

Pastoral and Social Ethics

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Preface: Importance of Christian Ethics

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

Part One: Introduction and Apologetic Orientation

I. Terminology (Not a matter of life and death, but important for clarity of communication)

A. Ethics and Theological Encyclopedia

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

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

B. Value-terms

1. Moral, ethical

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

2. Immoral: Ethically bad or wrong.

3. Amoral:

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

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

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

- a. Trite or provincial in ethical attitude.
- b. Self-righteous.
- c. Legalistic: putting law in the role reserved for grace. (Legalism is also a term that is often used imprecisely and as a club to beat up on others who merely want to express a positive appreciation for God's law.)
- d. Putting too much emphasis on ethics or on the law.
- e. Preaching ethics without adequate appreciation for the History of Redemption.
- f. Failing to follow the methodology of biblico-theological extremists (as expressed in publications such as the *Kerux* journal). Such extremists teach that
 - i. In preaching or teaching you should never use a biblical character as a moral example.
 - A) But in my judgment Scripture often intends its characters to be exemplary, as in Heb. 11.

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

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

- ii. Are such acts obligatory?
 - A. Scripture does not seem to command them for every person. Nobody should be charged with sin for failure to perform acts of moral heroism.
 - B. Yet the ultimate standard of obligation is the self-giving love of Christ (John 13:34-35).
 - C. Do you doubt that David's mighty men *felt* an obligation?
 - D. We should be thankful that we are saved by grace, rather than by carrying out God's ethical standards!
- C. The Triangle (Structure of Part One of the course)
1. The "Lordship Attributes": Characteristics of God that define His covenant relationship to us. (Note "Yahweh" treaty pattern).
 - a. Control: Works all things according to the counsel of His will.
 - b. Authority: His word is unconditionally binding.
 - c. Covenant solidarity or presence: "I will be with you;" "I will be your God and you shall be My people." God commits Himself to us so that we live in His presence. Results in blessing or judgment.
 2. Lordship and Ethics: How does God govern our ethical life?
 - a. Control: He plans history so as to determine what means are conducive to His ultimate purposes, our ultimate blessing.
 - b. Authority: He speaks to give us the norms for behavior.
 - c. Presence:
 - i. He, Himself, is our example of righteousness.
 - ii. It is His presence by which we gain the power to become righteous.
 3. Necessary and Sufficient Criteria of Good Works
 "Problem of the virtuous pagan": Non-Christians do conform to the law externally at times. Why does Scripture declare them to be depraved? Because they altogether lack the following (WCF 16.7):
 - a. Right Goal: The glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:23; Matthew 6:33).
 - b. Right Standard: Sin is lawlessness, and obedience is the criterion of discipleship. John 14:21, 1 John 3:4, etc.
 - c. Right Motive: I Corinthians 13; Romans 14:23 [faith / love], by grace, by God's Spirit.
 4. Factors in Ethical Judgment: World, Law, Self [Consider yourself in a counseling session]
 - a. What is the situation, the problem?
 - b. What does God's Word say?
 - c. What is my attitude? Do I have the maturity to make the right decision, the spiritual capacity to apply God's Word to the situation?
 5. Ethical teaching of Scripture itself

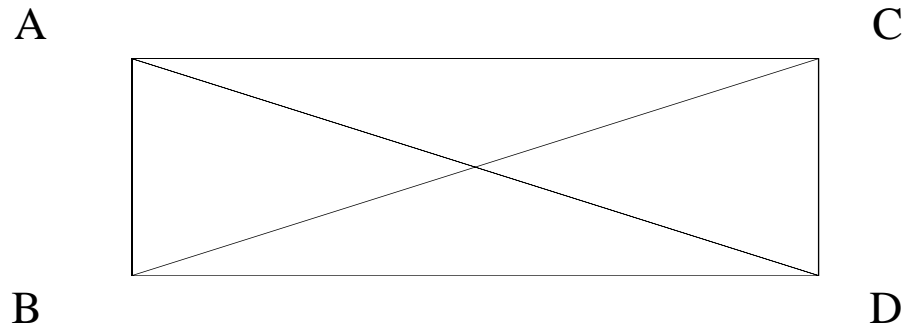
- a. Appeal to the events of redemption, imitation of God, Jesus, and others: John 13:34-35, Rom. 6:1-23, 13:11-12, 1 Cor. 6:20, 10:11, 15:58, Eph. 4:1-5, 25, 32, 5:25-33, Phil. 2:1-11, Col. 3:1-4 (and judgment, 2 Cor. 5:10), Heb. 12:1-28, 1 Pet. 2:1-3, 4:1-6
 - b. Appeal to commandments (of the OT law, Jesus, and Paul): Matt. 19:18-19, Luke 10:26f, John 14:15, 21, Rom. 12:19, 13:8ff, 1 Cor. 5:13, 14:34, 2 Cor. 8:15, 9:9, Eph. 4:20-24, 6:1-3, 1 Thess. 4:1, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Tit. 2:1, James 1:22-25, 2:8-13, 1 Pet. 1:16, 1 John 2:3-5, 3:24, 5:2
 - c. Appeal to the Spirit, who gives new life within: Rom. 8:1-17, Gal. 5:16-18, 22-26, Eph. 5:8-21.
6. Perspectives on the Discipline of Ethics: In general, ethical judgment always involves the **application** of a **norm** to a **situation** by a **person**. [May be useful to structure your paper like this]. One can look at the discipline from any of these three vantage points.
- a. The Situational Perspective (*teleological*)
 - i. Focuses on nature and history as under God's control.
 - ii. Notes relations of means to ends in God's economy.
 - iii. Asks "What are the best means of achieving God's purposes?"
 - b. The Normative Perspective (*deontological*)
 - i. Focuses on Scripture as the source of ethical norms.
 - ii. Asks "What does Scripture teach about this question?"
 - c. The Existential Perspective (*existential*)
 - i. Focuses on the self in confrontation with God.
 - ii. Asks "How must I change if I am to be holy?"
7. Interdependence of the Perspectives
- a. The "situation" includes Scripture and the self. You don't truly understand the situation until you see it in the light of Scripture and until you see its bearing upon yourself.
 - b. The "norm" must be applied to the situation and to the self, or else it is not adequately understood. (No difference between "understanding" and "application".) Scripture is rightly seen only when it is properly related to the world and to the self.
 - i. Does someone understand the meaning of the eighth commandment if he does not know how the commandment applies to embezzling or tax evasion? Not adequately, at any rate.
 - ii. Every attempt to "understand" or to "find meaning" is an attempt to answer some question or meet some need.
 - c. The "self" cannot be rightly understood until seen in the context of its situation and rightly interpreted by the Word of God.
 - d. Each perspective, then, necessitates consideration of the others. None of the perspectives can be treated adequately unless the others also are considered. Thus, each "includes" both of the others.
 - e. Each perspective, then, is a way of viewing the whole of ethics.

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

D. The Square

1. Purpose

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



2. Basic Structure

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

3. Interpretation

a. Transcendence and Immanence

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

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

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

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

II. Survey of Non-Christian Ethical Systems

A. More Explicitly Religious

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

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

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

- v. The sense of “oneness with nature” found in these religions has been praised by contemporary ecologists. However, the *laissez-faire* attitude toward nature is as dangerous as the grasping, exploitative attitude common in the West. India’s problems with disease, starvation, overpopulation are compounded by the attitudes of Hinduism toward cattle, insects, etc.
- f. Summary
 - i. Monism leads to an empty absolute—an ultimate reality with no rational or ethical character.
 - ii. Ethics is subordinate to metaphysics. Man’s quest for metaphysical union with the One takes precedence over all ethical considerations. Salvation is metaphysical transcendence, not redemption from sin.
 - iii. As such, there is no basis for ethical action or ground for ethical hope.
- 3. Ethics as Law Without Gospel
 - a. All religions except Christianity are religions of works-righteousness, religions in which one seeks to gain stature through his good works. Even religions that resemble Christianity greatly in their view of God and Scripture (unlike those above) may be faulted in this area.
 - b. Under this category we include non-Messianic Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, many cults, as well as the religions noted above.
 - c. The principle of works righteousness feeds man’s pride on the one hand and his despair on the other. One either deceives himself into believing that he is keeping the commandments perfectly, or (with clearer self-understanding) he loses hope of ever meeting God’s standard.
 - d. Having said all this, it must be recognized that Judaism, Islam and similar religions do often derive their ethics from (alleged) word-revelation of a personal God. In these and other ways they are influenced by Scripture.
 - i. However, denial of the Gospel of Christ drives a wide chasm between these and Christianity.
 - ii. The consequences of Unitarianism must also be noted:
 - a) The elimination of distinctions in God leads to a god without moral character (liberal Judaism and Christianity) in many cases.
 - b) The governance of God over the world is fatalistic, more mechanical than personal, in Islam. There is a tendency there to make God an abstract principle as in Eastern religions. Fatalism is devastating to moral responsibility.
 - c) Note also the tendency toward statism in Islam due to the primacy of the one over the many (Rushdoony, *The One and the Many*).
- B. Less Explicitly Religious (“secular” ethics)
 - 1. Major Tendencies

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

- concern both to Christians and non-Christians, both being in contact with God's law, the non-Christian systems are inevitably unsuccessful in implementing these concerns without distortion and conflict.
- a. Deontological (focusing on the normative perspective)
 - i. The ethical norm must be transcendent, sublime
 - a) It must be beyond ourselves, not a mere expression of our self-interest. It must be capable of motivating self-sacrifice—the opposite of selfish concern.
 - b) It must not be derivable from mere sense-experience. Sense-experience can tell us facts, but from those facts alone no obligation may be derived. (The claim that facts imply obligation is sometimes called the “naturalistic fallacy”.) The basis of duty must come from somewhere “beyond”.
 - ii. The ethical norm must be authoritative, must bind us, must impose duty upon us. We must have no right to disobey. There is no excuse for disobedience. Else there is no ethical norm, properly speaking.
 - iii. The ethical norm must be universally binding. A principle that binds me must be binding also on anyone else in the same situation. If it is wrong for me to rob a bank, it must be wrong for you also. Ethics is no respecter of persons. Obligation does not change when the only variable factor is the person involved.
 - iv. Summary: Ethics is something God-like. It comes from above, calls us all to account.
 - b. Teleological (focusing on the situational perspective)
 - i. Immanence: Ethical obligation is part of ordinary life, not something spooky, or something that appears only in crisis situations. We make moral decisions every day, moment by moment.
 - ii. Practicality: The content of the ethical norm is clear, definable.
 - iii. Doing good brings happiness. It is in our best interest, at least in the long run. The moral life is the good life.
 - iv. One may even answer moral questions by determining the consequences of an action—the happiness produced, etc. Happiness is the end; the moral task is to determine and accomplish the means to that end (teleology).
 - v. Specificity: The moral law applies to each specific case and takes the distinctive nature of each case into account.
 - vi. Righteousness is never merely internal. It gets involved in the world as much as it is able, adapting means to ends (the tree and its fruits).
 - vii. Righteousness is part of the causal order of nature (cf. iv.). Moral goodness is not an arbitrary decision arising in the soul by chance, but is a response to situations as reasons. The best people are consistently, predictably good.
 - c. Personalist (or “existential,” focusing on the existential perspective)
 - i. Immanence: Ethics is something profoundly inward, a matter of the heart.

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

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

All reality is static, undifferentiated being.

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

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

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

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

if one wishes to live a certain kind of life. But why ought one to make that choice? If one chooses otherwise, then other courses of action are more rational. Aristotle fails to recognize the presuppositions upon which his notion of “rational” is based.

- vi. There are some statist tendencies in Aristotle as in Plato, and for similar reasons (cf. above, 8.j.). Though he balances carefully the concerns of the state and the individual, the state in the end has the priority.

9. Early Teleological Theories

- a. Cyrenaicism (Aristippus, b. 435BC): crude teleological ethics.
 - i. Highest good: greatest amount of pleasure and avoidance of pain.
 - ii. Best pleasures are the most intense; quantity, not quality, is the significant variable.
 - iii. Hegesius the pessimist: For most people, there is more pain than pleasure. The more we seek pleasure, the more we attain boredom and frustration. Suicide is the most rational course.
- b. Epicurus (341-270): more sophisticated teleological ethics.
 - i. General philosophy: atomism; [cf. 5. above]. Epicurus modifies the traditional atomism by saying that atoms occasionally “swerve” from their vertical path. This swerve explains the formation of objects and human free will.
 - ii. All people by nature seek pleasure and avoid pain; therefore these are the goals of life; these are what we ought to do.
 - iii. Unlike the Cyrenaics, Epicurus distinguishes among the qualities of pleasure: We ought to endure short-range pains for long-range pleasures; we should prefer mental to physical pleasures, etc.
 - iv. To make such judgments, we need to know the causes of things. Philosophical contemplation, thus, is the highest pleasure (cf. Aristotle).
 - v. Society begins in a social contract—for mutual self-interest. There is no absolute justice apart from such self-interest.
 - vi. Laws are good if they are useful, if they protect, bring pleasure, etc. [Cf. sophists].
 - vii. One ought to avoid involvement in public affairs as much as possible.
- c. Comments:
 - i. Same problems as in atomism, compounded by the notion of pure chance (“the swerve”).
 - ii. Does everybody seek pleasure and avoid pain? What about self-sacrifice?
 - iii. Or do we simply define pleasure as “what anyone seeks”? Then we have a meaningless norm, as abstract as Plato’s good.
 - iv. Granted that everyone does seek pleasure and avoid pain, why ought we? (Question of the “naturalistic fallacy”).
 - v. Determining what to do in any situation seems hopelessly complex. There are so many different kinds of pleasure and pain to be measured against one another. Further, one cannot measure any of them until one knows

their effects indefinitely into the future. (What future pains and pleasures will there be if I choose X?) The principle seems at first to be simple and practical, but on reflection it appears otherwise.

- vi. Note, then, the tension between the meaningless absolute [iii.] and the hopelessly disjointed particulars [v.].
- vii. Note also the lack of a revealed standard to set forth specifically and authoritatively the whole duty of man.
- viii. Social contract idea leads to a dialectic of anarchy and totalitarianism: Absolute right of private self-interest on the one hand and collective self-interest on the other.

10. Early Deontological Theories

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

- iv. Problems of philosophical empiricism, materialism, rationalism, pantheism.

11. Neoplatonism (Plotinus, 204-269 AD)

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

12. Transition to Modern Period

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

- iv. Influence of modern science and mathematics:
 - a) Reduction of all to physical causation.
 - b) Power of reason (unaided) to understand all phenomena of interest to science and philosophy.
- 13. Continental Rationalism (R. Descartes, 1596-1650; B. Spinoza, 1632-1677, G. W. Leibniz, 1646-1716)
 - a. Descartes wrote little directly bearing on ethics. He did develop a theory of the emotions in which the passions and their effects on the soul are described as stemming from physical causation and mental states. The soul has an inner satisfaction when it is virtuous, so that external influences have no troubling influence [Cf. Stoics]. Descartes maintained free will.
 - b. Spinoza's metaphysic culminates in ethics; the title of his major philosophical work is *Ethics*.
 - i. The overall system: rationalist, determinist, pantheistic in a way ("God or nature"), monistic.
 - ii. Ethics: egoism modified by rational judgment.
 - a) I have a right to do anything I have power to do.
 - b) But reason shows what is truly useful to me—rational contemplation, universal accord among men, knowledge of God ("God or nature," that is).
 - c) Hence social contract, voluntary relinquishment of natural rights for the sake of social existence.
 - c. Leibniz
 - i. General: the world consists of many indivisible, mind-like entities ("monads") which develop according to their own internal laws without mutual influence (some inconsistency here).
 - ii. Organisms, as opposed to other bodies, are organized around a "queen monad" or soul, with which they work in harmony.
 - iii. God is the supreme monad of the universe. His relation to the other monads is somewhat unclear.
 - iv. This is the best of all possible worlds. The evils are necessary to maximize the good. God could not have made a better world.
 - v. God and the other monads are bound by moral principles which are innate to them. Reason enables us to become conscious of them and to follow them, overcoming the corruption of evil appetites. "Intuitionism."
 - vi. Each monad is autonomous, constrained by nothing outside itself (free will); but it is fully determined by its own nature, which is programmed to operate in "pre-established harmony" with other monads (determinism).
 - d. Summary: note rationalism, autonomy. Sin tends to be rationalized as mere failure to understand, inner conflict between reason and appetite.
- 14. British Empiricism
 - a. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

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

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

- i. Note extreme egalitarianism, coupled with totalitarian tendencies. Much of this influences Marxism and other later thought.
- ii. Note denial of the doctrine of the Fall, the autonomous authority of the masses.
- iii. Note attempt to do justice to the positive role of feeling. In some ways this is good (cf. existential perspective); but an ethic based on autonomous feeling alone loses normativity. Cf. above under Hume.

16. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

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

- iv. Another Summary: Act so as to treat each rational creature as an end in itself, not merely as a means. (It is contradictory to want this for yourself while denying it to others.)
- v. A Third Summary: Act so that your principles could be used to govern the whole universe of rational persons.
- h. Autonomy of ethics: In ethics, the self acts as an autonomous legislator [cf. g.v.]. The moral law is essentially self-imposed.
- i. Implications of ethics:
 - i. Since the ethical self is autonomous [h], and since obligation implies ability, we may assume that the moral self is free. This fact cannot be proved, for in our experience (phenomena) all events are caused. But the nature of morality leads us to suppose that freedom exists in the real (noumenal) world.
 - ii. God and immortality: Reason teaches that the good will deserves happiness. Since virtue and happiness are not always linked in this life, there must be a perfectly good, wise and powerful being who apportions fitting rewards and punishments in a later life. A future life is also needed so that the end of morality, the attainment of holiness, may be achieved. God and immortality, like freedom, are not known to exist, only supposed.
- j. Comments:
 - i. Note sharpness of difference with Christianity
 - a) Autonomy of the ethical self—both freedom from causation and ultimate ethical authority.
 - b) God is not the ultimate authority of ethics, but the one who rewards those who obey their own autonomous will.
 - c) We do not even know that God exists, and Kant's system does not require the existence of God.
 - d) Kant's formulations and language suggest that the moral self ought to act self-consciously as if he himself were God—"legislating" principles not only for himself, but also for the whole universe of rational beings (implying omniscience).
 - e) In Christian ethics, we are not called to do our duty merely for the sake of duty. Self-interest, gratitude, love, etc., are also legitimate motives for ethics.
 - ii. The problems of Kant's overall dialectic (phenomena / noumena) invalidate his ethics as well. If the noumenal world is wholly unknown, then it cannot even be said to exist. If it does not exist, then it calls in question even our knowledge of phenomena (what are the phenomena really like?). If it does not exist, then there are no limits on reason at all, no means of restraining speculation.
 - iii. At best, Kant provides a law without a gospel [cf. II.A.3)]—a norm without power to make us obedient.
 - iv. Kant makes arbitrary assumptions all along the line without nearly enough argument to sustain them:

- a) that only actions are right which are done for duty's sake,
 - b) that categorical duties can and must be derivable from the principle of universality alone
 - c) that morally right acts are always acts which are derived from universal principles, etc.
- v. Unclarity of the categorical imperative.
- a) In one sense, I can will, meaningfully, without contradiction, that everyone wear brown shoes. Does that mean that we have a duty to wear brown shoes? If so, may any number of trivial duties be derived from the categorical imperative?
 - b) I can also will, without obvious problem, that everyone refuse to wear brown shoes. Does the categorical imperative, then, lead to contradiction?
 - c) I can also justify obvious sins by careful phrasing: I can will that anyone with my name and social security number may steal (the "anyone" makes it a universal principle).
 - d) Is there some special kind of contradiction created by the above examples? It is not always clear what Kant regards as a contradiction.
- vi. Kant intends his categorical imperatives to be strictly non-empirical and in particular not derived from the consequences of actions. But how can we tell whether keeping promises is a universal duty [above, g.i.] unless we know the consequences of not keeping promises? Is Kant, then, in a roundabout way, telling us after all to judge our actions by their consequences? Is it possible to have deontology without some teleology?
- vii. Another way to put this point: We don't really know what a promise is, apart from its applications. We don't know the universal without the particulars. But we observe the applications, the particulars, in experience.
- viii. Summary: The absoluteness of Kant's norm is empty; it says anything we want it to say, and it says nothing. The immanence of the norm, the autonomy of the moral self, also lets us do whatever we want, provided that reason guides. Kant has failed to establish any principle which obligates us to transcend self-interest.
17. Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Green, Bradley, Bosanquet, Royce, Blanshard).
- a. Rejects the Kantian noumenal ("thing-in-itself"). All of reality is interconnected in such a way as to be knowable by man.
 - b. Morality is irreducibly personal. Only persons have obligations, obey or disobey.
 - c. In ethics, then, one is concerned primarily with developing that innate moral character. How one changes the world or relates to abstract principles are secondary considerations. When I paint a fence, what I'm really seeking is inward, satisfaction in completing a task.
 - d. Ethics, therefore, is essentially self-realization. (Cf. Aristotle). When we make a moral decision, we are seeking not so much to change the world as to

- change ourselves, to express ourselves in some way. As in Kant, the only unequivocal good is the good will.
- e. Unlike Kant, though, idealists see the good will not as looking toward its duty in the abstract, but also as taking into account its inclinations and environment.
 - i. Would a truly good will ignore the consequences of its actions upon others and upon the environment?
 - ii. Why must duty always be set over against inclination? Is it not better to enjoy doing good than to do it merely for duty's sake?
 - iii. Self-expression cannot be fulfilled unless external and internal barriers are removed.
 - f. Self-realization, then, involves relating oneself to the whole universe, to the "universal reason".
 - i. Individual and universal will are one. In willing the will of the universal reason, I am willing my own will, and thus am free.
 - ii. Freedom, then, involves absolute submission to the state and to the duties of my "station in life".
 - g. Wars are essentially conflicts of ideas. The stronger inevitably win out in the long run.
 - h. Comments:
 - i. A more balanced approach than many secular systems.
 - ii. Here, as in Kant, the self is an autonomous moral legislator.
 - iii. Since the moral self is ultimately one with the universal reason (God, the absolute), the moral self is deified in idealism.
 - iv. For idealism, we cannot know particular duties without relating them to the whole universal process. Thus we must be either omniscient or incapable of moral choice.
 - v. The doctrine of submission to authority [f.ii.] and the inevitable triumph of right ideology [g] suggests a kind of fatalism that is damaging to ethical motivation.
 - vi. The concept of war and political change [g] suggests that might makes right when motivated by superior ideology. One who is right can do anything he likes.
18. Karl Marx (1818-1883)
- a. The most basic forces in history, to Marx are not ideas, as Hegel thought, but economic relationships, specifically "relations of production" (relations between owners and workers).
 - b. The duality between owner and worker inevitably produces class struggle, since the interests of the two groups are incompatible.
 - i. Owners inevitably accumulate capital at the expense of the workers, who get poorer and poorer.
 - ii. The discrepancy provokes revolution of the lower class against the higher class, which in turn produces a new social order.

- iii. Master-slave, Lord-serf, bourgeois-proletariat: past stages.
- iv. The communist revolution seeks to bring about a dictatorship of the proletariat, and hence ownership of the means of production by the worker-state.
- v. The ultimate goal is the classless society in which the state “withers away”, no longer needed.
- c. Ethical systems attempt to justify interests.
 - i. The upper class advocates and imposes standards that rationalize and promote its goals.
 - ii. As the exploited class becomes self-conscious, it develops its own revolutionary morality. “Good” is what promotes the revolution; “evil” is what hinders it.
 - iii. In the dictatorship of the proletariat, “good” is what promotes progress to the classless society; “evil” is what hinders it.
- d. As the interests of one’s class change, so morality changes. What is “good” today may become “evil” tomorrow.
- e. Christianity (and other religions) represent ideologies concocted to keep the workers in their place, to make them satisfied with their lot. Even the more “prophetic” moralists do more harm than good, since they postpone the revolution by kindling false hopes of reform.
- f. Comments:
 - i. Good insights into the process by which the poor are exploited in the fallen world. Traditional aristocracies are the best example, but to some extent western nations also stack the deck against poor and laboring people.
 - ii. Confidence in the proletariat as revolutionary force, utopianism, often criticized by contemporary Marxists.
 - iii. Ethical relativism in Marxism as among the Sophists [6., above]: “Justice is the interest of the stronger.”
 - a) This blunts the force of the Marxist critique of exploitation. If the “justice” demanded by the Marxist is simply a justice promoting his self-interest, why should his critique be listened to by anyone else.
 - b) The rejection of any objective meaning to “justice,” together with the impassioned use of the rhetoric of justice, shows the inseparability of relativism and absolutism, rationalism and irrationalism. To the Marxist, the ethic autonomously developed by his class-interest is the only ethic, the absolute presupposition.
 - c) In the final analysis, no ethical norm. Man does what is right in his own eyes, and gives himself pseudo-absoluteness.
 - iv. Here as in idealism, might makes right. And unlike idealism, the progress of might in history is not accompanied by an objective process of thought; so the process is irrational.

- v. The pseudo-absoluteness of class values leads to totalitarianism; the prominence of economics over thought leads to cultural impoverishment.
- vi. The lack of private economic incentive also feeds the totalitarian impulse: if people don't want to work, they must be forced to.
- vii. We shall see that the biblical model of society is neither *laissez-faire* capitalism (with unrestricted accumulation of capital) nor totalitarian Communism. Exploitation of the poor is not only preached against in the Bible; there are institutional structures which, properly engaged, prevent such exploitation while maintaining a overall free society.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

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

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

- a. Utilitarianism is a frankly teleological system, founded (like ancient Epicureanism) on the premise that pleasure is the supreme good.
- b. It differs from Epicureanism chiefly in that it states as the goal of ethics not only the pleasure of the individual, but the "greatest pleasure for the greatest number." For Bentham, this broader goal is a consequence of individual self-interest. For Mill, it is based upon the social instinct in mankind.
- c. Bentham measures pleasures in mainly quantitative ways, as did the ancient Cyrenaicists. Mill distinguishes various qualities of pleasure, as did Epicurus.
- d. In theory, utilitarianism is a simple, practical system. There is one principle—the greatest pleasure for the greatest number. A good act furthers that principle; an evil act impedes it. One may, then, simply "calculate" the goodness or badness of an act by calculating the pleasures and pains produced by it. The "hedonistic calculus."
- e. Act (Bentham) vs. rule (Brandt) utilitarianism (Mill is intermediate): should the principle of utility be applied to particular acts, or to rules?

- f. Utilitarianism has had considerable influence upon legislation.
- g. The democratic process encourages utilitarian thinking to some extent. It is tempting to think that quantities and qualities of pleasures can be measured by votes and polls.
- h. Comments:
 - i. Both Bentham and Mill assumed as a matter of course that everyone by nature seeks pleasure and flees from pain. But is that true? People do sometimes sacrifice themselves for others. Cf. Nietzsche who argued that power was more central than pleasure.
 - ii. One way to overcome the above objection is to define pleasure as “whatever someone seeks,” whether it be ice cream or a martyr’s death. That introduces a circularity into the system. (Pleasure is what we seek. Anything we seek is pleasure.) More seriously, the circularity leaves unclear just what we are trying to calculate when we seek to calculate pleasure.
 - iii. Even if we do seek pleasure and avoid pain in some intelligible sense, does this imply that we ought to? (“Naturalistic fallacy” question.)
 - iv. Even if we seek pleasure for ourselves, is it obvious that we seek it for others? Is it obvious that we ought to seek it for others?
 - v. The principle of utility is, in the end, like Kant’s categorical imperative, an “empty,” contentless norm, which gives no ethical guidance, but which relativizes all concrete decisions. Thus it leaves us free to what is right in our own eyes—to be autonomous. In effect, utilitarianism tells us that we ought to seek whatever we seek.
 - vi. It seems that maximizing happiness is always right. But is it? What if the majority in a country would take great pleasure in the murdering off of a minority? Sidgwick, a later utilitarian, dealt with this problem by adding a new principle to the utilitarian scheme, a principle of “justice,” equal distribution of happiness.
 - a) But this principle has no basis in the overall utilitarian system.
 - b) It is certainly not intuitively obvious. Many people prefer freedom of opportunity to the forced equal distribution of benefits (capitalism vs. socialism).
 - vii. The difficulty of calculating the pleasures and pains produced by an act is so enormous as to require virtual omniscience.
 - a) There are so many kinds of pleasure and pain.
 - b) Most pleasures are not easily measurable at all, because many are not simple body sensations.
 - c) To complete the calculation, one would have to trace the effects of an action into the indefinite future, throughout the universe.
 - d) Note then, as in Kant, Hegel, the ethicist acting as if he were God.
 - e) The discussion between act- and rule- schools reveals another problem: that the kind of behavior that brings the most pleasure as an

individual act may not maximize pleasure when made into a general rule. (Cf. Kant's insistence that moral principles be generalizable.)

viii. Summary: The principle of utility, therefore, provides no concrete ethical guidance at all. Its meaning is unclear, its justification weak, its implementation impossible. Empty transcendence, relativistic immanence.

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

- a. Moore agrees with the utilitarians that the good is something beyond us, objective to us, not a quality of the will or mind as in Kant and the idealists. However, he agrees with Kant that the sublime, unique quality of the moral law cannot be derived from sense experience.
- b. Goodness, according to Moore, is indefinable. It is not pleasure, because it always makes sense to ask whether a pleasure is in fact good. All other definitions of "good" similarly fail, including definitions in terms of God's will. ("The open question argument").
 - i. Reply: Definitions are of many different kinds and serve many purposes. If indeed a definition must reproduce exhaustively all the meaning and connotations of the term it defines, then of course "goodness" is indefinable. But so is every other term on that basis. But definitions ordinarily claim to be no more than a guide to usage. Moore has not shown that goodness is indefinable in that sense.
 - ii. Reply 2: It seems that we can always ask whether pleasure, God's will, etc., are in fact good, because our age is in great confusion about the basis of morality. If everyone agreed that pleasure was the highest good, it would not make sense to ask if some pleasure were good. Same for the will of God.
 - iii. Reply 3: It is sometimes suggested that if we define the good as God's will, it is then meaningless to say that God's will is in fact good. (If I define "shortstop" as "whatever I am," then the assertion that I am a shortstop becomes true, but misleading and trivial.) Answer: such problems arise in the case of definitions which misuse language. It is not such a misuse to speak of God as the standard of goodness; rather this definition is required by revelation.
- c. Not only is goodness indefinable, according to Moore, but it is impossible to derive such goodness from any "natural" state of affairs. Moore accepts Hume's argument that "is" does not imply "ought". "Naturalistic fallacy" is his name for the mistake involved.
 - i. Moore never clearly defined what he meant by "natural" in this context.
 - ii. Moore's only ground for the distinction between "natural" and "nonnatural" was intuition; but the distinction is supposed to be the ground for the appeal to intuition (see below).
 - iii. The "naturalistic fallacy" is a fallacy only if indeed goodness cannot be defined in terms of natural properties; but Moore has not shown adequately that these assumptions are true.

- iv. Nevertheless, the argument about the naturalistic fallacy is important. A system of ethics does need to show why its observations yield moral conclusions. It is, e.g., proper to ask a utilitarian why we ought to seek pleasure, even granting that we do.
 - d. Since goodness is not defined by or derived from any “natural” state of affairs, it is to be regarded as a “nonnatural” property of various states of affairs, simple and unanalyzable (because not definable).
 - e. This nonnatural property is discovered by “intuition”.
 - i. Moore is not clear as to just how this is done. He speaks of holding something before the mind, contemplating it, identifying it as good or bad.
 - ii. Is this merely another kind of experience, by which we perceive special “is” factors from which “oughts” may be derived?
 - iii. At any rate, it seems to remove goodness from the area of that which is publicly discussible. It is hard to imagine how anyone could argue that something is good. But if such arguments are impossible on Moore’s view, he would seem to be doing injustice to common sense.
 - iv. At one point, he says that these “nonnatural properties” “depend on” natural properties, thus compromising the purity of his conception.
 - v. We have here another example of an empty norm—a norm so transcendent, so unique, that no one can establish what it says.
 - vi. Intuitionism prospered in Britain at a time when there was a strong moral consensus. It was plausible to say that simply “looking at” a moral question would magically generate agreement. The advent of sharply conflicting moralities (D. H. Lawrence, e.g.) weakened the consensus.
 - f. Once the good has been intuited, according to Moore, we can determine what is right simply by choosing the best means of attaining the good.
 - i. At this point, Moore’s position is close to utilitarianism. Intuition grasps the goal; the means are determined by calculation. Henry Sidgwick, a utilitarian, developed a similar approach.
 - ii. Other Intuitionists (H. Prichard, e.g.) felt that Moore was not consistent at this point. Does the end automatically justify the means, as Moore’s view suggests? Or must we intuit the goodness of means as well as that of ends? Prichard thought that the goodness of means must also be intuited.
 - iii. But to postulate a multitude of intuitions merely compounds the problems noted under e., above.
22. Pragmatism, Naturalism (John Dewey; cf. R.B. Perry, William James, many others)
- a. Ethics begins by surveying our likes and dislikes, but does not stop there. Through critical study of the effects of various choices, we discover what we really want. (So far, a straightforward teleological system.)
 - b. It is not simply a matter of choosing a goal and then enduring any means to achieve it. Some goals are highly desirable, but the means are so difficult or unpleasant that the goal is not worth the effort. One must, therefore, evaluate

the proposed means, then re-evaluate the proposed goal in the light of that analysis.

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

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

- a. Logical positivism insisted that all statements of fact were “verifiable” by methods akin to those of natural science. The positivists felt that ethical statements (e.g. “It is wrong to steal.”) could not be so verified: therefore, they said, ethical statements cannot be statements of fact; they must be something else.
- b. Different positivists adopted different analyses: M. Schlick said that ethical statements were “rules” for behavior, analogous to rules of procedure in science. R. Carnap said that ethical statements were imperatives, commands, disguised as indicative statements of fact.
- c. The prevalent positivist view, however, was that ethical statements are characterized by two distinctive elements:

- i. They are expressions of feeling. Since those feelings are often feelings about empirical facts, empirical facts do play a role in ethical discussion. But ethical statements are not statements of fact.
 - ii. They also recommend to others the feelings expressed.
 - d. The feelings expressed cannot be debated as such. Ethical debate centers around the facts concerning which the feelings are expressed, trying to bring to attention features of the facts which will change attitudes.
 - e. Comments:
 - i. There is an element of emotive expression in ethical language, and these men are right to point this out.
 - ii. On this basis, the ethical feelings themselves cannot be judged as right or wrong. They are responsible to no standard beyond themselves.
 - iii. Once an ethical debate is reduced to fundamental differences in feeling, no further debate is possible. In the final analysis, then, the emotivist claims the right to whatever, upon reflection, he feels like doing.
 - iv. On this basis, it is difficult to understand why anyone would ever wrestle with a moral question. How can you wrestle with a feeling? Once we know how we really feel about a matter, what further question is there? On the emotivist basis, then, people are simply confused when, even though knowing how they feel, they continue to ask what is right. This is an implausible account of the moral life.
 - v. Irrationalism, then, is manifest here in the relativism of the emotivist approach. Rationalism is evident in the dogmatic manner in which ethical statements are reduced to feeling-expressions and the latter rendered incorrigible.
 - vi. The defects in the positivist view of meaning have bearing here. Cf. Frame, "God and Biblical Language".
24. Other Recent Analyses of Ethical Language
- a. R. H. Hare: Ethical judgments ("It is wrong to steal." "One ought to keep his promises.") are prescriptions. That is, they are not descriptions, nor are they mere imperatives or expressions of feeling. Their force is to tell someone what to do, not necessarily to influence him to do it.
 - b. J. O. Urmson: Ethical judgments are a kind of grading. They do not describe qualities of things or merely express attitudes toward those qualities. Rather, they put things into various categories, based on prior descriptive analysis.
 - c. S. Toulmin, K. Baier: Moral language states socially-based rules of conduct, implications of those rules and justifications for them.
 - d. H. N. Castaneda: Imperatives and their justification.
 - e. R. B. Braithwaite: Personal subscription to a particular kind of conduct.
 - f. P. H. Nowell-Smith: Ethical language includes many uses of language of different sorts which are interrelated in many different ways.
 - g. Comments:

- i. This literature is useful in showing us the variety of ways in which ethical language is used. My own view is close to Nowell-Smith: We cannot simply reduce ethical language to any single form of non-ethical language.
 - a) Look at all that we do using ethical language: advise, exhort, implore, command, condemn, deplore, resolve, confess, profess, criticize.
 - b) At different times, different functions are prominent. Scholarly papers on ethics are more like descriptions; sermons (good ones) more like exhortations.
 - ii. Note that in this tradition, the traditional concerns of ethics are abandoned in favor of “meta-ethics”. These philosophers make no attempt to tell us what acts are right, or even how to find out what acts are right. They merely try to tell us what sort of language we are speaking when we discuss these issues.
 - iii. This last-named problem can be traced back to G. E. Moore, but in a more basic way it reveals the overall bankruptcy of non-Christian ethics. Non-Christian ethics has reached the point of admitting that it has no power to tell us what we ought to do.
 - iv. Balancing this irrationalism is the general agreement [see above under Moore, 21.b.] that goodness may not be defined in terms of God’s will. Thus, the general admission of ignorance is qualified by a dogmatic, rationalistic denial of divine authority.
 - v. These men all agree that at some point ethical discussion must cease—either with private feelings or social codes or something else. In a sense, this admission is perceptive. Ethical thought, like all human thought, is governed by religious presuppositions. And yet most all people are prompted by conscience to realize that their own feelings, or the will of society, cannot adequately serve as ethical presupposition. Feelings can be wrong, or bad. Thus, these modern theories are never fully persuasive, even to non-Christians themselves.
25. Existentialism (Jean-Paul Sartre; cf. M. Heidegger, K. Jaspers)
- a. As an approach to ethics, existentialism is chiefly a kind of moral psychology—an analysis of the experienced phenomena of moral decision making.
 - b. The British analysts tend to reduce the difficult moral choices to the simple: a hard moral choice is like grading apples or following rules, etc. The existentialists do the opposite: They analyze even “simple” moral choices in terms of our experiences of deep anguish, despair, etc. (E.g., Sartre: Why do we hate to touch something? Because stickiness is emblematic of every obstacle to our freedom to control reality.)
 - c. Comparison with idealism, which is also a kind of “existential” ethic:
 - i. Both are ethics of self-realization.
 - ii. For Sartre, ethical choices are realizations of human freedom, not human “nature” as in idealism. Sartre denies that there is any human “nature” prior to our concrete life.

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

- i. Inevitably, we seek union between the *pour soi* (ourselves) and the *en soi* (the world). For the world limits, opposes our ability to accomplish what we have chosen to do.
 - ii. We would like to become both *pour soi* and *en soi*—to have both pure being and freedom, both essence and existence; in other words, we would like to be God (in whom essence and existence are one). But the concept to God is self-contradictory.
 - iii. We want to control the world, but we cannot. Hence, nausea, anguish. The “other” is the enemy.
 - i. “Bad Faith”
 - i. To avoid this anguish, we deny our freedom. We pretend that we are mere objects, determined by our past or our station in life. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not responsible in the above sense.
 - ii. To live in this way is “inauthentic existence”.
 - j. Comments:
 - i. Sartre is perceptive about the freedom of moral choice. To be sure, on a Christian basis, sin is a result of divine foreordination and man’s fallen nature. But there is no excuse. Every actual sin results from a choice for which man is responsible before God.
 - ii. In other odd ways, Sartre’s approach mirrors the Christian system, possibly because the former is such a self-conscious negation of the latter. The Christian would agree, e.g., that man’s problem arises from his attempt to be God, to control all things, to evade responsibility.
 - iii. Sartre’s ethic is based on human autonomy more explicitly, perhaps, than any other ethic. The Christian must attack this assumption head-on.
 - iv. Sartre reduces ethics to metaphysics, though he would claim to be averse to metaphysics. Ethics is a matter, ultimately, of the relations between being and non-being. Contrary to his claim, this is devastating to moral responsibility.
 - v. Sartre’s concept of responsibility is precisely opposite to that of Christianity. Sartre’s autonomous man is responsible to no one. On a Christian view, this is a virtual definition of irresponsibility.
 - vi. Sartre claims on the one hand to free us from all ethical rules (irrationalism); yet, he stigmatizes a certain kind of behavior as inauthentic and claims for himself the authority to legislate in the field of morals (rationalism). He defines man as undefinable, etc.
26. Some More Recent Ethicists
- a. Stephen Toulmin (1922-)
 - i. The “good reasons” approach: Follow principles that bring the least amount of avoidable suffering (negative utilitarianism)
 - ii. Generally, however, better to use a case method than any universal rule.
 - b. John Rawls (1921-)

- i. Anti-utilitarian, because following the principle of utility can lead to horrible results for some and, therefore, for yourself.
- ii. Justice as “Fairness”
 - A) Each person entitled to the most extensive liberty compatible with the same liberty for others.
 - B) Inequalities are justified only to the extent that they are necessary to help the disadvantaged.

27. Summary

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

- iii. The rationalism, then, can produce only a formal principle—the good in general, duty in general, the principle of utility, ethical intuition, etc.—which turns out to tell us nothing specific and to be without basis.
- iv. The radical differences among these thinkers as to the standard of ethics, the goal (pleasure? power? self-realization? contentment?) and the motivation call in question the rationality of the project.
- v. The irrationalism relativizes not only the alleged norms, but even its own assertions. Thus, if irrationalism is true, it cannot be true.
- d. The non-Christian approach leads to the abandonment of ethics itself.
 - i. Without any norm or duty, available to human knowledge, ethical study is not possible.
 - ii. If there is no moral order in creation, choice is without meaning.
 - iii. If man is merely a product of chance, decision is without meaning.
 - iv. Thus, in non-Christian thought, ethics becomes speculation (deontology), technology (teleology) or psychology (existential).
 - v. Note, therefore:
 - a) Abandonment of ethics in favor of meta-ethics in modern language-analysis philosophy.
 - b) Abandonment of any attempt to give ethical guidance in existentialism, while retaining the vocabulary of ethical responsibility.
 - c) Modern discussions of ethical issues (abortion, capital punishment, etc.) without any distinctively moral concern, social utility being the only principle.
- e. Since non-Christian ethics is helpless to do justice to its own concerns, it is wholly unable to raise objections against Christianity.
 - i. Objections to the morality of the Bible.
 - ii. Objections to God's actions in Scripture—killing the Canaanites, etc.
 - iii. Objections to the imputation of Adam's sin, to election, to the substitutionary atonement, to reprobation and Hell.
 - iv. Objections based on the problem of evil:
 - A) On a non-Christian basis, good and evil cannot be meaningfully discussed; therefore, no problem can be spoken of.
 - B) Put differently: If a Christian has a problem with evil, the non-Christian has a problem with good.
 - C) How, on his basis, can good exist and be distinguished from evil?
 - D) Yet, as a man in God's image, he knows at some level of his thought and life that good exists and has a claim upon him.
- f. Yet, there are elements in non-Christian ethical systems which can be of use to Christians. The non-Christian has, though he opposes it, considerable knowledge of morality.
 - i. Specific precepts (Romans 1:32; 2:14f.).
 - ii. He attempts to do justice to the three perspectives, which is important even to Christian ethics.

- iii. He explores the complexity of ethical life.
 - a) The many elements of ethical language.
 - b) The difficulty of applying norms to situations.
 - c) The difficulty of ethical growth in the fallen world.
 - d) The problems of organizing society into a coherent order.
- iv. In recognizing the complexities of ethical decision, the non-Christian is often more perceptive than the Christian.

Part Two: Christian Ethics (Basic Principles)

I. Christian Ethics: The Normative Perspective (Christian Deontological Ethics)

A. God Himself as Norm:

1. “God is light,” I John 1:5, 4:8ff.
 - a. A reflection on the nature of God at a very basic level. (Cf. “God is love,” “God is Spirit”.)
 - b. By nature, God is self-communicative. Light is something which radiates from a source to a receiver. Cf. the identification between God and the Word, John 1:1, between God and His name (Psalm 7:17, etc.).
 - c. But “light,” particularly in this context, is a moral metaphor.
 - i. To walk in light, in John, is to walk obediently, righteously. Cf. 1:7, 2:9f.
 - ii. To walk in darkness is to sin: 2:11; cf. John 3:19f.
 - iii. Therefore, to say that God is light is to assert that God has a perfectly holy character, worthy of all praise and imitation. This is a pervasive teaching of Scripture. Simply to ascribe such perfection to God is to accord Him the status of a norm.
 - d. The specific function of light in the moral order is to reveal good and evil (John 1:5ff., 3:19ff., 8:12, 9:5, 11:9ff., 12:35f., 46, I John 1:7, 2:8ff.) and therefore to guide.
 - e. As the ultimate ethical guide, who shows us what is right and what is wrong, God is ultimate norm.
 - f. By His very nature, then, God establishes and displays what is normative.
2. Union of God Himself with His revelation (cf. course in *Scripture and God*):
 - a. Unity between God and His word, name, glory, angel, Son, Spirit.
 - b. Assertions made about these forms of revelation.
 - i. Divine attributes ascribed to them.
 - ii. Uniquely divine acts performed by them.
 - iii. Worship directed to them.
3. So authority intrinsic to God’s Lordship.
4. Our responsibility: Essentially, imitation of God.
 - a. Man as vassal king, in God’s image, with responsibilities and privileges analogous to God Himself.
 - b. Righteousness as imitation of God’s character: Leviticus 11:44, Matthew 5:44-48, I Peter 1:15f. Implication: The law ultimately coincides with the character of God. To obey the law is to reflect the character of God. To disobey the law is to mar that image. The law is a picture of God’s Own nature.
 - c. Righteousness as imitation of God’s acts: Exodus 20:11, Deuteronomy 5:15, Matthew 5:44-48, I John 4:9-11.
 - d. Righteousness as imitation of Christ:
 - i. Christ as light, John 1:4, 3:19, 8:12, 9:5, 12:35f., 46.

- ii. Cf. Christ as name, glory, angel, Son, Spirit.
 - iii. Imitation of Christ's character, acts: Matt. 16:24, 19:21, John 13:14f., 34f., 17:18, 20:21, 1 Cor. 11:1, Philipians 2:5-11, I Peter 2:21, I John 3:16, Matthew 16:24)
 - iv. Imitation of others who imitate Christ, Luke 4:25ff, 1 Cor. 10:1ff, 11:1, Phil. 3:17, 2 Thess. 3:9, Heb. 6:12, 11-12, James 5:17f.
 - e. Imitation of God must be carefully distinguished from coveting God's prerogatives, seeking to erase the Creator-creature distinction. Imitation is not seeking identity, but seeking to reflect God's character within the admitted limitations of creaturehood. The difference between the two attitudes is radical—between sin in its essence and righteousness in its essence.
 - f. At the most basic level, this is the source of ethical obligation. We have ethical duties because God is intrinsically worthy of obedience and because all creatures are inevitably confronted with the revelation of His standards.
- B. The Word of God as Norm (cf. course in *Scripture and God*. To say that God's Word is authoritative is to say that it is normative for ethics. On that score, no further argument is necessary.)
1. The Word that comes through nature and history:
 - a. Clearly reveals God's glory, His invisible power and divinity (Psalm 19, Romans 1:20).
 - b. Clearly reveals His wrath against sin (Romans 1:18).
 - c. Reveals man's obligations before God (norms!) (Romans 1:32).
 - d. Creation in general is not said to reveal the way of redemption from sin; however, the process of redemptive history described in Scripture does reveal God's way of salvation.
 - e. There is, therefore, a sense in which our "situation" is normative. Thus, the normative and situational perspectives overlap, as we have seen. We will consider this more fully in connection with the situational perspective.
 2. The Word that comes in persons.
 - a. The Word is identified with God Himself and with Christ, while the Spirit is said to bring the revelation home to man's heart. Thus, God mediates His Own Word.
 - b. The Word is also found in man:
 - i. "The work of the law" written upon the heart of man (Romans 2:14f.): All men, by nature, have access to the basic requirements of God. These are essentially the same as those given in the written law, but now communicated through another medium (cf. Murray on Romans).
 - ii. In the regenerate, the Word is written on the heart. This is a much more profound relation between the Word and man than is spoken of in i. The writing of the Word on the heart implies not only knowledge of obligation, but actual obedience to that obligation, obedience from the heart (Jeremiah 31:33f.; cf. Deuteronomy 6:6, Proverbs 3:3, etc.) Cf. *Doctrine of the Word*, "The Word as God's Presence".

- iii. The example of apostles, teachers: I Corinthians 4:16, 11:1, Philippians 3:17, I Thessalonians 1:6, 2:6, II Thessalonians 3:7-9, Hebrews 13:7, I Timothy 2:12.
 - c. This biblical teaching shows the overlap between normative and existential perspectives. We shall explore these matters further when we consider the existential perspective.
- 3. The Word as spoken and written language.
 - a. To the patriarchs, prophets, apostles.
 - b. Through them to others.
 - c. The revelation committed to writing is God's Own Word also:
 - i. The covenant document is authored by the Lord and stands as the supreme norm of covenant life.
 - ii. The prophetic message claims divine authorship. The prophet is one who speaks God's Word.
 - iii. Same for the apostolic message.
 - iv. The written Old Testament endorsed by Jesus and the apostles as God's word.
 - v. The writings of the apostles claim the same authority.
- 4. Unity of the Word: The same God is speaking in all the media, and His message is consistent in all of them.
 - a. Nature-history and Scripture
 - i. Psalm 33:4-11: The written law is binding because it is in essential unity with the creative word which inevitably comes to pass.
 - ii. Psalm 19: Note the implicit correlation between the revelation in creation (1-6) and in the law (7ff.). (Cf. Romans 10:13-17 with 18: Natural and special revelation as one organism).
 - iii. Psalm 147:15-20.
 - b. Person-revelation and Scripture.
 - i. The "law" in the phrases "work of the law" and "law written on the heart" is the law of God, particularly that given through Moses. Thus, the "law on the heart," far from being an alternative to the written law, is the written law inscribed upon our being.
 - ii. The witness of revelatory persons in Scripture (Christ, the Spirit, the apostles and prophets) unanimously endorses the truth of Scripture.
 - c. Scripture also validates the others, affirming their unity with itself.
- C. Ethics and the Attributes of Scripture
 - 1. Power
 - a. Through the Spirit, Scripture (as all divine utterances) carries with it the omnipotence of God.
 - b. Received in faith, the word is the source of all spiritual blessing, all holiness.
 - c. Received in unbelief, the word brings curse, hardening.
 - 2. Authority (the attribute particularly linked to the normative function)

- a. At each turning point in human history, the issue facing man is the question of how he will respond to the spoken or written Word of God.
 - i. Genesis 1:28ff: Man's original task defined by the Word.
 - ii. Genesis 2:17: The probation which is to determine his status as righteous or sinner, defined by the Word.
 - iii. The Fall: Substitution of the word of a talking animal (Satan) for that of God. Ultimately, substitution of one's own word for God's.
 - iv. Promises to the Patriarchs: given through God's Word. His people are to believe and obey, even in the face of apparent evidence to the contrary.
 - v. The Mosaic Covenant: Integral to it is the book of the covenant.
 - a) Authorship is by the Lord.
 - b) Contains stipulations, laws which the vassal (Israel) must obey.
 - c) Also contains authoritative revelation
 - i) Of God's Name
 - ii) Of the History of Redemption
 - iii) Of blessings and curses resulting from obedience or disobedience
 - iv) Concerning Covenant Administration
 - vi. Jesus
 - a) His perfect obedience defined by the Law.
 - b) His life directed by biblical prophecy.
 - c) He attests the authority of the Old Testament.
 - d) He sets forth His Own word as the supreme test of discipleship (John 12:47ff., etc.).
 - e) He provides for additional revelation through His apostles.
 - vii. Apostles
 - a) Attest the authority of the Old Testament—cf. II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21.
 - b) Claim to speak and write the Words of God.
 - c) Claim that their words in oral and written form are the supreme test of discipleship.
 - viii. The Last Judgment: the criterion will be the word of Christ, John 12:48.
- b. As ultimate criterion, Scripture, therefore, is to function as a basic commitment (or presupposition) for all our life. All choices must be consistent with the truth of Scripture.
 - i. Scripture has the ultimate say in defining what our duties are. Ethical behavior is keeping the word of the Lord, Deut. 6:4ff, Luke 8:15, John 17:6, 1 Tim. 6:20, 1 John 3:24, 5:2-3.
 - ii. The basis of duty, then, is not a rational abstraction (non-Christian deontological ethics) nor mere empirical examination of the causes and effects of actions (non-Christian teleological ethics), nor the autonomous moral self (non-Christian existential ethics).

- iii. The autonomy of the reason or the moral self is thus radically rejected, and with them, the whole tradition of secular ethics.
- iv. Positively, the basis of duty is the fact that a personal God, Who deserves all obedience, has called us in love and authority to be His willing servants.
- v. Why ought we to obey? The answer must be circular: Because God has commanded it.
 - a) All ethical systems have a similar circularity when it comes to justifying their ultimate principle.
 - b) Non-Christian systems, however, render the very concept of duty unintelligible.

3. Clarity

- a. Clarity has meant in Reformed theology that the way of salvation is plain enough that the unlearned as well as the learned may have a sufficient knowledge of it (Westminster Confession of Faith I:vii).
- b. A larger point is ethical in nature: We may never use the unclarity of Scripture (granting that it is unclear in a sense) as an excuse for sin. God always grants us sufficient means to carry out the responsibilities before us.
- c. Christian ethics is practical. The Christian is not faced with the mystery of a contentless norm (non-Christian deontology), nor with the impossibility of doing an indefinite amount of calculation (non-Christian teleology), nor with the impossible responsibility of creating norms out of his own head (non-Christian existentialism).

4. Necessity

- a. We are not permitted to form our moral opinions on the basis of natural revelation alone. Our fallen mind inevitably twists, represses or otherwise resists the truth of natural revelation. Romans 1.
- b. Without the revelation of Christ, no salvation and therefore no morality is possible, Romans 10:13-17.
- c. The covenant document is the covenant. To break the former is to break the latter and *vice-versa*.
- d. Without the written Word, we lose the ultimate standard of discipleship (Above, 2.a.).
- e. No Scripture, no Lord, no salvation.
- f. Thus, autonomous reason has no role in formulating ethical principles. At this point, the whole tradition of “secular ethics” is radically rejected.
- g. Nor may the traditions of the church ever serve in the unique place given by God to His written Word.

5. Sufficiency (of Scripture for ethics)

- a. Formulation. “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new

revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (Westminster Confession of Faith I:vi).

- b. Biblical bases.
 - i. The polemic against substituting the words of men for the Word of God: Deuteronomy 18; I Kings 13; Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:1-10; Galatians 1:8f.; II Thessalonians 2:2.
 - ii. The boldness of God’s messengers, standing against the many and powerful—Moses before Pharaoh, Elijah before Ahab, Isaiah before Ahaz, Jonah before Nineveh, Paul before Agrippa, Felix Festus—free men! Cf. Acts 4:19f., 5:29.
 - iii. The inscriptional curse of the covenant document: cursed be anyone who adds or subtracts, Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18.
 - iv. The sufficiency of Scripture for salvation and good works, II Timothy 3:16f.
 - v. Christ as the last word of God in the history of redemption (Hebrews 1:1ff.) attested by the apostles (Hebrews 2:4), showing us “all things pertaining to life and godliness” (II Peter 1:2-11) “until the eternal kingdom.”
- c. Misunderstandings of sufficiency
 - i. Sufficiency is not limited to “matters of salvation” in some narrow sense. Rather it is comprehensive. Scripture is sufficient to reveal God’s will in all matters.
 - a) The Confession’s statement does mention salvation explicitly; however:
 - i) The Confession does not regard salvation as something narrowly “religious” as opposed to some other area of life. Salvation is of the whole person.
 - ii) Besides salvation, the Confession refers to “all things necessary for His own glory,” “faith,” and “life.”
 - iii) Nor is it possible to confine “faith” and “life” to some particular area of life. Faith is what we believe and life is what we do (cf. Shorter Catechism, Question 3).
 - b) Scripture places no limit on the sufficiency of Scripture in telling us the will of God. Rather, it speaks comprehensively of the sufficiency of Scripture to equip us “for every good work.”
 - c) This is not to say that Scripture contains all the world’s information or instructs us in all human skills. The point: in any area of life, our duty toward God will be an application of Scripture. For the concept of “application” see section iii.
 - ii. Scripture is not merely sufficient as a general guide by which we discover ethical norms beyond Scripture. Scripture contains all the norms (vs. some Dooyeweerdian representations).

- a) Scripture draws a sharp distinction between the sufficient word of God and the traditions of men. To promulgate a norm as God's will which is not an application of Scripture is to deny that distinction.
 - b) This misunderstanding gains its plausibility from the fact that indeed we do need extra-Scriptural information to apply Scripture. But that fact does not imply that we have duties which are not applications of Scripture.
 - c) Scripture never speaks of any extra-biblical norms which are not also found in Scripture. Romans 3:1f., in fact, may imply that the Scriptures contain a much fuller transcript of God's will than what is available to the Gentiles in natural revelation.
- iii. Scripture is not sufficient merely as a supplement to natural law.
- a) Four types of law in Thomas Aquinas' conception:
 - i) Eternal law (in God's mind)
 - ii) Natural law
 - (1) The counterpart of eternal law in the created world
 - (2) Enables us through natural reason to discern what is good
 - iii) Human law (civil statutes, etc.)
 - iv) Divine law (Scripture)
 - (1) Adds what we must know to attain our supernatural end
 - (2) presupposes the general structure of natural law
 - b) Comments:
 - i) Built on a scheme which radically distinguishes between natural and supernatural ends (cf. critique of this under situational perspective).
 - ii) Fails to reckon with the noetic effects of sin.
 - iii) Puts the Scriptural doctrines on the faulty foundation of apostate (Aristotelian) natural reason.
 - iv) Eliminates the sufficiency of Scripture in any meaningful sense. Not Scripture, but Scripture plus Aristotle becomes our working ethical authority.
- iv. Sufficiency does not rule out the use, even the necessity, of extra-biblical information in the determination of our duty. (Cf. the relation of presuppositions to evidences in apologetics.)
- a) As we have seen, God is revealed in the whole creation, though that revelation is opposed by the natural man.
 - b) Creation is the necessary medium by which the law is applied to specific situations.
 - i) Note the "moral syllogism": Sabbath breaking is wrong Operating a factory on Sunday is Sabbath breaking Operating a factory on Sunday is wrong. To evaluate that syllogism, you need to know, not only something about the Bible, but also extra-biblical information. Most moral reasoning is of this kind.

- ii) Scripture itself assumes that man will use his knowledge of creation in applying God's law. When God told Adam to abstain from the forbidden fruit, Adam had the knowledge of creation to distinguish trees from other things and to single out a particular tree in view, etc. God does not spell out explicitly in his revelation all this information. To do so would be ludicrous.
- iii) In Scripture, men are rebuked for failing to make such applications to current questions (Matthew 16:3, 22:29; Luke 24:25; John 5:39f, Romans 15:4; II Timothy 3:16f, II Peter 1:19-21 [in context]).
- iv) If such applications of Scripture were not permitted, we could not use Scripture at all. We would then lack, in effect, not only the applications, but the norm itself. The meaning of Scripture is its application.
- c) Thus, human reasoning also has a role in moral decision making. The sufficiency of Scripture must not be taken to deny that. We are not, of course, speaking of autonomous reason, but reason subject to God's Word ("analogical"). Thus, the Confession speaks of "good and necessary consequence".
- d) And, thus, the Confession speaks of matters which are to be ordered by "the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed".
- v. Sufficiency does not rule out the use, even the necessity, of the illumination of the Spirit for a saving understanding of Scripture, for its proper use and application. Note statement in confession to this effect.
- vi. Summary:
 - a) Scripture contains all the ultimate norms for the Christian life in all its aspects.
 - b) Natural revelation also contains norms, but none that are not in Scripture also.
 - c) The norms of Scripture must be applied with the help of natural revelation and the illumination of the Spirit.
 - d) Such applications, when correct, set forth the meaning of Scripture, its demand in a situation, and therefore are not to be regarded as extra-Scriptural.
- d. The "*adiaphora*" (literally, "no difference," "indifferent").
 - i. History
 - a) Among the Church Fathers, the term was applied to actions such as eating meat which were considered to be neither right nor wrong in themselves.
 - b) During the Reformation, Luther applied the term to certain Roman forms of worship which he felt were neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture and thus could be practiced by the believer in good conscience. Later, further controversy developed as to whether

Protestant could acquiesce in church rites imposed by Roman Catholic rulers.

- c) In the late 1930's, there was a split in the Presbyterian Church of America (later OPC) partly based on the issue of "Christian liberty". Specifically, the question was whether total abstinence from alcoholic beverages was required by Scripture, or whether such use of alcohol was an *adiaphoron*.
- ii. *Adiaphora* is an ambiguous and misleading concept.
 - a) Taken literally (as a Greek neuter plural), it refers to things which are in some sense "indifferent." Thus often people refer to meat or wine or tables or chairs as "things indifferent". Generally, I think this is a shorthand way of talking about the human use of the "things". However, referring to "things" as indifferent can lead us to forget the biblical teaching that everything in creation is good (Genesis 1:31; I Timothy 4:4). There is no biblical distinction between some things which are good and others which are bad or indifferent.
 - b) More commonly, the word refers specifically to human acts. However, we should bear in mind that according to Scripture all human acts are either pleasing or displeasing to God. I Corinthians 10:31; Romans 14:23; Colossians 3:17, (cf. 23) show that all human acts are under God's evaluation as good or bad.
 - c) One sometimes hears, also, the above in modified form: "acts concerning which Scripture is silent". But the above texts indicate that Scripture speaks concerning all our acts, and so is not silent about anything. Significantly, I Corinthians 10:31 and Romans 14:23 occur in contexts dealing with matters which have traditionally been called *adiaphora*.
 - d) A more common and more defensible use of the term is formulated in this quote from the Lutheran theologian Robert Preus in Baker's *Dictionary of Christian Ethics* "acts or church rites which in themselves are neither morally right or wrong, but matters of Christian liberty." Note the modifying phrase "in themselves". The point is that these acts are right in some situations and wrong in others. Surely there are some actions in this class, but the use of *adiaphora* and the phrase "neither morally right or wrong" disguise the fact that every act in the class is right or wrong in God's sight.
 - e) Another possibility: *Adiaphora* are choices that are not between good and evil, but between two goods. This is an important concept, but I'm not convinced that the term *adiaphora* helps to expound it.
 - f) Finally: *Adiaphora* are acts that in a certain situation are neither commanded nor prohibited by Scripture. Again, this is an important notion, but the term conceals the important fact that such an act is, not morally neutral, but good in God's sight.
 - g) Conclusion: *Adiaphora* is used for too many different concepts, some of them quite unscriptural. Its use in communicating legitimate

Scriptural concepts is vitiated by its connotation of moral neutrality. Such neutrality is everywhere rejected by Scripture.

iii. There is, however, an important point raised by the *adiaphora* discussion, and that is the liberty of the Christian from the religious and ethical ordinances of men, or, in other words, the sufficiency of Scripture for ethics. (The Christian, to be sure, is subject to the ordinances of men for the Lord's sake, I Peter 2:13. But these ordinances can never be his ultimate authority, and they must be defied when they conflict with divine revelation.) That this is the central point of the debate can be seen from the classical "*adiaphora*-texts":

a) Romans 14:1-15:13

i) Setting

(1) One party in the church has a religious scruple that the other does not have.

(a) v. 2: the "strong" eat all things, the weak only herbs.

(b) v. 5: one regards special days, the other does not.

(2) Each is persuaded of the rightness of his actions (6—"unto the Lord")

(3) Both groups are Christians (3, 15).

ii) Problems (important to distinguish):

(1) One group is "weak in faith".

(2) Each group has a wrong attitude toward the other (despising, judging; 3, 4, 10).

(3) The strong, by his behavior, is placing a "stumbling block" in his brother's way.

(a) Not only a cause of grief to him (19), but:

- destructive (15)
- condemnatory (23)
- tending to overthrow the work of God (20)

(The work of God, of course, cannot be overthrown. The language, however, shows the supreme destructiveness of the stumbling block.)

(b) Interpretation: the strong, by his behavior, influences the weak to sin.

(c) The sin of the weak is against his own conscience (20-23) and thus against God.

(d) The sin in violating his own conscience, doing what he believes is wrong even though it may be objectively right, the weak acts out of rebellion, and thus sins objectively (23)

iii) Solutions

- (1) On weakness of faith: Paul sides with the “strong” (14:14, 20, 15:1). The weak, then, we assume, are to be won over to the position of the strong by loving admonishment from the Word.
 - (2) On the disputatiousness: Don’t despise or judge one another. Treat one another as brothers, in Christian love. [Note: this is not inconsistent with (1)]
 - (3) On the stumbling block: Do not induce a weak brother to sin against his conscience. If he cannot be instructed, do not use any pressure to get him to do something he believes is wrong.
- iv) The main thrust of Paul’s injunction: Do not play God. God, not man is the judge of right and wrong.
- (1) Both “strong” and “weak” have compromised that principle—the weak by “judging” the strong and the strong by “despising” the weak.
 - (2) The strong have also, in effect, “played God,” setting their own influence over against what the weak consider to be the command of God.
 - (3) Note Paul’s sustained emphasis throughout the passage on God as the supreme ethical judge: 3ff., 6-12, 17f.
 - (4) The term *adiaphora*, with its connotation of moral neutrality, suggests the very opposite of what Paul is stressing at such length. Paul wants, above all, to tell us that all our actions must be done “unto the Lord” and with faith (23).
 - (5) The notion, then, that the church may not teach people authoritatively concerning matters of food and drink is decisively rejected by this passage.
- b) I Corinthians 8-10
- i) Setting
 - (1) Food offered to pagan idols was being sold in the market, possibly indistinguishable from other food and, thus, hard to avoid.
 - (2) Question: Do we endorse idolatry by eating such food? (Note, in context, Paul’s strong condemnation of idolatry, 10:1-22, in particular connection with eating and drinking, 10:16ff. Note also the danger suggested concerning a possible sacramental union with a demon through participation in sacrifice, analogous to the union with God in the Lord’s Supper, 10:16-21, cf. 11:27-34.)
 - (3) Again, one party has a scruple (They “lack knowledge,” [1, 7, 10f.] and have a “weak conscience,” [7, 9, 10-12]); the other does not.
 - (4) Both groups are Christians (11f.)
 - ii) Problems (Same as those in Romans).
 - (1) Ignorance, weakness (8:1, 7, 9-12)

- (2) Contentions (a general problem at Corinth, 1:11. Note the urging to love in 8:1-3).
- (3) Stumbling block: 8:7, 9ff. The weak sees the strong eating and is enticed into eating himself—out of a rebellious spirit. The result is that the weak is guilty of idolatry.

iii) Solutions

- (1) The strong is right, because an idol, unlike God, has no power to curse those who eat his food. An idol is nothing (4ff.). Our God is the only Lord (cf. 8:8, 10:26).
 - (a) Note well: The emphasis is that we must not ask what the demon thinks about our eating, but what God thinks of it.
 - (b) Thus again, the stress is on the exclusive authority of God over our behavior. The point is that these matters of “indifference” or “neutrality”.
 - (c) If one eats to the glory of God, the act is good (10:31); if you do it out of rebellion against God, then you are in league with devils—not because of the food, but because of your sinful behavior.
 - (d) Weakness of faith is failure to understand this principle. Cf. the young Christian who burns his idols, throws away his rock music, vs. the older Christian who collects idols and rock records for their artistic value.
 - (2) Contentions: Be loving (8:1-3), edifying (10:23f.). Do not exalt your own “knowledge”. (“I am a Westminster graduate; I know the Greek. You are a benighted fundamentalist.”)
 - (3) Stumbling block: Seek to teach the weak, but, if that is not possible, and if you might cause him to violate his conscience, abstain, 8:7, 9ff. God’s concerns, not mine, must govern my behavior.
- iv) Note again, the inadequacy of “*adiaphora*” to convey the moral intensity of the situation. There is nothing morally neutral about becoming an idolater through violation of conscience. I Corinthians 9 is especially significant in showing the intensely moral considerations which govern Paul himself in decisions on how to use the good things of creation.
- c) I Timothy 4:1-5: Some advocate abstinence from marriage and meats. The operative point is that God has created all things good, and thus, man has no right to despise them.
 - d) Colossians 2:16f.: Some try to “judge” others about feasts, etc. The relevant point in context is the triumph of Christ over principalities and powers. We hold fast to him, not to men or angels. Again, the opposite of ethical indifference is presented.

D. Parts and Aspects of Scripture as Norms

Scripture is a diversity in unity. In seeking to use Scripture as our ethical norm, we cannot avoid the question of how the various parts and aspects are related to one another. Ethics presupposes hermeneutics (as well as *vice-versa!*).

1. Different Forms of Language

- a. Scripture contains many kinds of language: imperatives, indicatives, questions, promises, prose, poetry, song, law, history, epistle, proverbs, parables, drama, symbolism, emotive expression, etc.
- b. When doing theology, we are tempted to think of Scripture as a collection of indicatives; when doing ethics, we are inclined to think of Scripture as a collection of commands. There is truth in both of these approaches [e., below], but both can mislead.
- c. Since all Scripture is profitable for godliness (II Timothy 3:16f.), we dare not exclude any passage or any type of language in formulating a Christian ethic. The ethical implications of the Psalms, of Ecclesiastes, of the parables, etc., must all be done justice.
- d. It may not always be possible to do justice to such diverse media merely by translating them into scholars' prose. At times, ethical admonition may have to reflect the variety of Scripture itself—using poetry, symbol, parable, etc.
- e. Each type of language is a perspective on the whole, as well as an element within Scripture. In a sense, all Scripture is indicative because all Scripture contributes to our belief system. All Scripture is imperative because all Scripture contributes to our knowledge of our duty before God. Yet it is dangerous to reduce our image of Scripture to one such perspective, denying the existence or importance of others.
- f. The structure of the suzerainty treaty—a unity made up of different kinds of language (name, history, law, vow, administration) illustrates how a document with many functions can exercise a unified authority.

2. Gospel, Law, and Redemptive History (or: the relation of biblical and systematic theology in the development of a Christian ethic). Compare discussion of “biblico-theological extremism” under the definition of “moralism” in the beginning of this outline.

- a. In many ways, it can be shown (cf. courses in hermeneutics, homiletics, biblical theology) that Christ is the “center” of Scripture, and, more specifically, that the events of his death, resurrection, ascension, and sending forth the Spirit at Pentecost are of central importance in Scripture. These are the events to which the Old Testament looks forward and upon which the New Testament reflects.
- b. Does this imply that Scripture is most basically to be characterized as a redemptive history?
 - i. Certainly, Scripture is a history in that it records and interprets the historical events mentioned earlier, and in their historical context.
 - ii. Scripture, however, is different from modern histories.

- a) It includes, for instance, a law code, a song book, a collection of proverbs, a set of letters—and not merely as historical source-material!
 - b) All of these, and the historical material too, are intended not merely to give us historical information, but to govern our lives here and now (Romans 15:4; II Timothy 3:16f., etc.).
 - c) As often pointed out, the Gospels are not biographies of Jesus. They are Gospels. Their purpose is not merely to inform, but to elicit faith. Most histories do not have this purpose.
- iii. It would, of course, be possible to define “history” so broadly as to include all these functions. One could speak of the Psalms and Proverbs as in some sense “interpretation” of historical events. But such definitions are so far removed from normal language as to be misleading. “Interpretation” in the usual sense is not the chief purpose of Psalms and Proverbs.
- iv. I am therefore willing to say that Scripture is a redemptive history, but I am reluctant to say that this is the only way or the most important way of characterizing Scripture.
- v. At the very least, we would have to modify the phrase “redemptive history” in order to say that Scripture, unlike any other history, is normative redemptive history—history intended not only to inform, but to rule the reader (II Timothy 3:16f.).
- vi. But to say that Scripture is normative history is to say that Scripture is not only history, but also law, and that “history” and “law” are at least equally important characterizations of Scripture.
- vii. Such correlation between history and law is to be expected if, as Kline argues, Scripture is a “suzerainty treaty”.
- viii. Scripture is also Gospel—its intention is to bring the good news of Christ to elicit faith in Him.
- ix. I would argue that there are still other ways to characterize Scripture: It is also promise, wisdom, comfort, admonition. Cf. the variety of the treaty form.
- x. Does this approach compromise the emphasis of Scripture upon Christ and upon His death, resurrection, etc.?
- a) Christ is not only central to history, He is central also as the eternal lawgiver (Word), as the wisdom of God, as prophet, priest, and king. It therefore could be argued that a more flexible approach to Scripture does more justice to the centrality of Christ than does an approach which gives primacy to history.
 - b) The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the Pentecostal outpouring are important not merely as historical happenings (though over against the skepticism of modern thought, it is vitally important to affirm them as historical happenings). They are also vitally important in their present impact upon us, not least in their normative function. Romans 12:1ff.; Ephesians 4:1ff.

- c. Ought ethics and theology to be “controlled” by redemptive history?
 - i. They ought to be controlled by everything Scripture says. This includes not only its statements of historical fact and its interpretations of the meanings of history, but also its commands, poetry, its systems of truth, etc.
 - ii. Since theology is to be controlled by everything in Scripture, it is to be controlled by redemptive history, but not by that alone. Theology (ethics) must be aware of the process of redemptive history, must take it into account, must say or do nothing that compromises the teachings of Scripture about this history.
 - iii. Theology and ethics must be equally concerned to do justice to the normative teaching of Scripture, its power to change the heart, etc.
 - d. Relations between ethics and redemptive history
 - i. Redemptive history is the setting in which the law is given. We must understand redemptive history in order to understand and apply the law.
 - ii. The grace of God given in redemptive history gives to us the righteousness of Christ by imputation and the power to keep the law by sanctification.
 - iii. Reflection upon redemptive history motivates us to obey. We obey, not simply because we are commanded to, but out of gratefulness for what God has done and an in-wrought desire to obey. Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:15; Colossians 3:1ff.
 - iv. Our fundamental obligation, to imitate the righteousness of God, is not created by redemptive history. It dates from creation and is binding upon all people, whether redeemed or not.
 - v. Ethics, then, involves description of the redemptive-historical process, but not only that. It also involves the imperative of the law, the promise and comfort of the gospel, the powerful poetry and wisdom and parable which drives the message into the heart.
 - vi. Since ethics is inevitably application, it must not only look back upon redemptive history (and ahead to the *parousia*), but must focus upon the present, exhorting us to our present duties in the name of Christ.
3. Law and Gospel
- a. The Lutheran Distinction (*Formula of Concord*, Article V.)
 - i. Law: “properly a doctrine divinely revealed, which teaches what is just and acceptable to God, and which also denounces whatever is sinful and opposite to the divine will.”
 - ii. Gospel: “the doctrine which teaches what a man ought to believe who has not satisfied the law of God, and therefore is condemned by the same. . . .”
 - b. The *Formula* teaches that even though the Gospel preached by Christ and the disciples involves a call to repentance (Mark 1:1ff, 1:15, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 20:21), the Gospel when contrasted in general with law makes no such demand. It comforts against the terrors of the law by bidding us look to Christ alone (Article V:vi)

- c. In Lutheranism, the distinction between law and gospel is the key to Scripture. They consider many others, including the Reformed, to be confused as to the distinction.
 - d. The Reformed, while not denying the legitimacy of the distinction, tend to speak of “law” and “gospel” in broader, and, to my mind, more Scriptural terms.
 - i. The Lutheran sees law almost exclusively as threat and terror, while the Reformed put more emphasis upon law as the delight of the redeemed heart (Romans 7:22; Psalm 1, 119:97; etc.), the law as a gift of grace (Psalm 119:29), law as “way of life,” (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 5:33, 8:3, 11:13-15, 28:1-14, 30:11-20, 32:47; Psalm 119:29; etc.).
 - ii. The Lutheran position tends to abstract the Gospel from the demand of repentance, feeling that such a demand is not properly good news. But, in Scripture, the demand is good news because it arises out of the fact that God has acted, and man may now respond.
 - e. The three uses of the law
 - i. Enumeration:
 - a) “External discipline”—to restrain sin in society (*Formula of Concord*, Article VI)
 - b) Law as a means to drive men to Christ by exposing their sin.
 - c) Law as a rule by which the regenerate may shape their lives.
 - ii. The Lutherans accept all three uses of the law (as over against some among them who denied that the law should be preached to the regenerate). They base this use of the law upon the incompleteness of sanctification in the regenerate, and therefore, the believers continuing need of threat, “sharp urgency”.
 - iii. Works of the Spirit, however, are such as can be produced by no threat or constraint whatever. (“ . . . as if they had never received any precept, had never heard any threats, and expected no remuneration.”) As such, believers “live in the Law”; i.e., they conform to the law, but not by threat or constraint.
 - iv. The Reformed stress that the preaching of the law need not be mere threat or constraint, but is a gift of grace.
 - v. The distinction between works done under constraint of law and works done in the Spirit is not as simple as pictured in the *Formula*.
 - a) Agreed: Works done merely out of constraint and not out of love and gratefulness to God are not good works at all.
 - b) However, living in the Spirit is living in response to a command (Galatians 5:16, etc.). It is preposterous to suppose that obeying this command puts us in the sphere of the flesh.
 - c) It should not be supposed that sanctification is achieved without struggle, without constraint.
4. Law and Grace (see Murray, 181ff.)

- a. What law can do:
 - i. commands and demands
 - ii. pronounces approval and blessing
 - iii. pronounces judgment upon infractions
 - iv. exposes, convicts of sin
 - v. excites, incites to worse transgression
 - b. What law cannot do:
 - i. anything to justify the sinner
 - ii. anything to relieve the bondage of sin
 - c. Being “under law”:
 - i. being under the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14)
 - ii. being under the ritual law of the Mosaic economy
 - iii. obligated to obey God in Christ.
 - d. The Christian under the law of God: Matthew 5:17-20; I Corinthians 9:20f.; Romans 6:14, 7:1-6; I Corinthians 6, 8.
5. Old and New Covenants
- a. In both covenants, there is demand for obedience and the promise of salvation by grace alone through faith (Murray, 194-201).
 - b. Both covenant documents are authoritative for men today: II Timothy 3:16f.; Matthew 5:17-20.
 - c. What change is brought about by the establishing of the New Covenant?
 - i. Now, we live looking back on the accomplishment of redemption, not looking forward to it as under the Old Covenant.
 - a) Thus, the believer has a much greater power to do good works because of the great fullness of the Spirit poured out on Pentecost.
 - b) Thus, the believer has a firmer assurance that his sins are forgiven.
 - c) Thus, he has a stronger motive to holiness:
 - i) Gratefulness for the love shown to him in Christ.
 - ii) A firmer assurance that sin can be overcome by the power of God.
 - iii) The example of Jesus’ love.
 - d) Hence, appeal to the work of Christ and its results (presence of the Spirit, unity of the body, etc.) become the chief motivations of New Testament ethics. It is these facts, more than the mere fact that holiness is God’s will, which motivates the exhortations of the New Testament. (Note “therefore” in Romans 12, etc.)
 - e) The NT does sometimes appeal to the law, however, to motivate obedience (Matt. 5:17-20, 7:12, 12:5, 22:36-40, 23:23, Luke 10:26, John 8:17, Rom. 8:4, 13:8-10, 1 Cor. 9:8-9, 14:34, Gal. 4:21-22, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Jas. 2:8.)
 - ii. What change is there in the believer’s obligation as a result of the covenantal change? What stays the same?

- a) The fundamental requirement of love is the same (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37ff.; parallels; John 13:34f., many Johannine parallels) with a new clarity, motivation and example (“as I have loved you”).
 - b) Our obligation to keep the law in general remains intact, Matthew 5:17-20.
 - c) While the whole law remains binding, its application is different in many respects.
 - i) A change of situation always brings about a change in application. The application of the Torah to city life is different from its application to a largely agricultural society.
 - ii) The change from Old Covenant to New brings about some rather broad changes in the situation in which we apply the law.
 - (1) In general, the Old Covenant is related to the New as shadow to substance, as type to antitype. Since the reality had not yet come, God’s people in the Old Covenant period knew of Christ only through symbolic prophecies, types, ordinances. Since Christ has come, and with him, the New Covenant revelation, we are not restricted to such shadows for our knowledge of Christ. Positively, Christ, Himself, is revealed as the sufficient mediator and sacrifice.
 - (2) Unlike the Old, the New Covenant community is not identified with a particular national and political unit. The New Covenant order, therefore, does not demand loyalty to one earthly kingdom among others. Positively, Christ is the King in a new international commonwealth, a new people of God.
 - (3) The New Covenant puts into effect a written canon that will not be added to until the *Parousia*. The former special office of prophecy is fulfilled in Christ as the mediator of the New Covenant revelation.
 - (4) Thus, the New Covenant puts into effect crucial changes in the priestly, kingly, and prophetic functions.
 - iii) Since the situation changes in these ways, the status of the law changes as well.
 - (1) Christ as priest fulfills the law of expiation.
 - (2) Christ as king fulfills the civil law.
 - (3) Christ as prophet fulfills the moral law.
6. Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil Law
- a. The traditional discussion
 - i. The Westminster Confession (XIX:i-v) distinguishes three kinds of law:
 - a) Moral, given at creation, summarized in the Decalogue, perpetually binding and useful under the gospel (i, ii, v, vi)

- b) Ceremonial, prefiguring Christ and giving moral instruction, all of which are abrogated under the New Testament (iii).
 - c) Judicial (sometimes called civil), given to govern Israel as a political entity. These expired with that state, “not obliging any other now, further than the general equity may require.”
 - ii. Controversy has existed:
 - a) Concerning the three-fold distinction itself.
 - b) Concerning the status of the civil law.
- b. Evaluation of the three-fold distinction.
 - i. The distinction is not found explicitly in Scripture. Scripture speaks simply of “the law,” both positively and negatively. It is “the law” which Jesus did not come to destroy (Matthew 5:17-20). It is “the law” to which men are in bondage because of sin. It is “the law” from which we are set free in Christ. The Old Testament, too, does not list its statutes in such neat groups. “Moral,” “ceremonial,” and “civil” statutes are placed alongside each other and mixed together with no apparent concern about possible category-confusion.
 - ii. It is important, therefore, to say that the most basic changes wrought by the New Covenant in this area affect, not one part of the law, but the law as a whole.
 - iii. It is not always easy to distinguish these three categories.
 - a) They don’t come neatly labeled in the OT. Typically, they are mixed together.
 - b) Laws traditionally called “ceremonial” do not pertain only to ceremonies, but to many other things, like diet, clothing, economics (the Sabbatical years and Jubilee), etc.
 - c) The Confession’s discussion makes it look as though the way to find if a law is currently binding is to determine first which of the three categories it belongs to. However, it more often happens that we determine which laws are binding first, and then decide which bin to put them in.
 - iv. Nevertheless, the three-fold distinction does reflect a genuine distinction within the divine government—the prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions.
 - a) Moral law corresponds closely to the prophetic office, which sets forth God’s demand for righteousness.
 - b) Ceremonial law (called law of expiation in an earlier discussion) corresponds to the priestly office, which concerns particularly man’s need of expiation from sin.
 - c) Civil law corresponds to the kingly office, which governs the covenant commonwealth.
- c. Evaluation of the discussion concerning continuation / abrogation.

- i. To summarize our earlier discussion: It is best to say that the law as a whole is subject to changes in application because of the advent of the New Covenant.
- ii. Ideally, then, it is best not to raise the question in terms of the general categories moral, ceremonial, and civil. Rather, having seen something of the overall change in our relation to the law, we ought then to study each particular statute to see how it is affected by the overall change.
- iii. This task, however, can be facilitated if we learn to make at least rough groupings among types of laws, determining those groupings primarily by the functions of the laws in the history of redemption. The distinction between moral, ceremonial, and civil, then, can be an aid to us.
- iv. The ceremonial law.
 - a) Sacrifices and cleansing regulations are no longer literally binding because they are but shadows of the work of Christ (Colossians 2:13-17; Hebrews 9:8-10; 10:1-18).
 - b) Dietary laws are not literally binding because they are a form of cleansing law, prefiguring the purity of Christ. Enforced under the New Covenant, they would encourage the misconception that the Kingdom of God is food and drink, Mark 7:14-23, esp. verse 19; I Corinthians 8-10; Romans 14; Acts 10:9-16, 11:2-10.
 - c) The calendar of feasts is treated similarly, Colossians 2:16f.
 - d) The fundamental requirement of these laws is still binding, that we approach the holy hill of God with clean hands and a pure heart, i.e., with the righteousness of Christ. We come to God bearing sacrifice—the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.
 - e) The ceremonial laws continue to instruct us concerning that righteousness.
 - f) Do some of the “ceremonial” laws bear upon human health and safety? More work is needed on this subject.
- v. The moral law.
 - a) In general, the authority of the “moral” statutes is reaffirmed in the New Testament and most all of the Old Testament ethical principles are specifically reinforced.
 - i) Statements about the authority of the law (Matthew 5:17ff.) or the moral teaching of the Old Testament (II Timothy 3:16f., etc.).
 - ii) Authoritative use of the Old Testament in moral discussion: Matthew 5-7; James 2:8; Mark 7:10; Romans 13:8-10; Ephesians 6:2f., etc.
 - iii) Reiteration of Old Covenant moral principles, Ephesians 4-6, etc.
 - b) Changes
 - i) The law is no longer a curse and threat because of Christ.
 - ii) Since our sins are forgiven and the Spirit dwells within, the law is now in a greater sense than under the Old Covenant, a delight.

- iii) We have a stronger motivation to holiness.
- iv) The New Covenant revelation completes the canon. The moral law has been revealed once-for-all, and our business is application of that, not waiting expectantly for further revelation.
- vi. The civil law (Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*).
 - a) Obvious Changes
 - i) The New Covenant no longer identifies the Kingdom of God with an earthly political unit. We belong to a heavenly city, under Christ, the King. Thus, there is no requirement of loyalty to national Israel. The Kingdom of God is not to be defended by the sword.
 - ii) Some of the civil laws clearly are addressed to a particular historical situation, e.g., the division of Canaan into portions for the various families of Israel, the consultation of Urim and Thummim, etc.
 - b) Does the kingship of Christ, however, eliminate the need for a distinctively Christian political order?
 - i) In the Old Testament, the ultimate kingship of God was not compromised by the existence of a temporal human kingship.
 - ii) The New Testament teaches that in the new dispensation, God appoints rulers for His righteous purposes (Romans 13:1-7).
 - iii) Since all things are to be done to God's glory, we should expect God to provide us with at least general norms for righteous rule.
 - c) The Old Testament theocracy may be seen as a sort of "incarnation" (Don't press the analogy suggested by that word!): the kingdom of God existing in the form of human social institutions.
 - i) The theocratic statutes presuppose that paradoxical situation, and thus may not be naively applied to any other situation.
 - ii) With the coming of the New Covenant, political institutions on earth lose their "divine nature".
 - iii) Nevertheless, as a form of human government promoting social order, the statutes must be seen as the wisest ever given (Deuteronomy 4:7f.)
 - iv) In the Old Testament period, even pagan rulers were judged for their failure to rule righteously, righteousness being defined by the law of God. Thus, the Old Covenant norms for politics were not seen as applying exclusively to Israel (cf. Bahnsen).
 - v) It is inevitable, then, that we shall seek to imitate the Old Covenant theocracy in developing a Christian politics, somewhat as we seek to imitate the righteousness of the incarnate Christ.
 - vi) Imitation of Old Testament Israel, like imitation of Christ, is fraught with peril. We will often be tempted to claim for ourselves what was unique to the theocracy. On the other hand, we may

dismiss as unique to the theocracy something that God wants us to observe. The job is difficult.

- d) Problem Areas.
 - i) Sabbatical years and the Jubilee
 - (1) Analogous to yearly feasts or to weekly Sabbath?
 - (2) Are they moral, ceremonial, or civil? (Perhaps, the distinction breaks down here.)
 - (3) If civil, are they distinctive to Israel or a divine model for all civil order?
 - (4) If limited to Israel, how may we in the present situation emulate the equity provided by these laws?
 - ii) Tithe structure.
 - iii) Penalty structure (same problems).
- e) Summary: I'm straddling the fence on this issue. I hope I can resolve it some in my own mind because it is crucial in determining our social and political responsibility. In general, however, I would say that the burden of proof is on those who would deny the relevance of some civil statute to our time.

7. The Love Commandment and Other Commandments

Note: more will be said about the nature of love under the existential perspective. Our present purpose is to sketch the relation between the love-command and the other commandments. By "love commandment," we mean the commandment to love God and, thus implicitly and on that basis, the command to love one another.

- a. Prominence of the Love Commandment.
 - i. Love as the covenant allegiance owed by a vassal to his suzerain.
 - ii. Prominence of love (= exclusive covenant loyalty) in the Decalogue. ("Thou shalt have no other gods before me.")
 - iii. Prominence of love in the *shema*, the fundamental confession of faith of God's Old Covenant people (Deuteronomy 6:4ff.)
 - iv. Prominence of love in Jesus' teaching (particularly love of enemies, e.g., Matthew 6:43ff.).
 - v. Love as the "new commandment" identifying the New Covenant people of God, John 13:34f., 15:12, 17; I John 2:7ff., 3:11ff., 4:7ff.
 - vi. Emphases on love in New Covenant ethics: I Thessalonians 4:9; I Peter 1:22; Hebrews 13:1.
 - vii. Love as the highest Christian virtue: I Corinthians 13; I Peter 4:8.
 - viii. Love as fulfillment of the law: Matthew 22:37-40; parallels; Galatians 5:14, 6:2; Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:8ff.
- b. Love is a commandment, part of the law.
 - i. This fact immediately rules out any opposition or antithesis between love and commandments in general.
 - ii. Any arguments directed against the keeping of commandments in general bear with equal weight against obedience to the love commandment.

- c. The love commandment requires obedience to the whole law of God.
 - i. In the covenant structure, the commandment to love the Lord (exclusive covenant loyalty) is a prologue to the detailed prescriptions of the law. Love is demonstrated by obedience to the prescriptions. Note connection in Deuteronomy 6:4ff.
 - ii. “Fulfillment” of the law implies that loving behavior will carry out the law’s requirements.
 - iii. One who loves Jesus will keep his commandments, John 14:15, 21, 23, 15:10; I John 2:3-5, 3:21ff., 5:3. Cf. correlation of “light” and “love” as equally ultimate characterizations of God in I John.
 - iv. Scripture never suggests that one must ever disobey a divine command to fulfill the law of love.
- d. Love is a provocative characterization of the law.
 - i. Even though love involves obedience to law, loving and obeying are not merely synonymous. Although they require the same thing, they characterize it in different ways.
 - ii. Love focuses more on the motive of the heart (cf. later under existential perspective), obedience more on the actions performed.
 - iii. The emphasis on love, therefore, warns us that slavish obedience is not the goal of the law. Obedience out of grudging, unwilling submission is not what the law requires. Rather, God calls us to lives of earnest concern, genuine care, for God and one another.
- e. Misunderstandings
 - i. Schleiermacher: law is concerned only with the outward act. Therefore, the love commandment is not a commandment at all.
 - ii. Brunner, Bonhoeffer: Since God’s will for me is always absolutely concrete, law can be only a general guide. Knowledge of God’s will comes about in a momentary inspiration in a situation.
 - iii. J. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*: There are no rules. Laws are general guidelines, maxims, but none is absolute. Ultimately, we must simply do what is the most loving thing in a particular situation.
 - a) Contradiction: Fletcher renounces rules (irrationalism) but sets forth his own rule (do what is loving in a situation) as absolute (rationalism). (His attempt to show that his rule is not a rule in unconvincing.)
 - b) Fletcher’s rule lacks all content, and, thus, can give no moral guidance.
 - c) Fletcher’s notion of love is unbiblical. He denies the biblical relationship between love and the other commandments.
 - d) Implementing the norm of love faces the same difficulties as implementing the principle of utility.
 - e) Thus, Fletcher’s arguments (often dogmatic assertions) about what love requires are supremely unconvincing.

8. The Decalogue and the Other Commandments (see introduction to Part Three).
9. Priorities Among Divine Commands.
 - a. Every legal obligation (in human or divine law) is essentially obligation to a legal system. That system includes not only specific precepts, but also broader principles, judicial arrangements for applying the law, executive arrangements for enforcing it, etc. The system as a whole determines what use is to be made of any part of it.
 - b. In any legal system, certain principles are regarded as more important than others: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” Matthew 9:13; “Leave your gift at the altar and be reconciled to your brother,” Matthew 5:24; “Weightier matters of the Law,” Matthew 23:23. Cf. Psm. 78:17, 32, 56, Ezek. 8:6, 13, 15, Matt. 12:31-32, 18:6, Luke 12:47-48, John 19:11, Heb. 2:2-3, 10:29, 1 John 5:16, WLC 151-52.
 - c. In any legal system, it is assumed that, in emergencies, the normal regulations may be transcended by larger principles such as the maintenance of human life and safety (Matthew 12:4, parallels), obedience to higher authority (Acts 5:29; cf. Romans 13; I Peter 2:13ff.)
 - i. Norman Geisler: “graded absolutism”
 - ii. W. D. Ross: “prima facie duties.”
 - d. Thus, the application of any biblical commandment is subject to the broader principles of biblical ethics. In any particular situation, a lesser principle may be transcended by a higher one.
 - i. This is not antinomianism: we are talking about “higher” and “lesser” principles within the law itself, not exceptions to law. Actions in accord with this principle are obedient to the law in its full meaning.
 - ii. This must be done carefully. This principle is not a warrant, e.g., to disobey the seventh commandment in the name of love since love is a higher and broader principle. We must guard against replacing the biblical norms with the lusts of our own hearts and using the above principle as rationalization.
 - e. A further example of this principle: Not every biblical commandment can be carried out immediately by every individual.
 - i. We tend to think of obedience as instant response to divine commands: biblical pictures of Abraham, Jesus, and others reinforce this picture.
 - ii. Thus, sermons often suggest that we ought to drop whatever we are doing and do what the sermon calls for: persistent prayer, evangelism, pursuit of social justice, visiting the sick, feeding the poor, studying the Scripture, etc.
 - iii. However, we clearly cannot do all of these all of the time. We are finite, and our schedules are limited. We must frequently stop obeying one command in order to obey another. And Scripture does not assume otherwise. It assumes that some commands may not be carried out “immediately”.

- iv. It also recognizes that such activities are fundamentally the responsibility of the church as a whole, not of each individual within the church. No individual could single-handedly evangelize everyone in Burma or pray for all the lost in India.
- v. Each individual is expected to play a role in the fulfillment of these tasks. The role one plays will depend at least partly, on his own gifts. Not everyone is expected to play the same role.
- vi. It should not be assumed, therefore, that one who spends ten hours a week helping the poor is necessarily more obedient than someone who spends ten hours in prayer or visiting the sick.
- vii. Therefore, in addition to the general system of “priorities” set forth in the law itself [c., d. above], each individual must develop for himself, in the context of the church and obedience to the Word, a personal set of “priorities” which may be different from those of anyone else.
- viii. It seems odd, even impious, to suggest that an individual may decide what emphasis he will put on various divine (absolute) commands. Yet, this is a necessary part of applying the word to a situation; and without such application, the law is a dead letter.
- ix. It must not be assumed, therefore, that because God has commanded something, it must be done immediately or must be given an unlimited amount of time.
 - a) In some church courts, e.g., one commonly hears that since God has sanctified the truth and requires sound doctrine, questions of doctrinal orthodoxy always must take precedence over all other considerations. Thus, there are church courts that are so preoccupied with doctrinal questions (even minutiae) that they do little in the area of missions, evangelism, prayer, etc. The commandment concerning doctrinal soundness, however, must not be thought to take precedence over every other consideration in every situation.
 - b) Other church courts take the opposite approach: God commands evangelism, and, thus, we must be up and about the business of soul-winning, and questions of doctrine must take second place. But to assume without argument that they must is to take an irresponsible attitude.
 - c) The OP and PCA churches differ essentially in their customary determinations of priorities. The OPC is closer to a) above; the PCA closer to b), though both bodies are most balanced than the caricatures in a) and b) would suggest. The main problem inhibiting merger of these bodies is that neither group is willing to question seriously its own scheme of priorities or to acknowledge the difficulty and subtlety of the question involved. Each group tends simply to assume that its own scale of priorities is right and then to measure the other group in terms of that scale.

II. Christian Ethics: The Situational Perspective (Christian Teleological or Situational Ethics).

In the normative perspective, we asked “What is our duty?” Here, the ethical question is, “How must I change the world in order to accomplish God’s purposes?”

A. The Situation and Our Knowledge of Our Duty.

1. Recall what was said earlier about God’s character and acts as ethical revelation.
 - a. As our ultimate “situation” or environment, God Himself is norm [I.A.].
 - b. Since his word comes through nature and history, there are norms available to us through the situation [I.B.].
 - c. Such norms do not go “beyond” Scripture in the sense of compromising Scriptural sufficiency [I.C.5.].
 - d. Yet, natural revelation is indispensable for the application of Scripture [esp. I.C.5.c.iii.]. And without the application, we would have no norm at all.
2. Functions of the situation in making moral decisions.
 - a. Posing moral questions: We are told to do all to the glory of God. Thus, every fact poses the question of how we are going to use the things before us to God’s glory. (Picture Adam’s thinking as he came to know more and more about the world: “How can I best relate this fact to my calling before God?”)
 - b. Answering moral questions: Everything we learn about the facts helps us to answer the questions of 2.a. The fact that fire cooks food shows us one way in which fire can be employed in the building of God’s kingdom. This is saying simply that everything we learn about the world helps us better to apply God’s norms. Cf. the relation of presuppositions to evidences in apologetics. (Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*)
3. Means-end relationships (teleology).
 - a. Often, applications of God’s norms will be on the basis of means-end relationships. If I am to obey God by worshipping on Sunday morning, I must find transportation to church. Finding transportation, then, is a duty because it is a means to the end of getting to church.
 - b. Does the end justify any means?
 - i. God uses even ungodly means to achieve his purposes. His purposes will be achieved whatever means we may try to employ (his decretive will). This fact, however, does not justify the use of such means (his preceptive will).
 - ii. Though ungodly means have a certain effectiveness [i], Scripture often represents them as powerless. Ultimately, they can achieve neither their own purposes nor the purposes of God (Ephesians. 6, e.g.).
 - iii. Thus, in one sense, only godly means are capable of achieving God’s purposes. Ungodly means must be seen as working against them, contributing to them only in a highly ironic or paradoxical sense. God uses ungodly means by overruling them, overwhelming them, forcing them contrary to their intention to glorify him.

- iv. Thus, in one sense, the end does justify the means. Any means that is in the best sense conducive to God's glory is legitimate. Any means that is not is illegitimate.
 - v. However, the situation is so complicated that we should seek to evaluate on the basis of Scripture not only the ends we seek, but also the means for achieving them.
 - vi. In practice, we often justify an action because it is conducive to a good end. There is nothing wrong with this as long as we are open to the correction of Scripture concerning both ends and means.
 - vii. A means which is good "in itself," or good "in general," must be further evaluated according to the end it aims to accomplish and its efficiency in achieving that end.
 - c. Thus, we can see the very limited sense in which a "Christian utilitarianism" is possible. We seek to calculate the consequences of our actions to determine whether they are conducive to God's purposes. But we must do this always in subjection to God's written Word.
4. Casuistry.
- a. Casuistry is simply the application of law to situations.
 - b. As such, it is inevitable. If we are to obey the law at all, we must learn to make judgments about its applications (cf. normative perspective). Scripture requires that. [I.D.5.c.iv.b) i)].
 - c. Casuistry assesses the differences in different situations, the motives of actions, the diversities (priorities, especially) within the law itself.
 - d. Though casuistry is unavoidable to the Christian, it has been subject to much abuse. We dare not take on this job without being aware of the dangers of it, the errors associated with it in the past.
 - i. Pharisaism: The law is in effect replaced or even contradicted by casuistic interpretations, ". . . making the word of God of none effect by tradition."
 - ii. False applications were often made normative in the church.
 - iii. Casuistry as rationalization of sin: ("lax" interpretations). In Rabbinical Judaism and later Roman Catholic casuistry, there was a tendency to polarities between more "lax" and more "rigorous" schools: Shammai vs. Hillel, Jansenists vs. Jesuits, etc.
 - a) Principle that a wrong action can be justified because it is more right than its opposite.
 - b) Too easily determining exceptions to general commands.
 - c) Too easily claiming implicit qualifications to commands.
 - d) Principle that a normally sinful action can be excused if done for a good motive.
 - iv. Casuistry as a burdensome yoke ("rigorous" interpretations):
 - a) Vast catalogue of restrictions added to God's word.
 - b) Leaves little room for freedom of the believer, individual responsibility.

- c) Encourages a nit-picking mentality, interest in minutiae as over against the “weightier” matters.
 - d) Questions the perspicuity of revelation by making morality a matter for experts to decide.
 - e) Promotes overconfidence in the interpreter’s own ability to interpret Scripture and situation. Are we really sure that we “understood” the Viet Nam war?
 - f) Encourages works-righteousness.
- e. Ways to guard against such abuse.
- i. Firm, practical confidence in the gospel of justification by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ.
 - ii. Firm, practical confidence in Scripture as the clear and sufficient word of God.
 - iii. Perspective: Awareness of what is more or less important within Scripture itself, and among its applications (“priorities”).
 - iv. A mature conscience, resisting rationalization.
 - v. A recognition that even the largest catalogue of applications will not be exhaustive. No matter how large (or how accurate!) the catalogue, there will always be a question of application remaining. (If the catalogue applies the Scriptures, who applies the catalogue?). Thus, there is always need for a choice by the individual. And, often, that choice is best helped, not by a list of rules, but by moral growth in the Spirit.
5. Summary: A biblical understanding of our situation will tell us our duty. If we understand the ends and means of the created order, we will know what to do. This is a Christian “situational” or “teleological” ethic. However, it presupposes and involves all we said earlier about the norm.

B. The Ethical Situation (environment).

Since we must take our situation into account when we make ethical choices, it is important that we learn to describe that situation in a biblical way.

1. God Himself: God is the original environment from which all else comes, and in whom we live and move and have our being. Recall the “Lordship attributes,” control, authority and presence [Part I: I.C]. It is the fact of God, which must, above all, be taken account of in our ethical decisions.
 - a. His Decree.
 - i. Since God by His decree foreordains everything that comes to pass, all means/end relationships are part of his all-wise plan. We can trust that the means he approves will be effective and that the end he announces will surely come to pass. Hence, the persuasiveness of the “natural law” idea. God’s commands are consistent with creation. I would not say that the former are “grounded in” the latter, for the opposite conception is equally legitimate.
 - ii. Thus, the situational and normative perspectives are consistent. What God tells us in His word will surely take place in the world. Obeying the law is the best way to get along in the world.

- iii. Does our environment ever force us into making a sinful choice? (“Conflict of duties,” “tragic moral choice”.)
- a) There are many apparent examples of this: cf.
 - i) Must we not, in some situations, tell lies in order to preserve life? In World War II, many fought moral battles over the question of whether they should answer truly when asked if they were hiding Jews.
 - ii) Women in concentration camps were sometimes lured into adulterous relationships on the promise that cooperation would save the lives of their loved ones.
 - iii) Biblical examples: cf. Murray 123ff., Kline “The Intrusion”.
 - b) It appears that in these examples one cannot keep one commandment without breaking another. This is because the situation has become so distorted by sin that no perfectly righteous choice is possible.
 - c) Such an analysis must, however, be rejected:
 - i) The character of God.
 - (1) God is not a tempter (James 1:13). Men are tempted when they are enticed by their own lust (v. 14). If God in His providence allowed the world to go so far astray that no good choice could be made, it would be difficult to avoid shifting the blame for our sinful decisions on to him. In a sense, of course, God has decreed that fallen man cannot choose the good. But this presupposes that the environment presents even to fallen man a righteous alternative (see below).
 - (2) God does not deny Himself (II Timothy 2:13). If genuine “tragic choices” existed, God would be, in effect, commanding and forbidding the same thing (in our example, he would be commanding and forbidding either truth-telling or preservation of life).
 - ii) The character of sin: Sin always presupposes that there is something right that ought to be done, and that man knows what that is. Note Romans 1-2, other biblical condemnations of sin. If there were “tragic choices,” there would, in those cases, be no clearly right alternative, and, therefore, no way of knowing that alternative.
 - iii) The character of the law:
 - (1) If there are “tragic choices,” then the Lord in effect commands two contradictory things [1.b.], and the law, then, would also be contradictory. Remember that where applications are contradictory, meaning is contradictory.
 - (2) “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul” (Psalm 19:7ff.). If there were “tragic choices,” then it would be necessary and beneficial to break the law in some way (e.g., in

the example of the law requiring truth), and harmful to keep the law. The suppositions are impossible.

- iv) The character of Christ:
 - (1) If Jesus did face “tragic choices,” i.e., choices in which it is impossible not to sin, then, it could not be said that Jesus was “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” If Jesus faced “tragic choices,” then He was a sinner.
 - (2) If we face “tragic choices” and Jesus did not, then it can scarcely be said that Jesus was “tempted in all points like as we are.” (Hebrews 4:15). I.e., if Jesus did not face decisions of this most difficult type, then he can hardly be said to have participated in the moral agony of our fallen world.
- v) I Corinthians 10:13—A promise particularly given to believers, but reflecting the general view of moral life summarized above.
- d) Why the theory is plausible.
 - i) It is easy enough, when writing an ethics text, to concoct an example where all “ways of escape” from sin are ruled out. But are there cases like that in the real world? Be careful of forming your picture of the ethical life on the basis of hypothetical examples taken from ethics textbooks.
 - ii) Some of the plausibility of this theory comes, however, from the undeniable fact that moral choice is often very difficult. Often, it is not easy to find the “way of escape.” In rejecting the concept of “tragic moral choice,” do not fall to the other extreme of oversimplifying ethical problems.
 - iii) Some alleged examples of tragic moral choice are really questions of priority within the divine law. [Cf. I.D.11.]. It is at least arguable, e.g., that the command to preserve life overrides the command to tell the truth in some cases.
 - iv) Some moral situations are particularly difficult because they involve a choice between two evils. When trying to save lives on a battlefield, we may have to choose between allowing one man or another to die, in order to have time and resources to save others. This seems like a “tragic choice” in the above sense. Note well, however: It is a choice between two evils, not a choice between two wrongs. Either choice we make will bring harm to someone, and that is, in one sense, evil, even “tragic” in a general sense. But it cannot be shown that all possible choices in that situation will displease the Lord.
- iv. Foreordination, freedom, responsibility.
 - a) It has often been thought that if man is to be responsible for his actions, he must be able to act independently of God’s decree.
 - i) Recall *autexousion* (free will) in many church fathers.

- ii) Thomas Aquinas: God moves man's will toward the universal good; else man would not be able to will anything. However, man determines himself, by his reason, to will this or that (which may be a true or only apparent good).
- iii) Arminianism.
- iv) Secular philosophers: Descartes, Kant, Existentialism, some British writers such as H. D. Lewis and C.A. Campbell.
 - (1) Lewis and Campbell deny not only divine foreordination; they also deny that our choices are determined at all by past choices or character.
 - (2) Other secular philosophers the same.
- b) The central argument: "ought" implies "can".
 - i) It is generally assumed in law that a person can be blamed for something only if he was able to avoid doing it. If, e.g., someone is judged insane, he may be acquitted of blame, since, presumably, he "could not avoid" doing what he did.
 - ii) Scripture, then, is also invoked to support this principle.
- c) Comments:
 - i) It is true that in Scripture moral responsibility presupposes certain kinds of "ability".
 - (1) Doing right or wrong presupposes all those abilities which distinguish human beings from the animal kingdom. Animals are not subject to moral praise or blame (except metaphorically or symbolically, Exodus 19:13, etc.)
 - (2) Morality presupposes that ethical decisions are our decisions—decisions which, even if foreordained, are genuine decisions of the person, based on norms which the person adopts as his own [cf. III.B.1.d-e.]
 - (3) Doing right or wrong presupposes knowledge of God's standards, Romans 1-2. Those who have greater knowledge are subject to greater condemnation, Leviticus 5:17ff., Numbers 15:29ff., Luke 12:47f., for, in a sense, they are more "able" to do right.
 - (4) Moral choice also presupposes that mankind in Adam was originally created with such a nature that he could have chosen obedience. Thus, the human race is responsible for the depravity which resulted from disobedience (Romans 5).
 - (5) Scripture also presupposes that man is not determined entirely by his heredity and created environment. Even those without wealth or education or moral training know God's law and are expected to obey even if their environment militates against it. (Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, IX.) A bad environment, therefore, is no excuse for disobedience.

- (6) Moral responsibility presupposes various natural abilities: physical and mental capacities for carrying out God's commands.
- (7) Accessibility to God: God can reach us by his grace, so that we "can" do his will.
- ii) Other kinds of ability, however, are not presupposed by the Scriptural concept of responsibility.
 - (1) The power of contrary choice since the Fall.
 - (2) The ability to will contrary to, or independently of, God's decree (Acts 2:23, 4:27f.).
 - (3) The power to know exhaustively or control completely the effects of our actions.
 - (4) The power to establish our own moral standards (cf. Sartre).
- iii) To suppose that any of the abilities under ii) are required for morality is to adopt a non-biblical set of moral presuppositions. Thus, the basic question is a question of morality, not merely of metaphysics or anthropology.
- iv) "Free will" in the Arminian sense is actually destructive of responsibility.
 - (1) It makes our choices to some extent the product of chance. And who can be held responsible for choices which are purely accidental, which just happen?
 - (2) This problem is even more obvious in those views which make choice independent of previous choices and character. Moral choice on such views becomes "internal accident," a queer movement of the mind.
 - (3) It makes our ultimate environment, at some point, impersonal rather than personal. At that point, we are no longer responsible, because responsibility is always responsibility to a person.
 - (4) The notion of chance (irrationalism) coupled with moral autonomy (rationalism) amounts to a non-Christian dialectic that is destructive of all moral (and other) discourse.
- v) The Problem of Evil: See Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God; Doctrine of God*.
- b. His Authority (cf. I., the Normative Perspective): God's word is the fact by which all other facts are to be interpreted and evaluated.
- c. His Presence (cf. III., the Existential Perspective): In our thinking about ethics, we must reckon on the fact that God is not aloof or far away from us, but deeply involved in our midst both to bless and to curse.
 - i. Before the Fall: God was Lord and Friend to man; Control, Authority, Presence.
 - ii. After the Fall:

- a) God appears to judge sin. His hostility toward sin continues even in the present period. Thus, we make our ethical decisions with the wrath of God in view (Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6).
- b) He gives the redemptive promise—the basis of ethical hope.
- iii. With the patriarchs and Israel: covenant solidarity. “I will be with you,” Exodus 3:12; Cf. Deuteronomy 7:6ff., etc. Because we are his, because he has drawn us to himself, therefore we are to be holy, set apart for him.
- iv. Incarnation to Pentecost:
 - a) The kingdom has come—the righteousness of God on earth.
 - b) We are in the kingdom, in Christ, in the “age to come.” We are children of light. Thus, we are able to prevail in the moral battle.
 - c) In Christ, we have the definitive example of righteousness.
 - d) Yet, we are also living in “this age”. The old and new ages overlap, and we exist simultaneously in both. Christ has won the decisive victory (“already,”) but sin continues to exercise power until the *parousia* (“not yet”). Thus, all ethical life involves tension. We are holy in Christ, yet disobedient servants.
- v. The *Parousia* and Consummation: Note the various ways in which this hope is related to ethics as a purifying doctrine:
 - a) Since this age is to end and the things of this world are to be dissolved, the Christian ought to have a set of priorities radically different from those of the world, II Peter 3:11; cf. I Corinthians 7:26, 29.
 - b) Since we eagerly await that day (II Peter 3:12; I John 3:3), we will anticipate it even now by purifying ourselves as he is pure. Thus even now, we are part of the new age, not of the old (Galatians 1:4; Romans 12:2)
 - c) Since the Resurrection of Christ has decisively established the new age, we are confident that our labors for his kingdom will not be in vain, but will inevitably prevail, I Corinthians 15:58.
 - d) We look to the *parousia* as our deliverance from tribulation, and thus as a source of hope in tribulation, Luke 21:28, parallels.
 - e) Knowing that Christ is coming, but not knowing the day and hour, we must always be ready to meet him, Matthew 24:44; I Thessalonians 5:1-10; I Peter 1:7; II Peter 3:14.
 - f) Rewards also serve as motivation, Romans 14:10; II Corinthians 5:10; I Corinthians 3:8ff., 9:17f., 25; Colossians 3:23-25; Ephesians 6:7f., II Timothy 4:8; I Peter 5:4; James 1:12; Psalm 19:11; Matthew 5:12, 46, 6:1ff., 10:41f., parallels; II John 8; Revelation 11:18.
 - i) This teaching is not works righteousness or salvation by merit.
 - (1) We do not deserve the reward. Even at our best, we do no more than our duty, Luke 17:7-10.
 - (2) The reward is out of all proportion to the service rendered, Matthew 19:29, 20:1-16, 24:45-47, 25:21ff.; Luke 7:48, 12:37.

- (3) Essentially, the reward is the kingdom itself (Matthew 5:3, 10, 25:34) which is given by grace to the elect, Matthew 20:33, 25:34; Luke 12:31f. Cf. the Old Testament emphasis on the Lord himself as the inheritance of his people. Psalm 16:5, 73:24-26; Lamentations 3:24. Cf. Philippians 1:7-11.
- ii) Paradoxically, however, there are also degrees of reward, and these have some positive correlation to our faithfulness [passages under f)].
 - (1) Remember that our faithfulness is itself a gift, a product of God's grace.
 - (2) The passages underscore the principle that although we are saved by grace through faith alone, the faith that saves is never alone, never without obedience.
 - (3) Since, then, there is a positive correlation between salvation and obedience, it is not surprising that there should also be a correlation between the degree of obedience and the fullness of salvation blessing.
 - (4) Since there is no sorrow or pain in heaven, we must assume that even though there are degrees of blessing, everyone will be perfectly happy with the blessing he has. Everyone receives enough to fill him to capacity. No one will be jealous.
- iii) Note the correlation between our own ultimate self-interest and the fulfillment of God's purposes. [Cf. below on the goal.] There is no antagonism between these in Christian ethics.
- vi. Notice, then, how our ethical decisions must take account of past, present, and future events.

2. The Angels.

In a surprising number of passages, Scripture teaches us to take our angelic "environment" into account when making ethical decisions.

- a. The doctrine of angels rebukes the smallness of our cosmology.
 - i. The modern cosmology leaves little room for angels.
 - a) In one sense, it is relatively easy for modern man to deal with God: He makes God so utterly transcendent that his existence is irrelevant to the world.
 - b) Angels, however, cannot easily be eliminated by the transcendence route.
 - ii. Though the modern cosmology is often said to be much broader than the biblical one, much larger, it is actually smaller in its view of rational beings. The modern view sees man as the only rational being on earth and the vast reaches of space (save some enclaves on other planets) as devoid of intelligent life. In Scripture, however, the universe is filled with great multitudes—legions—of angels. Thus:
 - iii. Scripture teaches that the visible world is only a small part of God's kingdom, only a small part of the intelligent life of the universe. II Kings

- 6:17 teaches us that we need a larger perspective than the visible word affords.
- a) Our spiritual struggles are part of a much larger warfare.
 - b) The warfare is in one sense far bigger and more complicated than we would ever suppose apart from revelation.
- iv. The doctrine of angels also emphasizes the personal character of God's providence. Not only is the world governed by a divine person, but that divine person typically works, not through impersonal "law structures," but through personal agents. This is important, for impersonal determinism militates against ethical responsibility. God does not press buttons—not often at least; rather, he sends messengers.
- b. The doctrine of angels shows us something of the dimensions of our ethical warfare.
- i. Angels participate in the kingdom warfare.
 - a) Bad angels—Satan and his hosts—tempters, accusers, etc.
 - b) Good angels—ministering spirits for us (Hebrews 1:14).
 - c) They fight one another, as well as against and for us (Daniel 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7).
 - d) Thus, Scripture urges us not to underestimate the difficulty of the struggle, as if we could succeed with human resources alone, Ephesians 6. Not only are men involved, but also beings which are terribly strong, intelligent, numerous, and, to us, exceedingly mysterious.
 - e) On the other hand, we ought not to overestimate the difficulty either; for there are angels fighting on our side, II Kings 6:15-17.
 - f) The main point: Do not base your hopes or fears merely upon the empirical situation. The really decisive issues in life are religious and ethical, even if "experience" suggests otherwise; for it is our religious and ethical equipment alone that will prevail over the hosts of evil. Use the armor of God!
 - ii. Angels are witnesses to human salvation. Luke 12:8f., 15:10; I Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; I Timothy 3:16; I Peter 1:12; Revelation 14:10.
 - a) Although in one sense angels participate in the redemptive drama, there is another sense in which they are spectators rather than participants. Redemption does not extend to them. Unfallen angels need no redemption, and fallen angels receive none (cf. Hebrews 2:16).
 - b) Thus, the angels are somewhat bewildered by the process of redemption. They are amazed at what God has done for humanity.
 - c) Remarkably enough, they learn the redemptive wisdom of God through the church, Ephesians 3:10! It is our privilege to teach angels by our words and life! (Consider this as an ethical motivation.)
 - d) Beyond this, the angels also serve as "witnesses" in a more official sense (Luke 12:8f., etc.).

- iii. The doctrine of angels is a measure of the greatness of our salvation in Christ; for that salvation lifts us above the angels.
 - a) According to Hebrews 2:9, Jesus was made a little (or “for a little while;” the temporal expression *brachu* is used) lower than the angels for the suffering of death. He is then again exalted above them.
 - b) The passage implies that Jesus’ brethren share that exaltation with him. Thus, Psalm 8 is fulfilled. Although we do not yet see everything subject to man, we see this dominion in Jesus (2:8).
 - c) Thus, the angels minister to us, not *vice versa*, Hebrews 1:14.
 - d) The world to come is not theirs, but ours, 2:5ff. (Cf. Paul’s odd statement that we shall judge angels, I Corinthians 6:3.)
 - e) Thus, angel worship is a great delusion from which Christ has set us free, Colossians 2:18f., Revelation 19:10, 22:8f.
 - f) Because of Christ, Satan is a defeated foe. We may resist him, and he will flee, I Peter 5:8f.; James 4:7.
 - g) Salvation is for man alone, God’s image, not for angels (Hebrews 2:16) [cf. ii., above].

3. The Human Environment (Social).

God expects us to take our fellow human beings into account when we make moral decisions. We shall say much more about the foundations of social ethics in connection with the ethics of government (Fifth Commandment) and of sex (Seventh). At this point, we shall restrict ourselves to some very general observations.

- a. The Cultural Mandate: A Corporate Task (Genesis 1:28ff.).
 - i. “Subduing” and “replenishing” the earth are not tasks that Adam could even conceivably have done alone [cf. I.D.11.e.iv.].
 - ii. Since God made man male and female, and since reproduction is part of the cultural task itself, God intended from the beginning that this work be carried out primarily as a corporate task, a task of mankind.
 - iii. Thus, the individual is not responsible to replenish and subdue the earth; rather, his responsibility is to make the best contribution to this task of which he is capable.
 - iv. Thus, from the very beginning, God intended for us to make our individual decisions by taking other people into account, and specifically by seeking how we can best help our fellow human beings in their divinely ordained task.
- b. The Fall: A Corporate Failure.
 - i. Eve was intended as a helper for Adam in every respect including the ethical-religious. Both were to encourage one another in keeping the commands of God.
 - ii. In the Fall, Eve became temptress instead of helper, taking the role of Satan.

- iii. Similarly, Adam forsook his headship and capitulated to the sinful request of his wife.
 - iv. Thus, the Fall involved not only individual sins on the part of Adam and Eve, but simultaneously a breakdown of their relationship, of their God-ordained family structure.
 - v. Corroborating these observations: The Fall brings about sexual shame between the man and woman, Genesis 3:7, 10f., 21, cf. 2:25. Also, note Adam's blaming his wife for his sin, 3:12, further breakdown of family harmony, 3:16, pain and toil in the cultural task, 3:16-19 [cf. a.].
 - vi. Note also the New Testament emphasis on Adam as corporate head of the human race, Romans 5; I Corinthians 15.
 - vii. Thus, the question "What would have happened if Eve had sinned but Adam remained obedient?" is an unreal question, demanding, not a minor, but a major change in the biblical story. Adam and Eve were united in their cultural task and united also in sin. It was the race that fell in Genesis 3.
- c. Corporate Effects of the Fall.
- i. Working out of the curse [above, b.v.]
 - ii. Development of "civilization" among sinful men.
 - a) The sons of Cain, Genesis 4:17-24, developing social, cultural, governmental institutions in opposition to God.
 - b) Genesis 6:1-5: Royal polygamy? Angel marriages? Mixed marriages? In any case, a breakdown in the divinely ordained social structure.
 - c) Genesis 11:1ff.: Babel. Unification of the human race in disobedience to God.
 - d) Compounding of evil through cultural developments; Sodom and Gomorrah, Canaan, etc. Sinful practices reinforced by unified cultural tradition, rationalized, accepted easily by individuals.
 - e) Principles of evil incarnate in governmental, ecclesiastical forms: Daniel, Revelation.
- d. The Corporate Character of Redemption.
- i. The first redemptive promise, like the cultural mandate, concerns land and seed (Genesis 3:16-19): In toil, we will live off the land until the seed of promise defeats the enemy. Like the cultural mandate, these promises concern humanity as a body. The toil over the land is a common task, and the seed presupposes reproduction and family.
 - ii. God redeems, not merely individuals, but "a people".
 - a) Sethites / Cainites, Noah's family, Shem / Ham and Japheth, Peleg / Joktan (Genesis 10:25?), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Christ.
 - b) The promise "to you and to your children"—family units brought into the kingdom. Circumcision and baptism.

- iii. Redeeming a people implies that the people is united by common structures. Thus, redemption involves the development of a new civilization, new social institutions.
 - a) Prophetic, priestly, kingly institutions.
 - b) Family, church, state.
 - c) New Covenant: Christ as king, apostles, prophets, pastor-teachers, elders, deacons, each believer using his gifts to serve the body.
 - d) The consummation: not only new heavens and new earth, but New Jerusalem as well—new city, new social order.
 - e. Corporate Life “Between the Times”.
 - i. Specific situations do develop, different in some respects from those noted in Scripture, to which the law must be applied.
 - ii. Thus in ethics, we must discern carefully the process of history.
 - f. Corporate Life and Moral Decisions (Summary).
 - i. God intended for us to help one another in our common task, not to try to do everything alone. Thus, we are to seek help and guidance from those equipped to give it.
 - ii. Because of sin, however, other people are not only helpers, but tempters as well. Thus, the need of vigilance, testing, proving as well as trusting.
 - iii. Such temptation, sinful influence, is compounded by the development of unregenerate social institutions.
 - iv. Because of redemption, we may expect from others, not only help coming out of “natural” gifts, but specifically, the blessing of the Spirit. In other words, we meet Christ in his brethren. The gifts of the Spirit are not proportional to intelligence, education, wealth.
 - v. The blessing of the Spirit is magnified in the development of regenerate institutions.
 - vi. We must not only expect help from one another, but must above all seek to help one another—the love-command. In all our decisions, we must consider the needs of others above our own.
 - vii. The great events of our time must be addressed by the Word. This involves Christian analysis of social and political issues. Such social critique is itself a corporate task. Many ministers do not have the training to carry out such analysis knowledgeably. The ministry needs help from many Christians trained in many fields.
- 4. The Human Environment (Individual).
 - a. Christian ethics is throughout both individual and social. In every decision (not only decisions about “social issues”), we are called to take others into account. On the other hand, every decision (even on “social issues”) is a decision which we make as individuals. We must always live “with others,” but also with ourselves.
 - b. Our character.
 - i. Created in God’s image, precious to God.

- ii. Depraved by the fall, unable of ourselves to do anything good.
 - iii. New creatures in Christ, free from sin's dominion, filled with gifts of the Spirit.
 - iv. Sin still lingers until the consummation.
 - v. Individual differences in character from other Christians due to differences in level of sanctification, specific temptations, etc.
 - vi. For more on this, see existential perspective, III.
- c. Our history.
- i. Besides being members of groups and institutions, we are each unique—different in some way from every other human being.
 - ii. This uniqueness begins in the creative mind of God and exists from conception.
 - iii. Each of us has unique heredity, environment, abilities, strengths, weaknesses.
 - iv. None of us enters the kingdom of God in precisely the same way. Though faith and repentance are necessary in all cases, these occur in many different forms and in many different situations.
 - v. Each of us has a set of experiences different in some way from those of everyone else.
 - vi. Each of us has, in some degree, a unique role in the kingdom of God—a unique calling, unique gifts and opportunities.
 - vii. Each of us has, in some sense, a unique spiritual battle. True, the temptations we face are “common to man” (I Corinthians 10:13); but they do not take identical form in every individual case. All of us are tempted to steal, but in different ways: Some are tempted to steal from individuals, others “only” from corporations or government, others from the honor due to God.
 - viii. Each of us has, in some measure, unique moral responsibilities stemming from his particular calling. (The pastor of Covenant PCA, Winter Park, is obligated to preach there regularly; I am not.) These arise out of applications of the Word to our unique situations.
- d. Moral decisions, then, must take into account both the likenesses and the differences between ourselves and other persons (particularly other Christians).
- i. We must each apply the word to his unique situation. Though we can and must seek help from others in this, no one else can do it for us. Even in applying the advice of others, an individual judgment must be made.
 - ii. We must each seek to overcome his unique temptations through the means of grace, realizing that our temptations are not, at the most basic level, different from those all men experience (I Corinthians 10:13) or, specifically, different from those which Christ experienced as a man (Hebrews 4:15).
5. The Natural Environment.

- a. Man as part of nature.
 - i. Man is a creature, and in that respect is closer to nature than he is to God.
 - ii. Man is made of the dust, Genesis 2:7.
 - iii. He is dependent upon the ground for his continued life, Genesis 1:29, 2:8ff., 3:17ff., etc.
 - iv. Thus, many obvious similarities and analogies between human and animal life.
- b. Man as distinct from nature.
 - i. A special creation, not a product of evolution, Genesis 2:7, 21ff.
 - ii. Special engagement of the divine counsel, Genesis 1:26.
 - iii. Image of God, Genesis 1:26ff.
 - iv. Vassal lordship over the earth, Genesis 1:26ff., 2:19f.
- c. The curse on the ground, Genesis 3:17-19.
 - i. The earth resists man's dominion.
 - ii. It is a source of distress ("toil"), weariness.
 - iii. Though all things are good, even after the fall (I Timothy 4:4; cf. Genesis 1:31, I Corinthians 10:26), man's lust finds in things a source of temptation, as with the fruit in the fall narrative itself.
 - iv. Events in the natural world serve as means of divine judgment, chastening, deliverance.
 - a) The plagues of Egypt.
 - b) Job's sufferings.
 - c) The Flood, etc.
- d. Nature and redemption
 - i. Natural (and supernatural) signs, Matthew 2:2, 24:29ff.
 - ii. Nature and redemptive events (above, d.iv.).
 - iii. Creation waiting anxiously for the consummation, Romans 8:19-23.
 - iv. The course of nature and history is "on our side". Things and events are occasions for growth and victory, not only means of temptation (Romans 8:28).
 - v. Consummation: The new heavens and new earth, II Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1.
- e. Nature and moral decisions.
 - i. From the beginning, man was expected to apply God's word to his natural environment.
 - a) Cultural mandate: How do we use each thing to God's glory and to fulfill our task?
 - b) Naming of animals.
 - c) Abstaining from the forbidden fruit.
 - d) "Keeping" and "cultivating" the garden, Genesis 2:15. I.e., Adam's task is not merely to dominate, but also to maintain and improve his

natural environment. Conservation is not, of course, opposite to subduing and replenishing, but necessary to them.

- ii. Since the fall, we must reckon with nature as an occasion for suffering, frustration, sin.
- iii. Yet even now, we live by the ground (Genesis 3:17ff.) and, thus, must continue to cultivate and subdue it.
- iv. Anticipation of physical resurrection in the new creation-purifying doctrine.

C. The Goal of Christian Ethics.

Since Christian ethics is, from the situational perspective, a matter of determining the best godly means of achieving God's purposes, it is important for us to try to define in general what those purposes are. What goal or goals ought we to be seeking in moral decisions?

1. The Doctrine of the Two-fold End.

- a. Some church fathers, perhaps under Gnostic influence or due to misreading of Scripture, denigrated the physical world, favoring an ascetic withdrawal from the world as the highest form of Christian morality (Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Jerome).
- b. Augustine.
 - i. More positive, world-affirming view of the state, marriage, property. These are not evil in themselves.
 - ii. Earthly life, however, is but a pilgrimage to the hereafter. The supreme goal of human life is our union with God in the vision of God in heaven.
 - iii. Earthly pursuits, therefore, though not sinful in themselves, can distract us from our heavenly goal.
 - a) Private property is legitimate; the rich and poor alike can be saved by God's grace. But possessions are a hindrance to the soul, and, thus, poverty is preferable. If we cannot abstain from possessions, let us at least seek to avoid the love of possessions.
 - b) Marriage is a sacrament and therefore good, but sex always involves desire (in this age), and desire is evil. Therefore, celibacy is higher than marriage.
 - c) The state promotes justice and happiness in the world. Yet in this fallen world, it is based on self-love, contempt of God. Thus, it must be subordinate to the church.
 - d) Even good works are always tinged by sin.
 - iv. Asceticism, therefore, is valuable, not because the flesh is evil or because we ought to seek what is unpleasant for its own sake, but rather because such practices free us from earthly preoccupation so that we may better serve God.
 - v. Comments:
 - a) Augustine realizes better than his predecessors that God's creation is good.

- b) His motive for asceticism is not that things are bad in themselves, but that our sinful hearts become preoccupied with them so as to draw us away from the service of God. Augustine's concern, then, is ethical, not metaphysical. The question he asks about the use of things is altogether biblical.
 - c) Augustine, however, tends to go beyond the biblical data in his moral generalizations. Is it true that all desire is evil? That marriage always or generally presents more spiritual dangers than celibacy? That the state is necessarily less godly than the church?
 - d) In these overgeneralizations, Augustine almost unconsciously returns to hierarchical patterns of thought: the soul vs. the body, the church vs. the state, etc.
 - e) Augustine's otherworldliness, his preference for monasticism, run counter to the biblical emphasis upon involvement in the affairs and needs of the creation.
- c. Thomas Aquinas.
- i. Man's highest good: Contemplation and love of God, bringing likeness to God and realization of the true self.
 - ii. In its highest form, the beatific vision, this is possible only in the life to come.
 - iii. Through reason, leading us to habits of virtue, we can attain an incomplete happiness in this life.
 - iv. For eternal blessedness, however, a supernatural principle of grace must be infused into man by God—the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, love.
 - v. Even in this life, the contemplative life is superior to the practical life.
 - a) It is based on the love of God, while the practical life is based on the love of man.
 - b) The practical life is therefore less meritorious.
 - c) The contemplative life is more free from the senses and bodily organs.
 - vi. *Consilia Evangelica* (evangelical counsels).
 - a) The safest, quickest way to blessedness is the monastic life, the life of poverty, chastity, obedience.
 - b) These cannot be commanded, for they are not for everybody. Yet for those capable of it, this is the way to the highest perfection.
 - vii. Comments:
 - a) Like Augustine, Aquinas presents us with an essentially otherworldly ethic, based on biblical warnings about the temptations of earthly life and the kingdom of God as the highest good.
 - b) Aquinas is subject to the same criticisms as Augustine in these matters.
 - c) Aquinas compounds the problems which Augustine had.

- i) With a lower view of the effects of sin. He sees man without grace as capable of goodness at a certain level, but needing grace to achieve the highest goal.
 - ii) By dividing Christians into various groups who have essentially different obligations. One group has a “higher” morality than the other, even though the other group is not guilty of sin on that account. There is no biblical support for this notion.
 - d. Lessons.
 - i. It is important to maintain that all men have the same “chief end”. Much mischief has been done.
 - a) By allowing the legitimacy of non-Christian ends as having natural but not supernatural validity.
 - b) By claiming that different groups of Christians may properly seek different ethical goals.
 - ii. Formulation of the goal must be based upon Scripture, not on plausible generalizations about the physical and spiritual, the civil and ecclesiastical, the married vs. the celibate life, etc.
- 2. The Overall Goal: Biblical Formulations

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question #1: “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

 - a. Glory of God.
 - i. Man’s purpose from the beginning is determined by God, Genesis 1:26ff. Man is created, preserved and redeemed for the sake of God’s purposes and no other.
 - ii. Man’s obligation to God is the central feature of biblical law (cf. normative perspective).
 - iii. I Corinthians 10:31; Romans 14:23; Colossians 3:17ff., 23: All that we do must be done as unto the Lord. Our obligation to seek his glory pervades every aspect of life, every moral choice. Matt. 6:33.
 - b. Human Enjoyment of God (cf. “eternal life” as the goal *Westminster Confession of Faith* XVI:2).
 - i. Scripture data:
 - a) Law as delight of the redeemed heart, Psalm 1, 119:97; Romans 7:22.
 - b) Law as gift of grace, Psalm 119:29.
 - c) Law as way of life, Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 5:33, 8:3, 11:13-15, 28:1-4, 30:11-20. Obedience is the road to covenant blessing.
 - d) Law given for our good, Deuteronomy 10:12f; cf. 4:40, 12:28.
 - e) Rewards as motivation for obedience: [cf. above, II.B.1.c.v.f)]
 - ii. An “anthropocentric” formulation? Yes, in a way. But remember that it is God who is to be enjoyed, and indeed God in contrast with the lusts of our own hearts.
 - iii. Consistency with the first formulation: God is glorified by the realization of redeemed human life. He does not demand the annihilation of man, but

rather obedience to him brings the highest happiness. There is no need to draw sharp opposition between “happiness” and “duty” as in much non-Christian philosophy.

- iv. Scripture does condemn selfishness and preoccupation with one’s own comfort and pleasure, demanding self-sacrifice and even the endurance of hardship and persecution. But this is presented as the road to the most enduring forms of happiness: Matthew 5:24-34, 10:16-42, etc.
 - a) The passages which most graphically describe the rigors, the difficulties of the Christian life, characteristically also emphasizes its rewards.
 - b) In contrast, the pleasures of sin are characterized as fleeting and vain. Even the pursuit of the good things of this earth is vain outside the context of God’s overall purpose (Ecclesiastes).
- c. The Kingdom of God as Man’s *Summum Bonum* (Van Til).
 - i. Biblical emphases
 - a) Qualifications for entering the kingdom are ethical, but conferred by grace.
 - b) Seeking the kingdom involves seeking God’s righteousness, therefore, at all levels. Cf. Matthew 6:10.
 - c) Thus, “seeking the kingdom” is that supreme purpose which takes precedence over all others, Matthew 6:33. Cf. Matthew 25:34.
 - ii. Relation to other formulations:
 - a) Combines theocentric, anthropocentric emphases. Matthew 6:33 teaches that as we seek to glorify God, we will find our own happiness.
 - b) Brings out the key factor of historical development: The goal of ethics is the implementation of a particular historical program, not merely of general norms.
 - c) This specific program shows concretely how the glory of God is related to our happiness.
 - iii. Summary: The Goal of ethics is the fulfillment of the total covenant relationship between God and man. We seek to advance the purposes of that covenant, that kingdom program.
3. More Specific Goals.
 - a. Every commandment, indeed every application of a commandment, presents us with a goal to be fulfilled, an end to be attained (overlap of situational and normative perspectives). The question of priorities among these goals is the same as the question of “priorities among divine commands” [above, I.D.11.].
 - b. Cultural Mandate and Great Commission.

We shall deal with only one specific priority question here, the relation between these two basic aspects of God’s kingdom program. There is much to be said here, and I have much work yet to do on the question. However, I offer the following theses as fuel for discussion. The general point: The Great

Commission is an application of the cultural mandate to the post-fall situation, and within that situation, has “priority” in some, but not all, senses.

- i. The redemptive promise takes the form of the Cultural Mandate.
 - a) The Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28ff.) has two basic elements, the subduing and the replenishing of the earth, corresponding to the creation ordinances of labor and marriage. (The consecration of these activities to God is reflected in the Sabbath ordinance.)
 - b) The curse again brings these two elements into view. Childbearing (3:16) and labor (3:17ff.) are the aspects of human life singled out for special mention.
 - c) The *Protevangelium* (3:15ff.) also mentions these functions specifically. They are not only cursed, but are instruments of redemption.
 - i) Though childbearing will be painful, it will, in time, yield a redeemer.
 - ii) Though labor will be toilsome, nevertheless, it will sustain physical life so that the line of the promised seed will be preserved.
 - d) The post-Adamic covenants promise land and seed.
 - i) Noah: His family is to be saved, and the land will be preserved from further destruction by flood. His sons will live and be subject to curses and blessings. Note especially the renewal of the Cultural Mandate, Genesis 9:7.
 - ii) Abraham: The seed of the promise and the land of Canaan.
 - iii) Moses: The Abrahamic promise renewed.
 - iv) David: Seed and territorial dominion combined in the concept of kingship and the promise of a continuing Davidic throne.
 - v) Christ: Rules (Matthew 28:18, etc.), fills (Ephesians 1:23, 4:10) all things. Rule and filling by Christ are present realities, but they also have an aspect yet to be fulfilled, I Corinthians 15:24ff., Philippians 3:21.
 - e) Redemption, therefore, is a particular kind of “subduing” and “replenishing”.
 - i) It is the subduing of sin and of the enemies of God, and of the curse which these have brought upon the earth.
 - ii) It is the filling of all things with the redemptive presence of God in Christ, through the Spirit. More specifically, it is the creation of a new race of people (I Peter 2:9) with their children (Acts 2:39) who are to carry the knowledge of God throughout the earth (Matthew 28:19f.). Thus “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,” (Isaiah 11:9).
- ii. After the fall, the goal of ethics is always presented in specifically redemptive terms.

- a) “To him (Jesus), the kingdom exists there, where not merely God is supreme, for that is true at all times and under all circumstances, but where God supernaturally carries through his supremacy against all opposing powers and brings man to the willing recognition of the same.” Vos, *The Kingdom and the Church*, p. 50.
- i) Note: The kingdom is not mere rule, but redemptive rule; not mere filling of the earth, but filling the earth with faithful kingdom subjects.
 - ii) Scriptural basis: The kingdom as the righteousness of God on earth [above, 2.c.].
- b) I Corinthians 9, 10.
- i) Paul, here, speaks of the goals of his ministry, specifically the reasons why he does not use his “rights”: 9:16-27, 10:33.
 - (1) To make the gospel known without charge, 9:18.
 - (2) To save men, verses 19-22, 10:33.
 - (3) For his own share of Gospel benefit, 23-27.
 - (4) Note that all of these are specifically redemptive goals.
 - ii) Paul urges us to have the same goals: 9:24, 10:31-11:1.
 - (1) 10:31 presents us with a purpose which covers all of our activities.
 - (2) That purpose presupposes a concern for the redemption of others, verses 32-33. Doing things to the glory of God implies that we will constantly be thinking about the redemptive needs of other people.
 - (3) Imitating Paul and Christ (11:1) involves imitation of redemptive love [cf. other references to *imitatio Christi*, I.A.3.d.]
 - iii) Philippians 3:4-17.
 - (1) Here again, Paul describes the goal of his life in broad terms. Note the “all things,” v. 7f., the “one thing,” 13, “the goal,” 14.
 - (2) Here again, he presents his goal as an example to us, 15-17.
 - (3) Here, the emphasis is upon Paul’s own participation in Christ’s redemptive blessing, the knowledge of Christ gained through redemption, specifically in contrast with “confidence in the flesh” (3f.).
 - iv) Matthew 6:33.
 - (1) In context, the kingdom of God is presented as our ultimate priority as over against lesser priorities (seeking food, drink, clothing).
 - (2) The ultimate priority is characterized not only as the kingdom, but as righteousness (cf. 5:6). In the post-fall context, this is the righteousness of God in contrast with human sin. It is the divine program of redemption and judgment.

- (3) It is, then, this program which we must regard as our prime concern, even over against the (in itself good) concern for physical necessities.
- v) Conclusion: Everything we do must be done in advance, not only God's purposes in general, but specifically the purposes connected with his post-fall program, the purpose of redemption.
- iii. To say that the goal of ethics is specifically redemptive is, in one sense, to narrow the goal, and, in another sense, not.
- a) We are no longer concerned to subdue and replenish the earth apart from the redemptive significance of those acts. In that sense, our goal is "narrower" than it was before the fall.
- b) On the other hand, the redemptive mandate is every bit as comprehensive as the cultural mandate.
- i) The redemptive program culminates in a New Heaven and New Earth—if anything, a more comprehensive and radical change than would have resulted from Adam's obedience to the original mandate.
- ii) Our redemptive responsibility involves all our decisions, all aspects of life.
- iii) The Christian bricklayer, e.g., is responsible not only to bring out the potential from the earth to God's glory, but in doing so to contribute to the progress of the gospel (and this is done in many ways).
- iv. The Great Commission is a statement of the redemptive goal.
- a) Note that it is not merely a command to preach the way of forgiveness in abstraction. It commands us to "make disciples" and to teach "to observe all that I commanded you." Note the comprehensiveness here.
- b) The Great Commission, then, calls us to preach the gospel, but including all the implications of the gospel for all areas of life.
- c) Discipling and teaching are not only by word, but also by example. Cf. the notion of witness, Acts 1:8.
- d) Thus, the Great Commission calls us to redemptive witness in all aspects of life.
- v. Relations between Cultural Mandate and Great Commission.
- a) Both call for creative involvement in God's purposes in every decision of life.
- b) Both call for godly subduing and filling of the earth.
- c) Both call for comprehensive change in the world-system.
- d) The Cultural Mandate is prior in that it came first in history and established the general structure of man's responsibility. The Great Commission is merely a particular application of it to a sinful age.
- e) The Great Commission sets forth the specific concerns which must motivate our subduing and filling today. In that sense, it has priority.

- i) Thus, Paul gives up his cultural rights and responsibilities (eating, drinking, marriage) to carry out his redemptive calling, I Corinthians 9.
- ii) Each of us must imitate Paul insofar as our gifts and callings require.
- iii) This does not mean that everyone must be a preacher. Those better equipped to do other things also carry on redemptive witness as they demonstrate the difference made by the Gospel in their work.
 - (1) Not only making money for missions, etc.
 - (2) Ethical responsibility on the job.
 - (3) Seeking to develop new structures by which the love and righteousness of Christ can be made manifest through their work.
 - (4) Seeking to apply the teaching of Christ in its full scope.

III. Christian Ethics: The Existential Perspective (Christian Existential or Personalist Ethics)
 The normative perspective asks, “What is my duty?” The situational asks, “How may I change the world in order to bring about those goals pleasing to God?” The existential perspective puts it this way: “How must I be changed, that I may please God? Or corporately, “How must we be changed, etc.?”

A. Goodness and the Being of God.

- 1. [Cf. I.A.] God’s moral attributes and his person are one. His goodness is inseparable from his being. Without his goodness, God would not be God. His good acts, therefore, are expressions of what he truly is.
- 2. God’s moral attributes, not only his power and authority, render him “worthy” of all praise and obedience. The goodness of his acts, further, motivates us to obey.

B. Goodness and the Being of Man.

God intends that man as God’s image should reflect in a creaturely way this union of goodness and being, so that doing good comes “naturally”—i.e. as a normal expression of his nature. As an aspect of the divine image, this natural goodness renders man an object of worth, deserving of respect above all creatures.

1. Creation.

- a. As image of God, man was originally made with a positively good character—not, as on the Roman Catholic construction, in need of special grace.
- b. He was made free [cf. II.B.1.a.iv.] in various senses, particularly in the sense that, although good, he was in some paradoxical way capable of sinning.
- c. He was responsible to obey God’s commands.
- d. As free and responsible, he made his own decisions, in a sense. Though subject to God’s authority, he was responsible to adopt God’s norms as his own. Unlike all other creatures, man had the capacity to decide whether to obey or not.

- e. Thus, though God's norms were imposed upon him from above, in one sense, they were also imposed by man upon himself. Man acts upon those principles which he makes his own. (Note relative truth in existentialism.)
 - f. As vassal king, man also has the responsibility of applying God's norms to the lower creation. Everything else in creation is subject to man and specifically subject to man as a means of fulfilling the cultural task. Thus in a sense, man becomes a lawgiver to the lower creation. Man's authority reflects that of God of which it is image.
 - g. Like God, also, man is a unity. The distinction between body and soul creates no ethical conflict in man (as in Roman Catholic theology), nor does it imply that man is torn between an earthly and a heavenly end [II.C.1.]. Nor is there any tension in man created by the distinctions between will and intellect, emotions and reason, etc.
 - h. These ethical attributes of man (goodness, freedom, responsibility, authority, unity), together with all the aspects of the image of God, make man, like God, a person of worth, deserving respect. Christian ethics is personalist in that it values people above all other created things. Cf. Genesis 9:6; I Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9.
2. Fall.
- a. Man is depraved; in himself, he cannot please God (Romans 8:8; cf. 7:18).
 - b. There is controversy in the church as to whether man lost the image of God in the fall or whether that image is merely "defaced". The latter view, I think, is the Scriptural one. In any case, it is clear that man's original creation in God's image confers upon man a continuing dignity and importance, despite his sin [1.h., above].
 - c. After the fall, man is no longer free by nature to choose the good. Yet, he is free in other senses [II.B.1.a.iv.].
 - d. After the fall, man is still responsible.
 - e. Similarly, man maintains a kind of moral authority subordinate to that of God. He still must "decide for himself" [above, 1.d.]; He still establishes subordinate norms [1.f.]. Although he will abuse this responsibility, the responsibility remains.
 - f. After the fall, man remains a unity. His sin is not the result of inevitable conflict among the parts of his being; rather it is the result of willful choice. It does sometimes happen that will and intellect, or intellect and emotion, "conflict" in some sense; but such conflict simply means that fallen man wants to do what he knows is wrong. All "aspects" of man are equally affected by sin.
 - g. Though fallen, man is responsible to be what he was before the fall—obedient from the heart, obedient by nature. Nothing less will please God. Hence the depth of the hopelessness of fallen man even trying to please God apart from grace.
3. Redemption.

- a. The atonement of Christ, applied to our hearts by the continuing work of the Spirit, renews us in the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). There is controversy over the relation between this “image” and the image in which we were originally created. However, it is an image of God, and thus includes all the moral excellencies with which man was originally created.
- b. Sin remains in the believer, not to be wholly eradicated until the return of Christ; but the dominion of sin is gone forever (Romans 6:1-14).
- c. The process of sanctification (cf. courses on *ordo salutis* and means of grace), Murray, “The Dynamic,” *Principles*, IX.
 - i. It involves both dependence upon God and substantial effort on our part. Sanctification is a spiritual battle. It takes vigilance, discipline, effort (*contra* quietism, perfectionism, Keswick, some Lutheran representations).
 - ii. It involves conscious obedience to God’s commands [cf. I., normative perspective] as well as spontaneous action in the Spirit.
 - a) Recall earlier discussion of the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* [I.D.3.] which finds an opposition between obeying commandments and working in the Spirit.
 - b) Comments:
 - i) Such an opposition or antagonism is not found in Scripture. It is true that mere obedience to commands without a heart renewed by the Spirit is worthless; but such obedience is not true obedience either.
 - ii) The two need not compete, for each has a distinct function in equipping us for good works. The commands tell us God’s will, and the Spirit enables us to do it. Neither can do the job of the other.
 - iii) It is true that, as we mature in the Lord, our obedience becomes less labored, more spontaneous, in those areas in which are becoming sanctified [cf. d., below]. We do not always need to look up chapter and verse; we know God’s law so well that it is written on the heart, and we do it simply out of gratefulness and delight. Even in such cases, however, it is the law which we obey out of gratefulness and delight.
 - c) It involves Christ in union with us and us in union with Him.
 - i) Regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification are aspects of our union with Christ (Gaffin).
 - ii) Faith, repentance, these represent union with Christ “from our side”. We do these things because we are in Christ. They represent our reception of Christ.
- d. Note ethical goodness, freedom, responsibility, authority, unity in the redeemed [cf. 1., 2., above]. The process of sanctification brings about greater and greater unity between us and the goodness of Christ which indwells us. We are light in the Lord, Ephesians 5:8, Matthew 5:14; [cf. above, I.A.]. The

law is written on the heart, [I.B.2.b.]. The goal, again, is that we serve him gladly from the heart simply because we are his joyful servants; because what we want to do is to serve him in that way. The service of Christ is perfect freedom.

C. The Motive of Christian Ethics.

1. The Concept of Motive.

- a. “Motive” as reason given for an action: “His motive was revenge.”
 - i. A norm: “He did it because he was commanded to”—normative perspective.
 - ii. A goal: “He did it to achieve this purpose.”—situational perspective.
 - iii. An inward disposition: “He did it because he was hungry.”—existential perspective.
 - a) Overlaps the normative, since it presupposes a norm (that hunger ought to be satisfied).
 - b) Overlaps the situational, since it presupposes a goal (the satisfaction of hunger).
- b. “Motive” as efficient cause for an action (whether or not given as reason): “His political liberalism is motivated by a hatred of his domineering father.”
 - i. Norms [a. i.] and goals [a. ii.] do not in themselves cause actions unless accompanied by an inward commitment to obey the norm or to achieve the goal [a. iii.].
 - ii. Thus, motive, in the second sense, is roughly equivalent to motive in sense a.
 - iii. However, an inward disposition may cause an action even when it is not acknowledged as a reason for the action, and even when it functions unconsciously.
- c. The existential perspective deals with “motive” in senses a. iii. and b. The motives discussed (love, hate, faith, rebellion, etc.) will often be motives in both senses, but always in sense b.

2. The Necessity of a Right Motive (The Inwardness of Biblical Ethics).

- a. The demand for heart-righteousness, Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 5:8, etc.
- b. The polemic against externalism and hypocrisy, Isaiah 29:13f.; Matthew 23.
- c. The necessity of faith, love, etc., for any good work. Romans 14:23.
- d. Revelation as writing on the heart (cf. Christian Mind course): I Corinthians 13, to bring saving benefit, the word must be applied to the most basic level of man’s being.

3. Formulations of Motive.

- a. Here, we shall consider those “inward dispositions” which, in Scripture, are considered necessary and sufficient for good works. “Virtue ethics.”
 - i. “Necessary” = without them, there can be no good work.
 - ii. “Sufficient” = any work motivated by them will be good.
- b. Each of these may be regarded as “perspectives” on the whole regenerate character.

- i. None is ever found without the others.
 - ii. Each characterizes each of the others: Faith is loving (Galatians 5:6); love believes (I Corinthians 13:7), etc.
 - iii. The regenerate life is characterized by all of them.
 - iv. This does not make them all synonymous. They are different “perspectives”. While they all describe the regenerate life, they do it in different ways. Thus, love, e.g., cannot be substituted for faith in the expression “justification by faith alone”. Faith describes the regenerate life specifically as trusting and receiving Christ, and these qualities have a special role in justification.
- c. Faith.
- i. Its basic character (review from Doctrine of the Holy Spirit course)
 - a) Receiving the free gift of salvation.
 - b) Trusting Christ as savior and Lord (involves understanding and believing the word, Romans 4).
 - ii. Relation to works.
 - a) Faith is an obedient response to a divine command, the command to believe, and therefore is itself a good work.
 - b) One who has faith will inevitably do good works, so that there is no true faith without good works (James 2:14-26; Galatians 5:6).
 - c) Thus, works are an evidence of faith (James 2, Hebrews 11).
 - d) Faith is not a particular act which we can distinguish and isolate from all others. It is a way of doing other things.
 - i) Consider this model: Faith is one act, followed by other acts (“works”). We believe at one time, and that act of believing gives us the strength to do other things (good works).
 - A) It is like eating a candy bar and thereby getting strength to set a pole vaulting record.
 - B) The model of the evangelistic meeting: coming forward is faith; what follows is works.
 - ii) This model is misleading.
 - (1) What is the one act which constitutes faith (analogous to eating the candy bar)?
 - (a) Not a concrete physical act, like raising one’s hand at an evangelistic rally, or submitting to baptism. These can be done hypocritically, unfaithful, and well as faithfully.
 - (b) Not a concrete mental action (like praying a silent prayer, or saying “yes” to Jesus inwardly). These acts too can be hypocritical as well as faithful.
 - (c) Not something utterly mysterious, incapable of concrete definition. For in Scripture, “faith” is a word in the common language of Christians.

- (2) Trusting Christ is not something that I do, and then stop doing, before I obey. Rather, faith is particularly evident during obedience.
- (3) Trusting is most naturally understood as a characteristic of actions (including thoughts). The child trusts his father to catch him, not primarily before he jumps, but as he jumps. To trust is to act on the assumption that the object of our trust is reliable.
- (4) Thus, the close relation between faith and obedience in Scripture. It is not just that obedience always follows faith. Rather, faith and obedience are simultaneous, and even beyond that, logically involved in one another, inseparable in concept. Obedience always involves faith, and *vice-versa*.

iii) Conclusions.

- (1) Faith is not something distinctively “mental” as opposed to something “physical” (G. Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation*). It is as likely to be present (or absent) in physical acts as in mental acts. (Cf. the child jumping into father’s arms—perhaps without reflection; Abraham leaving Ur.)
- (2) Faith is not some act that we perform for a time and then stop doing in order to do something else. It pertains to all our actions insofar as these are obedient to God.
- (3) Faith is “adjectival” or “adverbial”. It is a quality of other acts, not something that can be performed by itself.
- e) However, although the relation of faith to works is so close that faith involves works, faith does not justify us in virtue of its character as obedience. It justifies by virtue of its quality as trust and receiving of Christ. It justifies because it looks away from itself, even from obedience, to Christ and his salvation.

iii. The necessity and sufficiency of faith for good works.

- a) Necessity, Hebrews 11:6; Romans 14:23.
- b) Sufficiency, Genesis 15:6; New Testament parallels.

iv. Faith as motive.

- a) Exhortations to act in faith, Matthew 8:10, 9:2, 22, 17:20, 21:22, etc.
- b) Ethical appeal to the great realities which are the object of Christian faith, Ephesians 4:1ff., Romans 12:1ff., etc.
- c) Indications that only believers are capable of doing good works.
- d) Inseparability of faith from good works and *vice-versa* (above).

d. Repentance.

- i. Repentance is the negative side of faith and inseparable from it. It is turning away from sin, while faith is turning to Christ. Each involves the other.
- ii. Repentance, therefore, functions as a motive as does faith, Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20; II Timothy 2:25f., Revelation 2:5.

- iii. As faith is not only a preparation for action but a quality of actions, so is repentance. Repentance is not just believing that one is a sinner, or feeling sorry, or even hating one's sins. Repentance is actually turning away from sin, and that is found only in one's actions.
- e. Fear of God—see Murray, *Principles*, X.
- f. Hope.
 - i. Hope is faith directed toward the future aspect of salvation. Like faith, it is firm and sure, not tentative or wishful as the English word “hope” sometimes suggests. Romans 5:5; I Corinthians 1:7; I Timothy 1:1; Hebrews 3:6.
 - ii. As such, hope functions as a motive to good works.
 - a) Specific references, Acts 23:6, parallels; Romans 5:4ff.; II Corinthians 3:12ff.; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:5 (there said to motivate faith and love!), I Thessalonians 5:8, etc.
 - b) Ethical passages motivating obedience by presenting the consummation of redemption [Above, II.B.1.c.v.].
- g. Love
 - i. Prominence of the love-commandment in Scripture, c. I.D.9.
 - ii. Relation of the love-commandment to the rest of the law, also cf. I.D.9.
 - iii. Necessity and sufficiency for good works, I Corinthians 13.
 - iv. Basic characteristics. (Here, love of God and of one another will be treated as one—cf. I John 4:19ff.)
 - a) Gratefulness.
 - i) In the covenant structure, the love-command follows and presupposes the historical prologue, in which the suzerain's gracious deeds are set forth. Love, then, is the vassal's grateful response to the suzerain's benevolence.
 - ii) In the Old Testament structure, love is particularly Israel's grateful response to God for his taking Israel to himself and delivering them from death.
 - iii) The New Testament calls us to love as God first loved us in Christ, I John 4:7-21; John 13:34f.
 - iv) Note, apart from use of the term “love,” the biblical emphasis on thanksgiving through offering, prayer, actions: gratefulness as “motive”. Emphasis of *Heidelberg Catechism*.
 - b) Covenant Loyalty.
 - i) “Love” is the term used in the treaties to describe the fundamental responsibility of the vassal: to give his ultimate loyalty exclusively to his covenant Lord, to avoid any competing treaty—relationships.
 - ii) Note this emphasis in Israel's fundamental confession of faith, Deuteronomy 6:5ff., and in the first commandment of the

Decalogue, which takes the role of a “love-command” in the Decalogue structure.

- iii) In the New Testament also, love is covenant loyalty. It is a commitment to Christ as the only Lord and therefore a resolution to keep (obey) him [above, I.D.9.]. Thus, it is the mark of Christians as opposed to those outside the covenant (John 13:34f., etc.).
 - iv) As loyalty to the whole covenant institution, love binds the vassals to one another as to the suzerain. I John 4:19ff.
 - v) Douma, “To love means to stick with your choice.” *The Ten Commandments*, 21.
- c) Comprehensive Reorientation of Life.
- i) Deuteronomy 6:5f. and its New Testament allusions indicate that the love of God is a loyalty that is to permeate all aspects of life, so that nothing is left unaffected by it.
 - ii) Note the comprehensiveness of love as a way of life in I Corinthians 13, particularly its connections with all other Christian virtues.
 - iii) It has sometimes been asked whether the concept of love undergoes change from Deuteronomy (covenantal love—a relation of loyalty and obedience) to the later Old Testament (in Hosea, a more emotional commitment, focused on marriage rather than politics as a model).
 - (1) Remember, however, that marriage, life politics, is essentially covenantal in character and involves loyalty and obedience, as Hosea makes clear.
 - (2) Remember also that covenantal love, being a heart-commitment, a commitment of the whole person (nation), engages the emotions as every other part of life. One cannot love God with his whole heart while remaining cool to him. He demands (and wins) our emotional allegiance along with the rest of what we are.
 - (3) God’s love for us is highly emotional, Psm. 103:13, Isa. 49:15, 66:13, Hos. 11:3.
- d) Imitation of God’s grace.
- i) Cf. imitation of God as fundamental principle of biblical ethics, I.A.3.
 - ii) Those who have been delivered will seek to deliver others, Deuteronomy 5:15; Matthew 18:21-35.
 - iii) Thus, we are called to imitate specifically God’s love for us by loving one another in the same way, John 13:34f.; I John 4:7-21.
- e) Imitation of the Atonement: laying down our lives for one another, I John 3:16.

- i) The love of God which we are to imitate is most precisely displayed in the atonement: John 3:16, 15:13; Romans 5:8, 8:39 (in context); Ephesians 2:4f.; II Thessalonians 2:16; I John 3:16, 4:9f.; Revelation 1:5. Cf. Mark 10:45; I Peter 2:18-25; Philippians 2:1-11.
 - ii) Involves loving the “unlovely,” since we were unlovely when Christ loved us, Romans 5:8; Luke 14:21; Matthew 9:9-13.
 - iii) Involves putting the interests of others above our own, Philippians 2.
- f) Imitation of God’s Common Grace: love of enemies, Matthew 5:43-48; Galatians 6:10; Exodus 23:4.
- i) Question of the Imprecatory Psalms:
 - A) Remember that the Psalms are communal, not merely individual songs, and that they call down the wrath of God against those who oppose that nation identified with the Kingdom of God. In our time, these are not so clearly identified, and the long-suffering of God in our age is more central.
 - B) Nevertheless, there are imprecations in the NT as well as the OT: Matt. 23:17ff, Acts 1:16-20, Rom. 11:9-10, Gal. 1:8ff, Rev. 6:10, 18:20. Jesus takes Psm. 69 on his lips, John 2:17, 15:25, Rom. 15:3.
 - C) And the OT, like the New, prohibits personal vengeance (Lev. 19:17f, Psm. 5:6, 7:4, Prov. 20:22).
 - D) It is not wrong, however, to call down God’s wrath on those who clearly oppose his kingdom—with the understanding that God may answer that prayer by bringing his wrath upon Jesus.
 - E) A proper imprecation disclaims personal vengeance. It is a prayer for the vindication of God’s name against rebels, leaving vengeance in God’s hands.
 - F) God has revealed that he will show vengeance to some. The imprecatory Psalms are our “Amen” to his justice.
 - ii) Note “priority” given to the “household of faith” in Galatians 6:10. This is like the priority of the family—everyone must provide for his own household (I Timothy 5:8) “especially”. Our brothers and sisters in Christ will naturally be closer to us than those outside—our closest friends. But this does not require any mechanical computation dividing the church’s funds into certain percentages. We are to be ready to meet the needs of those whom we can help, without asking first about national or religious allegiance, Luke 10:25-37.
- g) Seeking out responsibility.
- i) Love is a disposition to keep the commandments of God [I.D.9.c.].
 - ii) Love seeks out what we can do to serve one another [above, d)-f)].

- iii) Love, therefore, gives an inevitably positive thrust to the law of God, which tends often to favor negative formulation. It is not an adequate response to the law simply to abstain from certain things. (If that were true, we could achieve sanctification by remaining in bed.) Love calls the believer to seek out ways of doing positive good, not merely of avoiding evil.
- iv) We may, therefore, see Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as an exposition of the law in light of the love-commandment.
- v) Love involves a concern for justice, not only mercy or benevolence. (Response to common question of whether love as a basic principle of Christian ethics must be supplemented by justice (Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Niebuhr, Ramsey): the question assumes a sub-biblical concept of love.)

h. Hatred of evil, Gen. 3:15, Psm. 139:21f.

h. Other Christian Virtues (Galatians 5:22f., elsewhere): other "perspectives" on the Christian motive. Love is focal among them since it makes explicit the basic motivation of the atonement. Yet, all can teach us about the ramifications of love.

D. The New Life as a Source of Ethical Knowledge (overlap with normative perspective).

In order to know what to do, we must know God's law (normative perspective), the situation to which the law applies (situational), and ourselves as those who apply it (existential). The redemptive transformation makes us into new creatures who are capable of applying the law as God intended.

1. The Word as God's Presence in Blessing.

- a. Scripture speaks of God's word in at least three ways:
 - i. Decree—the word by which God directs the whole course of nature and history.
 - ii. Address—the word by which he speaks to his creatures in meaningful sentences.
 - iii. Presence—the word by which he comes to his creatures, by which he lives with them. Cf. syllabus on *Doctrine of the Word of God*.
- b. By his word, God dwells with believers to bring blessing.
 - i. God's "name" placed on his people.
 - ii. The word written on their heart.
 - iii. The word as containing sanctifying power, Isaiah 55:11; Genesis 18:4; Luke 1:37; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 4:12.
 - iv. "Revelation" as the knowledge of God given to all believers (Matthew 11:25; Ephesians 1:17).
 - v. Christ as the present word, John 1:14, etc.
 - vi. The Spirit as the breath which drives the word into the heart, I Thessalonians 1:5, etc.
- c. Formulation.

- i. Not a continuing special revelation, but an application to the heart of that revelation already given.
 - ii. Specifically, the taking root of God's address in our heart so as to create true obedience.
 - iii. To have the word (in this sense of "word") is to be actually obedient. Knowing it and doing it, therefore, coincide.
 - iv. Since the word in this sense makes us obedient, we may say that it enables us to translate precept into action, to apply the written word in our actual decisions.
 - v. Without this continuing divine work, we would be unable to do any good thing. Scripture itself does not make us good, unless the Spirit makes us obedient to Scripture.
 - vi. To speak of the "word" in this sense is to speak of all the divine gifts which produce sanctification.
 - vii. We ought to seek these blessings through all the "means of grace," through the word as address (Scripture, preaching, counsel), the sacraments, prayer.
- d. Implications.
- i. We can see already that there is a kind of ethical knowledge (knowing how to obey, having ethical ability) which requires the sanctifying work of the Spirit. More on this below.
 - ii. Ethics, therefore, can never be a merely academic discipline. It is never a matter of merely coming up with the best verbal formulation of ethical principle. Even an exhaustive catalogue to ethical principles (applications of Scripture) will not produce holiness unless the Spirit applies the word to the heart.
 - iii. When we go to Scripture as a means of grace, we ought to seek not only the answers to questions, but also the power of the Spirit, working in and through the word.
 - iv. Here, then, is another reason why all aspects of Scripture, not just the laws and ethical admonitions, are relevant to ethics. The questions, commands, prose, poetry, parables, history, etc., all serve equally as vehicles of that transforming power. Through the all, God turns our hearts to seek him.
2. Ethical Knowledge as Product of Sanctification.

That ethical knowledge which is peculiar to the Christian is inseparable from obedience [cf. c.iii., above]. That knowledge produced by sanctification is obedience.

- a. Wisdom.
 - i. Essentially a skill—"knowing how," rather than "knowing that" [Exodus 31:1-5; cf. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*] (These are related, but are not the same thing.)
 - ii. In Scripture, it sometimes takes on an ethical character—the skill of godly living, James 3:13-17.

- iii. Specifically, wisdom is often the ability to do the right thing in particular (especially in difficult) situations. Luke 21:14f.
 - iv. Godly speech seems to be particularly emphasized as wise: Acts 6:10, I Corinthians 2:6 (cf. 1, 4, 13), 12:8; II Peter 3:15; Colossians 1:28.
 - v. Wisdom is an ethical guide, Proverbs 3:5f., 22-26, producing confidence.
 - vi. Source: redemptive covenantal communication of God's wisdom to us by his word and Spirit: Proverbs 3:19, 8:30, 28:7-9, 30:5; Jeremiah 8:8f; Exodus 28:3, 13:3; Deuteronomy 34:9; Acts 6:3; I Corinthians 1:24, 30, 2:6-16; Colossians 2:3, 3:16; II Timothy 3:15.
 - vii. Note well: One cannot claim to have wisdom in this redemptive sense unless he is obedient.
- b. Knowledge (cf. *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*).
- i. To "know God" in the deepest sense is to know his covenant lordship.
 - ii. Involves knowledge of the three perspectives.
 - a) The works of God (situational).
 - b) The will of God (normative).
 - c) Self in the presence of God (existential).
 - iii. Given by grace, by Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - iv. Based on the Word of God.
 - v. Obedience is not only a consequence, but a constitutive aspect of the knowledge, so that we cannot have knowledge without obedience: Jeremiah 22:16, 31:31f., Hosea 4:1f., 6:6; John 7:17, 8:19, 32, 41, 55, 17:25; I John 2:3-5, 2:12ff., 3:16, 4:7; Philippians 3:8-11; I Corinthians 2:6f., 13; II Corinthians 10:5; Ephesians 3:17-19, 4:13; II Timothy 2:22f.; II Peter 1:3, 5, 2:18-20; II Thessalonians 1:8f.
- c. Truth (cf. *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*; Murray, *Principles*, 123-128; Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 382f.).
- i. Concept.
 - a) "Metaphysical" absoluteness.
 - b) "Epistemological" correctness.
 - c) "Ethical" rightness
 - ii. Source: God in Christ by word and Spirit.
 - iii. One cannot, therefore, say that he has the truth in the fullest biblical sense unless, by God's grace, he is walking in the truth, obeying the truth.
- d. Doctrine.
- i. The teaching of the word of God to promote spiritual health (I Timothy 1:10, 4:6, 6:3; II Timothy 1:13, 4:3; Titus 1:9).
 - ii. This teaching is done by all Christians, and not only in formal discourse (Colossians 3:16!).
- e. Conclusion: The knowledge conferred in the process of sanctification is not only the information necessary for obedience, but obedience itself.
3. Intellectual Knowledge and Ethical Knowledge.

How, then, does intellectual knowledge fit into the overall pattern of “knowledge” in the ethical-redemptive sense?

- a. The ethical presupposes the intellectual, Hebrews 11:6; I John 4:2, etc.
 - i. These passages, of course, are talking about adults of normal intelligence and do not resolve questions about the status of infants, the mentally retarded, etc.
 - ii. This is the sort of point generally in view when people say that “life ought to be built on doctrine”. That slogan misleads, I think, by equating doctrine with a set of propositions (cf. 2.d., above), but the intent of it is biblical.
- b. The intellectual presupposes the ethical. (This point is less often made and less often understood.)
 - i. The unbeliever’s ethical rebellion compromises even his “intellectual” knowledge. For to know the way of blessing and willfully to forsake it is a stupid response. Cf. *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. The “intellectual knowledge” of the unbeliever is paradoxical. He knows (and thus is responsible), but in some sense does not know (because he renounces his knowledge).
 - ii. Since, then, the grace of God overcomes our unbelief and its consequences it overcomes even the “intellectual” weakness caused by unbelief. Thus, when Scripture speaks of knowledge in general coming through sanctifying grace (I Corinthians 8:1-4; I Timothy 1:5-11; I John 2:3-6, 9-11, 20-27, 4:2f., 8, 13-17, 5:2f.; John 7:17, 11:40; Ephesians 1:17f., 3:18f.), it means knowledge as a whole. God’s gift of ethical righteousness brings restoration of knowledge, even in the “intellectual” sense.
 - iii. Note in the above passages especially the connection between “intellectual” knowledge and love (I Corinthians 8:1-4, 13:7, 11-13; Philippians 1:10; I Timothy 1:5-11; I John 2:9-11; Ephesians 3:17f.), faith (John 11:40), obedience (I John 2:3-6, 5:2f.; John 7:17).
 - iv. Scripture teaches us our duty, among other ways, by presenting the Christian virtues (the fruit of the Spirit). We can learn more about our duty by asking “How can I be more loving, gentle, etc.?”
 - v. *Dokimazein*: A life of obedience gives us increasing discernment as to what our duties are.
 - a) Romans 12:1f.
 - i) The language of living sacrifice, nonconformity to the world, transformation, renewal of the mind emphasizes the necessity of ethical change.
 - ii) One who is so transformed will “prove what the will of the Lord is”.
 - (1) “Prove” (*dokimazein*) = “to discover, to find out or learn by experience what the will of God is and therefore to learn how approved the will of God is” (Murray, *Romans*, *ad loc.*). It is both learning what God wants and coming to approve of it.

- (2) But notice that here ethical transformation precedes knowledge of God's will, oddly enough. The point seems to be that the more we obey, the more we know of our duty. The new life equips us to know.
- b) Philippians 1:10.
- i) Love produces knowledge and *aisthesis* (perception, discernment, sensitivity: a moral sense, we might say).
 - ii) This sensitivity enables us to prove (*dokimazein*) *ta diapheronta* (what is important, what really matters at a particular time).
 - iii) Here again, obedience (love) gives me a sensitivity to God's will, to know what to do.
- c) Ephesians 5:8-10.
- i) We are light, and that inevitably involves obedience [cf. earlier discussion about God as light, I.A.10. Also the discussion of "Goodness and the Being of Man", above, III.B.]. Note again how righteousness comes from an inward principle.
 - ii) That obedience enables us to know God's will, verse 10.
- d) Hebrews 5:11-14 (no *dokimazein* here, but the same idea).
- i) Problem: doctrinal immaturity, inability to understand Melchizedek priesthood (11).
 - (1) They don't even understand the most basic things (12; cf. 6:1-2).
 - (2) They lack a standard (*logos*; cf. F.F. Bruce) of righteousness. Doctrinal immaturity is ethical immaturity.
 - (3) They are "without experience of" (*apeiros*) the standard. The problem is somehow related to inexperience. In some sense, it requires experience in the Christian life to understand the great doctrines.
 - ii) Characteristics of doctrinal maturity (14).
 - (1) They have a moral sense (*aistheteria*—cf. Philippians 1:10).
 - (2) The sense is exercised; note emphasis on experience, connotation of rigor.
 - (3) The exercise is "by reason of use" (*exis*, a skill acquired through practice). The more we use our moral sense, the more accurate it becomes.
 - (4) The result of this exercise: the discernment of good and evil. Thus, we come to know our duty through vigorous moral exercise.
 - (5) The further result (in context): doctrinal discernment. We come to understand the Melchizedek priesthood as we obey God. As "life is built on doctrine," so "doctrine is built on life."
- e) Conclusion: knowing our duty presupposes sanctification. It presupposes active involvement in the spiritual warfare. We may never

suppose that knowledge of our duty always comes before obedience, as though we could spend three years studying God's will and then do it. Learning and doing God's will are simultaneous.

- vi. Some principles implicit in these passages. (The above teachings are rather hard to understand in the context of our intellectualistic heritage. The following comments may help us to understand why Scripture presents the matter as it does.)
- a) The intellect is part of life. Its health depends on the health of the whole organism. Intellectual acts are acts of the whole person, and like all other acts, they are subject to sin and sanctification. Sanctification in one area of life begets sanctification in others. Thus, it is not surprising that in some senses obedience is prior to intellectual understanding. Cf. John 3:3.
 - b) Thinking presupposes the ability to think; "knowing that" presupposes "knowing how". "Knowing how" involves obedience to a norm, i.e., doing right.
 - c) What does it mean to "have a concept" of something? Well, when we test people to see if they have the right "concept" of, say, a triangle, we find out what they can do. "Having a concept" always involves being able to do certain things. It is a disposition to action. Such dispositions to action are ethically directed—directed toward a particular goal which is either godly or sinful. Thus, concept presupposes disposition to act, which, in turn, presupposes ethical dispositions. (For a Christian" to have a "right concept" of God implies being ready to endure hardship for the sake of Christ. Concepts can take a long time to acquire. Compare the apostle Paul saying "We are more than conquerors" with a Sunday School class of five-year-olds saying the verse).
 - d) Knowing our duty involves application of Scripture to situations [I., II.], and that, in turn, involves a particular kind of moral vision.
 - i) Ethical judgments involve seeing our situations "in the light of" biblical categories. We ask, "Is this act murder?" "Is this act stealing?" etc. We want to call our experiences by their biblical names.
 - ii) The text itself does not perform this job. Scripture does not mention each of our experiences specifically. Categorizing our experiences under biblical rubrics, then, is something that we must do, by God's enabling.
 - iii) This moral task involves:
 - (1) Seeing patterns in our experience which can be compared with similar patterns in biblical events. (Hijacking planes is different from stealing oxen, but there is a common pattern).
 - (2) Seeing analogies between our experiences and biblical teachings, stories, etc.

- (3) (Cf. the aesthetic terminology in Philippians 1:10; Hebrews 5:11-14: the moral sense is in some ways like an aesthetic sensitivity.)
- iv) This moral discernment is not simply a matter of sense-experience.
- (1) The “duck-rabbit”: You can see the location of every line in the picture, even reproduce the picture, without having the “rabbit-aspect” dawn on you. Some would not even recognize the duck, though they see all the lines. “Seeing as” is not the same as “seeing”.
 - (2) Seeing a pattern involves experience in the world and in cultural means of representing the world. (In the above example, it helps to have seen ducks, rabbits, and other pictures of ducks and rabbits.)
 - (3) Seeing ethically relevant patterns is even more complicated. One can have a very good grasp of what takes place without “seeing” the relevant ethical patterns and analogies, without seeing this “as” adultery, Sabbath breaking, etc.
 - (4) Cf. this moral example: I feel rage. Is that rage to be understood as righteous indignation (John 2:14ff.) or is it murderous hatred (Matthew 5:22)? The answer may not be obvious.
 - (a) I may have memorized the whole Bible and still not seen the relevant pattern there.
 - (b) I may have very good knowledge of myself at one level, without seeing the pattern.
 - (c) Thus, it is not a mere question of intelligence or sense-perception.
- v) This discernment presupposes spiritual maturity. A mature Christian can do it better than an immature one. And this maturity is not necessarily equivalent to intelligence or education. Often, uneducated Christians will be among the wisest in noting the patterns and analogies.
- vi) The discernment can come about in unexpected ways.
- (1) It may, of course, come about in expected ways: perhaps a verse of Scripture coming to mind, perhaps a fact of experience not noticed before (like a line on the duck-rabbit not noticed).
 - (2) But, since one may know all the verses, and all the facts, without knowing the patterns, often the insight will come in odd ways.
 - (3) David’s sin with Bathsheba is an example.
 - (a) David knew the Scriptures; he knew adultery and murder were wrong.
 - (b) David knew what he had done.

- (c) Yet somehow, the moral dimension of his acts was missed. Perhaps, he had rationalized; perhaps, he was spiritually cold.
 - (d) Nathan revealed, in a sense, no new facts to David—neither facts about Scripture nor facts about his actions. Rather, he put the facts already known into a pattern which presented obvious analogies with Scripture. The parable of the ewe lamb shocked David into seeing the pattern with full clarity.
- vii) Thus, ethical discourse is never merely a matter of setting forth facts and verses.
- (1) In an ethical debate, one or both parties may be very knowledgeable about Scripture and experience, but unable to make the connections because of immaturity.
 - (2) Thus, it may sometimes be useful, not only to reason, but also to tell stories, to pray, to sing, to share analogies, to do odd things for “shock value” (Ezekiel), to teach by example.
 - (3) Sometimes, ethical agreement may be impossible due to the lack of vision of one or both parties. It may be necessary to abandon the discussion until the immature party has grown. Go out and live the Christian life, then come back and think some more. Exercise your discernment!
 - (4) Thus, for still another reason, we do not dare to try to work out all the answers before engaging in the Spiritual warfare.
- e) The “Doctrine of Guidance”.
- i) Two Extremes.
 - (1) Notion that guidance is essentially an academic process—the process of intellectual study of Scripture (danger in reformed circles.)
 - (2) Notion that guidance is by divine addresses above and beyond Scripture (danger in Pentecostalism).
 - ii) Both these views think that ethical knowledge is essentially a matter of acquiring propositional information. If we have an ethical problem, we merely need to know more facts.
 - iii) They tend to ignore:
 - (1) That we need facts about the situation, as well as facts about revelation (situational perspective).
 - (2) That we need the insight to see patterns and analogies.
 - (3) That such insight often comes about in other ways than by academic study.
 - (4) That the Spirit’s work in our time is not the giving of new canonical revelation but is nevertheless crucial—the opening of our eyes to see how Scripture applies.

- iv) Thus, guidance does not add to Scripture; but on the other hand, it is far from an academic or impersonal process. The believer is guided in a very personal, we might even say direct, manner. Often, his workings are mysterious, perhaps even mystical in some sense.
 - vii. Conclusion: The ethical is in some senses prior to the intellectual. If “life is built on doctrine,” doctrine being understood as intellectual understanding of propositional revelation, then it is also true that doctrine is built on life in various ways. There is a reciprocity between the two. Neither functions without the other.
4. The Organs of Ethical Knowledge.
- a. The Heart.
 - i. The “work of the law” written on the heart (Romans 2:15): all of us know by nature the law of God in its fundamental demands. Even under sin, man’s own nature is revelational of God and of God’s will. [Cf. I.B.2.b.].
 - ii. The word “written on the heart” of the regenerate [Jeremiah 31:33ff.; cf. I.B.2.b.]. This is a more profound relation between the word and our being than that described in i. If the word is written on the heart, then, we not only know God’s requirements, but we obey them by nature. Thus, the regenerate heart is naturally inclined to do God’s will.
 - iii. The heart convicting us of sin, II Samuel 24:10.
 - iv. In general, the heart is the “center” of man’s being. To say that the heart is a source of ethical knowledge is to say that our nature as a whole reveals God’s will, and [in case ii.] even inclines us to do God’s will (ethical knowledge as involving actual obedience).
 - v. Since man as a whole discerns God’s will, we must not press too hard the various divisions of man into “faculties” (reason, will, memory, etc.) or elevate one faculty above another as an ethical authority within man. Those distinctions have some value [see below], but must be seen as in some measure “abstractions”. Nor are they neatly distinguishable from one another.
 - vi. On the other hand, if man as a whole is an organ of knowledge, then all aspects of man are involved, somehow in ethical knowledge. Thus, there is some value in making distinctions within man to see in more detail how the knowledge functions.
 - b. Synteresis (or synderesis).
 - i. In Thomas Aquinas, *synteresis* is reason as the faculty by which the first principles of morality are known.
 - ii. These cannot be derived from anything more ultimate, but are a “habit” of the soul.
 - iii. As such, they form the major premises of ethical syllogisms (“All stealing is wrong,” etc.).
 - iv. The concept roughly coincides with our description of the “work of the law” written on the heart [a.i., above]. As such, it is unobjectionable.

- v. By making this a faculty of reason, however, Thomas suggests that this is something autonomous, as Aristotelian reason was conceived to be.
- c. Conscience.
 - i. In Thomas Aquinas, much moral theology.
 - a) Take the moral syllogism, “All stealing is wrong; embezzling is stealing; therefore, embezzling is wrong.” As we saw above, the first premise is supplied by *synteresis*.
 - b) The second premise is supplied by “an inferior kind of reason”.
 - c) Conscience (*syneidesis*) draws the conclusion, embezzling is wrong. Thus, conscience is essentially a syllogistic rational process, though Thomas agrees that the term “conscience” may also be applied to *synteresis*.
 - ii. In Scripture.”
 - a) “Conscience” (*syneidesis*) in the New Testament is used in ways roughly parallel to some Old Testament uses of “heart”. The word “conscience” is not found in the English Old Testament (KJV), but there are places where it is a possible translation of “heart”. Cf. II Samuel 24:10 with New Testament references. We would be inclined to say that David’s “conscience” smote him. This suggests that conscience is our inmost being, conceived as a means of ethical knowledge.
 - b) Conscience is not the law, or the work of the law [a.i. and a.ii., above]; rather, conscience bears witness to these revelations of God (Romans 2:15, cf. Murray’s commentary). It is, therefore, not autonomous, but rests upon the revelation of God.
 - c) Conscience is, therefore, a source of ethical knowledge: Acts 23:1, 24:16; Romans 9:1, 13:5; I Corinthians 8:7-12, 10:25-29 in context; I Timothy 1:5.
 - d) There is no Scriptural reason to restrict the work of conscience to the work of deriving conclusions from ethical premises.
 - i) Conscience is certainly that which perceives the revelation and attests its truth.
 - ii) Conscience convicts us of sin [above examples].
 - iii) Conscience is certainly involved in the perception of patterns and analogies [above, 3.] whereby we derive the minor premises of moral syllogisms (“Embezzling is stealing,” e.g.).
 - (1) It may be identified with that “moral sense” we discussed earlier which Scripture also speaks of under other names (*aisthesis, aistheterion*). That function of conscience is presented in Scripture as something highly important, the solution to much ethical perplexity. It is not to be relegated to “an inferior kind of reason” as in Aquinas.
 - (2) We identify this with conscience simply because, according to Scripture, conscience perceives our obligations. This implies

that conscience perceives, not only the law, but the application of the law.

- e) Sin infects even the conscience, I Corinthians 8:7, 12; I Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15. Cf. the expression “good conscience” or “pure conscience”. Sometimes, however, these expressions refer not to the sin or goodness of the conscience itself, but to the sin or goodness of the person, to which the conscience testifies.
 - i) Therefore, conscience is not infallible. If “seared,” it can fail to do its work of bringing sin to our attention.
 - ii) There is some paradox here. On the one hand, conscience sometimes fails; on the other hand, no one is ever without sufficient knowledge of God’s will to be responsible for sin. We ought to assume, then, that conscience is never entirely destroyed in the sinner. (Cf. the problems about the sinner’s having “knowledge” and having the “image of God”.)
 - f) It is always wrong to disobey conscience, even when conscience errs, I Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12 in context. To disobey conscience is, by definition, to do what we think is wrong. And doing what we think is wrong always involves a spirit of rebelliousness against God.
 - g) It is not, however, always right to obey conscience. Obeying conscience is right only when conscience itself is right.
 - h) Thus, we have a duty to train the conscience. The conscience must be sensitized by Scripture and the Spirit so that it becomes a more reliable guide.
- d. Experience.
- i. Scripture never deprecates knowledge obtained through the senses, as is done by rationalistic philosophers. The facts about Christ have been “heard and seen”. The gospel is based on reports to this effect by witnesses. (Cf. the emphasis on witnesses in biblical jurisprudence.)
 - ii. It is by means of our senses that we learn the content of Scripture and the facts of our situation.
 - iii. Sense-experience, in itself, is insufficient to teach us our duty (apart from divine authority, the Spirit, etc.). Yet, it plays an indispensable role in the discernment of our duty.
 - iv. Scripture is understood only insofar as it makes some connection with our present experience (meaning as application). We understand the meaning of Scripture by drawing analogies with the patterns of our own experience [above, D.3.]. This is not in a technical philosophical sense, but it is experience, and it involves sensation.
 - v. Thus, we are better equipped to explain Scripture when we have experienced the realities to which Scripture refers (e.g. when we have gone through the same trials and triumphs that the biblical characters have gone through).
- e. Reason.

- i. “Reason” is one of the most ambiguous concepts in human thought. Some meanings:
 - a) Logic (especially in rationalism, cf. G.H. Clark).
 - b) The “laws of thought” (law of non-contradiction, etc.).
 - c) Following a certain method of inquiry.
 - d) The psychological capacity for making judgments based on various data. I will assume this definition below.
 - ii. There is plenty of work for reason to do in the area of ethics.
 - a) Moral syllogisms.
 - b) Determining causal relations between means and ends (situational perspective).
 - c) Scripture exegesis.
 - d) Analysis of the situation to which Scripture applies, etc.
 - iii. Like “conscience” (with which the concept of “reason” overlaps), reason is infected by sin (cf. apologetics courses). Thus, like conscience, reason is not infallible. We may therefore say (as we said about conscience) that to disobey reason is always wrong (God does not want us to live irrationally), but to obey reason is not necessarily right. Reason must be trained to operate on godly presuppositions, to use godly methods, to be sensitive to what really matters.
 - iv. Like conscience, reason may never suppose itself to be autonomous. The function of reason is to understand and apply the law, not to create it. And even the understanding and application must be done obediently.
- f. Will.
- i. “Will,” in general, is our ability to choose to act in a particular way. Thus, will is always involved in any moral act or decision.
 - ii. Will is also involved in moral deliberation (which after all is itself a series of moral acts and decisions).
 - a) We choose to reason on certain presuppositions rather than others.
 - b) We choose to take the language of deliberation in one sense rather than in another (cf. existentialism).
 - c) We choose to accept one reason as valid and another as invalid.
 - iii. All of these choices, on the other hand, may be based on reasons.
 - iv. Thus, it appears that reason and will are mutually dependent. We accept reasons because we choose them, and we choose because we find those choices reasonable. Will and reason, therefore, are not neatly distinguishable. (Cf. earlier discussion of “doctrine” and “life”.)
- g. Imagination.
- i. The word “imagination” in the English Bible is almost always used in a bad sense (Jeremiah 3:17, etc.). It represents, however, various Hebrew and Greek terms which bear little relation to the term “imagination” as commonly used today; thus, we cannot condemn a positive use of the term out of hand.

- ii. Today, “imagination” can be a synonym for creativity, for the power to see patterns and analogies, for the power to conceive of possible situations in which something of importance takes place. As we’ve seen, ethics presupposes all of these skills.
 - iii. Imagination can help us in conceiving possible alternative courses of action, types of terminology, etc.
 - iv. Imagination may warn us against hasty generalization by presenting us with possible situations in which our principle does not apply (counter-examples).
- h. The Emotions.
- i. Scripture does not discuss “the emotions” as an independent item of concern, any more than it discusses “the intellect” or “the will” in such a way.
 - ii. Yet, it speaks a great deal concerning particular emotions—griefs, joys, anxieties, awe, terror, woe, lust, and also about concepts which have a large emotional component: love, hate, happiness, etc.
 - iii. According to Scripture, regeneration reorients our emotional life.
 - a) We learn to love God and hate evil, to rejoice in the good, to be content in the face of difficulty, etc.—the opposite of the unbelieving emotional disposition.
 - b) Regeneration does not necessarily make us more emotional or less emotional. We may assume that in this respect believers differ from one another. Yet, our emotional life, however active it may be, is now the Lord’s. Thus, our joys, sorrows, etc., are different from what they were.
 - c) As there is a change in our emotions by grace, so there is a command to work out this new principle (gift and task, “already” and “not-yet”).
 - i) It is sometimes said that feelings cannot be commanded, or even taught. Hegel (*Early Theological Writings*) thought that Christianity was even more reprehensibly authoritarian than Judaism, because while Judaism commanded actions, Christianity commanded feelings.
 - ii) Scripture, however, assumes that feelings ought to be changed to conform to God’s will, and that they can be changed, by thought and by new habits.
 - d) Scripture teaches about the emotions, not only by commanding us to change them, but also by:
 - i) Presenting sin in its true ugliness (*contra* Eve, Genesis 3:6).
 - ii) Presenting the new life as something beautiful and delightful (rationale for emotive sermons).
 - iv. Emotions and knowledge.
 - a) Emotions, like reason, have a “hermeneutical” component; i.e. they assign (or discover) meaning in various data which they express.

Anger, fear, and delight represent certain assessments of the meaning of the facts at which one is angry, fearful, or delighted.

- b) It may be said, therefore, that the emotions presuppose, or ought to presuppose, reason; for our feelings ought to be based on true assessments of meaning, and a true assessment is a rational assessment.
- c) The opposite, however, is also true. Reasoning presupposes emotions. Illustration: writing a book review is a highly “rational,” even “academic” or “theoretical” activity. Yet, it is a job that requires a subtle interplay of emotions and reasoning. I read a chapter; I feel a certain way about it. I return to verify or falsify my feeling. Perhaps, the feeling changes as I analyze. Perhaps, the initial analysis agrees with the initial feeling. Or perhaps, feeling and analysis disagree, in which case, it is evident to me that the analysis is incomplete.
 - i) Note that feeling can be said to “lead” the intellect in some senses. My feelings indicate what, to me, is in need of analysis.
 - ii) Once I am entirely satisfied emotionally, the analysis usually ends.
 - iii) If I had no emotions at all about the book, I would not keep on reading it, much less write about it.
 - iv) It is hard to imagine any theoretical or rational inquiry which is not dependent on emotion in some such way. Cf. “cognitive rest” in DKG.
- d) Emotions and reason, then, form a single complex set of capacities by which we seek to respond rightly to our world. (Other capacities are also part of the complex—sense-experience, imagination, etc.) Each involves the other.
- e) Scripture never suggests that emotions are naturally more sinful or less sanctified than reason, or *vice-versa*. Man, as a whole, is depraved and, as a whole, is redeemed. At some particular point, however, emotion may signal an inadequacy in our reasoning [iv.c), above] or *vice-versa*. (Checks and balances.)
- f) Scripture never suggests that emotions in general must be subordinated to reason or *vice-versa*, (the former in Greek thought, the latter in, e.g., Hume). (*Contra* Gordon H. Clark, “The Primacy of the Intellect”.)
 - i) The emotions and the reason ought to agree, to be sure.
 - ii) “Disagreements between emotions and reason” are best understood as disagreements between one set of emotion-reasons and another set of emotion-reasons. One set will have a more emotional cast, the other, a more rational cast, but neither will be totally devoid of either emotion or reason.
 - iii) In cases where “reason and emotion disagree,” the resolution may involve a better analysis or a better (more godly) emotional

response to the previous analysis. The direction of the solution is not dictated by the nature of reason and emotion as such.

- iv) Illustration: you are persuaded rationally that there can be no good in Pentecostal worship; but, when you attend a service, you find yourself (surprisingly!) clapping along, singing, shouting Amen from the heart. Do you simply rebuke your emotions for contradicting your intellect? Do you simply abandon your previous conviction because it no longer “feels right”? Neither. Think it through, pray about it, study Scripture, train yourself in godly emotions. It could go either way.
- v. Summary: Emotions are aspects of our ethical sensitivity, our *aistheteria*. We dare not neglect them as we seek to “prove what the will of the Lord is.”