

A Very Rough Intro to Biblical Ethics

- Ethics is the attempt to define what is good and just - how to be/decide/act morally.
- Ethics is not just a Christian endeavour. There are many competing ethical systems.
- Many of us have several inconsistent and unarticulated ethical systems in our heads e.g. end justifies means, God said it, pragmatics.
- Christian ethics is theology in action. It is based on the bible and developed by the Spirit renewing our minds Rom 12 and sanctifying us.
- Christian Ethics is not a list of Dos and Don'ts but the outflowing of God making us more like Jesus in our character

Goals of this Rough Guide

- **Start us on a path to develop a biblical framework for ethics** by which we live. A biblical framework we can think and act on and explain to ourselves and others.
- **Motivate us to consciously engage in talking ethics and acting ethically in our day to day lives** and to understand what the bible says about better and worse ways of talking and acting.
- **Draw us back again to dependence on God for the continuing renewing of our minds and characters. So we can live biblical ethics and speak and act wisely out of the overflow of a new person in Christ.**
- Eph 4: 14

A very Rough Guide to Ethical Theories

- Ethics of actions – what actions are right and wrong – ethics of duty (focus on action (including motives))
- Ethics of character – is this person virtuous, do they have a good character (focus on actor (including motives))

Ethics of actions

- Command theories (deontological) – something *binds* actors to do or not do a thing eg God commands that we speak the truth, so speaking the truth is right or the law order us to not drive while drunk, so drunk driving is wrong
- Goal OR consequence theories (teleological)
 - If the **goal** is right, the act is right e.g goal of human society is peaceful co-existence – therefore tolerance of all persons is right and intolerance is wrong
 - If the **consequence** is right, the act is right i.e. end justifies the means
 - e.g. 1. beating my son will stop him stealing so beating him is right.
 - e.g. 2. if we eliminated the Jews/ Christians/ homosexuals/ refugees we would have a good consequence being peaceful co-existence, so elimination is right to do.

Classical utilitarianism – a consequentialist ethic that underpins much economics

- Actions are right if they produce the greatest amount of “pleasure” for the greatest number of people (morality is defined in terms of things which people can use to satisfy their needs and wants)
- Eg Hedonism – pleasure is the ultimate good and pain is to be avoided, so sufferers should be allowed or aided or compelled to die
- Economic utilitarianism – free trade produces more utility for more people which is a good consequence and it is unfortunate for the minority of manufacturing workers whose industries fold
- The free market is good because it maximises the allocation of resources to those who derive the greatest utility from them

Ethics of Virtue – Morality of actor not action

- Examine character and disposition of actor, not the action
- Bible extols character virtues such as compassion, kindness, gentleness, hospitality, generosity, peacefulness, truthfulness, humility, forgiveness, forbearance.

A Balance of Approaches?

- In fact the bible contains moral material across the Command, Purpose, Consequence and Character approaches suggesting that some balance of all is needed. Christian ethics is complex.
- Hill suggests a Kingdom ethic of mutual love relationships – an action or a trait of character is right if it creates or maintains mutual love relationships between (a) God and humans or (b) humans and humans.

A Retrieval Ethic

- Sometimes it will be impossible to achieve the mutual love goal in full because we are sinful and we live in a fallen world
- So Christians may have to retrieve as much good as they can in a situation and limit as much harm as possible e.g the spouse who insists on leaving. (Not the lesser of two evils but do the greatest possible good.)

Truth

- You and your friend don't have much money. He goes to Asia on a mission opportunity and asks you to sell his car while he is gone – the proceeds are crucial to meeting his expenses.
- You know the car has significant rust issues in the chassis but these aren't apparent on a general inspection.
- What do you tell a prospective buyer about the condition of the car if:
 - - they ask nothing
 - - they ask is there anything wrong with the car
 - - they ask if you would buy the car
 - - they are your senior pastor

Business “Bluff”

- Extract from “Beyond Integrity”

Hot potatoes

- In an upcoming election, some parties are running on a platform of legalising gay marriage, some you suspect are almost there but not quite. Advocates tell you that Christians can't be against recognising loving relationships – how would you vote on that issue
- Same scenario but issue is legalising euthanasia.

Popular liberal secular world view	Christian world view
<p>The Good - What is of value The Right - What is Just</p>	<p>The Good - What is of value The Right - What is Just</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximising individual freedom of each person to do what they want. (Classic liberal view.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loving and serving God with all our being first, and loving other people as we love ourselves (Matt 22:37). This means serving God and others rather than just seeking our own comfort
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Justice is ensuring that all people have an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Justice is determined by the character of God. It includes rights and duties under the laws/rules of God (eg keep your word even when it hurts) but also Righteousness (meaning right relationships) with God and people which includes appropriate mercy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking pleasure / happiness as experienced by the individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worship God and enjoy Him forever – Westminster Catechism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More wealth and more power over others is good because it maximises freedom and pleasure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be content, trust in God not money, beware of greed: 1 Tim 6. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit

Sledging in Sport Secular	Christian
<p>Winning is most important – it maximises my and my team’s pleasure.</p> <p>A bit of well timed abuse can put the opponent off. So sledging improves the chances of winning (consequence).</p> <p>Everyone does it – its no big deal.</p> <p>It’s alright to give as good as you get as long you don’t start it.</p>	<p>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander. Eph 4:29-30 (Command and Character and Consequence)</p> <p>Would Jesus sledge on the sports field? (Character)</p> <p>See above.</p>

Abortion – Abortion Law Reform Act 2008

Secular

Maximise the woman's right to control her own body by aborting an unwanted fetus.

Consequential reasoning – liberty is good. Unwanted pregnancy impedes woman's liberty so destroy fetus.

But the consequences for the fetus must be ignored or relatively devalued to reach this conclusion.

Justice claim - Attempts to restrict abortion involve male oppression of women. (Must not restrict sexual freedom. Can encourage use of contraception but cannot coerce it.)

Christian

Promote the flourishing of all human life created by God - Thou shalt not kill. (Command)

The fetus is a human being (from conception (eg Ps 139) or an early gestation) and:

-is never to be killed or

-the value of the fetus' life is to be weighed against the value of the mother's life and health in each case.

(Command and consequence but more balanced)

In those cases where women are oppressed by bearing an unfair burden of irresponsible male-female sexual behaviour, the justice claim is not answered by killing the fetus but by ensuring the man and woman share the responsibility.

Abortion – Abortion Law Reform Act 2008

Secular

Christian

Abortion is a very difficult issue. Legislators can't make judgments for other people's lives – we need to leave it to the woman and her doctor, so decriminalise abortion and let it happen for any reason and hope that women are responsible. (This view seems to be strong on compassion for the woman but it denies justice and compassion to the fetus.)

Mercy and compassion lead to supporting the woman (and the man) and offering help, adoption and foster care alternatives in some cases. (Christian response can be right on justice but lacking in mercy, compassion.)

Legislators make judgments for other people's lives all the time and rely on the law as well as hope/ education for better choices.

God commands that we protect human life. (Command) If the effect of decriminalizing abortion is to increase the likelihood of the destruction of human life, abortion needs to remain prohibited by law (using some balance of the mother's life and health and the fetus' life). (Consequence)

IVF and surrogacy for Singles and Same-sex couples – ART Bill 2008

This Bill regulates access to IVF treatment and surrogacy. It will permit single men, single women and homosexual couples (whether or not medically infertile) to use IVF and surrogacy to procreate children and to nominate themselves as the parents on the birth certificate to the exclusion of the biological parents and the surrogate mother.

Based on discrimination being wrong - Single and same sex parents can be as loving as a heterosexual couple

Liberal view of maximizing individual liberty.

MS attempts at Christian Response

Discrimination means different treatment. Different treatment is not necessarily wrong. Q is whether it is justified.

God's plan for children is to be created and raised in a committed union of man and woman – Gen 2. Don't set out to create single parent families or same sex parent families. The issue is not the love that these adults can give but God's plan (Command) and outcomes for children (Consequence).

Maximising the liberty of the adult must be deferred to the well being of the child and this is not primarily a claim for liberty from State control. It is a claim for taxpayer funded assistance for medical intervention because fertile adults do not wish to procreate with the opposite sex.

ART Bill 2008

- Conscience Vote
- Passed by Legislative Assembly (lower house)
- 2nd reading vote by Leg Council (upper house) on Thursday – passed 20 to 18. 2 swing votes and 2 missing.
- Bruce Atkinson (Lib) – a local MLC was only Lib/Nat to support it.
- We lobbied Bruce to send it to Legislation Committee for public submissions. He agreed. Committee meets on 19/11.
- Email Bruce at bruce.atkinson@parliament.vic.gov.au
- See www.makeastand.org.au
- More info – sign up on sign up sheet

Some Ethics resources

Books

Stanley Grenz, The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics
Michael Hill, The How and Why of Love

Centres and Websites:

Centre for Applied Christian Ethics at Ridley (CACE) –
www.ridley.edu.au – look under CACE

Centre for Apologetic Scholarship and Education (CASE) an activity of
New College at the University of New South Wales in Sydney –
www.case.edu.au

Moore College Theological Issues email updates

Australian Christian Lobby – www.acl.org.au and
www.makeastand.org.au

Courses in Christian ethics at Ridley or BCV or Tabor

Small Group Course at St Alfs.

CACE is preparing a 4 week course in Ethics for small groups –
available early in 2009. If you are interested put your name on the
sign up sheet to be informed when it is ready.