

This Page:  
**Measuring Morality**

- | **The Moral Dilemma - Who Makes the Rules?**
- | **Conclusion**
- | **Notes / Further Reading**

**Mind Games  
 Survival Course  
 Manual**



Table of Contents

## Measuring Morality

### What is Right and Wrong?

Ray Cotton

#### THE MORAL DILEMMA: WHO MAKES THE RULES?

The fundamental question of ethics is, who makes the rules? God or men? The theistic answer is that God makes them. The humanistic answer is that men make them. This distinction between theism and humanism is the fundamental division in moral theory. {2}

- I. The ever changing answer to the question of who makes the rules, God or men?**
  - A. Prior to the modernism of the mid-1800s, the answer was clearly that God does, as men sought for a transcendent truth. There may have been disagreement about what that truth was, but mankind generally agreed that there was truth out there beyond themselves. This is truth with a capital "T."
  2. Modern man believes that the answer is found through rationalism and empiricism, through man's ability to reason and conduct scientific investigation. Truth comes from man himself. Naturalism is the order of the day. This is truth with a small "t."
  3. Post-Modernism that has come into vogue since after WWII says that there is no truth, that all we can hope to do is instill meaning into life by bringing in our own interpretation. This is an elimination of any truth (see *World Views: What is True* in this notebook).
2. In summary, there are two reasons why man, acting autonomously, cannot establish a valid and satisfying moral theory on either naturalistic or humanistic

moral theory.

**A. *The scientific method is limited.*** Science can collect facts, but these pieces of information cannot tell us what we **ought** to do. It ignores the very real possibility that something real exists beyond the natural world, and it is thus doomed to look **within** its own self-defined "closed system" for an adequate ethical base. Unfortunately, none honestly exists, philosophically, except the natural law of nature, "red in tooth and claw" (from *In Memorium*, Tennyson).

**2. *Relativism is always self-contradictory.***

1. Although relativism disclaims the existence of absolutes, it must assume the existence of an absolute by which other theories can be judged.

The problem today is that society has abandoned belief in a transcendent, absolute truth, a morally-binding source of authority that is above our rights as individuals. To modern man, then, there is no absolute other than perhaps the belief that "there are no absolutes," which is in itself a contradiction.

2. It assumes there are no intrinsic values, yet it must assume that intrinsic values exist whenever it gives guidance in making moral decisions.
3. If ends and means are relative, regardless of the ethical system preferred, their own point of reference must also be in flux.

**CONCLUSION: FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICAL ABSOLUTES**

1. They are based on an authority higher than man--Creator God given through revelation-- rather than human experience, individually or collectively.
2. The absolute standard for morality is God Himself, and every moral action must be judged in the light of His nature.
3. Man is not simply an animal, but a unique, moral being created in the image of God.
4. God's moral revelation has intrinsic value; it is normative rather than utilitarian. If true, a homeless person possesses the same God-given worth as the president of the United States.
5. Scripture is accepted as morally authoritative, the Word of God, being derived from God.
6. In the Scriptures, law and love are harmonized, and obedience to God's laws is not legalism.

7. God's moral revelation was given for the benefit of mankind.
8. These moral principles are timeless, having historical continuity, and humans, individually or collectively, experience the Common Grace of God whenever and wherever they are followed.

True Christian morality deals with intentions, as well as actions, seeks the glory of God instead of pleasure and self-gratification, and encourages service to others, rather than serving self.

God alone knows all the goals, determines all morality, and allows us to "play the game." But He does not allow us to make the rules. Modern man, seemingly loosed from such transcendent restrictions, has chosen to make up his own.

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments (Matt. 22:36--40).

### Notes

1. Chuck Colson, "The Return of the Barbarians," *Jubilee* (April 1988); 7.
2. Max Hocutt, "Toward an Ethic of Mutual Accommodation," in *Humanist Ethics*, ed. Morris B. Storer (Prometheus, 1980), 137.

### For Further Reading

Adler, Mortimer J. *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.

In this volume, Adler constructs a logic for determining how man is unlike everything else. He then applies this to various philosophical and scientific theories and concludes that, on the evidence we have up to now, man differs in kind from all other things, rather than merely by degree.

Clark, Gordon H. *Religion, Reason and Revelation*. Nutley, N.J.: Craig, 1961.

This Christian philosopher examines the relationships between philosophy (reason), religion (Christianity), and biblical revelation. He finds that the Bible accurately and authoritatively presents Christianity as a satisfying philosophical system. He also demonstrates how the Christian view sets forth a system of ethics that conforms to reality and, therefore, is practical.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Thales to Dewey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

Clark presents a thorough history of philosophy in this volume. He provides a chronicle of the relationship of theories of knowledge (epistemology) to other aspects of philosophy (including ethics).

Erickson, Millard J. *Relativism in Contemporary Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1974.

A contemporary Christian theologian examines the ethical concerns of our day and takes a critical stand against various forms of relativism. Although it is

addressed primarily to a Christian audience, this book may also be helpful to unbelievers.

*Ethics--Easier Said Than Done*. Josephson Inst., 310 Washington St. #104, Marina del Rey, CA 90292.

A journal of pragmatic views on various ethical areas such as business, medical, and government.

Geisler, Norman. *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1989.

This book is written from a decidedly evangelical perspective. Geisler gives an excellent discussion of various biblical approaches to moral conflicts and the conflicting relativistic approaches. He then shows how biblical approaches relate to various contemporary issues.

Henry, Carl F. H., ed. *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1973. A look at nearly every ethical system, problem, and issue by a wide range of evangelical scholars, this work is invaluable for the student who wishes to read a brief biblical evaluation of many of the issues and moral conflict situations one may face both in college life and in the classroom.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Christian Personal Ethics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975.

This is the most thorough defense of the evangelical ethical system written by any contemporary theologian.

Lutzer, Erwin W. *Measuring Morality*. Richardson, Tex.: Probe Books 1981.

The author carefully weighs four major views of ethics that have been offered by various disciples within the relativistic camp, showing that they are not relativistic at all. Rather, they are autonomous. Through an examination of traditional ethics, the author shows that the values and philosophical implications of the Judeo-Christian ethic are still worthy of consideration in a society dominated by humanistic systems.

Murray, John. *Principles of Conduct*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1957.

This work is based on a series of lectures presented by Murray at Fuller Theological Seminary, and it is addressed specifically to a Christian audience. He outlines biblical aspects of ethics from a Reformed view.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *Back to Freedom and Dignity*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1972.

This is a short book dealing with some current scientific theories that seek to dehumanize man. There is an excellent discussion of the ramifications of accepting chemical evolution and psychological determinism.

\_\_\_\_\_, and C. Everett Koop. *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1979.

Exploring an explosive issue, abortion, the authors expose the modern trends toward manipulation of human rights through bio-medical means (abortion, euthanasia, and infanticide). They view this as evidence of a loss of human dignity and a decreasing appreciation for ethical values in Western culture. They

point to relativistic ethics as a major cause of this erosion and chart a course for a return to a biblical base for moral values. Thus, they believe, will human dignity and rights be restored.

---

©1998 Probe Ministries

[Table of Contents](#)



[Return to Probe Home](#)