

CHRISTIAN ETHICIST LOOKS AT SOME ISSUES THAT WE WILL STRUGGLE TO APPLY OUR ETHICAL PRINCIPLES TO

The Problem Of Right Conduct, A Text-Book Of Christian Ethics, by Peter Green is one of the best Christian expositions of ethics I have ever come across. It tells us what Christians stand for whether they realise it or not.

Green takes the traditional Christian position that animals have no rights (page 272). He argues against cruelty to them on the grounds that God cares for them and cannot be indifferent to their suffering. He says that our own character is degraded by cruelty and it makes us worse. He says that we harm our neighbour by hurting animals because it corrupts him if he does not care and shocks him if he does. He takes the position then that the duty to care for animals has nothing to do with them having any rights. I'm sure Green wouldn't believe that babies at a very early stage of development in the womb which are lower in consciousness than grown animals have no rights! He would oppose abortion.

Green believes that sometimes there is no right thing to do like when a woman cheats on her husband and repents she has to hide it from him though he has a right to know and does it for his sake and hers (page 159). Her hiding it is bad and so is her not hiding it so she cannot win.

I totally object to his claim that for a married couple to use birth control to avoid the pains and troubles of rearing children is immoral for it is selfish (page 233). He however rejects the view that birth control is always wrong. He thinks that to forbid birth control always may be as silly as saying that a girl eating a chocolate between meals is unnatural sin for she does not need it for her nourishment. So sex just for fun cannot be wrong when undertaken within marriage. But if he is right about it being wrong to selfishly want to avoid children that means that a couple who can have more children but don't want them are sinning. Also he is restricting the right to marry to the well off for only people who are willing to have and can have as many children as possible should get married. If it is selfish to have sex and to intend no children, what is to not want a partner in marriage at all?

Green rejects the view that people can morally get divorced just because a partner ends up in jail for life (page 230). He rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine that a marriage is invalid if it takes place in a Register Office (page 212) for all that is necessary is for a man to take his wife to live with him for the rest of his and her life. The Roman Church just wants to break up couples married that way for the hell of it. It forces gay couples to break up and it is trying to legitimise adultery when the marriage was solemnised in a Register Office. The truth about marriage is that it is about having sex with nobody else until death they do part and is not about parting when love ceases. The living together is not even important and it is enough to have sex once. Marriage is not about love but about sex and power which is why thoughtful Humanists do not believe in it. When it is about sex that might not be very good then logically divorce is wrong for divorcing is done for the sake of happiness and marriage treats happiness with indifference. And why should a wife not divorce her jailbird husband if she is allowed to divorce him for a once-off act of adultery that should not have bothered her excessively?

He says that anger should never be allowed to become an emotion but allows intellectual anger which is seeing that something should not be (page 192). Emotional anger would then be an act of hate for it is totally unnecessary and dangerous.

He lists the reasons for punishment which are retribution, to prevent injury to the innocent, to deter others from doing wrong, and to reform the criminal (pages 256-259). It seems to me that if Christians really love their enemies the main reason for punishment will be to help the criminal to reform. Funny how the Church teaches that the law of the land has to be upheld by punishing to be a law and still it allows you to not turn yourself in if you commit a murder. Well it is funny if you consider hypocrisy funny!

He sees the deterrence element in punishment as something the criminal can do for society to undo some of the damage (page 259). Is this interest in society compatible with Humanist individualism? Yes for the criminal needs to be part of society to practice this individualism. He is condemned by the law he himself wants and upholds. Anyway, it is not Christian to expect anything from other people. The prophet, St Paul stated that it is better to give than to receive.