

This course's title states a conclusion. You can see it if I change to the title "What moralities does the Bible teach?"

While there's variety, & even diversity, in the Bible's moral teachings, we can speak of an underlying-overarching unity....We must avoid letting ourselves be overimpressed by unity (the fundamentalist error) or by diversity (the error of those who say, "You can prove anything by the Bible").

The limits of the biblical morality are clear. It's God-centered (theocentric)--so centering anywhere else (in humanity, the self, nature, science, philosophy, ideology, peace, justice, harmony, sensuous experience, religious experience, text, tradition, institution, or fellow-creature [person, dog, cat, whatnot]--see p.2) is off-limits. The other limit is the biblical morality's circumference: it's God-sanctioned, derivative from the nature & will of God as known by revelation in & through the Bible. Yes, the perception of God's nature & will develops through the biblical periods (eg, from slaughter your enemies to love your enemies), but the continuities are stronger than the discontinuities. Eg, anybody's off limits who thinks God doesn't care about the world & care for the world & call us to care (thus the abstract nouns creation, providence, stewardship)--or who thinks God is amoral (versus holiness, righteousness, judgment)--or who thinks God is fate (versus redemption, repentance, forgiveness) or absent (versus the Lord of history, the incarnation, the Holy Spirit).

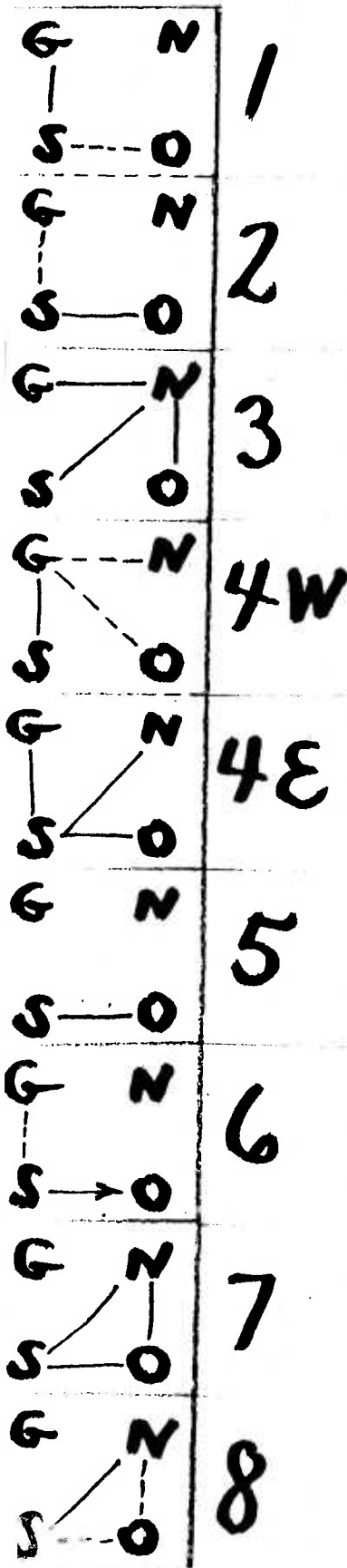
The logic of the biblical morality derives from its limits. Virtue is conforming to the nature & will of God (eg, "Since I'm holy, you be holy" [Lev.19.2] & "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is" [Mt.5.48]). Vice is any deviance from God's nature & will. The Bible is multicultural & uses many moral criteria, but its central motivator-criterion is God's character-name-words-works-will (the divine sanction), & Jesus Christ's (the dominical sanction). (See #233.)

Thus the short answer to the question "What morality does the Bible teach?" is "God's." Historically, the evolution is reciprocal: the God-idea & the behavior-ideal refine each other in-beyond Scripture. Eg, the Bible is not explicitly antislavery, but it's implicitly so--so no proslavery argument can honestly & intelligently appeal to Scripture. In the ancient world, some people were people-owners, some are to this day, & African blacks didn't object to the practice till they themselves got owned by whites because some blacks were willing to sell other blacks. (Moral history is a robber of self-righteousness & prejudice.)

But is God's morality as easy to read in nature & history & our own experience as it is in the Bible? It's not as easy to read in the Bible as many people think (eg, pro-lifers, who just love "Thou shalt not kill"), & it's harder in the worlds of our own experience, of history, & of nature. Even if it were easy to come by "the morality the Bible teaches," we would have to include other factors in our decisional field, in deciding how we are to act vis-a-vis issues of personal & public behavior, while usually giving priority to the biblical factor. Recall, from the announcement of this course, that the Bible, in moral decision-making, is to be used "less as a lawbook than a light." One of the scores of KJV verses I memorized in Sunday school was this (Pr.4.18): "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Only I remember it as "righteous," a better rendering for our time, as in NRSV: "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.") Your "path" is your life-course insofar as your decisions have determined it. The metaphor is closer to Hebrew than to English, for the Hebrew word for morality-ethics literally means "walking." So, care-ful as you "walk your walk & talk your talk"! Go with God (& with what I'm calling here "God's morality") if you want God to walk with you.

It's a good thing, a moral thing, that we're learning to think globally, to see the Big Picture of all God's peoples on our shrinking planet. Jesus objected that his contemporaries had too narrow a definition of "neighbor" & even of "enemy." We need to listen to our world neighbors & respect their desire to discover & live the good. They are all right here, on p.2.

This thinksheet visualizes the typology of Fred. Streng et al, WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS (P-H/73). For displaying the ways, I have selected four components: G[od], N[ature], S[elf], O[ther].



PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE HOLY. The vertical God/individual relationship dominates, with (and thus the weaker horizontal line), usually, social implications. (In this and all the delineations of the ways on this thinksheet, I'm striving for stark simplicity even at risk of minor distortion.) Revelation/"hearing"/communion-prayer.

CREATION OF COMMUNITY THROUGH MYTH AND RITUAL. Here the strong line is horizontal, the weak line showing the possibility (biblically, the actuality) that the community is formed around a founder's direct numinous experience (or, as in the case of Moses, re-formed). Liturgy.

LIVING HARMONIOUSLY THROUGH CONFORMITY TO THE COSMIC LAW. Shock: nature, almost invisible in #1 and #2 (though biblically the doctrine of creation ratifies #1 and #2), dominates (as Tao and Ti/Li) #3, the Sinic way. Yin/yang, coincidentia oppositorum, the convergent experience is "where it's at." Hyperstabilizing of individual/society.

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM THROUGH DISCIPLINE (MYSTICISM): WESTERN FORM. The emphasis in both 4W and 4E is not on prayer (as in #1 and #2) but on meditation—in 4W, a convergence of meditation and prayer into contemplation ("the beatific vision"). Theocentric, theotherapeutic, with incorporation of nature and other indirectly into God.

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM THROUGH DISCIPLINE (MYSTICISM): EASTERN FORM. Noo-centric, psychotherapeutic—with incorporation of Brahman (all/All) into Atman (soul, beginning with one's individual consciousness). In Transcendental Meditation, prostituted to Western hyperindividualism. The soul is all (Hinduism) or nothing (Buddhism, =Prot.Hinduism).

ATTAINING AN INTEGRATED SELF THROUGH CREATIVE INTERACTION. Flatlanders. Hyperfeminine fixation on the interpersonal (as thoroughgoing as the two #4 types, especially #4E, tend to be intrapsychic). "Human potential Movement" in its NTL/education/encounter strand (the Esalen strand allying rather more with #4E than with "interpersonal skills").

ACHIEVEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ACTION. Religion experienced primarily in the prophetic struggle for justice and peace. The weak line shows God optional in the sense that "movements" have both theistic and secular participants. Differs from #2 by the arrow toward other: altruistic, sociocentric.

THE NEW LIFE THROUGH TECHNOCRACY. Everything taken seriously except God. The God-amnesiac, secularistic society and its concerns as central. "Nature" instead of God or God + nature provides the vertical dimension—so, the biosphere (ecology, etc.) as value-center, though the more the emphasis is bio- rather than techno-, the more of #3.

ENJOYMENT OF THE FULL LIFE THROUGH SENSUOUS EXPERIENCE. Ironically, radically similar to and dissimilar from #7. Similar: elimination (or assimilation) of God; dissimilar: exaltive of the individual, instead of de-individualizing (though both may be dehumanizing). Compare with the G/S/N/O patterns of the other "ways," and do for the rest.

ECSTATIC as hyper-: orgasmic
hypo-: ascetic