

PREFACE

Religion, Morals and Ethics and Human History

The New Testament records one suicide, that of Judas Iscariot. Neither Testament denounces any of these reported suicides. Indeed, Matthew's recounting of Judas' return of the thirty silver pieces and the hanging of himself clearly implies the possibility that Judas' suicide reflects an act of repentance. (Matthew, 27: 3-10) Two early fathers of the Catholic church, Tertullian and Origen imply that Christ committed suicide and compare it to the ultimate act of love, namely, the giving up of one's life for a friend. John Donne, the English poet and Catholic Christian who became an Anglican priest comments in Biathanatos (literally, the force of death), 1621: "Our blessed Savior...chose that way for our Redemption to sacrifice his life, and profuse his blood". (Part 1, Distinction 3, Section 2)

The early Christian Catholic church adopted the Roman view of suicide, namely, that it was a choice made by noble men: whether pagan, such as the Greek Socrates, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Codrus, Charondas, Lycurgus, Cleombrotus, Cato, Zeno, Cleanthes, Seneca and Paulina; early Romans, like Lucretius, Lucan, Labienus, Terence, Aristarchus, Hannibal, Brutus, Cassius, Mark Anthony; or Eastern notables like Cleopatra, Nerva, Statius, Otho, King Ptolemy of Cyprus, Mithridates and the King Sardanapalus of Persia; or Catholic Christians, martyrs like Stephen or Perpetua.

Early Catholic Christian converts looked upon death as an opportunity to imitate Christ. Indeed, about 202 A.D., the letters of Pliny the Younger, Governor of Corinth (now Turkey) reveal the death sentence which was given for being a Catholic Christian. Indeed, the extant prison diary of one Perpetua, a pregnant woman details the last days of one such Catholic Christian. Perpetua had refused to offer public sacrifice to the Emperor, stating that she was a Christian. She persisted in her statement, as Pliny repeated the question three times, so he condemned her to be eaten by the animals in the amphitheater. After she gave birth, she was led into the amphitheater and faced down the lions although they mauled her badly. The Governor sent a young gladiator into the arena to dispatch her with his sword, but as the gladiator looked at her, his hand was shaking so badly that he could not cut off her head. Perpetua again proclaimed herself a follower of Christ, took his hand and thrust the sword into her throat. Turtullian, the Catholic Christian Theologian subsequently wrote in his Apology that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".

A.D. Catholic Augustine condemned suicide as a rejection of God's gift of life.

Justinian's Digest of Roman law specified that the suicide of a private citizen was not punishable if it had a "rational

cause". Three such "rational" causes were possible: "...impatience of pain or sickness, or by another cause...(or) by weariness of life...lunacy, or fear of dishonor". This motivation of "dishonor" was the reason Socrates, the Greek drank hemlock and Rikiu, the Japanese noble killed himself with his sword. However, the Romans did not permit suicide "without rational cause" because "...whoever does not spare himself would much less spare another".

Ironically, the Roman argument was that if a person held him or herself in such disregard as to commit suicide, then such a person would treat other persons likewise and be inclined to kill them, thus, causing a public disorder. But, the Romans listed three other specific cases wherein suicide became a crime: a slave committing suicide to deprive his master of a capital investment, namely, him or herself; a soldier committing suicide was the equivalent of desertion; and a criminal committing suicide to avoid a trial or to avoid his or her sentencing - in these cases, however, the crime was not religious or ethical, but rather economic since the possessions of the deceased reverted to a Roman citizen (in the first case) or to the Roman state (in the last two cases).

 "Suicide is a sin against God", says
 Plato, "since life itself is a gift".

However, barely three centuries later, the black Berber Catholic Christian Aurelius Augustine and the Catholic church faced a phenomenon which changed the Roman Catholic church's tolerance of suicide after the Roman model; that phenomenon developed within Catholic Christianity itself. Two Catholic groups, one called the "Donatists", in the fourth century A.D., then later, another called the "Albigensians", in the early thirteenth century A.D. advocated suicide as "proof" of one's love of Christ in God. Both the "Donatists" and the "Albigensians" cited the Old Testament, Jewish example of Eleazar and the seven brothers at Masada (2 Maccabees 6:18-7:42) as the ultimate sacrifice of faith in Yhwh. This Donatist phenomenon is even the subject for inclusion within Gibbon's The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire:

The rage of Donatists was inflamed by a phrensy of a very extraordinary kind: and which, if it really prevailed among them in so extravagant a degree, cannot surely be paralleled in any country or any age. Many of these fanatics were possessed with the horror of life and the desire of martyrdom; and they deemed it of little moment by what means or by what hands they perished, if their conduct was sanctified by the intention of devoting themselves to the glory of the true faith and the hope of eternal happiness. Sometimes they rudely disturbed the festivals and profaned the temples of paganism with the design of exciting the most zealous of the idolaters to revenge the insulted honor of their Gods. They sometimes forced their way into the courts of justice and compelled the frightened judge to give orders for their execution. They frequently stopped travellers on the public highways and obliged them to inflict the stroke of martyrdom by promise of a reward, if they consented - and by the threat of instant death, if they refused to grant so very singular a favor. (Vol. III, p. 401; Henri Daniel-Rops provides a more specific description of the Donatist schism within his two volume work, The Church of Apostles and Martyrs, Doubleday, Image Books, 1960, Vol. II, pp. 189-196)

St. Augustine, the black Berber, fourth century A.D. Catholic Bishop of Hippo in North Africa argued against the suicide of the Donatists, calling it a "sin against God". His argument was similar to the Greek Socrates' arguing against suicide within Plato's Phaedo - some scholars state that Plato's Phaedo is the source of Augustine's argument. This "sin against God" resulted from the same Socratic (and, prior to Plato, Pythagorean) principle, namely, that one's human life is a gift from God. Thus, to take one's life is to

murder oneself and from Augustine's time to today civil law has struggled with the identification of the crime, murder, with the criminal, as the victim - so after Augustine, the same person becomes both victim and criminal, the murdered and the murderer.

Augustine, therefore, compared taking one's life with taking another's life when he said that suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment - something which the Old Testament did not do. The Council of Orleans in 533

A.D. Protestant Christian Huguenots chose suicide to free the spiritual soul from the material body.

A.D. then denied funeral rites to anyone who killed himself while accused of a crime; the Council of Braga in 562 A.D. extended this exclusion to all suicides, regardless of social position, reason or method; the Council of Toledo in 693 A.D. ordered that even the person who attempts suicide be excommunicated, that is, be excluded from reception of the Christian Catholic sacraments. These decisions were made in order to stop a fanatical religious effort within the Catholic church, in spite of the best of religious intentions, yet the effect was that Catholic, then Protestant Christianity thereafter classified any suicide as a crime against the victim. So, legally suicide makes the victim become the criminal.

Much later, in the early 11th century A.D., the Cathar immigrant eastern non-Christians, Catholic heretic Manichaeians (a hybrid of Greek and Persian pagan Gnostics) moved into Germany and Southern France. French Catholics who later became schismatic Huguenots claimed these Cathars as their ancestors. These Cathars, literally, Greek meaning pure, (the original "puritans" whose example and name became the English Protestant puritans who came to America) claimed a purity of spirit and liberation from matter and a material world which they viewed as evil.

Huguenots sought direct communication with God and advocated suicide as the means to proclaim their freedom from the material world and to achieve union with God. These Cathars, "the pure ones", called "the Perfect" attracted many European Christian Catholics within the region of Albi in southern France from whence Cathars acquired the name Albigensians. This movement was condemned as heretical by the Catholic Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and Rome launched two crusades against the Cathars, driving them from France in 1229. (An interesting fact is that St. Dominic, founder of the Dominicans and his closest assistant went to Albi to reason with these Albigentians so they would not be killed, at the same time that other Dominicans were setting up what came to be called the Inquisition both in France and Spain.) Here a Catholic, Christian country drives a religious group from French soil because they advocate suicide as the action which "buys" union with God and eternal life.

Ethics, morals, religion, all gravitate about the issues of life and death, right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice. The public has views on these matters and private individuals have views which agree, or differ with these public views or both. The question is: is any consensus possible about what is right and what wrong, what is good and what evil, what is virtuous and what vicious? Is human suicide noble because human life is ignoble or does the gift of being alive preclude ending it through suicide? History reveals many views, but are these views applicable to the present needs? Do the views debated and written during the B.C.era (Or B.C.E. for those "pure" secular historians) have any relevance to the problems of our A.D. period of history (or, C.E., again for our "pure" secular historians!)?

The question people frequently ask about evil versus good, physical evil versus being "normal" is the same one which the disciples asked Jesus Christ when they saw the blind man: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?"

The answer is the same now as it was then: "Neither he nor his parents sinned", Jesus answered, "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him". (*John*, 9:1-8) When these same people ask this question about moral evil, the implication is the same: namely, that the sins of the father are inherited by the children. The fact of the matter is that good parents do not make good children, nor do bad parents make bad children. Good children come from bad parents; bad children come from good parents. Good people exist in bad neighborhoods and bad times; bad people exist in good neighborhoods and good times. The fourth century B.C. Aristotle commented on the origin of a person's good or bad actions within the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Is suicide an act of rejection
or an act of acceptance?

Now, we must start with the known. But this term has two connotations: 'what is known to us' and 'what is known' pure and simple. Therefore, we should start perhaps from what is known to us. For that reason, to be a competent student of what is right and just, and of politics generally, one must first have received a proper upbringing in moral conduct. The acceptance of a fact as a fact is the starting point, and if this is sufficiently clear, there will be no further need to ask why it is so. A man with this kind of background has or can easily acquire the foundation from which he must start. But if he neither has nor can acquire them, let him lend an ear to Hesiod's words:

That man is all-best who himself works out every problem... That man, too, is admirable who follows one who speaks well. He who cannot see the truth for himself, nor, hearing it from others, store it away in his mind, that man is utterly useless. (*Nich. Ethics*, Book 1, Chap. 4 1095b-15)

The decisive factor in virtue or vice is not intelligence, but the simple common sense effort to determine fact from fiction and accept fact as fact. This is a simple matter of free choice. A person chooses to do or not to do a particular action, to accept or to reject his or her life. Nevertheless, the haunting tendency is to "cover up" this simple matter by seeking some excuse for an individual's actions in the parents from whom we came, the friends with whom we associate or the circumstances in which we live. These excuses presume that whatever is "bad" in those actions comes from our DNA, the circumstances, influences, or, generally, from outside forces beyond "our" control. But, the fact of the matter is everything is beyond our control except what comes out of any one of us! A human being has control only over what comes out of him or her, whether that be words or actions.

Is to be ethical the same as to be
moral and are both also religious?

Yet, before we read some of the works of people such as Plato, Confucius, Tolstoy and Sartre on the issues of virtue and vice, ethics,

morals and religion, we must clarify the basic meaning of each of these words. People frequently use both ethics and morals interchangeably. To make matters

worse, Black's Law Dictionary (1983 edition), the source for all definitions of matters litigated in American courts defines both ethics and morals in the same manner, defining "ethics (p. 286) as "of or relating to moral action..." -a definition which would seem to call into question an individual's legal standing and actions within this litigious society! Then, some people include religion and use all three words synonymously. But, linguistically and factually these words differ, one from the other. We all recognize that an ethical person may be moral, for instance, yet a moral person might not be ethical. So also, an ethical person may be religious, but a religious person may be neither ethical nor moral. Furthermore, people may speak of and debate moral theories, however, only individual people are ethical and/or religious.

The fact is that "moral" comes from the Latin, *mos*, meaning manner, custom or habit in the sense of the fashionable thing; so *moral* is what is conventional, the socially acceptable thing to do. Therefore, to be moral is to be socially conscientious when we act. Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych, within The Death of Ivan Ilych, is the clearest literary example of the moral person.

Is love of self the basis
of love for others?

"Ethical". on the contrary, comes from the Greek *ethos*, meaning character, literally, the way one has oneself, thus, its Latin counterpart *habitus*, or its English equivalent habit, as in the way one is, is the result of one's chosen actions, or the "end" because of which one lives one's daily life. So, to be ethical is to act or not to act because the act is right or wrong respectively. Plato's Socrates, within the *Apology*, is the best historical example of an ethical person.

"Religious" comes possibly from three Latin words, each with the same prefix: *re*, meaning again. Those three Latin words are: *lego*, *légere*, meaning to read; *lego*, *legere*, meaning to choose; *ligo*, *ligare*, meaning to bind. So, religion means: to re-read, re-choose and re-bind; to re-read the signs indicating that God exists, to re-choose the fact that God exists, and to re-bind oneself to the God that exists.

In addition, people sometimes misunderstand the relevance of religion to ethics and morals. To be ethical is not only not to be moral, but to be ethical is also not to be religious and to be religious is not to be moral. Ethics is more basic than religion because it is the way a human being chooses "to have him or herself", whereas religion is the human being's chosen relation to God, or an Absolute, whether named *Yhwh*, *Tao*, *Allah*, who or whatever. Although ethics and religion are inherently related, a person's view of him or herself is more basic because such a self-view can affect that person's view of God and therefore his or her relationship to God. Indeed, one's self-image determines one's image of God, notwithstanding the fact that *Genesis* states:

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. (*Genesis* 1: 27)

The most obvious reason this is true has to do with the scriptural author, language and the translator. "God" here is referred to as "he," whereas the God of the *Pentateuch* specifically is described as *Yhwh*, "I am who is", "I am who am". (*Exodus* 3: 13-15) The Hebrew *Yhwh* has no gender and is not "gender" specific.

A less obvious reason is that our love of self mirrors, images and

reflects our love of others. Human beings, individually and socially tend to be solipsistic. Aristotle, the Athenian 3rd Century B.C. Philosopher, stated this within the Nicomachean Ethics:

The friendly relations which we have with our neighbors and which serve to define the various kinds of friendship seem to be derived from our relations to ourselves. We love as a friend (1) a person who wishes for and does what is good or what appears to him to be good for his friend's sake; or (2) a person who wishes for the existence and life of his friend for the friend's sake. This is also the feeling which mothers have for their children and which friends who have had a quarrel, (but are still friends) have for one another. We regard as a friend also (3) a person who spends his time in our company and (4) whose desires are the same as ours, or (5) a person who shares sorrow and joy with his friend. This quality, too, is most frequently found in mothers. By one or another of these sentiments people also define friendship.

Morals can be taught, ethics, however, can not.

A good man has all these feelings in relation to himself. All others have it to the extent that they regard themselves as good; and the measure (of excellence, areté) in particular instances seems to be virtue and a man of high moral standards, as we have said. (Nicomachean Ethics, Book 9, Chapter 4, 1166a-15)

Aristotle places "motive", or intention in the center of any human choice. So, whether this distinction between ethics and morals is valid, the fact is: each human being has the ability to make his/her own choice or to choose even if someone else tells him to do or not to do something. We each have two choice options within our power. We can act because the act is right or wrong or because our peers think the act is right or wrong. So, even if a human acts because someone else tells the person to act in such a way, that human chooses to act for that reason!

One thing that Plato's Apology or Tolstoy's Death of Ivan Ilych teaches is that we can be moral by social standards, and still not be ethical, yet, because each chooses how to act or not to act, each is responsible for his or her actions. Thus, we can act according to society's norms, that is, do what we are told by parents, teachers or our peer group, and yet, lack any character, or we can act against society's norms and be ethical. We also see that both choices lead to death. However, in both cases we are responsible for the action or non-action in which we engage. A second thing both these works teach is that we may be religious and moral, but not be ethical, as was Ivan Ilych. We also may be ethical and religious, but not moral, as Socrates was.

One ethical Socrates meant at least 226 moral Athenians in the fifth century B.C., and, if the American public's response to a self-styled military moral Oliver North or a legally moral President William Clinton are indicators, moral Americas are legion. At the same time, these 226 moral Athenians claimed they were religious because they also found Socrates guilty of being an atheist, yet, Socrates cited his belief in the Athenian priestess and in the truth of this priestess and God as the sources of his ethical quest for wisdom. So also, Oliver North claimed both patriotism and religion as his twin motives for perjury and violation of congressional law - however, North, originally a Catholic, left Catholicism in favor of a Christian fundamentalist group after Vatican II, saying that the Catholic Church had turned "leftist

and soft" on Communism - the use of such excuses to justify one's actions is typical of a moral person, but not of an ethical person. Nevertheless, ethics, morals and religion are usually "mixed up" one with the other. Of course, Clinton claimed his legally moral statements before family, staff, the public and a grand jury were motivated by his "embarrassment" and effort to protect his family! Moral people always find and make excuses!

Ethics, as a matter of fact, must be the core of morals, if morals are to be anything but what the crowd, at any given time, in any given place, during any given age and on any given subject approves or disapproves of as a social group. In the same manner, ethics must have its roots in religion, that is, a person's relation to God, or an Absolute, even though social groups use "religion" as the reason for disciplining, exiling, even killing ethical persons as anti-social, or even deviates as "sick".

To know oneself is to be ethical; to know society's values is to be moral.

The majority of the 501 Athenians judging Socrates guilty worshiped the God(s) and Goddess(es) of Athens and Ivan Ilych practiced the Orthodox Catholic religion; but, they all did so only because of their social position not out of personal conviction resulting from free choice. These moral people accepted and worshiped a social, group-approved God. Socrates, on the other hand, believed in God personally and acted on that belief ethically. Ivan Ilych only found his personal relation to God toward the end of his life and, using that as his basis, found the strength to choose what was right from what was wrong the first time in his adult life.

Finally, morals can be taught, but ethics can not. Indeed, it is John Stuart Mill in his Utilitarianism who organizes human actions around the public mores and, therefore, emphasizes that the means necessary to develop a moral society are education and legislation. Lao-tse, on the other hand, in his Tao, or The Way, condemns the attempt to educate and legislate morality or right action (li) within sixth Century B.C. Chinese society. Lau-tse even states that such social engineering, or tse "corrupts" human nature by distracting people from natural empathetic feeling available to a person's conscience and by habituating them to social opinions. This, Lao-tse contends creates social immorality and chaos instead of morality and order and this is why he rejects formal education and resists using words.

We study ethics not to acquire right or new knowledge, but to produce right actions.

So, if education and legislation are used, then morals will be acquired through a basic animal survival technique called "imprinting". Yet, anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of animal behavior (and human beings are

a type of animal) knows that baby chicks, for instance, if hatched by a duck will imprint duck-mother actions. Yet, no chicken is a duck, and, in some cases where such an "off" kind of imprinting occurs, the differences between the imprinted and the "parent" can be so great that the imprinted dies as a result. Many a baby chick has drowned in a farm's lake, notwithstanding the frantic efforts of the "foster mother" duck. So, Ivan Ilych died because he imprinted on his "peer" society!

The problem which morals bring, therefore, might be imprinted through parental actions or societal and school instruction. Then, of course, positive

law reinforces these problems, but none of these efforts can be the source of ethical actions. Thus, no country can take pride in being a country of "law and order" because any order which positive law produces is exterior only and will remain only as long as the "long arm of the law" hovers over the people, or as long as the parent or teacher watches over the child or student. This lesson has the proof of the historic "fall" of the Soviet Union with the tearing down the East Berlin's wall. The chaos we have witnessed to have occurred in the Baltic and Yugoslavia is proof that hatred and division are only controlled by fear of external penalties, but "break out"

Ethics cannot be taught, nor legislated - a fact newspaper and T.V. news headlines and stories attest to in America today and will continue to do tomorrow. Of

Knowing that one does not know is the only kind of knowledge which empowers a human to love wisdom and to be wise.

course, neither can religion be taught. Even religion can be imprinted or inherited, yet, each person must choose and decide what his or her relation is to God, or an Absolute, only, however, after and to the extent that person has achieved self-knowledge.

Aristotle states clearly and concisely the personal nature of ethics, even though he, as a father, wrote the Nicomachean Ethics for his then seventeen year old son:

we are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, else there would not be an advantage to studying it. (Nic. Ethics, Bk. 2, Chap. 2: 1103b 25-30)

Morals can be taught, ethics, however, can not.

So, notwithstanding Aristotle's and Plato's contention that the basis of free choice is knowledge of facts, it is clear that whatever power knowledge is and has, self-knowledge is the basis of that power. So, too is self-knowledge the basis or root of ethics whereas knowledge of society's ways might be the basis of morals.

This contention of Plato and Aristotle might imply that knowledge is virtue - an implication that few scholars have understood about Plato's *Meno* or *Theaetetus*. But, if knowing that we do not know reflects the human condition, then the only knowledge which constitutes the basis for human excellence, or virtue is knowing that one does not know. So, therefore, the only kind of knowledge which is power is self-knowledge!

This is precisely why Socrates reluctantly concluded to his being the wisest, or most virtuous of men; he became aware, or knowledgeable that he did not know when his peers claimed that they did know. The self-thinking which Socrates did, affected his actions. His thinking that human wisdom consisted in knowing that we do not know, affected his actions toward himself, namely, his questioning the statement of the Delphic Oracle. But, this thinking about human wisdom also affected his actions toward other Athenian citizens, namely, he deemed it his sacred duty to question them about the meaning of wisdom. This kind of thinking resulted in a like kind of living, however, a life of questioning not appreciated by his Athenian peers. Although no thought of suicide entered the thinking of Socrates, the majority decision of his Athenian judges found him guilty of treason and ordered the ultimate penalty,

death by drinking hemlock.

Socrates discovered that human virtue rests upon self-knowledge and this set the stage for Plato's discussions in the Meno and the Theaetetus and for Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Thus, Aristotle's twin contention that his inquiry seeks not "to know what virtue is, but...to become good" merely reasserts his agreement about the relevance of Socratic self-knowledge and then seeks to determine how to apply it through the virtue of prudence to achieve continuing growth in human virtue. To know oneself, therefore, is to be virtuous because knowing self means that one knows that one does not know.