

Ethics



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ethics and Religion There is a set of moral and ethical principles that are generally accepted, including directives such as the “ golden rule” (do unto others as you would have them do unto you), and there are many values that are generally accepted as “ good,” such as honesty, freedom, and charity, and these do not depend on any religion. It would not be unreasonable to assume that these values have existed before any sort of systematized religion existed, and that it was religion that assimilated these values.

The framework of ethical behavior that is often called the Divine Command Theory, is a framework where all moral decisions are based on gods commands. Many religions make claims in the ethics department, but the fact that religion does this is only a coincidence. Many religions address issues of ethics, but many also have directives that go contrary to this universally acceptable concept of ethics. Being religious is not synonymous to being ethical, as evidenced by the many instances in history where extreme violence was spurred by religious motivations, such as the Crusades and the Inquisition, the Muslim jihads, and the violence in Jerusalem. The advocates of different religions are forever squabbling over the superiority and correctness of their own religion, whereby we can conclude, if we are to be rational, that any one of the ethical systems that they advocate are just as contentious as their religion. Religious institutions have vested interests in many areas that may not be ethical.

The human experience is largely self-determined, and does not depend on the supernatural. There is a universal morality that transcends such exclusive institutions as religion; solutions to our ethical dilemmas cannot be based upon religion. As Ambrose Bierce puts succinctly, religion is “ a

daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable.”

Today many people are not religious, are atheists, even, but their lack of religious affiliation does not exclude them from the realm of ethics. Atheism, agnosticism, or any such lack of religious conviction is often associated (by the religious, no less) with a corresponding lack of morality. But this is not so; although religion does address some ethical issues, this is merely a coincidence; religion, in general, also espouses some profoundly unethical beliefs. Hence religion can, and should, never be a foundation of ethical behavior.

Throughout history man has constantly assumed the existence of metaphysical forces that provide a set of rules on morality, but morality can be observed without the aid of religion. The Modern Humanist perspective, in particular, provides us with a good framework on which to base our moral decision making, independently of religion. Corliss Lamont, a proponent of modern humanism, describes humanism as " a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion." Essentially, to be ethical, all we need to do is to avoid " harm" to ourselves and to others (of course what " harm" is will vary, depending on the context and the beliefs of the person, but this is a good general rule on which a complete framework of ethical principles can be established).