Business and Ethics

This essay grapples with some of the problems Christians face trying to operate ethically in today's business world.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Can "business" and "ethics" be used in the same sentence?

A while back, a member of the Probe lecture team was invited to speak on the topic of "Business Ethics" in a class at Colorado State University. When the Probe speaker arrived at the classroom, the professor explained that the reason the class chose to have him speak on this topic was their overwhelming sense of curiosity. They could not comprehend how the words business and ethics could be used in the same title.

Business enterprise has received a very diverse review from the ethicists of this generation. In the "Me First" era of the 80s, there was very little concern for ethics in the world of business, and you would have been hard pressed to find a university that dealt seriously with the need for ethics in its business school curriculum. A case in point concerns John Shad, former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. He donated $35 million dollars to the Harvard Business School to establish an ethics department. Yet two years later, Harvard had only come up with one rather flimsy-sounding course, and they had been unable to find an ethicist to head up the department.(1)

The 90s saw an awakening to the need for ethics because of the many scandals that were beginning to erupt within the world of business and finance, moral failures such as the disgraceful actions that brought down Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky. The problem is that in the 90s, the concern for ethics has not returned us to any absolute standard of ethics, but rather to a search for relative balance between ethics and the bottom

line or personal values. The following statement by a state representative from Tennessee demonstrates this tendency all too well. While explaining why he was for fair trade price controls on milk, but against it for liquors, he said, “I’ve got 423 dairy farmers in my district, and I’ve got to rise above principle.”

Often, today, the highest ethic is “tolerance.” By that, I don’t mean the traditional view of tolerance in which one tries to recognize and respect other people’s values without necessarily accepting those values as being correct. I’m talking about a whole new meaning to the word tolerance. Today the word is used in a way to imply that all values, beliefs, and claims to truth and life-styles are equal. It becomes extremely difficult to run a business when (1) you have to walk the tightrope of balancing everyone’s values and (2) you are expected to treat all these values as equally valid. Our society today has lost its ability to determine what is right from what is wrong. Business enterprise requires a level of trust among the participants. Where is that trust going to come from if we have no common platform upon which to base our ethics and must rely, instead, on the assorted and conflicting individual values of whatever group we’re a part of? This essay will grapple with some of the problems we must face as Christians in trying to operate in the business world, while surrounded with people who believe their personal values are not subject to any higher standard than their own reasoning.

Who Makes the Rules?

The fundamental question we need to address is, Who makes the rules, God or man? That is what the issue of ethics is all about. Either there is a source for what is morally right that is beyond ourselves, i.e., God, and that standard is absolute and universal, or we are left to ourselves to figure out what is right and what is wrong, if we can even agree among ourselves that there is a right and a wrong. If we were, in

fact, left to ourselves, how could we say one person's values were any better than another's? In the age of the industrial and scientific revolution, people believed they could reason themselves toward better behavior, but today, having seen the horrors of what the industrial and scientific revolution has brought upon us, many have given up any hope of finding a unified answer for right and wrong. In fact, many now actually fear anyone who thinks that he or she has a handle on any absolute standard by which we might live.

Society has moved from a Christian base, which held that there is a source of ultimate truth, through modernism, which saw truth as relative to circumstances, duty, consequences, situations, etc., to post-modernism, which asserts that there is no truth, only the power to put forth one's values.

King Solomon, who was hailed as the wisest leader ever to govern any nation, said, "Be wise and give serious thought to the way you live." In all endeavors, including our work, we must realize that morality is the single most important guiding principle behind all that we do and say. Our morality molds our ultimate being, who we really are.

Today most professional organizations have a code of ethics. The problem is that their codes are often ignored or not made known. For example, a few years ago Probe was speaking in the engineering department at Southern Methodist University. One of the students, after hearing the lecture on engineering ethics, came up to the speaker afterwards and said, "I have been an engineering student for four years, and this is the first time I ever heard that there was an engineering code of ethics."

There are some companies working hard to communicate to their employees a corporate goal and standard that puts forth biblical values. One company like this is the Servicemaster Company. Their corporate goals are: (1) Honor God in all we do, (2) Help people to develop, (3) Pursue excellence, and (4)

Grow profitably. Notice that the profitability goal, although one of their four key goals, is listed last. Making a profit is a necessary goal, but there are things more important than surviving in this world. In fact, there are a lot of businesses that should shut down, for their only legitimate goal is that they do make a profit. In this regard, the vast pornography business comes to mind, not to mention state lotteries and all the other forms of gambling.

So, as an individual or a business, do our personal or corporate goals demonstrate a commitment to a standard beyond ourselves? Do we have a set of guidelines that helps us to steer a course that is straight and narrow in a world that is adrift—floating all over the ethical map? What we need are some guidelines that will help us to steer that straight and narrow course.

Ethical Guidelines for the Real World

In his book, *Honesty, Morality & Conscience,* published by NavPress,(2) Jerry White gives us five excellent guidelines for conducting our business activities.

First, there is the guideline of a **just weight** as found in Deuteronomy 25:13-15. The principle of a just weight is to give a full amount in exchange for a fair payment. Another way to look at it is to give full quality for what is paid for and according to what is advertised. We must accept responsibility for both the quality and the amount of our product or service. As a business owner, do I fairly represent my product or service? As an employee, do I give a full day's work for a full day's pay? Remember, as it says in Colossians 3:23, we are working for the Lord and not for men.

Second, the Lord demands our **total honesty**. Ephesians 4:25 calls upon us to speak the truth. Jerry White reminds us that, "Although we will frequently fail, our intent must be total honesty with our employer, our co-worker, our employees, and

our customers."(3) This is a difficult principle to adhere to. James 3:2 says this is where we often fail, but if we can control our tongue we will be able to control the rest of our body as well. The Living Bible best sums it up in Romans 12:17 which says, "Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through." We must ask ourselves, are we totally honest in reporting our use of time, money, and accomplishments?

The third principle is **being a servant**. Someone has said Christians like to be *called* servants, but don't appreciate being *treated* like servants. To serve God sounds glorious, but to serve others is another matter. As usual, Jesus Christ is our example. Matthew 20:28 says that Christ did not come to be served, but to serve others, in fact, to give up his life for others. The value of a business is its service. How well it serves the needs of its customers will determine its success. The business, in turn, is made up of people who must do the serving. The value of the employees is in how well they serve the customer's needs. This is putting the needs of others before our own and then trusting God to meet our needs in the process.

The fourth guideline is **personal responsibility**. We must take full responsibility for our own actions and decisions. We should not try to excuse our actions based on pressure within our business or organization to do what we know is not right. We all fail at times to do what we know we should do. We must then accept the responsibility for what we have said or done and not try to pass that responsibility on to someone else or try to blame it on some set of circumstances. Romans 12:2 warns us about the danger of allowing the world to shape us into its mold.

Finally, there is the issue of **reasonable profits**. This principle is quite a bit harder to get a handle on, but it is still vital to have guidelines to follow. What is a reasonable profit? This is something each person has to deal with on his

own. Luke 6:31 is a great help on this. It says that we should treat others the same way we would want to be treated. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and ask yourself how you would want to be treated in a particular situation. To the business person this is the price of our service or product above our cost. To the employee it is the amount of our wages for our service to the organization. Luke 3:14 says to be content with our wages, but the Bible also reminds the employer in 1 Timothy 5:18 that the laborer is worthy of his wages.

It is all too easy to rationalize our way around many of these principles, but God will hold us accountable in the end. Ultimately it is God whom we serve and to whom we must give account.

The Cost of Living Ethically

The media is awash with reports of faulty business ethics: frauds, manipulations, thefts, industrial espionage, corruption, kickbacks, conspiracy, thefts, tax evasion, embezzling, and unfair competition proliferate. Either a lot more unethical acts are taking place today or those behaviors that have always existed are being exploited more in contemporary society. A Gallup report concluded that "you can't trust Americans as much as you used to." The *Wall Street Journal* reported that churched persons appear only slightly more likely to walk the straight and narrow than their less-pious compatriots.

Why is it so hard to walk the straight and narrow in our business dealings? We are continually under the stress of performance on the job and in the competitive work environment. Often our very livelihood is threatened under pressure of the job. Usually we know what we should do, but we count the cost of doing the right thing and then back down due to pressure from people or circumstances. If we feel that we must do whatever is necessary to keep our jobs, we may end up

serving the wrong master.

Steven Covey, in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*,(4) addresses the issue of the need to become principle-centered individuals. Are we living principle-centered lives? This means that there are some principles that are more important than the success or even the continuance of our business. Are there some ethical standards for which we are prepared to die if necessary? Those who let their business die rather than set aside their ethical standards can return to do business again someday, since they were able to maintain their integrity and their reputation. Those who cave in to the pressures to keep the business alive may be caught and end up losing their reputation and thus deprive themselves of a platform from which to rebuild their lives and businesses.

Ten Global Principles for Success

We are going to close this essay on business ethics with *Ten Global Principles for Business and Professional Success* from the booklet *Mega Values* by Colonel Nimrod McNair.(5) These principles are modeled after the Ten Commandments.

The first principle is, “Show proper respect for authority.” This is the invisible superstructure of productive enterprise. God clearly commands us to respect those in authority over us. God uses this command to bring order out of chaos. Authority is a necessary prerequisite to order.

The second rule is, “Have a singleness of purpose.” Divided purposes dilute effectiveness when interests conflict. We cannot serve two masters effectively. We must evaluate our time, talent, and resources and make sure we are using these God-given elements in a way that ultimately brings Him the glory.

Precept number three is, “Use effective communication in word and deed.” Complete communications and predictable follow-

through are the basic expressions of personal integrity. It means doing what you say you'll do, even if it is uncomfortable or inconvenient. This commandment is honored when promises are kept and accurate recounting of transactions is given.

A fourth truth is, "Provide proper rest, recreation, and reflection." This ensures a quality of life that will be reflected in creativity, productivity, and motivation. Rest is a necessity for effectiveness. Recreation guards the mind against mental and emotional fatigue. Reflection promotes self-monitoring, allows for mid-course corrections, and ensures single-mindedness. The fifth tenet is, "Show respect for the older and more experienced." Our parents, teachers, coaches, employers, pastors, and other elders in our lives have an investment in us. It is to our benefit to honor that investment and to draw fully from the wisdom and expertise of those more experienced than ourselves.

The sixth axiom is, "Show respect for human life, dignity, and rights." This encompasses product quality and service, the work environment, health and safety, personnel policies and responsibilities, and competitive practices. It is simply the Golden Rule—treating others as you would want to be treated.

The seventh principle is, "Maintain a stability of sexes and the family." Wisdom and good business practice dictate equal regard for men and women as persons irrespective of gender or marital status. Respect for the family structure as the crucial foundation of our cultural system must be reflected in our decisions regarding the conflicts between business demands and the value of the family and personal life.

Precept number eight is, "Demonstrate the proper allocation of resources." Two fundamental responsibilities and privileges of business are optimal use of material resources and wise leadership of people. We must treat all our business assets, whether they be people, funds, or materials, as a gift from

the Lord.

The ninth truth is, “Demonstrate honesty and integrity.” Integrity is the cornerstone of any good relationship. Without demonstrating the willingness to give and the worthiness to receive trust, no business can survive or prosper. A reputation for honesty is a comprehensive statement of both a person’s character and how he or she treats others. It is a fundamental mindset against stealing, lying, or deceiving.

The tenth and final business commandment is, “Maintain the right of ownership of property.” Those who are disciplined, creative, prudent, and industrious are entitled to the fruits of their labor. We must not covet that which belongs to another.

Business ethics is more than a list of do’s and don’ts, but these principles can help us get off to a good start.

Notes

1. Chuck Colson, Jubilee (October 1989).
2. Jerry White, Honesty, Morality & Conscience (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1978).
3. Ibid.
4. Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).
5. Colonel Nimrod McNair, *Mega Values: 10 Global Principles for Business and Professional Success Written in Stone* (Executive Leadership Foundation, Inc., 2179 Northlake Pkwy. Suite 119, Tucker, GA 30084-9885).

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Morality Apart From God

Recently, I became aware of a professor at one of the local colleges whose goal is to convince his students that you can have a system of ethics without a belief in God. Now I agree with him that holding his position is theoretically possible, but I said to him that such an ethical system is one built on sand. It would not stand the test of time nor the waves of adversity.

The U.S.S.R. tried to build an empire on godless atheism, and it failed miserably. Today in Russia we still see the results of the ethics of atheism. You would think that the Russians, having suffered so much under a totalitarian regime, would strive to do the right thing in appreciation for their new freedoms. Many have, but Russia today is torn apart by crime, greed, lawlessness, and immorality. Why? Was it merely too much freedom too soon, or are they still reaping the rewards of the ethics of atheism?

Many people today believe that God is, at best, unnecessary, and at worst, an intolerant task master. They say they don’t need God to live right, and they can set their own rules for life. We live in a world obsessed with personal values. What people do depends on their personal values, but since everyone’s values are different, there seems to be no standard by which we must all live. The very idea of basing our morality upon our values means that we have bought into the idea of a system of relativistic ethics. Personal values have replaced values of virtue as the foundation for ethical thought. Virtues speak of some objective realities, but personal values speak only about subjective decisions of our will.

Basing ethical decisions on personal values is problematic. For example, is something good because we love it, or do we love it because it is good? German philosopher Friedrich

Nietzsche would tell us that something is good because we love it. According to Nietzsche, man himself is the universal and absolute reference point for all of life. “God is dead,” he declared, believing this release from the demands of any metaphysical reality was an opportunity to develop his own system of ethics based on self cultivation.

Today the world is continuing to build an ethical system based on tolerance and enlightenment apart from God. Men have tried many ways to teach this new godless form of morality. A decade ago we constantly heard the term, “values clarification.” It was a national effort to allow even children to set their own standards of behavior. It was a disaster as it justified almost any kind of behavior. Educators may not loosely throw around the term, “values clarification,” as they once did, but many still try to teach a system of ethics based on man’s own values. These are values which are rooted in the idea of desirable goods, i.e., that which we decide is important to us.

The use of the term “values” can have objective content, but we must evaluate the source of that “objective content,” and that leads us back to the question at hand: Is it possible to have true morality without a belief in God?

In this essay I will address this question by presenting common arguments against the need for God and then I will respond to those arguments.

What Is Ethics Without God?

From the time of the Greeks, there have been many philosophers who have sought to prove that it is possible to have a universal morality without God. There have been many arguments presented to support this position, and in theory they may be right, depending on what one means by the word *universal.* They would say, all you have to have is a consensus on what is considered right and wrong behavior. Their position, with

which I disagree, goes something like this:

First: If God is necessary for morality, then whatever God deems moral is moral. Therefore, why praise God for what He has done if He could have just as likely done the opposite, and it would have been equally moral. If whatever God says goes, then if God decreed that adultery was permissible, then adultery would be permissible. If things are neither right nor wrong independently of God's will, then God cannot choose one thing over another because it is right. Thus, if He does choose one over another, His choice must be arbitrary. But a being whose decisions are arbitrary is not worthy of worship.

Second: If goodness is a defining attribute of God, then God cannot be used to define goodness. If we do so, we are guilty of circular reasoning. That is, if we use goodness to define God, we can't also use God to define goodness.

Third: If one doesn't believe in God, being told that one must do as God commands will not help one solve any moral dilemmas.

Some philosophers, therefore, come to the following conclusion: the idea that a moral law requires a divine lawgiver is untenable.(1)

What should be our response as Christians? We should point out to people who side with the preceding position their lack of understanding concerning both God and the nature of man.

God is the creator and sustainer of all things. We would not even be self aware, let alone aware of right and wrong, if God had not created within us His image, and therefore the ability to make moral distinctions. The truth is we have no reference point for all this discussion about morality except as God reveals it. For us to argue with the source of morality is for the clay to argue with the potter.

Some philosophers say that for God to define what is right or wrong is arbitrary. God is not arbitrary; He is the source of

all life and therefore the source of all truth. We have no basis to even understand the concept of being arbitrary except in reference to an unchanging God. That which would be circular reasoning or arbitrary in discussions about ourselves comes into perfect focus as we bring the dilemma close to the universal, absolute focal point for all creation, God Himself.

The second problem with these arguments is that they fail to recognize the nature of man. If man were not fallen, i.e., not corrupted by sin, we would have limitless potential to create from within ourselves a universal moral code. But, we are a fallen lot, every last one of us, and therefore incapable of fully knowing what is good (Rom. 3:23). We are even incapable of carrying out what we do know to be good (Rom. 7:18-21).

So the question of right or wrong has everything to do with the origin of our belief, not just the substance of it. No matter how sincerely I believe I am right about some moral decision, the true test is in the origin of that belief. And God is the only universal and absolute origin to all morality.

The Ethics of Belief

We are discussing arguments for the removal of God from ethical systems of morality. Many are trying to formulate an ethical platform that is devoid of any need for God.

We previously looked at one approach based on the idea that the need for a divine lawgiver is arbitrary and untenable.

Another argument, also based on scientific naturalism, holds that it is immoral to hold to a belief for which one has no evidence. The problem is that the backers of this theory are naturalists and, therefore, automatically limit all evidence to that which is naturalistic, i.e., what can scientifically be tested. For such people, putting any trust at all in the metaphysical is folly.

To these naturalists, all humans are born with a moral sense

which becomes a habit of virtue as we practice comradeship and work through our common struggles. It is merely the result of a social instinct born within us.

This is a very evolutionary approach to knowledge and ethics that considers theistic approaches as outmoded hypotheses. Scientific discourse is seen as an alternative to faith.(2)

As Christians, we recognize that man is more than just material; there is a lot more to us than just the physical body. We see this in our ability to mentally stand back and evaluate our lives, our ability to know right from wrong, and our self awareness and personality that make us unique from the rest of God's creation.

Because of our Christian perspective, we are interested not just in the physical evidences to the realities of life, but in the metaphysical evidences as well. For example, we have this book called the Holy Bible. It obviously is physical in nature because we can hold it and feel it and read it. But is there valid evidence that this book contains a message from God? Yes, in fact there are countless other books written to affirm that there is, in the pages of the Bible, a metaphysical message from the Creator of the Universe. The historic testimony of the ages confirms to our satisfaction that this book is the very communication from God to us. Can we prove this with scientific experiments? No. But, we have experienced countless testimonies and evidences that this book is more than just physical in its nature.

As Christians we must not allow the reductionism of this present age to eliminate the metaphysical in ethical dialogue. We must use the truth of God's Word unashamedly. We do not need to defend the Bible, for the Bible will defend itself. We just need to use it and live it to show the reality of God in our lives and demonstrate the power of our changed lives.

When man is allowed to see himself as only an animal,

controlled by inborn or acquired instincts, he becomes self-centered and power oriented. Everything becomes an issue of power to be what he wants to be, and we either seek to create our own reality and purpose in life as the existentialist would do, or we slump into the despair of the postmodernist who says nothing makes any difference, and it really doesn't matter what we do.

Next we will look at what can happen if we allow the world to tell us we are nothing but living flesh, totally on our own in this physical universe.

From a Crack in the Dam, To a Flood in the Valley

Intellectuals like Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Tillich and many others who have followed them have tried to create a godless society, a society free to create its own ethical system without the constraints of God-given mandates.

What can we expect if these leaders are able to advance their model for a system of ethics that has no need for God?

An interesting example may be the story of the medical profession in Germany during the Nazi regime. The medical profession is supposed to be the protector of human life. The Hippocratic Oath, that dates back to the Egyptians, states the highest standards of trust for those dedicating themselves to this honorable profession.

How did the medical profession in Germany become nothing more than an instrument of death in the hands of the Nazis? First, one's view of the nature of man had to change from that of a spiritual being to that of a purely physical being of no universal value beyond what society places on the individual. Through years of assault upon traditional morals and biblical truths, the German people began to see mankind through the eyes of German philosophers like Nietzsche and Hiedigger.

These men viewed humanity as strictly flesh and blood, different from the animals only in progression, not in basic nature.(3)

Once the German population in general, and the medical profession in particular, was sold on a collectivist-authoritarian way of life, everything was in place to use the medical profession to accomplish the purposes of the Third Reich.

The Nazi holocaust began with a subtle shift in attitude that judged the value of people based upon their cost/benefit ratio to the state. First, it started with sterilization and euthanasia of people with severe psychiatric illnesses. Soon all those with chronic illness were being exterminated. Before too long, all patients who had been sick for five years or more, or were medically unable to work and unlikely to recover were transported to killing centers; what started as "mercy killings" in rare cases of extreme mental illness soon expanded to mass extermination on an unprecedented scale. Before long all those who could not work and were medically evaluated as incapable of being rehabilitated were killed.(4)

The German medical profession then started using human body parts for medical research, and this led to the grisly "terminal human experiments," in which live people were used in medical experiments.(5)

It all started with the idea that humans belong to society and the state. According to this view, if someone is a burden to society and the state, it is logical to conclude that their life was not a life worth living. From the first decision to put to death burdensome mental patients, a chain of events followed that ultimately led to the death of the majority of all the Jews in Europe, as well as millions of other "undesirables."

If we don't believe we are created by God, but simply highly

evolved animals, and if we believe we have accountability only to society, then there is no end to the depths of depravity that we can go in our search to justify our actions. Corrosion of morals begins in microscopic proportions, but if not checked by a standard beyond ourselves, it will continue until the corrosion wipes away the very foundation of our lives, and we find ourselves sinking in a sea of relativity.

Repairing the Ethical Breach

In this essay we have been addressing the danger of trying to establish an ethical system apart from the need for God.

I was recently impressed by an editorial in the *Dallas Morning News.* Written by Al Casey, the editorial was entitled, "Our ethical foundation needs repair."(6) In emphasizing the need for high ethical standards, Mr. Casey quotes the famous medical missionary, Dr. Albert Schweitzer: "Ethics is concern for good behavior . . . an obligation to consider not only our personal well-being, but also that of others and of human society as a whole."(7)

This is so true, but there is an even higher standard than what we might consider the good of human society. It is God alone who can set that standard. Earlier we spoke of some unbelievable atrocities that were committed by the German medical profession for the "good of society."

There is an old adage that says, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Human beings left to themselves often start out with good intentions, but somehow, without guidance from above and obedient hearts, we lose our way.

Al Casey came the closest to the truth when he quoted Professor Alexander Tytler of the University of Edinburgh:

> *From bondage to spiritual faith.*
> *From spiritual faith to great courage.*
> *From courage to liberty.*

From liberty to abundance.
From abundance to selfishness.
From selfishness to complacency.
From complacency to apathy.
From apathy to dependency.
From dependency back again into bondage.(8)

A consensus of ethical norms apart from the supervision of God will eventually erode. Power begins to take over in determining our actions. Look at our government today. It is controlled for the most part by special interest groups vying for influence. Every day I receive in the mail a plea for funds to help some group influence our government. What ever happened to sending upright men and women to Washington and trusting them to do the right thing without our funding various organizations that seek to influence our leaders to do their bidding?

Mr. Casey said it right, "To an alarming extent, America has become complacent, a nation inhabited by people concerned only with their own well-being."(9)

But, we don't just need a code of ethics, as important as that is; we need to put God back into our lives. We need to submit to His leadership in our lives, to recognize that only the God who created us knows what is best for us and only God is capable of revealing to us the ethical standards that can ultimately bring the peace we so desperately seek.

How do we do that? It starts with His book, the Holy Bible. God has spelled out some pretty clear principles on how to treat others. Do we love others as we love ourselves? That is not so easy when everyone around us is living out the relativistic ethics of power. The true force of Christianity has never been the use of power plays to conquer the world. From the Crusades of the Middle Ages to the moral majority of the last decade, efforts by Christians to use political or

economic power to advance the Kingdom of God have been questionable, if not disastrous. The true power of Christendom has always been the testimony of Christians who are living out their faith in a world obsessed with self promotion—Christians who are in the Word of God and who maintain ethical and moral integrity!

Notes

1. Theodore Schick, Jr., "Morality Requires God . . . or Does It?," *Free Inquiry* (Summer 1997), pp. 32-34.

2. Timothy J. Madigan, "The Virtues of 'The Ethics of Belief,'" *Free Inquiry* (Spring 1997), pp. 29-33.

3. Leo Alexander, *Medical Science Under Dictatorship* (Flushing, N.Y.: Bibliographic Press, 1996), p. 9.

4. Ibid.

5. Maccaro, James A., "'From Small Beginnings:' The Road to Genocide," *The Freeman* (August 1997), pp. 479-81.

6. Casey, Al, "Our ethical foundation needs repair," *Dallas Morning News,* Sunday, 27 July 1997, p. 6J.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

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The Morality of the West

Cheating in the Schools

According to a study by Rutgers University, over 70% of all university students admit they have cheated at least once. And there's probably a few more who wouldn't admit it. The most common form of cheating admitted to is plagiarism. Students have always copied from someone else's paper or stealthily brought forbidden notes into the classroom. But the incidence is rising. Nineteen percent admit they have faked a bibliography, and fourteen percent say they have handed in a computer program written by someone else. {1}

This report highlights the fact that many students today are either unable or unwilling to act in an ethical manner. William Kilpatrick, in his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, brings to light the millions of crimes committed yearly on or near school property. Children go to school scared and intimidated. Many teachers contemplate and actually do leave the profession because of all the discipline and behavior problems.{2} A professor of philosophy at Clark University says:

> *Students come to college today as moral stutterers. They haven't been taught much respect for what I call "plain moral facts," the need for honesty, integrity, responsibility. It doesn't take a blue-ribbon commission to see this. Students don't reason morally. They don't know what that means.{3}*

Also, Mr. Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics, said "Far too many young people have abandoned traditional ethical values in favor of self- absorbed, win-at-any-cost attitudes that threaten to unravel the moral fabric of American society."{4} This "self-absorbed" attitude is based on a whole

new set of assumptions about how we should adopt our values and the right of individuals to construct their own values.

Where do these ideas come from? Are our young people only now discovering the difference between what their parents have preached to them and what they actually do? Is it simply due to the fact that society is changing? Or is this an ethical vacuum caused by a value system without a solid foundation?

Some have suggested that we have simply discovered more efficient ways of uncovering people's wrongdoing so it just seems that people are less moral in their dealings. In other words, we are just more aware of the imperfections that were always there. A more interesting question, however is whether the behavior is the result of values being communicated by society? Have the rules changed? and who makes these rules, God or men? The Christian and the theist turn toward the Creator of the Universe. The humanist or atheist turns toward himself. This distinction between theism and humanism is the fundamental division in moral theory.

It appears that we are rapidly approaching a Godless, valueless society in which "power ethics" or the "political rationalism" of humanism is replacing the Judeo-Christian ethical base of traditional morality. The roots of our present dilemma go all the way back to the secular humanism of the fifteenth- and sixteenth- century Renaissance, and the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The idea of the sufficiency of human reason grew stronger during these periods, continually challenging Judeo- Christian values in an increasingly sophisticated way. Humanity was placed at the center of the universe, rather than God.

The Moral Results of Reason Alone

Just as our Lord said that man cannot live by bread alone, so man cannot live by reason alone. If we exclude revelation as a source of direction in discovering who man is and rely solely

on our intellect, and our own ideas of how we came to be, then we will naturally slip into a pessimistic and ultimately depressing view of human nature.

The seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke said that all knowledge comes from sensation. In other words, the only reality is what we can see, hear, feel, smell, taste, or measure. Not much room for revelation here. Other philosophers have followed up on this idea and have concluded that man is shaped by evolutionary processes and the culture that surrounds us. The notion that man is born with some innate nature has been rejected. Men like Hegel, Darwin, and Marx believed that all living forms and social systems were nothing more than the result of progressive transformations over time. As the influence of the religious community began to wane in the nineteenth century, many began to search for a meaning to life totally apart from God. Man simply no longer believed he had a place in eternity. Therefore all he could do was hope to find his place in the movement of history.{5}

Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* catapulted the abandonment of God and revelation by attempting to show that God was not even necessary in the creation of living things. If God did not create us, then we certainly could not gain our sense of meaning and purpose from a book purportedly written by Him. Frederich Nietzsche purposed to highlight the ethical implications of Darwinism. Nietzsche's "superman" concept transformed man into the maker of his own destiny. Man was truly the measure of all things. If God is dead, as Nietzsche declared, and nature is all there is, then what is, is right. Human life was therefore stripped of any purpose or goal. The contemporary Harvard professor, E. O. Wilson has stated, "No species, ours included, possesses a purpose beyond the imperatives created by its genetic history." Elsewhere he declares that our dilemma is that "we have no particular place to go. The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature." This will ultimately result in a sense of

hopelessness, pessimism, apathy, and absurdity. William Kilpatrick in his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, says "Suicides among young people have risen by 300 percent over the last thirty years."{6} Next to accidents it is now the second leading cause of death in teenagers. Many of the deaths due to accidents are the result of auto accidents in which alcohol has played a role which can also be traced back to a sense of hopelessness and despair. Young people who may have never heard of Nietzsche are nevertheless living their lives in accordance with his philosophy of living recklessly.

A group of scholars presented the case of biblical authority to a group of students at Princeton University. At the conclusion of their presentation, a student stood and said:

> *I am surprised that I found myself feeling that you two were right and all of us were wrong, at least insofar as this very basic point: why we stand where we stand makes all the difference in the world. So the weakness of your presentation was that you were arguing on the basis of logic and presuppositions and intellectual integrity with persons who are perfectly ready to dispense with all three.{7}*

Our young people are so far removed from a rational discussion of what is right and what is wrong that they are unable to even decide what criterion should be used to make the decision, let alone make the decision itself. This is the inevitable result of the philosophical trend to utilize human reason alone apart from the revelation in Scripture. As our creator, God alone has the authority and knowledge to inform us as to how we are to act. Left to ourselves, we will only be confused.

Why Are Biblical Values No Longer Taught in Schools?

Many students today are so confused that they not only don't

know what ethical system is valid, but they don't even know how to evaluate them. One might ask, why aren't the schools teaching the values our children need, values that will work for them rather than against them?

To understand the lack of values being taught in our educational institutions, we need to go back to the biblical critics who were writing in Germany in the nineteenth century. The product of an attempt to operate by human reason alone, this movement placed the claims of religion and particularly the Bible outside the realm of human reason. If the Bible was not reasonable, then the Scriptures lost their foundation in real history. The traditions of the faith were seen as merely that, tradition with no basis in reality. This meant that the events contained in the Bible were to be evaluated on whether they were reasonable within a universe where the supernatural was assumed to be nonexistent or at least not involved in the real world. These scholars, called higher critics, believed that all morality is totally relative to historical time and place. The laws of the Bible were now to be seen as being understood only within the times that the Bible was describing. A Sabbath was only useful to an agrarian and shepherding culture. The same would be true for adultery or taking the Lord's name in vain.

This approach essentially denies the unity and moral integrity of the entire Bible.{8} The end result is that in people's minds, their ethics became separated from their faith. This eventually resulted in deism, a view that says that God only provided the necessary input to get the universe started but left it completely on its own after creation. He never intervened in natural or human history again. God is still there, but there is no possibility of any communication between God and His creation. Well, if you can't communicate with God and He has no influence over your life, why bother with worrying whether God existed at all? The worldview of naturalism quickly follows which says that there is no God.

Nietzsche's "madman" said, "God is dead!"{9} God was now out of the picture. Nietzsche simply took the next step. He tried to force men and women to, "feel the breath of empty space." If you have been following the train of thought here you are probably beginning to see the connection between Nietzsche's ideas and the state of our youth today. Many young people feel that there is no grand purpose for their life. Life is empty and cheap. If you believe in some form of a grand purpose, it is really only a grand illusion. All that is left, therefore, is to live for the pleasure of the moment. Gain what pleasure you can in an absurd universe. This will ultimately lead to an attitude of despair. If God is dead, what's the use of conforming to any rules. If I die as a result of my actions, so what, life is absurd anyway.

Students today often seem to be lost in relativism and are unable to think about or look into their futures. They shrivel up within the confines of their immediate surroundings. There is no longer any hope in eternity or in real justice.

Many of today's young people wander about their school halls with no hope, no dreams, no optimism about their future. Rock groups such as *Nirvana* and *Nine Inch Nails* continually fill their heads with the meaninglessness of a universe in which God is dead and life is absurd. We should be filled with great sadness when we witness the destruction this kind of thinking results in such as the suicide of Nirvana's heart and soul, Curt Cobain. I believe we should also see such people as Jesus does, as lost sheep. They are a great mission field for which the truth and historical reality of the gospel can find fertile ground.

The Twentieth Century Results of a "God Is Dead" Universe

The Greek philosopher Plato understood that there must be some universal or absolute under which the individual things (the

particulars, the details) must fit. Something beyond the everyday must be there to give it all unity and meaning. Even the atheist and existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, realized that a finite point is absurd if it has no infinite reference point.{10} Sartre chose to believe that this infinite reference point did not exist, therefore, the only thing worth doing is existing and making choices, regardless of what those choices may be. But how can we tell students, our children, that anything is right or wrong if there is no absolute reference point such as the Bible, to base this on?

Existentialism says that we need to make a "leap of faith"{11} and seek to find our meaning without reason. In other words, we just have to find what works for us. And as we go through life, what works will constantly be changing. If we actually try to think about it, if we try to rationalize a meaning, we will only get depressed. According to existentialism, the only way to be happy, is to not think, to be blindly optimistic.

Another perspective is power ethics or "political naturalism." Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) was a great voice in the revival of political naturalism in the sixteenth century. In his book *The Prince*, a ruler who wants to keep his post must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires.{12} In other words, do what you need to do to preserve your position and don't concern yourself with what is ethical. Just preserve your power. Machiavelli's ethical stance of whatever strengthens the state is right had a great influence on the thinking of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Feuerbach's claim that God was merely a human invention had a lot to do with the writings of Karl Marx (1819-1883) who took these ideas as validation of his own views. His ideas provided a foundation upon which Lenin and Stalin were able to build a society around the power ethics of political rationalism. Feuerbach and Marx rejoiced in the fact that the loosing grasp of religion had made it possible to create a city of man in an entirely human

space.{13} In Russia there was a concerted attempt to root out Christianity and substitute an extremely intolerant and militant form of the religion of the Enlightenment.{14}

Adolph Hitler is another example. So profound was Nietzsche's philosophy upon Hitler, that it provided the framework for his tireless efforts to obliterate the Jews and the weak of this world.{15} Nietzsche had proclaimed the coming of the Master Race, and a Superman who would unify Germany and perhaps the world.{16} Hitler, in his book *Mein Kampf*, clearly announced his intent to take Nietzsche's logic and drive the atheistic worldview to its logical conclusion. In Nietzschean terms, atheism will inevitably lead to violence and hedonism.{17} Hitler personally presented a copy of Nietzsche's works to Benito Mussolini, and Mussolini submitted a thesis on Machiavelli for his doctor's degree.

When human reason is allowed to be unaccountable it becomes solely a function of power, it legitimatizes the construction of a totalitarian state and in the case of Hitler the end result was the Holocaust. The real legacy of unbridled humanism is terror.{18}

The Purification of Moral Relativism

We construct museums so that we may never forget the horror of the German Holocaust. Russia is trying to recover from a total collapse of a power structure that was based on political rationalism and historical materialism. They had to find out the hard way. The fundamental dogma of the Enlightenment, the natural goodness and/or reasonableness of man, is a myth at best. It was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who related what he overheard two old peasants say during the blood baths of Stalin's regime, "It is because we have forgotten God. That is why all this is happening to us." Out of the rubble of a failed system rose a people desperate to reestablish an ethical base that will work for them rather than against them. An article in *USA Today* illustrates a new hope for values in

Russia. It reports that:

> *Officials say up to 55% of Russian teachers, many of whom were former atheists, have made personal commitments to Christ. Many are using the New Testament in schools. "For ages, (Russia) was a country of believers and morality was very close to the people," says assistant principal Olga Meinikova, 32, of school No. 788. "For a short period 74 years we lost it all. All Russian teachers should teach this course; Americans too. The Bible is part of normal education."{19}*

Teams of Americans are helping to train Russian teachers how to teach Judeo-Christian morals and values based on a system of biblical ethics. The military has also been retraining their staff in Judeo-Christian morality, ethics, and values. Russia reached the bottom of a Godless society and is making an effort to rebuild its ethical base.

We face a dilemma in Western culture. We can continue along the line of thinking that "reason" is our only hope and trust in the natural goodness and/or reasonableness of man. Another extreme is to throw out reason altogether and embrace the philosophy and religion of the new age. The biblical view is to return to the concept of the fallen nature of mankind and rebuild on the traditional base of historic Christianity, which puts reason under the authority of Scripture. This is the traditional basis for ethical teaching in Western culture. It applies to all our institutions of training, including churches and ministries. The ethics modeled by too many Christian leaders is at best a utilitarian form of ethics. At worst, it is a pragmatic form of ethics that serves the self-centered goals of the individual or institution.

In conclusion, ethics based on Enlightenment thinking is not the answer. Crane Brinton, in his book *A History of Western Morals* says, "the religion of the Enlightenment has a long and

unpredictable way to go before it can face the facts of life as effectively as does Christianity."{20} We appear to have an implosion of values in a society. Many are seeking to teach our children that there is no God and no afterlife, but if you live an ethical life it will pay off. It is a standard without a foundation, floating in mid air. Society must re-evaluate its commitment to Enlightenment ethics and thinking. Until it does, we will see a continuing loss of values and respect for humanity.

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