

of human life from both philosophical and biological perspectives, see Daniel Callahan, *Abortion: Law, Choice and Morality*, pp. 348-404.

37. "In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom." Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1940), p. 466.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 550.

39. "God might have created man without the power to transgress His law; He might have withheld the hand of Adam from touching the forbidden fruit; but in that case man would have been not a free moral agent, but a mere automaton." Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 49.

40. Alice S. Rossi, "Public Views on Abortion," in *The Case for Legalized Abortion*, ed. Alan F. Guttmacher (Berkeley: Diablo Press, 1967), pp. 31-32.

41. Probably the best-known philosophical argument for this point of view is Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (1971), 47-66.

42. See, for example, "U.N. Study Shows Liberal Abortion Laws Have Spread Worldwide," *The Hast-*

ings Center Report, 6 (April 1976), p. 2.

43. I leave to one side the question of whether abortion may sometimes be done for the fetus's own sake. But I join Camenisch in thinking that there is something odd about the concept of "benefits" for the nonexistent. Paul F. Camenisch, "Abortion: For the Fetus's Own Sake?" *The Hastings Center Report*, 6 (April 1976), pp. 38-41.

44. For a classic statement on the relationship of formal to substantive principles of justice, see Chaim Perelman, *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

45. Deuteronomy 10:17-19 (RSV).

46. John C. Bennett, *The Radical Imperative: From Theology of Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 13-14.

47. Stephen Charles Mott, "Egalitarian Aspects of the Biblical Theory of Justice," in *Selected Papers from the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the American Society of Christian Ethics*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (Newton Centre, Mass.: The American Society of Christian Ethics, 1978), p. 13.

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Four Ways of Making Ethical Decisions

by David R. Larson

War. Eugenics. Euthanasia. Racism. Cloning. Money. Starvation. Abortion. In vitro fertilization. Pollution. Feminism. Urbanization.

The list of issues now attracting serious ethical analysis is as fascinating as it is long!

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One important branch of such analysis is that of "normative ethics." It helps us discover what sorts of persons and things are really valuable and what methods of making ethical decisions are truly valid. Before we can know if we are obligated to be or to do something — before, indeed, we can deal responsibly with timely ethical questions — we must know how to make such decisions. We need some decision-making methods, some conceptual tools.

This essay surveys four ways of making

ethical decisions. It describes and evaluates the features and forms of these general approaches. It also reviews, in connection with each approach, the contribution of one Christian thinker who has used the approach influentially, paying particular attention to what he has said about abortion and euthanasia. The essay ends with some concluding remarks about rules in moral life.

One way to make ethical decisions is to do whatever some authority commands us to do. If we question a moral requirement, the only answers which remain within the limits of this method are those which establish the authority's credentials. We utilize some other method if we appeal to any other factor. According to this method, the rightness or

usual ethical courage which makes us willing to sacrifice greatly for that which is commanded. It can give us firmness against the changing tides of popular opinion. It can provide a culture or subculture with the corporate loyalties it needs to prevail against the forces of internal division. And, most importantly, this method can help us realize how dependent we are upon the many ethical authorities to which we are subservient, whether we realize it or not.

Our dependency upon ethical authority can be seen if we review some of its forms. We have documentary authorities (codes, constitutions, scriptures), charismatic authorities (prophets, entertainers, mystics), legal authorities (laws, courts, enforcers), consensual authorities (polls, tallies, surveys), professional authorities (doctors, lawyers, teachers), and kinship authorities (parents, uncles, aunts). We know that tradition can function as an authority and so can nature, fate, and, for some people, the position of the stars. Even our own whims can become authorities which we permit no one to question. And we may mention, too, of course, religious authorities (creeds, councils, God).

None of us fully avoids the way of authority. We therefore should choose our authorities with care and apply their commands with skill. This leads us to consider the use of religious literature in moral reasoning. The best of religious literature does not usually command us to accept its ethical conclusions on the basis of its authority alone. Such documents ordinarily try to persuade us by their lines of reasoning. This applies to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, both of which are important in differing ways for Seventh-day Adventists, even if the reasoning available in these collections is sometimes difficult to decipher. If we want to understand such reasoning, we must interpret it in the light of its literary and its historical and theological contexts. As we do so, we should remind ourselves that religious literature is more able to provide us theological doctrines, exemplary characters, ethical themes, and illustrative analogies than detailed specifications of what we ought to do in any cir-

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wrongness of a deed, rule, or trait depends upon the command of some superior and upon nothing else.

This approach's weaknesses are so apparent that the frequency or the severity with which it is criticized is not surprising. Its exclusive use makes us vulnerable to poor advice. It gives no help in deciding which commander should be obeyed. It causes us to defer to the thinking of others instead of knowing for ourselves why something is right or wrong. But worst of all, it makes moral requirements seem arbitrary, as if everything which is immoral would be moral and vice versa if only the authority decided differently.

But these weaknesses should not blind us to the method's strengths. It can save time, a contribution which might make the difference between life and death in a crisis. It can help us benefit from the wider experience and greater wisdom of others. It can give us un-

cumstance. Its most important ethical contribution is the understanding of God it communicates. This is so because we become like the One we worship.

These suggestions apply to the story about Abraham's apparent willingness to kill his own son at God's command. Some claim that this account teaches us to do whatever we sincerely believe God commands us no matter how unreasonable or immoral this may seem. This conclusion should be viewed with suspicion. The primary hero of Genesis 22 is neither Abraham nor Isaac, but God. These two men demonstrated impressive courage, to be sure. But in their time and in ours there have been many others who have been willing to sacrifice human life to their ultimate values. The distinctive thing about the story of Abraham and Isaac is not their willingness to obey, but God's final unwillingness to have them shed human blood as an act of devotion. This insight regarding God's true character is harmonious with everything we learn about divine love from Jesus and from the best moralists. We therefore should be hesitant to say that this story teaches us that divine authority may obligate us to do that which would be immoral if commanded by any lesser source.

The late Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian who was one of the most influential Christians of our century, took a somewhat different view of these things. He stressed God's loving and sovereign freedom to command whatever he deemed best in any given moment. Rejecting all attempts to draw lines of connection between the moment-by-moment commands of God and the most cogent moral wisdom of any age, he called upon Christians to obey. He believed that the command of God authenticates itself in the moment of decision, that those who wonder if they have mistaken it for some other voice have yet to hear the divine word. Barth therefore refused to develop a theoretical casuistry, a systematic application of general principles to particular problems. He formulated a practical casuistry which used biblical analogies and references to God's desire to create fellowship to prepare persons for the reception of God's command.

In applying his general views to the ques-

tions of abortion and euthanasia, Barth wrote that human life belongs to God and, therefore, only God is authorized to decide when it should end. God usually commands us to respect human life by preserving and protecting it. But, in exceptional cases, God may command us to respect life by terminating it. When the life of a fetus threatens the life of its mother, for instance, God may command an abortion. Barth believed that God virtually never commands active euthanasia, taking deliberate steps which cause a person to die. He admitted that passive euthanasia, allowing a terminally ill patient to die by not using all possible medical options, presented tempting and impressive questions. But he maintained that if passive euthanasia is ever permissible as an exception, it must be justified by God's specific and direct command in some particular circumstance and not by a general desire to relieve suffering. Those who doubt that God's commands are ever received with the degree of obviousness Barth described necessarily employ some other method.

If moral requirements are justified by appeals to anything other than the qualifications of those who issue commands, some method other than the way of authority is utilized. One of these other approaches is the way of teleology. As we might suspect from the Greek word *telos* (end, purpose, goal), this method determines the rightness or wrongness of things by appealing to the goodness or badness of their consequences alone. Teleology's exclusive emphasis upon results is its mark of identification. A deed, rule, or trait is permissible or obligatory if its outcomes are positive; otherwise not. Those who use the way of teleology are not necessarily required to disregard the commands of God or any other authority. But they are compelled to justify obedience by appealing only to the goodness of its consequences.

The way of teleology requires us to acquire a standard of value by which to distinguish good outcomes from bad ones. This standard must also help us to differentiate between the things desirable for their own sake (intrinsic values), and things desirable as a means to

something else (extrinsic values). Ethical hedonism makes happiness defined as pleasure the supreme intrinsic value. Ethical nonhedonism either denies that we ought to regard happiness so highly or denies that happiness is accurately depicted as pleasure. It holds (depending on the writer defending it) that we ought to value intellectual excellence, communion with God, self-realization, beauty, power, the triad of truth-beauty-goodness, conformity with our natural ends, or something else more

“Everyone can imagine some circumstances in which the greatest good for the greatest number would come from abortion or euthanasia. But does this make either right?”

highly than pleasure or perhaps even happiness. Teleologists are either ethical hedonists or ethical nonhedonists, depending upon their standards of value.

The way of teleology also requires us to have some convictions regarding whose interests should be favored when we are considering the outcomes of our decisions. Ethical egoism holds that each person always ought to be or do that which is to his or her own advantage and that this should be the first priority. This perspective sometimes describes selfishness as a virtue. But it does so with the assumption that the interests of society are best served when each person attends to his or her well-being in an intelligent manner. If a conflict emerges between what is good for the community and what is good for the individual, ethical egoism requires a person to place greater emphasis upon his or her own welfare.

Ethical universalism, more commonly called utilitarianism, makes the opposite case. It requires us to increase the total amount of value in the universe with no primary regard for how it should be allocated. This time the assumption is that each per-

son's best interests are served if he or she attends to the interests of the larger community. And this time, if a conflict emerges, the interests of society take precedence over those of the individual. Modified forms of utilitarianism alter its classical expression in different ways so as to incorporate greater concern for the welfare of individuals. The slogan, “The greatest good for the greatest number,” is one such modification.

Many ethical egoists and ethical universalists are also ethical hedonists and vice versa. But this is neither necessarily nor exclusively the case. Teleology merely requires us to have some standard of value, hedonistic or nonhedonistic, and some convictions regarding whose interests are primary, egoistic or universalistic.

It is not difficult to understand why the way of teleology often receives better reviews than does the way of authority. It requires us to think about right and wrong and to reflect about positive and negative values. It also invites us to consider the consequences of our choices so that we will have as few regrets as possible. It protects us from too much reliance upon authorities who frequently prove unworthy of our trust. And it encourages us to increase that which is truly valuable. All this is very helpful.

But the way of teleology exhibits a number of weaknesses as well. For one thing, it is difficult to predict all the consequences of our choices, a severe limitation for a method which considers nothing but results. Another difficulty is that this method's imperatives are always hypothetical or conditional. They always say something such as, “If you want to be happy, treat others with respect.” The question is whether or not ethical mandates should be dependent upon the contingencies of human desire. But teleology's most significant weakness is that it includes a potential justification for oppressing the weak. If exploiting others is to anyone's true advantage, ethical egoism approves it. If oppressing minorities really benefits any society, ethical universalism or utilitarianism approves it.

Teleologists can respond to this final criti-

cism in at least two ways. One option is to contend that it never is to any individual's true advantage to exploit others or to any society's actual benefit to oppress minorities. This response is impressive because it does seem that those who trample upon others eventually trip and destroy themselves in the process. The other option is to argue that some principle requiring us to respect each person can be derived from the principle encouraging us to increase value. This response is less impressive because the two principles are logically distinct. Every attempt to deduce one solely from the other, therefore, fails.

Joseph Fletcher, who has taught at the Episcopal Theological School in Boston and at the University of Virginia Medical School, offers a teleological interpretation of Christian ethics. He declares that in every circumstance we ought to do that which is most loving. For Fletcher, that means doing what will produce the greatest good for the greatest number. This is utilitarianism, but Fletcher does not favor the classical versions of it which are unconcerned about the allocation of value. He is dedicated to distributing value as widely as possible. Also, Fletcher's utilitarianism is nonhedonistic. He replaced hedonism's emphasis upon pleasure with his own concern for comprehensive human well-being. Fletcher's concern for human welfare is present in his focus upon the quality of life. Like others who emphasize this theme, he believes that there are some lives which are so deficient or so anguished they aren't worth living. In order to qualify for the greatest protection, human life, he holds, must meet a minimal degree of excellence. He therefore proposes standards by which to identify levels of human excellency.

Fletcher recognizes that clinical consideration of abortion and euthanasia occurs when life is not sublime. On the one hand, children can be born with handicaps so great or into environments so hostile they have no opportunity for fulfilled lives. On the other hand, dying can be a very painful and expensive process, one which frees a terminal patient from agony or unconscious functioning only after it has left his or her relatives exhausted emotionally and financially. Everyone can

imagine some circumstances in which the greatest good for the greatest number would come from abortion or euthanasia. But does this make either right? Fletcher answers "yes." Like all teleologists, he holds that the morality of any choice is determined solely by its consequences. He also believes that a fetus does not possess human dignity until it is about to experience normal birth and that the distinction between active and passive euthanasia is a theoretical quibble with little clinical relevance. Those who disagree with Fletcher's conclusions might argue that they will produce negative consequences. This criticism remains within the boundaries of his method. But someone who faults Fletcher's positions by appealing to something other than their results employs some other method.

Those who are satisfied with neither the way of authority nor the way of teleology might consider the way of deontology, the theory of duty or obligation. It agrees with teleology that rightness or wrongness cannot be defined merely by the command of some superior. But, in disagreement with teleology, it contends that the consequences of our choices are not the only relevant considerations. According to this method, the rightness or wrongness of a deed, rule, or trait depends upon our duties as well as upon the consequences of our choices.

The various deontological approaches can be distinguished in part by how they identify their duties. Some contend that certain options are self-evidently right or wrong regardless of the goodness or badness of their consequences. We know this, it is held, by direct insight, by intuition. Some deontologists who appeal to intuition distinguish *prima facie* duties from actual duties. "*Prima facie*" means at first appearance. *Prima facie* duties indicate what we are obliged to do in the absence of overriding considerations. Actual duties stipulate our obligations when both our *prima facie* duties and the distinctive features of any circumstance are considered. Our *prima facie* duty to keep promises, for instance, is overridden if we discover that this involves us in someone's plot to commit

murder. We then have an actual duty to break our promises of this nature. And we know this, say some, by intuition.

Other deontological approaches appeal to the psychological unacceptability of certain alternatives. The rule of reversibility invites us to imagine that we are on the receiving end of our decisions. Would we like this? The rule of universalizability suggests that we imagine a world in which everyone in circumstances similar to our own chooses as we do. Would this be thinkable? Some writers

“This understanding of each person’s inviolability is a litmus test for morality. It indicates whether or not our moral beliefs are truly ethical instead of being guises for opportunism.”

suggest that we picture a spectator who is informed, impartial, reflective, benevolent, clear-headed, and otherwise well qualified. Would this umpire endorse our decisions? Or sometimes we are invited to imagine we are sitting around a hypothetical table behind a veil of ignorance which permits general facts to enter but screens all specific information about our own lives. If we didn’t know our ages, genders, races, nationalities, religious professions, social positions, or anything else about ourselves which might prejudice our decisions, would we make the same choices? None of these approaches proves beyond the shadow of doubt that something is right or wrong. But each one points to relevant considerations other than consequences, without resting its case upon intuition.

Still other deontological approaches contend that considerations such as those surveyed in the preceding paragraph demonstrate that some deeds, rules, or traits are logically inconsistent and not merely psychologically unacceptable. One theory of this sort holds that unless a person is willing to cease being a moral agent, he or she must claim rights to freedom and well-being. Not

to claim these rights is to surrender the necessary and sufficient requirements for being a moral agent. But one must also honor the rights of others to freedom and well-being. This is so because the foundation of one person’s necessary claim is identical to the other person’s necessary claim. In both cases the foundation is what a person must have in order to remain a moral agent. To say that this need is an adequate justification for its fulfillment in one case and that it is not an adequate justification in another case, when there is no relevant difference between the two cases, is self-contradictory. Positions which contradict themselves cannot be true, and those which are not true are not worthy of our respect. Therefore, deeds, rules, or traits which deny freedom and well-being to others are questionable ethically.

One advantage of the way of deontology is that it protects those who are often sacrificed when we seek to better our personal and social fortunes. Women, children, those who are poor, uneducated, or ill, as well as those whose racial, national, or religious identities differ from our own, are sheltered from abuse by deontology’s insistence that no person be treated as though he or she were merely a thing. This understanding of each person’s inviolability is a litmus test for morality. It indicates whether or not our moral beliefs are truly ethical instead of being guises for opportunism. Another advantage of deontology is that its imperatives are categorical or unconditional and not hypothetical. They always say something such as “Treat persons with respect,” instead of something such as “If you want to be happy, treat persons with respect.” This also provides protection for vulnerable people.

One problem with deontology is that it often overlooks our duties to subhuman forms of life in its concern for the rights of humans. Another difficulty is that some deontologists posit a false dichotomy between duty and desire, between obligation and inclination. There are times when there is a sharp difference between what we ought to do and what we want to do. But this experience of inner conflict should not be accepted

as the norm for humans. Another disadvantage is that deontology finds it easier to warn us against treating people as things than to explain what it means to treat them as persons. Still further, deontology can become so inflexible and uncompromising that it is of no assistance when each of our alternatives seems questionable. This is especially true of those deontological approaches which do not distinguish between *prima facie* and actual duties or do not rank our duties in a hierarchy of importance. One other problem is that deontology can underestimate the importance of increasing the amount of value in its concern for fair allocations.

Paul Ramsey, who teaches at Princeton University, employs the way of deontology in his interpretations of Christian morality. Emphasizing themes such as covenant, faithfulness, loyalty, and fidelity, he portrays Christian love as deeds, rules, or traits which treat each person with respect. Anything which replaces, exchanges, substitutes, or sacrifices one person for another is to be viewed with suspicion. Because each person's value flows from God's love for that individual, his or her worth cannot vary in proportion to age, health, natural abilities, personal achievements, wealth, or contributions to society. Ramsey expresses dissatisfaction with every attempt to specify the quality of life or to use this criterion as a standard for treatment. He emphasizes the sanctity of life, the sacredness of each human in the fullness of his or her uniqueness. Ramsey believes his conclusions are rooted in his Christian convictions. But he sees the possibility of a convergence between truly Christian and truly humanistic ethical stances in their mutual respect for particular persons.

Given his emphasis upon life's sanctity, it is not surprising that Ramsey expresses reservations about abortion and active euthanasia, unless these are allowed by the rule of double effect. This principle stipulates that an evil deed may be performed if it is unintentionally and unavoidably connected with a moral act. The rule applies to the question of abortion when a fetus threatens the life of its mother. A physician may terminate such a pregnancy, it is held, because the intention is to save the woman's life and this

cannot be done without removing the fetus. The rule of double effect might apply to the question of euthanasia if a physician determines that the dosage of drugs required to relieve a patient's pain may also hasten his or her death somewhat. This too is permissible because attempts to decrease suffering are noble even when they unavoidably and unintentionally shorten life. Except for cases such as these, Ramsey does not ordinarily approve of abortion or active euthanasia. But he does not oppose passive euthanasia. Ramsey knows that there is a difference between prolonging life and extending the process of dying. He favors the first, not the second.

The way of responsibility advises us to respond fittingly. But what is a fitting response? The advocates of this fourth method agree that a fitting response exhibits clarity regarding the persons to whom we are responsible and the things for which we are responsible. Beyond this there is little consensus. Because this method is a relative newcomer to explicit ethical theory, it is given a variety of interpretations.

One possibility is that this approach is a disguised version of one of the first three methods. Perhaps it is practically equivalent to the way of authority or to the way of teleology or to the way of deontology. If so, the distinguishing feature of a fitting response is that it is either obedient, productive of value, or dutiful. The trouble with this interpretation is that the advocates of the way of responsibility maintain that it is a distinctive option which cannot be reduced to one of the other three. Perhaps they are wrong. But maybe we should resist this conclusion until we have exhausted the other possibilities.

A second alternative is that responsibility combines teleology and deontology in a mixed theory of moral obligation with two equally important but independent principles. The teleological principle requires us to increase value. The deontological principle requires us to treat people as persons rather than as things. The fitting response is that deed, rule, or trait which comes closest to fulfilling both requirements simultaneously. We are irrespon-

sible if we neglect either one. Because its two principles are equally binding, this mixed theory can give us no guidance regarding which one to favor when they conflict, except to suggest that we rely upon intuition.

A third option is that responsibility requires us to treat others in ways which are congruent with the ways God has treated us. A fitting response is a deed, rule, or trait which dovetails with God's graciousness. This interpretation does not indicate in detail what does or does not correspond with God's attitudes and actions. But detailed specifications may be unnecessary. Most people who read the story Jesus told about the man who refused to forgive a small matter after he had been forgiven a large matter discern that his choices were reprehensible. And they were blameworthy, not primarily because they were disobedient or unproductive of value or negligent of duty. They were reproachable because there was an incongruity between the man's acceptance of mercy and his refusal to be merciful toward others.

Many interpretations of responsibility leave much room for intuitionism, doing what appears appropriate at the moment of decision with greater reliance upon insight than upon deliberation. This can be a severe limitation if it encourages us to exaggerate the distinctive features of any circumstance or to justify our decisions, without presenting reasons which can be discussed and tested. Another limitation is that some advocates of the way of responsibility give the impression that our responses are wholly determined by other agents or things. If we have no freedom, if we are compelled by forces over which we have no control, it seems empty to ask if we are responding fittingly. This is so even if the one who is said to determine our responses is God.

One advantage of the way of responsibility is that it can provide interpretations of moral identity or character which seem more biblical and more modern than many others. Instead of contending that we discover who we are as we obey commands, increase value, or act dutifully, it can suggest that we learn this through responding to others. Character, therefore, emerges from a complex process of contemplation, communication, interpretation, and anticipation of responses to communication.

Another advantage of this method is that it often portrays the moral life as a series of grateful responses to God and to others who have acted favorably toward us, a vision which can have strong motivational appeal. Of all the reasons for being moral, none is quite so appealing as the realization that one is valued supremely and unconditionally. We love, says the New Testament, because God first loved us.

James Nelson, who teaches at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and

“Of all the reasons for being moral, none is quite so appealing as the realization that one is valued supremely and unconditionally. We love, says the New Testament, because God first loved us.”

at the University of Minnesota Medical School, uses the way of responsibility in his interpretation of Christian ethics. His understanding of the method seems akin to the second and third possibilities we have just reviewed. On the one hand, a fitting response occurs when we treat others as God has treated us. On the other hand, it is that option which comes closest to meeting the dual requirements to increase value and to treat people as persons. Nelson discusses these two requirements under the rubrics of the quality of life and the sanctity of life. Instead of placing greater importance upon one or the other, he emphasizes both equally. He believes that human life is sacred. But he distinguishes between prepersonal, personal, and postpersonal humanness, the first and third referring to an individual before and after he or she can experience sociality, limited freedom, and religiosity. All three forms of humanness deserve respect in keeping with their sanctity. But the higher quality of fully personal humanity merits greater protection.

It is not always easy to predict what Nelson's conclusions will be when the sanctity of life and the quality of life criteria conflict.

Perhaps the best clue is that his method of responsibility usually charts a moderate course between the more liberal conclusions of Joseph Fletcher's teleology and the more conservative ones of Paul Ramsey's deontology. This certainly is the case with regard to abortion and euthanasia. His presumptions against terminating prepersonal and postpersonal forms of human life are stronger than Fletcher's. But his willingness to overrule these presumptions in tragic circumstances is greater than Ramsey's. He maintains that it is always morally ambiguous to terminate human life even if in some circumstances this is the most fitting response. This seems about halfway between saying, on the one hand, that abortion and active euthanasia are proper if they produce the greatest good for the greatest number and saying, on the other hand, that both are questionable unless allowed by the rule of double effect. Nelson has few reservations about passive euthanasia. Of special interest is his published account of how he and his wife sought and finally found a physician who agreed not to prescribe insulin, digitalis, and diuretics for her aged father who was debilitated by diabetes and several strokes. When their loved one died, they were sorrowful. But they were comforted by their belief that they had acted responsibly.

Christians agree that they should be and do that which is loving. But, as we have seen,

they differ in their understandings of *agapé's* meaning. It is equated with obedience, increasing value, treating people as persons, responding fittingly, or some other alternative depending in part upon the preferred method of making ethical decisions. This diversity of opinion is not unfortunate. But we do well to remember that it exists so that we can be on guard against simplistic applications of Augustine's advice to love and do then as we please.

Because the four methods provide different ultimate justifications for ethical choices, it seems difficult to arrange them in a hierarchy which is satisfying theoretically. But this does not necessarily preclude the possibility of a practical hierarchy. Such an arrangement might begin by recognizing the importance of ethical authorities in everyday life. We can test the rightness of what we are commanded by considering its consequences and then by the requirement to treat people as persons. When the principles of increasing value and respecting humans conflict, we can seek that alternative which meets more of the objective need of more of the involved parties and which comes closest to our understandings of God's graciousness. This practical hierarchy will not eliminate all uncertainty. But it may reduce our perplexity somewhat. Beyond this we can trust God, accepting divine mercy to forgive our failures and appropriating divine power to increase our wisdom.

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