

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF ETHICAL NORMS?

Apologetics

Závadka, 11th April 2015

Pro 20:27 נִרְיָהוּהָ נְשָׁמַת אָדָם חֶפֶשׁ כָּל-חֲדָרָיִבְטָן	Prov 20:27 <u>The spirit of man</u> is <u>the lamp</u> of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts.
Pro 1:7-8 7 יִרְאַת יְהוָה רֵאשִׁית דָּעַת חִכְמוֹה וּמוֹסֵר אֲוִילִים בָּזוּ 8 שְׁמַע בְּנֵי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ וְאַל-תִּטַּשׁ תּוֹרַת אֲמוֹךָ	Prov 1:7-8 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise <u>wisdom</u> and instruction. ⁸ Hear, my son, <u>your father's</u> instruction, and forsake not <u>your mother's</u> teaching,
Psalm 19:8 8 תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ עֲדוֹת יְהוָה נְאֻמָּה מַחְכְּמֹת פִּתִּי	Psalm 19:7 <u>The law of the LORD</u> is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, <u>making wise</u> the simple;
Rom 1:19-20 διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφάνερωσεν. ²⁰ τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθοράται, ἢ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους,	Rom 1:19-20 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his <u>invisible attributes</u> , namely, his eternal <u>power</u> and divine <u>nature</u> , have been clearly perceived, ever since <u>the creation of the world</u> , in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

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4. TO REMEMBER**0. INTRODUCTION:**

- Ethics covers the following dilemmas:¹

¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml (2. 4. 2015)

- how to live a good life
- our rights and responsibilities
- the language of right and wrong
- moral decisions - what is good and bad?
- Ethics in the Bible: *wisdom*...
- Ethical theories:² (1) Egoism (2) Hedonism (3) Naturalism and virtue theory (4) Existentialism (5) Kantianism (6) Utilitarianism (7) Contractualism (8) religion and the meaning of life.

0.1. THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS TODAY

- “The future ain't what it used to be.” (Yogi Berra)
- “...the Enlightenment view of progress was that technology should be a means to social progress—e.g., the realization of democratic values. To ...[a] technocrat, however, technological progress became an end in itself rather than a means to an end. To him, democracy was an impediment to technological progress.”³
- “Scientific developments have enhanced our capacity to benefit, but they have enhanced our ability to harm still further. As a result, our power to harm is overwhelming. We are capable of forever putting an end to all higher life on this planet. Our success in learning to manipulate the world around us has left us facing two major threats: climate change – along with the attendant problems caused by increasingly scarce natural resources – and war, using immensely powerful weapons. What is to be done to counter these threats?”⁴
- Modern ethical dilemma: the world: (1) the spaceship [needs a captain] ↔ or (2) the lifeboat [only limited number can be saved]?

0.2. ONTOLOGY – THE STARTING POINT

- Begin with *ontology* (“what is”); continue with *axiology* (values); get to epistemology (“how can I know anything?”)
- (1) There is a Highest Being, (2) The Highest Being revealed his will in the form of regulations for our conduct, (3) We can learn His will through several channels
 - “Following Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov, it is often said that if God does not exist then everything is permitted. This is not literally the case, since God cannot permit anything if He does not exist, and those of us who do exist do not permit everything, or at least our parents, employers, and governments do not. It is true, though, that if God does not exist then nothing is forbidden in the traditional sense of 'forbidden'.”⁵ ⇒ *ontology* is decisive
- ANSCOMBE: “...it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology... And no amount of truth as to what is the case could possibly have a logical claim to have influence on your actions. (It is not judgment as such that sets us in motion; but our judgment on how to get or do something we want.) Hence it must be impossible to infer "needs" or "ought to be" from "is."”⁶

From time immemorial, all nations have acknowledged that the world has a moral, as well as a physical, import. Everywhere nevertheless the matter was only brought to an indistinct consciousness, which, in seeking for its adequate expression, has clothed itself in various images and myths. These are the different Religions. Philosophers, on their side, have at all times endeavoured to attain clear comprehension of the thing and, notwithstanding their differences in other respects, all, excepting the strictly materialistic, philosophical systems, agree in this one point: that what is most important, nay, alone essential, in our whole existence, that on which everything depends, the real meaning, pivot or point (*sit venia verbo*) of it, lies in the morality of human actions. But as to the sense of this, as to the ways and means, as to the possibility of

² GRAHAM, G. *Eight Theories of Ethics*, London : Routledge, 2004, Contents.

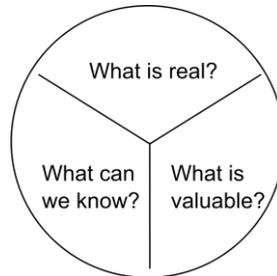
³ HERKERT, J. R. *Yogi Meets Moses: Ethics, Progress and the Grand Challenges for Engineering*, www.asee.org/public/conferences/1/papers/1604/download (10/04/2015)

⁴ blog.oup.com/2012/08/unfit-future-moral-enhancement/ (10/04/2015)

⁵ RICHTER, D. *Ethics after Anscombe*, Dordrecht : Springer Science+Business, 2000, p. ix.

⁶ ANSCOMBE, E. *Modern Moral Philosophy*. In: MARTINICH, A. P. – SOSA, D. *Analytic Philosophy*, Malden : Blackwell, 2001, p. 381.

the thing, they all again quite disagree, and find themselves before an abyss of obscurity. Thus it follows, that **it is easy to preach, but difficult to found, morality.** (...*Moral-Predigen leicht, Moral-Begründen schwer ist.*) It is just because that point is determined by our conscience, that it becomes the touchstone of all systems ; since we demand, and rightly demand, that Metaphysic should give support to Ethics...⁷



- (1) reality: ontology, metaphysics, (2) values: axiology, aesthetics, ethics

0.3. THE BASIC DIVISION OF ETHICAL SOURCES

- **Ethical norms:** “The expression "moral absolutes" designates moral norms that identify certain types of action which are possible objects of choice as always morally bad, and specify those types of action without employing in their description any morally evaluative terms.”⁸
- “...the assertion, and also to the denial, of the proposition that the ways in which men ought to behave may be discovered by human reason, the disputants on one side seem to say to those on the other, 'You are blind if you cannot see this' only to receive in reply, 'You have been dreaming'.”⁹

(1) **Naturalistic Ethics** (“**from below**”) presupposes that (1) nature is the ultimate reality, (2) man is essentially an animal, and 3) truth and right are intrinsically time-bound and changing.

(2) **Idealism (ethics “from above”)** “deifies” the moral life - postulating: (1) An eternal, supernatural realm which is the ultimate reality (which the world “mirrors”) (2) That man is superior to other creatures having a unique relationship to the eternal - he is a distinctive rational animal destined for immortality. (3) Truth and morality are eternal and changeless - norms that cannot be violated without impunity.¹⁰

- *Contemporary metaethics*¹¹

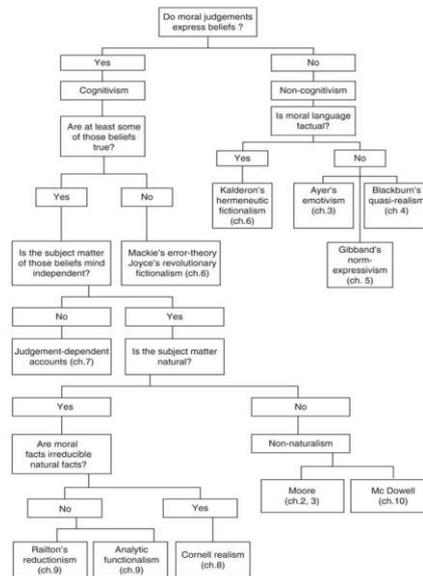
⁷ SCHOPENHAUER, A. *On the Will in Nature*, London : George Bell and Sons, 1903, p. 372.

⁸ MAY, W. *Moral Absolutes : Catholic Tradition*, Milwaukee : Marquette University Press, 1989, p. 1.

⁹ HART, H. L. A. *The Concept of Law*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 186.

¹⁰ This survey uses Carl Henry’s Christian Personal Ethics as a resource. (www.eldrbarry.net/clas/en/ethsur.pdf)

¹¹ MILLER, A. *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, Cambridge : Polity Press, 2003, p. 8.



0.3.1. ETHICS “FROM BELOW”

- “It is a commonplace to observe that it is a commonplace to observe that the moral supervenes upon the natural. ...is to say that it is necessary that fixing the natural fixes the moral.”¹²
- Basically, it is *denial* of the existence of the norms of conduct → there is nothing “above” humans to tell us what is right or what is wrong...

0.3.1.1. EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

- [DAWKINS] “Our genes may instruct us to be selfish, but we are not necessarily compelled to obey them all our lives.”¹³
- “Scientists and humanists should consider together the possibility that the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and **biologized**. ...Only by interpreting the activity of the emotive centers as a biological adaptation can the meaning of the canons be deciphered. ...It should also be clear that no single set of moral standards can be applied to all human populations, let alone all sex-age classes within each population.”¹⁴

0.3.1.2. SOCIOLOGICAL ETHICS

- MARX – class ethics

[NIETZSCHE] ...conscience is not, as is believed, 'the voice of God in man', - it is the instinct of cruelty that is turned inwards after it cannot discharge itself outwards anymore. Cruelty is first brought to light here as one of the oldest and most persistent underpinnings of culture.¹⁵

0.3.2. ETHICS “FROM ABOVE”

According to the meta-ethical theory that is known variously as "objectivism," "nonnaturalism," or "intuitionism," a moral judgment is a statement in subject-predicate form. The predicate of the statement is taken as the name of a property. In making a moral judgment, a person states that this property belongs to that which is named by the subject of the judgment. The judgment is true if the subject does in fact have the property attributed to it; otherwise it is false. There are two basic types of objectivism, depending on whether the fundamental moral property is considered to be goodness or Rightness. ...Professor G. E. Moore is the

¹² MAJORS, B. *The Natural and the Normative*. In: SHAFER-LANDAU, R. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics IV*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 29.

¹³ DAWKINS, R. *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 3

¹⁴ WILSON, E. O. *Sociobiology*, Cambridge : Belknap Press, 1978, p. 562.

¹⁵ NIETZSCHE, F. *Ecce Homo, The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 136.

best-known exposition of the first type of objectivism, and that by Sir David Ross is the best-known of the second type.¹⁶

- ARISTOTLE → telos;
- KANT – *categorical imperative* – unconnected with being ...stands above being
- FREUD (?) – “superego”
- MOORE – ethical objectivism

0.4. CHRISTIAN ETHICS

- [PINCKAERS]:

First Definition

Christian ethics is the branch of theology that studies human acts insofar as they are subject to the moral law, to its imperatives and the obligations determined by these, in the light of revelation. The central concept underlying this definition is law, seen as an expression of God's will and of reason. It is the idea of freedom overlaid with obligation. Morality becomes a matter of obligations, classified according to the commands issued. ...

Second Definition

Christian ethics is that branch of theology that studies human acts in order to conform them to duty and to the norms imposed on us by reason and by the will of God, in the light of revelation. The central idea here is duty, linked doubtless to the idea of obligations but connoting a greater inferiority. The basic orientation is to reason and personal conscience. Obviously we are moving into the tradition of Kant and his categorical imperative. The expression norms begins to supersede law, which has the ring of an authority external to ourselves. ...

Third Definition

Christian ethics is that branch of theology that studies human acts in order to direct them to the attainment of true happiness and to the ultimate end of the person by means of the virtues, and this in the light of revelation. In this view, a person's true happiness or personal good, seen as an ultimate goal, becomes the be all and end all of Christian ethics, outweighing any consideration of obligations, precepts, or norms. Here we are dealing with a theory of morality based on an attraction for the true and the good, rather than an orientation to commands and obligations. ...

Fourth Definition

Christian ethics is a branch of theology that studies human acts in order to conform them to the values contributing to human enrichment, and this in the light of revelation. This definition is inspired by the modern value theory, represented notably by Max Scheler, and is much in vogue among Catholic writers. It divides moral theory according to a value system arranged in ascending order. Thus we have: vital values, such as health, ecology, and all that contributes to our vital well-being; sense values, such as pleasure; ascetical values, found in the arts; social, moral, religious, spiritual, and mystical values.¹⁷

1. CONSCIENCE

1.1. CONSCIENCE IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

- “Conscience. — The Moral Faculty is simply the intellect directed towards the moral aspects of action, and hence styled the Moral or Practical Reason. It is not a different power from the Speculative Intellect.”¹⁸

To have a conscience involves being conscious of the moral quality of what one has done, or intends to do. There are several elements under the idea of conscience. (1) First, conscience can signify those very moral convictions persons cleave to most firmly and judge themselves by. (2) Second, the notion may cover the faculty by which we come to know moral truths (assuming there to be such) and apply them to ourselves. (3) Third, conscience can be said to concern the examination by a person of the morality of their desires,

¹⁶ TAYLOR, P. W. *The Moral Judgment*, Englewood Cliffs : Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 1.

¹⁷ PINCKAERS, S. *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Edinburgh : T&T Clark, 1995, pp. 4-7

¹⁸ MAHER, M. *Psychology*, London : Longmans, 1919, p. 334.

actions and so on. (4) Finally, conscience can involve guilt: one can suffer from a ‘bad conscience’. In the Christian tradition, conscience can be viewed as ‘the voice of God within’ each of us.¹⁹

- “...when a man is bidden, in any particular case, to ‘trust to his conscience’, it commonly seems to be meant that he should exercise a faculty of judging morally this particular case without reference to general rules, and even in opposition to conclusions obtained by systematic deduction from such rules.”²⁰

1.2. CONSCIENCE IN THEOLOGY

The meaning of conscience has evolved within the Christian tradition. The OT does not contain a word for conscience but employs images such as the ‘heart’ to speak of the reality of conscience. The heart can be receptive to or hardened against God’s voice; it can delight in or snub God’s law. In the NT Paul uses the word syneidesis for conscience (the Vulgate translation is conscientia, or ‘knowing with’). Syneidesis is the capacity to know right from wrong; this capacity is grounded in reason. Thus, Paul says of certain Gentiles that ‘the demands of the law are written in the hearts’ (Rom. 2:14); conscience thus attests to a moral law which humans do not invent but which resonates within. The natural law tradition that subsequently developed from Paul and other ancient sources affirms the existence of an objective moral order that is consonant with human flourishing, such that obedience to the moral law promotes the human good.²¹

- [CHAMBERS] “**Conscience** is the innate law in nature whereby man knows he is known. ...If conscience were the voice of God, it would be the most contradictory voice man ever heard. ...Conscience attaches itself to that system of things which man regards as highest, consequently conscience records differently in different people.”²²

2. MORAL LAW

- “Few questions concerning human society have been asked with such persistence and answered by serious thinkers in so many diverse, strange, and even paradoxical ways as the question ‘What is law?’”²³
- [FINNEY] “Moral Law is a rule of moral action with sanctions. It is that rule of action to which moral beings are under a moral obligation to conform all their voluntary actions, and is enforced by sanctions equal to the value of the precept. It is the rule for the government of free and intelligent action, as opposed to necessary and unintelligent action.”²⁴

2.1. IN PHILOSOPHY: VARIOUS

2.1.1. NATURAL LAW

[Routledge Encyclopedia] As for the term ‘law’, as understood in the phrase ‘natural law’, it does not connote that the relevant principles and norms have their directive force precisely as the imperatives or dictates of a superior will. Even when a natural law theorist argues (as most do) that the ultimate explanation of those principles and norms (as of all other realities) is a transcendent, creative, divine source of existence, meaning and value, the theorist usually will maintain also that moral precepts divinely commanded are commanded because fitting and obligatory, not fitting or obligatory because commanded (or that the source of their obligation is rather divine wisdom than divine will). Rather, the term ‘law’ in the phrase ‘natural law’ refers to standards of right choosing, standards which are normative, that is rationally directive and ‘obligatory’, because they are true and choice otherwise than in accordance with them is unreasonable. The term ‘natural’ in this context signifies any one or more of the following: that the relevant standards are not ‘positive’, that is, are directive prior to any positing by individual decision or group choice or convention; that the relevant standards are ‘higher’ than positive laws, conventions

¹⁹ *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Version 1.0, London: Routledge

²⁰ SIDGWICK, H. *The Methods of Ethics*, London: Macmillan, 1907, p. 99.

²¹ WEAVER, D. F. *Conscience*. In: MCFARLAND, I. A. – FERGUSSON, D. A. S. – KILBY, K. – TORRANCE, I. A. (eds.) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 111.

²² CHAMBERS, O. *Biblical psychology*.

²³ HART, H. L. A. *The Concept of Law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 1.

²⁴ FINNEY, C. G. *Systematic Theology*, Oberlin: James M. Fitch, 1846, p. 2.

and practices, that is, provide the premises for critical evaluation and endorsement or justified rejection of or disobedience to such laws, conventions or practices; that the relevant standards conform to the most demanding requirements of critical reason and are objective, in the sense that a person who fails to accept them as standards for judgment is in error; that adherence to the relevant standards tends systematically to promote human flourishing, the fulfilment of human individuals and communities.²⁵

- Aristotle's entelechy²⁶ - "...a power mediating between the simple faculty of acting and the definite or effected act. It contains and includes effort. It is self-determined to action, not requiring to be aided, but only requiring not to be inhibited."²⁷ (His doctrine of "the Entelechy" as the actualized substance of things, is perhaps the most advanced thought reached by man without Revelation.²⁸)

2.1.2. POSITIVE LAW

To call the law enforced by courts positive law is to claim that it **differs** in content from the principles of **justice and morality**. Why should we distinguish positive law from the pure requirements of moral law? First of all, the philosophers of positive law all insist that just because a law is enforced by a court does not conclusively prove that it is consistent with the demands of justice. It is essential to the whole project of criticism and reform of law that we not confuse the existence of a law with its justice.²⁹

2.2. IN THEOLOGY: GOD'S LAW

- **Natural law** in Rom 2: "...the heathens, who have not the (Mosaic) law, have nevertheless another law which teaches them the difference between right and wrong; a law which is the very foundation of the distinction of good and evil and not merely an indicator; a law which, although not reinforced by any special revelation to the Gentiles, yet obliges them and makes them blameworthy in rejecting it."³⁰
- **Torah**. Deals not only with the *right conduct*, but first of all requires the *right thinking, feeling, attitudes*. → Decalogue (love ↔ covetousness)
- **Rom 7:7** ...I would not have known what sin was except through the law...
- **Jer 31:33** "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- faith ↔ works controversy

We cry down *works* in opposition to Grace in justification; and cry up *obedience* as the fruits of Grace in sanctification: hee that *walkes* not in *obedience* is a stranger yet to Christ; and he that *refuseth* his *obedience* knows not Christ. Indeed ma³¹

3. GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- **Heb 8:10** ...I will put my **laws** into their minds, and write them on their **hearts**, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- **Gal 2:20** It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

3.1. PAGAN GODS - FATE

- "At times we find a more or less fatalistic view of life. Fate being conceived as a destiny fixed at

²⁵ *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Version 1.0, London: Routledge

²⁶ ἐντελέχεια, ...the absoluteness, actuality, actual being of a thing, as opp. to simple capability or potentiality...

²⁷ PETERS, R. S. – MACE, C. A. *Psychology*. In: BORCHERT, D. M. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy VIII*, Farmington Hills : Macmillan, 2006, p. 130.

²⁸ BOARDMAN, S.W. *Plato's 'Idea' and Aristotle's 'Entelechy'*. In: *The Monist* 20 (2):297-299 (1910).

²⁹ MURPHY, J. B. *The Philosophy of Positive Law*, New Haven : Yale University Press, 2005, p. 4.

³⁰ CROWE, M. B. *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law*, The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 53.

³¹ BOLTON, S. *True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, London : Austin Rice, 1656, p. 96.

birth, for the notion that the thread of life was spun already existed. ... beyond all lies something fixed and invariable to which all things and beings are ultimately subject.”³²

- “...vain attempts have been made to explain it away or to solve the problem of the relationship between the might and free will of the gods and Fate which determines all.”³³ “Fate is the work of the gods; but in Herodotus, at least, this is never said of a specific god, but always of "the gods" collectively or of "the divine" in the abstract. The belief comes very near to fatalism. It is a kind of philosophy of life and its vicissitudes rather than a religious conception.”³⁴
- Oedipus -

3.2. THE WILL OF GOD

- KIERKEGAARD: *Fear and Trembling...* (Abraham)
- Mt 5-7 (Jesus)
- “Thy will be done!”
- **John 8:29** ...I **always** do the things that are **pleasing** to him.
- **Rom 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3.3. FREEDOM

- Inward freedom → love for justice/righteousness
- Freedom through power → ability to do the right thing
- **James 1:25** ...the perfect law that gives freedom...
- **Rom 6:6-7** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

4. TO REMEMBER

- “Ethical norms” have to come “from above”. Otherwise we cannot talk about them being “norms”.
- The Bible tells us about several channels the Creator is informing humans about the norms of ethics.
- Christian ethics is built on all the sources of ethical norms given by the Creator but the overruling source is the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

³² MOORE, C. F. *The Religious Thought of the Greeks*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1916, p. 13

³³ NILSSON, M. P. *A History of Greek Religion*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1949, p. 167.

³⁴ NILSSON, M. P. *Greek Folk Religion*, Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, p. 110.