

Theory description: situation ethics theory



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Situation Ethics Theory For hundreds of years philosophers have concerned themselves with the questions surrounding what is right and what is wrong. Situation Ethics is Joseph Fletcher's, an Anglican theologian, answers to these questions. Fletcher claims that situation ethics is a balance between "antinomianism" (no law) and "legalism" (bound by law). Antinomianism and legalism represent the same basic concepts referred to above as nihilism and absolutism. For Fletcher, "love" is the sole factor in making moral judgments (1966, 26). Situation ethics also rejects any attempt to turn these generalizations into firm and steadfast rules and laws, what Fletcher (1966) called a form of "[ethical] idolatry." As a Christian, Fletcher came to the conclusion that the "boss principal" should be the Christian notion of love, perhaps better defined as the Greek agape, which we understand to mean a "giving", non-reciprocal love seeking the best interests of all. This raises the question of "what is love?" something Fletcher tries to answer in his six propositions of Situation Ethics, all of which are key to understanding Situation Ethics. Only one thing is intrinsically good, namely, love: nothing else. The ultimate norm of Christian decisions is love: nothing else. Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed. Love wills the neighbor's good whether we like him or not. Only the end justifies the means: nothing else. Decisions ought to be made situational, not prescriptively. Adler (1996) argues that the solution proffered by situationists is "unsound" because in appealing to love and to love alone, the solution is totally ignorant of the fact that the teleological ethics of common sense has already staked out a more tenable middle ground. For example, Aristotle (1958, 105-106) notion of the "Golden Mean" argues for agents to make specific determinations about what virtue requires in concrete situations. References Adler, M.

(1996). *The time of our lives*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Aristotle. (1958). *Metaphysics* (W. D. Ross, Trans.). In J. D. Kaplan (Ed.), *The pocket Aristotle* (pp. 106-156). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Fletcher, J. (1966). *Situation ethics: The new morality*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster. *Situation Ethics*, http://resources.r9paul.org/ASA2/RS/Essays/Ethics_SituationEthics.pdf