

Huck's Choice: On the Relation
Between Ethics and Religion

By
Matthew Bryan Nobriga

A Senior Essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in the Integral Curriculum of Liberal Arts.

Joseph Zepeda, Advisor

Saint Mary's College of California
April 20th, 2015

Matthew Nobriga

Senior Essay

02-24-15

Introduction

Ethics is what dictates the action of mankind. An ethic shapes society by being a group of societal standards and practices that all agree to. Many of these ethics are suggested through different philosophical texts or religions, and in many of these cases ethics will come and go. But through the course of time, mankind's guiding ideologies philosophy and religion, have agreed to a common ethic. The fact, that to a certain extent, religion and philosophy have a common code of ethics is undeniable, but the question becomes whether the ethics proposed in religion can be completely comprehended without the religion. Can someone understand the ethics attached to the Jewish and Christian religions independently of the religions? Or is the acceptance of God a necessary conditional to the ethical message of the Bible? These questions are certainly perplexing and are quite important if one wishes to understand ethics as a whole. If the common ethics in religion can be understood independently from the religion itself (i.e. remove the fulfillment of any ritual, sacrament, or submitting to God through a covenant), then ethics itself would supersede any form of philosophy or religion rather than be subjected to it.

The question at hand is one that is much older than the Church. In fact, Plato himself raises this very question in his dialogue, *Euthyphro*. At its surface, the dialogue deals with whether piety is pious for the sake of itself, or if it is pious because the gods favor it. This question isn't addressed directly but is raised when

Socrates says, "...for he says that I am a maker of gods, and on the ground that I create new gods while not believing in the old gods, he has indicted me for their sake, as he puts it." (Plato, pg 3) The reason why Socrates is going to trial is because a young man by the name of Meletus is not happy with what Socrates is teaching and claims that Socrates is corrupting the youth by speaking of new gods. Meletus' justification of his actions against Socrates is that he is doing this for the sake of the gods. This causes one to look at the accusation brought forward by Meletus with a bit of skepticism. This is obvious, because in order for Meletus to understand what is just for the gods he must understand either the virtue of justice in its entirety, or what is offensive in the eyes of the gods, which is quite the bold claim. Meletus is doing what many people have done before; subject the will of deity to their own will. With this, Socrates points to a flaw of man, but also touches on the topic brought up in this very essay, mainly, is what is just so on its own accord or because the gods make it so? In one case, justice, and virtue as a whole, exist without the gods having to conceive of the ideas, but in the other case the virtues are so because the gods dictate their existence, making anything virtuous so only because the gods have decided upon it. The question in play is a long-standing one and *Euthyphro* shows that it is not just a theological debate, but also one taken on by philosophers.

Euthyphro raises another very important idea towards the end of the dialogue. As Socrates and Euthyphro continue their conversation, the notion of whether that which is pious is also just and if things that are just are pious is discussed. The question that Socrates is asking Euthyphro is one worth making a note of to any reader of this dialogue (Plato, pg 11). But what if that which is unjust

is also pious? Examples of this inner strife are seen throughout literature as well. If one just reads *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain this very struggle is brought to life. The message that Plato sends in this section of *Euthyphro* is reiterated by these particular works and is even dealt with in the Bible with the story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22:1-3, New American Bible), showing that this is a dilemma in both philosophy and religion.

Part I: Old Testament

Since a philosophic text pertaining to this type of question has been brought up, it would be appropriate to refer to a Biblical text at this time. Rather than starting in the beginning of the Bible, the book of Romans will be the starting point for this inquiry. The Apostle Paul has much to say concerning gentiles, or non-Jews, and their relation to the laws of God followed by Jesus, who is the Son of God and the source of salvation for mankind. Romans 2:14-15 states, "For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them." (Rom. 2:14-15, New American Bible) Paul says something very important here firstly; he is stating that for those who are not born into the law, it is still possible for them to observe the law, but rather than holding to the law because they are born into a covenant with God, they are holding it for themselves. Secondly, by stating that "the demands of the law are written on their hearts," Paul is suggesting that there is a commonality to the gentile as well as the Jew or early Christian. Perhaps, this commonality is a code

of ethics that both groups of people follow, but that cannot be said for certain at this point in time. What is undeniable is that Paul sees a similarity between the laws that followers of God adhere to and the internal law that gentiles try to live up to. Paul goes on further to suggest that the gentile appears to be struggling with this very issue internally. While the common law between Jews and gentiles is written on their hearts, Paul states that their mind is often at conflict with the heart by way of its thoughts, and that the mind is quick to defend the thoughts that it begets.

As Paul continues in Romans he begins to discuss how man is to be saved. At Romans 4:1-6 Paul states that the story of Abraham and Isaac is an example of how one can be justified through faith, and a little bit later in the same chapter he says, "It was not through the law that the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he would inherit the world but through the righteousness that comes from faith." (Romans 4:13, New American Bible) Here, Paul points out that just because someone is a descendant of Abraham does not make him or her a righteous person, but rather it is the action of having faithfulness in God that makes him or her righteous. In other words, one must have faith in God to be righteous; it is not something that can be inherited. In the proceeding chapter, Paul continues this line of thought when he says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1, New American Bible) With this statement, Paul is clarifying the notion of how one finds peace in God by having faith in Jesus. Through the justification of one's faith in Christ, God will grant peace; that is the argument that Paul is proposing. It is the same kind of faith that Abraham possesses in the story from Genesis that Paul is

speaking of here. For one that possesses this kind of faith, they will trust in whatever it is that they put their faith in whole-heartedly. In sum, Paul is suggesting that the only way one can find peace is by putting their faith in Christ completely. Paul gives no other way for one to find peace; the only way is through God. It cannot be inherited through a bloodline nor will simply following ethics grant one the same kind of peace that Paul claims God grants. Therefore, what Paul is ultimately saying is that, though the gentiles may follow the law on their own accord and the Jews are born as God's chosen people, the only thing guarantees peace is having faith in God through Christ; everything else is secondary.

The time has come to challenge Paul's claim of the commonality of law between gentiles and Jews. It is safe to assume that Paul isn't speaking about the dietary laws and ritual laws given in later books of the Old Testament, for these laws are very specific to the Jewish faith. The only laws that would be making a profound statement by comparing it to the gentiles would be if Paul were comparing the Ten Commandments to the law that is written on the Gentile's hearts. One might think that the first three commandments (Exodus 20:2-11, New American Bible) do not pertain to gentiles, but Paul states in Romans, "For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible tributes of eternal power and divinity has been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse;" (Romans 1: 19-20, New American Bible) Paul is making an important statement here because he is pointing to a physical, tangible example to strengthen his argument. Paul credits everything that God has created as the biggest support in His

existence and furthers his point by citing this exact reason as to why no one has an excuse as to not being able to come to God. For Paul, the natural world is the most obvious sign of God's existence, and if one can recognize that only a omnipotent being is capable of making the world, then they should also come to know all the possibly can about it. The remaining commandments speak to person-to-person relationships rather than a person-to-God relationship, making it much easier to see the commonality between Jew and non-Jew. These particular commandments read, "Honor your father and mother, that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house." (Exodus 20:12-17, New American Bible) These commandments are distinct from the others due to the fact that they concern human relationships. The benefits that come from these commandments reveal themselves in a more tangible way due to the fact that they can be considered an ethical commandment as opposed to a spiritual commandment. If these laws are followed, whether its by God-fearing people or not, there will be a mindset among the group that these commandments are the supreme and most fundamental good for all people.

But what if the law written on the hearts of the gentiles does not coincide with the Hebrew laws as Paul claims? One must then begin to look for cases in which Paul's claim may be contradicted. Such a case can be found in the second book of Kings out of the Old Testament. In 2 Kings 2:23-24 it is written,

From there Elisha went up to Bethel. While he was on the way, some little boys came out of the city and jeered at him: "Go away baldy; go

away baldy!” The prophet turned and saw them, and he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the children to pieces. (2 Kings 2:23-24, New American Bible)

In this particular instance a prophet of God curses a group of children for mocking him. These children were dishonoring their father and mother by mocking a prophet, and by doing this they are violating one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12, New American Bible). Regardless of the transgressions that these children may have committed it would be hard to argue that they deserved to die. This is where the holes in Paul’s claim begin to show. If a group of people who did not follow this religion heard this story they would be mortified by the macabre image of a prophet inciting the wrath of his god upon a group of children all because they called him bald, even if they had commonalities in their ethical beliefs. Paul isn’t exactly wrong in his claim; gentiles and Jews have a commonalty in their ethics, but there are cases such as these that might cause one to question the sense of justice of the Judeo-Christian God, and subsequently, his followers.

A similar case within the Old Testament that has received much attention concerning this subject is the testing of Abraham from the book of Genesis. Genesis 22:1-3 starts,

Sometime afterward, God put Abraham to the test and said to him: Abraham “Here I am” he replied. Then God said: “Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.” Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac, and after cutting the wood for the burnt offering, set out for the place that God had told him. (Genesis 22:1-3, New American Bible)

In this case, Abraham is called upon by God to go and sacrifice his one and only son, Isaac. This is coming shortly after God promises to make Abraham’s descendants

many (Genesis 17:1-13), but without hesitation Abraham prepares to make the burnt offering. Now, if Paul's claim is correct in that there is a commonality in the law where both Jews and gentiles understand it, then a gentile must undoubtedly see the good within this action outside of Abraham's obedience to God. To put it simply, what is good about Abraham's actions? To give some context, this particular story happens before Moses gives the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, but if Paul's assertion that the law is written on the hearts of people is correct, it would follow that Abraham must know that it would be wrong to kill Isaac. Therefore, Abraham's justification is called into question. This issue relates back to the question that Socrates and Euthyphro ponder over in the *Euthyphro* dialogue (Plato, pg 11), that is, is something good so because the gods will it to be so, or is it good in its own right.

There is also a fact concerning this case that is worth making note of because it may provide information to the mental state of Abraham. Over the course of a three-day journey Abraham says practically nothing to his companions. The story continues with,

Abraham said to his servants "Stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on over there. We will worship and then come back to you." So Abraham took the wood for the offering and laid it on his son Isaac, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. "Father!" he said. "Here I am" he replied. Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" "My son," Abraham answered, "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering." Then the two walked on together. (Genesis 22: 5-8, New American Bible)

Abraham's silence should not be mistaken as cold-blooded; it would be a disservice to think that Abraham is emotionless when faced with such a predicament. If one

understands Abraham's silence as that of inner turmoil, rather than lack of emotions then one can read his responses to his son as Abraham answering his own questions concerning the matter. With this, Abraham isn't just telling Isaac that God will provide the lamb, but he is also reassuring himself that God is going to honor their covenant and he will keep his one and only son. Even though Abraham is answering his own concerns, as well as Isaac's with these answers, this does not make his actions good. It only shows that Abraham is ethical. The goodness in his actions lie in the fact that Abraham's faith is in God's covenant with him not within the action itself.

With the analysis of the Abraham and Isaac story, the holes in Paul's claim begin to show. Abraham's actions cannot be called good without taking into consideration the covenant between him and God. Even with an interpretation of his answers to Isaac suggesting that Abraham may have even been contemplating the morality of the situation the entire time it does not necessarily make his actions good. Abraham has the knife raised before an angel of God stops him. Ultimately, it is not all together apparent that a gentile could justify Abraham's actions as anything other than bad. The fact that Paul justifies Abraham for his faith is not enough for a gentile judge Abraham's actions as something other than bad; Paul spends a good portion of Romans 4 explaining why Abraham did something good, showing that it is not an obvious conclusion. This makes Paul's work in Romans 4 look almost like a defense of Abraham's actions in order to show that what he did was not bad.

But if Abraham's covenant with God is a key piece in understanding Abraham's goodness, then what effect does this case from the Old Testament have

on natural ethics? There are three options for the ethical implications of Abraham's faith: Abraham's faith is either a counter to natural ethics, goes beyond natural ethics, or is inclusive of natural ethics. If Abraham's faith counters ethics then that suggests that Abraham's actions are in fact, unethical and the only justification that can be made on his behalf is reasonable to the followers of the Jewish and Christian faiths. If Abraham's faith goes beyond ethics then that suggests that the events depicted in Genesis 22 are to elevate the understanding of natural ethics. This would be an addition to natural ethics, which would refine the understanding of ethics as a whole. If Abraham's faith is inclusive of ethics then the goodness in Abraham's actions will be apparent and understood as such. Abraham's faith in God is what actualizes the covenant, without Abraham's faith the covenant would not exist, so in order to get a full picture of Abraham and God's covenant it is necessary to explore the nature of the faith that Abraham possesses. In Romans 4, Paul provides some insight to this very question. It is here that Paul says,

For this reason, it depends on faith, so that it may be a gift, and a promise may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not to those who adhere to the law but those who follow the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist. (Romans 4:16-17, New American Bible)

Paul is suggesting something quite powerful here, that the faith Abraham has trumps following the law. Not only that, but he is speaking to what exactly Abraham had faith in God in. In verse 17, Paul says, "He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist." With this statement, Paul is clarifying that it isn't just God the deity that

Abraham has faith in, but actually in what God has promised to him, that his descendants will be many. Abraham is an old man when the covenant is made with God, and his wife is almost as old as Abraham himself; which suggests that Sarah could possibly be barren, and the window for the two to have children has closed. But regardless, Abraham has faith that God will accomplish the impossible, in this case Abraham has faith that God will bless him and Sarah with many children, despite their old age. But how does defining Abraham's faith affect the natural ethics? The faith of Abraham doesn't explicitly suggest that it is inclusive of natural ethics because having faith in that God can do the impossible doesn't seem to be apparently good within its own right. The only options left for the affects that Abraham's faith has on natural ethics is that his faith either goes beyond natural ethics or counters natural ethics. Because Paul dedicates all of Romans 4 to the subject of Abraham's faith, he is suggesting that Abraham's faith, in some way or another, goes beyond natural ethics. Paul has the advantage of being familiar with the Sermon on the Mount, which changes the understanding of the law "you shall not kill" (Matthew 5:21-24). But even with this elevated understanding of that particular law, Paul fails to state what is naturally good about Abraham's actions other than pointing out the nature of the man's faith. In summation, I am forced to conclude that Abraham's actions in Genesis counter natural ethics for two reasons: without taking into account the covenant with God, Abraham nearly sacrifices his child, which is taboo to just about anyone. Secondly, Paul fails to equate the goodness of Abraham's faith in God to the natural goodness that is available to all, which is what Paul suggests in Romans 2:14-15.

Now, I could spend the entire length of this paper discussing Abraham alone, but for the sake of this essay, I will now investigate the New Testament, and in particular the Gospels, in order to see how Jesus affects natural ethics just as how I investigated how Abraham and other Old Testament figures affect natural ethics. And with this, we have reached the conclusion of Part I.

Part II: New Testament

The Sermon on the Mount is an important part of the New Testament. It is here where Jesus takes different laws and customary practices of the Jewish faith and critiques them in some way. When analyzing the Sermon on the Mount from an ethical perspective the important question to ask oneself is how this sermon affects ethics as a whole, and what the nature of the relationship is between ethics and the Sermon on the Mount. A good place to start this analysis would be where Jesus discusses adultery:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks to a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart...It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.’ But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:27-28, 31-32, New American Bible)

Here, Jesus takes on one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14) and changes how one understands the law. What Jesus is suggesting is that just abstaining from adultery isn't enough; instead the mind must be clear of any thoughts associated with the act. What Jesus is attempting to do by treating the law in this way is to elevate the understanding of the law. Here, he is taking one of the Ten Commandments and expanding, as well as refining, the understanding of the law.

Instead, one must pair the physical with the mental by keeping the mind clear of adulterous thoughts as well. He continues with this by saying that divorcing one's wife and remarrying another woman, minus the exception of an unlawful marriage, is to be considered adultery. In proposing this, Jesus is expanding what is to fall under the jurisdiction of this law: not only does adultery include the act in its traditional sense, but it also applies to divorce and remarriage as well. He refines the understanding of the law when he suggests that the mind must be clear in addition to refraining from the action.

The question now becomes, how Jesus affects ethics with these teachings. Paul once again gives some insight to this subject in Romans chapter six, where he says,

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall be united with him through the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If then, we have died with Christ, we believe we should also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies know more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as for his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourself as (being) dead

to sin and living for God in Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:5-11, New American Bible)

The main point of Paul's argument is that we are slaves to sin and the only way to be freed of this slavery is to live for God through Jesus Christ. He says that man has the ability to share the same death as Christ by accepting him, which allows us to put the earthly life man lives into a perspective that parallels the life that Christ lived. The last verse sums up the way Paul thinks a good Christian should live his

life. It is a mindset one must adopt where one is dead to sin; sin is taken away as an option for action for any Christian, and in addition Paul states that one must live for God in Jesus.

But one must ask what it means to live for God in Jesus. Earlier in Romans, Paul says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2, New American Bible) This would suggest that one’s faith in God is what allows them to live for God in Jesus, because Jesus is the one who gives man the ability to have this faith. Ultimately, Paul is saying that a Christian is required to be dead to sin and only live for God through Jesus by putting his or her faith in God, and this faith is given to all of man by Christ himself. But Paul fails to address a very important question in this chapter of Romans, namely, how does Christ provide this faith to man? If Paul is to be correct in his assertion this is a question that must be answered.

Though Paul does not address this directly, in later chapters of the book of Romans, Paul indirectly addresses what he says in chapter six. One such a statement is in chapter 13, when Paul says,

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in saying, (namely) “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10, New American Bible)

These few verses comment on the Ten Commandments that deal with person-to-person relationships, the same commandments that Jesus addresses and elevates the understanding of in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Paul is addressing a key moment within Jesus' ministry, and is summarizing it quite nicely by saying that all of the person-to-person commandments can be summed up in saying one should love their neighbor in the same fashion that they would love themselves. This interpretation coincides well with how Jesus elevates the same laws in the Sermon on the Mount because in many of the cases brought up by Christ in that sermon can be simplified down to Paul's suggestion. An example of this can be seen with what Jesus says concerning anger (Matthew 5:21-24). Jesus elevates the understanding of the commandment "Thou shall not kill" by saying that not only is it wrong to kill, but it is also wrong to harbor anger against someone, because murdering someone is an act done out of anger. The summary of the law that Paul provides is an example of how Paul expects Christians to live for God through Jesus. Paul's expectations for a good Christian can met by taking Jesus' teachings and putting them into action while keeping the mindset proposed in Romans 6.

But by bringing up this verse it becomes necessary to investigate what fulfilling the law actually entails. Not only does Paul say that that loving others fulfills the law, but Jesus himself uses similar language. In the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but fulfill. (Matthew 5:17, New American Bible) With this type of diction being used by Jesus himself, as well as Paul, the meaning of "fulfillment" needs to be explicitly stated. A way to find an answer to this

question is to try to understand if what Jesus is suggesting to his disciples is going beyond what the law dictates. One part of the Sermon on the Mount provides a textual example of how Jesus is fulfilling the law. At the end of Matthew 5, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love you neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

(Matthew 5:43-44, New American Bible) Here, Jesus is fulfilling the law by once again elevating the necessary conditions of following that law. Whereas, before Jesus one could get away with hating one's enemies, now Jesus is proposing that a way to take this particular law to the next level would be to not only love your neighbors but also love your enemies. Jesus is fulfilling the law by elevating the understanding of them, but does the elevation of this law translate to a goodness that is apparent outside of the religion of Christianity? The issue becomes whether or not someone can accept Jesus' fulfillment of this law without actually accepting Jesus as messiah. Even though someone could potentially follow this elevated law, in Romans 4:13 Paul suggests that faith in God and Jesus is greater than just good deeds alone. Therefore, it seems that even if a gentile were to accept Jesus' elevated laws without accepting Jesus, they would be lesser than someone who accepts Jesus as well as follows the elevated laws.

Another place within the Gospels that can help us understand how Jesus is fulfilling the law takes place in the gospel of John. There is a verse that is unique to John's rendition of the Last Supper that says, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." (John 13:34, New American Bible) The word choice of this verse is very similar to the word

choice that Jesus uses during the Sermon on the Mount, but there is a key difference between the two. In Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus is giving a general claim that elevates an old law. To tell someone to love their enemies is a broad statement indeed; one person's enemy may not necessarily be another person's enemy. But what Jesus is saying in John is quite different because Jesus is saying to follow the example he has set for loving others, making Jesus a sort of standard for selfless love. What Jesus says during the Last Supper is key; Jesus is setting himself apart from all other men by saying the love that he has for his fellow man is to be mimicked from this point forward. But just as the case before, it is necessary to question whether someone can accept Jesus' teaching without necessarily accepting Jesus as the messiah. What Jesus is doing here is putting himself as the standard of how to act selflessly. In doing this, Jesus is making himself the focal point of his ministry, that he is the ultimate example of brotherly love. It would be unreasonable to think that a non-Christian couldn't use Jesus as a standard for his or her ethical beliefs, but Paul's statement in Romans 4 cannot be ignored. If faith in God is ultimately more important than good deeds, Paul's work suggests that regardless if one adopts Jesus' message of selfless love, without faith in Jesus being the messiah, they would be missing the point of Jesus' ministry entirely.

Though it does appear that Jesus, and subsequently Paul's statements are naturally acceptable to everyone's conscience, it seems that if one investigates deeper into the matter, the holes in this claim become apparent. At its heart, Jesus' ministry possesses a strong ethical structure, but through Paul's interpretation in Romans 4:13 and Jesus' own words in John 13:34, it seems one must not only accept

the ethics that are part of the ministry but also accept the message of the ministry: that Jesus is the Messiah and the one Son of God. This creates a dichotomy between the religious and ethical; even though the two bear similarities to one another, an ethical life does not equal a religious life. One must accept the religion as a whole, or deny the religion and follow one's own ethics. The latter may be similar to the ethics of the religion, but there is an uncertainty about their relationship that must be acknowledged.

Because a non-Christian must choose Christianity or their own ethics, perhaps this is why there are instances within the New Testament where language is used that would be familiar to a gentile, in order to make this transition from an ethical life to a religious life seem easier. Such an example of this type of text is found in Romans chapter 12, where Paul says:

I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, New American Bible)

These couple of verses deal with a topic that an ancient Greek would be quite familiar with. Many Greek philosophers have taken up the same subject matter, namely the relationship between the soul and body, which parallels Paul's language of mind and body. Paul's ultimate claim here is that it is necessary to sacrifice the body in order to renew the mind, which results in being able to differentiate what is the will of God from everything else. It is important to take note of the fact that Paul is equating God's will to what is good for all, not just good for a Christian. But would a philosopher agree with this claim? Perhaps, but it is not at all certain. But, if Paul is

suggesting that renewing the mind and sacrificing the body is for the sole purpose of being able to discern the will of God from everything else, then could a Greek be content with a claim of that magnitude? Paul is essentially taking a philosophical idea and tweaking it so it fits Christian theology. But, a Greek would rather renew the mind for the sake of goodness itself, not to understand the will of God. Is the will of God or any other gods for that matter, better than the form of Good as a whole? All that can be stated concerning these particular verses is that a Greek would not be willing to sacrifice his body in order to renew his mind so he might know the will of God, if there is no understanding of the form of Good involved in the will of God. Ultimately, a philosopher would rather come to understand the Good than the will of God, and this is made apparent through the predicament left in *Euthyphro* (pg 12, Plato), that what is pious and in accordance with the gods is not always going to be good and just. But if Paul's statement of God's will and the Good being synonymous is in fact true, then a philosopher might want nothing more than to come to know the will of God.

It is time to take stock of what has been given to see if a conclusion is in sight. Obviously both paths seek out the good, one using the Bible as its guide, while the other trusts philosophy. Part I seeks to explore the compatibility between the Old Testament and common ethics, or the idea that "the law is written on the hearts of all." This section shows stories within the Old Testament that prove to be contrary to common ethics. In certain stories, like the Abraham and Isaac story, we see a case where the figure that is seen as good (God) is trumping the ethical with their demands. In some cases it is obvious, but other cases require much analysis and

care in order to extrapolate a conclusion. Part II takes up the New Testament and seeks out to find answers to the answer to the same question in Part I, and is investigated in a similar way. By analyzing Jesus' own words within the Gospels and Paul's interpretation and commentary on scriptures in the book of Romans, the conclusion was reached that there is in fact a commonalty in ethics between non-Christians and Christians and the law is written on the hearts of all. But from the perspective of what Paul is saying concerning faith in Romans, regardless of the ethics someone possesses, or how much Jesus influences their actions, if they do not accept Jesus to be the messiah then they cannot be saved and are missing out on the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

Mark Twain communicates the essence of this issue in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* beautifully. In Chapter XXXI of the book, Huck deals with moral dilemma of whether he should write to Miss Watson and inform her the her runaway slave, Jim, is two miles down the river, or if he should allow Jim to escape to the northern states and gain freedom. After writing out the letter, Huck has a very important decision to make and he finally decides, "I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll *go* to hell' – and tore it up." (pg 206, Twain) Twain presents one of heaviest decisions a person could go through in a way that is innocent yet complex due to the results that depend upon Huck's choice. It is obvious to the reader that the right decision for Huck is to tear up the letter and allow Jim to have a chance in gaining his freedom. The reality of this situation is that Huck is debating on doing the ethical, as well as the Christian act of

assisting Jim in gaining his freedom, and the unethical and unchristian act of sending the letter to Miss Watson. Huck has a very convoluted idea of Christianity (pg 205, Twain), which leads him to reason that the act he is committing is one that will result in him going to hell. Little does Huck realize that his act is far more Christian than what his skewed perception of Christianity allows him to understand. If Huck had a more complete understanding of Christianity that included knowledge of scripture, then perhaps he wouldn't have concluded that he is going to hell. Jesus himself offers insight to a predicament such as the one Huck has found himself in. In Matthew 25 Jesus says:

Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me....Then the righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And the king will say to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:34-35, 37, and 40, New American Bible)

If Huck were aware of these particular verses he would perhaps have a different opinion on the fate of his soul. According to the book of Matthew, Jesus will see the actions of everyone and judge them. Those who commit good actions for the sake of the Good will be spared from eternal damnation, so Huck choosing to save Jim is actually closer to a Christian act than the other action he could have chosen. The choice Huck is faced with shows the nature of the common ethics in religion and philosophy: they are intertwined with one another like a grapevine; they are two separate branches with a common base. Both branches reach for the same thing in the Good, but remain two separate components of the vine, bearing their own fruit. Perhaps Huck may not agree with his idea of Christianity, but he is completely

unaware of how Christ-like his action is. Regardless of Huck's neglecting of the religion, good recognizes good, and Huck is undoubtedly committing a good act for his fellow man. But what are the implications of this conclusion? There appears to be a contradiction between what Jesus is proposing here and what Paul says in Romans 4:13. Paul's commentary on the Gospels would suggest that regardless of how Christ-like Huck's actions are, he would not be saved if he did not believe in Christ as Lord. But Jesus' words in Matthew 25 suggest that Huck would actually be free from punishment in hell. The contradiction is decided in favor of Jesus' words over Paul's, ultimately showing that Huck has a much greater understanding of Christianity than what he realizes.

The choice that Huck has to make can be seen in two different lights. At first glance, Huck appears to be rejecting religion and trusting his conscience as a suitable ethical guide, but in reality, Huck has an inverse understanding of what the Christian thing to do is. Huck sees the bad as an apparent good and the good as an apparent bad, but throughout the confusion he fulfills the law. Huck treats Jim the way Jesus would treat Jim, fulfilling the commandment given at the Last Supper. Not only that, but Huck also believes he's giving up his own eternal happiness by helping Jim, because he sees it as an action that will place him in hell. In fact, Huck's actions serve as a prime example of Paul's claim in Romans 2:14-15, that the law is written on the hearts of non-Christians and Christians alike. The metaphor of the grapevine that represents Huck's choice can also apply to religion and philosophy. The two have a commonality in their ethical foundation that Paul has made explicit within Romans, that non-Christians have the law written on their hearts. Both the ethical

and the religious strive for the Good, but they remain two separate branches with their own doctrine and beliefs that are twisted and tangled amongst one another.

Work Cited

Plato, *Euthyphro* from Plato Complete Works edited by John M. Hoover, Indianapolis, Indiana, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, Print

The New American Bible, New York, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, Print

Twain, Mark, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, New York, New York, Bantam Books, 1981, Print