persons are not morally culpable if they fail to keep an obligation they could not possibly keep without breaking a higher obligation. This is evident to all, even to those who hold opposing ethical views. Clearly a person is not blameworthy for breaking a promise to meet his wife for dinner at six o'clock if he has been delayed by helping to save a life. Likewise, who would blame a man for refusing to return a gun to an angry neighbor who wants to kill his wife? In each case, the praiseworthy and exemplary conduct of keeping the higher obligation absolves one of any responsibility to the lower duty.

Third, the Bible includes many examples of persons who were praised by God for following their highest duty in situations of conflict. God commended Abraham for his willingness to sacrifice (kill) his son Isaac for God (Gen. 22; Heb. 11). Likewise, Daniel (Dan. 6) and the three Hebrew youths (Dan. 3) received divine approval for their disobedience of human government. The Hebrew midwives were blessed by God for their disobedience to the king's command (Exod. 1). David and his men—who entered the house of God? asked the priest for bread, and "ate the consecrated bread"—were declared guiltless by Christ (1 Sam. 22:3-5; Matt. 12:3-4). In each case there was no divine condemnation for the moral law they did not keep; instead, there was evident divine approval. The same is true of other, similar cases in which moral commands to obey parents (Luke 2:41-49) or God-ordained authorities are concerned (e.g., Exod. 12; Acts 4-5; Rev. 13).

Graded Absolutism Is the Right View

Therefore, in real, unavoidable moral conflicts, God does not hold a person guilty for not keeping a lower moral law so long as one keeps the higher law. God exempts one from his duty to keep the lower law since he could not keep it without breaking a higher law. This exemption functions something like an ethical right-of-way law. In many states, the law declares that when two cars simultaneously reach an intersection without signals or signs, the car on the left must yield the right of way to the car on the right. Common sense dictates that both cars cannot go through the intersection at the same time; one car must yield. Similarly, when a person enters an ethical intersection where two laws come into unavoidable conflict, it is evident that one law must yield to the other.

An Elaboration of Graded Absolutism

The most obvious and basic of all divisions or levels of duty is between the command to love God and the command to love one's neighbor. The former always takes precedence over the latter.

Love for God over Love for Humankind

Jesus explicitly declares the commandment to love God to be the 'first and greatest'. Further, he teaches (Matt. 22:36-38) that one's love for God should be so much more than one's love for parents that the love for the latter would look like "hate" by contrast (Luke 14:26). One implication of this is that if parents teach a child to hate God, the child must disobey the parents in order to obey God. This is true despite the fact that the Bible enjoins children to be obedient to parents in all things (Col. 3:20). The parallel passage in Ephesians (6:1) adds "in the Lord" and thus envisions a hierarchy that places filial duty on a lower level, under the duty to love and obey God.

Obey God over Government

God ordained human government and commands the Christian to "submit" to and "obey" those in authority, even if they are evil rulers (Rom. 13:1-2; Titus 3:1). Peter goes so far as to say we should submit to "every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13 KJV). The attempt of some to differentiate between submission and obedience—and thus claim that Christians need only to submit to but not to obey government—fails for several reasons. First, it is plainly opposed to the spirit of the passages that enjoin Christians to follow the laws of their land. Second, the passage in 1 Peter demands submission to "every ordinance; not merely to the consequences of disobeying an ordinance. And submission to a law is obedience. Third, the word *submission* as used in the New Testament implies obedience. It was, for example, what slaves were to do toward their masters (Col. 3:22). Finally, the words *submission* and *obedience* are used in parallel in Titus (3:1); thus Christians are told "to obey" governmental authorities.

It is clear that God commands Christians to obey government. Hence, when disobedience to government is approved by God, it is clearly in view of a higher moral law. Several biblical instances illustrate this point. First, worship of God is higher than any command of government (Dan. 3). Second, no governmental law against private prayer should be obeyed (Dan. 6). Further, if a government commands a believer not to preach the gospel (Acts 4-5), or if it decrees participation in idolatry (Dan. 3) or even the murder of innocent victims (Exod. 1), it should not be obeyed. In each case the moral obligation to pray, worship God, preach the gospel, and so forth is a higher duty than the one to obey government.

Mercy over Veracity

There is no question that the Bible commands Christians to not "give false testimony" (Exod. 20:16). We are also told to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully to ... [our] neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). Indeed, deception and lying are repeatedly condemned in Scripture (see Prov. 12:22; 19:5). On the other hand, the Bible indicates that there are occasions when intentionally falsifying (lying) is justifiable. Rahab intentionally deceived to save the lives of Israel's spies and was immortalized in the spiritual hall of fame (Heb. 11). Nowhere does the Bible condemn Rahab for this deception; second, her falsehood was an integral part of the act of mercy she showed in saving the spies' lives; third, the Bible says, "Rahab ... shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent" (Josh. 6:17). But the real concealment was accomplished by deceiving the authorities at her door. God blessed her because of the deception, not in spite of it. Hence, her "lie" was an integral part of her faith, for which God commended her (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25).

In the story of the Hebrew midwives we have an even clearer case of divinely approved lying to save a life. For Scripture says, "God dealt well with the midwives; and ... he gave them families" (Exod. 1:20-21 RSV). Nowhere in the text does God ever say they were blessed only for their mercy and in spite of their lie.

Indeed, the lie was part of the mercy shown. For mercy sometimes supersedes justice (James 2:13).

It should not be surprising that mercy is considered to be higher than truth. Common sense dictates that Corrie ten Boom's acts of mercy to the Jews, which involved lying to the Nazis, were not evil but good. Indeed, those who say that one should not lie to save a life are inconsistent, for they leave their lights on when they are away from home. This is an intentional deception to save their property. Why not do the same to save a life? Is not a life worth more than a lamp? Are not persons more valuable than property? Why lie to save jewels but refuse to lie to save Jews?

There are other biblical examples of graded absolutism, but these will suffice to illustrate that there are "weightier matters" of the law and greater and lesser commands of God. It is the Christian's obligation in every morally conflicting situation to search Scripture for an answer. One who does not know what to do in certain situations should heed Jesus's words: "You are mistaken, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29 NEB).

Objections to Graded Absolutism

Like all other views, graded absolutism is subject to evaluation, both positive and negative. A number of objections have been raised against this kind of graded absolutism, and a brief discussion of each is now in order.

How Does Graded Absolutism Differ from Situationism?

First, Joseph Fletcher's situationism (see chap. 3) does not hold that there are any absolutes with substantive content; graded absolutism does. According to graded absolutism, the universal commands of Scripture such as the prohibitions against blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, murder, lying, and so forth are absolute, and these are binding on all people at all times and all places. Second, graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one. Fletcher believes in one and only one absolute, and that absolute is formal and empty. Third, Fletcher believes that the situation determines what one should do in a given case; graded absolutism holds that situational factors only help one to discover what God has determined that we should do. The situation does not fill an empty absolute with content and thereby determine what one should do. Rather, the situational factors merely help one discover which command of God is applicable to that particular case.

Do Graded Absolutism and Situationism Agree in Practice?

This question suggests that the two views differ only in theory but not in practice. This criticism, however, is unfounded. First, even if the two views agreed on given courses of action, nevertheless the reasons for that accord would be quite

different. Hence, the similarities are only accidental and not essential. Fletcher concludes that something is right or wrong because the "existential particularities" of the situation determine it. Graded absolutism, on the other hand, concludes that something is right or wrong because God has declared it so. Second, there are numerous and significant differences in conclusion between situationism and graded absolutism. For example, in contrast to Fletcher, graded absolutism does not approve of mate-swapping, adultery to get out of prison, blasphemy, abortion of unwanted babies, harlotry to teach maturity, premarital intercourse, or a host of other sins. In belief, whether in principle or practice, any relation to situationism is purely coincidental. Indeed, the same accidental similarities could be drawn between most other views and situationism.

Is Graded Absolutism a Form of Subjectivism?

Doesn't each person have to decide for oneself what is the greatest good? And doesn't this amount to subjectivism? In response, two things should be recognized. First, if someone makes up one's own hierarchy of values based on one's own subjective choices, then this is subjectivism. But this is emphatically not what Christian graded absolutism holds. Second, in graded absolutism, Christians do not decide for themselves what the ethical priorities are. God establishes the pyramid of values in accordance with his own nature. These are recorded in Scripture, and hence they are no more subjective than anything else revealed in Scripture (see chap. 8). The priority of values is objective and determined by God; the only subjective factor is our understanding and acceptance of God's values. But this is a limitation shared by the other Christian views as well.

In What Sense Is Graded Absolutism an Absolutism?

If obedience to lower commands is sometimes unnecessary, then in what sense is it proper to call this view an absolutism? In response to this question, two things should be observed. To begin with, there are three ways in which graded absolutism involves absolutes. First, it is absolute in its *source*. All norms are based in the absoluteness of God. God does not change, and principles based on his nature are likewise unchanging. Furthermore, each particular command is absolute in its *sphere*. Each moral law is absolute as such. It is only when there is a conflict between two of them that appeal must be made to the higher in order to resolve the conflict. Finally, it is absolute in its *order of priority*. The very gradation of values by which the conflicts are resolved is absolute. For example, it is absolutely established by God that in an unavoidable conflict between God and parent, one must put God first.

Second, there surely is a sense in which graded absolutism is not an unqualified absolutism (see chap. 5). Graded absolutism may be called qualified absolutism or contextual absolutism, as some do call it. However, it is still proper to designate it as a form of absolutism because it does maintain, in contrast to situationism,

that moral laws are absolute in their source, in their sphere as such, and in their order of priority.

If God Is One, How Can There Be Many Moral Laws?

If God is one in essence, then how can there be many moral laws based on his nature? The response is quite simple: God is one in nature, but he has many moral attributes. Each absolute moral law is traceable to one of God's unchangeable moral attributes. Each of these is absolute insofar as it reflects his nature, but there are many of them. Just as the many radii of a circle are based in and spring out of the one center, even so God's many moral characteristics are rooted in his one essence. For example, God is unchanging love, and he is also immutably holy. Love and holiness are two different moral attributes, but they are both true of God's one essence. Just as a rock has many attributes (like round, solid, and gray) but yet is one, so also God is one with many attributes.

Is There a Hierarchy within God?

If there is a gradation of moral principles that are based on God's moral nature, then is there a hierarchy within God? By way of response, two things can be observed. First, there is no hierarchy within God's essence. God is absolutely one in essence, and any form of hierarchy implies two or more things. So whatever ordering of values there maybe would have to be within his attributes, not his essence. For example, mercy as an attribute of God could take priority over justice when two moral principles based on them come into an unavoidable conflict (James 2:13).

Second, it is not necessary to graded absolutism that there be a hierarchy in God's attributes. The hierarchy maybe only in God's laws based on those attributes. Thus the priority may be not on the basis of the values but on their expression in moral laws. So the real hierarchy maybe not in God's attributes but in the application of his attributes to his creatures. For example, light is one, yet when it passes through a prism, it is manifest in a whole array of colors from higher to lower wavelengths. In like manner, all the many moral attributes are one in God, but as they pass through the prism of the finite world, they diffuse into many laws, ranging from higher to lower. In any case, graded absolutism does not need the hierarchy to be in God but simply to be revealed by God and reflect the attributes of God.

Did Jesus Face Real Moral Conflicts?

The Bible teaches that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are and that he is our complete moral example. Certainly there would be something lacking in the basis for Christian ethics if the model of our morality did not face the most difficult kinds of situations that we his followers face. Yes, Jesus faced real moral conflicts without ever sinning (Heb. 4:15). Specific examples in Jesus's life are the

moral conflicts between obedience toward parents and God (Luke 2.), Sabbath regulations and healing (Mark 2), and government and God (Matt. 22). But the greatest conflict Christ faced—the conflict of the cross—is often overlooked. Here he was squeezed *between* the demands of justice for the innocent (himself) and mercy for humankind (the guilty). He chose mercy for the many over justice for the one. This conflict was without question the greatest ever faced by any human being, and it dramatizes the supremacy of mercy over justice in unavoidable moral conflicts.

Do We Create Our Own Moral Conflicts?

Are not our moral dilemmas of our own making, and therefore shouldn't we be held responsible for them rather than being exempted from them by some "greater good"? Two things should be pointed out in response. First, it is true that we do sometimes create our own conflicts, and in those cases we are guilty. If we make our moral bed, then we must lie in it. Many moral conflicts can be avoided, and when they are not, we are responsible for the resulting dilemma.

Second, while some moral conflicts are avoidable, it is a mistake to suppose that all of them are a result of prior personal sins. Sometimes it is actually one's virtue that precipitates a moral conflict. This was true of the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1), the three Hebrew youths (Dan. 3), and Daniel (Dan. 6). On other occasions it is neither one's sin nor righteousness that occasions the moral conflict. For example, an abortion to save a mother's life or a crisis caused by too many people in a lifeboat is not usually the result of the prior sins of the individuals involved. It is to these kinds of personally unavoidable conflicts that graded absolutism is addressed. And both Scripture and human experience provide significant and numerous examples of these real but unavoidable conflicts.

How Can a Lesser Evil Ever Be the Good Thing to Do?

Is not graded absolutism nothing more than pronouncing evil good, which the prophet forbade (In. 5:20)? This question confuses graded absolutism with conflicting absolutism. The latter believes that the right thing to do in unavoidable moral conflicts is a lesser evil, but graded absolutism believes we should do the greater good. The graded absolutist does not proclaim that the evil is a good thing to do, but rather that the highest obligation in the conflict is the good thing to do. For example, in falsifying to save a life, it is not the falsehood that is good (a lie as such is always wrong), but it is the act of mercy to save a *life* that is good—despite the fact that intentional falsification was necessary to accomplish this good. In other words, it is unfortunately true that what is called "evil" sometimes accompanies the performance of good acts. In these cases God does not consider a person culpable for the concomitant regrettable act in view of the performance of the greater good.

In this respect, graded absolutism is similar to the principle of double effect, which states that when two results—a good result and an evil result—emerge from one act, the individual is held responsible only for the intended good result and not the evil result that necessarily resulted from the good intention. For example, a doctor who amputates to save a life is not morally culpable for maiming but is to be morally praised for saving a life.

Is Graded Absolutism Really Utilitarianism?

Isn't doing the greatest good what utilitarianism holds? How does graded absolutism differ from it? There is a basic difference between graded absolutism and utilitarianism. First, utilitarianism is a teleological (end-centered) ethic, but graded absolutism is a deontological (duty-centered) ethic (see chap. 1). When graded absolutists speak of "greater good; they do not mean greater results but the higher rule. They are not referring to a higher end but a higher norm. Furthermore, the basis for their action is not future consequences (the long run) but present commands (the short run). Yet any ethic is obliged to consider the possible results of actions, but this does not make them utilitarian (see chap. 4). But graded absolutism, in contrast to utilitarianism, holds that following the moral rules that God has established will bring about the best results. It does not believe that human calculation of the best results will determine what the best rules should be. We keep the rules and leave the long-range consequences to God. Third, graded absolutism has many absolute norms; utilitarianism has no absolute norms.

How Do Exemptions Differ from Exceptions?

Graded absolutism does not believe there are any exceptions to absolute laws, only exemptions (see chap. 1). But is not this merely a semantic difference rather than a real one? No, the difference is more than verbal. First, an exception would violate the universality and absoluteness of a moral law, whereas an exemption does not. If there is an exception, then the law is not absolute and hence does not reflect the nature of God but at best describes only what is generally the right course of action. Absolute norms, on the contrary, are based on God's unchanging nature and have no exceptions. If they did, it would be much like saying that God is truthful or loving only at certain times but not at other times.

Second, an exception means that lying as such is sometimes right. Not so with an exemption. Lying as such is always wrong; it is only the lifesaving activity for which the falsehood may be a necessary concomitant that is good, not the lie as such. Third, in an exception, the general rule is not binding on that particular case, and so there is no real conflict. However, when there is an exemption from following a universal law, the law is still binding; this is what makes the conflict real. For instance, the law of filial piety is still binding on the child who refuses to obey the parents' command to worship an idol; that is precisely what makes the conflict so real.

Finally, an exemption only eliminates the individual's culpability in not performing the demands of that lower law; it in no way changes either the basis or the nature of the law as an absolute in its domain. An exception, on the other hand, would prove that the law is not absolute. The difference between an exemption and an exception can be illustrated as follows. Whoever kills another human being in self-defense is exempt from guilt (Exod. 22:2). Yet there is no exception made to the law, which requires us to always treat another person—even a would-be murderer—as a human with God-given value. There is never a moment when the murderer ceases to be human. If there were, then there would be a legitimate exception to the law of demanding respect for humans. However, despite the fact that a would-be murderer is always human and that the law to treat that person as human still stands, the potential victim is exempt from the moral consequences of disobeying this law in view of the overriding value of defending one's own innocent life.

How Can Conflicts Be Real Yet Resolvable?

This question wrongly assumes that a conflict is not real if it is resolvable. But this overlooks several things. First, if this were so, then any conflict that is ultimately resolved would turn out to be only apparent or illusory. But surely no biblical theist would seriously hold that the conflict between good and evil is not real simply because it will be resolved in the eschaton (end). Nor does the fact that one triumphs over temptation make the sin's allurements unreal, for this would make Christ's temptation unreal.

Second, to claim that a conflict is not real because it is resolvable is justification by stipulation. It is simply a decree by definition. If we stipulate that whatever is resolved is not a real conflict, then this question seems pointless. Moral conflict can be real and unavoidable and yet be capable of a final resolution, with the lower norm yielding to the higher norm.

Third, the conflict is real because it is unavoidable, but it is not irresolvable, because in such a case we are exempt from obedience to the lower command. The conflict is real because neither law "backed down": both continued to be binding even though one was more binding than the other. Thus God's absolute nature does not change simply because finite and fallible humans find themselves in unavoidable moral conflicts. But in moral conflicts God's justice provides a way out of the dilemma, since the conflict was not of our making.

How Can a Moral Law Be Absolute Yet Not Obeyed?

It seems contradictory to claim that a moral principle is absolute when it can sometimes be broken. For what has exceptions is not universal, and what is broken is not absolute.

In response to this criticism, several things can be said in defense of graded absolutism. First, the lower command is not really broken when the higher com-

mand is followed. Just as a magnet does not break the law of gravity in attracting a nail, killing in self-defense does not violate the law of respect and preservation of human beings. The overriding duty to keep the higher law simply renders it unnecessary for us to perform the demands of the lesser command.

Second, as was already noted, there are no exceptions to absolute moral laws, only exemptions from obeying them in view of higher laws. So a law's universality is not contradicted by an exemption.

Third, the command remains absolute even when it is not followed, for its absoluteness is based in the nature of God, which does not change. The nature of truth does not change when humans tell justifiable falsehoods in order to save innocent lives. If the real conflict is between truthfulness and mercifulness, both of which are grounded in God's nature, then there is no conflict between these in the nature of God. God is one, and all his attributes are harmonious. The real conflict is that on some occasions a human being cannot perform both. In these cases God withholds culpability from the human who shows *mercy* to the innocent rather than telling the truth to the guilty. But this in no way means that both commands are not binding at all times; God never ceases to manifest absolutely what is absolutely right. However, in unavoidable clashes, God does not demand obedience to lower laws, nor amid such clashes does God charge humans with personal culpability for failing to obey a lower law.

How Can Lying Flow from the Nature of God as Truth?

If all moral laws are rooted in God, then how can lying ever be right, since God is absolute truth? Quite simply, the answer to this is that lying as such does not flow from God's nature. A lie can never be justified by an appeal to him who is truth. However, though lying as such is never justified, lying to save a life is. But "lying to save a life" is really an act of mercy, and love is an attribute of God (1 John 4:16). Cutting off a human leg as such is not right either; it is called mutilation. But cutting off a leg to save a life is right; it is called amputation. Second, God is both loving and true. So even though lying to save a life cannot be based in God as true, it still can be based in God as merciful. Lifesaving is an act of love, even if deception is necessary to accomplish it. Graded absolutism holds that when truth and mercy conflict, the necessary act of mercy (in this case, lying) finds its basis in God's nature as love. Hence, justifiable lies are based not in God's truthfulness but in his love.

Doesn't Graded Absolutism Deny Total Depravity?

This objection assumes that sin is unavoidable for fallen human beings. Hence, unavoidable moral dilemmas are merely an extension of our depraved condition. But for several reasons, this is a misunderstanding of depravity.

First, total depravity does not mean that sin is unavoidable. This would contradict 1 Corinthians 10:13, which states that in every temptation there is always

a "way of escape" (RSV). Depravity means that it is inevitable that fallen humans will sin but not that it is necessary that they sin.

Second, sin maybe unavoidable by fallen humans *on their own*, but all sin is avoidable *by God's grace*. That is, what we ought to do, we can do, by God's grace.

Third, to insist that sin is inescapable is to negate human responsibility. God is rational and moral, but it is neither rational nor moral to blame someone for doing something they could not avoid.

Fourth, responsibility implies the ability to respond. And culpability implies avoidability. Depravity does not make sin unavoidable. If it did, then depravity would destroy humans' ability to sin and would destroy God's ability to hold humans accountable for their sin.

Does Graded Absolutism Involve a Contradiction?

It is charged that graded absolutism involves a contradiction because it holds that two opposing courses of action should be done at the same time. But the law of noncontradiction says it is impossible to do opposites at the same time.

First, this is a misstatement of the law of noncontradiction. To be contradictory, the two opposing commands would have to be binding at the same time and in the same sense. But according to graded absolutism, the commands are not binding in the same sense: one is binding in a higher sense.

Second, this criticism is a misunderstanding of graded absolutism. It does not hold that one can do opposites at the same time and in the same sense, but only that one ought to do both as such. God certainly knows that we cannot actually do opposites, so he exempts us from doing the lower duty, even though we ought to do it. It thus is still binding on us even when we cannot do it because of our higher obligation. But since it is binding only in a lower sense, our obligation is to follow the greater duty.

Does Graded Absolutism Undermine the Truthfulness of Scripture?

According to graded absolutism, it is sometimes justifiable to lie to save a life for a greater good. The redemption of human beings is a greater good. From this it would appear to follow that God could lie in Scripture in order to get people saved.

First, moral conflicts arise only in a finite/fallen world, but God is not part of such a world. The Bible says, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18; cf. Titus 1:2). So God could not lie even if he wanted to, and he does not want to do so. Also, his "word is truth" (John 17:17), and there is no error in truth. What is more, a lie is contrary to fact, and it is impossible for God to act contrary to fact. For in his omniscience, God knows what the *facts* are, and he can't speak contrary to what he knows. Thus, God cannot lie or utter falsehood. Finally, if the Bible could contain divinely expressed falsehoods (for a good end), it would undermine assurance in anything God said. But God assures us that his Word is trustworthy

(2 Tim. 2:13; 3:16-17). In fact, we would have no way to know that it is false, since we have no higher standard than God's revelation by which we could test it for falsehood. In his revelation, God adapts to human finitude, but he never accommodates to human error. In summation, graded absolutism does not undermine the truthfulness of Scripture.

The Values of Graded Absolutism

There are a number of values of graded absolutism. Each value emerges from the foregoing discussion.

It Avoids Relativism

In contrast to antinomianism, situationism, and generalism (see chaps. 2-4), graded absolutism avoids the pitfalls of relativism. It stands firmly on moral principles based in the absolute, unchanging character of God. These moral principles are absolute in their source, absolute in their sphere, and absolute in their order of priority. They are objective, propositional, and substantive in content. God's moral laws are specific and known in advance of the situation. Furthermore, there are no exceptions to them as such; they apply to all people in all places and all times.

It Successfully Answers Moral Conflicts

Another value of graded absolutism, in contrast to unqualified and conflicting absolutism, is that it gives a realistic and successful answer to the problem of moral conflicts. It neither closes its eyes to their reality nor blames an individual because of their unavoidability. It looks squarely at the total moral circumstance and acts responsibly, without forsaking the absolute nature of moral principles. It avoids both legalism and antinomianism. It acts courageously but not recklessly.

It Makes Sense of the Cross

Apart from graded absolutism, it is difficult to make moral sense of the cross. From the standpoint of nonconflicting absolutism, the cross is a moral injustice, for on the cross "the just" was punished "for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18 NASB; 2 Cor. 5:21). There is no moral justification for this unless there are higher and lower moral laws. In this way, mercy can take precedence over justice. The one (Christ) can suffer for the many that they maybe saved (Rom. 5:6-18). But if mercy and love are not higher moral values than justice (James 2:13), then what God did to Christ, when it pleased him to "bruise" his son (cf. Isa. 53:5 RSV), was a great injustice. But God cannot be unjust. Therefore, the cross makes sense only if the demands of justice are satisfied but subordinated to the desires of mercy. Yet God can't lie for a higher good since a lie is contrary to fact, which is impossible. Nonetheless,

God can show love over mercy since it is not contrary to fact. It would actually be contrary to God's just nature not to punish sin. This is precisely why the cross is necessary, so that God's justice can be satisfied and his mercy released.

Summary and Conclusion

Graded absolutism is distinct from antinomianism, situationism, and generalism (chaps. 2-4) in that it believes in moral absolutes. Moral laws are absolute in their source; absolute in their own sphere, where there is no conflict; and absolute in their order of priority when there is a conflict. In contrast to nonconflicting absolutism, graded absolutism believes that there are real moral conflicts. But in distinction from conflicting absolutism, it holds that in these circumstances one is not culpable for subordinating the lower duty to the higher duty.

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

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8

THE BASIS FOR ETHICAL DECISIONS

There are numerous views on the basis for ethical decisions. These vary greatly. Space does not permit a detailed account of each. So first each view will be briefly stated and evaluated. Then an evangelical view on the basis for ethics will be set forth: that it is based on divine commands in God's general and special revelations.

Different Views about the Basis for What Is Morally Right

For centuries philosophers have debated over what is the basis for ethical action. Each view will be stated and then briefly evaluated.' Then the divine command view will be explained, and one form of it will be defended from both reason and Scripture.

Might Is Right

The ancient Greek philosopher Thrasymachus is supposed to have held that "justice is the interest of the stronger party," stated more simply as "Might is right." That is to say, right is defined in terms of power. This may mean political power (cf. Machiavelli), although it could mean physical, psychological, or any other kind

I. This is a modified version of chapter 23 in Norman L. Geisler and Paul a Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1980).

of power. This is not a widely held ethical view, even though it seems too often to be the *de facto* view of many dictators.

In response, several things may be briefly noted. First, most people see a difference between *power* and *goodness*. It is possible to be good without power and powerful without goodness. An evil tyrant is sufficient practical disproof of Thrasymachus's "theory" of right. Second, some have insisted that almost the opposite is the case, arguing that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton [1887]). There is much evidence in human experience for rejecting the view that right is might.

Morals Are Mores

Some hold that right is determined by the group to which one belongs. Ethics is identified with the ethnic; moral commands are considered community demands. This surely implies a cultural relativity of morality. Any overlapping of ethical principles between cultures and societies that would seem to give the appearance of universality is accidental. The most one can say for apparently universal ethical norms is that all groups "happen" to come up with similar codes (probably because of common aspirations or situations).

This view has several problems. First, it is based on what Hume called the "is-ought" fallacy. Just because something *is* the practice does not mean it *ought* to be. It *is* the case that people are cruel at times; they hate and kill. This in no way means that *ought* to be the case. Second, if each community is right, then there is no way to solve conflicts *between* communities and nations. Whatever each one believes is right; even if it means the annihilation of the other, it is right.

Man Is the Measure

The ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras said, "Man is the measure of all things." If this is taken in an individual sense, then right is measured by an individual's will. The right is what is right to me. What is right for one may be wrong for another, and vice versa.

The most common criticism of this is that it would lead to chaos. If every person literally "did their own thing," then there would be no community, no unity in society. Further, what particular aspect of humanity should be taken as the "measure"? One cannot answer, "the 'good' aspects." For in that case it presupposes that "good" apart from the human is really the measure of the human, and not that the human is the measure of what is good.

The Race Is Right

One way to avoid the individualism and ethical solipsism of the former two views is to insist that neither individuals nor individual communities are the ultimate arbiters of what is right; rather, the whole human race is the final court of appeals.

In this way the part does not determine the whole; the whole race determines what is right for the individual members. In short, humankind rather than a human is the measure of all things.

The first objection to this view is that just as groups are often wrong, so the whole race could be wrong. Communities have committed mass suicide. What if the race decided that suicide was right, and all dissenters were forced to do likewise? Second, the race is in a state of flux. If the race were the ultimate norm, then how could one make judgments such as "Humanity is not perfect;" or "The world needs improvement"? These statements are meaningless unless there is some standard outside the race by which its degree of goodness can be measured.

Right Is Moderation

According to the ancient Greek view, especially exemplified in Aristotle, the meaning of right is found in the path of moderation. The "golden mean;" or moderate course between *extremes*, was considered to be the right course of action. For instance, temperance is the mean between indulgence and insensibility. Pride is the mean between vanity and humility. And courage is the mean between fear and aggression.

There certainly is much wisdom in generally taking the path of moderation. The question is, however, whether the middle course should be seen as a *definition* of what is right. First, the right sometimes seems to call for extreme action, as in emergencies, self-defense, war, and so on. Even some virtues, such as love, seem best expressed not moderately but liberally. Second, the "middle of the road" is not always the wisest (or safest) place to be. It all depends on how extreme the situation is. One extreme sometimes calls for another extreme. For instance, extreme sickness (cancer) often calls for an extreme operation (removing the diseased tissue). Finally, moderation seems at best to be only a *general* guide for practice, not a universal definition of right.

There Is No Right

Some philosophers simply deny that anything is right or wrong (see chap. 2 above). They are called "antinomian" (against law). Few actually claim to be complete antinomians, but many views can be reduced to this. A. J. Ayer insisted that all "ought" sentences actually translate to feel" sentences. Hence, "You *ought* not to be cruel" means "I *do not like* cruelty." Ethics is not prescriptive; it is simply emotive. There are no commands; there are only ejaculations of one's personal feelings.

The first objection to this view is its radical solipsism. The right is reduced to "what I like," which reduces truth to mere taste. The ethical content of "Hitler should not kill Jews" is considered no different in kind from "I do not like chocolate? Second, the view does not *listen* to the meaning of "ought" statements; rather, it *legislates* what they must mean. In other words, on what basis is "ought" reduced

to "I feel"? "There are things I *ought* to do (such as be loving and just) whether I feel like it or not.

Right Is What Brings Pleasure

The Epicureans (4th century BC) are credited with the original philosophy of hedonism. Simply put, hedonism claims that what brings pleasure is right and what brings pain is wrong. Actually, the formula for right is a little more complicated: What brings the maximal pleasure and the minimal pain is the right thing to do.

There are obvious difficulties with this theory. First, not all pleasures are good and not all pain is bad. Sadistic pleasure obtained from torturing people is bad. The pain of study or hard work can be good. Second, one may ask, Pleasure for whom and for how long? Pleasure for the individual and for the moment? What about for all humankind and for all time?

Right Is the Greatest Good for the Race

Utilitarians answer the last problem of the hedonistic view by claiming that the right is what brings "the greatest good for the greatest number of persons (in the long run)." Jeremy Bentham (d. 1832) suggested that good should be understood in a *quantitative* sense. That is, it depended on how much pleasure was obtained, for how long, and for how many. John Stuart Mill accepted utilitarianism, but he insisted that good be understood in a *qualitative* sense as well. Some goods are higher than physical (and other) goods. An unhappy human is better than a happy pig, said Mill.

Clearly, Mill's view is an improvement over both hedonism and Bentham's quantitative utilitarianism. There are, however, other difficulties. First, how does a human being—who can only rarely predict short-run consequences—determine what will result from one's actions in the long run? Many evil actions (lying and cheating, for example) seem to "work" for people for long periods of time. Does this make them right? Second, how long is the long run? If it means the remote future or the end of the world, then it is too far out of reach to be of any help in making decisions today. But if it means the near future, then that would justify obviously evil things that seem to work well for a short time (corrupt governments, cruelty, and deception). Finally, *even* when the results are obvious, how does one know they are "good" results without some standard of good beyond the results? But if there is a norm for rightness or wrongness *beyond* the results, then the results as such do not determine rightness.

Good Is What Is Desired for Its Own Sake

The difficulty that has emerged from the above criticism is this: no matter how one defines right or good in terms of something else, one can still ask, "But is *that*

right?" If good is defined as pleasure, one can ask, "But is the pleasure good or bad?" If right is defined in terms of results, then one can still ask, "Are the results good or bad?" Perhaps the solution to this is to follow Aristotle and define the right or good in terms of itself. Maybe the good is that which is desirable for its own sake, that which has intrinsic value in and of itself. In other words, good should never be desired as a means but only as an end.

Critics of this view have pointed out several problems. First, people seem to desire some evil ends for their own sake. How can the desire to annihilate a race be called a good desire? Aristotle would answer that every evil action is performed for a good end. Even those committing suicide act for the alleged "good" it will bring them by eliminating all their problems. However, this answer leads to another criticism: some "goods" are only apparent goods and not real ones. If we define "good" simply in terms of the end, then what we call "good" is often not really good at all but evil.

Finally, there is a problem with providing *content* for the meaning of good. If good were simply the object of what is *desired*, then logically one should be able to examine the object (s) of one's desires and discover the content of the meaning of good. But this will not do, since, as has already been observed, what we desire is not always genuinely good; sometimes it is only apparently good but actually evil. We are faced with the dilemma that good cannot be defined in terms of anything else, and yet it seems to have no content when understood in terms of itself. Is there any way out?

Good Is Indefinable

G. E. Moore (d. 1958) insisted that the good is an unanalyzable and indefinable concept. Every attempt to define good in terms of something else commits what he called the "naturalistic fallacy." This fallacy results from assuming that because, for example, pleasure can be attributed to good, then it is of the nature of Good, that is, identical with Good. All that we can say is that "the Good is good," nothing more. Thus Good is known only intuitively.

There are grounds for what Moore *says*, but there are also dangers. The first problem is that apparently not all people "intuit" the same content in the good or right. Further, many argue that intuitions are vague. They lack clarity, which is one of the things a philosopher pursues. Further, there is the problem of how to avoid the charge of tautology when all one can say is "Good is good."

There is some truth to Moore's position, however, especially since he recognized that the ultimacy of "good" makes it resistant to definition in terms of something else. For eventually, every discipline and point of view must acknowledge *something as its ground or source*, in terms of which everything else is understood. To the Christian, who thinks of God in terms of the ultimate Good, this is very appealing.

Good Is What God Wills

One solution to the problem of defining good or right is to proclaim that something is right if God wills it right, and wrong if God wills it wrong. This would solve the problem of determining content in the meaning of good, as well as the difficulty involved in defining good in terms of something not ultimate. Christians claim that God's sovereign will is ultimate, and the Bible spells out the content of that will to us.

Two Divine Command Views. Although this does solve the problems above, it creates a new one. First, is something right because God wills it (voluntarism), or does he will it because it is right (essentialism)? If one takes the voluntarism alternative, then it seems to make God arbitrary. If one takes the essentialism alternative, then God is acting according to a standard beyond himself (goodness). This would contradict the Christian definition of God as the Ultimate Good.

A Defense of Essentialism. It seems best to follow the essentialists who insist that God can will only in accordance with his unchangingly good nature, which is not beyond himself. There are several reasons for this: First, God cannot change his basic nature (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:18; James 1:17; 2 Tim. 2:13). Second, God's unchangingly good nature is the basis for his unconditional promises (Heb. 6:13-18; Ps. 89:26-35; 2 Tim. 2:13). Third, it is contrary to God's moral perfection (Matt. 5:48) to claim that he could will that hatred, rape, and cruelty be the right things to do. Fourth, if God changed, it would undermine all moral stability, for how could we make an ultimate commitment to love, justice, and mercy if we thought they could change? Fifth, God's changing would make him untrustworthy since, contrary to Scripture (1 Sam. 15:29; Rom. 11:29), God could not be counted on to keep his word (Isa. 55:11). Sixth, if God changed, it would make good and evil arbitrary since he could change his mind about which is which. Seventh, God's changing would destroy the basis for all moral absolutes since any one of them could change. Eighth, if essentialism is not true, then God could change his mind about his predictions and, hence, what is now true prophecy could be false. Ninth, God's changing would invalidate the test for a false prophet (Deut. 18:22), which demands that a true prophecy come to pass. Tenth, voluntarism makes good out to be arbitrary. Nothing would be essentially or ultimately good, because it could change at God's will.

In brief, a Christian view of the basis of moral action is an essentialist's form of the divine-command view. God wills it to be good because it is good in accordance with his own unchangeably good nature.

Elements of Truth in the Other Views

Even though the various non-Christian views of ethics were found unable to provide an adequate ethical system as such, there is an element of truth within each view

First, it was discovered that "right" cannot be defined in terms of something else *ad infinitum*. The good is a basic category of its own. Feeling, pleasure, communal code, the consensus of the race, or the results—all have been found to be unreliable at times. Good is what has intrinsic value and should be desired for its own sake.

Second, we found that when good is so defined, it has ultimacy but lacks content. We cannot supply the content by simply studying the object of our desires, since not everything desired is genuinely good. Some things that are desired for the good one sees in them are only apparently good but actually evil.

Third, it is inadequate to claim that the ultimate content of good can be defined by claiming that whatever God wills is good. This assumes an arbitrariness in a Being considered to be ultimately and essentially good. Something is not good simply because God wills it; rather, God wills it because it is good. And it is good because it is in accordance with God's unchangeably good nature.

Fourth, there is some truth, however, in relating good to long-range results. If there is an absolutely good God, then surely he is interested in bringing about the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run. However, the results (in the long run) do not determine right; rather, what is right according to God's will determines what the results will be. Further, since only an omniscient God can know what will bring the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run, only God is in a position to determine the right way to bring about these best results.

Fifth, the same kind of argument applies to pleasure. Surely a good God is interested in maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. But only God really knows what will bring "fullness of joy ... [and] pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11 KJV). What we think is good is often no more than the "fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25 RSV).

Sixth, there is a good deal of truth to the emotive theory of ethics. Many of what are passed off as universal ethical "oughts" are no more than personal feelings. Not everything claimed to be prescriptive is actually more than emotive. We often strengthen our personal preferences by putting them in a divine imperative form.

Seventh, there is even some truth to voluntarism. For not all commands of God are unchangeable, only those that are bound by his unchangeable nature. For example, in the Old Testament the people were not to eat ceremonially unclean meat (Lev. 11), but this was revoked in the New Testament (Acts 10, Is).

Finally, not all aspects of ethical codes have universal applicability. Some rules are local and communal, such as speed laws. The mores of cultures do vary from place to place and from group to group; what is wrong in one place is right in another. Ethnocentricity, however, is a fact of life. We tend to judge other groups in terms of our own less-than-universal standards.

Christian ethics recognizes these cultural differences and does not demand that people give up their own culture in order to keep God's commands. Chris-

Christianity asks only that people implement God's commands within that culture. For example, early Christians kissed one another in greeting. American Christians, however, usually shake hands as a greeting. Others embrace. All of this is culturally relative. However, we cannot conclude from this that there is nothing ethically binding on all Christians. Actually, within this cultural relativity is a universally binding imperative: greet one another in love.

An Evangelical View of the Basis for Moral Decisions

As is clear from the above discussion, the only valid basis for ethical decisions is a form of the divine-command view. The residual difficulty with this view is how one can know the content of the divine commands. Evangelicals offer two words in response: God's revelation. Whatever God reveals is right (as rooted in his moral nature) and hence is the basis for our ethical decisions.

Evangelicals recognize two spheres of God's revelation: general and special. The former is revealed in nature, the latter in Scripture.

God's General Revelation in Nature

THE NATURE OF NATURAL REVELATION

God knew that not all people would have access to the truths of Scripture at all times, so he inscribed a law upon their hearts. Paul wrote, "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the [written] law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness ..." (Rom. 2:14-15 RSV). Some have described this knowledge of the law as "innate" or as "a natural inclination."²

THE EVIDENCE FOR NATURAL LAW

First, even some non-Christians admit to the universality of moral law. Immanuel Kant called it a categorical imperative: willing for all people what we desire to be done to ourselves. For example, willing that we should treat others as an end, not as a means to an end.

Second, the great moral creeds of humankind's civilizations give testimony to the general revelation of God in the striking resemblance of their basic ethical principles. C. S. Lewis has assembled many of these creeds in the excellent appendix to his book *The Abolition of Man*.³

Third, the evidence of the universal availability of God's natural revelation comes to light by examining not what one *does* but by assessing what one wants to have *done to oneself*. What person does not expect to be treated as a person?

2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.103.8.

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 93-121.

Who actually believes that it is right to take what belongs to anyone at any time? Who truly believes that murder, rape, or cruelty to children is morally right? So the true moral law can be derived not from our *actions* (for we all fall short) but from our *expectations*.

Fourth, we find the moral law not in what people *do* or even in what they *say* ought to be done; rather, we see the moral law in what they *expect* others to do to them. In order to discover whether or not a man (or woman) really believes one has a right to take anyone's property (or mate) at anytime, do not ask him what he wishes to *do*, nor what he *says* one has the right to do. Just watch carefully how he reacts when someone tries to seize what he dearly loves. In this sense, the moral law can be discovered more by one *reactions* than by one's actions.

Fifth, without a universal moral law common to all people, there would be no grounds for meaningful and moral communication, for action adjudication between divergent societies. For example, international commerce would not be possible without mutually accepted moral principles. Neither would international justice. The Nuremberg trials after the Second World War were based on a superintending natural law, by which one could know that the genocidal actions of the Nazis *were* morally wrong.

Sixth, without a universally known moral law, there would be no just basis on which God could judge nonbelievers' actions. But as Paul put it, there is such a standard for all people, "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15), so that they are "without excuse" (1:20).

ANSWERING SOME OBJECTIONS TO NATURAL LAW

Several objections have been leveled against the belief in natural law. Upon examination, however, they fail to give sufficient evidence to deny the existence or validity of natural law.

Divergence in understanding it reveals that there is no universal natural law. This objection fails for several reasons. First, human finitude, to say nothing of human sinfulness, can account for much diversity of interpretation. After all, scientists have been studying the same objective world for centuries and often have come to very different interpretations of it. But this is insufficient basis for denying that there is an objective world. So it should not be surprising that the objective and universal moral world (God's natural revelation) should be viewed somewhat differently by different people at different times. Even so, as C. S. Lewis showed, there is a surprising unanimity of understanding of 'natural revelation,' as is indicated by the great moral creeds of humankind.

Widely divergent practices show that there is no universal natural law. This objection entails a kind of "is-ought fallacy" Yet as noted above, one cannot reason from what people do to what they believe ought to be done. Our practices always fall short of our principles. It is simply fallacious to argue that what people *do* is what they *ought to do*. We can no more legitimately move from "do" to "ought" than we

can from "is" to "ought." People *do* things such as lie, steal, rape, and kill. But from this we cannot argue that they *ought to do* these things.

Atheists are moral without believing in natural law. Most atheists insist that morality is possible without belief in a universal moral law or a Law Given. But this objection confuses *belief* and *basis* for belief. True, there are many moral atheists, and they do not accept the natural law view. However, this only shows that *belief in* a natural law is not necessary for being moral. It does not show that the *existence* of a moral law is not necessary for moral behavior. Atheists do not *believe in* a universal natural law. However, they cannot *justify* such a belief unless there is a Moral Law Given.

God's Special Revelation in Scripture

In addition to general revelation available to all rationally and morally responsible persons, God has a special revelation in Scripture. Evangelicals believe that this is the only written infallible record of the basis for moral decisions. The revelation of God in nature is not written or infallible. Nonetheless, it is sufficient and reliable when properly understood.

The Bible claims to be the divinely inscripturated truth of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is a special revelation of the same moral character of God that is revealed in nature and the hearts of people.

The Relation of General and Special Revelation

This raises the questions of the purpose of and relationship between the two revelations. First, since God is the author of both, there can be no real conflict between the two.

Second, the Bible indicates a unity between them, insisting that "when Gentiles who have not the law [of Moses] do by nature what the law [of Moses] requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law [of Moses]; for "they show that what the law [of Moses] requires is written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14-15 RSV).

Third, Jesus summarized the Old Testament law in one command: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them, for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12 RSV). Third, even non-Christians like Confucius set forth a negative form of the "Golden Rule" that Jesus said summarized the law of Moses. Confucius said, "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."

Fourth, even pagans were judged by God for immorality (also condemned in the Mosaic law) without their having any knowledge of the Scriptures (Lev. 18:26-28). Fifth, all the moral principles of Moses's law were reaffirmed in the New Testament. For example, nine of the Ten Commandments are reaffirmed. All but the Sabbath were restated, and even here the principle of setting one day in seven was reaffirmed—only the day had changed from Saturday to Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Sixth, this harmony was perceived by early American fathers who spoke alternatively of "Nature's Laws," which came from "Nature's God" (*The Declaration of Independence*), and the moral principles in the Ten Commandments. James Madison, 'the Father of the U.S. Constitution,' recognized this: "Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe." Indeed, from the beginning the New Haven colonial law (1644) declared, "The Judicial laws of God as they were delivered by Moses ... [are to] be a rule to all the courts in this jurisdiction?" President John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." In his second inaugural address, President Jefferson declared: "I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of Old, from their native land flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life." President John Quincy Adams affirmed explicitly: "If 'Thou shalt not covet' and 'Thou shalt not steal' were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free" (*The Right Constitution* . . . , Letter VI). Indeed, *The New England Primer*, used in American schools from about 1700-1850, contained a Shorter Catechism and taught the Ten Commandments, along with Bible history, doctrine, and prayer. It was the most widely read schoolbook in America for over a hundred years. Before 1980, when the Ten Commandments were banned from display in public schools (*Stone v. Graham*), the Supreme Court had upheld virtually every one of the Ten Commandments.

The Uniqueness of Special Revelation

All of this is not to say that both general and special revelation are identical. There are some significant differences, several of which may be identified here.

GENERAL REVELATION IS AVAILABLE TO ALL PEOPLE

A unique feature of general revelation is that it is available to all human beings. Indeed, it is "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). Thus there is a common moral law making interethnic and international communication, commerce, and justice possible. Also, it provides a basis for divine justice in that all people are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). This is not true of special revelation, which is available only to those who have the Bible or parts of it.

SPECIAL REVELATION IS UNIQUE

There are, however, several unique features of special revelation. This is true in general, as well as in the realm of ethics.

First, only special revelation is *written*. The Bible is a verbal revelation from God. All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). In it "every word ... comes out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). For "no prophecy [of Scripture] was ever

4. James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments* (1785), remonstrance I.

produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. **1:21** ESV). David confessed, "The Spirit of the **LORD** speaks by me; his word is upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2 RSV). By contrast, there is no inspired written record of general revelation.

Second, there is no *infallible* record of the natural law. Only Scripture is infallible. Only the Bible is the very Word of God (Matt. 15:6; Rom. 3:2). Only the Bible is unbreakable. Jesus said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He added, "Till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law" (Matt. 5:18 RSV).

Third, special revelation has *more* explicit statements of the moral law. Clearly, the Ten Commandments are more explicit than the mere Golden Rule. They spell out what it means in various spheres of life. What is more, Moses gave many more moral instructions (see Exod. 21-23) than those contained in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20). Also Jesus brought out some implications of the moral law that the Jews had missed in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5). And Paul applied the moral law to some areas on which Jesus had not explicitly spoken (1 Cor. 7). Yet none of these are explicitly part of the natural law (though they surely are not contrary to it). Fourth, only special revelation, not natural law, provides salvation (salvific) information. The moral law at best instructs us about our *condemnation* (since we do not keep it perfectly), but it tells us nothing about our *salvation* (John 15:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). Natural law is sufficient to tell us what not to do, but it does not tell us how to overcome our failure to do it. Indeed, this was true of Moses's moral laws as well: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3 KJV), "in order that he might fulfill the righteous requirement of the law in us" (Rom. 8:3-4 ESV alt.) .s

Conclusion

In short, there is a harmony between God's moral law in the Old and New Testaments, as well as between general and special revelation. After all, there is only one and the same moral God who is behind all these expressions of his one and the same moral nature. Hence, the same moral principles that reflect the moral nature of God are embedded in Moses's law and also expressed in the natural law. This natural law has one distinctive advantage over God's special revelation in Scripture: it is available to all rationally and morally accountable persons. For not everyone has a Bible or part of one. However, the written law of God is superior in that it is written, infallible, and more explicit than the natural law. And with its greater light comes greater responsibility for the believer.

S. This is a slight rewording of the ESV.

Part 2

ETHICAL ISSUES

9

ABORTION

We turn now from ethical options to ethical issues. Of all the moral issues, the most pressing are those involving life and death. And of the life-and-death issues, the one that involves the taking of the most lives is abortion. So we will begin our discussion by examining when, if *ever*, it is right to terminate a *life* in the womb.

There are three basic positions on abortion, and they all center around the question of the human status of the unborn. Those who believe the unborn are subhuman favor abortion on demand. On the other hand, those who hold that the unborn are fully human are against all forms of abortion as such. And those who argue that the unborn is a potential human favor abortion in specified circumstances. The three views are outlined in table 9.1.

TABLE 9.1
Three Views of Abortion

Status of unborn	Fully human	Potentially human	Subhuman
Abortion	Never	Sometimes	Anytime
Basis	Sanctity of life	Emergence of life	Quality of life
Mother's rights	Life over privacy	Combination of rights	Privacy over right to life

The status of the unborn is crucial to the various views, for if the unborn are truly human, then the prohibition against taking human life applies to them as well. On the other hand, if the unborn are merely appendages or extensions of their mothers' bodies, then abortion is no more serious than an appendectomy.

Another important issue is the relationship between the right to life and the right of privacy. If human life takes precedence over personal privacy, then aborting a human fetus on the basis of the right to privacy is unjustified. If, on the other hand, the mother's right to privacy takes priority over the baby's right to life, then abortion is justified.

Abortion at Any Time: The Belief That the Fetus Is Subhuman

Abortion on demand was recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in two major decisions (*Doe v. Rotten* and *Roe v. Wade*) in 1973. In these decisions, the Court argued that the woman's right to privacy prevails over the states' interest in regulating abortions. As a result of these two decisions, abortion for any reason became legal in all fifty states. The *Webster* decision (1989) gave states more regulatory rights but did not outlaw abortion. Likewise, the *Gonzalez* partial-birth abortion prohibition (2000) only forbids abortion for babies partly but not completely out of the womb.

The pro-abortionist's self-designation as "pro-choice" places emphasis on the right of the mother to decide whether she wants to have a baby. It reveals the belief that the right to privacy is dominant in the decision. Many proponents believe that no unwanted baby should ever be born. No woman should be forced to have a child against her will.

The Supreme Court clearly based its decision on this assumption, referring to the unborn as merely "a potential [human] life." At the same time, the Court also recognized explicitly that if the right of personhood is established, the "appellant's case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [Fourteenth] Amendment." Hence, the pro-abortion position is dependent on the belief that the unborn is not an actual human person.

Biblical Arguments Used to Show the Fetus Is Subhuman

Abortion is opposed by both general and special revelation. First, we will look at biblical texts used by some abortionists to support the view that an unborn child is not fully human. Brief comments can be made about and conclusions drawn from the most significant biblical passages used for this position.

Genesis 2:7 declares that the first human "became a living being" only after God gave him life. Since breathing does not occur until birth, it is argued that the unborn are not human until they are born.

Job 34:14-15 says that if God "withdrew his spirit and breath, all [hu] mankind would perish." Here again, since life is connected with breath, it is reasoned that there is no human life before breath.

1. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 US. 113, 93 S. Ct. 705, 35 L. Ed. 2d 147 (1973).

Isaiah 57:16 refers to "the breath of [hu]man that I [God] have created." This also seems to make the beginning of breath to be the point of a human being's creation.

Ecclesiastes 6:3-5 declares that "a stillborn child" comes into the world 'without meaning, it departs in darkness, ... it never saw the sun or knew anything.' This is taken to indicate that the unborn are no more than the dead, who also know nothing but lie in the darkness of the grave (9:10).

Matthew 26:24 records Jesus's statement about Judas: "It would have been better for him if he had not been born." The implication drawn from this is that human life begins at birth. Otherwise, Jesus should have said it would have been better for him never to have been conceived.

Other Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Subhuman

There are several extrabiblical arguments presented by proponents of abortion. The most significant ones will be briefly considered here. Others will be considered later when objections to the pro-life view are discussed.

The argument from self-consciousness. It is argued by some that a baby is not a human until it possesses self-consciousness. Since no infant in the womb is self-conscious, this would argue in favor of a subhuman status for the unborn, and on this ground abortion would be permissible.

The argument from physical dependence. Another reason sometimes given by proponents of abortion is that the baby is an extension of the mother's body, and the mother has the right to control her own body and reproductive system. Since the baby is intruding on the mother's physical domain, she has the right to abort it.

The argument from the transmission of hormonal signals. Many pro-choice advocates argue that the unborn are not human beings until implantation (which takes place about a week or so after conception). Before implantation the unborn may have its complete genetic structure, but it lacks interface with the human community and the ability to communicate that fact, which, it is argued, is an essential element of human life. This begins only when the implanted conceptus sends out hormonal signals to the mother's body for its housing and development for the next nine months.

The argument from the zygote's reliance on material molecules for its development. Many pro-choice advocates argue that since the zygote's genes are activated by the mother, it does not have an independent existence of its own. For in the initial stages of the cell division, it does not rely upon its own genes, but rather upon the messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) from the mother's ovum, and that is what directs the cell through its development from the four-cell to eight-cell stage. Hence, it is argued that the mother should be able to choose if she would like to keep the zygote in existence or not.

The argument from the safety of the mother. Here it is argued that illegal abortion is dangerous. Figures ranging between five thousand and ten thousand maternal

deaths from illegal abortions are offered as evidence. By legalizing abortion, thousands of mothers can be saved from death by rusty coat hangers in back alleys.

The argument concerning the autonomous rights of the mother's body. Many pro-choice advocates argue that the mother has her rights to privacy and autonomy. This means that if a woman does not want to use her bodily organs to sustain the life of the unborn, then she has the right to abort the child. The reason given is that bodily autonomy outweighs the unborn's right to life. Therefore, if the woman feels that her rights are being imposed upon, she has the option of aborting the unborn child.

For example, a person has a right to evacuate an intruder from taking residence in one's home and attaching self to one's refrigerator for nine months. Likewise, the baby is an unwanted intruder who takes up residency in the mother's womb and feeds off the mother for nine months.

The argument from abuse and neglect. Another argument given in favor of abortion is the need to prevent child abuse and neglect. Unwanted pregnancies lead to unwanted children, and unwanted children become abused children. Abortion will help prevent child abuse.

The argument from deformity. Why should any child be born deformed? Why should the family or society be forced to care for deformed children? Abortion based on prenatal tests can eliminate these unnecessary and undesirable births. Furthermore, abortionists argue that concern for the genetic purity of the human race should lead us to weed out bad genes from the human gene pool, from which all future human beings will come.

The argument from the right to privacy. The Supreme Court declared in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that a woman's right to privacy over her own body is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Others argue the same thing on ethical grounds. They reason that just as we have the right to evict an unwanted guest from our home, a woman likewise has the right to eject an unwanted baby from her womb.

The argument from rape. Pro-choice advocates insist that no woman should be forced to have a child against her will. It is immoral to add the necessity of pregnancy to the indignity of being raped. No women should be forced to have a baby against her will.

Argument from the inability to know when human life begins. Many pro-choice advocates argue that even if the law protects the life of a human being, and abortion would be morally wrong if it is the killing of an innocent human being, still we cannot know with absolute certainty when a new human organism/being has been formed. Therefore, because we do not know when the germ-cell progenitors cease to be and the new individual organism begins to exist, forming a new human being, it would be foolish dogmatism to rule in favor of the fetus being a person.

The argument concerning the autonomous rights of the mother and her consent to sex. This claim is that a woman's consent to sex is not thereby a consent to pregnancy. In the same way that it is wrong to force a person to have sex, it is wrong to force a person to consent to pregnancy. Just as rape should be stopped immediately in

order not to violate the rights and liberty of the individual, so should the pregnancy be stopped immediately in order not to violate the rights and liberty of the woman who has been forced into pregnancy against her will.

The argument from the Fourteenth Amendment. Justice Blackmun argued that according to the Fourteenth Amendment, individuals have a right to privacy and liberty, and that to pass laws outlawing abortion is to infringe upon an individual's right to privacy and liberty. He also argued that the unborn are not considered persons under the Fourteenth Amendment. The reasons are that the U.S. Constitution does not define a person. He then argues that in all of the instances where the term "person" is used, it is always in reference to a postnatal individual with no possible prenatal applications. The second reason he offers is that the Texas court could not cite a case in which the court ruled that an unborn human being is a person under the Fourteenth Amendment. Finally, he says that throughout most of the nineteenth century, not only was abortion practiced, but there also were fewer legal restrictions than those that were issued in 1972.

The argument that society determines when a person's life begins. Some abortionists insist that an individual becomes a person only when a society accepts one as a person. And since our society dictates that someone is a person at birth, it follows that only then does someone have human rights. They claim that this is evident since only after a person's birth is one named, allowed to fulfill societal functions, and *accepted* into the family.

The argument that intrinsic values are insufficient to determine human value. Some abortionists claim that even if the unborn have a human nature, this is not sufficient for them to have a right to life. In addition to that, they must be engaged in certain value-giving functions in the present to have a right to live. Having the present capacity for such values to be expressed only in the future is insufficient. It is insisted that the so-called intrinsic value of the unborn is not enough, since it is only a potential value, not an actual one.

An Evaluation of the View That the Fetus Is Subhuman

Now that the arguments have been outlined in favor of abortion, a brief evaluation of each is in order. First, a reply to the biblical arguments.

A Response to the Biblical Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Subhuman

Breath is not the beginning of humanness. There are *several* reasons for not taking breath as the point of human life's beginning. If breath is equated with the presence of human life, then the loss of breath would mean the loss of humanness. But the Bible is clear that human beings continue to exist in another realm after they stop breathing (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Rev. 6:9). The Scriptures speak of human life in the womb long before breathing begins, even from the point of conception. David said, "In sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5 RSV). And

the angel said of Mary, "What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). Also, on the *medical* scene, many who stop breathing later revive or live while aided by a machine.

Furthermore, the verses on breath speak not of the beginning of human life but simply of the initial coming-out event. Birth is the human debut into the world. These passages speak about the beginning of *observable* human life, not the beginning of an actual human life. Even in Bible times people knew that the baby was alive in the womb. The mother could feel the unborn baby move, at times even jump (Luke 1:44). Birth was not seen as the beginning of human life but simply as the beginning or emergence of life in the naturally visible world—as the human debut.

Adam was a unique case. Since Adam was directly created by God, he was a special case. Thus, the fact that he did not become human until he breathed is not decisive for determining when individual human life begins, and that for several reasons. First, Adam was never conceived and born like other humans; he was directly created. Second, the fact that Adam was not human until he began to breathe no more proves when individual human life begins today than does the fact that he was created as an adult prove that individual human life does not begin until we are adults. Third, "breath" in Genesis 2:7 means "life" (see Job 33:4). So this means that life began when God gave human life to Adam, not simply because he began breathing. Human life was later given to his posterity at fertilization, or conception (Gen. 4:1). Fourth, other animals breathe but are not human (Gen. 7:21-22).

Knowledge is not necessary to humanness. When Ecclesiastes 6:3-S speaks of a "stillborn child" as not knowing anything, this does not mean the stillborn is not human. If this were the case, then adults would not be human after they die either, for the same book also says there is no "knowledge" in the "the grave, where you are going" (9:10). In context, this passage is simply making the obvious point that people not in the world cannot enjoy its opportunities (see v. 9). If lack of knowledge rendered an individual subhuman, then the ignorant would not be human, and the educated would be more human than the uneducated.

A Response to the Extrabiblical Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Subhuman

Most extrabiblical arguments in favor of abortion beg the question. They all assume what they are to prove, that unborn children are not really human.

Self-consciousness is not necessary to humanness. If self-consciousness is essential to humanness, then those who are in a state of dreamless sleep or in a coma are not human. But people do awake from comas. In which case, they would be nonhumans becoming humans again, which is absurd. This carries the additional absurd implication that if a wife were to awaken her sleeping husband, she would be calling him back into existence! Furthermore, little children do not gain self-consciousness until they are about a year and a half of age. This would mean, then,

that infanticide would be justified on any child going on two years of age! Finally, on this ground killing an unconscious person would be justified.

An embryo is not an extension of the mother. It is a scientific fact that embryos are not physical extensions of their mothers. From the moment of conception, they have their own sex, and slightly more than half are male, while the mother is female. Beginning about forty days after conception, they have their own individual brain waves, which they keep until death. Within a few weeks of conception, they have their own blood type, which may differ from the mother's, and their own unique fingerprints, which do differ from the mother's. Finally, the embryo is only "nesting" in the mother's womb. Birth simply changes the method of receiving food and oxygen.

Hence, embryos are no more a part of the mother's body than a nursing baby is part of the mother's breast or a test-tube baby is part of a Petri dish. So distinct is an embryo from a mother's womb that if a fertilized ovum from a black couple is transplanted into a white mother, she will have a black baby, and vice versa.

Response to the transmission of hormonal signals. First, this argument confuses *when* life begins (at conception) with *how* it is protected and nourished after it begins and until birth.

Second, no new genetic information is added to a human being after the point of conception. The mother aids in the development of the embryo after conception but does not add anything to its human nature after conception. And just because the mother is not aware the baby is there before implantation does not mean it is not there.

Third, both scientifically and metaphysically, there is no difference between the communicative unborn after implantation and the noncommunicative unborn before implantation. The only differences are accidental difference of location and relation, but these have no bearing upon the essential nature of the unborn. The abortionists' argument is akin to saying that a radio is not a radio until it is plugged into the socket. Or better *yet, that* a baby is not human until the mother is nursing the infant. Implantation is like "nesting." It is necessary for growth and development, but it is not necessary to define humanness.

Response to the argument on the reliance of material molecules. First, this view seems to rest upon the notion that an entity is an individual being if and only if one can rely upon one's own genes for its sustenance. But there is no necessity to accept this premise.

Second, the abortion argument does not demonstrate that an embryo is not a unified being that needs sustenance from an exterior being or source. This argument shows rather that the zygote is a living substance and a unified being, which has within itself the capacity to be acted upon to be directed toward its final cause.

Third, even postnatal individuals seem to rely upon the genetic information of other beings for their sustenance. For instance, a sick individual may rely on the genetic information of antibiotics to kill bacteria and microorganisms infecting the body. Further, all individual human beings rely on the genetic structure of

other beings for sustenance when they consume food and water, which are the basic genetic necessities of life.

Thus a zygote is no less human than any other being that receives material molecules from an exterior source. Otherwise, they must claim that all human beings who have taken any exterior material source (including medicine and food) are no longer human, which none of them would claim.

Legalized abortion does not save lives. Legalizing abortion has not saved thousands of mothers from dying, but it has killed millions of babies. Before the legalization of abortion in 1973, there were not thousands of women dying each year from illegal abortions. The U.S. Bureau of Vital Statistics reported that in 1973 there were only forty-five maternal deaths from abortion. One of the original leaders of the abortion movement, Dr. Bernard N. Nathanson, later admitted that proponents of abortion lied about the statistics.²

However, the maternal death rate for childbirth is only 1 in 10,000 births, or 1/100 of 1 percent. Childbirth one of the safest medical procedures in the country. But the child mortality rate from successful abortions is 100 percent; it is the most fatal operation in America. If the embryo is human, then saving even hundreds of mothers would not justify killing millions of babies. Abortion has taken the lives of near 1.3 million babies a year since *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in the United States. So the net effect of legalizing abortion has been to arrange that these deaths occur more sanitarily and professionally.

Response to the autonomous rights of the mother's body. This position wrongly assumes that only the mother's rights are in view. True, a mother has the right to control her own body under normal circumstances. But when she is carrying another human being within her body, there is a conflict of two rights: the baby's right to live conflicting with the mother's right to control her own body. And the right to life takes precedent over the right to control one's own body. In short, this argument fails to deal with the human status of the unborn in order to substantiate its main claim.

Further, it is true that one has a right to evacuate an intruding adult from taking residence in one's home and attaching self to one's refrigerator. However, if one drops a newly born baby on one's doorstep, it would be a crime of negligent homicide to toss the baby into the garage to die! But this is precisely what abortion does. Certainly the baby has intruded into the mother's body. Truly this can be an unwanted inconvenience. Likewise, it will involve the baby feeding off the mother for nine months. But none of these are moral grounds for expelling a human baby to certain death because of these inconveniences.

Response to the argument from child abuse. The argument for preventing child abuse as a rationale for abortion takes the focus off the issue of whether the unborn child is human. If the unborn is human, then abortion does not avoid child abuse. Rather, abortion is child abuse of the worst kind—abuse by a cruel death. Accord-

2. Bernard N. Nathanson, *Aborting America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 193.

ing to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' figures, between 1973 (when abortion was legalized) and 1982, child abuse increased more than 500 percent. Further, research reveals that the vast majority of battered children were wanted by their parents. One study showed that 91 percent of abused children were wanted children.'

Response to the deformity argument. Once again, this argument for abortion makes sense only if the unborn are not human, which begs the question. If the unborn are human, then abortion of the deformed is no more justified than infanticide or euthanasia for genetic reasons. Abortion of the handicapped is not promoted by handicapped people. At last count, there was not a single organization for parents of handicapped children on record as favoring abortion of the handicapped. In short, it is not the handicapped or their parents who want abortions of babies who may be born handicapped; it is those who are not handicapped (and not their parents) who favor abortions. Let's allow the handicapped to live and speak for themselves.

Response to the privacy-rights argument. The problem with the right-to-privacy argument for abortion is that it brings us face-to-face again with the basic issue: Are the unborn human? In other words, justifying abortion on the grounds of privacy makes good sense only if the embryo is not a human being. This is obvious for several reasons. First, we do not have the right to privately kill human beings. Abortionists would have to argue that we also have the right to engage in child abuse or rape as long as it is done privately. But certainly we have no right to kill privately. Second, abortion of human beings is significantly different from evicting someone from our home. Abortion is more like killing an indigent person in our home because that person will not leave. After all, evicting a nonviable embryo is fatal. It is tantamount to killing it, since it cannot live on its own outside the womb. Third, with the exception of criminal rape, no pregnancy is unwilled. If one consents to intercourse, then one is responsible for the result of that free act. So, to carry the illustration through, in 99 percent of abortions the "guest" was invited to begin with. This being the case, abortion is more like inviting indigent guests to our home and then killing them (or evicting them to a sure death) simply because they are not wanted.

Response to the argument from rape. Rape is understandably an emotionally charged issue. But the rape of the mother does not justify the murder of the child. If the unborn is a human, then intentionally taking its innocent *life* is murder. So here again the real issue is the human status of the unborn. But appealing to sympathy for the rape victim does not avoid the question of justice for the abortion's victim.

Abortion does not take away the evil of the rape; it adds another evil to it. The rape problem is not solved by killing the baby. We should punish the guilty rap-

3. E. Lenowski, *Heartbeat* 3-4 (December 1980), quoted in J. C. Willke and Barbara Willke, *Abortion: Questions and Answers* (Cincinnati: Hayes, 1985), 138.

ist, not the innocent baby. Furthermore, even if abortion were justified in a few extreme cases such as rape (and it is not), this would in no way justify abortion on demand, such as *the Roe v. Wade* court permitted.

If a rape victim receives immediate medical treatment, then conception can be avoided in all cases (since conception does not occur immediately). Further, due to understandable physical and psychological circumstances, few pregnancies ever occur from rape. The figure for criminal rape is well under 1 percent. But in the cases where pregnancy does occur, about half of rape victims want to have the baby. Should the mother not want the baby, there are people waiting to adopt babies. Adoption, not abortion, is the better alternative.

Ironically, the woman (Norma McCorvey) whose generic name was "Jane Roe," whose alleged rape led to the *Roe v. Wade* (1973) case that overthrew antiabortion laws in the United States, has subsequently admitted that she lied, thus undermining the original claim behind the case.

Response to the argument from the inability to know when human life begins. First, in response to this, one should follow the commonsense approach of Ronald Reagan, the only sitting president to write a book on abortion: "If you aren't sure, then don't shoot!" If there is something in the bushes with a bright orange coat and carrying a gun, then don't shoot. It probably is not a deer!

Second, the laws of logic demand that we know either that it is a human organism and person or that it is not; either our knowledge is a fact or it is not. Hence, there are four possibilities: (1) The organism is a person, and we know it. (2) The organism is a person, and we do not know it. (3) The organism is not a person, and we do not know it. (4) The organism is not a person, and we do know it.

1. From the first case, it is clear that if we know it is a person and we kill it, then it is a homicide.
2. From the second case, it would at least be manslaughter. People cannot plead ignorance because they didn't know a person was there; they didn't know there wasn't one there either. That would be the height of irresponsibility. In the Pastor Rick Warren preelection interview, President Barack Obama claimed that it is "above my pay grade" to know whether life begins at conception; if so, then it is also above his pay grade to know that it does not begin at conception and that it thus is permissible to kill millions of babies, which is what his pro—*Roe v. Wade* position allows.
3. From the third case, the fetus is not a person, but that is not known with certainty. This seems to be just as irresponsible as the second case. The abortionists should be charged with manslaughter, for they did not know, but it is still an act of criminal negligence.
4. Only in the fourth case would abortion be reasonable, legal, and responsible. But it is contrary to fact, since nobody really knows this with any kind of

4. See Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984).

certainty. The organism may be a human person, and if it may be a human person, then killing it is still a culpable crime. Thus, in the end, the skeptical argument fails because abortionists are still culpable in all cases. For if the unborn is or maybe a human person, then abortion is either homicide, manslaughter, or a heinous crime. Certainly, what is conceived by a human, born as a human, and grows as a human should be given the benefit of the doubt that it is a human.

Response to the consent to sex. First, if it is known that pregnancy is a possible result of sex (which nearly all women know), then the mother is giving tacit consent to having the baby when she has sex. At the minimum, she is playing Russian roulette and is responsible if the trigger goes off. More importantly, this view begs the question by assuming that the unborn is not human. For if the unborn is human, then the mother has no right to kill the fetus on the grounds that she did not consent to the fetus coming into being. The unborn's right to life takes precedence over the mother's desire not to be pregnant, whether she knew she was going to become pregnant or not.

Response to the Fourteenth Amendment argument. First, the difficulty with Justice Blackmun's *Roe v. Wade* citations is that he refers only to cases that applied to already-existing persons. For instance, he cites the U.S. Constitution's Fugitive Slave Clause (Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3) and the Migration and Importation provision (Art. 1, Sec. 9, Cl. 1). But both of these provisions had already been eliminated by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, and their application was clearly only for *already-existing individuals*. He also cites the reference to the qualifications of a congressman (Art. 1, Sec. 2, Cl. 2; Art. 1, Sec. 3, Cl. 3), which state that a senator must be at least 30 years old and that a representative must be at least 25 years old. But again, these references seem to beg the question because they imply that because a fetus cannot hold these offices, then that individual is not a person. Along this line of reasoning, anyone who is not at least 25 to 30 years old would not be a person.

Further, Justice Blackmun is correct in stating that Texas did not cite a case holding that the unborn is a person according to the Fourteenth Amendment. But he failed to recognize that the *Steinberg v. Brown* (1970) case, cited in the *Roe v. Wade* decision, states that in the case of a controversial issue, a legal principle has universal application. This means that if the unborn is a person, then the Fourteenth Amendment is meant to protect that individual, even if it is not explicitly stated in the Fourteenth Amendment. But what can be drawn from this Texas decision is that the U.S. Supreme Court accepted the premise of universal application, but then it legislated incorrectly in its ruling concerning the person-hood of a fetus.

Finally, Blackmun's statement that nineteenth-century abortion not only was practiced but that the law also had fewer legal restrictions does not stand. By the end of the nineteenth century, abortion was prohibited throughout the entire

pregnancy. Not only were common laws recognized, but even state-legislated laws were recognized. For instance, the state of Texas suggested, as did *Steinberg*, that the unborn are protected under the Fourteenth Amendment because they are *persons*. So, even if Justice Blackmun was correct that the unborn never had been considered a full person under the law, what the Texas ruling did argue for is that the humanity of the unborn be recognized by the Court in the present, and the Fourteenth Amendment should be interpreted in light of that decision. Hence, all beings that have the essential attributes and properties of those in the Fourteenth Amendment should be considered persons and be protected by the law.

Response to the argument that society determines when the person has rights. First, this view confines a social convention with one's actual (metaphysical) status. Further, there are many Eastern cultures that celebrate the personhood of a fetus from conception. If society determines personhood at the same time, an Eastern child would be a person and a Western child would not. What then of Eastern children living in the West?

Second, this view fails to make the distinction between essential and accidental characteristics. Essentially the fetus does not change from conception until death. The only changes that take place are accidental, such as location, size, and shape. And accidental changes do not affect the nature of a being, but only its secondary qualities.

Third, not all cultures allow children to be accepted into society at the same time and in the same way. Different religions use different events at different times to bring one into society. For instance, some Christians baptize infants; some Jews perform a bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen. Should we assume that they are not human until then? On this ground, some Christian children would be persons while some Jewish kids would not. But this is clearly inconsistent, because there is no essential difference between the nature of the individual people of the Christian and Jewish faiths. It should be clear that events after conception do not determine nature, for the individuals all remain essentially the same throughout the entire process.

Response to the argument from insufficiency of intrinsic values. First, this argument grants the human nature of the unborn. But the moral law extends to protecting all human life. Second, requiring an additional test for humanness other than having a human nature—that is, determining humanness on the basis of what one *does* rather than on the basis of what one *is*—has fatal consequences for the handicapped and elderly who can do little or nothing for themselves or anyone else.

Third, who decides what kind of activity and/or how much is necessary? On this view, the criteria for humanness—and for life—become social, not metaphysical. Given thousands of years of history as a precedent, the predictable results of this view are fatal.

Fourth, given this view, then some beings have more intrinsic value than others. For instance, some adults have a better capacity to reason and learn than others.

This would mean that some adults are more intrinsically valuable than others. But if this is so of adults, then it would also be true of the unborn.

Finally, according to this position, there would be degrees of humanness since there are degrees of human activity that determine humanness. But this is absurd, since natures do not come in degrees. Either a figure is a triangle or it is not a triangle. There are no degrees of triangeliness. Neither are there degrees of humanness.

Abortion Sometimes: The Belief that the Fetus Is Potentially Human

According to this opinion on abortion, the unborn child is merely a potential human being. Proponents argue that the humanness of the individual develops gradually between conception and birth. The fetus begins as a potentially human person and gradually becomes fully human. Yet even as a potential human being, the fetus has more value than mere things or even animals. However, this emerging value must be weighed against such other considerations as the mother's rights and society's rights. Whether abortion is justified in a given case will depend on where the greater weight of these rights falls in the balance. Generally, those who hold this view favor abortion to save the mother's life, for rape, for incest, and (in many cases) for genetic deformities. The arguments offered in favor of this view can be categorized as biblical and nonbiblical.

Biblical Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Potentially Human

Several passages are used to support the position that the unborn are only potentially human. The one most often appealed to is Exodus 21. *Exodus* 21:22-23. This passage reads as follows.

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life. (KJV)

These verses are taken to mean that only a monetary fine was exacted for the death of the fetus, but capital punishment for the death of the mother. If so, then the mother's actual life was considered of more value than the fetus's potential life. Adherents argue that "her fruit depart from her" means a miscarriage, in which the baby dies. That "no mischief follow" would thus refer to the mother, since the miscarriage has already brought death to the fetus. If this is so, then the mere fine, as opposed to capital punishment, for the death of the fetus would indicate that the fetus was not considered fully human.

Psalms 51:5. David confessed, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." In what sense was David a sinner at the moment of conception? He obviously was not an actual sinner, because he had not yet actually

sinned. So, it is reasoned, David was a potential sinner. He was a potential sinner because he was only a potential person. Later, when he became an actual person, he became an actual sinner.

Psalm 139:13, IS-16. The psalmist wrote of the process by which we are formed in our mother's womb:

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.... When
I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your
eyes saw my unformed body.

From these verses it is argued that the fetus is not fully human because it is in the process of being "knit ... together" and is called "unformed." Add to this the verses from Ecclesiastes (6:3-5) that the fetus does not know anything, and the image develops of a potential but emerging human being in the womb. Yet it is argued from this that the fetus is not yet fully developed or fully human.

Romans 5:12. The Bible declares that "sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all ... , because all sinned [in Adam]." However, it is evident that all people were not actually in Adam. Hence, it is argued that all humans were in Adam only potentially. Thus it is concluded that we are only potentially human before we are born and only become actual human beings later.

Hebrews 7:9-10 says that 'Levi ... paid the tenth through Abraham, because ... Levi was still in the body of [Abraham]:' But since Levi lived hundreds of years after Abraham, it is clear that he was not actually in Abraham's body. He must have been there only potentially. Thus, it is argued by comparison that the unborn are only potentially human when they are in the body of the mother.

Other Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Only Potentially Human

In addition to the biblical evidence, there are several reasons offered to support the view that a fetus is only potentially human. Some of the most significant ones are summarized here.

Human personality develops only gradually. Observation reveals that human personality goes through a gradual process of development. One is not conceived with a sense of personal identity. This develops gradually through relationships with other persons. Thus it is urged that one becomes a person only as the personality develops. Before that, one is only potentially and emergently human.

Human development is interconnected with physical development. It is evident that there is physical development between conception and birth. Not all bodily organs and functions are present at conception; they gradually develop throughout the prenatal period. But it is equally true that there is an interrelation between psychological and physical development. For example, a one-day-old baby's body

does not have an eighteen-year-old's mind. This being the case, some argue that human personhood develops along with the human body.

The analogy with other living things. An acorn is not an oak tree, nor is an egg a chicken, and an embryo is to a human being what an acorn is to an oak tree, or an egg to a chicken. Just as an egg is not a chicken, so neither is a fetus a human. An acorn is a potential oak tree, and an embryo is a potential human being. Yet a fetus has the potential to become human, and the egg does not. This potential is of great value, of more value than an actual chicken. However, a potential human is no more an actual human than an acorn is an oak tree.

The legal argument. The Supreme Court referred to a fetus as "a potential [human] life. Some pro-abortionists claim that this idea is implied in the Fourteenth Amendment:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No state shall ... deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.

Since the amendment extends the rights of citizenship only to those who are born, pro-abortionists reason that the Constitution implies that the unborn are not fully human. Hence, the right to life of those already born would not apply to the unborn.

An Evaluation of the View That the Fetus Is Potentially Human

There are several fatal problems with the position that the unborn are only potentially human. First, the interpretations of the biblical passages are questionable.

A Response to the Biblical Arguments Viewing the Fetus as Potentially Human

Exodus 21 does not teach that a fetus is a potential human. Neither can this be legitimately inferred from the passage. The Hebrew word for "come forth" is *isydsd*, which means "to give birth." It is the same word regularly used for live birth in the Old Testament. Hence, in this passage it refers to a live premature birth, not a miscarriage. The separate Hebrew word for miscarriage, *idkol*, is not used here. The word used for the mother's offspring here is *yeled*, which means "child." It is the same word used of babies and young children (Gen. 21:8; Exod. 2:3). If any harm came to either the mother or the child, the same punishment was given: "life for life" (v. 23). This reveals that the unborn was considered of equal value with the mother.

The famous Hebrew scholar Umberto Cassuto rendered this passage as follows:

When men strive together and they hurt unintentionally a woman with child, and her children come forth but no mischief happens—that is, the woman and the children do not die—the one who hurts her shall surely be punished by a fine. But if any mischief happens, that is, if the woman dies or the children die, then you shall give life for life.⁴

This makes the meaning clear; it is a strong passage affirming that the unborn are of equal value to adult human beings.

Psalms 51:5 does not support the potential-human view for several reasons. Even if it were teaching that humans are potential sinners from conception, it would not follow that they are potential humans. The very fact that humans are declared sinners from conception reveals that they are human, part of the fallen human race. It is only by virtue of being part of the Adamic human race that we are conceived in sin (see comments on Rom. 5:12, below).

Psalms 139 is a strong support of the view that the unborn are fully human, not merely potentially human. "Unformed" (v. 16) does not mean unhuman anymore than deformed does. The baby in the womb is referred to as being made by God just as Adam was made (Gen. 2:7) in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The unborn is referred to by personal pronouns (Jen 1:5 LXX), and the unborn is "known" by God in the womb, a term implying personal relationship. Each unborn child in the womb is also written down in God's book in heaven (Ps. 139:16).

Romans 5:12 implies that all humans were in Adam potentially, but not that they were potential humans before they were born. The passage is not speaking about an embryo in the womb but about the fact that all humans were in Adam. The fact that we were all genetically or representatively in Adam, and therefore responsible in his sin, reveals that there is a corporateness about human nature. That is, there is a unity in humanity, so that we cannot totally cut off one member from another (Rom. 14:7), wherever we are located. The very fact that we are all declared sinners from conception (Ps. 51:5) by virtue of being in Adam reveals that even at the point of conception, one is considered to be part of the human race.

Hebrews 7:9-10 is not speaking of an embryo, to say nothing of it being a potential human being. Levi was probably there potentially, representatively, or figuratively. But even if Levi was potentially in Abraham, it certainly does not follow that he was an embryo in Abraham. If Levi, who was not even conceived when he was said to be "in Abraham," was a potential human being, then we are potential humans before we are even conceived. If this is so, then even human sperm (before they fertilize an ovum) are potential human beings. But this is genetically incor-

6. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974), 275.

rect. Sperm have only twenty-three chromosomes, while embryos have forty-six. Embryos have human souls, but sperms do not.

A Response to the Nonbiblical Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Potentially Human

The extrabiblical arguments for viewing the fetus as only potentially human suffer from many of the same weaknesses as the arguments for viewing the fetus as subhuman. Let us consider them in turn.

Personality differs from personhood. Arguing that the unborn are only potential persons because personality develops is a confusion of personality and personhood. Personality is a psychological concept; personhood is an ontological category. Personality is a property, but personhood is the substance of being human. Personalities are formed by their surroundings, but personhood is created by God. Thus, personality is developed gradually, but personhood comes instantly at conception. If personhood is identified with personality, then an improperly adjusted person is not properly human. Since personality involves consciousness, those who lack consciousness would cease to be human. On this ground, killing people who are unconscious would be justified.

The soul does not have to change with the body. Simply because the body develops does not mean the soul does. A jar can have the same form whether it is small or big. This sentence could be magnified (enlarged) without changing its meaning (form). Likewise, the small body of a fertilized ovum can have the same soul as the somewhat bigger one of a fetus, or even the much bigger one of an adult. So simply because the human body undergoes obvious development does not mean that the human person animating that body must also develop gradually. The soul can be present wholly and completely from the very beginning of the body's development.

Neither an acorn nor an embryo is a potential life. It is a misunderstanding of botany to say an acorn is a potential oak tree. An acorn is a tiny living oak tree inside a shell. Its dormant life does not grow until properly nourished by planting and watering, but it is a tiny living oak tree in a shell nonetheless. All the genetic information that comprises an oak tree is in the acorn. And all the genetic information that comprises an adult human being is in the fertilized ovum. All that is added to make an adult human from this tiny human is water, air, and food. An embryo is not a potential human life; it is a human life with great potential.

The unborn are constitutionally protected. There are a number of significant reasons why the Supreme Court was wrong when it declared that unborn children are not persons with a protected right to life. It is not simply those who are born in the United States who are protected under the Constitution. Otherwise, it would be legal to kill any alien within our borders. But the Fourteenth Amendment explicitly says that the state shall not "deprive any person of life, liberty, or

property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law:'

Even corporations have been considered "persons" under the Fourteenth Amendment (*Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific R. R. Co.*, 118 U.S. 394 [1886]), and the Supreme Court also once mistakenly said that blacks did not fully count as "persons" or citizens (*Dred Scott v. (John F. A.) Sandford*, 60 U.S. [19 How.] 393, 15 L. Ed. 691 [1857]) and was tragically wrong then too. The right to life is an inalienable God-given right, according to *The Declaration of Independence* (1776), our national birth certificate. The fact that abortions were forbidden by law at that time and that an embryo was defined as a "child in the womb" shows that this right to life included unborn children as well. And only three years before *Roe v. Wade*, a federal court referred to the unborn as persons (*Steinberg v. Brown* [1970]).

No Abortions: The Belief That the Fetus Is Fully Human

The final view holds that the fetus is fully human. Therefore, any intentional taking of an unborn's life is homicide. This position is supported by both biblical and nonbiblical evidence.

Biblical Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Fully Human

Since most of the biblical data has already been presented, the arguments pertinent to this position will simply be summarized here.

1. Unborn babies are called "children," the same word used of infants and young children (Exod. 21:22; Luke 1:41,44; 2:12,16) and sometimes even of young adults (1 Kings 17:21; cf. 3:17).
2. The unborn are formed by God (Ps. 139:13), just as God formed Adam and Eve in his image (Gen. 1:27; cf. 2:7).
3. The life of the unborn is protected by the same punishment for injury or death (Exod. 21:22-24) as that of an adult (Gen. 9:6).
4. Christ was human (the God-man) from the point that he was conceived in Mary's womb (Matt. **1:20-21**; Luke **1:26-27**, 31).
5. The image of God includes "male and female" (Gen. **1:27**), but it is a scientific fact that maleness or femaleness (sex) is determined at the moment of conception.
6. Unborn children possess personal characteristics, such as sin (Ps. 51:5) and joy, that are distinctive of humans.
7. Personal pronouns are used to describe unborn children (Jer. 1:5 UDC; Matt. 1:20-21) just as any other human being.
8. The unborn are said to be known intimately and personally by God as he would know any other person (Ps. 139:15-16; Jer. 1:5).

9. The unborn are even called by God before birth (Gen. 25:22-23; Judg. 13:2-7; Isa. 49:1, 5; Gal. 1:15).

Taken as a whole, these Scripture texts leave no doubt that unborn children are just as much persons in God's image as little children or adults are. They are created in God's image from the very moment of conception, and their prenatal life is precious in God's eyes and protected by his prohibition against murder.

Nonbiblical Arguments for Viewing the Fetus as Fully Human

The extrabiblical evidence that prenatal life is fully human falls into the categories of scientific and social.

Scientific evidence for the humanity of the unborn. Modern science has placed a window in the womb. As a result, the evidence is now clearer than ever that individual human life begins at the very moment of conception, or fertilization.

It is a genetic fact that a fertilized human ovum is 100 percent human. From the very moment of fertilization, all genetic information is present. All the physical characteristics of an individual being are contained in the genetic code present at conception. The sex of the individual child is determined at the moment of conception as well. A female ovum has only twenty-three chromosomes, and a male sperm has twenty-three chromosomes, but a normal adult human being has forty-six chromosomes. At the very moment of conception, when the male sperm and female ovum unite, a new, tiny, forty-six-chromosome human being emerges. From the moment of conception until death, no new genetic information is added. All that is added between conception and death is food, water, and oxygen.

At a U.S. congressional hearing in 1981, scientific experts from around the world testified about the beginning of an individual life:

In biology and in medicine, it is an accepted fact that the life of any individual organism reproducing by sexual reproduction begins at conception, or fertilization. (Dr. Micheline M. Matthews-Roth)'

To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being from conception to old age is not a metaphysical contention, it is plain experimental evidence. (Jerome LeJeune)

But now we can say, unequivocally, that the question of when life begins is no longer a question for theological or philosophical dispute. It is an established scientific ***fact***. Theologians and philosophers may go on to debate the meaning of life or the

7. Subcommittee on Separation of Powers, report to Senate Judiciary Committee S•158, 97th Congress, 1st session, 1981.

8. Ibid.

purpose of life, but it is an established fact that all life, including human life, begins at the moment of conception. (Dr. Hymie Gordon)'

Modern fetology has brought to light some amazing things about the growth of this tiny person in the mother's womb. The following summary is vivid testimony to the full humanness of the prenatal child (a girl in this instance).

First Month: Actualization

Conception: All her human characteristics are present.
She implants or "nests" in her mother's uterus (one week or so later).
Her heart muscle pulsates (three weeks).
Her head, arms, and legs begin to appear.

Second Month: Development

Her brain waves can be detected (40 to 42 days).
Her nose, eyes, ears, and toes appear.
Her heart beats and blood (her own type) flows.
Her skeleton develops.
She has her own unique fingerprints.
She is sensitive to touch on her lips and has reflexes.
All her bodily systems are present and functioning.

Third Month: Movement

She swallows, squints, and swims.
She grasps with her hands and moves her tongue.
She can even suck her thumb.
She can feel organic pain (8-13 weeks).

Fourth Month: Growth

Her weight increases six times (to one-half birth weight).
She grows up to eight to ten inches long.
She can hear her mother's voice.

Fifth Month: Viability

Her skin, hair, and nails develop.
She dreams (REM sleep). She
can cry (if air is present).

She can live outside the womb.

She is only halfway to her scheduled birth date.

These characteristics make the identity of human embryos unmistakable. Human embryos are not mineral, vegetable, or animal. They are fully human.

Social evidence for the humanity of the unborn. In addition to the biblical and scientific evidence, there are many social arguments for protecting the human rights of unborn children. These are the most significant ones among them.

First, no one disputes that human embryos have human parents. Why then should anyone argue that a human embryo is not human? No biologist has any difficulty in identifying an unborn pig as a pig or an unborn horse as a horse. Why should an unborn human be considered anything but human?

Second, human life never stops and then starts up again. There is a continuous flow of human life from generation to generation, from parent to child. This flow of human life is uninterrupted. The way new individual human life appears is through conception. Hence, the new life that appears at that point is every bit as human as its parents. Otherwise, human life would have a discontinuity between conception and birth (or whenever it would begin again).

Third, the father of modern fetology, Dr. A. Liley, observed that 'this is the same baby we are caring for before and after birth, who before birth can be ill and need diagnosis and treatment just like any other patient?' But if it is the same baby and the same patient both before and after birth, then it is just as human before it is born as after.

Fourth, modern medical care has made it possible for premature babies to live outside the womb much earlier—some twenty-week-old fetuses have survived. But if they are human when they come out of the womb at five months, then they must be human if they stay in the womb. Thus there are no grounds for killing them up to nine months, which is what U. S. law permits. This contradiction is often dramatized in a modern hospital, where staff members in one room rush to save a five-month-old preemie, while in another room others may be killing (by abortion) a baby.

Fifth, all the arguments for abortion apply equally as well to infanticide and euthanasia. If unborn children can be killed because of deformity, poverty, or undesirability, then both infants and the aged can be disposed of for the same reasons. There is no real difference between abortion and infanticide or euthanasia: they all involve the same patient and the same procedure and end in the same result.

Sixth, abortion has been declared wrong by many societies and moralists, whether Christian or pagan, since the dawn of civilization. The Code of Hammurabi (18th cent. BC) had a penalty for even unintentionally causing a miscarriage. Mosaic law (16th-15th cent. BC) exacted the same penalty for injury to baby or

10. Quoted in Willke and Willke, *Abortion*, 52.

mother. Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria (12th cent. BC) punished women who caused themselves to abort. The Greek physician Hippocrates (5th-4th cent. BC) opposed abortion with an oath: "I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone if asked for, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy." Even Seneca (AD 1st cent.), whose Stoic compatriots allowed abortion, praised his mother for not aborting him. Augustine of Hippo (4th-5th cent.), Thomas Aquinas (13th cent.), and John Calvin (16th cent.) all considered abortion immoral. English common law exacted punishment for taking life by abortion, as did early American law. Before 1973, actually, laws in nearly all fifty states opposed abortion.

Seventh, discrimination against anyone's life based on circumstantial matters such as size, age, location, or functional ability is morally wrong. Yet these are the same grounds on which abortionists consider the unborn child to be nonhuman. On these same grounds we could discriminate against the lives of pygmies or preemies because they are too small, or against minorities because of where they live. Why then discriminate against babies who still live in the womb? Or we could discriminate against the handicapped or elderly because they lack certain functional abilities. And if we can eliminate babies from the human community because they are unwanted, then why not discard other undesired segments of society, such as AIDS victims, drug addicts, or derelicts?

Pragmatic Argument against Abortion

For those who may not accept the biblical, metaphysical, epistemological, or scientific arguments against abortion, a pragmatic argument can be offered. The economic value of each person should warrant the preservation of the life of the unborn.

First, the economic value of each individual is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars over the span of a person's lifetime. This money from these individuals could be used to sustain and, in many cases, boost the economy.

Second, after the baby-boomer generation, there was a rise in the population of children and a rise in the amount of money in the economic system. Because of this rise, the United States was able to institute and finance programs like Social Security to fund many of the elderly and individuals who are not able to work. If there is a sudden drop in the economic workforce (which abortion will bring because those who would fill the jobs of the previous generations will no longer be there), then there would be a drop in the amount of funds available for programs such as Social Security. In short, abortion will undermine the economic stability, deplete federal funds," and ultimately help bankrupt Social Security.

11. E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 189-92.

A Response to Criticisms of the View That the Fetus Is Fully Human

Granting that a fertilized ovum is fully human leads to some difficulties. The most important ones are briefly noted here.

What If the Mother's Life Is Threatened?

Thanks to the advances of modern medicine, it is seldom necessary to initiate a drastic procedure that will lead to the death of the unborn in order to save the mother's life. However, when it is necessary (such as in tubal pregnancies), it is morally justified to take every medical precaution to save the mother's life. This is not abortion as such, and for several reasons. First, the intention is not to kill the baby; it is to save the life of the mother. It is justified on by the principle of double effect, which affirms that if one action (say, to save a life) leads to two consequences, one good (saving the life of the mother) and the other bad (leading to the death of the fetus), then the act is justifiable if one wills the good result. Second, it is a life-for-a-life issue, not an abortion-on-demand situation. Actually, it is not really an abortion at all since it is not an operation aimed at killing an embryo. Third, when one's life is threatened, as the mother's is, she has a right to preserve it on a self-defense basis (see Exod. 22:2) since the presence of the fetus in a fallopian tube (an ectopic pregnancy) is threatening her life. Either the baby dies or else both will die. And it is better to save one life than none.

Half of All Conceptions Spontaneously Abort

It is objected that if a fertilized ovum is a human being, then about half of all human beings are killed spontaneously anyway, for they never make it to the uterus to develop. However, this is not a legitimate ground for abortion. It fails to make the crucial distinction between spontaneous death and homicide. We are not morally culpable for the former, but we are for the latter. There is also a high infant mortality rate in some underdeveloped countries, but this does not justify intentionally killing these babies before they are born. There is a 100 percent mortality rate among people who are terminally ill, but this does not justify killing them. From a biblical standpoint, God is sovereign over life, not humans. The believer's attitude should be "the **LORD** gave, and the **LORD** hath taken away; blessed be the name of the **LORD**" (Job 1:21 KJV; see also Deut. 32:39).

If All Fertilized Ova Are Human, We Should Try to Save Them

It is argued that if every fertilized ovum is human, then we are obligated to try to save all spontaneous abortions as well. But if we did, it would lead to overpopulation, death by medical neglect, and starvation. In response, several points should be made. There is no unqualified moral duty to interfere with natural death. Protecting life is a moral obligation, but resisting natural death is not necessar-

ily a moral duty (see chap. 10). This also rejects God's sovereignty over life and death. God has appointed death for all persons (Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27), and we have no unqualified moral duty to interfere with God when he carries out these appointments. There is no inconsistency between preserving natural life by opposing artificial abortion and allowing natural death by spontaneous abortion. Both respect God's right over human life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21).

Twins Prove That Life Begins at Conception

Identical twins come from one fertilized ovum that does not divide until after conception. On this basis it is argued that human life could not begin at conception, since each twin's life did not begin until after conception. But this does not follow for several reasons. The original ovum was 100 percent human, with forty-six chromosomes. From the instant the ovum split in two, each twin has 100 percent human characteristics and forty-six chromosomes. Twin splitting may simply be a nonsexual way of parenting (reproduction). And we do not consider the parents of humans to be subhuman. The "parent" of a twin is just as human as would be the "parent" of a human clone. Both have human genetic characteristics. The fact that some are reported to rejoin after splitting does not diminish the humanness of either the united or separated forms. For at no time is there a loss of the 100 percent human genetic characteristics that constitute the human nature involved.

Some Fertilized Ova Do Not Have Forty-six Chromosomes

Some babies have only 45 chromosomes (Turner's syndrome) and some have 47 (Down syndrome). This is used by some pro-abortionists to justify abortion of genetically imperfect babies, but this does not follow for many reasons. On this same ground we could also kill little children and adults with these same genetic imperfections. Further, many people with other than 46 chromosomes live relatively normal lives. What is more, we do not treat the physically impaired as subhuman, and neither should we treat the genetically impaired that way. Finally, having 46 chromosomes makes one human. Not having 46 chromosomes does not necessarily make one subhuman—especially when one comes from humans, has a human nature, and has the potentiality to function in a uniquely human way.

A Human Being Is Not Necessarily a Person

This distinction admits the humanness of the embryo but denies that the embryo is a person. Yet for many reasons, this will not help the pro-abortion cause. First, the distinction is arbitrary. There are no really essential differences between being human and being a human person, only functional ones. Second, on the same grounds the personhood of the severely retarded, the unconscious, and the senile could be denied. Third, even if an embryo were not yet a person, it still would be wrong to kill an innocent human being, such as they are. And they are

unmistakably human in both parentage and genetic characteristics. Fourth, it is a false distinction without a real difference. Fifth, it is an artificial distinction that makes a fatal difference. Finally, if having a human nature does not make one a human person, then society will be at a loss to decide who qualifies as a person, which may lead to tyranny and discrimination.

The Quality-of-Life Argument

Some abortionists argue that a child who is deformed or defective should not have to suffer through life and that death would be a better option. The quality of life maybe for the unborn or it maybe for the parents. The qualityoflife may range from the housing conditions to physical defects in the child. But the main point is that if the child cannot have an acceptable quality of life, then it should be aborted.

In response to this argument, several points are made.¹² First, if the fetus is actually a person, then the fetus has the same moral rights, and we have the same obligations to the *fetus*, as any other person. Also, it would be an act of discrimination to kill the deformed or defective child purely because they are deformed or defective.

Second, quality-of-life adherents use a subjective standard for judging the quality of life. This view assumes that certain lives are not worth living just because they do not meet a certain standard. But not one handicapped or disability group has come out in favor of abortion for those who are deformed or defective."

Third, this view has an inherent logical problem. It is basically arguing that no life is better than any life. But this is a false comparison: to compare two things, they both must exist and have properties to compare. Fourth, this view does not believe that there is any value to suffering. But this is clearly not always the case, because many individuals have been able to learn more, grow more, and draw closer to God through trials and pain (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4).

The Brain-Development Argument

Many pro-abortionists claim that a fetus should not be considered a person until it has a developed brain and consciousness. They also argue that because a human being is considered dead at brain death, the person no longer exists in the physical body; it thus seems logical to make the same comparison for a fetus: when it is developing in the womb, it is not a person until it has consciousness.

In response to this argument, several points are made."¹³ First, this position has a false view of symmetry by comparing brain death and brain life. Its proponent says, "If the 'person is gone at brain death, then he must not be there until the

12. Mark Foreman, *Christianity and Bioethics; Confronting Clinical Issues* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 75-76.

13. *Ibid.*, 75.

14. *Ibid.*, 90-92.

brain is alive." As much as this symmetry *seems* to exist, there is no a priori reason to assume it really exists. There is no evidence for it; it may just be our tendency to be symmetrical."

Second, this view fails to recognize that the unborn possess the ontological structure and capacity to have brain activity, but it is in a latent form. It is within the basic inherent capacity of an unborn fetus to develop cognitive activity.

Third, the function or actions of the fetus do not determine the essence of the fetus. This argument is based upon the notion that 'to do is to be,' in which the actions determine the essence of the individual. Yet since the fetus is a human or a person, it will express the actions for being human, even if at the moment they are in a latent form. If someone denies this argument, they need to account for why nonhuman fetuses do not have or develop human activities such as language, discursive thought, and so forth.

Finally, this view falsely assumes that consciousness is a physical act instead of a nonphysical cognitive power; but because it is a nonphysical power, ontologically inherent within the nature of a person, it is not dependent upon a physical brain. It could exist apart from a physical brain.

Argument That the Fetus Lacks Human Appearance

Some abortionists believe that a fetus is not a person and does not have rights until it has the appearance of a human being. Many pro-life advocates argue in the same way, though, claiming that because it looks like a human being, it must therefore have the same rights as a human being.

First, this view seems to forget the fact that an accidental or extrinsic characteristic does not change the essential substance of the being. In other words, one could still be a human being even if they do not have the appearance of what we typically see a human being have. For instance, there have been many individuals who have been badly burned or deformed in some type of an accident, and we still consider them human beings. This is because ontologically they are still human beings, even if their accidental qualities such as shape, color, size, and so forth do not bear the usual marks of a human being.

Second, this view assumes that a human being is reserved to a narrow and particular form. On the same ground one could argue that some children, adolescents, and mature adults are not human beings because they do not all look the same.

Finally, if appearance determines personhood or humanity, then it could lead to extreme forms of bigotry. This is exactly what Hitler did when he defined the Jews and all others who did not have blond hair and blue eyes to be nonpersons because they did not have characteristics that he defined as the proper human appearance.

Argument from Sentience (Ability to Feel Pain)

Some abortionists argue that a fetus does not become a person before being able to experience physical sensations such as pain. This view argues that when a being can feel pain, it has interests, and anything that has interests can be harmed." And because they can be harmed and have interests, they are human beings and have a right to life.

First, this view confuses *being* and *being affected*. Metaphysically the fetus does not undergo a substantive change from the moment of conception until death. This is because the *being* or the type of existence in accordance with the essence of the fetus is inherently the same throughout the whole of its life. The only thing that changes is the extrinsic accidental qualities.

Second, the *being* is only affected or changed in the sense that something can act upon the substance. In order for the fetus to experience sensations, it has to exist and have the potentiality or capacity to be acted upon in this manner. But the actions upon the being do not determine the essence of the being; rather, the essence of the being determines the actions or reactions that can flow from that being.

Third, this view fails to define what it might mean to "hurt" or "harm" an individual. Professor Foreman says, "Hurt implies an awareness of pain; harm is the obstruction or prevention of the legitimate interests of one party by the invasive actions of another party. You can harm someone without ever hurting them.... If the fetus already is a person, you are harming it by aborting it, whether it feels it or not.""

Argument from Lack of Viability

Many abortionists argue that a fetus becomes a person when it is viable or able to live outside the womb. The argument rests upon the notion that it is not a person until it is completely able to survive on its own. This was actually the argument used in *Roe v. Wade*.

First, pro-abortionists fail to understand the difference between substance and accidents. There is no substantial difference between the unborn before it is in the womb and after it leaves the womb.

Second, the viability of the unborn can change with the rise of medical progress. With the rise and improvement of medical procedures and capability, it is evident that unborn children are able to survive at much earlier terms. But again, this only credits the progress and improvements of medical technology, not the substantial nature of the unborn fetus.

Third, the same argument can be applied to many individuals outside the womb. For instance, is an individual still a human or a person if they are unable to live in

16.Ibid., 92.

17.Ibid., 93.

a certain environmental climate? If they cannot live in an extremely cold environment or in a place with no oxygen, are they still human beings? According to this view, these individuals would not be human beings or persons. This is because they cannot survive on their own in their own environment's

Argument from Gradualism

One writer summarizes the gradualism argument this way: "Gradualism is the view that says there is no one specific moment when personhood begins. Instead it is a gradual change that occurs over the entire pregnancy. In the beginning, at conception, there is no person and by the end, at birth, there is a person. There is no decisive moment *between* conception and birth, personhood slowly develops as the fetus develops?"

This argument seems to rest upon hypotheticals and logical absurdities that, if properly addressed, remove the strength of the argument. First, this view does not offer any evidence or criteria on why one could declare that an unborn child is not a person and a born child is a person. Rather, the view is contingent upon an arbitrary and personal declaration of personhood.

Second, again this view does not understand the difference between substantial and accidental change. The only difference ontologically and scientifically between an unborn fetus at conception and a baby at birth is its accidental or extrinsic physical features, not its substantial nature.

Third, if this view were true, it would lead to a logical contradiction. This is because a fetus would be both a person and not a person at the same time and in the same sense.

Finally, if this view were true, why would the development of personhood stop at birth? It seems as though if personhood can develop, an individual would be more of a person at fifty than at twenty-five. This is because there is no way for anyone to draw the line and declare when a person stops developing and actual personhood begins. Thus the same arguments used in favor of gradualism inside the womb of a mother can be used for an individual outside the womb of a mother."

Summary and Conclusion

The abortion debate focuses the whole issue of the sanctity of human life. Both Scripture and science support the view that an individual human life begins at conception, and both special and general revelation declare that it is wrong to kill an innocent human life. Furthermore, the same arguments used to justify abortion

18. Ibid., 94.

19. Ibid., 95.

20. Ibid., 96-97.

may also be used to justify infanticide and euthanasia. These reasons all violate the sanctity of human life.

Abortion is not just a threat to the unborn. As the English poet John Donne declared, 'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.' In America it tolls more than three thousand times per day, once every thirty seconds!

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INFANTICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

In the previous chapter, we dealt with the reasons for and against abortion. Nearly all the arguments pertaining to abortion are equally good arguments with reference to infanticide and euthanasia. Both deal with the same patient and have the same result (death), for most of the same reasons. For example, if it is justified to kill an unborn human because the fetus is not wanted, might be deformed, or might not be able to function fully as a human being, then by the same logic some infants and most of the elderly maybe eliminated for the same reason. Thus, if abortion is morally right, then so is infanticide and euthanasia for the same reasons. In short, 'today, no unwanted baby; tomorrow, no unwanted infant or grandparent?

Indeed, what follows logically is already beginning to actually happen. First it begins with the young and helpless, then it occurs with the elderly and helpless. The principal arguments on which both infanticide and euthanasia rest are already in play—legally—in abortion.

Passive Infanticide

Infanticide refers to the killing of an infant human being after birth. Active infanticide involves a procedure that actually *takes the* life of the infant. Passive infanticide simply *allows an infant to* die by withholding needed treatments. In the final analysis there is no real difference for the infant since it dies a preventable death.

In 1982, the Supreme Court in Indiana ruled that parents could permit their Down syndrome baby to starve to death. It is not an uncommon practice in hos-

pitals to allow deformed or handicapped infants to die without food, water, or treatment. Others get a DNR (do not resuscitate) order. A professor of pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin stated boldly, "It is common in the United States to withhold routine surgery and medical care from infants with Down Syndrome for the explicit purpose of hastening death..²¹ It is even more so today.

Active Euthanasia

Some infants are not merely allowed to die; procedures are actually employed to take their life. The most notorious of these is the so-called partial-birth abortion. Under this method, the baby is allowed to come out of the womb feet first until a hole can be drilled in its head and its brain sucked out. After many failed attempts to outlaw this form of active euthanasia, the Supreme Court ruled five to four against it (in the *Gonzales* 2007 case). Hidden from view are instances where the unwanted infant is drowned to death or suffocated. Again, both by logic and actual results, there is no real difference between taking the life of a born or an unborn human being. The main difference seems to be social acceptability, and that is fragile and quickly changing.

There are also numerous cases of botched abortions that result in a live baby. These have been disposed of by both active and passive forms of infanticide. But it matters not how the baby arrived here alive. Once a human is here, then any act to take their life or approve of procedures that will lead to their death is infanticide. And intentionally taking the life of an innocent young human is just as morally culpable as taking the life of an older human.

The Arguments for Active Infanticide

Imperiled Newborn Children and Who Should Make the Choke

It is argued by many in favor of infanticide that the parents should have the first and initial right to make the choice about imperiled children." Thus, if the parents do not want the imperiled child, then the child should not be born.

Imperiled Children Are Nonpersons

Many in favor of euthanizing imperiled children believe that they are human beings, but they *are not persons in the full sense* of the term. This is because they

21. N. Post, "Passive Euthanasia of Patients with Down's Syndrome," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 142 (December 13, 1982): 2295-96.

22:Imperiled children' are those born with an impairment that will cause death if not immediately treated. Not to repair it is a form of infanticide. By contrast, an Impaired child' is one born with an impairment that does not necessarily entail immediate death if left untreated.

do not exhibit self-consciousness or other human functions. Moreover, they also believe that these children will never have the ability to exhibit characteristic human activities.

The Quality of the Life of a Child

Some argue that it is morally permissible to euthanize (either through active or passive euthanasia) an imperiled child if it does not exhibit a *certain quality of life*. They insist that it is more merciful to kill a child in this condition than it is to allow them to suffer.

The Quality of Life of the Caregivers

A second form of the quality-of-life argument claims that it is morally permissible to euthanize an imperiled child if that child is going to infringe on the quality of life for the parents, community, government, the medical field, and so forth. This is because it would be more merciful to kill a child in this condition than to allow for the burdens to be placed on someone else.

Response to the Arguments for Active Infanticide

Parental Rights Do Not Mean Absolute Rights

First, the parental right to make the decision can be overridden if the decision is in conflict with a higher fundamental right (see chap. 7, "Graded Absolutism"). For instance, if the parents' choice severely endangers the health or life of a child, then their right can be overridden.

Second, it can be argued that the physicians and the legal system have a duty to override the parental decision in such cases. This is because physicians have the responsibility not to harm their patients, but to protect their best interests.

Third, these are still human beings, and they have the moral rights of a human being. We need to examine the direct cause of the imperiled newborn's death. If the direct cause is the doctor, then it is infanticide. If the direct cause is the disease or physical defect, then it is a natural death. But just because an individual does not exhibit all of the characteristics of a fully functioning human being does not mean that they are not human, but only that their human characteristics are in a latent or defective form.

Fourth, because the imperiled child is a human person, it would be infanticide to also withhold treatment of the child if it is known that medical intervention would fix the problem. For instance, some children are born with a closed esophagus, and through a simple medical procedure, this problem can be fixed. If the parents or the physicians in charge neglect to perform this treatment, they would be committing a form of infanticide.

Imperiled Children Are Still Persons

First, there is a distinction between *being* a human being and *functioning as* a human being. The view that imperiled children are nonpersons errs since it believes that actions *determine* essence instead of essence *determining* actions. One is a human being that exhibits human actions, not a bundle of actions that, when collected, become a human being.

Second, this view does not understand the difference between *being human* and being able to *function as a human*. In order for there to be any actions, there first must be a being that can exhibit those actions.

Third, the logic of this argument is not only valid for imperiled children but also for any individual at any stage of life who does not or cannot exhibit all of the characteristics that one deems to be human. If this were the case, then parents or any person with rights over an individual should be allowed to kill or allow them to die because they do not exhibit the characteristics of a human being. If this were the case, then many elderly, sick, bedridden, and other individuals who are not exhibiting human characteristics would be candidates to be euthanized.

Killing a Sufferer Is Not an Act of Mercy

Some individuals argue that it is morally permissible to euthanize (either through active or passive euthanasia) an imperiled child if it will not exhibit a *certain quality of life*. But when considered, this view fails for many reasons.

First, the "quality of life" is defined only vaguely. It is a subjective definition, and it will have subjective results. For a universal criterion, an objective definition of "quality of life" is needed.

Second, many times people who are suffering are not in a sufficiently healthy emotional state to make a proper decision about their condition.

Third, many people determine the quality of life from personal subjective experiences. For instance, what a poor person in a third-world country would consider quality housing will differ from the standards of someone raised in a rich family. In the same way, many individuals who are advocating the quality-of-life argument have a subjective rather than an objective standard on what determines a quality of life.

Fourth, it is wrong to assume that non-life is better than a life with suffering. It is a category mistake to affirm that non-life is better than an imperfect life or that life and non-life have something in common to enable us to compare them.

Fifth, much moral good can result from suffering. In *fact*, few enduring lessons in life are learned through pleasure, and most enduring lessons are learned through pain (Heb. 12:11). This is not to say that we should promote pain so that pleasure may come (by beating our head on the wall so that we may feel better when we stop!). But we can permit unavoidable or necessary suffering so that good may come—we do every time we go to the dentist! Suffering can produce good qualities such as patience (Rom. 5:3-4).

Sixth, the quality of life does not take precedence over the sanctity of *life*. *Life is a gift from God*. He gave it, and only he has the right to take it (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21). So allowing unavoidable suffering is *better* than killing the sufferer. We certainly should utilize available pain relief. Unnecessary pain is just that: unnecessary.

Finally, if advocates of the quality of life are wrong in their definition and practice, the result has fatal consequences. For if they are wrong, they are committing acts of infanticide, which is the killing of an innocent child.

It Is Not Merciful to Kill Another to Relieve My Burdens

The second form of the quality-of-life argument holds that it is morally permissible to euthanize an imperiled child if its suffering infringes on the quality of life for the parents, community, government, medical field, and so forth.

First, this view falls under the critiques for the quality-of-life view mentioned above.

Second, this view wrongly regards children as a means to an end, not as an end in themselves. But this violates a fundamental moral principle that persons should be treated as ends and not as means (*see* chap. 4, on Generalism).

Third, this view fails to recognize that we have a duty to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Certainly, suffering children fall into this category.

Fourth, if it is acceptable to kill a child just because they are a burden and will infringe on someone's quality of life, then one could argue that nearly any child at anytime would be a candidate for infanticide, especially when they are teenagers! At one time or another, most persons are a burden to the quality of life of someone else. So by this logic we could kill almost anyone at some time in their life.

Arguments against Infanticide

The arguments against infanticide are the same as those against homicide. The infant is an innocent human being. And it is morally wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being. Two reasons suffice. First, human beings are made in the image of God. So killing them is killing God in effigy. For "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, *for* God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6 RSV; man = humankind; cf. 1:27). The sixth commandment pointedly says, "You shall not commit murder" (Exod. 20:13 NEB).

The second reason for not killing an innocent human being is that God is sovereign over life. Only God gave life (Gen. 1:21), and only God has the right to take life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21). Just because an infant is not fully developed does not mean it is not fully human. As noted above, arguments to the contrary are fallacious because they are based on accidental differences, not substantial ones. An infant human is a human by essence, not by accidental characteristics. Here, intentional infanticide is a morally culpable form of homicide.

Active Euthanasia: Taking Lives to Avoid Suffering

Euthanasia means "good (or happy) death." There are two kinds of euthanasia: active and passive. The former is *taking a life* to avoid suffering, and the latter is simply *allowing death* to occur in order to avoid suffering.

Euthanasia can be either voluntary or not voluntary. In the voluntary kind, the patient consents to this death; in the latter, the patient does not consent. The death can be self-caused or caused by another. In the former case, it is a form of suicide; in the latter case, it is a homicide.

Those subjected to humanly initiated death can be young or old. The former is infanticide, and the latter is called euthanasia. In this section the discussion is concerned with active euthanasia, or the intentional taking of another life, whether by oneself or another, whether one is young or old. None of these are natural deaths; all are unnatural. They are not the result of natural processes, but are humanly initiated deaths.

The very word "euthanasia" gives a positive connotation to the act. It is an attempt to have a happy or painless death. The most basic reason for this is to avoid suffering, usually of a physical nature. The proponents of active euthanasia offer the following reasons in favor of it.

Arguments for Active Euthanasia

There is a moral right to die with dignity. It is argued that everyone has a right to die with dignity and that this is part of what it means to have a human kind of life. Death is a part of that life, albeit the last part. But a slow, painful, and merciless death is not a dignified death. Rather, it is a dehumanizing death, like that of an animal (or even a vegetable, in some cases). Thus, proponents of active euthanasia insist that it is a necessary means to guarantee a dignified death. Without it, we humans have no choice in our own destiny or demise. We have no control over catastrophe. We are mere pawns on the chessboard of pain.

The constitutional right of privacy includes death with dignity. The argument for euthanasia is an extension of the one used by the Supreme Court to justify abortion (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). The Court contends that there is a constitutional right to privacy implied in the Fourteenth Amendment. This guarantees a woman's right to have her unborn baby put to death by abortion. But if the right to privacy includes taking the life of the unborn, then why not also the life of the newly born by infanticide or the almost dead by euthanasia? If we have the constitutional right to decide who lives, then why not also the right to decide who dies?

It is an act of mercy to the sufferer. We shoot horses trapped in burning barns to prevent their suffering. Why not be at least as humane with humans? Not allowing euthanasia merely prolongs suffering. Why must we perpetuate human misery? The most compassionate thing to do is to put sufferers out of their misery. It is not kind or considerate to insist that one must go through endless pain for nothing. Mercy dictates that we alleviate the pain in the most effective and permanent way

possible, that we give a suffering person a good death. Indeed, the once governor Richard Lamm of Colorado asserted that as elderly people, "We've got a duty to die and get out of the way"

It is an act of mercy to the suffering family. The patient is not the only one suffering; the family suffers also. Hastening an inevitable death will not only relieve untold suffering for the patient but will also take an incalculable burden from the family. Their social sacrifice and psychological suffering can be every bit as great as the physical suffering of the one dying. Thus, it is also an act of mercy to the family to "pull the plug" In 1983 the Supreme Court of Indiana agreed with this reasoning and upheld the parents' right to allow 'Baby Doe' to starve to death. Defenders of the decision considered it the compassionate thing to do. The same logic applies to the elderly.

It relieves the family of heavy financial strain. Besides the social and psychological burden, the family also may be carrying a heavy financial load. Severe illness can wipe out a lifetime of savings in a short period. Often these are funds badly needed by the survivors for their own sustenance. At other times sickness can drain funds needed for the future education or health care of other members of the family. Hence, euthanasia not only is an act of mercy to the dying but also shows mercy to the living who are responsible for them.

It relieves society of a great social burden. As medical costs soar and the number of elderly increases in society, the burden of caring for the suffering increases. If the elderly have a duty to die and get out of the way, then *there* are now groups to help them. A voluntary euthanasia group in England is called Exit. In the United States one is called the Society for the Right to Die, and another is called the Hemlock Society. The founder of the latter group, Derek Humphry, helped his *wife* to commit suicide in England in 1975. The society's book *Let Me Die before I Wake* includes case studies of suicides as well as the amount of drugs necessary to end one's life. Humphry boasts, "We have made it respectable to debate and discuss euthanasia. We've also helped a lot of people die well."

It is the humane thing to do. Before a presidential commission appointed to study biomedical ethical issues (1982), philosopher Mary Anne Warren compared a severely disabled newborn child to a horse with a broken leg, which should be killed to spare it from the agony of a slow and painful death? Professor Peter Singer insists that "the life of a fetus is of no greater value than the life of a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality.... Now it must be admitted that these arguments apply to the newborn baby as much as to the fetus? Thus he concludes that "the life of a newborn baby is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a

23. toy. Lamm Asserts Elderly, If Very Ill, Have 'Duty to Die,' *New York Times*, March 29, 1984, final edition, sec. A.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/29/us/gowlamm.asserts.eldedriverrill.have.duty.to.die.html>.

24. Derek Humphry, *Reader*, June 29, 1983.

25. William Brennan, *The Abortion Holocaust: Today's Final Solution* (St. Louis: Landmark, 1983), 83.

chimpanzee?" A 1982 *Newsweek* article proclaimed in large print, "Biologists say infanticide is as normal as the sex drive—and that most animals, including man, practice it."²⁷ This logic applies also to the mentally impaired elderly.

Argument from autonomy. It is argued that people have an autonomous right to make their own decisions in all areas and aspects of life. This right also includes the right to determine the timing and type of their death. Many in support of euthanasia use this to argue that their decision to take their life is not wrong because it is their choice and they are not hurting anyone else.

Argument from the distinction between biographical and biological life. It is argued that there is a distinction between a person's biographical and biological life. A biographical life is one where the individual has certain aspirations, can make personal decisions, have human relationships, and so forth." On the basis of this distinction, it is reasoned that individuals may have biological life, but they do not have biographical life. And if they can no longer live the active kind of life that they desire, then they should be euthanized.

An Evaluation of Active Euthanasia

The response to these arguments from a Christian perspective has been strong, for they are based on utilitarian presuppositions that deny deeply held Christian convictions about the sovereignty of God and the sanctity of human life made in his *image*.

There is no moral right to kill an innocent human being. The euthanasia proponents assume that there is a moral right to intentionally kill an innocent human. But the Bible says, "You shall not kill" (Exod. 20:13 RSV). They believe that humankind is sovereign over human life, but Scripture declares that God is sovereign. "I put to death and I bring to life, ... and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. 32:39). As Job declared, "The **LORD** gave and the **LORD** has taken away" (Job 1:21). God created human life (Gen. 1:27), and he alone has the right to take it (Heb. 9:27). So the basic fallacy of active euthanasia is in presuming upon God's sovereign right over human life. The proponents presume to play God rather than simply to be human.

The Constitution gives no right to kill. First, there is no explicitly stated right to privacy in the U.S. Constitution; it is at best only implied. Second, even if there is an implied right of privacy, it does not take precedence over the emphatically stated right to life in the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments. *The Declaration of Independence* calls the right to life an "unalienable" right for all people, with which they are "endowed by their Creator." So the right to life is absolute, but the right to privacy is limited. For example, the Constitution grants no right to abuse children

26. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 122-23.

27. Sharon Begley, "Nature's Baby Killers," *Newsweek*, September 6, 1982, 78.

28. Mark W. Foreman, *Christianity and Bioethics: Confronting Clinical Issues* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 129.

or commit rape, even when it is done privately. And certainly there is no right to kill privately. But active euthanasia is killing. It is taking innocent human lives, and this is both unconstitutional and unchristian.

It is not merciful to kill a sufferer. First, the argument for euthanasia, like the argument for abortion, is misdirected. Killing an unborn human does not avoid child abuse; it is abuse of the worse kind! Likewise, killing deformed infants and suffering adults does not avoid human misery; it inflicts the misery of death. Second, even if euthanasia avoids more suffering, this does not justify it. The end does not justify any means; the end only justifies *good* means. And killing innocent people is not a good act; it is evil (Exod. 20:13). Third, if any good end (avoiding suffering) justifies the means (killing), then killing abortion and euthanasia proponents could save millions of lives. Yet no euthanasia proponent would allow this.

Much can be learned through suffering. Much of the pro-euthanasia rhetoric emphasizes the avoidance of suffering, calling it a great evil to be avoided at all costs, even the cost of one's life. This is not a Christian view of suffering. James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4). The apostle Paul told the Christians at Rome, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3-4).

Far from being an evil to avoid at all costs, suffering can be a time of refining and character building (Job 23:10). James said of Job's suffering that "the Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (5:11). Surely "no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11).

There is no price tag on human life. The pro-euthanasia argument concerning the relief of financial strain is based on the fallacious premise that a price tag can be placed on human life. It wrongly assumes that we should protect and preserve *life* only if we can afford it. But this is materialist, not moral. It is a confusion of categories. No material value can be placed on a spiritual value such as life made in God's image. Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36). One human life is more valuable than anything in this world (Matt. 6:26). Hence, to argue that we should take life in order to save money is a distorted and materialist view of human life.

The end does not justify the means. The same basic utilitarian errors (see chap. 4 also) lie behind the argument that euthanasia will relieve society of a great burden. First, this overlooks the intrinsic value of an individual human life. Second, it wrongly assumes that the end justifies the means (killing). Third, it calculates results in only material and not spiritual terms. Fourth, euthanasia can be a tyrannical tool (consider Hitler) with which to rob millions of their human rights.

Humans are not animals. Another fatal assumption behind the pro-euthanasia arguments is that humans are basically animals. Thus, just as we weed out and breed

out undesired traits in animals, even so we should eliminate undesired strains in the human race. Yet actually, the reason a Christian could shoot a horse hopelessly trapped in a burning barn but not kill a suffering human being is precisely because a human is not a horse! Once we reduce human beings to mere animals, then a host of horrendous evils follow logically, including human experimentation, killing AIDS victims, and even genocide. But even the most ardent proponents of euthanasia oppose these practices.

Indeed, Hitler applied a similar logic to human beings. The result was one of the largest mass murders in human history. He left an estimated eleven million dead Jews and other "unfit" members in the wake of his evolutionary ethic, which demanded weeding out inferior breeds of humankind."

Response to the argument from autonomy. On the surface this argument seems to be in favor of a person's autonomous rights, but in actuality it is an argument against their autonomous rights." There are several reasons for this.

First, just because those considering suicide or using euthanasia are not hurting anyone else does not relieve them from the moral obligation not to hurt any person, including themselves. The moral law demands that we not hurt any person. But candidates for suicide or euthanasia are persons. Hence, all are morally obligated not to hurt themselves or others.

Second, their view of autonomy is distorted and overextended. People do have a certain right to their own bodies, but this does not mean they have the right to do anything with it that they want to do. Just because they have the "unalienable right to life" (as in *The Declaration of Independence*) does not mean they have the right to death, the right to kill their body.

Third, this argument overlooks God's sovereignty over life. The Bible declares that "the LORD gives and the LORD takes away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21 NEB; cf. Deut. 32:39). Even general revelation informs us that we are not the creator of our life. Hence, it does not belong to us (Acts 14:17; 17:24-25). We did not create life, and therefore we have no right to take an innocent life, even our own.

Fourth, in order for a person to have a "right to die it would have to be a natural right because no legal rights to die have been established. But it would be self-defeating to say that a person has a natural right to die because of nature's inclination toward preservation. As one writer said, "For one to argue that one has a right to die is to argue that one has the right to annihilate the very basis of all rights including the right to die. Therefore, to propose such an annihilation would ultimately be self-defeating.""

Fifth, to say that one has rights is to presuppose that someone is obligated to uphold those rights. This means that if a person has a right to die, then physicians

29. See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. James Murphy (1924; reprint, London: Hurst & Blackett, 1939), 239-40.

30. Foreman, *Christianity anti Bioethics*, 124-25. 31. *ibid.*, 124.

(and/or the state) are obligated to kill their patients when their patients insist on it. But this is clearly against the main premise of the argument, that a person has autonomous rights. The right to eliminate all rights (by suicide) is not a right but a wrong: it is an act of freedom by which someone eliminates any further acts of freedom.

Finally, as one writer said, "If the argument from autonomy is valid and can really stand on its own, then one would have to argue that any autonomous individual at any time has the right to die and, as we argued, has the right to ask others for help.... Even most suicide advocates would disagree [with this extreme view of autonomy], ... yet if one agrees with the view of autonomy that is offered here, one must take this position to remain consistent."³²

Response to the argument from the distinction between biographical and biological life First, the basic problem with this argument is its failure to recognize that actions do not determine humanness, but essence does. Some elderly and ill have lost certain functions associated with human personhood, but it does not mean they are less than human. They still have a human nature, even though they lack the ability to express it in certain human actions. The lack of these functions does not make them nonhuman. Rather, it is the presence of a human nature that makes them human.

Second, the definition of a biographical life is too broad and subjective. It lacks a real objective standard by which biographical *life* can be determined. For one person's goals and aspirations are different from another's. But if this is going to be a universal argument, then it needs a universal criterion by which to judge and determine the standards by which euthanasia can be determined.

Finally, if certain elderly or ill individuals have lost their status as real human beings, then they have lost their moral rights as well. The implications of this distinction mean that persons in this condition would be proper candidates for experimental and medical treatments and so forth." But it is clear from the person's reaction and that of most family members that they do not like to have experimental medical treatments performed on them or on their family members.

Different Kinds of Passive Euthanasia

Now that we have examined and evaluated active euthanasia from a Christian perspective, it is time to look at what is often called passive euthanasia. Two distinct views go by this name and must be differentiated.

Active euthanasia means to *produce* death. Passive euthanasia, on the other hand, means to *allow* death. The former is morally wrong, but the latter may be

32. Ibid., 125.

33. Ibid., 130-31.

morally right, depending on whether it results from withholding natural means of sustaining life or from withdrawing unnatural means of resisting irreversible sickness. Passive euthanasia that withdraws natural means of life support in order to "allow" the death is called unnatural passive euthanasia. Passive euthanasia that withdraws unnatural life support is called natural passive euthanasia.

Unnatural Passive Euthanasia

Unnatural passive euthanasia is allowing someone to die by deliberately withholding natural means of sustaining life. Natural means are normal methods of life sustenance such as food, water, and air. Unnatural means include mechanical devices such as respirators and artificial organs. In view of this distinction, an important point must be made: not all so-called passive euthanasia is morally justified from a Christian point of view. For example, withholding food is passive euthanasia, for by "allowing" the person to die, one is really responsible for taking their life. This is morally wrong.

Natural Passive Euthanasia

Since the withholding of food, air, and water leads directly to the person's death, it is negligent homicide. On the other hand, withholding unnatural means leads only indirectly to the individual's death. So withholding natural means is tantamount to active euthanasia, since the act leads directly to the death of the individual. Hence, when we speak about morally justified cases of passive euthanasia, we are referring only to those that fall into the category of *natural passive euthanasia*. Only in cases of irreversible disease should a person be allowed to die naturally by withholding unnatural life-sustaining equipment.

A Question of Worldview

The debate over euthanasia is basically a clash of worldviews. From a secular humanist perspective, euthanasia makes sense; within a Judeo-Christian context, it is morally unacceptable. In order to understand the differences, it will be helpful to contrast them in table 10.1.

TABLE 10.1
The Non-Judeo-Christian
and Judeo-Christian Worldviews

Non-Judeo-Christian View	Judeo-Christian View
No Creator	A Creator
Humans not created	Humans are created
No God-given values	God-given values
Humankind determines right	Humankind discovers right

Arguments against Unnatural Passive Euthanasia

It Is Contrary to God's Sovereignty over Life

Both active euthanasia and unnatural passive euthanasia (such as starving someone to death) are a direct human cause of death. This is morally unacceptable from a Christian perspective because it rejects God's sovereignty over human life. According to the Bible, God is the Creator and owner of all things (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 24:1). He made humans in his own image (Gen. 1:27) and holds them responsible to him for human life.

When Cain killed Abel, the blood of Abel cried directly to God for vengeance (Gen. 4:10). God told Moses, "I put to death and I bring to life, ... and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Lev. 24:17). When Pharaoh challenged God's sovereignty, saying, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him?" he soon found the answer when God took the life of all Egypt's firstborn sons, including Pharaoh's (Exod. 5:2; 11:4-7; 12:29). When God (through Moses) produced life out of the dust, the magicians of Pharaoh cried out, "This is the finger of God" (Exod. 8:19). God alone is sovereign over life. And since human life is in his image, he has placed a social sanction upon it. God alone created human life, and God alone has the right to take an innocent life. Euthanasia is an attempt to preempt God of his sovereign right over human life.

It Is Contrary to the Sanctity of Human Life

Not only is God sovereign over human life, but human life is also sacred. Humans are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). Because of this, it is wrong to kill an innocent human being. When bloodshed and violence filled the earth, God destroyed it with a flood (Gen. 6:11, 17) and then instituted human government with the authority of capital punishment. The reason for this was stated explicitly by God: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6; man = humankind). Human life is sacred and godlike. For this reason it is even wrong to curse another human being (James 3:9).

Unlike animals, human beings are rational (Col. 3:10; Jude 10), moral beings. They resemble God and are morally responsible to him (Gen. 2:16-17). They can be holy as he is holy (Lev. 11:44) and are exhorted to moral perfection, just as their "heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Because of the sacredness of human life, God has forbidden any person to kill another, for such a killer thereby indirectly attacks God.

It Is a Form of Suicide or Murder

Scripture is emphatic in proclaiming that murder is wrong. It is one of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13). The penalty for violating this command is death (Exod. 21:12-13). Since suicide is also a form of homi-

cide, it too comes under the prohibition against murder. Killing oneself is both a rejection of God's sovereignty over life and an attack upon the sanctity of life. It matters not whether the human life is our own or another's; it is still in God's image, and he is sovereign over it. Euthanasia is either voluntary or not voluntary. But whether it is self-inflicted or inflicted by another, it is still a form of homicide. In either case, the Bible prohibits it.

It Is Specifically Condemned in Scripture

Even the most desperate believer in the Bible who wished to die never contemplated taking his own life but prayed, like Jonah, "O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life" (Jon. 4:3 NASB; cf. Job 3). And the few cases of suicide recorded in the Bible are condemned by God. King Saul's suicide is a case in point (1 Sam. 31; 2 Sam. 1). So horrible was the crime that Saul's armor bearer refused to obey his mortally wounded master's command to kill Saul. As a result, "Saul took his own sword and fell on it" (1 Sam. 31:4). The same is true of Abimelech's assisted suicide (Judg. 9:54), of which the Bible says, "Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done" (v. 56).

Suicide is a particularly abhorrent crime because it not only violates God's sovereignty and life's sanctity but reflects a refusal to take responsibility for the life that God has entrusted to us. It fails to show the basic self-respect of which Paul spoke when he declared, "No one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it" (Eph. 5:29).

It Is Based on a Humanistic Ethic

Humanist Manifesto II specifically recommends abortion, suicide, and euthanasia. This flows naturally from humanists' rejection of God-given values and acceptance of a situational ethic. They claim that "the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantee of human values." This follows from their belief that "the universe is self-existing and not created"³⁴ If there is no Creator, then he cannot be the source or guarantor of any values. Thus it would follow, as they claim, that "moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction."³⁵

Once God and God-given values are denied, then Fyodor Dostoyevsky (d. 1881) was right in *The Brothers Karamazov* when he claimed that if God is dead, then "everything is lawful." Indeed, the Humanist Manifesto II goes on to demand "an individual's right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide."³⁶ This actually confirms what is logically inherent in their position, that euthanasia follows

34. Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifestos and II* (Soffit: Prometheus, 1973), 8.

35. *Ibid.*, 17.

36. *Ibid.*, 19.

from a denial of divine sanctions on human life. Conversely, if God has created humanity in his image, then the reality of God is the basis for the sanctity of life and the dignity of humans. Since a secular humanistic ethic rejects this, it destroys the barriers that protect human life.

It Cheapens the Value of Human Life

Euthanasia, like abortion that leads to it (see chap. 9), cheapens the value of human life. A classic example is that of Dr. Bernard N. Nathanson, who operated one of the largest abortion clinics in the Western world, responsible for killing some sixty thousand unborn babies. According to his own testimony, what guided him was "a humanistic philosophy drawn from modern biological data, not from religious creeds."³⁷ Using his own "humanistic" ethic, Nathanson was dehumanized by the process of performing abortions. Euthanasia is even more dehumanizing since, unlike abortion, the actual death is not usually seen by the doctor or nurses.

A society cannot engage in the wholesale slaughter of innocent life without paying a sobering price. The value of life is significantly cheapened by such callous disregard for human beings. When we do not respect life before birth, it affects our attitude toward life after birth. When we do not respect the dying, it affects our attitude toward the living. Human life is a continuous and communal web. "For none of us lives to himself [or herself] alone and none of us dies to himself [or herself] alone" (Rom. 14:7). Hence, what affects one member of the race affects all.

It Produces Guilt in the Family and Society

The decision to remove artificial life support from a loved one is a heavy load to bear, even when, as in some cases of indirect passive euthanasia, it maybe morally justified. But when it is a humanly initiated act deliberately aimed at extinguishing a life that God in his sovereignty has not chosen to take, then the load of guilt is heavy. A society that permits the slaughter of innocents, whether young or old, will bear this heavy load of guilt.

Discussion of Natural Passive Euthanasia

Taking a human life by euthanasia is morally wrong no matter how well intended the motives are for doing so. It is always wrong to intentionally take another innocent human life as such. However, it is not always wrong to allow someone to die, especially if it is a natural death. Yet withholding food and water to starve a person to death is murder, even though it is by definition a form of passive euthanasia. This is because withholding these natural life-sustaining elements leads

37. Bernard N. Nathanson, *Aborting America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 259.

directly to death. However, this leaves open the discussion of when, if ever, it is morally right to withhold unnatural life-sustaining means and allow someone to die naturally.

Some Important Differences

As we have already seen, taking a human life by infanticide or euthanasia is never right, but allowing someone to die is not always wrong. If we "allow" a person to die by deliberately withholding food and water, then it is murder, even though it is called "passive" euthanasia. This is because the action leads directly to death. But withholding unnatural means of sustaining life is not always wrong. It now remains to discuss precisely where the line is drawn between cases of passive euthanasia that are justified and those that are not. Table 10.2. summarizes the situation.

TABLE 10.2	
Active and Passive Euthanasia	
Active Euthanasia	Passive Euthanasia
Taking life	Allowing death by withholding
	natural means unnatural means

Guidelines for the Decision

It is never right either to take a life or to withhold ordinary life-sustaining means such as food, water, and air. The only time allowing a death can be justified is when we are withdrawing unnatural lifesaving mechanisms or for cases of irreversible disease. There are times when the heroic use of unnatural means is a hindrance, not a help, to the process of natural death, which is under God's sovereign hand (Eccles. 3:2; Heb. 9:27). This is when extraordinary human efforts are really prolonging death rather than prolonging life. When artificial life supports are interfering with the natural process of death rather than enriching the person's natural life, then their use is wrong. It is resisting the hand of God, which is involved in the very process of death.

Keeping a comatose person alive by a machine, one who has an incurable disease and is irreversibly dying, is unnecessary. In fact, it could be viewed as unethical because it is opposing the very processes of natural mortality, which God has ordained. God has appointed that all must die (Gen. 2:16-17; Rom. 5:12). He has declared that there are natural limits to life (Ps. 90:10). Hence, extraordinary efforts to fight the divinely appointed limits of our mortality are really working in opposition to God.

Usually the most important decision is the one made to put a person on a life-sustaining machine. Sometimes this is unnecessary, and it creates a later ethical dilemma concerning when the machine should be disconnected. Life has become so mechanized that technology has created its own new morality. The scientific advances that have made the extension of life possible have also made the process

of dying longer; technology is a mixed blessing. Hence, an important moral decision should be made at a very early stage concerning whether it is necessary to put someone on a life-support machine or not.

Who makes these crucial decisions to connect individuals to or disconnect them from a life-sustaining machine? Some guidelines are in order.

The disease must be irreversible. No one should be allowed to die if we have the means at hand to save that life. If possible, correctable situations should be corrected. Unless the process of the disease is irreversible, even natural passive euthanasia is not justifiable.

The patient has veto power. First and foremost, the patient who is conscious and rational thus has veto power over any decision not to extend one's life by artificial means. If the patient is not conscious, then all other things being equal, one's living will on the matter should be respected. If the patient is not conscious and has expressed no will on the matter previously, then others responsible for the patient must make the decision. In short, representative decisions for the unconscious patient, but not substitute decisions, can be made regarding procedures.

A collective decision. But who should make the decision when others cannot make it for themselves? The Bible says there is wisdom in joint decisions (Num. 35:30; Prov. 24:6). Since there are spiritual, legal, moral, and family implications to the decision, it seems wise to consider all aspects. So the decision should not be made until there is consent from pastor, doctor, lawyer, and family members. But even before this—pray. God should be consulted first, before any decision is contemplated. After all, he is sovereign and supernatural. It may be God's will to heal, and he is waiting for us to ask (James 4:2.; 5:14-15). God is able to perform miracles, and he should be sought first on behalf of the sufferer. But if after fervent and repeated prayer, medical science is not able to improve a patient's condition and God does not perform a miracle, then we must rest assured that God's grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:9).

An Evaluation of Natural Passive Euthanasia in Irreversible Sickness

Even in this carefully circumscribed sense of limited passive euthanasia, there are some significant problems. The two most prominent ones deal with the meaning of "Irreversible" and "unnatural means."

What Does Dying Mean?

The definition of "irreversible" is important to the decision because it circumscribes the legitimate occasions when withholding extraordinary means is called for. In practical terms a condition is "irreversible" when there are no known available medical means to correct the injury or disease process leading to death. In other words, there is no medical hope for recovery, and it is only a matter of

time before a person dies. Medically, this means that even the best unnatural (mechanical) means will not stop death.

What Are Unnatural Means?

Natural means include food, water, and oxygen. Unnatural means include a respirator, an artificial heart, a kidney machine, or the like. However, certain things do not clearly fall into one of these two categories, such as intravenous feeding, oxygen masks, and antibiotics, and thus pose a problem. Although intravenous feeding is not natural in the sense of being produced by nature, neither is it purely artificial, since it is food, and food is a natural means of sustaining life. Hence, withdrawing someone's intravenous feeding can be tantamount to starving them to death. The same would apply to artificially supplied oxygen. In these cases the morality of the decision will be conditioned by the availability of the technology. Obviously, if the special equipment is not available, there is no moral obligation to use it. The same is true of all technology and drugs. Heroic efforts with unnatural means are not a moral duty when one is irreversibly ill.

Is It Unmerciful Not to Relieve Pain by Death?

Are not some people suffering so intensely that only death will relieve their pain? Isn't it unmerciful to refuse to relieve their extreme pain? In response, several things should be recognized. First, the Bible provides an answer to this question. Solomon wrote:

Give strong drink to him who is perishing,
and wine to those in bitter distress;
let them drink and forget their poverty,
and remember their misery no more. (Prov. 31:6-7 RSV)

Although strong drink is condemned as a beverage that causes drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; Isa. 5:11), it is recommended as a medicine for those who are dying so that it can relieve them of their suffering. In brief, the Bible recommends that the dying should be shot with a sedative but not with a bullet.

What If Pain Relievers Hasten Death?

Sometimes the treatment used to reduce pain (e.g., morphine) also hastens death. Is this then an unjustified use of passive euthanasia? Not necessarily. In such cases the principle of double effect maybe invoked. Where two effects, one good and one evil, follow from the same action, it is our moral responsibility to will the good one. The evil effect is simply a necessary concomitant of the good action that is taken; there is no moral culpability for it. For example, when it is necessary to amputate a gangrenous leg, there are two effects. First, the life of the individual can be saved.

Second, the body will be mutilated and handicapped. But this evil consequence of amputation is offset by the saving of a life. Likewise, sometimes the pain is so great that the medicine necessary to counter it will also hasten death. Patients sometimes die from surgery, but the potential benefits outweigh the risks.

Is There a Right to Refuse Treatment?

Many moral dilemmas are created by the decision to place persons on lifesaving mechanical devices. Is it morally wrong to refuse this kind of treatment? In responding to this, an important distinction should be made: the difference between repairing life to function naturally and sustaining life artificially. Under most circumstances, it certainly is morally wrong to refuse treatment that would save one's life. Lifesaving is an essential part of the medical service. Refusing treatment for cuts and wounds that could cause one's death is tantamount to suicide. These are all ordinary medical treatments. It is the extraordinary treatment, involving life-sustaining or life-prolonging mechanisms, that is the question.

While there is clearly a moral obligation to accept treatment to repair life, there is no absolute obligation to accept treatment that would sustain life artificially. We should accept treatment that would preserve life, but we need not accept treatment that really will only prolong death. There would be, for example, no moral duty for Christians to take a pill (if it were available) to double their life span. Likewise, there is no absolute moral duty to take kidney dialysis or even chemotherapy. It may be desirable or even wise to accept such treatment, but it is not morally necessary as such. One can *accept* the natural consequences of disease and mortality that God has appointed (Gen. 3; Rom. 5). Indeed, eventually we must all do so.

Summary and Conclusion

"Euthanasia" means good or painless death. Active euthanasia is taking a human life, and passive euthanasia is simply allowing death. The former is morally wrong from a Christian perspective, but the latter may be morally acceptable, as long as it is a natural and irreversible death, not an unnatural or reversible one.

Natural passive euthanasia is allowing death to occur naturally by withholding unnatural means of sustaining life, such as heart-and-lung machines. Natural means of sustaining life include food, water, and air. Deliberately withholding these is unnatural passive euthanasia, and it is morally unacceptable from a Christian perspective.

Even in morally acceptable natural passive euthanasia, there are difficult decisions. It should be exercised only when someone is irreversibly dying, and then not against the patient's expressed will. Also, the decision should be by consensus of pastor, doctor, lawyer, and family. God should be sought first and repeatedly in prayer for healing. When the course of death is medically irreversible and no

divine intervention is forthcoming, it is morally justified to stop unnatural efforts to prolong the process of dying.

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BIOMEDICAL ISSUES

Technology has created new ethical issues. Artificial insemination, test-tube babies, surrogate mothers, organ transplantation, organ harvesting, gene-splicing, and cloning are all medical realities. There is no longer a question of whether they *can* be done; it is only a question of whether they *ought* to be done. Here again the viewpoints can be broadly divided between two categories: a secular humanist approach and a Judeo-Christian perspective. There are intramural debates in each camp that will emerge as the discussion unfolds.

A Secular Humanist Perspective: Playing God

Nowhere are the lines of demarcation between the secular humanist and Christian perspectives clearer than in biomedical issues. This is because ethical decisions are not made in a vacuum. They are made from within a worldview. And it is in the human role of deciding what is right and wrong that the two positions are most evidently in conflict. The differences are summarized in table 11.1. Given these differences, conflicts are inevitable. Such conflicts manifest themselves in many areas of biomedical concern. These will become evident as the two positions unfold in our discussion.

TABLE 11.1
The Judeo-Christian and Secular Humanist Worldviews

Judeo-Christian	Secular Humanist
There is a Creator.	There is no Creator.
Humankind was specially created.	Humankind evolved from animals.
God is sovereign over life.	Humankind is sovereign over life.

Judeo-Christian	Secular Humanist
Sanctity of life is a key principle.	Quality of life is a key principle.
The end does not justify the means. The end justifies the means.	

Secular humanists have stated their beliefs repeatedly and clearly. Their Humanist Manifestos (1933; 1973) support abortion, euthanasia, and suicide. They speak glowingly about technology and emphatically deny that there is any God in control. They affirm: "We need to extend the uses of scientific method.... Confronted by many possible futures, we must decide which to pursue." They disavow any Creator or divine aid, boasting, "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves."^{1z} Hence, they "affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanctions." From this context several crucial elements of their position emerge in relation to biomedical issues.

Humans Are Responsible for the Quality of Life

Paul Kurtz, the author of Humanist Manifesto II, set forth the humanist position well in *Forbidden Fruit*:

We, not God, are responsible for our destiny. Accordingly we must create our own ethical universes. We should seek to transform a blind and conscious morality into a rationally based one, retaining the best wisdom of the past but devising new ethical principles and judging them by their consequences and testing them in the context of lived *experience*.'

One consequence to be kept in mind is the "quality of life which according to Kurtz can justify in vitro fertilization and even active euthanasia.' Indeed, the same principle is behind the right to abortion and the right to suicide.[§]

Genetic improvement of the race is also based on the so-called quality-of-life principle. Nobel prizewinner Dr. James Watson argued that no newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment: "If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then all parents could be allowed the choice ... [to] allow the child to die ... and save a lot of misery and suffering,

1. Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifestos I and II* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1973), 14.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ibid., 17.
4. Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988), 18.
5. Ibid., 217, 222.
6. Ibid., 217, 220.
7.J. C. Willke and Barbara Willke, *Abortion: Questions and Answers* (Cincinnati: Hayes, 1985), 204.

Individuals Have Sovereignty over Their Own Lives

For secular humanists, God is not sovereign over life—humankind is. Each individual has the right to live and the right to die. Although most humanists encourage life, they insist that they have the right to end it as well. Thus suicide and voluntary euthanasia are defended as moral rights. Ironically enough, abortion is also considered a right; this generally is based on the grounds of the mother's freedom of choice. Although some admit that the unborn are human, others confess difficulty in knowing when human life begins. Some claim that human life does not begin until birth, and others say it begins when one becomes a self-conscious individual, which normally occurs at nearly two years of age.

Euthanasia is another manifestation of the humanist's belief that the individual is sovereign over their own life. This belief has given rise to voluntary euthanasia groups like the Society for the Right to Die and the Hemlock Society, whose book *Let Me Die before I Wake* provides information for those who wish to commit suicide. Its founder, Derek Humphry, boasts that he has helped make euthanasia respectable and also helped a lot of people die well."⁸

The Duty to Create a Superior Race

All secular humanists believe in biological evolution. Many believe that because humans have advanced to such a technological level, they have a duty to guide the future evolution of the race. For some, the hope goes beyond a bionic human to genetically engineered humans. Gene-splicing holds the promise of creating and patenting new animals. Sperm banks, artificial insemination, and surrogate mothers now make it possible to breed superior human beings. The ultimate goal is a human being totally engineered to specifications, the creation of a superior breed. Prenatal tests can already warn parents of genetically impure offspring, and abortion can eliminate them. The final goal is for a completely fabricated human being.

One signer of Humanist Manifesto II, Joseph Fletcher, believes that coercive or compulsory genetic control is justified in cases where carriers of genetic disease do not abstain voluntarily from having children. Here the end justifies the means. That is, the goal of a genetically purified race justifies the compulsory sterilization necessary to achieve it.

The End Justifies the Means

In *Situation Ethics*, Fletcher states flatly, "Only the end justifies the means; nothing else" Although few humanists are this frank, most operate on the same principle, particularly when it comes to advances in medical science. For example, when it was discovered that brain tissue from aborted babies could aid in treating Parkinson's disease, this good end was considered by many to be justification for

8. Derek Humphry, *Reader*, June 29, 1983.

9. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 120.

the means necessary to obtain the tissue (from an aborted baby). The brisk business in organ transplants has likewise created a need for more organs. Since fresh tissues are better, tissues are taken from live babies aborted by hysterotomy.

Because the advancement of medical science depends on experimentation, many have taken advantage of the abortion business to use the live babies for experimentation. Some scientists speak openly of growing fetuses for spare parts.

An Evaluation of the Humanist Biomedical Ethic

The humanists' approval of certain biomedical procedures for the supposed benefit of the individual or the race flows from their presuppositions. If there is no God and the human is simply a higher animal, then there seems to be no logical reason to deny many of their conclusions. There are, however, some good rational grounds for challenging their presuppositions.

The Quality-of-Life Principle Is Utilitarian

The so-called quality-of-life principle is a thinly veiled form of utilitarianism. In addition to the arguments already given against ethical utilitarianism (see chap. 4), there are good reasons for rejecting this medical form of it. First, what does "quality of life" mean? Is it a physical, social, or spiritual quality? If a combination, then in what proportion? Often it is an ill-defined and ambiguous catchall term used to justify actions that lack any proper ethical quality whatsoever. Second, who decides what "quality" means? The patient? The doctor? Society? Third, which people receive this "quality" treatment? On what basis do we discriminate? Age? Race? Social rank? Fourth, how do we know for sure what procedures will bring about this elusive quality of life? One would have to be God in order to know all the factors necessary to predict that our genetic tinkering would really improve the race. It might cure some problems and cause greater ones.

We Are Not Sovereign over Life

The Bible makes it unmistakably clear that we are not sovereign over our own life. "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21). God said to Moses, "I put to death and I bring to life" (Deut. 32:39). God created life (Gen. 1:21, 27), and he alone sustains it (Acts 17:28). Hence, we have no right to take innocent life (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 20:13).

But in addition to these scriptural truths, there are many other obvious reasons for concluding that we do not possess sovereignty over life. First, it is evident to all that we did not create life. Life was here before humankind arrived on earth, and human life clearly did not begin as a result of human activity. Second, in spite of all our medical advances, we cannot avoid death. This too is out of human hands. Third, humans have not been able to create life, certainly not human life. Thus far

human brilliance has produced only some biologically interesting chemicals (e.g., amino acids) and crossed and spliced existing forms of life. But humans have not created from scratch their own new living things, to say nothing of a full-fledged human being.

Even if we could produce some simple forms (and therefore had some kind of claim on them), there is no realistic prospect of creating anything like a human *life*. But if we did not bring human life into this world, then we have no right to claim sovereignty over when it leaves. The secular humanist pretension to sovereignty over life collapses in the face of the facts of life.

There Is No Duty to Produce a Superior Race

Evolutionists often boast of their desires to forward the evolutionary process and produce a superior race. Indeed, the subtitle of Darwin's famous book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) has racist overtones: *The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. Carrying Darwin's idea forward, Adolf Hitler used natural selection as his model for producing the superior race. He wrote, "If nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one.' Why? "Because in such a case all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being, may thus be rendered futile."¹⁰ The famous evolutionist Julian S. Huxley (d. 1975) contended, "In the light of evolutionary biology man can now see himself as the sole agent of further evolutionary advance on this planet, and one of the few possible instruments of progress in the universe at large:' Huxley sees man as "the business manager for the cosmic process of evolutionf"

Yet for several reasons, the exaggerated expectations of producing a superior race are unfounded. First, there is no real evidence that the present race was produced by any naturalistic evolutionary process. Both Scripture and the scientific evidence point to God as the cause of the human species.¹² Second, science, with all its technology and touted brilliance, has not been able to permanently improve even a fruit fly. We have a long way to go to "improve" humankind. Third, even if we could make permanent changes in the human species, there is no ethical reason why we should. "Can" does not imply "ought" any more than "is" implies "ought.' Just because we can do something does not mean that we should do it. Ability does not imply morality. Fourth, even if we were able actually to produce changes in the human species, how would we know they were better, not merely different? By what standard would we judge them better? It would beg the question

10. Adolf Hider, *Mein Kampf*, trans. James Murphy (1924; reprint, London: Hurst & Blaciccett, 1939), 2.39-40.

11. Julian S. Huxley, *Essays of a Biologist* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1939), 132.

12. Norman L. Geisler and J. Kerby Anderson, *Origin Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 127-57.

to answer, "by the desired human standard.' For the secular humanist, as we will see, there is no revealed standard that sanctions such a procedure.

The End Does Not Justify the Means

Since the "end justifies the means" ethic has already been critiqued (see chaps. 3 and 4), we will only summarize the problems here. First, ends do not justify means. Means must have their own justification. Second, even ends need justification. Not every goal is good, even if it is highly desired by many people. Many Germans desired the obliteration of the Jews, but this desire does not justify it. Third, if good ends justified any means, then killing political dissenters to produce greater national harmony would be justifiable, and killing AIDS patients in order to curb the spread of this deadly disease would be morally justified. Simple reflection reveals numerous similar illustrations of morally unacceptable consequences that would follow from applying such an ethic.

A Christian Perspective on Biomedical Ethics: Serving God

While the humanist approach to biomedical ethics is to play God, the Christian approach is to use medical advances to serve God. Humanists believe that humankind is sovereign over life; Christians hold that God is sovereign over life. This certainly does not mean that there is no role for technology and medicine to improve human life. It means, rather, that we do not use this wisdom to create human life. This accumulated learning should be used to cultivate what God has given but not to control it.

A comparison of the two approaches to biomedical issues will help to focus the differences and serve as a springboard for articulating the basic principles of a Christian approach to biomedical issues. Table 11.2 notes the major differences.

Tans 11.2	
Christian and Humanist Approaches to Biomedical Issues	
Christian View: Serving God	Humanistic View: Playing God
Voluntary treatment	Compulsory treatment
Improving human life	Creating human life
Repairing human life	Re-creating human life
Maintenance of life	Engineering of life
Genetic fitness	Genetic fabrication
Cooperation with nature	Control over nature
Conformity to nature	Power over nature

There is a marked difference between Christian and humanist approaches to biomedical ethics. Christians believe that God is sovereign over life; humanists

think humankind is sovereign. Hence, Christians believe that we should serve God, not play God. Treatment should always be voluntary, not compulsory. The medical task is to improve life, not to create it. God has only made us the maintenance crew, not the engineers of life. Our goal is the more modest one of genetic fitness, not the grandiose one of genetic fabrication. We work in cooperation with nature, not to have control over it. We conform to nature as God's creation; we do not seek power over it as our creation. In short, the legitimate role of the Christian in biomedical areas is therapeutic, not eugenic.

Some Basic Fallacies Exposed

Some basic assumptions in the modern humanistic approach to biomedical ethics need to be exposed and analyzed from a Christian perspective. Often they are implied, not stated. But they are operative nonetheless.

What is being done ought to be done. As any student of logic knows, this is the famous is-ought fallacy. Just because we are aborting babies does not mean we should be doing so (see chap. 9); by the same rationale, the fact that rape and child abuse are occurring does not mean that they ought to be happening. Likewise, the fact that scientists are cloning, splicing genes, and harvesting organs does not automatically mean that they should be doing so. These activities need some moral justification of their own. "Is" does not imply "ought."

If it can be done, it should be done. Another similar and common ethical fallacy is that what can be done, ought to be done. There seems to be an implied ethic in the progress of science dictating that whatever humans can invent, they should invent and use. Scientific progress has been absolutized. Just because something is technologically possible does not make it morally permissible. It is technologically possible to destroy the human race by nuclear war, but no one in their right mind believes the race should be destroyed! Technological progress is not necessarily ethical progress. It may be ethical regress instead.

The end justifies the means. This fallacy, already examined, becomes emotionally appealing when the factor of suffering is added. Why, we are asked, should not brain tissue from aborted babies be used to help cure those with Parkinson's disease? **Why** should people be allowed to suffer when we have the means of alleviating it? The answer surely is that the means are evil. Killing an innocent human being to alleviate the suffering of another is not a morally justifiable means of attaining this end.

Two wrongs make a right. Scarcely anyone admits to believing this, but many people act upon it. It is never right to correct a wrong by doing a wrong. Adding a wrong to a wrong does not take away the first wrong; it simply adds another wrong to it. Hence, the fact that the wrong of abortion is occurring does not justify adding to it the additional wrong of experimentation with the live aborted babies, regardless of the information that may be gained from doing so. There is no ethical obligation to know everything no matter how we get the information. If this

were so, then governmental invasion of privacy would be justified by the wealth of helpful information it could provide to curb crime and help society.

Some Basic Principles Stated

Now that we have examined the difference between a Christian and a humanist approach to biomedical issues and exposed some fallacious humanist principles, let us state some of the basic principles involved in a Christian approach to these problems.

The sovereignty of God. First and foremost is the principle of God's sovereignty over life. God created every living thing (Gen. 1:21) and human beings in his image and likeness (1:27). God controls both life and death. He gives life and he takes it away (Job 1:21). From dust we come, and to dust we return (Gen. 3:19). The Lord kills and makes alive (Deut. 32:39). We are not our own but his. God has made us, and we belong to him. This being the case, humans have no right to seek control of human life, to try to "advance" its evolution or to tinker with it genetically.

The dignity of humanity. Another principle at the heart of a Christian biomedical ethic is the dignity of humankind. Humans are made in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:27). They are the crown of his creation. Human beings both represent and resemble God. For this reason, murder is such a heinous crime, for it is killing God in effigy. This is why God instituted capital punishment for capital crimes (see chap. 12), saying, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6; man = humankind). Human beings have such dignity that it is even wrong to curse them, because they "have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9). This dignity of human life includes the body, which should be cared for (Eph. 5:29) and even buried with respect, anticipating its final resurrection (1 Cor. 15).

The sanctity of life. Human life has both dignity and sanctity. The dignity calls for respect, the sanctity for reverence. This is not to say that human life should be worshiped, but only that it should be considered holy. Human life should not be adored as the Creator is, but it should be respected as one of God's creations. Humans are not God, but we are godlike. We were made "a little lower than the heavenly beings [angels]" and were also "crowned ... with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). Since God is holy (Lev. 11:44) and we are made in his likeness (Gen. 1:27), it follows that in some sense we share in this moral likeness. This sacredness of life, as it uniquely reflects the very character of God, is the basis for a pro-life stance from conception to death. No matter how badly human life may be scarred or disfigured, it is still godlike and deserves to be treated as the sacred thing it is.

Principle of the greater good. When two or more moral principles conflict unavoidably, follow the higher obligation (see chap 7).

Principle of double effect. When an act has both good and bad consequences, it can be preferred if (1) the act is good or indifferent, (2) a good effect also follows

from the ad, (3) one intends the good effect and only tolerates the evil effect, and (4) the good effect is at least equal to the evil effect.

The mortality of life. Another principle endemic to a Christian approach to biomedical issues is the fact of human mortality. This is a fallen world, and the consequence of the fall is death. Adam was told of the tree of knowledge that when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The apostle Paul added, "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Thus the human being "is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Moses spoke of the limits of human life: "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength ... for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (Ps. 90:10). In short, there are limits to human life in this world. Humans are mortal, and human attempts to avoid mortality or overcome this *fact are* futile and misdirected.

Charity toward human life. Love is the essence of Christian ethics; Jesus said that the greatest commandment is first to love God and then to love other human beings as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Therefore, it is necessary to apply this love toward human beings in every area of ethical responsibility, including biomedical issues. Christian love (*agape*) is not selfish love. It comes from God, who is love (1 John 4:16), and is to be directed toward others (John 15:13). It is a responsibility we have to God (Matt. 25:45) and to all who are less fortunate than we. Love is not an empty, vacuous feeling or attitude. It is fleshed out in specific commandments. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15 KJV). Hence, the Christian looks to Scripture for guidance in bioethical issues, as well as in other moral matters.

Some Basic Guidelines for Crucial Issues

The preceding discussion has presented a number of biblical guidelines that can be applied to a range of biomedical issues. We will first state the principle and its biblical support and then apply it to specific issues.

Voluntary versus compulsory procedures. Flowing from the fact of freedom and dignity is the principle of autonomy, which entails informed consent. Even otherwise legitimate medical procedures are morally wrong unless there is informed consent to them. The patient should be informed about the nature and possible consequences of the medication or operation, and then must give free and uncoerced consent to it. Where the patient is not able to do this because of irrationality or unconsciousness, no organs should be taken and no medical procedure undertaken except what is necessary to preserve the person's life. This is called a best-interest judgment, as opposed to a substituted judgment. The latter takes away the autonomy of the patient.

A forced cure, no matter how beneficial it may be for society, is immoral. This includes forced abortions, sterilizations, and a lobotomy. Abstinence, birth control, or voluntary sterilization are proper alternatives. A forced cure is immoral, whether

it is imposed on citizens or prisoners. It is in the very nature of morally responsible human acts that they be free and uncoerced. Yet it is sometimes necessary to restrain and even punish violent patients against their will for the protection of those around them in the same way we restrain and punish criminals."

Informed consent is a necessary foundation for all bioethical decisions, including abortion. It is a tragic moral irony to require informed consent before a teenager in a public school can put an aspirin in her mouth, but not require informed consent before she can kill a baby in her womb.

Mercy killing versus mercifully allowing death. As previously noted, there is an important difference between taking an innocent life and allowing a death. The former is always wrong; the latter is sometimes right. Intentionally taking an innocent human life is murder, but allowing a natural death may be an act of mercy. Thus mercy killing is always wrong, but mercifully allowing death is sometimes right.

Preserving life versus prolonging death. The command "You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13) implies that we should help prevent the unnatural death of innocent people as well. The Bible declares that sins of omission are wrong, as are sins of commission (James 4:17). Failing to prevent such a death is as culpable as actually causing it. In this sense, there is a duty to prolong human life, and if medical or technical aids are available, they should be rightly utilized. However, the duty to preserve life should be distinguished from a supposed obligation to prolong death. Nowhere does the Bible declare a duty to prolong the agony of death. Actually, trying to avoid the inevitability of death is contrary to the principle of human mortality (Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27).

Artificial means versus natural means. Every attempt should be made to preserve a human life, by whatever means are available. Certainly food, water, and air should never be withheld from human beings, no matter how small, old, or sick they are. Taking away these natural means of sustaining life is tantamount to causing death. And knowingly causing the death of innocent human beings is murder. Furthermore, when heroic means (technology) are available, they should be used to preserve human life. However, there is no divine duty to use heroic or unnatural means to prolong human death. This is contrary to the principles of human mortality and Christian charity. There is no duty to prolong misery or to fight mortality. Hence, when sustenance of life is artificial and the process of death is irreversible, there is no moral obligation to prolong life by artificial means.

Birth control versus abortion. Some Christians oppose both abortion and birth control (see appendix 4). Historically, Roman Catholics have opposed birth con-

13. In the Mosaic law, even animals known to have killed others were to be restrained or put away, even though they were not morally accountable for their actions (Exod. 21:28-29). The reasoning is based on the moral responsibility of those in charge who knew they were killers. Similarly, those in charge of violent patients must have means of keeping them from killing others. These means may include isolation, drugs, and other medical involuntary procedures. In this case, graded absolutism (see chap. 7) allows for the higher law of lifesaving to take precedence over the lower law of the patient's rights.

trol, and Protestants have favored it. Today, these lines are crossed. However, both sides agree that there is a qualitative difference between taking a human life by abortion and preventing more human lives by birth control. Whatever one can say for or against birth control, it is not murder. It is simply a method of limiting how many children are born, not a method of killing unborn children. Yet some methods of what is called birth control are really methods of abortion (see chap. 9), since they lead directly to the death of a fertilized ovum (which is a human being). But methods of birth control, natural or artificial, that simply prevent fertilization from taking place are not murder. Both Catholics and Protestants agree that it is right to use birth control; the debate is over the legitimacy of *artificial* forms of birth control.

Correcting versus creating life. This is an imperfect world. God did not plan it that way; humankind has made a mess of it. The effects of humanity's fall are evident in the physical world (Gen. 3; Rom. 5, 8) and have taken their toll on human health. There is no biblical imperative saying that we cannot work to correct these imperfections. The Bible actually recommends medicine (1 Tim. 5:23) and prayer for healing (James 5:14-15).

Jesus manifested his approval of a medically corrective ministry by spending much of his time healing those who were sick. Likewise, he gave his apostles the ability to "heal the sick" (Matt. 10:8). However, there is a significant difference between correcting imperfect humans and creating perfect ones of our own. Alleviating human suffering due to the fall is a moral duty, but fabricating human beings is not.

Some Basic Issues

Now that the basic principles and guidelines of Christian bioethics have been outlined, it remains to apply them to some of the pressing issues made possible by modern technological advances. Since we have already discussed abortion (chap. 9) and euthanasia (chap. 10), we will not include them here.

Organ transplants. Organ transplantation has become a reality. Heart, lung, and kidney transplants are now common. Hundreds of people have had their lives prolonged because of this corrective technology. Transplantation is in accordance with many biblical principles. First, the principle of charity (love): "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). I find it hard to imagine giving an eye, lung, or kidney to someone who has none, yet some living human beings have done this. How little sacrifice is required to do so when we are dead and no longer in need of these organs! Organ transplantation need not be, as some suggest, a violation of the mortality principle. It can and should be used as a means to prolong life, not as a means to avoid the eventuality of death. In this regard it can be questionable when used on the very elderly. In this case, the chances for surviving the operation are lessened, as is the need for the operation. Also, there are younger candidates in need of the procedure.

Serious moral questions are involved in the transplantation procedure. First, it should involve informed consent. No one should be forced to donate one's organs, and no organ should be taken without permission of the donor, especially from those who are unable to make this decision (such as the handicapped). No one else has the right to give away another person's organs against the donor's will. In this sense my body belongs to me, and death does not erase this right. It is still my body and is put in my grave. Respect for human dignity demands that the body, which is the remaining symbol of the person, not be pilfered. Just as a national flag is the symbol of the nation and should be treated with respect, *even* so the body is a symbol of the person and should be treated with the respect due the person who occupied it.

Second, there is a moral question about the life-and-death status of the donor. The fresher the organ, the greater chances of success in the transplant, and organs from living donors are the best. However, if taking the organ causes death, then it is wrong. Yet after the person dies, the body may justifiably be kept "alive" by machine to prevent organ decay. It simply means that we should not hasten death in order to harvest a fresh organ.

With the exception of cases of taking "spare" organs, such as one kidney or one eye, the donor must be brain-dead before the organ is taken. Death is difficult to define, but in general terms it means vital signs are lacking, such as breathing, pulse, nerve reaction, or brain wave (EEG).

Genetic surgery. Genetic surgery is now medically possible, but does this in itself make it morally permissible? Here again the answer depends on whether it is an attempt to correct and restore life as God created it or an attempt to reconstruct it in the way we want it. Is the surgery correcting or creating? Is the procedure maintaining the life that God created, or is it engineering life the way humans want it? If the surgery is for repairing, not for creating, then it is morally permissible. After all, God created perfect human beings, and he wants us to be as perfect as we can be, even in this fallen world.

Trans-gender (sex-change) operation. These are morally objectionable from a Christian perspective. God created 'male and female' (Gen. 1:27). The fact that they were told to reproduce their kind (v. 28) reveals that this was understood as biological maleness and femaleness. For this reason genetic surgery to change one's sex is morally wrong. Whatever our psychological or sociological tendencies, we should seek to bring them into conformity to the way God made us physically.

Sex detection and selection. It is now possible to know the sex of the unborn well before birth. Hence, selection of the desired sex is possible. Is this morally right? In the light of the Christian principles stated above, the appropriate response seems to be: sex detection, yes; sex selection, no. There is nothing inherently wrong with knowing in advance whether the baby is a boy or a girl. Sooner or later we will know anyway. Science has now made it possible to know sooner. Science has made it possible to know a lot of things sooner—storms, earthquakes, tornadoes,

hurricanes. Few of us would reject this knowledge, but neither should we use it to do evil.

There is an inherent danger in sex-detection methods: they often become means of sex selection. Unfortunately, the only way to *select* the desired sex *after* it has been detected is by abortion, and that is morally wrong (see chap. 9). So if one chooses to know the sex of one's child before birth (and there is no obligation to do so), one is just as morally obligated to accept it from God's sovereign hand as one is the day it is born. Sex selection *before* conception is not necessarily morally wrong, but it can be both socially and psychologically harmful.

Artificial insemination. There are two forms of artificial insemination: artificial insemination by the husband (AIH), and artificial insemination by a donor (MD). There seem to be no valid moral objections from a Christian perspective to the former. Once one accepts the premise that it is morally permissible to correct impediments to fulfilling God's command to propagate life, then AIH would seem to fit in this category. If not, then one would have to argue against other corrective operations, including those to restore sight.

Sometimes Exodus 4:11 is cited in defense of accepting all our imperfections, *even* if they are correctable. God said to Moses, "Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" However, to so use this verse is to wrench it out of context and to ignore much other clear Scriptures. First, the verse is descriptive, not prescriptive. It is describing the situation the way it is, not necessarily the way it ought to be. Second, in context, it is a statement about God's ability to overcome these difficulties, not about the undesirability of doing so. God said this to Moses because Moses complained to God that he was not eloquent enough to fulfill God's command to speak to Pharaoh (v. 10). Third, if correcting blindness and deafness was wrong, then Jesus often sinned by healing these very imperfections (Mark 7; John 9).

But AID raises some moral questions not involved in AIH. Some object that it is "adultery by proxy," since the sperm is not from the woman's husband. However, this objection is a bit far-fetched, since no sexual act with another man is involved, nor need there be any lust entailed. Others consider the so-called one-flesh principle to be opposed to MD, but simply because the conception was not born of sexual intercourse between husband and wife does not mean they are not "one flesh" in their marriage. Actually, the "one flesh" is possible without sexual intercourse; it refers to the intimacy of marriage, not just to sexual intercourse (Gen. 2:24).

Still others object that in AID the baby is not really the husband's child, only the wife's. But if this is pressed, it would also be an argument against adoption, where the child is neither the husband's nor the wife's.

Finally, some object because of the use of an autosexual act in obtaining the sperm necessary for the insemination. However, if the donor collects the sperm in the context of his own marital relationship, the objection loses its force. First, inside a marriage the act need not be autosexual; it can be mutual. Second, as long

as the act is done without lustful intentions toward a woman other than one's wife, the objection loses its force. Masturbation is wrong as a form of lust and when it is done outside a marital relationship. It is also unnecessary since there are other alternatives, such as abstinence and marriage.

In short, whatever social, psychological, and legal arguments can be urged, and these should be considered, there seems to be no moral reason against either AIH or AID from a biblical perspective. Nevertheless, a childless couple may choose to remain that way or to adopt, but there is no moral duty to do so. They may also choose pregnancy of the wife through artificial insemination.

The morality of artificial insemination within the bounds of marriage does not automatically extend to the unmarried. For example, the Bible does not recommend a believer marrying an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:39), yet it forbids divorcing an unbelieving spouse unless the unbelieving partner initiates it (vv. 12, 15). Likewise, one-parent families maybe necessitated by death or other circumstances. But they are less than ideal under any circumstance and should not be promoted by artificial insemination. Hence, lesbian or bachelor motherhood by artificial insemination is not God's ideal for a home. Children need a father and a mother. And while God takes special care of wives who once had a husband (widows: Deut. 14:29; 1 Tim. 5:9), the Bible repeatedly bemoans fatherlessness (Pss. 10:18; 82:3). Fatherless homes are tragedies to be avoided, not models to be encouraged.

Surrogate motherhood. Even for Christians who accept artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood poses some more difficult problems. In effect, it is a 'womb for hire,' for the mother carrying the baby is not the wife of the husband. And even though there is no adultery involved, nevertheless there are serious social, legal, and psychological problems to be considered. As notable court cases have dramatized, the maternal instinct is strong, and the biological mother often has a difficult time giving up her child.

Theoretically, surrogate motherhood is only the reverse of artificial insemination and is like an adoption. In this respect there is nothing inherently immoral about it. However, we do not live in a theoretical world. Deep-seated human feelings are involved. Surrogate motherhood carries with it tremendous potential for exploitation of womanhood and the degradation of motherhood. Ethical considerations notwithstanding, wisdom seems to argue that adoption is a wiser course. And if abortion on demand were not practiced, there would be plenty of babies to adopt. Overseas babies and minority babies are more readily available.

Certainly, surrogate motherhood for convenience is wrong. Motherhood should not be for hire or rent anymore than wifehood should be. In this regard, surrogate motherhood is no better than harlotry. God created a place for sex with one's own spouse. And God created a place for having babies: in one's own wife's womb. If we cannot have them there, then maybe we should consider whether it is God's will for us to have one of our own genetic offspring. Perhaps there are other babies to adopt, or maybe God wants us to help with the care of the fatherless and not to have our own.

In vitro fertilization (IVF). Although in vitro fertilization is known by the popular expression "test-tube babies," it is more accurately test-tube conception. Sperm and ovum are united in a Petri dish and later transplanted into a mother's womb. Many babies have already been born of this method where otherwise the couple was unable to have children. It can be done, but here again the question is whether it should be done.

Granted that artificial insemination is permissible, from a Christian perspective the main question in IVF relates to the "wasted" embryos. According to present methods, the majority of embryos are sacrificed in order to get one that will survive. This means that we are knowingly causing the death of many tiny human beings in order to find one to develop. Since the end does not justify this means, in vitro fertilization that wastes embryos is morally wrong. The fact that many naturally fertilized ova spontaneously abort is not relevant, for there is a significant moral difference between a natural death and a homicide. So IVF is not a natural death; it is an artificially contrived and unnecessary death. It goes without saying that IVF for the purposes of research and experimentation on humans is doubly wrong.

There is the possibility of perfecting the method so as not to waste human life or to use a natural form whereby a husband's sperm is artificially placed in his wife's womb. But until or unless this kind of thing is done, IVF is morally wrong.

Organ and tissue harvesting. There is an increasing traffic in human organs and tissues created by medical technology and corresponding human demand. Organs from aborted babies are used for transplantation. Brain tissue is utilized in treating Parkinson's disease. Other body fluids have medicinal value. Here again we must be careful not to argue from "can" to "ought." The question is not whether it can be done or is being done, but whether it should be done.

Several principles come into play on the question of harvesting. Certainly if there are legitimate instances of harvesting, it should never be done without informed consent. Then there is the question of human dignity. A human body is not a chemical factory or an organic pharmaceutical company. Its purpose is not to function as an organ farm but as the body of an immortal person, who can worship and glorify God (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Though there is no objection to giving our organs after we are dead, it is contrary to our dignity and mortality to keep bodies alive simply for the purpose of harvesting from them. The only sense in which harvesting is legitimate is in one-time donor gifts by informed consent after death. But growing embryos or keeping bodies alive artificially for this purpose is a denigration of human dignity.

Stem cell cures. Human stem cells have proved to be a valuable source for curing diseases. This has raised a crucial debate over the ethics of using embryo stem cells, which offer the prospect of treating or curing some otherwise incurable diseases. In response, an important distinction must be made between the use of nonembryonic ("adult") stem cells, which does not involve the destruction of human life, and the use of embryonic stem cells, which does. The latter is unacceptable for the same reason abortions are not acceptable: it involves taking an innocent human

life. In addition, it violates several other ethical principles, such as these: (1) The end does not justify the means. (2) That we can do something doesn't mean that we should do it. (3) We should not cause death to lengthen life.

The fact is that there are other ethical ways to approach solving this problem. First, other forms of treatment are possible. Still others may yet be discovered. And most importantly for the present, nonembryonic cells have already proved to be more valuable, especially those from umbilical cords. Thus, it is unnecessary to use embryonic stem cells. Further, even if no other cures were presently available, it is morally wrong to sacrifice innocent human life to forward the progress of science. Some have asked, "What's wrong with harvesting parts from embryos destined to die anyway?" The response is this: Just because death-row prisoners are going to die anyway does not justify using them as a sacrificial medicine for the so-called progress of science. Hitler used this same bad argument (which embryonic stem cell proponents are using) to justify his experimenting on Jews, and the results were inhumane, unchristian, and barbaric! Closer to home, some African American men in Tuscaloosa, AL, were allowed to suffer with untreated syphilis in order to study its effects. But good ends are not justified by evil means.

Cryonics. It is possible to deep-freeze human bodies at death with the hope of resuscitating them someday. This could prolong life considerably, especially for those who die of diseases for which we may later find cures. Once more we must not ask if this can be done, but whether it ought to be done. It can and is being done, but should we do it? For several reasons, the Christian response is negative.

There is no evidence that a person can be brought back to life this way. Even if the body can be biologically resuscitated, there is no evidence that the person who occupied it will return. The Bible seems to indicate that when the person leaves the body (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8), only God can bring the person back to that body, and that God will do this at the resurrection (John 5:25-29; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 20). The purpose behind deep-freeze death is a desire to avoid the eventuality of human mortality. But the Bible is clear that God has appointed death (Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27) and has limited our life span (Ps. 90:10). Attempts to avoid or deny death are not of God (see Gen. 3:4). We should accept the limits of natural life and the eventuality of natural death and not engage in vain attempts to avoid death.

Cloning. 'Carbon-copy' human beings are genetically possible. It has already been successfully done with other mammals. Each cell in the body has the blueprint for that life. Hence, it is theoretically possible to produce an identical twin by nonsexual parenting. Given the humanistic quest for scientific progress, someone eventually will apply the advanced technology to produce a human clone. From a Christian standpoint, there are serious objections to cloning. First, it is playing God, not serving God. It violates the fundamental principle that we are only the custodians of human life, not its creators. It is the ultimate in human presumption and pride, human's technological Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Second, clones would generate unprecedented psychological and social problems of identity and sibling rivalry. Third, it bypasses the God-ordained means of human propagation,

fertilization in a mother's womb. In this sense it is a denial of the sanctity of sex, which God has created, hallowed, and ordained (Gen. 1:28; Heb. 13:4). Fourth, it is a futile attempt to avoid mortality by having one's identical 'twin' live on after one's death, and so on infinitely. So even if it were possible, it would be morally objectionable.

Gene-splicing. It is now possible to produce new kinds of biological organisms by splicing the genes of one into another. These laboratory hybrids are already being patented. One such artificially constructed "superbug" (*pseudomonas*) is said to have value in eliminating large oil slicks, since it feeds and multiplies in oil. *Many* other highly touted uses are in view, including medical cures, higher food production, environmental purification, more useful animals, and even more productive human beings!

Gene-splicing has some serious problems. J. Kerby Anderson identifies many of these in his excellent book *Genetic Engineering*. **First**, there are serious scientific problems including the possibility of escaped organisms, creating new diseases, and creating an imbalance in the delicately arranged microworld." Second, there are social and legal problems. Anderson comments, 'No one would welcome the spread of an infectious disease that destroys car, truck, and airplane lubrication systems:'"

Finally, there *are* serious ethical problems. Human gene-splicing violates several principles. First, the anticipated benefits (ends) do not justify the means. Gene-splicing is another example of the humanistic 'end justifies the means' ethic. Second, God made man "in his image:" Gene-splicing is a mixing of the created categories of human and animals. Third, human gene-splicing is a classic example of the human desire to be sovereign over creation, rather than being a servant in it. It is a rejection of the Creator and an effort to redesign nature. The creation mandate (Gen. 1:28) does not include destruction or reconstruction of what God created (see chap. 18). It means service in creation, not sovereignty *over* it.

Answering Some Objections to a Christian Biomedical Ethic

Many objections have been raised to a Christian biomedical ethic. Some of them have already emerged in the preceding discussion and been addressed. Here we will summarize the more important ones.

It Holds Back Scientific Progress

It is objected that opposing genetic engineering, cloning, and gene-splicing retards scientific progress. However, this objection has serious problems of its own.

14. J. Kerby Anderson, *Genetic Engineering: The Wiwi Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zonderran, 1982), 87-91.

15. 161, 192.

For one, it assumes that these inventions are really progress rather than merely changes. Further, not everything new is morally better. Also, 'scientific progress' is an ambiguous term used to justify almost anything we desire to do. What is more, this argument absolutizes scientific progress as the norm by which all else is justified. But science is not morally normative. Science deals with what *is*, not with what *ought* to be. Finally, the proper standards for science do not come from within but from beyond. This became painfully evident when German scientists in the *Nazi* regime engaged in ghastly human "research" at the expense of human respect.

It Lacks Proper Compassion for the Suffering

It is also argued that failing to utilize these advances in science to alleviate human suffering lacks proper concern *for* human suffering. Why allow some to suffer from Parkinson's disease when the brain tissue from aborted babies can lessen their misery?

In response, the end does not justify the means. Extending the *life* of one person does not justify exterminating the life of another. Evil means are not justified by good ends. Only good means are to be used for good ends. Further, respecting human life and dignity is a proper concern. And violating human dignity, sanctity, and responsibility is not the way to show this concern. What is more, the humanists' standard for proper compassion is ultimately without justification. Humanists have a moral prescription without a moral Prescriber. They can believe in compassion, but they have no real justification for that belief. If they try to justify their moral laws, they find themselves face-to-face with a moral Lawgiver. But if there is a divine imperative about human life, then the humanists whole *case* for utilitarian compassion collapses.

Summary and Conclusion

Biomedical issues clutter the stage of crucial ethical decisions. The conflict of opinion on these issues arises out of two opposed worldviews: the secular humanists' perspective and Christian perspective. The former denies that there is a Creator, that humans were created, and that they have God-given moral obligations. Humans are merely higher animals with greater intelligence. This intelligence should be used to improve the human species. Hence, secular humanists favor abortion, euthanasia, and genetic engineering to do so.

By contrast with the humanist biomedical ethic, Christians believe that God specially created humans in his own likeness and gave them moral imperatives to preserve the dignity and sanctity of human life. Hence, the Christian obligation is to serve God, not to play God. We are not the engineers of life but merely its custodians. Medical intervention, therefore, should be corrective, not creative. We should repair life, not try to reconstruct it. Technology must serve morality, not the reverse.

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12

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

There are three basic views on capital punishment: reconstructionism, which insists on the death sentence for all serious crimes; rehabilitationism, which would not allow it for any crime; and retributionism, which recommends death for some (capital) crimes. Forms of all three views are held by Christians. Since two views share a belief in capital punishment for capital crimes, our discussion will begin with the opposing view, rehabilitationism.

Rehabilitationism: No Capital Punishment for Any Crimes

Proponents of this view include both Christians and non-Christians, those who appeal to the Bible for justification and those who do not. Both types of arguments will be presented. The essence of this position is that the purpose of justice is rehabilitation and not retribution. Justice is remedial, not retributive. We should try to reform criminals, not punish them, or at least not with capital punishment.

Biblical Arguments for Rehabilitationism

Christian rehabilitationists appeal to Scripture in support of their position, and what follows is a summary of the biblical arguments used in defending their conclusions. Although their reasoning has wider application to crime in general, it is applied specifically to capital punishment here.

The purpose of justice is to reform, not punish. Ezekiel declared that God takes no "pleasure in the death of the wicked" and instead desires "that he should turn from his way and live" (18:23 RSV). God wants to cure the sinner, not kill him.

Capital punishment was abolished with Moses's law. It is argued that capital punishment was part of the Old Testament legalistic system abolished by Christ. In particular, an appeal is made to Jesus's rejection of Moses's "eye for eye" principle (Matt. 5:38). Instead of retribution, Jesus declared, "Do not resist an evil person" (v. 39).

Mosaic capital punishment is not practiced today. The Old Testament prescribed capital punishment for some twenty crimes, including breaking the Sabbath, striking one's parents, cursing God, homosexual relations, kidnapping—and rebellious children! But no one really believes that all these should still be prosecuted today. Thus none of them should be practiced.

Jesus abolished capital punishment for adultery. One of the crimes deserving of capital punishment in the Old Testament was adultery (Lev. 20:10), but it is argued that Jesus set this aside when he told the woman taken in adultery, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11 KJV). In 1 Corinthians 5, only excommunication from the church, not execution by the state, was recommended by Paul for the gross case of immorality there.

Cain was not given capital punishment. Even in the Old Testament, capital punishment was not always exacted for capital crimes. Cain killed Abel (Gen. 4), and yet God put a mark upon him and protected his life against anyone who would retaliate against him (v. 15).

David was not given the death sentence. David committed two capital crimes, adultery and murder, and yet he was not given capital punishment. As a matter of fact, when he confessed his sin (Ps. 51), he was forgiven (Ps. 32) and even restored to his throne (2 Sam. 18-19).

New Testament love rules out capital punishment. It is argued that the idea that we can love someone's soul while killing their body is inconsistent. As Christians we are enjoined to love even our enemies, and we cannot love them by killing them. Love would constrain us to sacrifice our own life for them (John 15:13), but it would never take their life from them.

The cross was capital punishment for all people. Most Christian rehabilitationists admit that capital punishment was sometimes used in the Old Testament. But they insist that whatever place there may have been for it before Christ came, there is no place for it since then. Because sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), and since Christ died for all people (Rom. 5:12-18), it follows that he has already taken capital punishment for all. In view of his suffering the death penalty for all persons, there should be no death penalty for any person.

Other arguments include the following: (1) Capital punishment is killing God in effigy (Gen. 1:27). (2) God alone gives and takes life (Deut. 32:39). (3) It costs more to kill than to keep. (4) Mistakes made are fatal.

Moral Arguments for Rehabilitationism

In addition to the biblical arguments, several moral arguments are used to reject capital punishment. Most of them have been used by Christians as well as non-Christians to defend this position.

Capital punishment is unjustly applied. A disproportionate number of minorities are given capital punishment. This being the case, rehabilitationists insist that capital punishment should not be applied at all if it is not applied fairly to all. Otherwise, it is a tyrannical tool to subdue minority groups, a tool to promote racism.

Capital punishment is not a deterrent to crime. It is argued that capital punishment does not really deter crime, for even where it is in effect, capital crimes still continue. In fact, some argue that capital punishment encourages serious crime because it gives state sanction to the violent taking of human life. Thus, by using capital punishment, the state encourages crime rather than deterring it.

Capital punishment is antihumanitarian. We provide shelters and adoption for stray animals; why should we kill wayward humans? It is an inhumane form of punishment. It is cruel and unusual punishment in the extreme.

Criminals should be cured, not killed. Criminals are socially ill and need to be treated, but we cannot cure them by killing them. Patients need a doctor, not a funeral director, and socially sick people need a psychiatrist, not an executioner.

Capital punishment sends unbelievers to hell. Capital punishment is an especially cruel sentence for a Christian to support, for according to the Bible, the unbelievers will be eternally damned (Matt. 25:41-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:11-15). If God is "longsuffering, ... not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9 KJV), then so should we be. To will that unbelievers be given capital punishment is to will that they go to their eternal doom.

An Evaluation of Rehabilitationism

Since rehabilitationists use both biblical and moral arguments for their view, the response will be divided accordingly. First, a reply to their arguments from the Bible.

An Evaluation of the Biblical Arguments

The primary purpose of justice is not rehabilitation. The primary purpose of justice is not reformation but punishment. This is clear in both Old and New Testaments. God himself punishes sin (Exod. 20:5; Ezek. 18:4, 20), and he demands that proper authorities do it also (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21:12). The heart of the penal view is manifest in the death of Christ, who was punished as "the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18 NASB). As Paul put it, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

While it is hoped that those who commit noncapital crimes will reform as the result of their incarceration, this is not its primary purpose. Since capital crimes

demand a capital punishment, there is no place for reform, only for a just punishment. And the only just punishment for taking someone's life is giving one's own life. Only in this way is justice satisfied.

Capital punishment was prior to Moses's law. The Mosaic law was fulfilled by Christ (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4), but capital punishment was not unique to it. God instituted capital punishment for all murderers in Noah's day (Gen. 9:6), long before Moses gave the law to Israel (Exod. 20). Hence, in fulfilling Moses's law for Israel (Heb. 7-8), Jesus did not destroy the moral law for all people (Rom. 2:2-14).

Not only was capital punishment instituted before Moses's law, but it has continued in effect after Moses's time. Paul stated it in principle (Rom. 13:4) and implied it in practice (Acts 25:11). And Jesus stated it in principle (John 19:10-11) and accepted it in practice when he died on the cross. So capital punishment was not limited to the Mosaic law or abolished with it.

The Mosaic laws are not in effect today. It is true that few Christians (except re-constructionists) really advocate the position that governments should practice capital punishment for all the religious and moral crimes mentioned in the Old Testament. However, just because one rejects capital punishment for noncapital crimes does not mean that we should reject it for capital crimes. In fact, capital punishment was prescribed in the Bible for capital crimes both before and after the time of Moses.

Jesus's response to the adulterous woman did not revoke capital punishment. Jesus's forgiving attitude toward the woman taken in adultery (John 8) is not proof that he rejected capital punishment, and for several reasons. This was not a capital crime, and therefore, even at best, it would not here reject the law of Moses, which demanded at least two witnesses to accuse the woman (Num. 35:30), and none were willing to accuse her (John 8:10-11). Jesus's charge, "Go, and sin no more" (8:11 KJV), was a declaration not of the invalidity of capital punishment but of his forgiveness for her sin.

Cain's punishment implies capital punishment. Cain's murder of Abel is a special case (Gen. 4). There are good reasons why he was not given capital punishment. First, who would do it? There was no human government other than the family, and his only brother was dead. God would certainly not expect his father or mother to kill their only remaining son. In view of these special circumstances, God personally commuted Cain's death sentence. God has the right to do this because he is the author of life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21). But even in God's protection of Cain, there is an implication of capital punishment in the sevenfold vengeance to be taken on anyone who would kill Cain (Gen. 4:15). Cain himself seemed to expect capital punishment when he said, "Whoever finds me will kill me" (4:14).

There were specific reasons why David was not given capital punishment. David committed two sins worthy of death, according to Moses's law: murder and adultery. Why then was his life spared? There is no record that anyone pressed charges, and according to the law, there had to be two witnesses (Deut. 17:6). Capital punishment was executed by the government, but Israel was a monarchy, and David was

the monarch. In effect, capital punishment of David would need to be carried out by David himself.

Perhaps this special circumstance is why God intervened and gave his own sentence through Nathan the prophet. Just as God said, David paid "fourfold," and some of the penalty involved lives. First, the baby of David's adulterous act died. Then David's son Absalom was killed, and David's daughter was defiled as he had defiled another man's wife. And finally, David lost his kingdom for a while. David paid severely for his offenses (2 Sam. 12-16).

Love and capital punishment are not contrary. If love and capital punishment are mutually exclusive, then the sacrifice of Christ was a contradiction. For "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (15:13).

Not only are love and punishment compatible, but the very principle behind capital punishment is the one that made the cross necessary: It is the principle of "a life for a life." The concept behind substitutionary atonement, that it takes life to atone for life (Lev. 17:11), is what makes capital punishment necessary for capital crimes. If there were any other way to satisfy justice and release grace, then surely God would have found it rather than sacrificing his only beloved Son (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). In fact, if capital punishment had not been in effect in the first century, then Jesus could not have died for our sins. Thus capital punishment elevates the value of life rather than lowering it. For the more serious the punishment for a murder, the more value we place on the person who was murdered.

The cross didn't abolish capital punishment. It is still commended in the New Testament after the cross (Rom. 13:4; Acts 25:11). As just noted, the cross did not destroy the life-for-a-life principle; it exemplified it perfectly. The cross provided forgiveness of sins, but it did not thereby destroy all the consequences of our sins. Even though Jesus tasted death for *every* person, nevertheless all people will still die (Rom. 5:12). If a Christian jumps off a high cliff, confessing his sins on the way down will not avert death at the bottom. The truth is that, forgiven or not, there are social and physical consequences of sin. A Christian who commits a capital crime can receive forgiveness but should not expect to avoid the appropriate penalty. And the fitting penalty for taking another life is giving one's own life.

An important distinction should be made here. Although all who commit capital crimes *deserve* death, it is not necessary that all should *get* death as a sentence. God's justice is tempered with mercy, and so should human justice be. Room should be left in special circumstances for a pardon. This, however, is the exception that establishes the rule, not one that destroys the rule. As a rule, capital crime should be given capital punishment. On the other hand, if we see the extenuating circumstances of the crime and/or the thorough repentance of the criminal, we may call for justice mingled with mercy.

An Evaluation of the Moral Arguments

In addition to the biblical arguments against capital punishment, there are several moral arguments. These too call for comment.

Unequal justice does not negate the need for justice. Several things should be recognized in response to the argument against capital punishment on the grounds of its unequal distribution. If justice is applied unequally, then we should work to assure that it is applied equally, not abolish justice altogether. The same thing holds true for capital punishment. We do not argue that all medical treatment should be abolished until everyone has it equally, even though more poor and minority people will die from lack of treatment than others. Why then should capital punishment be abolished until equal percentages of all races are executed?

A disproportionate number of capital punishments is not in itself a proof of inequity any more than a disproportionately high number of minorities in professional basketball is proof of discrimination against majority ethnic groups. This is not to say that one group of people is more sinful than another, but simply that conditions may occasion different social behavior. However understandable and regrettable this may be, a society cannot tolerate violent social behavior, and it must protect its citizens.

Capital punishment affirms human dignity. Punishing persons for their wrong is a compliment, not an insult, to their freedom and dignity. As C. S. Lewis aptly put it, "To be punished, however severely, because we deserved it, because we 'ought to have known better,' is to be treated as a human person made in God's image." The very fact that God places such a high price tag on taking another's life shows what great value he places on human life. Capital punishment, then, is the ultimate compliment to human dignity; it implies the most affirmative stance possible.

Criminals should be treated as persons, not patients. The working assumption of the view opposing capital punishment is that it is dehumanizing. Prisoners are not patients; they are persons. They are not objects to be manipulated, but human beings to be respected. The criminal is not sick but sinful. It is tyrannical to submit persons to compulsory cure against their will, an illusory humanitarianism with sinister political implications. It dehumanizes individuals by treating each as a "case" or patient rather than as a responsible person. As Lewis put it, "To be 'cured' against one's will ... is to be put on a level with those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals." On the other hand, to be punished, however severely, is to be respected as persons created in God's image, who know better and therefore deserve to be punished for their wrongdoing.

Capital punishment does not send people to hell. It is not capital punishment that sends people to hell; their unbelief does (John 3:36). If capital punishment is

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 226.
2. Ibid.

wrong because unbelievers end in hell as a result, then it could also be argued that capital punishment is right because it sends believers to heaven. Should it then be given only to Christian murderers? If anything, knowing the sure moment of one's approaching death should be an incentive to belief. It certainly eliminates procrastination and encourages sober thinking about life after death.

Reconstructionism: Capital Punishment for All Major Crimes

Reconstructionism is on the opposite end of the spectrum from rehabilitationism. While the latter does not permit capital punishment for any crime, reconstructionism requires it for every major crime. More precisely, reconstructionists believe that capital punishment should be exacted for every nonceremonial crime designated in Moses's law, which included some twenty different offenses.

Classical reconstructionists believe that society should be reconstructed on the basis of Old Testament Mosaic law. Thus, their position is called theonomist because they are governed by the law of God. God's moral law was revealed to Moses and never abrogated. Only ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament law were done away with by Christ. The moral law, however, is eternal since it reflects the very character of God. Jesus said of the Old Testament Law and Prophets, "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

The primary purpose of justice is retribution, not rehabilitation. It is to punish, not to reform. Reconstructionist Greg L. Bahnsen makes this clear in *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*; he contends that "we are to understand the prescription of the death penalty on the basis that such a civic punishment is what the crime warrants in God's eyes."

Although they can be numbered differently, there are more than twenty offenses that call for capital punishment in the Old Testament:

1. Murder (Exod. 21:12)
2. Contemptuous act against a judge (Deut. 17:12)
3. Causing a fatal miscarriage (Exod. 21:22-25)
4. False testimony in a potentially capital crime (Deut. 19:16-19)
5. Negligence by the owner of an ox that kills people (Exod. 21:29)
6. Idolatry (Exod. 22:20)
7. Blasphemy (Lev. 24:15-16)
8. Witchcraft or sorcery (Exod. 22:18)
9. False prophecy (Deut. 18:20)
10. Apostasy (Lev. 20:2)
11. Breaking the Sabbath (Exod. 31:14)

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, expanded ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984), +N.

12. Homosexual relations (Lev. 18:22, 29)
13. Bestiality (Lev. 20:15-16)
14. Adultery (Lev. 20:10)
15. Rape (Deut. 22:25)
16. Incest (Lev. 20:11)
17. Cursing parents (Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9)
18. Rebellion by children (Deut. 21:18-21; Exod. 21:15)
19. Kidnapping (Exod. 21:16)
20. Drunkenness by a priest (Lev. 10:8-9)
21. Unanointed individuals touching the holy furnishings in the temple (Num. 4:15)
22. Striking parents (Exod. 21:15)
23. Having sex during woman's menstrual period (Lev. 18:19, 28)

A careful look at this list reveals several interesting things. Only the first five involve capital offenses, either actually or potentially. The remaining sixteen are for noncapital crimes, even though some of them (rape) could lead to murder and others (rebellion by a son) could prevent murders that he could do in his rebellion. The next six (6-11) are for religious offenses, while the next eight (12-19) are for various moral issues. The next two (20-21) relate to ceremonial duties, though drunkenness is also a moral issue (Prov. 20:1; 23:21). Since 20-21 are part of the ceremonial law, some theonomists do not believe that they are binding today because of their ceremonial nature.* But with this exception, they believe that capital punishment is still binding today. They insist that human governments are under divine obligation to implement capital punishment for these offenses. In short, they believe in capital punishment for virtually every major kind of offense, social, religious, or moral.

Arguments for Reconstructionism

The defense of this Old Testament use of capital punishment boils down to the question of whether the Old Testament law is still binding today. Hence, the reconstructionists' case is basically biblical in nature, though many point to the social consequences of not following what they believe to be God's law for today. Let us examine the most basic reasons for justifying their view.

God's law reflects his unchanging character. The moral law of God is a reflection of the moral character of God. "Be holy, because I am holy," said the Lord (Lev. 11:44). God is just; therefore, he requires justice of us (Ezek. 18:5-6). But if God's law reflects his moral character, and if God's moral character does not change, then God's law given through Moses is still in effect today. It must be, because God has not changed.

4. *Ibid.*, 213.

The New Testament repeats the Ten Commandments. The very commands given to Moses on Sinai are repeated in the New Testament. Paul states many of them in Romans 13:9. Others appear elsewhere (Eph. 6:2-3). If the Old Testament law is not in effect today, then it is strange that the New Testament repeats these commandments.

The Old Testament was the Bible of the early church. The early Christian church had no New Testament; it was not written until the last half of the first century. When Paul told Christians that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, ... and training in righteousness," he was referring to the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:16). This is clear from verse 15, which refers to the "holy Scriptures" that Timothy learned from his Jewish mother and grandmother (1:5). This being the case, reconstructionists argue that the New Testament church used the Old Testament as its standard for righteousness. And the Old Testament taught that capital punishment should be given for the offenses noted above.

Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law Jesus said clearly, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them? He added, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law" (Matt. 5:17-18). On this basis Bahnsen insists that we are bound by the entirety of Old Testament moral law on capital punishment.

Capital punishment is repeated in the New Testament. Furthermore, argue re-constructionists, the New Testament explicitly reaffirms capital punishment in Romans 13:4, where it declares that God has given the sword to human governments. Likewise, both Jesus (John 19:10-11) and Paul refer to capital punishment (Acts 25:11).

The Mosaic law applied to Gentiles. Many Old Testament verses speak of non-Jews being under the Mosaic law (see below).

An Evaluation of Reconstructionism

Though many Christians have a high view of the profitability of the Old Testament for believers (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11), most do not believe that the Mosaic legislation is still binding on human governments today. There are many reasons for this, but first a response should be made to the arguments given by reconstructionists in favor of capital punishment for everything from breaking the Sabbath to rebellious children.

Not all of Moses's law is necessitated by God's character. While all of Moses's law is in accord with God's character, not all of it is necessitated by God's character. God never legislates contrary to his character, but neither does everything flow of necessity from it. God can and has willed different things at different times for different people, all of which are in accord with his nature but not all of which are demanded by it.

Reconstructionists believe that the ceremonial laws of Moses are not binding today. They believe that Christ fulfilled the sacrificial and typological system (1 Cor. 5:7), and it therefore is unnecessary to bring a lamb to a temple. It is also unnecessary to abstain from eating pork or shrimp, because Christ revoked the laws of ceremonial unclean meats (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15). But if this is so, then there is no reason that God could not will that Old Testament laws about capital punishment could change too.

Furthermore, capital punishment is not a law; it is a penalty or sanction for disobeying a specific law. Hence, one need not argue that God's basic moral principles change when he no longer requires capital punishment for all the offenses listed in the Old Testament.

It is not sufficient to argue that all offenses deserve death (Rom. 1:32; 6:23), for God never gave capital punishment for all offenses, even in the Old Testament. But if God did not require capital punishment for some offenses that deserved death, even in the Old Testament system of law, then there is no reason why he cannot do the same for other offenses in the New Testament. So it is not a question of whether all of these twentysome offenses deserve death, but whether God has designated death as their punishment today. And as we will see, there is no evidence that God has designated capital punishment for any but capital offenses in the New Testament.

Not all of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. Reconstructionists err in claiming that the Ten Commandments of Moses are restated in the New Testament for Christians. First, only nine of the Ten Commandments are restated in any form in the New Testament. The command to worship on Saturday is not repeated, for obvious reasons: Jesus rose, appeared to his disciples, ascended into heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit on Sunday. Thus, the early church met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), not the last day. So the command to worship on Saturday is no longer binding on Christians (see Rom. 14:5; Col. 2:16).

Even when one of the basic moral principles embodied in the law of Moses is restated in the New Testament, it is repeated with a different promise. For example, when Paul told the children in Ephesians 6:2 to "honor your parents," he added a different promise than the one given to Israel. Israel was promised that they would "live long in the land [of Palestine] the LORD your God is giving you" (Exod. 20:12). The Christians at Ephesus were not given Israel's promise of land and blessing but simply told to honor their parents "that it may go well with you ... on the earth" (Eph. 6:3). But if different blessings are attached to keeping laws in the New Testament, then there is no reason why different punishments cannot be listed for breaking them. Capital punishment is not a law but a punishment for breaking a law. Hence, changing a punishment for a law from the Old Testament times is not changing any moral law.

Nowhere does the New Testament state, as does the Old Testament, that capital punishment should be given for adultery. In fact, Paul told the church at Corinth to

have the adulterer excommunicated, not to have him executed (1 Cor. 5:5). Later he even told the church to restore the repentant adulterer to its fellowship. This is a significant change in penalty from the Old to the New Testament.

The Old Testament is for but not to the church. It is true that the very early church did not have the entire New Testament. The church began in AD 33, and the first books may not have been written for about twenty years. They did not need a written New Testament, since they had living apostles (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20) who could perform special miracles to confirm their divine authority (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4).

Their use of the Old Testament reveals that they did not believe it was all written to them but only that it was for them. Paul said, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written *for* our instruction" (Rom. 15:4 NASB). He told the Corinthians that the Old Testament was for their example (1 Cor. 10:11). But nowhere is it stated in the New Testament that the whole of Old Testament law is directed to the Christian, to say nothing of civil governments. In fact, as previously noted, even reconstructionists admit that some parts of the Mosaic legislation no longer apply to us today.

Jesus did away with the Old Testament laws. First, it is true that Jesus came to fulfill the righteous demands of the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17-18; see also Rom. 10:2-3). He did not do away with it by destroying it, but rather by fulfilling it.

The New Testament is clear that the law of Moses was superseded by Christ. Paul said that which was written in stone (the Commandments) has faded away (2 Cor. 3:7,11). The writer of Hebrews declares that "there must also be a change of the law" (7:12). The old covenant was replaced by the new covenant (8:13), just as Jeremiah had predicted (31:31). Paul told the Galatians that "we are no longer under the supervision of the law" since Christ has come (Gal. 3:25). To the Romans he wrote, "We are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:15 NASB). And in Colossians he affirms that in view of Christ's death and resurrection, God has "canceled the written code, with its regulations" (Col. 2:14).

Just because there are similar moral laws in the New Testament does not mean we are still under the Old Testament. There are also similar traffic laws in North Carolina and Texas. But when a citizen of North Carolina disobeys one of its traffic laws, he has not thereby broken the similar law in Texas. Since God's moral nature does not change from age to age, we should expect that many of the moral laws will be the same. But this does not mean that we are still bound by the Mosaic codification simply because Moses received them from the same God who inspired Paul and Peter.

Again there is a confusion here between what the law prohibits and the penalty for disobeying it. Even though the basic moral principles embodied in the Mosaic legislation are the same as those expressed in New Testament law for Christians, nevertheless it does not follow that the punishment for breaking these principles will be the same. And capital punishment is a question of punishment, not a question of moral law as such. For example, it is granted that the moral prohibition

against adultery has not changed from age to age. God has always opposed it. The question is whether he has always demanded the same punishment for it in every age. There is no indication that he has. In fact, there is indication that he has not.

Not all Old Testament demands for capital punishment are repeated in the New Testament. It is mistaken to imply that capital punishment is not reaffirmed in the New Testament since all the offenses for which it was demanded in the Old Testament are not in effect in the New Testament. As noted earlier, even reconstructionists admit that some cases of Old Testament capital punishment do not apply today. The cases where capital punishment is implied (John 19:11; Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:4) do not include all those offenses in the Old Testament. It can actually be argued that all of these were for capital offenses or the equivalent, such as treason (see Luke 23:2; Acts 17:7). There is indication that capital punishment was not demanded in the New Testament for some offenses listed in the Old Testament, for example, adultery. In the New Testament, only excommunication was required for the unrepentant offender, not capital punishment (1 Cor. 5:5), and he was to be restored to the church after repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-10).

Reconstructionists object that even non Jews in the Old Testament were obligated to keep the law of Moses. They cite passages like Jeremiah 12:14-17: And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, As the LORD lives; even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people' (v. 16 RSV). But this is speaking of heathen converting from idolatry to Judaism. It says nothing about their being under the law of Moses as heathen.

Another text cited is Ezekiel 5:7-8: "Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, therefore thus says the LORD GOD: Behold, I, *even I*, am against you" (ESV). But there is a distinction between the "statutes" God gave to Israel and the "rules" of the heathen around them, who did not have the same standard.

Isaiah 24:5 is also used to support theonomy: "The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (ESV). But a look at the context reveals that Israel is in view here, not the heathen. Verse 15 refers to "Israel," and "Mt. Zion" in verse 23 supports this, as does the reference to "the wasted city [of Jerusalem]" in verse 10 (ESV).

There are also texts in the law of Moses that refer to "sojourners" (foreigners) living by the law of Moses. Exodus 12:49 declares: "There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you" (ESV). But the context indicates that offering a Jewish sacrifice was voluntary on their part. It says only, "If a stranger ... *would* [wants to] keep the Passover: then that person must "be circumcised" (v. 48 ESV). However, the stranger (alien) was under no obligation to keep the Jewish Passover (which was about Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt).

Likewise, other verses (Lev. 20:2-5; cf. 24:22) speak only of sojourners abiding by the Jewish laws of the land while they are visiting Israel. But this does not mean that the law of Moses is given for the alien any more than keeping Islamic law while traveling in a Muslim country shows that God intends everyone to be a Muslim.

Yet Jews and non Jews alike surely are under the natural law (general revelation), which forbids murder, adultery, sodomy, and the like (Lev. 18:24). This is precisely what Paul says in Romans 2:12-15: those "who do not have the law [of Moses]" nevertheless have a "law written on their hearts." It also is what America's founding fathers meant by "Laws of Nature" that come from "Nature's God" (in *The Declaration of Independence*).

A Biblical Critique of Reconstructionism

Many of the critiques of reconstructionism have already been implied in responding to the arguments. The reconstructionist argument for capital punishment is based on the belief that the Old Testament law of Moses is still binding on believers today. In response to this, there are many arguments showing that the law of Moses is not binding today.

The separation between ceremonial and moral categories is problematic. Nowhere does the Bible divide the law into distinct ceremonial, civil, and moral categories. No such hard-and-fast lines are drawn. Jesus did cleanse all meat (Mark 7:19), and the New Testament writers follow in doing away with the designation of some foods as unclean (Acts 10:15; 1 Tim. 4:3-4). However, the ceremonial aspects of the law are broader than clean and unclean foods. They include regulations on clothes, sacrifices, rituals, and even sanitation (Lev. 11-27). Hence, the cleansing of certain foods cannot be equated with the so-called ceremonial law. Furthermore, the laws against idolatry, immorality, eating blood, and strangled animals enjoined on Christians (Acts 15:29) were not unique to the Mosaic legislation; they were earlier (see Gen. 9:4).

The law of Moses was a unit. There were civil aspects to the moral law and moral dimensions of the civil law. Indeed, there were moral aspects of the ceremonial law,⁵ as is evident from the fact that it was said to reflect God's holiness (Lev. 11:45). Surely God's holiness is not a strictly amoral issue. Nowhere in the Old Testament is a separation made between the moral and the civil aspects of Moses's law, or between the civil and the ceremonial aspects. And nowhere in the New Testament does it declare that only the ceremonial and sacrificial aspects of the law of Moses have been abolished. Any moral law reflective of the very nature of God applies to all people at all times because God does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:10-12; James 1:17).

5. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) speaks of "ceremonial laws, [as] containing ... divers instructions of moral duties" (19.3).

The apostles set aside the law. The apostles ruled against the contention that Gentiles must be circumcised and required to "obey the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). They insisted only that Christians should "abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (v. 29). But these were not unique to Moses's law (Gen. 9:4), and they were not all that was required by Moses's law. Hence, the very *fact* that the apostles did not insist on "anything beyond the ... [stated] requirements" (Acts 15:28) proves they did not believe that Christians were under the law of Moses. Further, the prohibitions the apostles gave to Christians in Acts 15 cannot be considered as rules against purely ceremonial matters, for one of them was against idolatry and another against immorality.

James affirmed the unity of the law. The unity of Moses's law is so strong that James insists that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10). And in the next verse he quotes the laws against adultery and murder, which everyone agrees are moral laws. The law of Moses was considered a unity. So if any of it is thrown out, then all of it is thrown out. Yet this is not to say that the moral principles based on the character of God and embedded in Moses's law were also thrown out. Those moral principles must not be discarded, because God's moral nature does not change.

Paul said Christians are not under the law. New Testament believers "are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). John said, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Here the law given by Moses is contrasted to the grace brought by Christ. Hence, we cannot be under both at the same time.

The Ten Commandments have faded away Paul told the Corinthians that what "was carved in letters on stone [the Ten Commandments] ... was being brought to an end" through Christ and the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:7, 11 ESV). It has been replaced by "that which lasts!" (v. 11). Hebrews declares that "when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well" (Heb. 7:12 RSV).

How was the law of Moses done away with by Christ? He did it "by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph. 2:15). The law condemned us, but Christ redeemed us. For "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Christ is the end of the law. "Christ is the end [*telos*, goal] of the law" for believers (Rom. 10:4). Christ did not simply end the law; rather, he is the End of the law. He finished it by fulfilling it. He did not do away with *the* law by destroying it (Matt. 5:17-18) but by completing it. He is the perfect goal of the law because he perfectly kept it (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 8:3-4).

The law was in place only until Christ came. The "law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." But "now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Gal. 3:24-25). Here too it is clear that Paul includes the moral law of Moses, because he refers to it as what was given at Sinai some 430 years after the promise was confirmed to the patriarchs (v. 17). And what was given at Sinai were the Ten Commandments, which contain the

very heart and basis of the moral law. So the whole law of Moses as given to Israel was taken away by Christ.

The law of Moses was given only to Israel. The book of Hebrews is emphatic about the fact that "the law was given to the people" of Israel (7:11). And of that law it declares "there must also be a change of the law" (v. 12). By the new covenant "the former regulation is set aside" (v. 18). The old covenant is replaced by the new covenant (8:10-12). And this new one, said the Lord, "will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers" (8:9). By the very *fact* of "calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete" (8:13). The language could hardly be clearer: the whole covenant given to Israel through Moses, which included moral laws, has been done away with. The psalmist said explicitly that the Mosaic law was given to Israel and not to any other nation. For "He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them" (Ps. 147:19-20 NASB).

As for the reconstructionists' claim that foreigners were under the same law as Israel (Exod. 12:48; Num. 15:16), two things are important. First, when it came to morally based civil laws, sojourners in Israel had to obey its laws just as Christians traveling in Muslim countries do today (cf. Lev. 20:1-2). God's moral law "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15) applies to all persons wherever they are. Murder is wrong everywhere, and whoever commits it is subject to the law of the land in which they do it.

Second, when it came to the sacrificial system unique to Israel, there was no obligation for non-Jews to offer Jewish sacrifices. It was only necessary that if they voluntarily decided to participate, then it must be done according to Jewish law. Exodus 12:48 declares: "*If* a stranger shall sojourn among you and *would* keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised" (ESV). Sojourners had no obligation to do so, but *if* they did take part, then they must do so according to Jewish law. This is contrary to reconstructionism, which claims that all persons are subject to the moral law of Moses and its capital penalties today.

We cannot take the law without its curses. Those who believe Christians are still under the law are reminded by Paul, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Gal. 3:10). One thus cannot take the blessings of the law without its curses (see Deut. 27). According to Paul, with the law it is either all or nothing. So on the one hand, if any of the law is binding on Christians, then all of it is. On the other hand, if some of the Mosaic law does not apply to Christians, then none of it does. But Christ has taken the curse of the law for us (Gal. 3:13). So to accept the law of Moses as binding on us is to *reject* what Christ has done for us (Gal. 3:21).

A Social Critique of Reconstructionism

From a strictly social point of view, there are serious problems with reconstructionism. First, it would eliminate our constitutional freedom of religion by

establishing one religion as preferred. Thus it would be a violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Second, it has already been tried and has failed. Calvin's Geneva and the Puritans' early America are cases in point. Baptists had to flee to Rhode Island because they were persecuted by the reconstructionists.

Third, since reconstructionism is government based on religious revelation, the question can always be asked: "Whose revelation?" It is simply bigotry to answer "Mine!" And it is presumption to respond "God's." Lest Christians be tempted to say "a Christian revelation," we need only be reminded that there is a Muslim revelation too. In a pluralistic world, no one's religious revelation is going to be accepted by all others as the basis for government. The Bible (plus other religious books) can certainly be informative yet not normative for government. It can be a source without being used as a divinely authoritative source.

Retributionism: Capital Punishment for Some Crimes

The third major view is retributionism, which holds that capital punishment is legitimate for some crimes: capital ones. Since the essence of this position has already emerged in the critique of the other two views, the discussion here will be more brief. Unlike rehabilitationism, retributionism believes that the primary purpose of capital punishment is to punish. Unlike reconstructionism, retributionism does not believe that civil governments today are bound by the Mosaic legislation regarding capital punishment.

Retributionism holds that criminals are sinful, not sick. Their capital offense is moral, not pathological. Since they are rational and morally responsible beings, they know better and therefore deserve to be punished. Though capital punishment also protects innocent people from repeated violent crimes, this is not its primary purpose. Furthermore, even though capital punishment will deter crime, at least by those offenders, nonetheless this is not its primary purpose. Its primary purpose is penal, not remedial. Its purpose as such is to punish the guilty rather than protect the innocent.

When God instituted human government and gave it capital authority, it was for the purpose of dealing with capital crimes. God told Noah explicitly:

From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (Gen. 9:5-6; man = humankind)

When this mandate was later incorporated into the Mosaic law, a number of capital crimes were spelled **out**, including murder (Exod. 21:12), avenging a death, causing a miscarriage (Exod. 21:22-23), false testimony in a capital case (Deut. 19:16-19), and not killing an ox that killed people (Exod. 21:29). In each case the

person who received capital punishment was responsible for the death of an innocent person or persons. In principle this would include treason, since many lives are at stake in treasonous acts. In short, capital punishment is for capital crimes.

When capital punishment is mentioned in the New Testament, it is also in the context of capital crimes. Government was the sword God gave to Noah for capital crimes (cf. Rom. 13:4). Jesus acknowledged Rome's capital authority over his life (John 19:10-11), but here again the alleged offense was a capital crime: treason (Luke 23:2). Likewise, Paul's alleged crime for which he was willing to receive capital punishment if guilty was treason (Acts 25:11; cf. 17:7).

The Biblical Basis for Capital Punishment

Capital punishment is implied from the very beginning of the Old Testament. It is repeated over and over again throughout the Scriptures, including the New Testament.

The need for capital punishment is implied in human nature. Human beings, male and female, are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). They both resemble and represent God on earth. Killing them is an attack on the God who made them. It is a rejection of his sovereignty over human life (Deut. 32:39). For this capital crime, God later explicitly declared that he demanded a capital punishment (Gen. 9:6). But such a punishment is implied in the very nature of the crime, even before it is explicitly stated. This becomes obvious in the case of Cain, the first murderer.

Cain deserved and expected capital punishment. There are many indications in the text that when Cain killed his brother, Abel, he both expected and deserved capital punishment. God said, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). This cry for blood (life) vengeance is a clear indication that justice demanded a life in return. Cain himself plainly expected vengeance against his life: "Whoever finds me will kill me" (v. 14). Even God's pronouncement of protection on Cain implied capital punishment by its reference to "vengeance seven times over" on anyone who later killed Cain (v. 15). Since there was no government or anyone left (except Cain's father and mother) to execute Cain, God personally commuted Cain's deserved death sentence. Since God is the author of life, he has the right to do it. But the text nonetheless makes it evident that capital punishment was both expected and deserved.

God gave the power of capital punishment to human government. There was capital punishment before the time of Noah, but it was left to relatives to avenge the murderer (Gen. 4:14). By instituting capital punishment, God took justice out of the hands of the families of the deceased and placed the sword in the hands of human government. In this way justice could be more objectively exercised by eliminating the personal revenge factor and the emotional anger. So Noah was not the first to be given the right to capital punishment (Gen. 9:6). This was simply the point at which God instituted human government, which was thereby to assume the capital authority already being exercised by families.

Capital punishment was incorporated into the Mosaic law. When God enjoined capital punishment on Israel (Exod. 21), it was not the first time he had instituted it. It was implied from the beginning (Gen. 4) and given to human government under Noah for capital crimes (Gen. 9:6). What Moses's law did was simply to incorporate it and extend it to many other noncapital crimes, including certain religious and ceremonial offenses. Israel was a chosen nation, whom God was to rule in a special way (Exod. 19). Hence, since Israel was a theocracy, these additional reasons for capital punishment were not intended for other nations (Ps. 147:19-20). For example, God never commanded other nations to worship on the Sabbath or to pay tithes to the temple in Jerusalem. Hence, Gentile nations are not condemned for not doing this, even though they are judged for a whole host of sins from pride to injustice (see Obad. 1). Israel, however, is often condemned by God for breaking these special laws. Individuals were even given capital punishment for not keeping the Sabbath (Exod. 31:14).

Under God, Moses did not institute capital punishment for capital crimes; he simply incorporated it into his law. But he did extend capital punishment to certain noncapital crimes. Moses did not give capital punishment to the nations in general, but he did apply it to God's chosen nation in special ways.

If capital punishment for capital crimes was not given with the law of Moses, then it did not thereby pass away with the Mosaic law. It abides when that which was unique to Moses's law has passed away (Heb. 7-8).

Capital punishment is reaffirmed in the New Testament. Capital punishment for capital crimes was not given by God simply to Israel, as was the law of Moses (Deut. 4:8; Ps. 147:19-20). It was given to Noah for the whole human race (Gen. 9:6, 9-10). And since God has never abolished this punishment on the race, any more than he has ever abolished his promise to Noah for the whole race that he would "never again" flood the whole earth (Gen. 9:11), then divinely instituted capital punishment is still in effect for the whole race.

The sword that was divinely given to human government for capital punishment (Gen. 9:6) is explicitly reaffirmed in the New Testament (Rom. 13:4). Jesus acknowledged it before Pilate (John 19:10-11), as did Paul before the Roman authorities (Acts 25:11). So capital punishment, at least for capital crimes, is stated before the law of Moses and repeated after it. Hence, whatever additions were made in Moses's law regarding capital punishment for other reasons are not binding on the human race today.

An Evaluation of Retributionism—Negative Criticisms

Many criticisms have been leveled at capital punishment, even for crimes involving the loss of life. Most of these have already been implied in the response to rehabilitationism. Hence, they will be only briefly summarized here.

It is cruel and unusual punishment. If it is, then so is the murder of an innocent person, and justice demands a life for a life. Those who take a life should give their life. What we take, we owe. There is nothing cruel or unusual about this.

It is unfairly applied. Not administering justice for any capital crime is not the answer to injustice for some real crimes. Two wrongs do not make a right. Just because some people die from a lack of proper distribution of medical care does not mean it should be withheld from all. Likewise, just because some people die from an unjust distribution of capital punishment does not mean that justice should be withheld from all.

It does not deter crime. God said it will deter offenses. When justice is done, "all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not be contemptuous again" (Deut. 17:13). One thing is certain: capital punishment will deter that particular violent criminal from ever repeating another crime. If capital punishment does not deter as much other crime as it could, it is probably because it is not exercised widely and speedily enough to be a real threat (Eccles. 8:11).

It is not biblical, at least not today. As we have seen, capital punishment is not biblical today for noncapital crimes. Those were unique to the Mosaic legislation, which is no longer binding. But capital punishment for capital crimes was given to human government before Moses's law (Gen. 9:6), and it was reaffirmed after Moses's law (John 19:10-11; Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:4).

The criminal should be cured, not killed. This is based on the mistaken notion that justice is remedial, not penal. However, the remedial view dehumanizes criminals by making them into patients or objects to be treated, rather than persons to be respected. It is an illusory humanitarianism that is really antihuman. It has horrendous tyrannical potential in the hands of an elite, who can pronounce who is "sick" and must be treated by the state.

Some murderers are not rationally responsible. If this refers to children before they are socially accountable, to imbeciles, or to people who do not have the moral and rational capability to understand their actions, then capital punishment is not an appropriate punishment. Moral responsibility assumes someone is morally responsible. A person who is not rational cannot be held rationally accountable.

It is contrary to the concept of pardon. First, pardon makes no sense in a remedial view of justice. Someone who is sick cannot be pardoned; only a sinner can be forgiven. Hence, the concept of pardon makes sense only in a penal view of justice. All capital crimes deserve death, but not all criminals deserving death should necessarily die. For that matter, all offenses are worthy of death (Rom. 1:32; 6:23). But even the old law did not demand capital punishment for all offenses. In Genesis 4, God personally commuted the death sentence for Cain. So suspending the deserved death penalty in special cases, especially where there is genuine repentance and restitution, is not without biblical precedent. But the very concept of mercy to the genuinely repentant presupposes the framework of justice that calls for capital justice in capital crimes.

It overlooks those who are insane. No one who is really insane (not in control of one's faculties) should be given capital punishment, because such are not morally responsible. However, so-called temporary insanity is often only a fit of rage. And we are responsible for getting angry and for what we do in anger. Being irrational

(insane) and acting irrationally (criminally) are two different things. In one sense, all sin is irrational, including capital sins.

An Evaluation of Retributionism—Positive Contributions

In spite of many criticisms, capital punishment for capital crimes has many positive dimensions. Several will be summarized here.

It is based on a high view of humanity. The retributionist position behind capital punishment presupposes a high view of human freedom and dignity. It is based on the assumption that normal adult human beings are rational and moral beings who know better, who could do otherwise, and yet who chose to do evil anyway and therefore deserve to be punished.

It treats criminals with respect. By punishing those who deserve it, the state is rendering respect to them. But submitting criminals to compulsory cures against their will is treating them as infants, imbeciles, or domestic animals. Persons who knowingly do wrong deserve to be punished, not to be treated like an object to be manipulated.

It operates on a correct view of justice. As noted earlier, the biblical view of justice is penal, not remedial. The primary purpose of justice is moral, not therapeutic. It is ethical, not pathological. This is true *whether* the crime is incidental or capital. Punishment should be given only because people deserve it.

It does deter crime. All the protests notwithstanding, punishment does deter crime. The Bible says it does (Deut. 17:13), and the *facts* support it, especially in the case of capital punishment. Dead offenders cannot repeat their crimes. And even common sense dictates that average persons will think twice about breaking the law if they really believe they will be severely punished.

It protects innocent lives. Capital punishment protects innocent lives in three ways. First, it is a strong advance premium placed upon human life that generates our respect in preserving and protecting life. Second, when it is properly exercised, it puts the fear of God into other would-be murderers. Finally, it prevents repeat crimes by capital offenders.

Summary and Conclusion

There are three basic views on capital punishment held by Christians: rehabilitationism, reconstructionism, and retributionism. Rehabilitationism opposes capital punishment for any crime. Reconstructionism insists on capital punishment for all major crimes, whether moral or religious. Retributionism holds that capital punishment is appropriate for certain crimes: capital offenses.

Rehabilitationism is based on a remedial (reformatory) view of justice. The criminal is seen as a patient who is sick and in need of treatment. The other two views hold that justice is retributive. They view the criminal as a morally responsible person who deserves punishment. Retributionism differs from reconstructionism

and does not believe that offenses calling for capital punishment under Moses's law are still binding today. Rather, retributionism contends that capital punishment is based on the biblically stated principle of a life for a life that is applicable to all persons in all places and at all times.

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13

W A R

What should the Christian's attitude be toward war? Is it ever right to take the life of another person under the command of one's government? Is there a biblical basis for engaging in war? These questions have found varying responses among Christians. Basically, views regarding taking the life of another in war fall into three categories. First, there is *activism*, which holds that the Christian ought to participate in any war engaged in by one's government because government is ordained of God. Second, there is *ispacifism*, which contends that Christians should never participate in war to the point of killing others because God has commanded people never to take the lives of others. Finally, there is *selectivism* (the just-war view), which argues that Christians should participate in some *wars*—the just ones. To do otherwise is to refuse to follow the just course commanded by God.

Activism: It Is Always Right to Participate in War

Activism holds that Christians are duty-bound to obey their government and to participate in everywar for which that government enlists their support. Adherents of this position offer two different kinds of arguments in favor of their view, biblical and philosophical (or social). We will begin by examining the biblical data.

The Biblical Argument: Government Is Ordained of God

Scripture seems emphatic on this point. Government is of God. Whether in the religious or the civil realm, God is the God of order and not of chaos (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

Old Testament data on God and government. From the very beginning, Scripture declares that humankind is to "have dominion over... every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28 RSV). Humankind is to be king over all the earth. After the fall the woman is told, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16 RSV). When Cain killed Abel, the text implies that he failed to realize that he was his "brother's keeper" (Gen. 4:9-10). Finally, when the whole antediluvian civilization had become corrupt and "the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11 RSV), God destroyed it and instituted human government. God said to Noah and his family after the flood, "For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning ... ; of every man's brother I will require the life of man:' For "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:5-6 RSV; man = humankind).

In brief, God ordained human government. Adam was given the crown to reign over the earth. And then evil became rampant, and Noah was given the sword to enforce that rule. Government is of God both because order is from God and because disorder must be put down for God. Humans have the right from God to take the lives of unruly human beings who shed innocent blood. Government is invested with divine power.

The sword given to Noah was used by Abraham when he engaged in war against the kings who had committed aggression against Abraham's nephew Lot (Gen. 14). This passage indicates God's approval of wars that protect the innocent from aggressors.

Although the specific form of government changed throughout the Old Testament, there is a reiteration of the principle that government is of God. In the Mosaic theocracy, the powers of government are quite explicit: "You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exod. 21:23-25 RSV). Even when Israel set up its monarchy contrary to God's plan (1 Sam. 8:7), God nevertheless anointed their choice of a king. God said to Samuel the prophet, "Hearken to their voice, and make them a king" (1 Sam. 8:22 RSV). Later Samuel said, "Do you *see* him whom the Lord has chosen?" (1 Sam. 10:24 RSV). Even before David was king, he was commanded to fight against the Philistines, who were robbing Israel (1 Sam. 23:1).

As far as the governments of Gentile nations were concerned, the Old Testament declares that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (Dan. 4:25). And from the rest of Daniel's prophecy, it is clear that God ordained the great Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman governments (Dan. 2-7). Thus the text indicates that God has ordained government wherever it is found. And since government is given by God, it follows that to disobey government is to disobey God. If, therefore, the country's government commands a person to go to war, biblical activism argues that one must respond in obedience to the Lord, for the Lord has ordained the government with the sword, the power to take lives.

New Testament data on God and government. The New Testament confirms the view of the Old Testament that God has ordained government. Jesus declares that we should "give to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21). That civil authority is God-given is further acknowledged by Jesus before Pilate: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11). Paul admonishes Timothy to pray and give thanks "for kings and all those in authority" (1 Tim. 2:2). Titus is exhorted to "remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient" (Titus 3:1). Peter is very clear: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him" (1 Pet. 2:13-14 RSV).

The most extensive passage in the New Testament on the relation of the Christian to government is found in Romans 13:1-7. The first verse makes it clear that all government is divinely established: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established: Therefore, 'he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves'" (vv.1-2). The further reason given for obeying a ruler is that "he is God's servant to do you good.... He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (v. 4).

Paul writes, "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing" (v. 6). In view of this, the Christian is urged to "pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (v. 7 RSV). What is especially significant about this passage of Scripture is that it is the New Testament's reiteration of the power of government to take a human life. Christians are urged to obey the existing governor or king, "for he does not bear the sword in vain" (v. 4 RSV). Government, with its power over life, is "ordained of God: and whoever resists one's government is resisting God (Rom. 13:1-2 KJV). It would follow from this, according to biblical activists, that one ought to respond to the government's call to take part in war because God has given the authority of the sword to the governing authorities.

The Philosophical Argument: Government Is Humans' Guardian

Activism is defended by arguments outside the Bible as well. One of the most powerful defenses of this position comes from Plato's dialogue *Crito*. In it, he offers three explicit reasons (and two more implied ones) why a person should not disobey even a government that is unjustly putting him to death. The scene is the prison where Socrates awaits his death after he has been charged with impiety and sentenced to drink the cup of poison. Socrates' young friend Crito urges him to escape and evade the death penalty. In reply, Socrates gives five reasons for obeying an unjust government, even to the point of death:

Government is the human's parent. One ought not disobey even an unjust government. "First, because in disobeying it he is disobeying his parent." By this Socrates

means that under the sponsorship of government, the individual is brought into the world. One is not born into a lawless jungle but comes into this world under the parentage of the state. The state makes one's very birth more than barbaric: it is a birth into a state of civilization rather than into anarchy. Just as parents spend months in preparation and anticipation for a child, many years have likewise been spent in maintaining the state, which makes a civilized birth possible, and these years may not be lightly regarded later because a person finds oneself at odds with the government. If one were to disobey the government, says Socrates, would it not reply, "In the first place did we not bring you into existence? Your father married your mother by our aid and begat you. Say whether you have any objection to urge against those of us who regulate marriage. None, I should reply."

Government is the human's educator. Socrates offers another reason for obedience to one's government. "Second, because it is the author of his education." The implication here is that the very education making persons what they are (including their knowledge of justice and injustice) was given to them by their government. They are civilized, and not barbarian, not only by birth but also by training. And both the birth and training were made possible by the government that is now demanding one's life. What can one reply against governments that "after birth regulate the nurture and education of children, in which you also were trained? Were not the laws, which have the charge of education, right in commanding your father to train you in music and gymnastic? Right, I should reply." From this it follows that government could say to us, "Since you were brought into the world and nurtured and educated by us, can you deny in the first place that you are our child and slave, as your fathers were before you?" And if this is true, people are not on equal terms with their government. They have no more right to strike back at it and revile it than one does to hit one's mother or father. Even if government would destroy us, we have no right to destroy it in return. Persons who think that they do have such a right have "failed to discover that [their] country is more to be valued and higher and holier far than mother or father or any ancestor." Government is not only prior to the individual citizen, but also superior to the citizen as well.

The governed have a duty to obey government. The third reason Socrates gives for a person obeying the government is that "he has made an agreement with [it] that he will duly obey [its] commands?" That is, people's consent to be governed, given by pledging allegiance to that government, binds them to its laws. By the very *fact* that one takes a given country as one's own country, that person has thereby made a tacit covenant to be obedient to its commands. Hence, "when we are punished by [our country], whether with imprisonment or stripes, the punishment is to be endured in silence; and if she lead us to wounds or death in battle, thither we follow as is right?"³ For if people accept the privileges of education and protec-

1. Plato, *Crito*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowen, vol. 7 of *The Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 217.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

by attaching divine sanctions to them. Since this option seems to clearly reject the authority of the Old Testament, it is not a viable alternative for an evangelical Christian. Some pacifists suggest that these wars were unique in that Israel was acting as a theocratic instrument in the hands of God. These were not really Israel's wars at all but God's wars, as is evidenced by the special miracles God performed to win them (see Josh. 6, 10; Ps. 44).

Other pacifists argue that the wars of the Old Testament were not God's perfect will but only his permissive will. God is represented as commanding war in the same secondary and concessive sense that he is said to have commanded Samuel to anoint Saul the king (1 Sam. 10:1) even though God had not chosen Saul but David to be king. Wars are commanded by God in the same sense in which Moses commanded divorce—because of the hardness of people's hearts (Matt. 19:8). It is not that God really desires and commands war any more than he likes disobedience or divorce. God has a better way than that, and it is obedience and love. God could have accomplished his purposes in Israel and Canaan without war if they had been more obedient to him.

No war as such is ever God's command. What God commands clearly and unequivocally is "You shall not kill." This command applies to all people, friends, or enemies. All persons are made in God's image, and it therefore is wrong to kill them. The Old Testament clearly teaches that one should love one's enemies (Lev. 19:18; Jon. 4), and Jesus reaffirmed this: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). War is based in hate and is intrinsically wrong. Taking the life of another person is contrary to the principle of love and is therefore fundamentally unchristian.

Resisting evil with force is wrong. Closely connected with the first basic premise of pacifism, that killing is wrong, is another. Evil should never be resisted with physical force, but rather with the spiritual force of love. Did not Jesus say, "Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39 RSV)? Did not Christ also teach in this passage that "if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (v. 41 RSV)? The Christian is not to retaliate or payback evil with evil, for vengeance belongs to God (Deut. 32:35). Paul wrote, "Beloved, never avenge yourself, but leave it to the wrath of God.... No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:19-21 RSV). The Christian is to "repay no one evil for evil.... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (vv. 17-18 RSV).

The story of Jesus's driving the money changers from the temple is not incompatible with this position, some pacifists argue, for physical force (the whip) was used only on the animals, not the people. Furthermore, the authority Jesus used was his own and that of Scripture, not that of a strong-armed band of disciples (John 2:15-16). Finally, pacifists argue that the kind of physical force used by Jesus in the temple falls far short of proving that Jesus would sanction using extreme physical force to the point of taking human life.

Jesus's statement "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" cannot be used to support war (Matt. 10:34). When Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword; he was defining not the purpose but the result of his ministry (Matt. 26:52 RSV). He was saying that the effect of allegiance to him would "set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother" (Matt. 10:35 RSV). The effect of Christ's ministry would be to divide families as if by a sword (Luke 12:51), even though this was not the intent of his coming.

Pacifism is committed to the premise that it is essentially wrong to use physical force, at least to the point of taking life, in order to resist evil. This does not mean that pacifists repudiate all force. It means only that they believe in affirming the greater force of spiritual good when faced by the forces of physical evil. Pacifists believe basically that "we are not contending against flesh and blood but against ... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12 RSV).

When pressed to the wall by a militant activist asking whether a pacifist would kill a would-be murderer of his wife, the consistent pacifist's reply is simple: Why kill a wicked murderer and send him to his eternal doom, when permitting the murderer to kill his believing wife will result in her eternal bliss? The less stringent pacifist (or perhaps one with a non-Christian wife) might argue that wounding or disarming the murderer would be sufficient, but that one should never aim to kill even a murderer.

Another basic premise of pacifism is that there is no real distinction between what one should do as a private citizen and what one should do as a public official. What is wrong for a person to do in one's own neighborhood is wrong in any other neighborhood in the world. Putting on a military uniform does not revoke one's moral responsibility. The distinction between person and office is rejected as unbiblical and inconsistent. No person is exonerated from God's command not to kill simply because they have changed uniforms. The command against murder is not abrogated by one's obligation to the state. Only God holds the power of life and death. The powers of the state are social but not capital. The right to take a life belongs only to the Author of life himself (see Job 1:21). No human authority has the right to transcend God's moral law. Indeed, what authority government has is derived from God's moral law.

The Social Arguments: War Is Always Wrong

There are strong social arguments against war. It is not the best way to settle human disputes. Down through history, a river of human blood flows in the wake of wars. Evils of all kinds result from war: starvation, cruelty, plagues, and death.

War is based on the evil of greed. As far back as Plato's *Republic*, thinking people recognized that the desire for luxury was the basis of warfare. Plato observes. "We need not say yet whether war does good or harm, but only that we have discovered its origin in desires which are the most fruitful source of evils both to individuals

resistance. Even the otherwise pacifist Dietrich Bonhoeffer finally concluded that Hitler should have been assassinated. Out of dissatisfaction with the easy solutions of declaring all wars just or unjustifiable, a view is emerging called selectivism, which holds that some wars are justifiable and some are not. This view offers a more satisfactory alternative for a Christian ethic.

Selectivism as a Response to Activism: Some Wars Are Unjust

Both activism and pacifism claim the support of Scripture. Each view represents some truth. The truth of pacifism is that some wars are unjust, and Christians ought not participate in these. The truth of activism is that some wars are just, and Christians ought to fight in those. Selectivism, then, is committed to the position that one ought to participate only in a just war. There actually is a point of agreement (at least theoretically) with all three views. All could assent to the following ethical proposition: One should not participate in an unjust war.

The pacifist believes that all wars are unjust. The activist holds that no war is unjust (or at least if there are some unjust wars, then participation in them is not wrong). And the selectivist contends that in principle some wars are unjust and others are just. Thus, it is often called the just-war view. To support a Christian selectivism, one must show both that at least some wars are just in principle, showing that total pacifism is wrong, and that some wars are unjust in principle, thus showing that activism is wrong.

The rejection of total activism is supported by Scripture. The Bible teaches that it is not always right to obey one's government in everything it commands, particularly when its commands contradict the higher moral laws of God. There are clear instances of this in the Bible. The three Hebrew youths disobeyed the king's command to worship an idol (Dan. 3). Daniel broke a law commanding him not to pray to God (Dan. 6). The early apostles disobeyed orders not to preach the gospel of Christ (Acts 4-5). And in a clear case of divinely approved disobedience of civil law, the Hebrew midwives in Egypt disobeyed the command to kill all the male babies born. It is written, "The midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.... So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong." Further, "because the midwives feared God he gave them families" (Exod. 1:17, 20-21 RSV).

This passage clearly teaches that it is wrong to take the life of an innocent human, even if the government "ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1 KJV) commands it. The government commanding it may be ordained of God, but the morally unjustifiable command is not ordained of God. The parents of Jesus evidenced the same conviction that government has no rights over the life of an innocent human being: under God's direction, they fled Herod's attempt to kill the Christ child (Matt. 2:13-14). The inevitable conclusion from these Scriptures is that government is not always to be obeyed, especially when its command conflicts with the higher

use. While he opposed the use of force on religious grounds, he approved of it on social grounds to protect life.

The story of Abraham's battle against the kings of Genesis 14 lends support to the conclusion that unjust national aggressors should be resisted, as should unjust individual aggressors (see 1 Sam. 23:1-2). Nations as well as individuals can rob and murder. And it is faulty logic to argue that one should resist a murderous individual with the sword but let a murderous country run roughshod over thousands of innocent people.

Further support for the position that defensive military power is sometimes justifiable may be deduced from the life of the apostle Paul. When his life was threatened by unruly men, he appealed to his Roman citizenship and accepted the protection of the Roman army (Acts 22:25-29). On one occasion, certain men dedicated themselves to kill Paul, but he was escorted under the protection of a

small army of soldiers (Acts 23:23). Paul considered it his right as a citizen to be protected by the army from unjust aggression against his life. His actions clearly demonstrate that he demanded protection as a Roman citizen.

The principle of using military power in self-defense can be extended to a nation as well as to individuals. As pacifists also acknowledge, there is not a double standard of morality in the New Testament, with one rule for the individual and another for the country. After all, countries are made of many individuals. Not all killings or wars are unjust. God sometimes commands that the sword be used to resist evil people. Another support for just wars is evident in the words of John the Baptist. When asked by soldiers who had become believers "What shall we do?" his answer was not "Leave the army." Rather, it was in essence "Be a good soldier? They were simply told, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14). Surely if it had been wrong to engage in military activity, they would have been told so. The military is not an evil occupation as such. It is really a ministry of God to execute justice on behalf of the government (Rom. 13:4).

Selectivism as a Response to Pacifism: Some Wars Are Just

Christian pacifists appeal to Scripture in support of their position, but in each case the passage is capable of interpretation in another way. When taken in their proper contexts, these passages do not really support the claims of pacifists.

Were commands to kill only concessions? The attempt by pacifists to explain God's commands to kill in the Old Testament as simply divine concessions to human sinfulness is unacceptable. This kind of hermeneutic would undermine the Christian's confidence in all the commands of Scripture. When a command is conditional or cultural, the Scriptures label it as such. For example, Jesus pointed out that Moses had not really commanded divorce but merely allowed it (Matt. 19:8). There actually is no command to divorce anywhere in Scripture. The passage simply says, "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him" (Deut. 24:1).

This is a concession but not a command to divorce. Even in the Old Testament, God made his view on divorce very clear: "I hate divorce; says the LORD God of Israel" (Mal. 2:16).

The Bible also clearly indicates that God's order to anoint Saul king over Israel was a concession and not God's real desire for Israel (1 Sam. 8:6-9), at least not at that time and in that way. However, when God commanded Israel to exterminate the wicked Canaanites, there is no indication that God really wanted Israel to "make love, not war" with them. In fact, they were past the period of God's forbearance; the cup of their iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16). Like a gangrenous leg, they were incurably wicked, and God ordered Israel to perform the "amputation" (see also Lev. 18:25-27; Deut. 20:16-17).

Neither is there any indication in the Old Testament that capital punishment was used on murderers simply because the prevailing culture taught this or because the people did not love the murderer enough. On the contrary, the Scriptures state plainly that capital punishment is the very thing that God wanted to be done to such murderers. This is evident from the reason God gave for instituting capital punishment, that "in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6).

Likewise, God specifically ordered Israel to wage war on Canaan; in this theocracy, Israel was an instrument in the hand of God, who was fighting his war through them. Hence, "He left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded" (Josh. 10:40 RSV). Before Israel entered Canaan, they were told, "But in the cities of these people that the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them" (Deut. 20:16-17 RSV). Yet since these were theocratic wars, they cannot be used as a models for wars today.

Nonetheless, with regard to all cities outside of Canaan, there are lessons for just wars today. For example, the Israelites were told, "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. And if its answer to you is peace and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and serve you. But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; ... you shall put all the males to the sword, but the women and the little ones, the cattle, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourselves" (Deut. 20:10-14 RSV). In this case waging war was conditional, and the innocent were spared, but this was not so with the command of God to wage war on the unrepentant Canaanites.⁷ Another example for a just war can be learned from instructions for war against non-Canaanites: "You shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down" (Deut. 20:19 ESV; cE vv. 15-16).

From the above passages we may conclude that God not only sanctioned exterminating the Canaanites but also approved other just wars against peoples who

7. See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), chap. 4.

would not accept a just peace. In brief, God's command to engage in just warfare cannot be limited to the special theocratic command of God to exterminate the wicked Canaanites. Even in the later monarchies, God is seen as approving of Israel's war against threatening aggressors (2 Chron. 13:15-16; 20:29). Indeed, throughout the Old and New Testaments, God ordained war as an instrument of justice. Even apostate Israel itself, despite its special covenant relation to God, became the victim of governments raised up by God to defeat Israel (Dan. 1:1-2). Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:17), Cyrus (Isa. 44:28), and even Nero are described as servants of God, empowered with the sword. Paul wrote of Nero, "But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4 RSV). From these Scriptures it is evident that Gentile rulers in both Testaments were given the sword to promote good and resist evil. While not all did it with justice on their side, they nevertheless had the authority of God to do so and were responsible to God for how they used the sword.

Is all life-taking murder? Pacifists argue that one should never take another human life, because the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13 KJV). But this is a misunderstanding of the passage, which the New International Version correctly translates: "You shall not murder." All murder involves the taking of life, but not all taking of life is murder. Capital punishment takes life, but it is not murder. In fact, capital punishment is divinely enjoined in the very next chapter of the Bible (Exod. 21:12). Likewise, killing in self-defense is not murder and is approved in the following chapter (Exod. 22:2). War in defense of the innocent is not murder. And a war against an unjust aggressor is not murder (Gen. 14).

The pacifist is not facing squarely all the data of Scripture. Rather, while pacifists cling to the prohibition against murder, they overlook the verses where God commands taking the lives of wicked people in defense of the innocent. In brief, from Scripture one cannot justify a view that it is never right to take another human life.

Should evil be resisted with physical force? The Sermon on the Mount is the pacifist's stronghold. Did not Jesus say, "Turn the other cheek" and "Do not resist evil" (cf. Matt. 5:39 KJV)? Yes, but the question is What did Jesus mean by these statements? From the total context, it is clear that Jesus did not mean that we should never use the sword in self-defense or in civil justice. If one takes this passage too literally, then Jesus is also recommending that we actually pluck out our physical eyes or cut off our hands (5:29-30)! Further, the blow on the cheek was probably only a slap on the face with the back of the hand, as indicated by the fact that the normal right-handed person could only use the back of his hand to slap another on the "right cheek" (5:39). So Jesus is speaking more of insult than injury. The Greek word is *rhapizo*, meaning to "strike with open hand" or "slap on the cheek"

Indeed, Jesus himself never turned the other cheek to a blow. When he was struck (*rhapisma*) in the face (John 18:22), he rebuked those who did it: "If I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" (v. 23). Finally, the Sermon on the Mount

Third, turning biblical commands into concessions (as pacifists do) is a hermeneutical violation that will undermine evangelical orthodoxy on fundamental doctrines of Scripture. After all, ideally (and this is not an ideal world) we would not need to kill animals and have animal sacrifices. But the Bible commands both. To make these into concessions is to make the sacrifice of Christ only a divine concession rather than an eternal plan (Rev. 13:8; Acts 2:23). Twisting the plain and obvious meaning of Scriptures that command a certain behavior (in this case killing the violent to protect the innocent) into a divine concession to our fallenness stands the historical-grammatical hermeneutic on its head and potentially undermines an orthodox understanding of all of Scripture. Why, by the same logic, can we not assume that other commands of Scripture (like loving one's enemies or preaching the gospel) are mere concessions to a fallen world? Certainly the world is fallen, and if it were not, then there would be no enemies to love and no heathen to preach to; but that is not the point. The point is that these are commands, not concessions. They are things God really is commanding us to do. Likewise, we would not have to defend the innocent if the world were not fallen. But it is fallen, and we are commanded to kill if necessary to protect the innocent. The same is true of capital punishment (*see* chap. 12), saving the mother in tubal pregnancies (*see* chap. 9), killing in self-defense (Exod. 22:2), and wars against aggressors.

The Basis of Selectivism

The arguments in favor of selectivism can be grouped into two categories: biblical and moral. Since many of the biblical precedents have already been discussed, they need only be summarized here.

The biblical basis of selectivism. There are several instances of morally justified killing in the Bible. Some of these refer specifically to individuals and can be extended to nations, and others refer specifically to a country or countries.

First, there is killing in self-defense that is approved in Exodus 22:2, which says, "If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed." Then there is killing in capital punishment mentioned in Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (man = humankind).

There are also divinely approved wars, such as the one Abraham fought against the kings of the Valley of Siddim (Gen. 14). When they took aggressive action and "carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possession" (v. 12), Abraham "attack[ed] them and routed them.... He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions" (vv. 15-16). After this, Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, who said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand" (vv. 19-20). Thus, Abraham's military activity in defense of the innocent was clearly blessed by God.

This divinely sanctioned war is an especially important case because it occurred before Israel was established as a theocracy (Exod. 19). Hence, it cannot be argued that this war is a special case of a theocratic war such as God commanded Joshua to wage in exterminating the wicked residents of Canaan (Josh. 10). (It can be justifiably argued that what applied *uniquely* to Israel as God's chosen instrument is not normative for any other nation since then.)

The New Testament reaffirms that the sword is still a divinely appointed means of human justice. Paul wrote to the Romans, But if you do wrong, be afraid, for [the one in authority] does not bear the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:4 RSV).

John the Baptist sanctioned the role of the military when he was asked by soldiers what they should do after they had become believers. He did not tell them to leave the army but simply to be good soldiers (Luke 3:14).

Jesus recognized that Pilate had God-given authority over his life. When Pilate said to him, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" he replied, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:10-11).

The apostle Paul showed both his acceptance of the government's right to kill and his acceptance of the military. He said to Caesar's court, "If... I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die" (Acts 25:11). But when his life was threatened by militant Jews, he demanded and received the protection of the Roman army as a Roman citizen (Acts 23).

The moral basis of selectivism. The moral arguments for selectivism emerge naturally out of the arguments against activism and pacifism. They may be stated briefly.

In an evil world, force will always be necessary to restrain evil persons. Ideally, killings by police and military should not be necessary, but this is not an ideal world: it is an evil world. Ideally, we should not need locks on our doors or prisons. But it is simply unrealistic to presume that we can get along without them in this wicked world.

It is evil not to resist evil; it is morally wrong not to defend the innocent. Sometimes only physical force and taking lives are sufficient to accomplish this. All too often in our violent world, hostages are taken and all efforts at negotiation fail. Sometimes military action is the only way to save these innocent lives.

To permit a murder when one could have prevented it is morally wrong. To allow a rape when one could have hindered it is an evil. To watch an act of cruelty toward children without trying to intervene is morally inexcusable. In brief, not resisting evil is a sin of omission, and sins of omission can be just as evil as sins of commission. In biblical language, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17). Any man who does not protect his wife and children against a violent intruder fails them morally. Likewise, any country that can defend its citizens against evil aggressors and does not do it is morally remiss.

Just as the cause of justice demands a life for a life in capital crimes (see chap. 12), the same logic can be extended to the unjust actions of nations. Other na-

noted in response. First, it is a matter of factual dispute whether full-scale nuclear war would irreparably and permanently destroy the world. With proper warning and shelter, much of a population could be salvaged from an all-out nuclear attack. And with proper food storage and equipment, the fading effects of radiation can be survived.⁹

Nuclear war does not have to be that massive. It could be more tactical and limited in scope. This is especially true if a defensive shield or system like the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars") can be developed to deflect the major impact of an all-out nuclear attack. Furthermore, even if a tyrant could, it is not likely that anyone desiring more power would choose to destroy the world over which one wants power. Thus, it is more likely that the tyrant would engage in tactical or limited nuclear war.

While the stakes are higher in nuclear war, the principles are the same. Nuclear weapons should be used justly and discriminately. They should be directed, for example, at military targets, not civilian populations. Yet more innocent people may be accidentally killed in nuclear war than by conventional warfare. Collateral damage is one of the necessary by-products of war. But it is justified on the basis of the principle of double effect (see glossary). However, just because the stakes are higher does not mean that the weapons are automatically illegitimate.

If nuclear warfare is ruled unjust, then the unjust will rule. Declaring nuclear weapons unjust makes nuclear blackmail possible. Even the threat of their use by an evil power can make innocent people submit to tyrannical demands." The only realistic way to overcome this is to retain nuclear weapons as a real threat against aggressors. For any tyrant who knows that the opponent will not retaliate with similar nuclear force has already won the war. Once nuclear weapons are outlawed for countries, then only outlaw countries will have them.

The very fact that there is a balance of power among opposing nations with nuclear capabilities is a stabilizing factor for peace. As long as no one nation has unparalleled power, then each nation is automatically restrained by the realistic expectation that an opposing nation can retaliate in kind. This fact has had a sobering effect on the international superpowers for nearly half a century now. Once this balance is upset by unilateral disarmament or by one of the superpowers declaring that it will not use nuclear force, then the real threat of tyranny emerges. Hence, maintaining a real balance of power, including nuclear power, is important to world peace.

The problem of who decides. One of the most difficult problems for selectivism is establishing who has the authority to decide which wars are just and which are unjust. Would not confusion result if every individual in a country were allowed to make up their mind whether they should obey a given law? What if everyone

9. Ernest W. LeFever and E. Stephen Hunt, eds., *The Apocalyptic Atila* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982).

10. Myron S. Augsburger and Dean C. Curry, *Nuclear Arms* (Waco: Word, 1987), 114-24.

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14

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Should Christians ever disobey their government? If so, when? If not, why not? Is it ever right to revolt against an unjust government or to assassinate a tyrant? These questions are important for Christians in free countries, but are acutely so for believers in oppressive nations.

There are three basic positions on civil disobedience: it is always right, never right, or sometimes right. The first view is called *anarchism*, the second is *radical patriotism*, and the third is *biblical submissionism*. Since the first view lacks any Christian justification, our attention will be focused on the latter two.

Radical Patriotism: Civil Disobedience Is Never Right

Radical patriotism is similar to the activism (chap. 13) arguing that all wars are just so long as the government commands one to participate. Here, however, the focus is not on war against another country but on the citizen's duties to his or her own country. Should one ever disobey any law of the land? Radical patriotism says no.

An Explanation of Radical Patriotism

"My country, right or wrong!" cries the radical patriot. To the degree that some Christians adopt this stance, they appeal for justification to certain Scriptures. Let's take a look at their arguments.

God ordained government. God established government after the flood (Gen. 9:6), and he expects this authority to be respected. Paul writes that "there is no

authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom. 13:1).

God expects obedience to human government. Not only did God establish government; he also expects us to obey it. This is obvious for two reasons. First, we are told to "submit" to it. This implies obedience because "submit" and "obey" are used in parallel in other passages (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:5-6). Second, Paul explicitly enjoins Christians to obey their government when he writes, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient" (Titus 3:1).

Obedience is necessary even to evil governments. When Paul exhorted the Romans to "submit ... to the governing authorities" as "God's servant" (Rom. 13:1, 4), Nero was emperor. He killed his mother to ascend to the throne, burned Rome, and even burned Christians alive for streetlights. Nero was a brutal and wicked man, yet Paul called him "God's servant" and asked Christians to obey him. God told Daniel that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (Dan. 4:32). Sometimes this includes "the lowliest of men" (v. 17). But whomever God establishes is to be obeyed, good or evil. Peter said plainly, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (1 Pet. 2:13).

On the basis of these and similar Scriptures, the Christian patriot believes that obedience to government is obedience to God. To use Paul's words, the patriot insists that "he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted" (Rom. 13:2). Hence, civil disobedience is never justified.

An Evaluation of Radical Patriotism

There are several objections to the use of these Scriptures to justify unqualified obedience to human government. The foremost reason is that they are not taken in their proper context.

God ordained government but not its evil. God ordained human government but does not approve of its evil. There is a hint of this even in the passage in Romans, which says the ruler "is God's servant to do you good" (13:4). There is no indication here or anywhere else in the Bible that God is pleased with evil governments. Actually, much of the thrust of the Bible, especially the prophets, is to condemn evil governments (see Obad.; Jon. 1; Nah. 2). Isaiah said, "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees" (10:1). God appointed government, but he surely does not approve of its evils.

Obedience to government is not unqualified. While it is true that God demands obedience to human authorities, this obedience is not without some limitations. Peter said to the authorities who commanded him not to preach the gospel, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19). John spoke of the faithful remnant of the tribulation, who would not submit to the idolatrous commands of the antichrist (Rev. 13). Indeed, as will be seen shortly, there are many divinely approved instances of disobedience to civil

authorities (e.g., Exod. 1; Dan. 3, 6). In each case the implication is clear: government should be obeyed as long as it takes its place under God, but not when it takes the place of God.

We need not obey the evils of government. The Bible does enjoin obedience to governments even if they are evil, but it does not demand obedience to the evils of government. Indeed, it forbids doing evil no matter who says so. This is clear from the midwives' refusal to kill innocent babies at the command of Pharaoh (Exod. 1) and from the unwillingness of the three Hebrew youths to worship an idol (Dan. 3). Christians can obey a government that permits evil, but not when one commands them to do an evil. Blind obedience to the evils of government is not patriotic; it is idiotic. Unqualified submission to an oppressive government is not patriotism. It is patriolatry, and patriolatry is idolatry, an ultimate commitment to what is less than ultimate.

An evaluation of anarchism. As in the case of activism in war (see chap. 13), one should not be indiscriminate in action against governments with which one disagrees. Not every war is justified (only the just ones), and not every action against an evil government is justified. A right cause should not be undertaken in the wrong way. The truth is that almost any law is better than no law. A monarchy is better than total anarchy. This is why the Bible bids believers to submit *even* to evil governments (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13). Anyone who has lived through a lawless situation, like riots out of control, knows the terror of such conditions.

As spelled out in the last chapter, there is a time and a place for disobedience to government (Exod. 1; Dan. 3, 6; Acts 4-5; Rev. 13); however, it should not be done in a violent manner. Citizens are not given the sword to use on the government. Rather, the government is given the sword to use on rebellious citizens (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:4). In short, two wrongs do not make a right.

Saving the environment is a noble cause, but ecological terrorism is not a proper way to do it. Groups like Earth Liberation Front (ELF) are really environmental anarchists. Their tactics are as wrong as their goals may be right. Such also is the Earth First! group that engaged in a series of protests and civil disobedience. However, in 1984, members introduced "tree spiking" (insertion of metal or ceramic spikes in trees in an effort to damage saws) as a tactic to thwart logging. Resistance to evil is necessary (as spelled out below), but the resistance should not itself be an evil. One evil does not compensate for another.

Biblical Submissionism: Disobedience to Government Is Sometimes Right

There is general agreement among Christians that there are times when a Christian should engage in civil disobedience. The real problem is where to draw the line, and there are two positions on this. One view holds that government should be disobeyed when it promulgates a law that is contrary to the Word

of God. The other view contends that government should be disobeyed only when it commands the Christian to do evil. Both views will be presented and evaluated.

The Antipromulgation Position: Disobedience to Government When It Promulgates Unbiblical Laws

Christians have the right to disobey their government when it promulgates laws or actions contrary to the Word of God. (A broader version of this position would say, when it contradicts the moral law or an individual's conscience. The deist Thomas Jefferson espoused a form of this view.)

Since this is a book on Christian ethics, we will focus here on the Christian form of this viewpoint. It was presented by Samuel Rutherford in his famous *Lex Rex (The Law Is King [1644])*. Francis Schaeffer (d. 1984) adopted the position in his widely circulated *Christian Manifesto* (1981), which presents the essence of the view.

The power of government is not absolute. Following Rutherford, Francis Schaeffer insisted that "kings then have not an absolute power in their regiment to do what pleases them; but their power is limited by God's Word." In other words, "all men, even the king, are under the law and not above it." "The law is king; the king is not the law. Government is under God's law; it is not God's law.

The law is above the government. Schaeffer claimed that "the law is king, and if the king and the government disobey the law they are to be disobeyed." Thus the true law is the law of God, which is not the government but is over the government. The Christian's obedience, then, is to God's law and to government only insofar as it is in accordance with God's law.

Governments that rule contrary to God's law are tyrannical. According to Schaeffer, "the law is founded on the law of God." Hence, "tyranny was defined as ruling without the sanctions of God." In other words, whenever a government rules contrary to God's Word, it has ruled tyrannically. In such cases the Christian should not obey the government.

Citizens should resist a tyrannical government. Not only should citizens disobey a tyrannical government; they also should actively resist it. Schaeffer declares that "citizens have a moral obligation to resist unjust and tyrannical government." For "when any office commands that which is contrary to the Word of God, those who hold that office abrogate their authority and they are not to be obeyed, and that includes the state."

13. Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 100.

14. *Ibid.*, 99

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 100.

17. *Ibid.*, 101.

18. *Ibid.*, 90.

Summary and Conclusion

There are three basic views regarding civil disobedience. Anarchism approves of it anytime. Radical patriotism never approves of disobeying government, and biblical submissionism holds that it is sometimes right to disobey government. While most Christians believe the Bible supports the latter view, there is disagreement about when disobedience is justified. Antipromulgationists insist on the right to disobey any law that permits actions contrary to God's Word. Anticompulsionists, on the other hand, hold that disobedience is justified only when the government is trying to compel one to do an evil.

Even among those who agree that disobedience to government is sometimes called for, there is a difference of opinion concerning how one should disobey. Some believe in revolting against an unjust government, but the biblical view calls for resisting it without rebelling against it. Such resistance is not passive acceptance of injustice in government, but it can involve an active spiritual, moral, and political campaign against that injustice.

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15

SEXUAL ISSUES

We live in a sex-saturated society. The secular views of sexual license have penetrated the Christian church. This is true in spite of the *fact* that Christians are urged by Scripture: "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2 RSV). John added, "All that is in the world [is] the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of *life*" (1 John 2:16). Typical of the prevailing secular view of sex is that whatever is done between consenting adults is okay. The Bible, on the other hand, condemns adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and other forms of sexual perversion.

However, since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, Christians have largely abandoned biblical imperatives about sexual activity. As Scott Rae asks,

If the sexual revolution [of the 1960s] was over, why are sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, especially among teenagers, now at an all-time high? Why are there more abortions being performed to day than in any other period since it became legal in 1973? Why are reports out of the nation's junior high and high schools indicating that the average age of a person's first sexual encounter is getting younger and younger, even as young as age 13? Why do further studies show that the great majority of teenagers have been sexually active long before graduation from high school?

Further, the notion of abstinence until marriage is considered outdated, and it can be assumed that even many committed Christian couples are sleeping together before marriage.

1. Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 225.

One of the difficulties in the Christian context is that Christians often take their guidance from what other Christians *do*, rather than what they *ought* to do. They neglect the fact that our basis for activity should not be the norm *of* Christians, but the norm *for* Christians (which is God's revelation). Yet since we have rid our public schools of the God, prayer, and the Ten Commandments as sources of guidance for our lives, we should not be surprised that the sexual morals have changed radically in the past generation or so. Rather than spelling out various views on sex and its many ramifications, we will develop a Christian view of sex over against our sexual society, based on what Scripture mandates for believers.

The Rise of the Sexual Revolution

For the purpose of this chapter, we will discuss sexual ethics in two broad categories: secular and Christian. By the former is meant the widespread cultural belief and practice known in general as the sexual revolution. Others call it "the *Playboy* ethic." It is really a contemporary form of hedonism. Also, it is part of situation ethics, discussed earlier (in chap. 3). Several factors gave rise to this secular and relativistic view of sex.

Nihilism

The most significant root of the sexual revolution in the modern world is what Nietzsche (d. 1900) called "the death of God." He said, "God is dead and we have killed him."² But when God dies, then all objective value dies with him. As the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (d. 1881) observed in *The Brothers Karamazov*, when God dies, then anything is permitted. The truth is that when we kill the moral Lawgiver, then there is no basis left for the moral law.

Emotivism

Out of A. J. Ayer's (d. 1989) logical positivism arose an ethic called emotivism. Ayer tried to reduce all ethical statements to an expression of our feeling. So statements like "You shall not kill" really mean "I don't like killing" or "I feel killing is wrong." There are no divine imperatives. Everything is relative to our individual feelings. Hence, there are no objective moral laws binding on all persons.

Existentialism

Atheistic existentialism also contributed to the rise of the new ethic. Jean-Paul Sartre (d. 1980) wrote: "No sooner had you (God) created me than I ceased to be yours.... I knew myself alone, utterly alone.... I was like a man who's lost his

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Madman" in *The Gay Science*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1960, 125.

Zen Buddhism

The more recent influence of Eastern religions in the West has also contributed to moral relativism. As Alan Watts noted, "Buddhism does not share the Western view that there is a moral law, enjoined by God or by nature, which it is man's duty to obey. The Buddha's precepts of conduct—abstinence from taking life, taking what is not given, exploitation of the passions, lying, and intoxication—are voluntarily assumed rules of expediency. ... Generally speaking, the conventionally 'bad' actions are rather more grasping than the 'good. But the higher stages of Buddhist practice are as much concerned with disentanglement from 'good karma' as from bad."⁶

These and other influences (like Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* ethics and pornographic photos) set the stage for the sexual revolution. If there are no moral absolutes, then absolutely anything goes. When the moral Lawgiver is expelled from the culture, then so is the moral law. And as Sartre noted, without God and his law, we must make up our own law.

A Defense of a Biblical Ethic of Sex

Objective ethics, even as they apply to sex, can be defended from a natural law perspective, as well as from special revelation in the Bible. While the emphasis here is on the latter, arguments from the former will be interwoven with the biblical reasons.

Sexuality in the Old Testament

Sexuality affects all aspects of one's life. A person's gender (or sex) is a teleological, or designed, factor of an individual's life. There exists what is considered a *complementary* difference between men and women. This means that men are physically and spiritually created to fulfill the role of males, husbands, fathers, and so forth; and that women are physically and spiritually created to fulfill the role of female, wives, and mothers (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:21-25; Eph. 5:22-32; Col. 3:18-24). Both sexes are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and they both possess equal dignity.

GENESIS

Genesis 1-2. God instituted marriage and officiated at the first marriage. Sex was not only created by God's making humans "male and female" (Gen. 1:27); it was also ordained as the means for propagating the race. "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28 RSV). The union of a man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating God's generosity by fulfilling the command to populate the earth. The limits

6. Man Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 57.

for the use of sex, however, were within marriage. This is implied in several ways. First, the creation of sex is part of the union of "male and female" (Gen. 1:27). Second, the instruction of God is for male and female to "cleave" to one another as "one flesh" (Gen. 2:18-25 RSV). Third, the use of the sexually intimate word "know" describes the means of propagation (Gen. 4:1, 25 RSV).

From Genesis 2:18-25 it is clear that marriage was created so that the man would not be alone and that he would have a comparable helper. This is also indicated in the institution of marriage, in which the two should "leave" their parents and be joined ("cleave") to one another (RSV). From this passage it is clear that it was not good for the man to be alone and that he needed a suitable helper. This points to Adam's insufficiency (1 Con 11:9), not Eve's, and indicates that God created the woman to meet man's deficiency in being unable to bear children (1 Tim. 2:15) and form an interdependence (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

The marriage relationship was established as the first human institution. It is the only institution coming to us from before the fall (Gen. 3). Thus it is still binding on all people (Heb. 13:4). Genesis 2 says that children are to leave their parents and let their own one-flesh union carry with it the marital partners' new primary responsibility to each other instead of to their parents. It also says that they are to be joined together with each other. The term "joined" (Gen. 2:24 NASB) carries with it the sense of a solid and unbreakable union, meaning that divorce should not be an option (see chap. 17, "Marriage and Divorce"). The one flesh that is joined together carries with it the connotation of being whole and complete. The implication is that the marital union is complete with the two individuals. The idea of a perfect monogamous relationship is what is established in this passage, and monogamy continues to be the proper design found throughout the Old and New Testaments (Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Con 7:2).

Genesis 4. The first abuse of God's pattern for marriage came in Genesis 4, when "Lamech took two wives" (v. 19). God had ordained only one for Adam. Even the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:17) speak of one "wife" (singular) when it urges, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (singular). Polygamy, like divorce, was permitted "because of [their] hardness of heart: but "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8 ESV). Indeed, Moses commanded against multiple wives, saying, "[Do] not multiply wives" (Deut. 17:17 NASB). Solomon paid bitterly for his polygamy, for "his wives turned away his heart" from God to idols (1 Kings 11:4-6 RSV).

Genesis 9. Noah's son Ham apparently engaged in a perverse sexual act with his father while he was drunk. For it says that "when Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan! .. :'" (Gen. 9:24-25). The text also says that Ham, Canaan's father, "saw the nakedness" of Noah (v. 22 RSV) and that the other sons "covered the nakedness of their father" (v. 23 RSV). For several reasons, homosexuality seems to be implied here. First, surely, inadvertently seeing a nude parent was insufficient grounds for such a severe punishment of all his posterity for generations to come (v. 25). Second, to

brother (18:14); father's brother's wife, or aunt (18:14); daughter-in-law, or son's wife (18:15); both a woman and her daughter (18:17) or her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter (18:17); or one's wife's sister while the wife is still alive (18:18).

Sex during a woman's menstrual period was forbidden. Leviticus 18:19 instructs against having sex during a woman's "menstrual uncleanness" (RSV; customary impurity). No physical reason is explicitly stated, but Leviticus 15:24 says, And if any man lies with her, and her impurity [natural menstrual discharges] is on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and everybed on which he lies shall be unclean" (RSV). At a minimum it caused ceremonial uncleanness and possibly more problems.

Homosexuality was forbidden. As noted above, homosexual and incestuous activity was forbidden even before Moses and was later incorporated into Moses's law. Among these, God clearly forbade both Israel and "the nations" to participate in homosexual activity. God said, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev. 18:22 RSV). The consequences stated are "lest the land vomit you out ... as it vomited out the nation that was before you" (Lev. 18:28 RSV). Thus homosexual practices are wrong for those who do not have the law of Moses, because they have the natural law "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:12-15).

Bestiality was forbidden. Bestiality, or sexual union with animals, was also forbidden in the Levitical law. Leviticus 18:23 says, "Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall anywoman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion" (NKJV; cf. Exod. 22:19; Lev. 20:15, 16; Deut. 27:21).

Fornication was forbidden. Fornication, or premarital sex, was also forbidden in the Old Testament. It is implied in the commands against adultery since it was wrong even if one partner was not married. Further, it is implicit in the condemnation of prostitution (Lev. 19:29; Isa. 23:17; Ezek. 16:15,26,29), also described as being a "whore" (KJV) or "harlot" (RSV; Lev. 21:7; Deut. 23:18).

SONG OF SOLOMON

While there are restrictions on sex, it is also celebrated within the beauty of marriage. The literal interpretation of Song of Solomon reveals the beauty of courting (1:2-3:5), cleaving (3:6-5:1), and marriage (5:2-8:14). This book depicts the interaction between Solomon and his beloved. What is found in this passage reflects the proper sanctions and boundaries of marriage. First, this is a relationship between one man and one woman. Second, this is a relationship that during the courtship (1:1-3:5) did not involve premarital sex. It is clear that Solomon had the natural desires and emotions for sexual intercourse but that he demonstrated restraint by refraining until after the wedding ceremony took place (3:6-5:1; cf. 2:7; 3:5). Third, there was a wedding ceremony that took place before the consummation of the marriage (3:6-5:1; esp. 3:6-7,11). This shows that marriage is not a private event, but that it should be a ceremony before both God and humans.

HOSEA

Some have pointed out that God commanded Hosea, "Take to yourself a wife of harlotry" (Hos. 1:2 RSV). Yet according to Exodus 20:14, adultery is a sin, and according to 1 Corinthians 6:15-18, having sexual relations with a harlot is immoral (cf. Lev. 19:29). How, then, could a holy God command Hosea to take a harlot as his wife? While some have taken this as an allegory, there is no reason it cannot be understood literally without violating Old Testament sexual standards.

First, when God commanded Hosea to take Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, to be his wife, Gomer may not yet have actually committed adultery. However, God knew what was in her heart, and he knew that she would ultimately be unfaithful to Hosea.

Second, the passage does not condone harlotry. It actually is a strong condemnation of harlotry, of both the physical and spiritual (idolatry) kind (cf. 4:11-19). The fact that the grave sin of idolatry is depicted as spiritual harlotry reveals God's disapproval of harlotry.

Third, Hosea was commanded to *marry* a harlot, not to commit adultery with her. God said, "Go, take to yourself a wife" (Hos. 1:2 RSV). God did not say to go and commit fornication with her. Rather, God said to marry her and be faithful to her, even though she would be unfaithful to Hosea. Not only does this not violate the commitment of marriage; it actually also intensifies it. Hosea was to be faithful to his marriage vows even though his wife would become unfaithful to her vows.

Fourth, the command in Leviticus 21:7 not to marry a harlot was given to the Levitical priests, not to everyone. Salmon apparently married Rahab the harlot (Matt. 1:5), from whose legal genealogy Christ eventually came. At anyrate, Hosea was a prophet, not a Levitical priest; hence, the prohibition not to marry a harlot did not apply to him.

Finally, the command in 1 Corinthians 6:16 not to be joined to a harlot is not a command never to marry a woman who was a harlot. Rather, the command is directed against those who were having sexual relations outside of the marriage relationship. But Hosea did not have sexual relations outside of marriage. God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer and always to be faithful to her. Thus, Hosea does not diminish the Old Testament sexual standards but exemplifies and elevates them.

Sexuality in the New Testament

God set specific parameters for sexuality in the Old Testament, but he also continued to uphold those same strict parameters in the New Testament. We do not live under the Old Testament law as such today, but this does not mean that a person is free from the moral law (Rom. 2:14-15). For Jesus said he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Indeed, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament (all but the one on keeping the Sabbath). The moral principles embedded in the Ten Commandments are

eternal since they reflect the unchangeable character of God. In this sense there is a unity between Old and New Testaments on moral issues.

THE GOSPELS

Jesus upholds the Old Testament definition of marriage. God's standard for marriage was the same from its inception: one man and one woman united till death parts them. This can be seen from the fact that Jesus reaffirmed the clear definition of marriage in Matthew 19:1-6 (cf. Mark. 10:1-12). Here Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 5:2. In this passage Jesus affirms that marriage is defined as between one man and one woman. The couple is to leave their parents and become "one flesh" (cf. Gen. 2:24). Also, in this passage Jesus affirms the fact that marriage is of the Lord and not merely a human institution: "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6 ESV).

Jesus condemns fornication. Jesus clearly condemned "fornication" in the Gospels (KJV: Matt. 5:32; 15:19; Mark 7:21). Fornication is understood to be consensual sexual intercourse by an unmarried person. Adultery, by contrast, is consensual sexual intercourse by a married person. Yet the same act can be adultery for one person (the married one) and fornication by another (the unmarried one). Probably the clearest case of the condemnation of fornication in the New Testament comes from Matthew 15:19-20 (emphasis added) when Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, *fornications*, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man" (NKJV). From this passage it is clear that Jesus distinguishes between moral and ceremonial standards. Jesus sees moral defilement as a means of corrupting the soul. It is clear that Jesus sees the source of fornication to be from the evil inside the heart of a human and that it is a means of defiling a human. Again, prostitution or harlotry is a form of fornication. Paul said, "Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?" (1 Cor. 6:16 ESV). He adds, "Flee from sexual immorality" (6:18); here "immorality" translates the Greek word *porneia*, meaning fornication.'

Jesus condemns adultery. Jesus also condemns adultery in the New Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus pointedly and clearly condemns all forms of adultery. In this passage Jesus reaffirms the validity of the Old Testament when in Matthew 5:27 he quotes from Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18. In this passage we find that Jesus not only condemns the external action of adultery, but also the lust from which it grows (cf. Matt. 15:19). Jesus said, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (5:28 NKJV).

7. The word for 'fornication' is not limited to extramarital sexual relations. Its meaning is broader than 'adultery*' and is not identical with it.

In addition, Jesus speaks strongly against lustful desires and immoral actions: "If your right eye cause you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (5:29-30 NKJV). Jesus was not advocating a form of self-mutilation, for this would not cure lust, which is from the heart. Rather, he uses this hyperbole to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and how one needs to drastically do away with immorality (or any sin) in one's life. Finally, Jesus speaks to the fact that if a man wrongfully divorces his wife and marries another person, he has committed adultery (5:32).

Jesus condemns adultery in a few other places as well. These can be found in his interaction with rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27) and with the woman taken in adultery in John 8, which he called a "sin" (8:11). In the first story Jesus clearly affirms the Old Testament commandments by declaring adultery to be wrong.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Throughout the book of Acts, marriage is depicted as a union of man and female. Despite the ungodly acts of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, they are presented as a married couple. Likewise, the godly couple of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18) are seen as married. Also, Acts speaks of the households of Cornelius (10:33-48) and the Philippian jailer (16:25-34).

The Jerusalem gathering in Acts 15 condemned sexual immorality in the early church (Acts 15:20,29). This is found in their statement about how the Gentiles—and for that matter, how Jews—should live their lives. The council held it to be "necessary ... that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well" (Acts 15:28-29 NKJV). Sexual sins as such were condemned, but in particular, sexual orgies associated with the worship of pagan gods. These stipulations were provided so that the Gentiles would keep themselves pure, so that they would avoid being an offense to the Jewish sensibilities, either in their marriages or in any other type of relationship.

THE EPISTLES

Improper sex results from a depraved heart. Paul depicts improper sex as part of the downward spiral of the wrath and abandonment of God in a person's life. In Romans 1:24 Paul says, "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves" (NKJV). According to this passage, God has removed his restraint and is allowing these people's sin to run its course, and the effects of their sin are seen as divine judgment. They are given over to uncleanness, which speaks of sexual immorality (2 Cor. 12:21;

Gal. 5:19-23; Eph. 5:3; 1 Mess. 4:7), which has begun in the heart, and then proceeds to shame and produce an effect on the body.

This evident from Romans 1:28-29: "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting: ... sexual immorality? In this passage many things are listed as a result of not keeping the knowledge of God. But in keeping with our theme, it is clear that sexual immorality is considered to be an effect that comes from a person turning away from their knowledge of God. This act of turning away from God is manifest in sexual immorality, and it is considered to be debased, not fitting, and deserving of death.

Homosexuality is condemned in the Epistles. For a longer defense against homosexuality, see chapter 16, "Homosexuality." What needs to be briefly looked at here is that homosexuality was condemned in the New Testament Epistles. This is found in Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5; 1 Timothy 1: 9-10; Jude 7. In Romans 1:26 Paul does not use the normal Greek word for women, or a general word for female. The reason for this could possibly be to show the extent of the immorality in the society and to typify the abandonment by God, because in the Roman culture, like many cultures, women are usually the last to be affected by a great moral collapse.

Adultery is condemned in the Epistles. Adultery is clearly condemned in the New Testament Epistles. The references to their condemnation can be found in Romans 2:22; 13:9; Galatians 5:19; James 2:11; 2 Peter 2:14; and Revelation 2:22. Adultery is the voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband. Each of these passages clearly reaffirms the Old Testament definitions of improper sexuality. Also, texts such as Romans 13:9 actually quote the Ten Commandments against committing adultery. This is a case and example to show that the moral law found within the Old Testament ceremonial law still applies to all peoples at all times. Furthermore, adultery is seen as being one of "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19 RSV) and thus is done by a person who does not "walk by the Spirit" (5:16 RSV). In 2 Peter 2:14 the notion of adultery is associated with those who are false teachers. These false teachers are considered to be so lost in their moral control that they are found carousing (2:13); they are driven by an uncontrollable lust, and their eyes are full of adultery, in which they cannot look upon a woman without being a potential adulterer (2:14; Matt. 5:28). Finally, God promised the church of Thyatira that unless they repent of their immorality and adultery, they would be cast "into a sickbed" and experience "great tribulation" (Rev. 2:22 NKJV). From these passages it is clear that adultery was condemned and that it was a sign of ungodliness, whose punishment was the judgment of God.

Incest and fornication are condemned in the Epistles. First Corinthians 5:1 says, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's

wife!" (NKJV). Instead of saying "sexual immorality; some translations use the term "fornication" (KJV). This sin was so vile that even the nonbelieving Gentiles (pagans) were disgusted at such horrendous acts. The Corinthians had tried to suppress and minimize the severity of such sin, but they were not able to hide that immorality, and it was evident to all. This is known from 5:9, where Paul says, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people" (NKJV).

The sin that these individuals were committing was a sexual sin between a man and his father's wife. This is a form of incest, and it was comparable to a son having a sexual relationship with his mother. The rebuke of this individual mirrors the Old Testament condemnation (Lev. 18:7-8, 29; Deut. 22:30; 27:20). Finally, this type of relationship was "not even named" among the Gentiles. This may be a reference to the fact that it was both uncommon and illegal under the Roman law (which was based on the natural law).

Sexual immorality received apostolic and ecclesiastical condemnation. In 1 Corinthians, it is clear that the apostle Paul and the early church condemned sexual immorality. Some were partaking in sexual immorality (5:1) and were becoming "puffed up" with pride about it (5:2 NKJV). In response to this immorality, Paul had previously written them a letter rebuking them for their sexual immorality (5:9). But now he is calling for official church discipline to be performed upon such individuals. He said they should have mourned over their sin (5:2). "When they are gathered together, ... [they should] deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (5:4-5 NKJV). The reasoning for this excommunication of the professed believer was for divine chastening by throwing him into the realm of Satan (1 Tim. 1:20). But this person was also cast out so that he did not affect the rest of the church

Cor. 5:6), so that it might be separated from the dominion of sin and the old life; hence, the church was to remove all things that are sinful, including all possible evil influences upon itself. In 2 Corinthians (12:21), Paul expected and demanded that these actions be taken in the church. Not putting these instructions into practice will result in a church and a society that have been overcome with the "leaven" of sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:6 RSV).

Sexually immoral individuals are portrayed as unregenerate in the New Testament Epistles. Sexual immorality was seen as acts done by the unregenerate and not by those who have come under the Lordship of Christ. This is clearly seen in the Letter to the Galatians, where sexual immorality and fornication are portrayed as being "works of the flesh" (5:19 RSV). Another reference to the fact that those who portray these characteristics are either unregenerate or have fallen into an unregenerate lifestyle is found in the Letter to the Ephesians 5:3-7: "But fornication and *all uncleanness* or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom

of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (emphasis added).

In other places it is clear that sexual immorality was considered to be part of the old life and that it is to be done away with (Col. 3:5). It is also clear that it is the will of God for a person's sanctification that they abstain from sexual immorality and fornication (1 Thess. 4:3). The New Testament portrays unsanctified and sometimes unregenerate individuals as being sexually immoral (Heb. 12:16; Jude 7). From the host of these passages, it is clear that sexual immorality does not befit Christian believers. It shows the marks of ungodliness, a lack of restraint, and living in the flesh; ultimately it might indicate that a person is not a regenerate believer.

Believers are not to associate with the sexually immoral. Immorality was seen to be such an infectious sin that believers were commanded to not associate with anyone who professed to be a believer and lived in sexual immorality. Paul says, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:9-11 NKJV). There is a twofold purpose for this separation: one, so that these sins would not affect the church; two, so that the sinning persons' lack of fellowship would drive them to repent and to be reinstated into the church's fellowship.

Sexual immorality received divine judgment in the New Testament. Throughout the New Testament, those who fell into sexual immorality received divine judgment (Rom. 1:18-32). Also, being excommunicated from the church is a form of divine judgment (1 Cor. 5:9-11). Some will receive the divine judgment of not inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9). Finally, the book of Revelation makes it clear that those who are sexually immoral are going to *receive* divine judgment. Thus the church of Thyatira is going to be cast "into great tribulation" (2:22 NKJV). Later in the book we find that those practicing "sexually immorality" receive judgment with the sixth trumpet (9:21). Fornication and sexual immorality are portrayed as being in association with the spiritual prostitution of the antichrist's false system, which will inevitably fail because of its immorality (14:8). The book of Revelation then goes on to show that the nations and kings that have committed adultery and fornication are going to receive divine judgment (17:2, 4; 18:3, 9). Finally, as the kingdom of heaven is coming down from God (21:1-2), the great Babylon is judged for her fornication and immorality (19:2); then outside the gates of heaven are those who are sexually immoral (22:15). It is clear from these passages that God does not approve of sexual immorality. In itself sexual immorality receives divine judgment, and it is also a

symbol of those nations and great systems of Satan that are coming against the kingdom of God.

Improper Sexuality and the Trinity

There is a trinitarian reason for why Christians should not partake in any type of sexual immorality. The reasons for this derive from the ministries of each person of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The first theological reason involves God the Father. Sexual immorality is a sin against the body (1 Cor. 6:15-20), which God owns. The body has a prominent role in the New Testament and Christian worldview. The body is not considered to be less real, as the Platonists claimed, or evil, as the gnostics claimed. Rather, it has real existence and is not an evil thing as such (even though sin does affect the body). But because sexual sin is against the body, it is wrong to sin in this manner (and any manner), especially because Paul says, "And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power" (1 Cor. 6:14 NKJV). In this passage sexual immorality is wrong because God the Father ultimately owns the body, and he will raise the faithful Christian's body to glory.

The second reason why sexual immorality is wrong is because of a believer's union and connection to the body of Christ. Christians should keep their bodies pure because we are joined to Christ. First Corinthians 6:15-17 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two'; He says, 'shall become one flesh: But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him'" (NKJV).

The third reason a believer should not commit sexual immorality is because it defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (NKJV).

In summation, the trinitarian reasons for believers not partaking in immorality are clear. One, God is going to raise the body, and believers should keep their bodies pure in light of the future resurrection. Two, Christians are joined to the body of Christ, and thus committing sexual immorality in essence defiles the body of Christ. Three, the body of a Christian is now the temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, and defiling the body defiles the temple in which the Holy Spirit resides.

According to the New Testament, marriage is to be solely *between* one man and one woman (1 Cor. 7:2). Because of God's concern for the family, he sets regulations and sanctions upon proper and improper sexuality. This can be seen from many passages, such as Leviticus 18; Song of Solomon 7-8; 1 Corinthians 5-6; Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:16; 13:4.

they may lie dormant for a while, sometimes tend to show their ugly head when a person is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Finally, sexual impurity before and after marriage sows the seeds of mistrust and false commitments. Many couples think that if they are sexually active before marriage, then it shows their commitment to each other. But in reality, it shows their commitment to lust and not to the Lord. Many couples who have been sexually impure are not really able to trust their spouse in marriage. As was said above, it is hard to trust someone who you know (literally) has been living in sexual immorality.

How to Stay Sexually Pure

In an age where individuals believe the old adage "The devil made me do it," one can seemingly justify any sexual behavior either because of temptation, lust, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A person who looks into the Scriptures, especially at the person and *life* of Joseph in the Old Testament, finds a clear paradigm on how Christians should respond to sexual immorality. When he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he fled the scene in order to abstain from all sexual immorality (Gen. 39). But in contrast, when David was tempted with Bathsheba, he partook in the immorality instead of fleeing from the immorality (2 Sam. 11-12). Sexual abstinence is 100 percent effective whenever it is practiced.

A person who looks into the New Testament *sees* three imperatives: (1) believers are to *resist* the devil (1 Pet. 5:9), (2) believers are to *flee* sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), and (3) believers are to *seek* God's help: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you maybe able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13 NKJV). The stronger imperatives in the New Testament follow this line of thinking—that one is to keep away from the schemes of the devil and to abstain and flee from all immorality (1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Thess. 4:3).

Is Masturbation Morally Acceptable?

Since autosexual activity brings no harm to anyone else, some consider it to be acceptable for a Christian. After all, can it not help avoid unhelpful and unbiblical forms of sex before marriage? In response, there are several serious problems with masturbation. First, it does bring harm to oneself. For it can become an unwholesome habit to which one is bound. As the apostle said, we should "exercise self-control in all things," for "I discipline my body and keep it under control" (1 Cor. 9:25, 27 ESV). Second, it usually involves lust toward someone to whom the individual is not married. And sexual lust is a sin (Matt. 5:28; 1 John 2:16). Third, it is a form of self-gratification, which is not helpful or holy. Fourth, God has provided for a way to release male semen without this morally questionable

more important: risking one's life for "romance; or having a lifelong romance in which you know that both individuals are free from sexual diseases?

Doesn't Sex outside Marriage Show a Commitment to Each Other?

Not really, at least not in any long-term sense. Sex outside of marriage does not show a real commitment to another person; marriage does. Sex outside of marriage shows a commitment to sin together and a lack of commitment to live together in a God-ordained way. Sex outside of marriage is really a sign of no real commitment either to God or to the other person.

Since Sex Is a Physical Need, Isn't It Right to Fulfill It Like Other Physical Needs?

People are known to die for lack of food and water, but no one has ever died for lack of sex! Sex is not a physical necessity; it is a luxury. Many people go a whole lifetime without it and live a full life. Sex is not a need but a want—sometimes a strong one—but it is not a need. And it is not going to kill anyone to wait for it until marriage. In fact, waiting till marriage will help to develop one's character. And they will enjoy it much more as a result.

An Experience So Pleasurable Cannot Be Morally Wrong

First, sex is a pleasurable experience, and God does want people to experience it. But God also knows it is best experienced within the bonds of marriage. Further, even if sex feels good outside marriage, that does not make it right. Overeating is pleasurable but not desirable. Indeed, some of the greatest pleasures in life come only after the pain of achieving them. Every great artist or athlete has experienced this. Finally, those who seek pleasure and pleasure alone tend to find themselves in the most unpleasurable situations. Looking for sexual pleasure outside marriage finds the displeasure of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted children, undue burdens of wrecked relationships, and so forth. So while sex in and of itself is not morally wrong, it nonetheless is more pleasurable, more safe, and more meaningful within marriage.

Sex within the Confines of Marriage is Boring and Lacks Variety

First, a variety of partners is not necessary for sexual enjoyment. In fact, it tends to lessen the enjoyment because of the risks and the lack of a secure, unique, and enduring relationship. Second, sexual variety is possible within the confines of a monogamous relationship. Continuous enjoyment will depend on the preparation, place, approach, and passion of the relationship, not on the variety of partners. A person can gain more pleasure out of driving the same good car every day than from driving a series of poor vehicles. Likewise, a good sexual relation within a

secure, danger-free lifetime commitment is better than bad, temporal, and dangerous relationships without any long-term commitment.

Sex before Marriage Is Okay If We Know for Sure That We Are Going to Get Married

Simply stated, no, it is not! This is because sex before marriage is fornication, and fornication is not okay. Fornication is sin, and sin is never right. You may love each other, you may have your closet wedding ceremony, and you may think you are going to be committed to one another for life; but the truth is that all of those things do not constitute a biblical marriage relationship. Marriage is always a covenant relationship to God and before humans (see chap. 17), and not to fulfill the biblical regulations for marriage and sexual relationships is sin. Second, as was seen in the Song of Solomon, it is clear that the couple really wanted to have sex before marriage, but they waited; and this produced a better relationship for the couple. Third, a lot of people can make false commitments of love and marriage in order to fulfill their sexual desires. But the truth is that talk is cheap, and after they have what they wanted, you will realize that you were betrayed with a kiss.

It Really Depends on What You Mean by "Sex"

Unfortunately, President Bill Clinton's relation with Monica Lewinsky has redefined what is meant by "having sex" for years to come. It once meant adultery (or fornication); now it can mean all kinds of sexual perversion short of penile penetration. Yes, there are different kinds of sexual relations, such as oral and anal. But the Bible declares all extramarital sexual relations wrong, even those like pornography, which involve no sexual contact. Indeed, Jesus said, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28 NKJV). The Bible speaks of sexual sins in a broader sense than adultery. There is fornication, masturbation, homosexuality, bestiality, and other kinds of sexual perversity of body and mind. The Christian should remain pure from all of them. To put it bluntly, in an age where our hedonistic culture is constantly pushing the limits, the best advice to the unmarried is this: keep your thoughts pure, keep your clothes on, and only allow a doctor to perform closer examinations!

Conclusion

In a sexually saturated society, it is difficult to get people to think objectively, let alone biblically, about the subject of sex. The hedonistic throng wants it—and wants it now. The truth is, however, that we appreciate things more when we have

come under his roof. This attempt at sexual appeasement was necessary to save their lives.

Further, it is argued that homosexuality was not envisioned in the request of the men of the city to "know" Lot's friends, since this Hebrew word (*Odd*) simply means "to get acquainted" (19:5). This term (*yriidd*) occurs 873 times in the Old Testament, and in the overwhelming number of occurrences it has no sexual connotations whatsoever (see Ps. 139:1). Thus, it is concluded that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality, not homosexuality.

The sin of Sodom was selfishness. The sin of Sodom is spelled out in these words: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezek. 16:49). No mention is made of homosexuality or related sexual sins. They were condemned simply because they were selfish, not because they were homosexuals.

The Levitical law is no longer applicable. The chief passage in the Old Testament condemning homosexual practices is found in the Levitical law (Lev. 18:22). These same Levitical laws also condemned eating pork and shrimp. However, such ceremonial laws have been done away with (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15). This being the case, proponents have argued that there is no reason the laws prohibiting homosexual activity should still be considered binding either.

Barrenness was a curse to Jewish women. According to Jewish belief, barrenness was a curse (Gen. 16:1; 1 Sam. 1:3-8). Children were considered a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). The blessing of God in the land was dependent on having children (Gen. 15:5). Indeed, the hope of Jewish women was to bear the promised Messiah (Gen. 3:15; cf. 4:1, 25). In view of the emphasis on having children, it is not surprising that the Old Testament law would frown on homosexual activity, from which no children come. However, it is reasoned, this in no way condemns homosexual activity as such, nor is it condemned for those not included in this Jewish expectation.

Homosexuality was connected with idolatry. It is also argued that the biblical condemnations used against homosexuality fail to take into account that the purpose of the passages is to prohibit idolatry. Since the temple (or cult) prostitutes were associated with these idolatrous practices, they were condemned along with idolatry (Deut. 23:17). However, proponents insist, homosexuality as such is not thereby condemned, but only homosexuality associated with idolatry, as in the case of the shrine prostitute (1 Kings 14:24).

The Pauline condemnations were private opinions. Most New Testament passages against homosexuality come from the apostle Paul, who was only giving his private opinion (1 Cor. 7:25). In fact, Paul admitted, "I have no command from the Lord" (v. 25), and "I say this (I, not the Lord)" (v. 12). In this same book, only a chapter earlier, Paul gives his condemnation of homosexuals (1 Cor. 6:9). Thus, Paul's opinion on these sexual matters is, by his own confession, not binding.

Paul also condemned long hair on men. According to homosexual proponents, much of what the apostle Paul taught was obviously culturally relative. For example,

in 1 Corinthians the apostle also taught that "if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him" (11:14). But since this was obviously a culturally relative statement, there is no reason that Paul's statements against homosexuals should be considered to be absolute moral prohibitions.

First Corinthians 6:9 speaks only against offenses. Some homosexuals appeal to the fact that 1 Corinthians 6:9 speaks only against "homosexual offenders," not against homosexuality as such. That is, the passage only condemns offensive homosexual acts, but not homosexual activity per se. This being the case, Paul's apparent condemnation turns out to be an implied approval of inoffensive homosexual acts.

Heterosexuality is unnatural for homosexuals. According to some homosexuals, when Paul spoke against what was "unnatural" in Romans 1:26, he was not declaring that homosexuality was morally wrong, but simply that heterosexual activity was unnatural for homosexuals. Thus, "unnatural" is used in a sociological rather than a biological sense. So it is argued that, rather than condemning homosexual practices, this passage in Romans actually approves of them for homosexuals. Each person should act according to their own sociological tendencies, whether these are heterosexual or homosexual.

Isaiah predicted homosexuals in the kingdom. Isaiah 56:3-5 declares that eunuchs will be brought into the kingdom of God. The Lord said, "To them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off" (v. 5). This is taken to mean that Isaiah predicted the day of acceptance of homosexuals into God's kingdom, the fulfillment of which some homosexuals now claim is occurring.

David and Jonathan were homosexual. First Samuel 18-20 records the intense love David and Jonathan had for each other. Some see this passage as an indication that they were homosexual, pointing out that it says Jonathan "loved" David "as himself" (18:3), that Jonathan stripped in David's presence (18:4), that they kissed each other (20:41), and that they "exceeded" (20:41 RSV footnote), a term taken to mean ejaculation. David's lack of successful relations with women is also taken to indicate his homosexual tendencies. Jonathan's love for David was said to be "more wonderful than that of women" (2 Sam. 1:26). All these factors considered together show, it is argued, that David and Jonathan were homosexual.

Other Arguments for Homosexuality

In addition to these arguments drawn from the Bible, a number of other reasons are offered in favor of homosexuality. They fall into the general category of social and moral reasons.

There should be no sexual constraints among consenting adults. Many insist that there should be no sexual prohibitions for consenting adults. While admitting that forced sex and sexual abuse of children are wrong, many homosexuals contend

no place in the Bible is any such connection stated. If homosexuals were punished because they were barren, then why were they put to death (and thus could not have any children)? Heterosexual marriage would have been a more appropriate punishment! The same prohibition against homosexuality was not only for Jews but also for Gentiles (Lev. 18:24), whose blessings were not dependent on having heirs to inherit the land of Israel. If barrenness were a divine curse, then singleness would be sinful. But both Jesus (Matt. 19:11-12) and Paul (1 Cor. 7:8) hallowed singlehood by precept and practice.

Homosexuality is evil apart from idolatry. Homosexual practices are not condemned in the Bible simply because they were connected with idolatry. This is made evident by several things. Condemnations of homosexuality are often made apart from reference to any explicit idolatrous practice (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27). (Adultery was also considered immoral apart from female cult prostitutes.) When homosexuality is associated with idolatry (such as in temple/cult prostitution), it is not essentially connected. It is only a concomitant but not an equivalent sin. Sexual unfaithfulness is often used as an illustration of idolatry (e.g., Hos. 3:1; 4:12), but it has no necessary connection with it. Idolatry may lead to immorality (Rom. 1:22-27), but they are different sins. Even the Ten Commandments distinguish between idolatry (first table of the law, Exod. 20:3-5) and sexual sins (second table, 20:14-17).

Paul's teaching is divinely authoritative. Paul's condemnation against homosexuality is divinely authoritative, even in 1 Corinthians. Actually, Paul's clearest condemnation of homosexuality is in Romans 1, the divine authority of which is not challenged by any Christian accepting the inspiration of Scripture. Paul's apostolic credentials are firmly established in Scripture. He declared in Galatians that his revelations were "not something that man made up" but were "received ... by revelation from Jesus Christ" (1:11-12). To the Corinthians, Paul affirmed: "The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you" (2 Cor. 12:12). Even in 1 Corinthians, where Paul's authority is severely challenged by his critics, his divine authority is made evident in three ways. He begins the book by claiming that he has "words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). He concludes the book by claiming, "What I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (14:37). Even in the disputed seventh chapter, where Paul is alleged to be giving his own uninspired opinion, he declares, "I too have the Spirit of God" (v. 40). Indeed, when he says "I, not the Lord; he does not mean his words are not from the Lord; this would contradict everything he says elsewhere. Rather, it means that esus did not speak directly to this matter while on earth. But esus promised his apostles that he would send the Holy Spirit to "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). And Paul's teaching in Corinthians was a fulfillment of that promise.

Homosexuality is an offense. When 1 Corinthians 6:9 speaks of "homosexual offenders," it means the offense of homosexuality, not an offensive act by a homosexual as opposed to an inoffensive one. This is made plain by several factors. "Homosexual" qualifies 'offend ers,' not the reverse. It speaks against a homosexual

one. Changing the location of an immoral act does not change its violation of a moral law. Yet the reverse is not true. For example, just because marital sex is good in private does not mean it is good in public. Finally, there is a difference between the morality of performing a private homosexual act and the difficulty of prohibiting it. Whatever the difficulty of enforcing the prohibitions against it, it is still morally wrong.

There are no homosexual rights. As such, homosexuals have rights as citizens but not as homosexuals. This is evident for several reasons. Homosexual acts are morally wrong, and there is no right to do a wrong. That is moral nonsense. Neither are there any civil rights to do a moral wrong. Homosexuality is morally wrong, and the civil law should not encourage what is morally wrong. Civil law should be based on moral law. Third, it is as meaningless to speak of homosexual rights as it is to speak of rapists' rights, child abusers' rights, or murderers' rights. Rapists have no civil (or moral) right to be rapists, and child molesters have no civil right to be child molesters. Likewise, there are no civil rights to perform homosexual acts. Homosexuality is a moral and civil wrong, and there is no civil right to do a civil wrong. Finally, homosexuals have rights as citizens but not as homosexuals. However, when the practice of homosexuality interferes with the rights of others (as in solicitation of children), then their rights as citizens can be abrogated (by prison).

Homosexual tendencies are not inherited. For several reasons, homosexual acts cannot be justified on the grounds that they are inherited. There is no undisputed scientific evidence to support the contention that homosexual tendencies are genetic. It shows every evidence of being a learned behavior. People are recruited into the movement and taught to perform homosexual acts. Even if there were an inherited tendency toward a homosexual attitude, this would not justify homosexual acts. Some people seem to inherit a tendency toward violence, but this does not justify violent acts. Some people are said to have an inherited tendency toward alcohol abuse, but this does not justify drunkenness. The Bible declares that homosexuality is "unnatural" and comes about only when someone "abandons" their natural inclinations (Rom. 1:26-27). The Bible teaches that we all inherit a tendency to sin (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3), but we are still responsible for sinning.

Morality does not change. Basic moral principles do not change; what changes is our understanding of them and our performance of them. To affirm that moral laws themselves change is misinformed for many reasons. It confuses unchanging moral values with changing moral practices. That is, it confuses morals and mores. It confuses an absolute moral command with our relative comprehension of it. My understanding of love has changed over the past fifty years, but love has not changed. Claiming that morals can change confuses facts and values. The reason witches were once killed but no longer are is not because morality has changed but because we no longer believe that witches can kill people by their incantations. If they could, then they should still be punished as murderers. To the degree that

moral principles reflect the nature of God, they cannot change, for God cannot change his basic moral character (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:18).

Animal behavior is not normative for humans. There are several objections to appealing to animal behavior as a justification for homosexual activity. For the most part, homosexual acts among mammals are casual and temporary, not habitual and lifelong. Thus the appeal to animal behavior to justify a homosexual lifestyle is unfounded judging by the perversion and violence of some human homosexual acts, animals are receiving a bad deal in the comparison. Nothing like the human degradation among hard-core homosexuals is known in the animal kingdom. Animal behavior is not normative for human activity. One should not expect that the behavior of brute beasts is exemplary for human conduct. Animals are not relationally and morally responsible creatures. They act from instinct and, hence, are not ethically culpable for their actions. Humans, on the other hand, are created in God's image and are responsible to act in a godlike manner, not like animals.

The Arguments against Homosexuality

God loves alcoholics but hates alcoholism. Likewise, God loves homosexuals but hates homosexual perversity. The case against homosexual acts can be made in two ways: biblically and socially. The biblical arguments will be presented first.

Biblical Arguments against Homosexual Practices

There are many biblical arguments against homosexual practices, both implicit and explicit. The implicit argument is derived from the fact that God ordained heterosexual acts within the bonds of marriage, not homosexual activity. Since this will be treated in the next chapter, it will only be touched upon here.

God ordained heterosexuality, not homosexuality. God ordained heterosexual relationships when he created "male and female" and commanded them to have children (Gen. 1:27-28). Sex was given a family context from the very beginning. God said, "A man [male] will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife [female], and they will become one flesh" (2:24). Paul makes it clear that "one flesh" implies sexual intercourse (1 Cor. 6:15-17). The writer of Hebrews proclaims that "marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4). Indeed, the Ten Commandments declare: "You shall not commit adultery" and "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Exod. 20:14, 17). These passages *make* it plain that God has ordained sex to be used between a male and female within the bonds of heterosexual marriage.

Canaan was condemned for a homosexual sin. Although the text does not explicitly say so, it appears that Noah's son Ham engaged in a homosexual act with his drunken father. There are several indications in the Bible that this was the case. The phrase "saw his father's nakedness" (Gen. 9:22) is used elsewhere of

Homosexuality is condemned in the book of Judges. One of the most grotesque and horrifying sins in the Old Testament was provoked by homosexuals. When a man from Gibeah invited a traveler into his home, "some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, 'Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him'" (Judg. 19:22). The man urged the homosexual crowd: "Don't do such a disgraceful thing" (v. 24). In an attempt to appease them, he offered his virgin daughter and his guest's concubine to them. So the men "raped [the concubine] and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go" (v. 25). When her master found the concubine limp on the doorstep the next morning, he cut her in twelve pieces and sent one piece to each of the twelve tribes. Everyone who saw it said, "Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!" (v. 30). It is difficult to imagine a greater perversity growing out of homosexuality than this. But as horrible as the rape and consequent evil that followed, the Levite saw giving his concubine to them as a less "disgraceful thing" than homosexuality (v. 24).

The prophets condemned sodomy. Homosexual acts were condemned throughout the Old Testament. The prophetic writer of Kings (perhaps Jeremiah) speaks over and over of the evil of homosexuality. He wrote, "There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites" (1 Kings 14:24). Later, one of Asa's reforms was that "he expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land" (15:12). Likewise, Jehoshaphat "rid the land of the rest of the male shrine prostitutes who remained there even after the reign of his father Asa" (22:46). When the good king Josiah later invoked a revival, "he also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LOIUD" (2 Kings 23:7). The prophet Ezekiel spoke out against the sensual sins of Sodom, calling them "detestable things" (16:50). This is the same word used to describe homosexual acts in Leviticus (18:22-23).

Romans I condemns homosexuality among pagans. The most descriptive passage on homosexual acts in the Bible is recorded in Romans 1. Paul called it a sin for which 'the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven' (v. 18). The descriptions of the sin of homosexuality are virtually unrivaled anywhere in Scripture. It is called "sinful desires: "sexual impurity," "degrading," "a lie; "shameful lusts," "unnatural," "inflamed ...lust," "indecent: and a "perversion" (vv. 24-27). As a result of these kinds of wicked practices, God "gave them over to a depraved mind" (v. 28). They became "filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity" (v. 29).

The Scriptures vividly describe homosexual acts in these terms: "Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (vv. 26-27). Noteworthy are the two words "exchanged" and "abandoned," both indicating that a free and sinful choice was

Homosexual practices are a threat to lives. One of the most powerful social arguments against homosexual practices is AIDS. There is no question that this deadly disease is spread by homosexual practices. Neither is there any doubt that it is spread from homosexuals to such nonhomosexuals as hemophiliacs, users of common needles, medical workers, wives of bisexuals, and others. Predictions are that eventually millions of people will die as a direct or indirect result of homosexual practices that pass on this fatal virus. The disease has reached epidemic proportions. When the physical well-being of society is so threatened, it is necessary for society to protect itself against such life-threatening practices. No rational society would fail to defend itself against other activities that so endangered the lives of its citizens.

One study reveals that male homosexuals live on the average about thirty years less than do heterosexual males. Statistics on homosexual deaths show that the average male homosexual lives to about age 40, but the average male heterosexual lives to about 75. Even chain-smoking is not that lethal. A widely accepted Hogg study shows a life-span reduction of from eight to twenty years.'

Some Objections Considered

Several objections have been leveled against the various arguments counter to homosexuality. These will be briefly considered now.

These arguments produce homophobia. Some object that the case against homosexuality produces an unnatural and unwarranted fear and generates a kind of hysteria against homosexuals, and that it is an overreaction based on emotions. However, this objection is not justified. The case against homosexuality is based not on emotions but on Scripture and facts and sound reasoning. There is a difference between an appeal to emotions and an appeal based on emotions. Certainly, a strong warning to leave a burning building is an appeal to the emotions, but if the building is ablaze, no one should object, since it is an appeal based on *facts*. The arguments against the homosexuals' deviant behavior no more deserve to be called productive of homophobia than arguments against stealing should be called productive of kleptophobia. The real question is whether the behavior is morally and socially acceptable, not whether it produces legitimate fear of a socially damaging or dangerous practice.

It discriminates against homosexuals. There are two basic mistakes in this argument. First, it fails to distinguish between homosexuals and homosexuality. Laws against drunk driving do not thereby discriminate against drinkers. One can be opposed to alcoholism without being opposed to alcoholics. We must distinguish between the person and the practice. It is only homosexual behavior that is objectionable, not homosexuals as persons.

2. See Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *Legislating Morality: Is It Wise? Is It Legal? Is It Possible?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998), 131-32.

3. Frank Turek, *Correct, Not Politically Correct: How Same-Sex Marriage Hurts Everyone* (Charlotte: CrossExamined.org, 2008), 28.

Second, this objection incorrectly assumes that all discrimination is wrong. It is a discrimination against discrimination. Actually, the word "discrimination" is a good word. All rational people discriminate. That is why we put skulls and cross-bones on poisons and warning labels on cigarette packages. We also discriminate against socially disruptive behavior by applying punishments and imprisonment. In this sense it is legitimate to discriminate against homosexual behavior. Not to discriminate against socially undesirable behavior is as unreasonable as claiming that child abusers or rapists should not be imprisoned, since this would be discriminating against them.

It lacks proper Christian love for all persons. This objection wrongly assumes that we cannot love the sinner and yet hate the sin. There is no reason we cannot love an alcoholic but hate alcoholism. Likewise, we can love homosexuals and hate homosexuality. Admittedly, not all Christians consistently practice this distinction. Many reject even their own children when they "come out of the closet." This is a tragic mistake. It is both unchristian and unhelpful. It is unchristian because it is not in the spirit of Christ, who ministered to publicans and sinners. Nor can one hope to win them by rejecting them.

Yet if they are professing believers and members of a church, unrepentant practicing homosexuals must be given church discipline (cf. 1 Cor. 5). However, we should still reach out in love as friends and relatives in order to help them. Total rejection of them as persons only drives them further into their sin. Love reaches out to people, even sinful ones; it does not reject them. Homosexuals need compassion as persons, not condemnation.

Homosexuals are born that way. This argument backfires for several reasons. First, if homosexuals were also designed (born) as males or females, they why shouldn't they follow the design of their bodies instead of their desires, which go against God's design for their bodies? Failing to follow one's desires can be uncomfortable, but failing to follow the design for one's body can be fatal.'

Second, science has not demonstrated that there is a genetic source or biological source for homosexual desires. At any rate, since homosexuals do not and cannot reproduce, there is no way for the genetic desires to be passed on to the next generation.s

Third, even if scientists were to find a biological cause for homosexual desires, it still would not be grounds to accept or promote homosexuality. Even if we are born with certain sinful tendencies, this is no excuse for performing these perverse activities. The Bible is the final authority for our behavior (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 2:5-6), and it clearly condemns homosexual practice:

God also gave them up to *uncleanness*, in *the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies* amongthemselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped

4. Ibid., 82.

5. Ibid.

and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. *For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.* Likewise also the men, leaving the *natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due;* . . . who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:24-27, 32 NKJV, emphasis added)

Fourth, even apart from the Bible there is evidence against yielding to homosexual tendencies or practices. This is seen from the fact that homosexuals tend to die earlier, have higher cases of HIV and AIDS, colon and rectal cancer, and hepatitis. In fact, "according to the Center for Disease Control, more than 82 percent of all known sexually-transmitted AIDS cases in 2006 were the result of male-to-male sexual contact. Moreover, gay and bisexual men account for more than 60 percent of all syphilis cases,

Finally, most people would not apply this homosexual reasoning to other areas of life. We know that rapists can fight their desires, as can murders and adulterers. And experience (by ex-gays) shows that this tendency can be fought too. Further, we should fight homosexual tendencies because, like other bad tendencies, the practices they prompt are harmful not only to individuals but also to society.

It is bigotry not to condone homosexuality. Bigotry is a prejudgment without any reasons or grounds for the objection. But this is not the case with homosexuality. Clearly there are good reasons for rejecting it. First, it is contrary to Scripture (see above sections). Second, it is harmful to natural marriage. Third, it is harmful to children. Fourth, it raises the cost of many insurance carriers because of the sicknesses many homosexuals have. Fifth, it is dangerous to the individuals themselves. Sixth, this argument presupposes a moral standard. But if homosexual activists are going to apply this moral standard against those who oppose homosexuality, why don't they use the same moral law against homosexual behavior?"

Christians need to be more tolerant and loving of homosexuality. First, tolerance assumes that something is wrong. We don't tolerate good; we happily accept it. Second, homosexuals want more than tolerance. They are looking for a full-fledged endorsement of their lifestyle. Third, it is an evil to accept or approve evil action that is going to harm and endanger the individuals themselves. Finally, homosexuals are not tolerant of the heterosexual lifestyle. This is evident from the facts that they are in favor of revising the definition of marriage and in favor of imposing same-sex marriage and all of its social effects upon people without their consent. Therefore, it is not a question of tolerance, but a question of al-

6. Ibid., 19.

7. Ibid., 84.

Scripture could scarcely be more emphatic. Homosexual practices are called unnatural, impure, shameful, indecent, perverse, and an abomination.

In addition to the powerful biblical exhortations against homosexuality, there are strong social arguments as well. Indeed, no society, past or present, has ever accorded equal status to homosexuals. It is not only psychologically and socially dangerous; it also has become an epidemic threat to the physical lives of millions of people. In view of this, it is necessary for rational societies to protect their citizens against the contaminating influences of such sexually deviant behavior. Nonetheless, as Christians we should love the sinner, even though we hate the sinner's sin. Thus we should reach out in love to win homosexuals to Christ, who loves them and has died for them.

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MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage is the most basic and influential societal unit in the world. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of marriage, yet each year in the United States there are about half as many divorces as marriages. In view of this, it behooves us to consider the basis for marriage as God intended it. Likewise, since divorce has become commonplace both inside and outside the church, we need to examine when, if ever, it is justifiable.

A Biblical View of Marriage

Since divorce is the dissolution of a marriage, it is necessary to consider marriage before discussing divorce. Just what is a Christian marriage, and should it ever be dissolved? Christians have more agreement on the nature of marriage than they do on divorce. Following are the basic elements of a Christian view of marriage.

The Nature of Marriage

Both the nature and length of marriage are important from a Christian perspective. Marriage is a lifelong commitment between a male and a female, which involves mutual sexual rights. There are at least three basic elements in the biblical concept of marriage.

Marriage is between a male and a female. A biblical marriage is between a biological male and a biological female. This is clear from the very beginning. God created "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) and commanded them to "be fruitful and

now have is not your husband" (John 4:17-18). This is taken to imply that one's first spouse is the only true one.

7. Divorce violates a sacred typology. According to Paul, a wife is to her husband what the church is to Christ (Eph. 5:32). Hence, divorce violates that beautiful typology of the heavenly marriage between Christ and his bride, the church. That God takes a violation of a sacred type seriously can be witnessed in his punishment of Moses for striking the rock (Christ) twice (Num. 20:9-12).

In summary, this view argues that there are no grounds for divorce. The "exception" in Matthew 19:9 refers to premarital intercourse (fornication), not to adultery after marriage. Since there are no grounds for divorce, then divorce is sin and remarriage of a divorcee (man) or divorcee (woman) is wrong.

There is only one ground for divorce. Many Christians believe that there is only one justifiable ground for divorce: adultery. Remarriage of divorced persons is not permitted, since they would be living in sin (Matt. 5:32). This they base on several considerations.

1. Jesus explicitly stated that adultery is grounds for divorce. Proponents of this view favor rendering Matthew 19:9 the way the New International Version does: "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, and marries another woman commits adultery" (emphasis added). They point to several factors in favor of this rendering. The Greek word used is *porneia*, which includes illicit sexual relations of married as well as unmarried people (see Acts 15:20; Rom. 1:29). It is used in parallel with the word "adultery" in this very passage, indicating that they have overlapping usages.
2. Jesus repeated this exception in a parallel passage. Not only did Jesus state adultery as the one ground for divorce when asked, but he stated the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt. 5:32, emphasis added). In view of this repeated exception, it is argued that the other reference (in Mark 10:1-9; Luke 16:18), where no exception is mentioned, *must* be understood in the light of the clearly stated exception of adultery in Matthew.
3. Paul agreed with Jesus's view on divorce. Paul affirmed Jesus's position on divorce for adultery at least implicitly, if not explicitly. He was careful to point to the authority and remembered words of Christ in these matters by phrases like "not I, but the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:10). Even when he said "I, not the Lord," he was not contradicting Christ but merely noting that though Christ never spoke to that particular issue, Christ through the Spirit later gave revelation to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13; 7:12, 40; 14:37). Furthermore, it is

married. Hence, living with another is adultery, since it is sexual intercourse with a married person.

With respect to God's ideal for marriage, this seems to be a valid inference from the passage. Yet for several reasons, it is wrong to assume that this eliminates all remarriage.

First, Jesus obviously does not mean that the innocent party is actually committing adultery, for it is one's partner who has committed adultery. God is simply treating the innocent party *as if* that person has committed adultery. In like manner, 1 John 1:10 says, "If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar" (KJV). But it is clear that we cannot actually make God to be a liar. By claiming sinlessness, we treat God *as if* he were a liar. Thus, since divorce violates God's ideal for marriage, even the innocent party is treated as if an adulterer or adulteress, even though one really is not.

Second, as all admit, the death of one partner would make remarriage valid. In such a case the other party would not be committing adultery by remarriage.

Third, as the Westminster Confession argued, there are other situations than divorce that are "as if the *offending party were dead*" (emphasis added). Desertion, for example, is the virtual equivalent of death.

Fourth, as noted, forgiveness by confession cancels the state-of-sin status of the divorced person (Jer. 3:1,11-14). The only reason they are living in sin after a divorce is that the divorce was a sin. And as long as they do not confess the sin of the divorce, they are still living in sin. But if they do confess their sin, God will forgive it like any other sin (1 John 1:9).

An Evaluation of the Position Allowing Divorce for Many Reasons

As we have already seen, there is no justification for divorce as such; yet the position that permits divorce for many reasons has a good deal of merit. Its value is not in the grounds it allows for the dissolution of a marriage, but in its arguments in favor of encouraging a remarriage. These arguments cannot be used to justify divorce; whatever value they have can only be used to justify remarriage. At best, they are not arguments in favor of breaking an old marriage, but simply reasons for making a new marriage. Some of the reasons deserve repetition.

Marriage is a mutual vow. Since marriage is a mutual vow, it is both impossible and unnecessary for only one person to keep a vow when the other person has irrevocably broken it. Yet a believer should seek reconciliation. As long as it is possible to make the first marriage function, the believer has a responsibility to do so. Following the example of Hosea, we should even forgive and receive back an adulterous partner (Hos. 3). On the other hand, if the other person is dead (or the equivalent) or has remarried, then there obviously is no possibility of reconciliation. In such cases the other party is not bound by the wedding vows since they were vows to another person with whom it is no longer possible to fulfill them.

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ECOLOGY

The Barna Group's research committee has found that a majority of Americans (60 percent) believe that it is "absolutely necessary" to invest in environmental protection. They then go on to say that 57 percent of adults believe that global warming is a "major problem facing not only the nation but [also] the world.:" *Yet* the care and concern for the environment is not a recent phenomenon. E. Calvin Beisner gives the historical development of the environmental ethics debate? He demonstrates that the debate is actually rooted in the ideas of writers like Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) and in the studies of naturalists like John James Audubon (d. 1851), Sierra Club founder John Muir (d. 1914), and John Burroughs (d. 1921), and outdoorsmen like President Theodore Roosevelt (d. 1919) and United States Forest Service founder Gifford Pinchot (d. 1946). As radical environmentalist and Earth First movement founder David Foreman (b. 1947) declared, The founders of the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, and the wildlife conservation groups were, as a rule, pillars in American society."³

Beisner addresses the church: "*Environmentalism* as a movement among evangelicals, like its non-evangelical counterparts (Secular, *New Age*, mainline

1. Barna Group, "Americans Describe Their Moral and Social Concerns, Including Abortion and Homosexuality" (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, January 21, 2008), <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/50-americans.describe-their-moraland-social-concerns-including-abortion-and-homosexuality>.

2. See. E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

3. *ibid.*, 2.

Protestant, and Catholic), is a recent phenomenon..'" By the late 1980s, a survey of 125 church-related colleges revealed that 95 percent offered environmental ethics courses.' Today it would be almost an anomaly to find a school that does not have a course addressing the issue of environmental ethics. There has also been the rise and development of evangelical environmental ethics groups such as Evangelicals for Social Action, Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies, Evangelical Environmental Network, Christian Society of the Green Cross, and Christian Environmental Council.' Beyond these groups, hundreds of churches and Christian social groups have started to emphasize our responsibility toward the environment.

In view of the ecological situation and the heightened awareness among evangelicals, what is Christians' ethical responsibility to the physical environment in which we live? Certain countries are being charged with going over their sanctioned amount of pollution levels, and other towns like Greensburg, Kansas, want to be the first all-green town in America. What are the moral implications of pollution destroying our world's natural resources? Some atheists like Ayn Rand (d. 1982) extol the virtues of technology over nature and show little concern for the natural environment. One of her disciples, Henry Binswanger, even speaks blatantly of "raping" the environment to advance society. At the other end of the spectrum from such humanists are pantheists, who virtually worship nature. They oppose drilling for oil offshore, building dams, killing animals for fur, using insecticides, and any other human intervention that can disturb the natural environment.

Between the two extremes of the materialist's wastage of nature and the pantheist's worship of it, the Christian believes in the proper respect for and use of natural resources. The respectful utilization of our physical environment grows out of the Christian concept of creation and our divinely appointed obligation to be good stewards of what God has given us.

A Materialist View of the Environment

Although not all materialists are atheists, most atheists are materialists of some kind. Hence, the philosophical basis of a materialist view of the environment grows out of an atheistic or secular humanist worldview. Such a view is expressed in Humanist Manifesto 1 (1933). After denying a Creator and a distinctive spiritual aspect in human beings, it affirms unbounded optimism in humans' ability to solve their own problems: "Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life-span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock

4. Ibid., 1.

5. Ibid.,

3. 6. Ibid.,

4.

is a fact that nondrinkers live longer. Some **55** percent of nondrinkers live till age seventy-five or more, but only 40 percent of drinkers live to seventy-five.

Objection 10: Alcohol Makes One Relax and Feel Better

This objection highlights the height of our hedonism. Unfortunately, in our feeling-centered and self-centered culture, this argument is more persuasive than it deserves to be. In response, first, there are nonaddictive ways to relax. Meditation on Scripture is an effective way (Ps. 1:2; cf. Isa. 26:3). Second, a person should not make one's happiness depend on addictive drugs. Doing that is both deceptive and dangerous. Third, if one wants a high without a hangover, Paul's advice is hard to beat: "Do not be drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 5:18 KJV). Finally, God's plan for our nerves is a lot better than that of the booze promoters. Paul exhorted, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7 NKJV).

Conclusion

To drink or not to drink? We have taken a sober look at the question. What is the answer? Just say No! Why? Because drinking alcoholic beverages is unbiblical, deadly, addictive, unhealthy, costly, a bad example, not edifying, and unnecessary. Clearly, total abstinence is the safest policy regarding alcohol or other addictive drugs. It is an indisputable fact that, without taking the first drink, no one ever became drunk, became addicted, or had diseases such as heart attacks, cirrhosis, or insanity from alcohol. Likewise, without taking the first drink, no one ever engaged in spouse abuse or child abuse, killed anyone in an accident, caused any debt or injury, or caused anyone to stumble in their faith while under the influence of alcohol.

Why then is our society in general—and evangelical Christians not far behind wider society—on such a self-destructive alcoholic course? Hosea gave part of the answer: "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (4:6). Most of the rest of the problem lies in resisting temptation, but the Bible declares that no temptation (including drugs) is too strong! "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you maybe able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13 NKJV). Mark Twain once said of the temptation to gamble that the best toss of the dice is to toss them away. Likewise, the best use of the beer can is to toss it into the recycling bin—after the contents have been poured down the drain!

APPENDIX 2

IS GAMBLING UNETHICAL?

Several years ago Boston College had a sports nightmare on campus. Just before the big game, thirteen football players had to be disciplined for betting on games. Some even wagered against their own team! Famous major league baseball player Peter (*Pete*) Rose was denied the Hall of Fame because of his gambling habits, which allegedly included betting on baseball games. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Legal gambling is a more than \$300-billion-a-year business. Illegal gambling is estimated to be in the trillions of dollars—almost as high as the national debt! Legal gambling now exists in forty-eight states (all but Utah and Hawaii).

Gambling can be defined as the transfer of something of value from one person to another primarily on the basis of chance. It differs from games of chance where nothing of real value is transferred to others. Gambling also differs from other risks (such as investing in stocks) where something of value is transferred but not primarily on the basis of chance. There is risk in investing (and taking high risks maybe unwise), but usually stock and bond investments invoke a calculated risk, meaning a rational process is used to make the investment. Yet if someone simply tossed a coin to decide which stock to invest in, then this would be gambling by definition. The most widespread and popular form of gambling in the United States is the lottery. But casino gambling is increasing, not only in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, but also on Native American reservations around the country.

The moral arguments against gambling can be divided into two categories: those taken from special revelation (the Bible) and those drawn from general revelation (see chap. 8). The latter arguments involve reason, common sense, and moral in-

tuition, and they are based on the law written on the heart (*cf.* Rom. 2:15) of all human beings.' First, let's review the biblical data applicable to the subject.

Response to Biblical Arguments for Gambling

Many biblical principles exhort us not to gamble. But since some people have used the Bible to support gambling, it is necessary to address their arguments. One pro-gambling author declared, "Nowhere does the holy Bible, bedrock of the Judeo-Christian morality, in either the Old or New Testaments, take a stand against gambling" z However, as we will see, there is no evidence for such a claim.

Casting Lots Was Approved in the Bible

Joshua cast lots to determine God's will in dividing up the land for Israel (Josh. 14:2). The apostles used lots to choose another apostle (Acts 1:26). But this was not wrong because Proverbs (16:33) declares, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."

In response, although this was a divinely approved method, it was not gambling. Why? Because nothing of value was hazarded in so doing. They were simply using a divinely appointed means of determining God's will.

The Soldiers Gambled for Jesus's Garment

When Jesus was being crucified, the Roman soldiers gambled for his garment (Matt. 27:35). This is true, but it is not a divinely approved activity. The Bible simply describes what they did; it does not approve of the gambling. The soldiers also crucified Christ, but this by no means made it right.

The Word "Gambling" Does Not Even Appear in the Bible

It is sometimes stated that the word "gambling" does not even appear in the Bible. Surely, if it were that important, there would at least be some reference to it.

In response, this is a very weak argument since there are many things, both pro and con, that are not mentioned by their current name in the Bible but that the Bible has a clear teaching on, either for or against. For example, the word "Trinity" does not occur in the Bible, yet the Bible emphatically proclaims that the doctrine is true (Matt. 3:16; 28:18-20; John 1:1, 14; 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8). The words "rape," "sexual abuser" or "spouse abuse" do not appear in the Bible either. But the principles that oppose all of these are in the Bible. So just because the word "gambling" does not appear in most translations does not mean

1. For a more extensive treatment of gambling, see Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *Gambling Is a Bad Bet* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1990).

2. Richard Sasuly, *Bookies and Bettors* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982), 36.

the Bible is not opposed to it. Furthermore, the word "gambling" does appear in some translations. The Living Bible says, "Wealth from gambling quickly disappears" (Prov. 13:11). As will be shown below, the Bible speaks against gambling by principle, if not by name.

Biblical Arguments against Gambling

There are many biblical principles, exhortations, and even commands that oppose gambling. Indeed, at least three of the Ten Commandments are opposed to gambling. Consider the following:

Gambling Is a Form of Coveting or Greed

The tenth commandment declares: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house ... nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exod. 20:17 NKJV). Paul added, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). The motive for gambling fits into this category: it is often a form of greed.

Gambling Is a Form of Stealing

The eighth commandment exhorts: "You shall not steal" (Exod. 20:15). But gambling in the lottery is an indirect way of stealing from the poor. In the case of government-sponsored lotteries, the poor play more, and therefore the poor pay more. In contrast to the rich, the poor spend a larger portion of their income on the lottery per capita. Thus, they are paying more taxes in proportion to their income than the rich are. Supporting the lottery is supporting a regressive tax on the poor.

Gambling Is a Font: of Idolatry

Gambling also violates the first commandment since it can become one's god. Rather than following God's appointed way to earn wages (i.e., to work), gamblers place their trust in gambling as their "god," who will provide for them. But the first commandment declares: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, ... and all these things shall be added to you" (Man. 6:33 NKJV). Gambling is the love of gold more than God.

Gambling Is a Fonn of Oppressing the Poor

Another reason for opposing gambling is that it oppresses the poor. Isaiah writes, "The LORD stands ... to judge the people.... 'The plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?'" (3:13-14 NKJV). Amos adds, "Listen to me, you 'fat cows'

of Bashan living in Samaria—you women who encourage your husbands to rob the poor" (4:1 TLB). So gambling (especially the lottery) is wrong because it is a form of oppressing the poor.

Gambling Is a Lack of Faith in God's Provision

Many people gamble to increase their means of living. Rather than working hard and trusting God, they place their trust in Lady Luck to improve their lot in life. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24 RSV). But one should put faith in God, not in gambling as a means of gain.

Gambling Is Bad Stewardship of God-Given Resources

The psalmist affirmed that "the earth is the **LORD'S**, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1 KJV). Paul stated, "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2 NKJV; cf. Matt. 25:21). Gambling fails to reckon that everything we have comes from God and belongs to God. David said, "All things come from you [God]" (1 Chron. 29:14 NKJV). Paul added, "Do you not know that your body ... you have from God? ... So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20 RSV). Hence, we should not waste or squander anything by gambling.

Gambling Bypasses God's Appointed Way to Make a Living

From the first man, Adam, to the present, God's way to make a living is "by the sweat of your brow" (Gen. 3:19). Paul told the Thessalonians, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10 NKJ V). As the (Smith Barney) ad rightly says, "We make money the old fashioned way. We earn it?" Earning, not winning, is God's way to obtain gain. In fact, on the average and for the vast majority of all gamblers, gambling is a way of losing money, not gaining money.

Gambling Destroys Human Dignity

Gambling for gain is an admission of one's inability to earn what one needs. And a person who cannot earn a living loses self-respect. Thus, gambling can destroy human dignity. The best way to restore one's self-esteem is to expend a little steam by working. Gambling in place of working is a way of destroying one's self-respect.

Gambling Has a Corrupting Influence on Society

Gambling is like yeast. As Paul said, "A little leaven [yeast] leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6 NKJV). Gambling has a corrupting effect on society. Paul approvingly quotes Menander: "Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Cor. 15:33).

NKJV). Gambling has a corrupting influence by leaching money from legitimate businesses, robbing from the poor and needy, and breeding crime and prostitution.

In brief, gambling breaks three of the Ten Commandments and several other biblical principles. It may not be mentioned by name in most translations of the Bible, but it is clearly forbidden by many other moral and spiritual principles in the Bible.

Other Moral and Social Reasons Not to Gamble

Apart from belief in divine revelation in the Bible, there are numerous reasons not to gamble. They are known by experience, intuition, common sense, and good reason. These reasons against gambling include the following.

The Statistical Argument against Gambling

About 90 percent of Americans gamble in some form, and over 95 percent lose more than they bet. Winners as a group get back less than half of what they bet—a poor investment by any standard. One is more likely to survive 88 rounds of Russian roulette than to win a typical state lottery. A person is 7 times more likely to be hit by lightning and a half million times more likely to die in a plane crash than to win the lottery. The typical odds against winning a state lottery are between 5 and 10 million to 1. If you bought 50 lottery tickets every week, you would win on the average of once in every 5,000 years! In short, the chances are about the same if you don't play the lottery at all!

The Economic Argument against Gambling

Gambling has no product or service. It leeches billions from legitimate businesses. Money received by the gambling industry means less business for the grocer, the gas station, the clothing store, restaurants, and so forth. In the end lotteries add little or nothing to state treasuries. Most states take in no more than 2 percent of their budget from gambling. No state (except Nevada) takes in more than 4 percent. And the cost for having gambling is many times more than what is taken in from gambling. The increase comes in the form of more police, higher court costs, increased welfare rolls, enlarged prisons, larger rehabilitation costs, greater insurance costs, and the loss of tax dollars.

Funding for education usually does not go up as a result of gambling income. It often goes down, since people tend not to support legitimate tax increases once they believe gambling proceeds are supporting it. No state has experienced a tax decrease because of income from gambling. Former Minnesota Senator Wiley affirmed that the actual cost for gambling in his state was five times the amount of revenue generated by the state's lottery!

The Cultural Argument against Gambling

Gambling penalizes the poor. Since the poor play the lottery more, they pay proportionately more than the rich. Lotteries are a regressive form of taxation because they are not based on the ability to pay. The poor buy three and a half times more lottery tickets than others. In New York, 70 percent of the lottery tickets are bought by poor, black, and Hispanic people. One-third of families with incomes less than \$10,000 per year spend one-fifth of their income (\$2,000) on gambling. In Connecticut, those below \$5,000 in annual income spend fourteen times as much on gambling as those above \$25,000 income, and many take in less. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, the lottery equals a 60-90 percent tax on lower income groups. The amount spent on the lottery equals the amount not spent on groceries and other essentials.

The Social Argument against Gambling

Gambling has a bad influence on society. It breeds crime, drugs, and prostitution. Up to 98 percent of compulsive gamblers commit crimes. Legal gambling breeds illegal gambling because the odds are better with illegal wagering, people can play on credit, and they can avoid taxes on earnings, which are not reported to the government. The organized crime section of the U.S. Justice Department found that "the rate of illegal gambling in those states which have some legalized form of gambling was three times as high as those states where there was not a legalized form of gambling"³ Legal gambling spawns compulsive gambling. Some 5 percent of the population are now compulsive gamblers. One in twenty adults who gamble regularly become gambling addicts, and one in ten teenagers do. Sadly, only one in thirty compulsive gamblers ever recover completely! Charles Wells, the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo, gambled away all his winnings and died broke!

The Domestic Argument against Gambling

There are some 12 million compulsive gamblers in the United States. Over a third are women, and the figure is growing. Each addict affects 10-17 other people. Spouses of gamblers suffer greatly. Nearly 7 of 10 are harassed by creditors. **Six** of 10 creditors become violent toward the gambler. Almost 8 gamblers out of 10 suffer from insomnia. Over 10 percent try suicide, which is 150 times the national average. The average gambler's debt is \$40,000 or more. Gamblers commit 40 percent of the white-collar crimes. Families of addicted gamblers are emotionally devastated.

The Moral-Corruption Argument against Gambling

Gambling has a degenerating moral effect on society. It encourages irresponsibility. It robs the poor. It encourages greed. It is state-sponsored immorality because it

3. Emmett Henderson, *State Lottery: The Absolute Worst Form of Legalized Gambling* (Atlanta: Georgia Council on Moral and Civil Concerns, n.d.), 26.

exploits the weaknesses in human nature. Wherever there is legal gambling, crime, suicide, drugs, prostitution, and illegal gambling are also found. Nevada has more houses of prostitution than libraries, more prostitutes than police officers. When casinos were introduced in Atlantic City, crime increased 259 percent. George Washington said, "Gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity, and the father of mischief!"

Conclusion

Gambling is a serious problem and a widespread addiction in America. It has penetrated every state in one form or another. God's special and general revelations both speak strongly against it. Illegal gambling is a social parasite, corrupting the culture wherever it takes hold. Gambling not only violates several of the Ten Commandments; it is also a bad bet statistically, culturally, socially, and morally. It destroys individuals, families, and society.

A word to the wise is sufficient: Those who never gambled have a 100 percent chance to never lose. As Mark Twain once wisely quipped, The best toss of the dice is to toss them away"!

APPENDIX 3

PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography is a major problem both in society in general and among many Christians in particular. Today TV, DVDs, and the Internet have made it readily available to all who want it. But viewing pornographic material precipitates marriage breakups and can produce cocaine-like addictions. It has contributed to both common and violent crimes, including rape and murder. Like a rash, once it is scratched, it grows worse. In 1972, *Playboy* magazine reached 25 percent of all college men.¹ Ninety percent of children 8-16 years of age have been exposed to pornography. By 2004, there were 23-60 million visitors to some type of pornography Web site every day. In fact, one Internet search engine for KaZaA has reported that 72 percent of its Internet searches are for pornography, and that 24 percent of those are for child pornography. In 1998 there were 14 million Internet Web sites on pornography. By July of 2004 there were 420 million pornographic Web sites.² As one writer has put it, "America does not know the difference between money and sex. It treats sex like money because it treats sex as a medium of exchange, and it treats money like sex because it expects its money to get pregnant and reproduce."³

Just what is pornography? Webster defines it as "obscene literature or art." The legal understanding includes three aspects as defined by the Supreme Court in

1. John Coleman, 'Porn in the USA: Examining Our National Addiction, *Salvo* 2 (Spring 2007): 21; <http://xnew.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo2/2coleman.php>.
2. Ibid., 21-25.
3. Peter !Creek *How to Win the Culture Wan A Christian Battle Plan for o Society in Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 15.

1973: (1) When taken as a whole within community standards, it is something that the average person believes does appeal to prurient (sensual) interests. (2) It is material that depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way as specifically defined by applicable law. (3) Taken in its totality, the work lacks serious literary, political, or scientific value.

Our purposes here are less technical and legal than this definition. Hence, we view pornography as any writings or images that appeal to one's sexual desires outside of one's marital partner. In brief, it is something that stimulates extramarital lust or sensual desires.

The Social Case against Pornography

There are numerous arguments against pornography, both social and scriptural. Pornography is not merely a lustful pastime. It is actually a sensual activity that has devastating effects upon the individual, the family, and society at large. A leading expert on this issue, Dr. Judith Reisman, "has devoted her life to demonstrating—through irrefutable scientific evidence—that pornographic images actually alter the chemical structures of the human brain, and not in a good way. Moreover, she has proved beyond question (and to anyone who cares in the least) that pornography can be as addictive as crack cocaine and is a key contributor to rape, incest, pedophilia, and other forms of sexual assault."

Pornography Causes Aggression among Individuals

Pornography causes aggression because it destroys the natural relationships found between individuals. A proper sexual relation provides a proper context for sexual relations. But when a person views pornography, it can lead to aggression because it destroys the normal spatial relationships between individuals. It starts to build an aggression in the individual, which over long periods of time can foster a state of aggression known to eventually act out in the public arena.'

Pornography Creates a Type of Animal Behavior in Human Beings

Pornography produces a type of estrus (heat, sexual excitability) that provokes men to sexual lust. Reisman shows that in many cases this leads to sexual frustration in men because it builds all the chemical and emotional conditions for sexual intercourse, but they are not able to express those emotions.⁶ This habitual emotional frustration eventually leads to long-term states of emotional frustration, aggression, and sometimes even violence in other areas of life.

4. Bobby Maddex, 'The Naked Truth: An Interview with Dr. Judith Reisman; *Salvo* 2 (Spring 2007): 28; <http://wvny.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo2/2maddex.php>. S. Ibid., 30.