



ethics. However, neither deontological nor virtue ethics *necessarily* involve principles and virtues that arise from a transcendent source. The relevant principles/virtues can also be human creations. In fact, even religion-based forms of ethics can be human creations if they see their scripture as a solely human-generated work. So people who view the Bible as nothing more than the reflections of fallible human beings could hold to a moral theory based on the Bible but still see the principles and virtues as human creations.

Any ethical system involves both a personal and intellectual commitment to follow its dictates. Any view of morality commits a person, whether he or she knows it, to a certain worldview. It commits a person to a certain view of *metaphysics*, or the nature of reality, of which moral values are a part, especially for those that claim to have a transcendent source. It also commits a person to a certain view of *epistemology*, or theory of knowledge, because moral responsibility is linked to a person's knowledge of a particular moral system's rules. Questions of epistemology are especially important for moral systems that appeal to a transcendent source of moral authority because how a person discovers moral values is critical to the viability of such a moral system. Supporting a particular moral system also commits one to a certain view of *anthropology*, or view of human nature, because of the connection between one's ethics and a person's ability to live up to that ethical standard.

As I will suggest in chapter 3, Christian ethics is a blend of virtues and principles, and it employs some other types of moral reasoning in order to support the primary role of virtues and principles. It is one thing to use some of the moral theories discussed in this chapter as a supplement, for example, in order to be more persuasive in one's presentation. But it is a very different thing to appeal to any one of these systems (egoism, relativism, utilitarianism, etc.) as the *sole determinant of morality*. Most advocates of these systems intend them to be *the* system for grounding right and wrong.

## Subjective and Objective Views of Morality

It is very common today for people to assert that someone's moral views are simply matters of subjective opinion, particularly in private moral matters such as sexual ethics. Moral statements are seen as categorically different from statements that can be empirically verified, such as matters of science. Subjective views see morality as applicable only to whoever holds them. And so for subjective morality, two diametrically opposed moral views can be right at the same time.



To make sure we all understand the difference between objective and subjective views of morality, we can distinguish between objective and subjective statements in general. Objective statements are either true or false *regardless* of how anyone feels about them. By contrast, subjective statements are true or false *depending* on how someone feels about them. We take objective statements as facts and subjective statements as opinions. The following exercise will help make this clear.<sup>2</sup> Which of the following statements are objective, and which are subjective?

1. My newborn baby is the cutest child in the entire city.
2. Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States.
3. Stage plays are more entertaining than movies.
4. Chocolate ice cream tastes better than vanilla.
5. Salads have fewer calories than cheesecake.
6. I (in my 60's) am able to run a sub-four-minute mile.
7. The earth is the center of the solar system.
8. The Los Angeles Dodgers will win the World Series this year.

Those were the easy ones, so let's see how you did. The first is clearly subjective, since it is likely my opinion only and almost certainly not shared by any other parents of newborns in my city. The second is objective, since that is true whether or not we believe it or like it. The third is subjective, simply a matter of opinion. So is the fourth, a matter of personal preference. The fifth is objective and true, since we can verify the calorie count for salad and cheesecake. The sixth is also objective but clearly is false. I have never run a mile under four minutes, and never will. The seventh is also objective. It is a statement that was accepted as true at one time but is now rejected as false. The eighth is also an objective statement, but we won't know if it will be true or false until the end of the baseball season.

Now it gets more complicated. Try these specifically moral statements. Are they objective or subjective statements?<sup>3</sup>

1. Abortion, unless it is necessary to save the mother's life, is immoral.
2. Racial discrimination is morally wrong.
3. Sexual assault is morally acceptable.

What did you decide on (9)? I suspect that if you asked (9) to a group of your peers, you would get either a mixed opinion or the majority would regard it as a subjective statement. However, (9) is actually an objective statement, not simply