Without God There Is No Objective Absolute Moral Standard

Intro: Jud. 21:25 “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This aptly states the result of the subject of this lesson. Ultimately it is left to every man doing what they think is right. Ethics is “a set of standards around which we organize our lives and from which we define our duties and obligations. It results in a set of imperatives that establishes acceptable behavior patterns. It is what people ought to do” (James Eckman). Can man without God discover or invent a system of ethics that is correct and binding on men today?

I. MORALITY
   A. Theocentric
      1. Centered in God
      2. Centered in an eternal source of goodness.
   B. Anthropocentric
      1. Grounded in the mind of man.
      2. Man having evolved from inanimate forces.

II. ANTHROPOCENTRIC
   A. The function (the purpose of meaning) of ethics
      1. Hedonism
         a. The aim is the attainment of the greatest possible pleasure with the greatest avoidance of pain.
         b. Problems:
            (1) What if in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, one must inflict pain upon others to achieve it? (One must act immorally to practice his morality.)
            (2) There is no motivation for a person to forego his own pleasure in the interest of others.
      2. Utilitarianism
         a. Built upon the foundation of hedonism.
         b. “Good” is that which gives pleasure to the greatest number of people.
         c. Problems:
            (1) There is no motivation to the pleasure of many over the pleasure of the individual.
            (2) There is no guideline to determine what the pleasure of the many actually is.
            (3) What if some have to suffer for the ultimate good to be accomplished? (This is Hitler’s holocaust.)
            (4) There is no rational reason why it would be wrong to ignore what is in the interest of the many for the pursuit of personal pleasure.
         d. Illustrated by the daughter of famous agnostic Bertrand Russell.
            (1) Katherine Tait’s book My Father Bertrand Russell.
(2) Mrs. Tait was the only daughter of English agnostic Bertrand Russell. She was born in London in 1923 and was educated at her parents’ innovative school, Beacon Hill, an institution dedicated to the promotion of atheistic humanism. Tait attempts to explain what it was like being the renowned philosopher’s daughter.

(3) Russell believed that a parent must teach his child “with its very first breath that it has entered into a moral world.” Yet, as with all atheists/ agnostics, he had a most difficult time explaining just why, if man is merely the product of natural forces, children should be taught morality.

(4) Tait recalls that a child she might say, in connection with some moral responsibility, “I don’t want to! Why should I?”

(a) A conventional parent, she observes, might reply, “Because I say so... your father says so... God says so.”

(b) Russell, however, would say to his children: “Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don’t.”

(c) “So what,” she would respond, “I don’t care about other people.”

(d) Her father would declare, “You should!”

(e) In her innocence, young Katherine would inquire, “But why?”

(f) To which the redundant rejoinder would be, “Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don’t.”

(g) Tait notes, “We felt the heavy pressure of his rectitude and obeyed, but the reason was not convincing—neither to us nor to him.”

3. Evolutionary Survival
   a. Morality has been developed in the scheme of evolution as a means of survival.
   b. Questions:
      (1) **How** was this decision making ability developed?
      (2) **Who** decides **what** will be the basis of survival in a competitive society?
   c. Many have argued the survival of the fittest.
      (1) Classic Darwinianism holds such.
      (2) Thus, the moral thing to do is for the fittest to exterminate the weak.
      (3) This becomes the basis of forced euthanasia.
      (4) Hitler holocaust was based on this.
   d. No one can draw any moral lines against a person who acts outrageously if that person claims his actions result from his personal sense of survival.

B. The **criteria** (principle or standard by which something is to be judged) for ethics
   1. Nihilism
      a. Since there is no God, there can be no rational justification for ethical norms.
      b. Since there is no rational justification, then everything is permitted.
      c. Jean Paul Sartre wrote, “Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist… if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior.”
      d. Thus, whatever one chooses to do is right.
   2. Relativism (Cultural Relativism)
      a. Rejects the idea that there can be universal criteria for determining values.
b. Thus all cultural ethical systems are equally valid.

c. Whatever the cultural group approves of is right and whatever they disapprove of is wrong.

d. They will not remain consistent.
   (1) Will they say that those who believe ethics are absolute is valid?
   (2) Will they condemn what the Nazi’s did in the holocaust?

e. Cultural relativism eventually leads to individual relativism that leads to social anarchy.

3. Situationism
   a. Again repudiates the concept of any absolute system of values.
   b. The rightness or wrongness of an action is dependent upon the situation.
   c. The only factor in making moral judgments is “love.”
      (1) Love is purely subjective.
      (2) Each person must decide for himself what the loving course is in any situation.
   d. Joseph Fletcher affirmed that the loving thing was what would bring the greatest pleasure to the greatest number.

4. Determinism
   a. This absolves man of his personal responsibility
      (1) Man’s conduct, as humans, are the product of forces beyond their control.
      (2) Thus, terms such as “good” and “evil” are meaningless
   b. Behaviorism
      (1) This says that conduct is the product of our habit system.
      (2) Man, the animal, is the product of environment so human responsibility is nonsense.
   c. Sociobiology
      (1) Tries to synthesize the social sciences with biology.
      (2) Man is a mere machine programmed by his genetic makeup.
   d. Theological
      (1) This is Calvinism (or Augustinianism).
      (2) Man has a depraved nature.
      (3) God has predetermined what man will do.

C. Results.
   1. It is the way of death:
      a. Jer. 10:23 “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”
      b. Pro. 14:12 “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”
   2. It results in sin, wickedness, and chaos.
      a. Gentiles condition: Rom. 1:21-31 “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the
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Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despicable, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:"

b. Their condition is because they did not have God: Eph. 2:12 “12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”

3. There are no rules, and no one would be able to say to another that they ever did anything wrong.

III. THEOCENTRIC

A. Human morality is based upon the fact that God is the Creator.

1. Gen. 1

2. And that God created man in His image;

a. Gen. 1:26-27 “26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

b. Jam. 3:9 “9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.”

B. Since God’s nature does not change, the moral attributes that come from Him do not change.

1. Mal. 3:6 “6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

2. They are objective and absolute—not subjective, cultural, relative, situational, etc.

C. The Bible is God’s revelation of that ethical code.

1. Rom. 1:16-17 “16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

2. 1 Cor. 2:9-10, 13 “9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

D. Design of Biblical ethics:

1. Develop in man the right attitudes.

a. Phi. 2:5 “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”

b. 2 Pet. 1:3-4 “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”
2. To translate those right spiritual attitudes into right action.
   a. Eph. 4:22-24 “22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”
   b. 1 Pet. 1:15-16 “15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

3. To guide man back into accord with the Divine ideal.
   a. This is dealing with our reconciliation to God.
      (1) Tit. 2:11-12 “11 For the grace of God thatbringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteousness, and godly, in this present world;”
      (2) 2 Cor. 5:18-19 “18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”
   b. This begins by our obedience to the Gospel.
   c. It continues as we translate into our lives, God’s Word.

Conclusion: Leo Tolstoy said, “Without religion there can be no real, sincere morality, just as without roots there can be no real flower.”

Works Consulted: