

## IN DEFENCE OF SITUATION ETHICS

The idea of situation ethics teaches that you just act with the intention of love and forget about rules. You can lie and steal if somebody is better off if you do and there is no better way you can think of.

### A defence

The problems people have with situation ethics are all built up around the notion that it is too easily abused. That makes their criticisms immoral for it is obvious that nothing can be condemned because people are not using it properly.

They say a person can pretend to be doing the loving thing while actually implementing an evil plan. They are saying that unscrupulous people can take advantage of the fact that it is up to them to decide what the best consequences are and pretend to care about doing what is best. It is hard to predict consequences and the unexpected often happens.

They say that situation ethics puts you on a slippery slope - eg it wants you to kill a person who is in terrible agony and who will never get better but if you are allowed to do that soon people will start mercykilling people for crazy reasons.

The problems are a worry but they do not affect the majesty of situation ethics. Blaming it and its practitioners because of abuses is hardly ethical. Any other form of ethics does just that so they are really hypocrisies and lies rather than ethics. And practitioners of other ethical systems do dip into situation ethics a lot anyway.

Most people live by Situationism and we are all still alive and even better off than in previous years. That shows that practice rather than reason alone may be the best argument for it.

Christians would agree with the following: "Situationism tells you that you must decide what is the most loving thing to do. As with Utilitarianism, there is the problem that people like being told what to do to a large extent for they value happiness more than freedom. A moral theory that increases misery by doing without law is no use (Ethics in a Permissive Society, Barclay, page 80). " What must we say to that?

Why do people want to be told what to do and have moral rules? One reason is laziness. Or they just don't have the time to think for themselves. Either way they are being manipulated by the rule makers and the religious leaders. To give people rules for they are too lazy to come up with good rules themselves is taking advantage and encouraging their vice. To give people rules because they don't have the time is also taking advantage. It is facilitating the tendency to put one's job and family before one's heart and sense of personal responsibility.

The people are not fond of rules in relation to drinking and sex and money. So that makes one question the force of the objection. What weakens it far more is how people pay lip service to moral rules and religion. People like to try and fit in with their communities.

Situationism is said to be unloving in the sense that it takes away rules from the people - rules that they want and need even if they don't like them. This is ridiculous. People want more rules one year and less rules the next and sometimes none the year after that! Also, how do we measure the benefits of having the rules against the benefits of not having them? There is no way of gauging. The balance might tip a little in favour of the rules but we cannot be that accurate at assessing this.

If people want rules what might they want them for?

-They want the rules because they are right or at least for the best.

-To feel safe in what they do. This is not the same as being safe. For example, women feel protected by social mores and rules banning adultery. But what if, hypothetically, adulterous men are less violent towards their wives than faithful men? The sense of safety is based on error. To want rules just because you want to feel safe is actually selfish.

-People who don't like the fact that situation ethics says the rules take second place and really should be guidelines and not rules are deep down hoping that others will be forced to comply with their moral rules. They do not think guidelines are enough to help the well-meaning person make a decision. Rules are about force not guidance. And if man's wellbeing is as important as a rule we are in big trouble. That is downgrading man for the sake of rules. The person who feeds you when you are starving and who does it with no regard to a rule is the best person. They do good spontaneously.

Some answer that the reason we must have the rules is that some things are bad in themselves no matter what the results are or how good they are. They say it is not all about the consequences. They say an evil deed is not bad because of the evil that results but that the evil results because the act is bad in the first place.

But no act is meant to be totally bad. If we do wrong it is because we think there is enough good in it.

Even if you don't agree with Situation Ethics, you get a sense of warmth and comfort from its teaching. You develop revulsion for the likes of the Pope who is its most savage opponent.

### **The sin objection**

Sin is a religious term which means that wrongdoing is not the problem so much as it is against God. Sin worries about how God sees wrongdoing. Sin is not an ethical term. If we want morality to be about us and not religion for not all are religious then then the idea of sin needs to be excluded. The idea of sin is not necessary which opens the door to humanistic non-religious morality. Situation ethics is fine but it needs to drop the religious connotations and thus the idea that we should love God and love others for his sake. These ideas are saying it is a sin to disobey them.

### **The contradiction**

It is said that situation ethics is autonomous and situational and this is a contradiction. So it makes morality about what you decide and not the situation and then tells you to look at the situation. The objection is nonsense for having to decide for yourself is not the same as being autonomous.

### **Finally**

No moral approach is 100% perfect and there will always be people sacrificed to whatever approach you take. We live in a brutal world. Situation ethics is the best of a bad lot. The advantages are how it makes your judgment matter not what the Bible or any religion says. They cannot judge for you and are not very useful. Love and law are incompatible according to situation ethics but we must remember that sometimes law not only just opposes love but is hostile to it. It makes each man and woman his or her own standard of love and morality. It gives a lot of freedom as sometimes decisions have to be made very fast. The permissive nature of situation ethics is actually a good thing for most moralists are really just imposing their own sexual hang-ups on everybody else. Jesus was firmer on sex than anything else - no other rules got clad in iron like that one and he even showed that he did not take his teaching on respect seriously when he vandalised the temple at whim. Situation ethics teaches that an act with love has turned out as well as it can even if it ends in disaster for it is still devoted to love.

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