

God and Bioethics

<http://www.cis.org.uk/ireland/>

Image: NASA, NOAO, ESA, the Hubble Helix Nebula Team, M. Meixner (STScI), and T.A. Rector (NRAO)



CHRISTIANS · IN · SCIENCE
IRELAND

The Role of Faith in Moral Decision Making

John Murray

The sceptical answer?

- Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. Teaching children that unquestioned faith is a virtue primes them ... to grow up into potentially lethal weapons for future jihads or crusades.
- [R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 308]

Wrong about Christian faith

Wrong about moral decision making

None of us is fully
independent

The Role of Religion
as a Basic Human Good
in the Moral Theory
of Germain Grisez

■ How **little** I know or see

■ How **little** each of us knows or sees

We **all** need to have faith
in others

Human faith

Human Beings:

naturally social

naturally interdependent

The human condition

- Moral decision making is not a solitary matter,
- done by an isolated, fully independent, all-knowing individual.

- We need to be **critical** thinkers, yes,
- but none of us can **see everything directly**

We walk by faith,
not by sight

[2 Cor 5:7]

Faith is ...

believing something
on the authority
of another person or persons

The human finitude problem

The human interdependence
condition

The moral weakness problem

Problematic Emotions and Attitudes

unreasonable partiality towards oneself or others,
selfishness,
wishful thinking, self-deception,
hatred, bitterness,
fear,
greed, lust, etc;
even good emotions and wishes [compassion, etc]

Sin affects the human condition

- Original sin
- Further [actual] sins, historically
- Personal sins
- Sinful social and cultural structures

Man's intellect has been darkened
and his will weakened

Human faith is not enough

But what if ...?

**A more-than-human,
better-than-human**

Source of moral clarity,
truth, strength, guidance?

A God who speaks

The *Logos*

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

[John 1:1]

God the Creator

- An ordered creation
- A creation that is “very good”
- An intelligible creation

God speaks

in the Old Testament

The Ten Commandments

- God makes his will known
- Rules of the Covenant
- God's rules for authentic human freedom

The Ten Commandments

- Not arbitrary or mere impositions
- Principles of practical reason itself
- Protecting human dignity, human goods
- Worship, family, marriage, life, truth, justice

From *Veritatis Splendor*, 41 [a]

Human freedom and God's law meet and are called to intersect, in the sense of man's free obedience to God and of God's completely gratuitous benevolence towards man.

VS, 41, cont. [b]

Hence obedience to God is not, as some would believe, a *heteronomy*, as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom ...

VS, 41, cont. [c]

Others speak, and rightly so, of *theonomy*, or *participated theonomy*, since man's free obedience to God's law effectively implies that human reason and human will participate in God's wisdom and providence.

- *Autonomy*: self-law
- *Heteronomy*: other-law
- *Theonomy*: God-law

Participated Theonomy

- Not autonomy [I am my own moral law]
- Nor heteronomy [I obey a totally external law]
- But participated theonomy [God's law is my law, God's will is friendly to the truth of my being, God's will is for our good, which manifests God's glory]

The natural law

- The intrinsic reasonableness of being morally good
- Human reason participates in God's providential governance of the world, of us

Foundations matter

God shows us that morality,
the moral law,
rests on firm foundations:
His loving wisdom, wise love

God speaks in The New Testament

- Jesus Christ taught morality
- He taught the commandments

Jesus and the Decalogue

[Jesus said to the man:] “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which?” And Jesus said, “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” [Mt 19:17-19]

The greatest commandment

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. [Mt 22:37-40]

The Golden Rule

Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

[Mt 7:12]

Other moral teachings in the NT

- The Sermon on the Mount
- Jesus' parables
 - e.g.
 - The Good Samaritan [Lk 10]
 - The Prodigal Son [Lk 15]
 - The Rich Man and Lazarus [Lk 16]
- St Paul's letters and the other letters

An example from Colossians 3

But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

An example from James 3

- But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

St Augustine

I believe, in order to understand; and
I understand, the better to believe.

[As cited in the
Catechism of the Catholic Church, 158]

The Bible teaches us by examples
too

Jesus is

the perfect moral exemplar.

The New Commandment

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

[Jn 13:34]

There is more
to good moral decision making
than simply knowing moral
truth

From Romans 7

- I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.

As well as **revelation**

We need a **relationship** with
Jesus Christ

Moral life is

Life in Christ

Moral life is a Response to Love

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

[1 Jn 4:10-11]

Christian faith transforms morality

It sets morality in a new context:

Our relationship with God
and his with us

Dimensions of this relationship

- pupil to Teacher,
- disciple to Master,
- friend to Friend,
- adopted son or daughter to Father
(in union with the Son
through the power of the Spirit).

A morally good will is...

a human “heart”, that is
properly and fully responsive
to God’s love

“poured into our hearts through
the Holy Spirit which has been
given to us” [Romans 5:5].

Morality is ...

- Our cooperation with God:
- Stewards of creation
- Co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord
- The Body of Christ [Baptism, Eucharist ...]

The Ecclesial Dimension

The Church helps and guides us by
her sacraments,
her prayer and worship,
her saints,
her tradition
and her teaching.

The long-term context

Christian faith sets morality in an eternal context:

Our moral decisions and choices really matter

The parable of the Last Judgement

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, **you did it not to me**” ...
And they will go away into **eternal punishment**”

[Mt 25:45-46]

The importance of hope

Now faith is the assurance of
things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.
[Heb 11:1]

The promise of His Presence

“Lo, I am with you always,
to the close of the age.”

[Mt 28:20, the Risen Jesus' final
words].

The Good News of the Gospel

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?” And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, **you did it to me.**” ... and the righteous [will go] into **eternal life.**

[Mt 25:37-40, 46].

Thank you