

# How can Science and Scripture inform ethics?

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While there is no single Christian ethic, with approaches ranging from the teleological to the deontological, a unifying feature of these ethics is Scripture. Indeed, the Bible's influence in ethics is not just limited to Christians but seen throughout the world, influencing pivotal Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Kant, and shaping key pieces of legislation which have promoted freedom and human rights, perhaps most famously the US Declaration of Independence (Becker, 1958). As well as Scripture, however, Science also informs many people's ethics in modern society: scientific facts surrounding germ theory and hand-washing have made it such that it would be irresponsible, and for many people immoral, for a doctor to endanger patients' lives by purposely disregarding proper hygiene procedures. In this essay, I seek to demonstrate how both cannot only inform ethics, but do so in unison, and that Scripture and Science, as gifts from God, are mutually reinforcing and allow all to access God's ethical truths.

Firstly, not only do Science and Scripture inform our ethics, they are in dialogue with one another and reach conclusions which reinforce one another: unsurprising as both are gifts from God. Consider Polkinghorne's (2004) remark that he approaches life with the 'two-eyed' approach of Christian faith and Science; or Galileo (1615) writing that God is both known through "Nature in His Works", Science, and "doctrine in His revealed word", Scripture. This sentiment is shared by many Christian scientists, and while they often mean this in the context of understanding the natural world, Science and Scripture also conform to create a mutually reinforcing view of ethics. A contemporary example of Science and Scripture reaching agreement is in tackling a pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Science informed of the effectiveness of measures like social distancing, with the Government suggesting it was our civic duty to take these actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Many accepted the need to engage in social distancing and self-isolation without referring to Scripture, but Leviticus 13:45–46 informed the Israelites nearly 3000 years ago what to do during a pandemic: ensure infected people keep their distance from healthy people, and they live "alone ... outside the camp". These, and countless other examples, show how Science and Scripture are not only in conversation with one another, but reach reinforcing conclusions. Importantly, this allows people who understand God differently to Christians to still access God's truths and act ethically – a sign of his omnibenevolence and reflecting Hick's (1993) thinking that God allows his love and

gifts to be received by all: Christians and non-Christians alike. Therefore, not only can Scripture and Science inform ethics, but can do so in mutually reinforcing ways, even when utilised independently of one another.

However, despite converging onto mutually reinforcing conclusions, Science and Scripture provide different cognitive approaches to ethics and the world, which allows for a richer exploration of God and his gifts to humanity. For example, Science relies on empiricism and the scientific method, which reflects God providing humans with critical thinking capabilities and a rational mind – features of being created *imago dei*, as per Genesis 1:27. Rather than opposing Christianity, many theologians have used the framework of Science to justify God's existence and his divine commands, perhaps the most famous being Paley's (1812) watchmaker analogy, with Paley arguing that as God lovingly designed every organism, God must be omnibenevolent and as such obeyed. Similarly, Aquinas refused to believe that God would provide commandments which some could not follow, for example those who have not heard of Christianity. However, through empirical observations he derived seven 'Basic Goods' which all humans follow, such as a drive for self-preservation. From this formed Aquinas' Natural Law theory, allowing all humans to follow God's divine commands so long as we applied our God-given rationality and followed our 'Basic Goods'. Conversely, Scripture and faith is not an abandonment of critical thinking but is a theological virtue which Aquinas describes 'as act of the intellect assenting to a Divine truth owing to the movement of the will' (St. Thomas, II-II, Q. iv, a. 2), which reveals certain truths which cannot be gained otherwise. For example, Science denies the possibility of any exploration of God owing to the impossibility of direct empirical observations: instead, God must be explored through faith. Indeed, it is the same with understanding the objective nature of his ethics – logically we can discover what is ethical and mandate others to follow this, but it is only through accepting faith in God, and the authority of his divine commands as delivered through Scripture, can we have a basis for understanding objective morality. This is because, unlike humans, God is omnibenevolent and infallible, hence eliminating any debate over what actions are ethical. Therefore, while Science and Scripture both converge to the same conclusions and allow us to explore ethics from different cognitive viewpoints, only by accepting the divine commands of God as delivered through Scripture can we explore the ethics agreed upon by Science and Scripture as objective and binding for all.

In summation, both Science and Scripture inform our ethics from contrasting cognitive viewpoints, which allows us to explore aspects of God and the Christian faith, but they still converge onto mutually reinforcing conclusions which reveal to us how to act ethically. Rather than Science opposing God, it reflects God's gifts to humanity of critical thinking capabilities and rationality, reflective of us being created *imago dei*. Consequently, even those outside of the Christian faith can access God's ethical truths and commandments and can act ethically, showing God's omnibenevolence, as argued by Aquinas and Hick. Likewise, Scripture and faith is not an abandonment of critical thinking but rather a Christian virtue and an 'act of the intellect' to ascertain divine truths and is the only marker for an objective moral standard as these commands do not derive from fallible humans but the omniscient and omnibenevolent Christian God. Therefore, while Science and Scripture both inform our ethics and come from contrasting cognitive standpoints, they both converge to create a unified ethic suitable for all.

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