

THE PROBLEM OF RIGHT CONDUCT

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. That is not to say there are no serious flaws in the book. What I like about it is how it states the Christian side so well which is very important so that critics can pick out the blunders and refute the Christian faith through doing that. We cannot refute any system of belief unless we have an accurate knowledge of what it teaches.

The material on Utilitarianism, work for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, has been left out but suffice to say he sees it as a form of hedonism and too simple and thus dangerous. Killing a baby for fun would be declared right if most people were made happy by it. That this will not happen is not the point. It can be the point and it puts feelings before the innocent.

Green thinks that because a watch cannot correct itself for it is not aware of itself and a man can for he is aware of himself that humans have free will (page 35, 36). That proves nothing. The man might be programmed to change. Consciousness could be something that is programmed by the data that enters it so that change happens. A computer rejects programs that can harm it when it has the right anti-viral software so why should a conscious being need any free will when it does not need it? Green believes that we have free will because we admire goodness in a person different from how we admire a good machine or a beautiful object (page 51). But that is just a feeling. It is the way we are. To base belief in free will on such a terrible foundation means that the morality built on that will be a shambles and a disgrace for you need to be sure we have got free will before you can accuse us of deliberate wickedness.

Green is right that change is the only hope you have if you want evidence for free will for free will is about change. The evidence for free will is as important as free will. There is no good in a free agent being free if she or he cannot be sure. In a sense then the evidence is more important than actually having free will!

We are so weak that often when we fail we are doing our best. Could we be meant to be weak and should we be glad that we are? To be human is to be weak for you cannot fly. So why should morality be any different? What use is believing in free will when somebody might be so weak that it was to blame and not them for shoplifting or whatever? Even the person doing these things will not be able to be sure if they had free will when they did them.

The book spells out that the study of ethics requires three jobs for it has three parts (page 12) which can be simplified as follows:

1. Try to answer the question of what you mean by right and wrong.
2. When the answer is got try to build a set of rules and attitudes that are consistent with that answer and with each other.
3. The science of casuistry is for working out what to do when the rules conflict with each other and to see which rule is overruled by another rule and what the best thing to do is so it is what has to be done when steps 1 and 2 have been satisfactorily completed. An example of one thing that casuistry will have to think about is that if you have to lie to save a life should you still obey the rule that lying is always wrong?

This is all absolutely correct and Humanists accept it without reserve.

In trying to answer question 1 Green considers several attempts to state what is meant by right and wrong.

Green rejects the Theocratic Basis for morality which argues that right is right and wrong is wrong just because God says so. It means that when you call God just and good it has no meaning for God has just made up justice and good. It means that there is no reason to obey God if he is not right and is just making it up. Because of these implications Green says the Theocratic Basis is impossible (page 63-64). This leads him to hold that the law of the land should not match God's law in every respect – that it is right for example not to make adultery illegal. But he pretends not to see that the Theocratic Basis is what he has to confess as true if he believes in God which means the state has to be the tool of divine law and fit it in all respects.

The fact of the matter is that to be a Christian like Green or even a believer in God you have to accept the theory as silly as it is. One could go through life loving nobody but doing amazing good works. Yet they all say this is wrong even if it makes you do good better because loving others is a duty. Yet the only excuse for saying it is wrong is that there is a God who sees into the most secret recesses of your heart and is displeased.

Also a dying person is forbidden to enjoy doing something awful to a hated enemy. Logically he might as well for he deserves to die having vengeful fun but God religion says he should not do it meaning that God's morality is not human morality and that God invents it.

If you believe in God then you believe God has the right to take all you have from you in death which means that if he is good then he means for us to devote ourselves to him and leave nothing for anybody else and just help others as a means of serving him alone. So morality has to be determined on his terms and not ours for even the suffering baby is cruelly not to be helped for its own sake but for his. He could make it a virtue to persecute the innocent.

Christians believe that God has the right to command us what to do. That is to say, we are to do what he asks primarily because he commands it. So he is putting obedience to his authority before you doing good which means that he is saying that it is good to put him before good which can only mean he can invent good and evil and have the right to do so which would mean that morality cannot exist unless we have a God to invent it. The Ten Commandments then were made to be obeyed meaning they imply that it is disobedient to God to hold that God does not invent morality. The Ten Commandments should therefore be banned because they are out to destroy right and wrong and replace it with enslavement to a deity. God does not care about your freedom. He loathes it. Morality could not give God the authority to command because it is its own authority and allegiance is due to it so God has stolen the authority and thereby has declared that he will decide what is right and wrong even if the facts contradict him. Those who see God just as a trap with which to trick people into obeying the commands of men in dog collars will hold that it is they who are the thieves. The commandments were given by God in his role as king and you obey kings because of who they are for you are not allowed to disobey them if you think they are wrong. Jesus also appropriated the king title for that is what his title Christ means.

God commanded that we must not steal or commit adultery. He declared this by his strong and inflexible "Thou shalt not...". His intention was that the people are to be forced and blackmailed by the law not to do these things. When he declared this by authority and didn't say, "It is wrong to commit adultery" but said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery", he was advocating force. If you leave people free and respect their will you will tell them what is wrong but you will not order them like it is their job to do what you want and because you are the superior.

Ideally, the Law prevents crime. When that is the ideal, then why does God put so much value on free will? The Law is really given out of uncharitable motives for he gives free will in order that it might be abused for the ideal is not what is reflected in reality. We live in a world in which any law frequently fails in its objective to regulate behaviour. If blackmail is right then we have a God who can make a virtue of evil things like unjust hatred.

Green recognises that if the Church teaches that God makes morality up out of thin air that people will be unlikely to take God seriously (page 64). They prefer to do good because it is good and not because some being claims that it is good. But the God concept definitely argues that God invents morality therefore it is out to make sure people don't take doing good and being good seriously. Believers are to preach God despite being guaranteed to turn most people off morality for all agree that human beings do not like a moral God and usually invent a softie God with no guts for themselves. They will invent weak morals and blame their invention on God.

The Stoic Basis says that good is to be done for its own sake and not for its results (page 72). This view argues that intuition not logic defends this morality. We sense by intuition that it is right. But some of us have an intuition that it is wrong so what then?

Green agrees partly with the view that we see and perceive what is good about justice and mercy and kindness so that they need nobody to commend them (page 112). But this view assumes that you are sane. A psychopath will not see things as you do and will be very sane acting and intelligent and will believe himself to be sane. You have to believe in yourself before you can believe in the virtues. This shows that all morality or belief in right and

wrong goes back to one thing: self-love. Thus the perverse command of Jesus and Moses: "Love thy neighbour as thyself" stands eternally in its hatred of goodness and replaces it with a double altered by theological plastic surgery. What you do is you love your neighbour by yourself. You good for your neighbour for the sake of your own dignity. In this sense, and not in the antisocial sense, many Humanists are individualists. The Christian faith forbids belief in the existence of the psychopath because it holds that nobody has an excuse for not following Jesus. But the psychopath would have for he has a disorder.

Green finds that the failure of all attempts to establish a basis for morality show that there is only one thing that can succeed. This is that right is not working with people as they are but as they should be or as their nature would require (page 86). In other words people should be treated in the way that suits them as persons. This is not the same as the view that persons are absolutely valuable and it brings God in which means which advocates discrimination against atheists and hatred of their beliefs. As a Christian he really means that a person should be treated in a way that befits them as instruments of God. This implies that unless you have a strong faith in God you cannot be a moral person.

So you can work out morality according to Green by approaching a person as the person ought to be not as he or she is. So lying is wrong because our mouths were given to us to tell the truth. Murder is wrong for life is meant to be lived. To approach the murderer as a murderer would mean it was right to kill him but to approach him as his nature should be would mean that you do not kill him for it is immoral.

There is some truth in this but when you believe in God you end up foolishly saying for example that murder is wrong but if God commanded us to kill one another it would be right to do it. So the God belief is a danger to our faith that murder is bad. Maybe it is a small danger most of the time - but it is still a danger for doing that.

I argue that stealing for fun is not stealing for a reason but for an excuse or a made up reason. Therefore it is a more irrational reason than stealing to buy a coat from the sale of the stolen item would be. This is to be condemned. Stealing for fun is to be condemned more. Stealing to save a life is not to be condemned at all. The Humanist works out right and wrong by approaching man not as a being that should believe in God and obey God's commands but as a being that behaves intelligently or can and should.

Green makes the accusation that those who have no religious convictions are guilty of the sin of not taking God seriously and of being careless (page 132). This presupposes that Christianity is the only right faith. This makes many retort that Christianity is founded on an arrogant and know-it-all attitude which is dishonestly disguised as humility - a tactic which enabled Christianity to steal the sheep that comprise it and which always enabled it. A Muslim or an Atheist could say that Christians are guilty of these sins of carelessness for not agreeing with him! Green rejects the view that religion and religious beliefs are a private matter between each individual and his conscience (page 131). So it is your duty then to believe in God like most other people and you are betraying them if you abjure and fall away from that belief. He says that making your own religious decisions is unnatural for man is a social creature. But man can be social and spiritual and diligent in the quest for truth and have communion with others without organised religion. An informal religious gathering that is not affiliated with any dogmatic cult would suffice. Green's attitude is shown to be a Christian one by the fact that the gospels portray Jesus as claiming the right even to break the law of the land and the Law of Caesar by promulgating the view, in teaching and in miracle, that Jesus was the real Son of God and not Caesar. In actuality, Jesus would have been thrown in jail the second he started doing that so the gospels lie but the point is that he was a master at causing trouble in subtle ways with his harmful theology which Green unhesitatingly embraces.

Humanists do not accuse everybody who disagrees with them of laziness for it is up to each person to see the truth and our deficiencies are often to blame when they don't. Green thinks you are bad for not investigating Christianity but why Christianity? If you should investigate anything you should investigate the case against it which will be presented invariably by rationalists including Humanists. Religion will be ashamed to say it but it needs people like us if it is interested in truth and honesty.

In some parts of the book, instead of the hypocrisy of teaching that the sinner is to be loved and the sin hated the book admits that it is not what the evil person does that we hate but the evil character of that person that we find detestable (page 33). So you hate not the sin but the hateful person for doing the sin. This attitude implies that when a good person does wrong it is more vile than an evil person doing it for the good person has less of an

excuse. If you believe in you have to hate the evil person if you are to hate evil. That is why Humanism mostly denies free will and holds that people who do evil are just victims of mental aberrations. It is necessary to be able to value all people.

Green says that when we call an act evil we are really strictly speaking saying the man that does it is evil. He says the act is not wrong in itself it is just an act so it is the agent who is evil and sinful (page 138). The action is neither good or bad in itself – the consequences have nothing to do with this assessment. To hit someone to waken them up to get them out of a burning building is good and to hit them for no reason is bad. Green says that an unselfish sacrifice can do more harm at times than the vilest treachery and says this can be solved if we do not judge the act but the motive it was inspired with, was it a caring or uncaring motive.

Green even goes as far as to say we cannot have any idea if what we do will be of benefit so it is only motive that counts (page 138). This is wrong and extremely dangerous. You cannot have a sincere good motive to act if it makes no difference what we do – it's only done to ensure we do something for we cannot win.

Green says that ethics is about character and not about actions for a bad character produces bad actions just like a good character produces good actions. He sees that people who attempt to do good without cleaning their souls of sin first are spiritually insensible and arrogant (page 136). He says they cannot do good works. The results of their work may be good but the motives are bad so they are not good works in the sight of God. Then he considers the common objection to Christianity which is that Christians put purifying their hearts before working to make the world a better place.

He states that the answer is that this life is schooling for the next life so that we have a right to put holiness before getting the best results (page 137). That is his answer to those who say that “when A secretly hates his brother and does an amazing pile of good to prove he is better than his brother, A is better being like this than being a holy person who does less good.” That is why he says that the doctrine of immortality indicates that it is right to accuse not acts of immorality but the agents.

Green says that it is not a sin to doubt even what is true if the evidence you have got is insufficient but to doubt your own reason is a sin against the Holy Ghost (page 80). The statement that to have no trust in your own thinking is a fatal sin against the Holy Ghost (page 80) is offensive to Humanists. A person will have reasons for having doubts about his reason or the way he reasons. To make an accusation of sin against them is really to say that people can be condemned for the beliefs they have. To doubt is a reflection of your belief that you should doubt. To accuse like this in the name of God is therefore to say that evil is good when God commands it though it is still harmful and evil. To say that to disbelieve in your own reason is a sin against the Holy Ghost is to deny that it is just a sin against your own reason. There is no need to bring in the Holy Ghost. He would certainly expect to be brought in so he is just interfering. To be like him we have to stick our noses where they don't belong. Time and time again Green keeps talking as if he believes in the Theocratic Basis of morality. All believers in God do but it is not something they like to wear on their sleeves.

Green tells us that loving God gives more permanent and potent virtues than loving others would (page 107). That would be an argument against Atheism and believers in God would necessarily have to agree with it. But that means you only have the Christians' word for it that they are better than anybody else. Why should we believe it in a world of liars and hypocrites? Green said also that it was impossible to measure how much good x or y causes which makes him contradict his boast about the benefits of belief in God (page 71). The truth is it is other believers in God and their attitudes that affect the Christians' behaviour and virtues. Nobody fears letting God down as much as they do letting their neighbours and Church down. Loving others then would be the most potent virtue producer. This is the atheist answer to Green's slur against us.

Green, however, wisely sees later (page 112) that Kant said that morality depends on the principle that man is to be taken as an end in himself. In other words, you do all you do for ultimately it is only you and other people that counts. He sees the view that we are only here for God's ends as demeaning to us and says this view leaves it impossible to convince us as to why we should just go along with God's plans and treat ourselves as his means and not as ends in ourselves. It is destructive to morality and right and wrong. But to this problem Green proposes an unacceptable solution. He thinks that things like justice and charity are eternally right therefore they are an everlasting moral law. He argues that they can only be that if we live forever (page 112). He supposes that there

can be no morality but just expediency if death is the end (page 135). Then he goes back to the villainous view that we exist for God (page 113). He states that cannot know what right and wrong mean unless we presuppose everlasting life (page 111). He denies that he means that the unbeliever in an afterlife

You need to believe in an afterlife which is not like Heaven where there is no need for virtue or in a terrible Hell where virtue is non-existent if Green is right that you need to believe in everlasting life in order to know what right and wrong are. This automatically states that Jesus did not save us from sin by his death on the cross by winning a Heaven for us where there is no sin. It denies the existence of Heaven and it condemns the Christian faith for saying there is a Heaven.

We conclude that Christianity does not know much about right and wrong.