

FINDING AN ETHICAL FOUNDATION IN BIBLICAL FAITH

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This essay demonstrates that the only suitable basis for morality lies in the Judeo-Christian faith. Popular relativistic approaches either rely on one's intuition or society for guidance. However, intuitionism lacks any objective standards and cultural relativism is illogical and often condones what is clearly evil. Philosophy is also wanting since the different ethical philosophies sometimes yield conflicting prescriptions and are subject to the limitations of human reasoning. Natural law and divine revelation are less disputable. However, natural law is less clear than divine revelation. While divine revelation has been criticized on various grounds, none of these is a serious problem. Divine law provides an unequivocal moral authority, and the Bible is a superior divine revelation. However, in ethical dilemmas it requires reasoned application, which can be flawed, although the Holy Spirit guides believers. It is hoped that the arguments in this paper will help both Christian professors and their students be able to intelligently defend Judeo-Christian ethics when they come under attack.

THE NEED TO DEFEND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN MORALITY

Our contemporary culture is in a moral crisis. There is no longer a general consensus on what constitutes morality or on where ethical standards originate. In fact, the whole notion of truth is coming under attack.

Traditionally the majority of Americans believed that the Bible's moral revelation provides fixed permanent guidelines and a basis for moral consensus or common morality. The founding fathers, influenced by their Puritan beliefs, thought the Almighty provided Divine guidance in human affairs. American moral values once were firmly based on a foundation of traditional Judeo-Christian and Western socio-theological laws and principles. Underlying this system is the belief in an intrinsic underlying truth. This belief is central to the Biblical system of ethics and morality. Here, moral and ethical bases are provided through the decrees of a sovereign moral authority, God. As a sovereign, God declares right and wrong, providing a general moral and legal framework for organizing a society. The Bible was considered by most Americans to be a handbook of values, the best textbook ever penned on how to effectively and wisely live life. The basic truths of Western civilization were explicitly spelled out in the Old Testament (e.g., the Ten Commandments) and the New Testament (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount).

There was a gradual turning away from this thinking in Western civilization in the seventeenth century with the advent of the Enlightenment, when many intellectuals proudly proclaimed autonomy from God (Trunfio 1990: 11), although even during the American founding there was

some tension between Enlightenment thinking and Judeo-Christian thought. The Enlightenment's philosophy of *rationalism*, also known as *modernism* or *humanism*, tried to find truth in human reason alone. Because this thinking excluded God, it helped result in a secularization of culture. *Revelation* was replaced by *rationalism* - the thinking was that human reason, not divine will or divine moral law, determines morality. For the first time in Western history the intellectual world said it was possible to create a just order without God.

As a result, today we have two diametrically opposed worldviews: *humanism* and *Christianity* each having very different perspectives. Humanism suggests that individual worth comes from the capacity to reason and the ability to shape character and life according to rational standards. There is no moral authority above reason, through which people can reach the values that guide their lives. Ultimate good is sought through independent thought and action (Dupree 1993: 142).

Christianity, on the other hand, says that individuals have worth because they are created in God's image. God is the ultimate authority. Ethical standards emanate from the personal will of God, and only obedience to God makes people ethical. People cannot perfect themselves through knowledge, reason, or science. Ultimate good comes from knowing, obeying, and loving God (Dupree 1993: 142-43).

However, there is now some evidence that in light of what many people see as a moral morass in society, they are either turning back to traditional religion or toward "New Age" spiritual beliefs, such as reincarnation and human divinity. Moreover, a third worldview became popular in the late 20th century: *postmodernism*. This represents a collapse in the hope of finding truth by human reason alone. Postmodernism insists that human reason alone is incapable of coming up with any overarching, universal truth. It is a form of *relativism* that says that there is no coherent truth that makes sense for everyone, since everyone's reality is different. The thinking is not only that morality is relative to the individual but also that life has no ultimate purpose or meaning.

In such a confused society, the question we face is: where do standards of right and wrong come from? How can we know what is moral or immoral, good or evil, commanded or forbidden, acceptable or unacceptable, noble or base, a virtue or a vice? Today more than ever before, in the face of a perceived moral meltdown across the globe, there is an intense interest in ethics and how we can know whether a given behavior, decision, policy, or institution is ethical. Christians believe that we can know because God has revealed His moral law to us in the Bible. But most of the world disdains this approach, saying that it is "narrow-minded" and entails imposing one's views on others. Therefore, this paper's objective is to help both Christian professors and their students be able to intelligently defend Judeo-Christian ethics when they come under attack.

We begin in the next section with a brief survey of the different possible ethical bases. Subsequent sections evaluate the different ethical foundations. The Judeo-Christian ethic based on Scripture will be shown to be superior to all other ethical systems.

OVERVIEW OF THE POSSIBLE FOUNDATIONS FOR ETHICS

In order to answer the question “How can we know right from wrong?” we must first answer the more general question, “How do we know what we know?” There are five foundations for obtaining knowledge:

1. *Intuition* – One relies on one's own intuition, feelings, experience, accumulated wisdom, and conscience to discern right from wrong. The popular perspective known as *intuitionism* or *emotivism* uses intuition.
2. *Induction* – One relies on empirical observation and experience. This is the domain of *science*. By repeated observation of particular facts or instances we draw general principles or laws (e.g., the law of gravity). Induction is employed by social scientists who describe what they find individuals or societies believe to be ethical. Also, most *philosophers* base their reasoning on observation of the world around them, and especially *natural law* philosophers use this approach by observing what appears to be natural. This is the *descriptive* (rather than *normative* or *prescriptive*) approach to ethics.
3. *Deduction* – One relies on logic and reasoning. This is the realm of *philosophy*. Moral philosophers or ethicists, who engage in “moral reasoning,” practice deduction.
4. *Divine revelation* – God speaks to humans objectively through a holy book believed to be divinely inspired and through the created order, and sometimes through subjective means such as prayer, dreams and visions, and other supernatural phenomena. Divine revelation suggests that God, as the Moral Ruler of the universe, has spoken and revealed Truth, including moral truth, through his Word, the Bible (or other holy books in other religions). This is the domain of *religion*.¹
5. *Instruction* – We learn through instruction that is both formal (e.g., school) and informal (e.g., parents, friends). Aristotle said that moral knowledge is best gained by those with experience and proper upbringing (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapters 3, 4).

There are two approaches to ethics: *normative* and *descriptive*. The study of *normative ethics* is an interdisciplinary study in the domain of the normative disciplines. Such areas of inquiry are *prescriptive*, telling us what we ought to do, prescribing that we perform those actions that are good and proscribing those actions that are evil (Velasquez 1982: 8). They deal with what people really ought to do rather than with what they believe they ought to do (Boatright 1997: 23).

Normative approaches include *deduction*, where humans prescribe right and wrong, and *divine revelation*, where God decides. *Induction* is a descriptive approach to ethics. *Instruction* can be used in either a prescriptive or descriptive way, and is beyond the scope of this paper. *Intuition* relies only on the self, not on the world around oneself (descriptive ethics) or on definite moral rules (normative ethics).

In the next section I will rapidly dispose of the ideas that we can justifiably use intuition or induction as a proper foundation for ethics. Then I will examine, in turn, philosophy and religion as serious contenders. I will conclude that religion, specifically the Judeo-Christian religion, or philosophy, offers the superior alternative.

INTUITION AND INDUCTION: TWO FAULTY BASES FOR MORALITY

The idea of relying on intuition, feelings, and conscience to discern right from wrong is variously known as *intuitionism* (intuition), *emotivism* (feelings), radical *individualism* (morality is relative to the individual's conscience, preferences, and experiences), and *naïve relativism* (human beings are themselves the standard by which their actions should be judged). By default, intuitionism is probably the most popular approach to ethical decision making. Many times when people face a difficult moral choice, they feel left to their own devices. Somehow they must decide what the correct course of action is just by trying to intuit what to do. This came into vogue during the 70's and 80's with the "me" generation, who declared that "I have to do what I feel that I have to do."

Some people believe that people intuitively know what is right - each of us has an inner guide telling us what is the correct action to take. However, this approach does not use the *reason/deduction* that philosophers ordinarily prescribe we use in making moral decisions. Neither does it rely on *induction*, i.e., observing what the world suggests is true. Instead, it relies on *subjective feelings* rather than *objective standards* of good or evil. You may break the rules if you disagree with them. Thus, moral judgments are not *normative statements*, and there is no objective moral truth, i.e., no universal moral standards. This perspective relates to *existentialism*, a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. It regards human experience as inexplicable, and it stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.

According to emotivism, moral judgments are merely expressions of personal feelings, not of facts. This is based on the relativist notion that morality is relative to the *individual*. Saying, "this is wrong," really means, "I don't like it." Moral judgments are expressions of an attitude rather than rational analysis of facts in light of moral standards. The intuitionist judges not the

behavior in question but rather the agent's *motives* or *intentions*. As long she feels that her motives are good, she is "sincere," she does not intend to harm anyone, and she is comfortable doing it, then all is well. It is the "what's-right-for-me" value system. The decision is correct if the individual's *conscience* tells him that it is right. People often advise their friends who face moral dilemmas, "Let your conscience be your guide." The idea is that "if your heart doesn't condemn you," then for you the behavior is okay.

While this approach is easy (no hard thinking is required), is comfortable because it does not violate one's conscience, can be experience-based ("experience is the best teacher"), and maximizes freedom by allowing one to be one's own moral authority, it cannot be accepted as a legitimate basis for justifying morality. The major problem is that the feelings upon which intuitionism is based can deviate from what is ethical (Trunfio 1990: 11), stoked by hatred, lust, envy, bitterness, and other negative emotions. There are no objective guidelines, just subjective feelings – "ethics is in the eye of the beholder" (Rae and Wong 1996: 32). Other problems are that one's conscience can become seared, making differentiation of right and wrong difficult; feelings can be changing and contradictory, leading to inconsistencies over time and place; disagreements among individuals lead to lack of consensus, with people even becoming a law unto themselves; and there is an inability to judge other moral agents since there is a lack of standards and, after all, they are being sincere and can claim good motives.

A second approach to ethics, the *inductive* approach, is in the realm of *descriptive* ethics, studied by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and other social scientists (Feeley and Gendreau 1993: 10-11). Descriptive approaches involve an empirical inquiry into the actual rules, standards, values, and attitudes of a particular group (for example, a sociological study of the values of American managers; public opinion polls on how Americans feel about various controversial moral issues) or of the ethical reasoning process (such as work of psychologists on cognitive moral development). Sociologically, ethics has its sources in various socializing institutions such as the family, church, educational system, and society at large.

We can immediately dismiss the notion that we can look to society's cultural law, and the civil law derived from it, for guidance on morality. This thinking is founded on the misguided concept of cultural relativism, which says that cultures vary widely, and morality is relative to the moral norms and laws of a particular culture, society, or community. Simply, the belief is that morals are mores (social consensus). There are no universal moral principles that are binding on all cultures in all time periods.

Very few moral philosophers would accept cultural relativism as an adequate basis for ethics (Rosaldo 2000: 2), and for good reasons. Culturally shared values or *cultural law* does not

provide an adequate basis for morality since cultural norms arise as a process of consensus among humans and are often situation- and context-specific; hence they are relativistic. As is true of civil law, cultural law and norms often reflect moral absolutes since they are rooted in religious traditions, but this is not guaranteed. For example, the basic truths of Western civilization are explicitly spelled out in the Bible and are implicitly given in great literature. Another problem is that cultural anthropologists and sociologists have pointed to a wide range of practices considered morally acceptable in some societies but condemned in others, including bribery, racism, infanticide, genocide, polygamy, cannibalism, sexism, and torture. Also, cultural relativism is not logical because contradictory imperatives can not both be true. If you believe in the notion of absolute truth and transcendent values (values that transcend culture), then some societies believe what is false and practice what is evil. The cultural relativist must be prepared to tolerate all cultural differences, even the most odious ones. Yet, social stability on a global scale requires universal values. Cultural relativism is subject to confusion between *descriptive ethics* (sociologists describe what exists in a culture) and *prescriptive ethics* (philosophers and religious authorities prescribe what ought to be). We can call this the "is-ought fallacy" - simply because someone *is* doing something does not mean one *ought* to do so.

Moral issues, however, raise *normative* questions about the rights and welfare of people and about the *character* of moral agents, i.e., the types of people we should strive to become. Normative questions are questions of *value* (for example, "Was it morally permissible for starving Mike to steal that loaf of bread?") as opposed to questions of mere *fact* (for instance, "Did starving Mike steal that loaf of bread?"), which are *descriptive*.

The concept of ethics does not dictate or imply a dogmatic response to specific situations. It merely requires a commitment to a core of universal ethical principles or absolute moral principles common to virtually all religions and secular moral philosophy, i.e., the *normative disciplines*, which set standards or norms for judging behavior as good or moral, or as evil or immoral. These normative disciplines are: 1) *moral theology* or religion, which relies on *faith* plus reason to understand and apply the divine revelations of one's religious faith, and 2) *moral philosophy*, which relies on *reason* alone (Feeley and Gendreau 1993: 12).

This leaves us to consider philosophy and religion as bases for ethics. Can we rely on one to the exclusion of the other or must we rely on both to differentiate the good from the bad?

PHILOSOPHY AS AN IMPERFECT ETHICAL BASIS

The most popular approach in academia and the professions to discover what is moral is to rely on *philosophy*, which has been defined as "the love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual

means and moral self-discipline” (*American Heritage Dictionary* 1982: 931). Philosophy relies on *deduction*, inquiring into the nature of the world based on logical human reasoning. However, since philosophy involves the investigation of causes and laws underlying reality, the reasoning is also based on *induction*, i.e., observation of human nature and society. *Moral philosophy* is usually synonymous with the term “*ethics*, (Feeley and Gendreau 1993: 5), the oldest and, according to Socrates, the most important branch of philosophy (Boatright 1997: 22-23). The academic study of ethics is at least 2300 years old. Questions of right and wrong were discussed at length by both Plato and Aristotle during the classical period in Athens, Greece, and have been treated by Western philosophers ever since. In Oriental philosophy such questions appeared even earlier (Gilbert 1992).

Most philosophers subscribe to the idea that there are absolute moral laws that can be discovered by reason. The "oughts" are rational. For example, rational thinking is the basis for Kant's *categorical imperative* (ask the following questions regarding the action in question: “What if everyone did that? Would you want that behavior to become normative?”), i.e., categorical "oughts" must be accepted by rational people because the “oughts” are rational. However, relying on rational moral principles is problematic because it is a self-willed, autonomous approach to ethics. Immanuel Kant, in fact, taught about the *autonomous will* - one does not determine moral principles by conditions or persons other than himself. For Kant, that means we should not accept any moral laws outside ourselves - not from parents, not from teachers, and especially not from God. The *autonomous self*, Kant taught, creates its own law (Colson 1996). Thus, the paradox is that, while Kant taught about absolutes such as the categorical imperative (a version of the Golden Rule), they are created in a relativistic sense. In short, human reasoning can be flawed and does not really create consistent absolute standards.

This inconsistency is demonstrated by the fact that work in the field of moral philosophy in the twentieth century has evolved from two basic and often conflicting approaches: *teleological* theory (focus on *consequences*) and *deontological* theory (focus on *duties*). The major teleological principle is *utilitarianism*, and the major deontological theories are *rights* theory and *justice* theory. Each principle/theory/perspective/framework uses different criteria to evaluate ethical behavior. Each perspective examines a given moral dilemma from a different moral point of view and suggests certain minimum moral standards. Thus, *utilitarianism* has sometimes been called the *negative harm principle*: avoid actions that increase a net balance of harms. *Rights theory* suggests a respect for basic rights: do not engage in activities which violate or increase the violation of basic human rights. *Justice theory* suggests that we not engage in or continue actions

which increase injustices, e.g., that increase the treatment of persons who are equal on relevant criteria as unequal or that increase unfair distributions.

A problem is that no perspective is sufficient by itself because none of the theories captures all of the factors that must be considered when rendering moral judgments (Velasquez 1996: 128). For instance, utilitarianism considers aggregate societal welfare but ignores the individual and how that welfare is distributed; rights theory considers individual moral rights but not aggregate welfare or distributional effects; and justice theory considers the distribution of benefits and burdens among individuals but not aggregate welfare and individual rights. Therefore, typically the philosophers who write the textbooks suggest that all theories should be given consideration, although only one might be most relevant in a particular situation (Velasquez 1998: 128).²

While the various philosophical perspectives enable us to use critical reasoning skills in reaching the postconventional level of analysis in Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral cognitive development, different ethical theories sometimes promote rival answers to moral dilemmas, resulting in uncertainty for moral agents. Conventional wisdom in many ethics textbooks is that when there is a conflict among the results yielded by the different approaches, judgment should be used in weighting the different theories (Velasquez 1998: 127-130).

In such conflicts between the different perspectives some ethicists feel that rights take precedence over justice, which take priority over utilitarian consequences, although there can be exceptions (Velasquez 1998: 128). For instance, if a certain action (or decision, policy or institution) promises to generate sufficiently large social benefits or prevent sufficiently large social harm, the enormity of these utilitarian consequences might justify limited infringements on individual rights or departure from standards of justice. The big problem here is determining where you draw the line -- how large does the utilitarian value have to be and how limited should the rights infringements or departure from justice standards have to be? Moral philosophers have not agreed on any absolute rules here (Velasquez 1998: 128). The answers are still subjective and intuitive - hence relativistic.

Where there is conflict among criteria *within* a given approach, such as between two or more duties, between utilitarian consequences, between the rights of competing individuals (such as privacy vs. free speech), or between different canons of justice, one should choose the more important of the two -the stronger obligation. Of course, this choice tends to also be a result of subjective judgments. There is no sure procedure for making comparative determinations. Modern ethicists such as Velasquez commonly explain that each of these basic categories of ethical theory is inadequate by itself but, when all are considered together, they can provide a reasonable framework for analyzing ethical problems. What these philosophers fail to recognize

is that these perspectives are not different facets of the same jewel but that sometimes two different theories can be opposed to one another at the deepest level (Kennedy 1999: 3). For instance, Kant says it is the act and the actor's intention to do the right thing that counts, whereas utilitarians say it is the consequences of the act that make it morally good. It is a sign of the poverty of contemporary moral philosophy (at least to the extent that it finds its way into ethics textbooks) that this opposition is portrayed as complementary (Kennedy 1999: 3). None of the traditional consequentialist or deontologist moral theories are sufficient in themselves.

Thus, there are two schools of thought. The above represents the majority ecumenical view which is agnostic as to the best theory and which looks for a convergence of judgment among alternative theories. The second school of thought says that because of philosophy's shortcomings, one must turn to religion.

RELIGION AS A BETTER FOUNDATION FOR ETHICS

The second normative discipline concerned with moral matters is *religion* or *theology*, often neglected by modern scholars. The dictionary defines religion as "belief in and reverence for a supernatural power recognized as the creator and governor (in this context, moral authority) of the universe." (*American Heritage Dictionary* 1982: 1044). *Theology* is defined as "the study of the nature of God and religious *truth*" (*The American Heritage Dictionary* 1982: 1260). This gives us faith-based ethics, where *faith* involves belief and trust in God and religious convictions about truths in matters of right and wrong. This might be why former departments of "theology" in colleges are now called departments of "religious studies" – postmodern professors no longer believe they know what truth is.

The fact that morality is independent of individual desires (egoism) has led many to characterize morality in terms of an absolute and independent moral agent, usually God. This suggests that we must answer to and abide by the revealed moral laws of our Creator (or of the gods in pagan religions) (Gilbert 1992: 6). Any religion provides its adherents with a *world view*, part of which involves certain moral instructions and values (Shaw 1992: 9). For instance, Judeo-Christian teaching says that life is sacred because we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

God's revealed moral laws include (1) *natural law* i.e., a body of laws that derives from nature and is believed to be binding upon human actions apart from or in conjunction with laws established by human authority, and (2) *divine revelation*. I now examine each one in turn.

Since there are natural law philosophers, natural law entails a point of intersection between philosophy and religion. The concept of *nature* refers to the proper ordering of the universe.

Aristotle defined nature as the material world in its pristine condition, unaltered by human intervention (Aristotle, *Physics*, Book II, Chapter 1). Behavior which follows from this material nature is said to be natural to it. Things strive toward ends or goals, and this is the natural order built into them. By observing something in nature, one can discern its intended purpose in the natural order. This end indicates how the thing should act.

Natural law is a body of laws which derives from nature (and God, if, like John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and other such natural law philosophers, you believe that the “Laws of Nature” derive from “Nature’s God”) (Geisler 1991: 160). The laws are believed to be binding upon human activity apart from or in conjunction with laws established by human authority. Just as there are laws governing the *physical* aspects of the universe, there are laws governing the *moral* aspects of the universe (Rae and Wong 1996: 120). Thus, values such as equality and liberty are as real as material aspects of the universe.

Based on the thinking of Greek philosopher St. Augustine and Dominican theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas, and other philosophers like John Calvin, John Locke and Thomas Jefferson, natural law philosophers say that an act is morally wrong if it is incompatible with universal human nature (Geisler 1991: 158-59). Thus, *human nature*, which consists of mind and matter, or body and soul, provides the key to how people ought to live their lives. This rules out acts which cause potential physical or psychological harm, such as child abuse, drunkenness (leads to sickness and vile behavior), "casual sex" (sexually transmitted diseases are not a casual thing), and even foolish behavior. Augustine, perhaps inspired by Romans 1:27, said that God was just in punishing unbelievers for not living in accordance with the "law of God written on their hearts" (Geisler 1991: 159). Natural law is an absolute law since human nature and the natural order do not change. Therefore, whatever ethical norms are derived from nature also do not change from time to time or place to place.

The political philosophy of the Greeks (and later of Aquinas) said that natural law could be discovered by observation and experience (*induction*) and by *reason (deduction)*, by observing the operations of nature and society and drawing logical conclusions. These moral laws are naturally discerned by our minds. What reason discovers by reflecting on the natural order is consistent with what man intuitively knows through his *conscience*. Thus, through reason alone, everyone can know the basic principles of right and wrong (Davis 1985: 18). Aquinas therefore believed that natural law is imposed on everyone, whereas divine law is ordained only for believers. Consistent with Romans 1:19 ("That which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them"), Calvin said that we have an innate knowledge of God, including moral awareness of His natural law. Calvin believed that such knowledge makes

people ashamed of sins like adultery and theft (Geisler 1991: 159). Thus, natural law provides moral absolutes that all can agree on.

But, natural law is not just a process of induction and deduction, but also a general form of divine revelation. Whereas *natural law* is a *general revelation* given to everyone through experience and reason, *divine law* is a *special revelation* given only to believers (Geisler 1991: 157). Romans 2:14 describes natural law as what people "do by nature" as a result of the law written on their hearts, i.e., the law of conscience: "Gentiles...show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness..." According to Romans 1:27-31, those who disobey natural law go contrary to nature, and as a natural consequence they bring upon themselves the natural punishment they deserve for their sin (e.g., unwanted pregnancy and venereal disease are sometimes divine judgment for fornication).

A big advantage of natural law is that it provides a set of fairly indisputable standards "written on the hearts of men" (Romans 2:14-15) which are invariant across cultures. As Romans 1:19 says, natural revelation "is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." Nonetheless, sin has distorted peoples' perception of the truth, and so they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1: 18).

One's real moral beliefs are manifest not so much in what one does but in what one wants done to oneself, i.e., the Golden Rule. Through asking, "What would I like someone else to do to me?" you can read God's natural law written on your own heart. Thus, natural law can be instinctively seen, which is why Christ, in summarizing the moral law, declared, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." (Matt. 7:12). (Geisler 1991: 165).

Roman Catholics, in trying justify their moral laws to a broader audience than just believers, lean heavily on natural law as synthesized by medieval theologians (Rae and Wong 1996: 120). For instance, they prohibit reproductive technologies, believing they interfere with God's natural order from conception through pregnancy to birth; have proscriptions against genetic engineering as "playing God" (Rae and Wong 1996: 145); and view homosexual acts as unnatural since they are not compatible with the way our bodies were designed, frustrating the natural order and easily leading to disease. God can be said to be just when he holds even nonbelievers to these standards since they can be intuitively known. This is supported in Scripture by the Old Testament prophets' condemnation of pagan neighbors who, while not having the Law of Moses, were nonetheless condemned by God (Rae and Wong 1996: 146).

However, because of their fallen nature, not everyone accepts natural law arguments. As Romans 1:18-25 points out, they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" and "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Geisler 1991: 163). Scripture's special revelation is therefore sometimes

needed to supplement natural revelation since it is not always clear if something is natural because of sin or because of creation (Skillen 1996: 132-37). Also, natural law will not resolve ethical issues regarding public policy issues (for example, what part of a “just price” should be set by the marketplace and what part by government regulation?).

One problem with reasoned nature is that no two Natural Law theorists have ever been able to agree exactly on all provisions of the reasoned truth (Skillen 1996: 135), although many have agreed on some points, e.g., “Do good and avoid evil” (Celano). Much clearer is the revelation of God in Scripture. Such *divine revelation* is a higher form of law than *natural law* (e.g., natural law requires us gain justly while divine law urges us to give liberally) (Geisler 1991: 174) and reflects the beauty of God's holiness.

The Christian religion, which I will argue is the only adequate basis for moral decision making, is based on Biblical revelation (God has spoken His Word, e.g., Ten Commandments, Sermon on the Mount, etc.), which is the basis for *Judeo-Christian values*. In addition to divine revelation, Christianity also relies on church *traditions*. As a Protestant I believe in the superiority of divine revelation should there ever be a conflict, since traditions come primarily through humans, whose reasoning can be flawed.

There is a standard above our own ideas of right and wrong (i.e., a *transcendent standard*). Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Moral absolutes can be divinely inspired. Most religions claim to provide the certain standards that the human heart yearns for. Whereas *relativistic* rules are bound within a *closed system* (self-contained universe) and no appeal can be made to a principle or existence outside the system (Engel et. al. 1978: 649), God makes the rules in an *open system* where morality is revealed from outside the human mind (say, of philosophers) and human experience (Engel et. 1978: 651). *Relativists* substitute mankind's ideas about right and wrong for God's revealed moral will. They practice *situation ethics*, not religious ethics. A me-oriented secular culture does not like the idea of submitting to god's external standards, which suggests that some things are plain wrong.

Whereas intuition, cultural law, civil law, philosophy, and natural law all ultimately depend on the operations of the human mind and are human-centered, divine revelation depends on a "higher law" which comes from the mind of God and is therefore God-centered. Nonetheless, imperfect men perceive the facts and values. God is the moral Ruler of the universe (Master of the Universe, if you will). From a deontological perspective, our ultimate duty is to obey God and His revealed will. In fact, the world's three great religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, are all strongly deontological. A Biblical ethic is a blend of *divine commands*, *natural law*, and

virtues/moral character. It says that ethical people are people of good character, and that becoming a Christian entails a character transformation (Hill 1997: 14).

For many people a religious base for ethics is problematic. First, moral revelation is not necessarily consistent with the 18th century *rationalism* of the Enlightenment, which is a strong influence in today's world. Disagreements can ensue if religious faith and individual interpretations of revelation solely determines morality. One person says, "God says do X" and another says, "God says do Y." The dispute is supposedly not reconcilable; thus, theology alone, philosophers have argued, does not provide a basis of ethics (Bowie 1990). For philosophers, the issue is whether moral beliefs can be rationally justified. "Orthodox secularists believe that their positions are fully and decisively vindicated by reason and therefore can be judged to have been displaced only on the basis of irrational or at least nonrational faith" (George 1998: 3). However, if it can be proven that the truth claims of the Bible are valid and reasonable, this argument breaks down. Although this is an issue beyond the scope of this paper, there are many solid arguments in support of the truth of the Bible, such as 100% fulfilled prophecy, manuscript evidence which surpasses that of any other ancient works, archaeological evidence supporting Biblical stories and history, historical accuracy, the unified message of many different authors (most of whom had no contact with one another), and the transformed character of believers (Strobel 1999).

Another problem is that there are minorities of people who fail grow up with access to religious training or who do not believe in God. However, non-religious people can also be ethical and subscribe to the same values as religious people. Often, people act morally out of habit, or simply because that is the kind of person they are, or because they want others' approval, to appease their consciences, to avoid punishment, or due to other rational reasons to want to be ethical (Lantos 1998: 8). In a culture where many do not accept the moral authority of the Bible, natural law is a perfectly consistent (albeit less clear) substitute since God is the Creator of nature.

Another objection is that supposedly God's written commands absolve us of the need to think and reason regarding moral matters. *Divine command theory* says something is wrong simply because God says so in a sacred writing - that "good" is defined in terms of what God wills. Whatever action God defines as a good action is a good action, and whatever action He defines as evil is evil -- moral justification is not needed (Shaw and Barry 1992: 11). God did not justify His rules. It is not, "You should not commit adultery because..." but rather you should not do so because of His moral authority: "Thus saith the Lord." Divine command theory suggests that certain truths are not discernible by the unaided human mind but rather are known because God has made them known in a special way.

However, most philosophers and many theologians would say we should go beyond the divine

moral laws and also be able to justify/explain why what God has decreed wrong is, in fact, immoral (aside from the fact that God is good and therefore his laws are for our own good). Thinking believers should be able to justify why something is wrong other than simply because "God says so." Revealed truth is also *reasoned* truth.

Thus, in specific cases, divine commands must be supplemented with *moral reasoning* (although the danger here is the imperfection of human reasoning and moral corruption within us all). Within a given religious tradition, people sometimes disagree on interpretation of the sacred writings since the moral instructions of the world's great religions are general and somewhat vague (Shaw 1992: 10). Although prescriptions like, "thou shalt not steal" seem fairly unambiguous, many specific situations are exceedingly complex and defy the application of biblical precepts. For example, it is easy to apply the principle that God does not condone stealing to know that stealing an automobile to take a joy ride is wrong. Other situations require more difficult judgments and analysis. For instance, is a poor, starving man justified in stealing a loaf of bread/? Or, consider that Polaroid and Eastman Kodak battled in the courts for years because Kodak developed an instant film process similar to Polaroid's. Kodak said its process was different and thus a separate invention. Polaroid claimed that it was stolen. The courts agreed with Polaroid and rejected the argument of Eastman Kodak. Is Kodak's slightly different product a new product? How do we interpret God's commandment against stealing in this situation? And even prescriptions like "Thou shalt not kill" are interpreted variously - does this commandment allow fighting in war, capital punishment, or killing in self-defense?

Due to these gray areas, believing in the existence of godly absolutes does not negate the need to make moral judgments. We should test Scripture with rational thought and intellectual argument; since God has given us these capacities to use- Matthew 22:37 tells us to love God with our entire *mind*. God's commands do not do away with our need to make moral judgments, which ultimately do require moral reasoning and, as the secular literature so often suggests, consultation with others (for Christians these would be godly others). We are to take advantage of God's gift of human reasoning capacity.

Another complication is that moral choices do not always involve choices between one thing that is wrong and another that is right. Often choices are between two or more "*rights*." For example, consider business decisions relating to the use of profits. Should they be used to increase wages, cut prices, reinvest in capital equipment, or increase the owner's dividends? The morally superior alternative is not completely clear, since any of the choices will benefit some stakeholder group. We also confront choices in our world, which is dominated by sin, in which none of the alternatives are good. For example, when a business faces economic difficulty it

might be necessary to choose between laying employees off or letting the business go into further decline. Scripture does not provide an easy answer as to which is the lesser of the two evils.

Thus, although God's moral standards are absolute, the way we apply them using moral reasoning does change to fit unique circumstances. In fact, some moral idealists, variously called *contextual absolutists*, *near absolutists*, *prima facie absolutists* (absolutists “on the surface”), or *graded absolutists*, believe that there are many absolute laws that conflict in certain circumstances, and we are responsible to obey the higher law. These contextual absolutists hold that in each and every situation there is a course of action that is morally right in that situation (e.g., lying) even though in general it is wrong. That is, near absolutists allow for justifiable exceptions to the general moral principles, depending on the circumstances. For instance, some believe that abortion is wrong except in cases of rape, incest, or to save a mother's life (in which case, however, it would seem that the value of human life inside the womb is viewed as a secondary value to the life and health of the mother).

Under the principle of *hierarchicalism* there is a *hierarchy of values and interests*: when norms conflict one must determine which is the higher norm and obey it - the norms have exceptions. It is our duty to obey the higher rule, and we are not guilty for breaking the lesser rule. For example, lying is generally wrong, but exceptions can be made to, for instance, protect a person's sensitivities (“little white lies,” for example, telling your child that the ugly picture she painted is pretty) or for national security reasons (for instance, Colin Powell lied to reporters about Desert Storm).

Thus, ours is to be a *reasoned faith*. In the Old Testament God tells us “‘Come now, let us *reason* together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’” (Isaiah 1:18). In the New Testament, He says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the *reason* for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15). This is the heart of Christian apologetics: reasonably explaining or defending our faith. First Thessalonians 5:21 exhorts us to “*examine* everything, hold fast to that which is *good*.” Most religions hold that human reason is capable of understanding what is right and wrong, but in Christianity it is *reason inspired by the Holy Spirit* who indwells believers (Romans 9:1: “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit”). In fact, a Christian is someone who has had their thinking transformed according to the power of God (Rom. 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will; Eph. 4:17-24) (Hannegraaf). General moral values alone often do not cut it when it comes to sticky ethical

dilemmas. Here, we must use our God-given intelligence. Nonetheless, God's absolutes-- commands to love God, love our neighbors, do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God-- provide us with certain principles that provide general guidance. They reflect the righteousness of God and a belief in the worth of humans because they are created in God's image.

Another objection to divine revelation is that religion is authoritarian. However, there is nothing wrong with acknowledging that the Ultimate Authority has ultimate authority. If an absolutely perfect God exists, then by His very nature He is the ultimate standard of what is good and what is evil. The problem with the *authoritative viewpoint of ethics* (to be ethical is to obey humans in authority over you) is that human authorities are fallible, but God is perfect.

A final objection to a religious base for morality is that there are too many religions - which one's moral precepts should we follow? After all, the great world religions disagree on the nature of God. For instance, Hinduism teaches pantheism (God exists in everything) while Christianity teaches that God is separate from all He has created and exists in three persons, the trinity; some religions are polytheistic (many gods), while Christianity is monotheistic (one God, three persons), and of salvation (most religions teach that it is earned through works while Protestant Christianity says it is a free gift given through God's grace to those who have faith and Catholic Christianity views it as a combination of works and faith).

Fortunately, by and large these religions agree on common moral standards. For example, most religions believe that sex outside of marriage is sinful and discourage excess in acquisition and constraint in consumption (Lastovicka et. al. 1999: 86). Most world religions include a statement of compassion, kindness, and reciprocity (treating others as you would wish to be treated) similar to the Golden Rule. However, there are exceptions: some religions teach polygamy, women as less valuable than men; mutilation of female genitals, and other ideas and practices inconsistent with Christianity. Nonetheless, there is a body of moral values common to all religious traditions (*common morality*: do not lie, cheat, steal, etc.). In fact, all of the world's religions met in the 1993 Parliament of World Religions to draft a Declaration of Global Ethics which affirmed a common set of *core values* to form the basis of a *global ethic*. A basic idea was "we must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others" (Sikula 1996: 80). Our common religious culture in the U. S. provides for us a basis of moral consensus that can be applied to modern-day circumstances

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that on some moral principles religions disagree, and even within a religion people can disagree among themselves due either to different honest interpretations or to stubborn refusal to believe in the religion's teachings (Shaw 1992: 11). However, this is not the degree of conflict we find between mutually inconsistent ethical

philosophies. Also, we must be careful not to equate religious principles with morality, for, as we have just seen, some false religions have immoral guidelines, and even some true religions have strayed and done reprehensible things (e.g., the Roman Catholic Inquisition, which involved the execution of religious heretics; the Protestant Salem witch trials).

THE BIBLE AS THE BEST BASIS FOR MORALITY

Bible-believing Christians conclude that other “holy books” of other religions, while usually containing good moral truths, can not be trusted as the Truth since some of their teachings conflict with Christianity, such as the nature and work of Christ as the Messiah, the nature of God as trinity, and salvation being based on faith plus nothing (vs. works). Bible believers point to evidence such as fulfilled prophecy and transformed lives as outlined above as support of the veracity of the Scriptures.

In the U.S., most believers (Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jewish) rely on the *Judeo/Judaic-Christian value system* derived from the teachings of the Bible. Judaic-Christian revelation created and nurtured Western civilization and gave rise to what we now call "traditional values."

In Israel, moral behavior was guided by the Judaic religion. Its tenets were spelled out in the commandments of the Mosaic Law, as outlined in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Many of the biblical proverbs dealt with issues such as competition, profits, selling, saving, obeying the law, honesty, integrity, greed, deception, and conflicts of interest. The Mosaic Law also discussed some of these issues. Members of Hebrew society were expected to follow these standards without question.

Today, Orthodox Jews strictly adhere to the mandates of the Old Testament plus teachings of the great Rabbis through the ages. Protestant Christians adhere to the dictums of the New Testament, which claim that God has added to His self-revelation in Jesus Christ and Christ's new teachings (such as the Sermon on the Mount, which expanded on the 10 commandments - anger is as bad as murder, whoever lusts after a woman has committed adultery with her in his heart, love your enemies, and other teachings in Matthew 5), as well as the Old Testament teachings which have not been superseded by the New Testament. Christians point out the many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah which have been fulfilled in Christ, most notably Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Protestants believe in private interpretation of the Scriptures and in the Bible as the ultimate moral authority. They believe that human reason inspired by the Holy Spirit will reveal truth to the believer. Catholics also believe in the truth and authority of the Bible, but the Catholic Church (e.g., the Pope) is seen as the only accurate and divinely inspired interpreter of this divine revelation.

Liberal theology in all three traditions now abandons the idea of divine revelation. For liberals, religion becomes essentially a dimension of human experience with no reference point outside that experience. However, this is very subjective and nonverifiable. They subscribe to Nietzsche's thesis that "God is dead" and therefore religion can not be used to determine people's values.

To both modernism and postmodernism the Word of God responds: "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God, for it is written 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message we preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:18-21). 1 Corinthians 3:19-20 says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God, for it is written, 'He is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'the Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.'"

When you talk about a code of ethics, I do not see how you can improve on the Bible. This handbook of values is the best textbook ever written on how to effectively and morally live life (2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"). For example, the Old Testament still offers the best literature on business ethics: the books of Amos and Isaiah are all about the ethics of work, wealth, and poverty. Biblical truths about honest scales, helping the poor, not cheating others, and fair wages are unchanging, and the profoundly life-changing book of Proverbs has many references to deceptive and irresponsible business practices.

Without God's special revelation we lack a moral authority. Plato said that society could not survive without an ultimate source of authority. Cicero explained that justice is impossible without God. George Washington said in his farewell address to Congress in 1797: "And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion...reason and experience forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle" (Abrams 1998). In Dostoyovsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, three brothers debate the source of evil in the world. The older brother, who is unregenerate, debates the younger brother, Alexis the priest, over the soul of the middle brother, Ivan. At one point, Ivan yells out and says, "Ah, if there is no God, then everything is permissible" (Quoted in Colson *Sources* 1992: 22). The legal scholar, Arthur Leff, said that without the ultimate warrant of divine revelation, all claims to moral authority are vulnerable to "the grand 'sez who?'" (Colson,

July 1999). Without God, sin becomes whatever makes us feel uncomfortable. Being good is replaced by feeling good. We become a law unto ourselves and a people living for ourselves. Who is to say for sure that Hitler was wrong in murdering six million Jews?

Absent a religious foundation, morality becomes a matter of personal preference, more often than not, a code of convenience (Feder 1992: 13). Morality without a religious base crumbles. Every society which has abandoned a religious moral base for one based on human reasoning has collapsed violently (e.g., the French Revolution). Liberals like George Eliot and J.S. Mill thought it possible to get rid of God while retaining Christian morality. They did not realize that when one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. Morality is and always has been based on religious principle. The virtuous pagan, helped in part by restraints he alone has imposed, is a greater rarity than the yellow-bellied sapsucker. The alternative to religion, *secularism (secular humanism)*, is itself a sectarian doctrine with its own metaphysical and moral propositions and foundations. It is a religion (George 1998: 4), demonstrating that not just any religion will do for a moral basis.

For 23 centuries there has been a transcendent value system to guide human behavior - whether it was the unknown god of the Greeks, the natural law of the Enlightenment thinkers, Yahweh of the Old Testament revealed to the Jew, or the Christ of the Scriptures revealed to the Christian (Colson *Sources* 1996: 6-7). This belief guided our conduct until a great cultural revolution began in America in the 1920s and 1930s when people began to challenge the idea of fixed and common moral standards, an ideology that exploded in the 1960s. In today's New Age, God does not exist. If He does, he is no party to the debate. Each of us, individually, determines his own moral code, and we will decide, democratically, of course, what is right and wrong (e.g., the idea of "victimless crimes" -- vs. scriptural teaching that no one's sin only affects him).

The Judeo-Christian ethic is the only adequate basis for moral action for several reasons. First, while other ethical systems can postulate good moral views, only a Judaic-Christian view can *justify* them. This is because: (1) unless ethics is rooted in the unchangeable nature of a morally perfect being (God), there is no basis for believing in morals, and (2) if everything is relative, there *is* no good reason why anyone ought to refrain from doing anything he or she wishes. There are no real grounds for justifying right and wrong.

Also, some other religions advocate what we know is immoral because it is written on our hearts. For example, two of the greatest attributes of Christianity are liberty and equality. Male/female, white/black/brown/red/yellow. It is all equal footing beneath the cross (Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."). That is not true with some of the world's best-

known religions. For example, in the Islamic society of Afghanistan, women are treated repressively: they must wear government-prescribed attire, are not allowed to work or even go out in public without a male relative, and husbands have the official power of life or death over their wives. Hinduism has the caste system in which there is a lower element of society, once called the untouchables, who are considered outcasts. Although modernization and industrialization have fortunately weakened the caste system over time, its influence can still be felt, especially in more rural areas.³

Only a Judeo-Christian ethic is *universal*. This is because not only is it expressed in the Bible, it is also written on the human hearts of all people (for example, the Golden Rule as discussed above). As another example, recall that natural law is consistent with Christianity's view on divine revelation. Thus, the argument that Christian ethics are uniquely religious is wrong. It is not just limited to Judaism and Christianity but is universally available to all by way of God's *general revelation* to all peoples.

The answer to Dostoevsky's famous question, "Can man be good without God?" is an emphatic "No." This is because the human will is rebellious – naturally prone to sin. The human will is not strong enough to maintain a life of decency and morality apart from the transforming of that will by the power of Christ. Only the power of God's spirit can enable us to live a moral and righteous life. We can not create a good and just society on our own, without reference to a transcendent moral authority, and sustain it on our own strength, that is, apart from Jesus Christ. From the earliest days of Christianity its teaching has focused upon the role of God in achieving good. God's help was necessary to achieve good. Will and intelligence alone were insufficient.

There are two things which make the Christian ethic different from other, lesser theistic ethics: (1) it has been perfectly lived by one Person who is the perfect role model, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one Who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin"), and (2) the Christian ethic is unique in its *empowerment*. God has not only given us a role model in Jesus Christ but also a divine ability to do the good we are commanded to do. As Saint Paul said, "Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:2-4). This is not to say that the Christian is or can become perfect. Christians still experience the struggle between the new nature and the old nature (Romans 7:13-25).

This idea that Christians possess the truth and all others are wrong is offensive to many people. It used to be understood that Christianity is a universalist religion, one that claims to be true for all people--in contrast to pagan religions, which were often tied to a particular place or ethnic group. And since it is a religion for all humankind, Christianity is by nature a proselytizing religion--one that seeks to convert others by sharing the Good News. But in today's intellectual climate, people are offended because they have rejected the notion of any universal truth--at least in the area of religion. Objective truth is found, if anywhere, only in science; in matters of religion and morality, all we have is subjective faith and belief. So, there can be different truths for different groups--morality is relative to the individual, group, or society (*relativism*). Thus, to try to persuade others of universal truth claims is regarded as an insult. In today's postmodernist world, the attitude is: "I have my truth, and you have yours, and for you to intrude on mine is a violation of common courtesy." Such people slot the Christian message into postmodernist mental categories: They will regard Christianity as one more non-rational, subjective belief system. Hence, to try to persuade others of Christian beliefs is taken as an offense against the peace. In this way, the traditional ideal of tolerance has turned into intolerance--where Christianity's universalistic claims are denounced as selfish, exclusionist, and promoting hatred. Therefore, before Christians can persuade people that Christianity is true, they must first explain the very nature of truth - that we are not talking about a private, subjective experience, but about a truth that is universally valid and rationally defensible (Colson, Nov. 8, 1999).

Christianity teaches that we answer to the revealed laws of our Creator not to save us (salvation requires repentance and following Christ), but rather because these laws are given for our own good since God is good. Most Christians believe that God gives us moral rules for moral reasons and because He cares for us (rather than just being mean or arbitrarily imposing his will on us). After all, the injunction "So that it may go well with you" often follows Old Testament commands. His law is for our own good since He has created the world in such a way that sin - the breaking of His law - always has negative repercussions (Numbers 32:23: "Be sure your sin will find you out"). Generally, when we obey His moral law things will go well and when we disobey them things will not go well. We also want to obey divine commands to live a life pleasing to God and to demonstrate our love for Him. God's laws--commands to love God, love our neighbors, do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God--provide us with absolute principles that guide every situation. They reflect the righteousness of God and a belief in the worth of humans because they are created in God's image.

If there is a conflict between philosophy and Christianity, we should prefer Christianity since it is based on God's infallible Word (the Bible) as revealed to men (divine revelation) rather than human reasoning, which can be flawed (Proverbs 16:25 "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"). However, it is fallacious to say that a person who does not believe in God or the Bible cannot be ethical. There are, unfortunately, unethical Christians in the world and there are some ethical atheists. Also, Christians cannot justify their faith-based decisions to unbelievers since they do not share that faith with Christians.

CONCLUSION

We need a theistic, and in particular, Judeo-Christian foundation for ethics. The relativistic approaches, which rely on intuition or on inductively relying on societal norms for guidance, have been found to be lacking. The major deficiencies with intuitionism are its reliance on subjective feelings rather than objective standards, plus the imperfection of the human conscience and lack of consensus among individuals. The inductive approach, which empirically describes the ethical standards of a particular group or society, has many problems, which include its condoning of clearly evil cultural practices such as bribery and racism, its inviting of global disputes regarding ethical practices, and its concern with descriptive ethics rather than prescriptive/normative ethics. Philosophical deduction has also shown to come up short since the different ethical philosophies sometimes yield conflicting prescriptions for a given ethical dilemma and are subject to the limitations of human reasoning. Relying on rational moral principles such as rights and justice is problematic because it is a self-willed, autonomous approach to ethics.

Christians, on the other hand, believe that God has revealed His moral laws in both nature and Scripture, which provide the two necessary bases for moral order. Philosophers, statesmen, and common folk have all recognized through the ages that we must look outside ourselves to nature and to God to discover the rules whereby we must live. However, natural law, popular as an ethical basis in many Roman Catholic colleges, while giving general absolute direction which is invariant across cultures, is less clear and specific than divine revelation given in holy books of various religions, and it is open to interpretation of human reasoning. Divine revelation, unlike all of the other ethical bases, depends not on the operations of the human mind but rather on a "higher law" originating in the mind of God.

We have examined and responded to the major perceived limitations of theistic ethics, such as how to resolve disputes with unbelievers, the untrue perception that theistic ethics negates the need for reasoning and induces "blind faith," its lack of definitive guidance in many specific

situations, its perceived authoritarianism, and the problem of choosing which religious system to follow. Regarding the latter, although by and large most religions agree on common moral standards, there are still some important differences.

Ultimately, the Bible provides the best basis for morality. The Judeo-Christian ethic is the only adequate foundation for moral action for several reasons. First, while other ethical systems can postulate good moral views, only a Judaic-Christian view can justify them. Second, only a Judeo-Christian ethic is universal. Third, there are two things which make the Christian ethic different from other religious moral systems: (1) it has been perfectly lived by the perfect role model, Jesus Christ, and (2) only the Christian ethic empowers people to live by its commands.

The teachings of Scripture are the final court of appeal for ethics. Human reason, church traditions, and the natural and social sciences might aid moral reflection, but divine revelation found in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments constitutes the "bottom line" of the decision-making process (Davis 1985: 9).

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ENDNOTES

¹ Most philosophers would not ascribe the term “knowledge” to religion or divine revelation, saying instead that it is a belief or perception (Celano).

² It should be noted that it is the modern textbook authors who make the error of saying that all ethical theories should be considered and melded, if possible. This is not the perspective of the great philosophical thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Rawls, et al. (Celano).

³ Although some would argue that Christianity abuses women in giving them second-class status, to do so twists the Scriptures. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is perhaps the most famous passage in the New Testament that assigns equal status to individuals of both genders (and all races, nationalities and slave status). However, the biblical roles of men and women do vary (for example, 1 Corinthians 11:3: “Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife, and the head of Christ is God.; Ephesians 5:22-24: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife...wives should submit to their husbands in everything”).