






Ethical Dilemma...



A woman and her husband are both held prisoners at a Nazi prison camp. If a prison guard asks the wife to have sex with her, and she does, is she morally guilty of the sin of adultery?

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Ethical Dilemma...



A woman and her husband are both held prisoners at a Nazi prison camp. If a guard tells the wife that he'll kill her husband unless she has sex with him, and she does, is she morally guilty of the sin of adultery?

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Ethical Dilemma...



A woman and her husband are both held prisoners at a Nazi prison camp. If a guard holds a gun to the wife's head and says he'll kill her unless she has sex with him, and she does, is she morally guilty of the sin of adultery?

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What Ethics is and is not

What Ethics is Not	What Ethics is
Is	Ought
Do	Should
Descriptive	Prescriptive
Mores	Morals
Culture	Commands
Standards of Society	Standards for Morality

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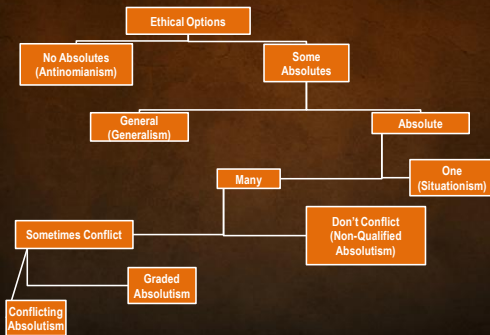
Possible Ethical Options

- Antinomianism
- Situationism
- Generalism
- Unqualified Absolutism
- Conflicting Absolutism
- Graded Absolutism



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Possible Ethical Options



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One Example

"Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them."
(Exodus 1:15-21)

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Possible Ethical Options

- Antinomianism – lying is neither right nor wrong; there are no moral laws to follow
- Situationism – lying may be loving thing to do and therefore is morally OK
- Generalism – lying is generally wrong, but in specific cases it can be broken if the results are 'good'; the ends justifies the means
- Unqualified Absolutism – lying is always wrong; whatever consequences come about from telling the truth should be welcomed
- Conflicting Absolutism – lying is forgivable because there are absolute moral laws that sometimes conflict, however the person has sinned
- Graded Absolutism – lying is sometimes right because there are higher absolute moral laws that sometimes conflict with lower ones; a person has not sinned

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Overview of Antinomianism

- Antinomianism literally means "against law"
- There are no binding absolute moral laws; everything is relative
- Three historical movements carried antinomianism
- Processism – the Greeks thought everything was in process/flux and so no law could ever be absolute
- Hedonism – the Epicureans said pleasure rules and pain is to be avoided
- Skepticism – those like David Hume argue all judgment must be suspended because there is always two sides to a moral position



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MORALITY IS DOING WHAT IS RIGHT REGARDLESS OF WHAT YOU ARE TOLD

RELIGION IS DOING WHAT YOU ARE TOLD REGARDLESS OF WHAT IS RIGHT

How does the atheist know what is right?

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Basic Beliefs of Antinomianism

- Assumes either a theoretical or practical atheist stance because they do not believe that any moral principles have divine sanction
- Emotive response to actions – “thou shall not murder” becomes “I don’t like murder”
- Does not deny that persons can choose to live by some moral standards, but refuse to accept that any law is anything more than the subjective choice of individuals
- Opposed to any timeless moral laws; morals are simply mores that change from place to place and time to time



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“My belief is that if I say something it goes. I am the law, if you don’t like it you die.”

-Eric Harris

Participant in Columbine High School massacre



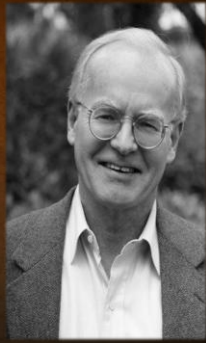
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YOU DON'T HAVE TO BELIEVE IN GOD TO BE A MORAL OR ETHICAL PERSON
 WWW.NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG

People don't need to believe in God to discern moral duties or understand that objective moral values exist. That has never been the argument of Christianity. The Christian argument is that in order to ground an objective moral law, you need to have a transcendent source of those values.

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"We have been unable to show that reason requires the moral point of view or that really rational persons need not be egoists or classical amoralists. Reason doesn't decide here. The picture I have painted for you here is not a pleasant one for me and reflection on this actually depresses me. Pure, practical reason even with the good knowledge of the facts will not take you to morality."
- Atheist Kai Nielson



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"Unless we believe in a transcendent framework of reference to right and wrong, relativism will hold sway, and relativism is self-destructive and mutually contradictory."
- Ravi Zacharias



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The Bible Condemns Antinomianism

"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work"
(2 Thessalonians 2:7)

"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness."
(1 John 3:4)

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2)

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The Bible Condemns Antinomianism


"You shall not do at all what we are doing here today,
every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes"
(Deuteronomy 12:8)

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes"
(Proverbs 12:15)

"Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the Lord
weighs the hearts."
(Proverbs 21:2)

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"I used to live so freely. The mantra for my generation was 'Be your own man!' I always said, 'Hey, you can have whatever rules you want - I'm going to have mine. I'll accept the guilt. I'll pay the check., I'll do the time.' I chose my own way. That was my philosophical position well into my 50s. As I've gotten older, I've had to adjust."
-Jack Nicholson
Parade Magazine Interview



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Overview of Generalism

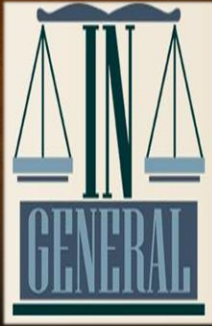
- Generalism believes that there are universally binding moral laws, but believe they are only generally binding and not absolutely binding
- Includes Utilitarian position, which says that whatever brings about the greatest good for the greatest number of people is morally right
- Is the heir of ancient hedonism, which believed that pleasure is the greatest good
- Acts are judged morally right by examining their end results: there is no meaning apart from the result



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Basic Beliefs of Generalism

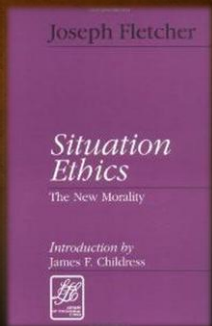
- There are valid moral rules, beliefs, and codes to guide human decisions toward maximizing the good in society, but none of them are exceptionless; all can and should be broken for the principle of utility when the greater good is in jeopardy
- Stealing in general is wrong and paying taxes is generally right because of their effect on society as a whole
- The ultimate goal is happiness and pleasure
- No act has intrinsic value; all acts are judged by the end result



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Overview of Situationism

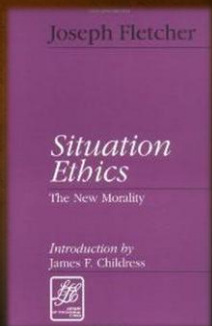
- Most recognized proponent was Joseph Fletcher whose core work on the subject was the book *Situation Ethics*
- Situationism has one and only one absolute law – the law of love
- “Only the command to love is categorically good”
- The situation determines what is right and there is no higher authority that can be appealed to; the situation determines what is love and what is not
- Fletcher admits his view is really utilitarian; the ends do justify the means if done in love



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Basic Beliefs of Situationism

- Has four working principles
- Pragmatism – does the act “work” or satisfy for love’s sake?
- Relativism – everything is relative to the one absolute, love
- Positivism – moral acts are not understood via nature, but rather each person decides on their own values; morals become emotive to each person
- Personalism – moral values are not what persons express, but rather persons are the ultimate moral values. There are no inherently good things; only persons are inherently valuable
- Self-defeating “Never use the word never”



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Overview of Unqualified Absolutism

- Held by thinkers such as Augustine (early years) and Immanuel Kant
- There are moral absolutes that admit no exceptions and never come into contact with one another
- To the question of whether one should lie to save a life, this position says "no"
- Breaking an absolute law to avoid committing what is perceived to be another sin is morally wrong
- According to Augustine, the Hebrew midwives were blessed by God in spite of their lie, not because of it

Absolute Moral Laws Exist

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An Example of Unqualified Absolutism?



Ravi Zacharias tells the story of a friend of his, Hen, who was his translator while he was preaching in Vietnam. Hen was arrested by the North Vietnamese, but had devised a plan to escape by boat. He was confronted by 3 Vietnamese guards about his plan, but he lied and said he wasn't planning on escaping. He felt convicted by God because of his lie and swore to tell the truth if asked again. The guards did indeed come back and ask, and this time he told them the truth. Amazingly, they said they wanted to go with him. Hen said they encountered a terrible storm at sea and it was only because the 3 guards were experienced sailors that they were able to survive and reach freedom.

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Basic Beliefs of Unqualified Absolutism

- Moral conflicts between two absolute moral laws never really occur
- God's unchanging character is the basis of moral absolutes
- God cannot contradict Himself
- Hence, no two absolute moral laws can really conflict
- So, all moral conflicts are only apparent and not real
- Recognizes that moral acts are intrinsic; i.e. the end result is not the final determiner of what is morally good
- Trusts God's providence in all situations

Absolute Moral Laws Exist

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Overview of Conflicting Absolutism

- Claims that moral conflicts do occur in life where two (or more) absolute moral laws come into conflict with one another
- Moral conflicts will arise because this is a fallen world
- Says that a person is guilty of sin no matter what they do in the situation
- The phrase "the lesser of two evils" arises from this position
- Martin Luther's writings sometimes used to justify the stance: "Sin boldly".
- Luther believed although we sin in such situations, we can be forgiven



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Basic Beliefs of Conflicting Absolutism

- God does not desire that moral dilemmas occur, and in the original perfect world He created, they would not have
- Four basic premises:
 1. God's law is absolute
 2. Moral conflicts are unavoidable
 3. The duty is to do the lesser evil
 4. Forgiveness is available
- Problem: How can one have a moral obligation to do that which is immoral?
- Problem: if conflicts are unavoidable in life, then Jesus must have sinned at some point



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Overview of Graded Absolutism

- Originates from Reformed theology
- Agrees that real moral conflicts do occur in this life
- Says that there is a "greater good" vs. a "lesser evil"
- Illustrated numerous times in Scripture such as Jesus apparently giving approval to free an animal that was trapped on the Sabbath
- States that there are 'exemptions' to absolute moral laws
- Believes a person does not sin when they choose to apparently break an absolute moral law



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Basic Beliefs of Graded Absolutism

- There are higher and lower moral laws
- There are unavoidable moral conflicts
- One law must yield to the other in conflicts
- The higher law should be kept. Jesus speaks of "weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23), the "least" and "greatest" commandments (Matt. 22:36)
- No guilt is imputed for the unavoidable



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Biblical Examples of Graded Absolutism

- "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." "This is the great and foremost commandment." (Matthew 22:36-38)
- "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26)
- "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." (Romans 13:1-2) vs. "But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."" (Acts 5:29)

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Biblical Examples of Graded Absolutism



- In Daniel, the three Hebrews disobeyed the king and refused to worship the golden statue (cf. Dan. 3)
- Also in Daniel, Daniel violates the government order not to pray to anyone but the king (cf. Dan. 6)
- "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16) vs. the Hebrew midwives lying to save the Jewish babies and Rahab lying to protect the Hebrew spies in Jericho

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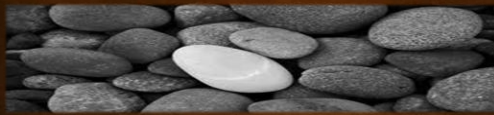
Biblical Examples of Graded Absolutism



"Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. "The Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. "Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.'" The Lord said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.'" Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you." (1 Kings 22:19-23)

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Graded Absolutism vs. Situationism



- Graded absolutism anchors moral in what God says vs. love humans feel; it says God is the source of morality vs. a person deciding on their own
- Graded absolutism acknowledges that things such as wife-swapping (which Joseph Fletcher says is OK if done in love), blasphemy, premarital sex, etc., are sins, whereas Situationism says these could be OK if done in love
- Graded absolutism says there are more absolutes than one
- Graded absolutism says that situational factors help us discover what to do but are not the sole determiner of what we morally do

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Does an "Exemption" violate an Absolute Law?



Even though the law of gravity is an absolute law, a magnet can operate within that absolute law and demonstrate an exemption to it, which is different than an exception to it. The law of gravity is still an absolute law.

In the same way, while killing is normally wrong, exemptions exist: "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. " (Exodus 22:2)

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How do we follow Graded Absolutism?



"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

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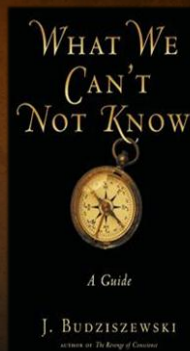
How do we follow Graded Absolutism?

"For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them"
(Romans 2:14-15)




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"Certain moral principles are not only right for all but at some level known to all. They are the universal common sense of the human race, as well as the foundation of its uncommon sense. It makes a difference that they are right for all; otherwise there would be nothing for moral reasoning and persuasion to be about. It makes a difference that they are known to all; otherwise, even though moral reasoning and persuasion would be about something, they could never get started."
~J. Budziszewski



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"Whereas conscience accuses the self the judicial sentiment accuses others. The direction of accusation is the important thing. Conscience monitors one's own moral conduct, while the judicial sentiment monitors the moral conduct of others. Furthermore, conscience is subject to social and cultural conditioning, whereas the judicial sentiment is not. All normal men, past, present, and future, experience an aroused judicial sentiment whenever they are personally mistreated. . . . All aroused judicial sentiment is merely heaven's warning that the image of God is being outraged."
-Edward John Carnell



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Conclusions

- There are at least six basic ethical frameworks from which to choose
- Of all of them, the one that appears to mirror the Biblical standard is Graded Absolutism
- Graded Absolutism is followed by both following God's Word and the internal Law of God written on everyone's hearts



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Got Ethics? Ethical Options – Which is Correct?
