

A SUMMARY OF THE BOULDER SCHOOL UNIT ON MORALITY AND ETHICS,  
SPRING 1987

This is an initial draft summary. It is designed to be used in a study group in conjunction with the handouts referred to and the text, Manuel Velasquez and Cynthia Rostankowski, Ethics: Theory and Practice, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1985—hereafter cited as MVCR. Note that every selection in this text is summarized/explained in the introduction to the chapter in which it occurs. Otherwise, all references and quotations are from The URANTIA Book, C 1955, The URANTIA Foundation, all rights reserved. The thoughts expressed herein reflect no official position whatsoever.

Introduction: The handout, "Whetting our appetites for righteousness" gives a wide range of references to The URANTIA Book on duty, the need for morality in our time, progressive and regressive compromises. The testimony of Arthur Nash in The Golden Rule in Business (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1923), which recounted his experience as a man of Christian faith wholeheartedly devoted to putting the golden rule into practice as a textile manufacturer. The phenomenal social and industrial results of his practical extension of love could not be duplicated by those who attempted to imitate his methods without his spirit.

Continuation: Plato's Crito, an account of Socrates' utter integrity in the quest to discover what is the right thing to do in a particular situation. Socrates discovers, by a deduction from basic moral principle, that it would be wrong to (partly) destroy the fabric of the state, which he has accepted as an adult citizen, by breaking out of jail, even to save his life. This dialogue illustrates Plato's doctrine about the types of soul: some people pursue pleasure; others (e.g., Crito) cherish reputation, honor, position, victory, and wealth; while others love knowledge, wisdom, and insight.

Plato had a major insight that is just as important today as it was for Greek civilization: that **relativism—the teaching that there is no true standard of values—is a disaster for the individual and the society.** Relativistic popular sayings, such as "It's all relative," "Who's to judge?" "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," "Different strokes for different folks"—often tend, not merely toward tolerance and broadmindedness and good humor, but also to a kind of laissez-faire attitude that is the smiling modern equivalent of the Luciferian doctrine of false liberty. The URANTIA Book teaches, on the contrary, that values are real, not merely subjective (2094c), and morality plays a very real part in universe progress (2096.2). According to the new age version of a dialogue illustrating false liberty, someone approaches Hitler, saying, "Hey, man, I really feel that maybe you should think twice about killing all those people." Hitler replies, "Look man, I'm not into all that morality stuff right now. I've got my own trip to work out." And the response is tolerant! "Yeah, I guess it's something you've just got to go through. It'll all work out in the end. I don't want to lay my trip on you, force my values down your throat, or anything." Note the guilt that attends such tolerance. (2086.6)

I. The role of law in the universe, duty in consciousness, and moral rules in evolution:

The universality of law (1126.2); God is law (114.2); the difficulty of adequately formulating laws (47); love and law are coordinate in the universe (1145.5; 1222c); disdain for laws vitiates prayer (1638b), *law is life itself (555.2)*  
Early Evolution of Religion (955#6); The Ghost Cults (961.7 - 963). As evolution progresses, moral teaching moves from negative to positive commandments (796d; 803b). Hap's moral code (751.3); Adamic teaching (835#7); Melchizedek's



commands (1017.6); Jesus' simplification of 613 rules (1805a; 1584#10); Jesus was invited to leave behind a system of religious ethics 1329d; the exposition of the golden rule (1650-51) is a contribution to that project.

Some authors distinguish (particular) rules from (general) principles. Some seek to find, to attack, or to defend some "ethical theory" of the form, "X is good (or right) if and only if X is \_\_\_\_\_." One counterexample is sufficient to embarrass a theory in such a linear way of thinking. Islamic ethics considers not only the polar opposition right vs. wrong, but the wider spectrum of actions which are commanded, recommended, morally indifferent, discouraged, and forbidden.

It was suggested that as dispensations advance, the ranges of behaviors that fall under these categories shift. I.e., as dispensations of epochal revelations advance, the standards rise: what was merely acceptable before becomes discouraged now; what was above and beyond the call of duty before becomes expected now. The ordination sermon sets up a class of individuals who are dedicated to living according to the highest standards or patterns. The same is not expected of every believer.

There is a gravity to the mores that resists higher and revealed standards. (1104#2) No new revelation can be accepted as genuine if it does not maintain and advance the standards achieved by the previous religious tradition. (1115.3) There are many standards—the level of society, the level of the current religious community, and the standards of the divine spirit that lives within. (1457d)

The importance of genetics for morality is indicated at 719.4, 729.2, and 891.5-6. The spiritual compensation for a morally unresponsive nature is proclaimed at 382#7: the Spirit makes it possible for us to progress as though we were part of a world which had never suffered an Adamic default.

## II. Conformity to Cosmic Pattern

The Stoic, Thomistic, and modern Roman Catholic "natural law ethics" is based on the affirmation that there are intelligible principles and patterns in the creation; that we achieve our highest happiness and harmony with the universe by living in accord with them. (MVCR, Chapter 2)

Ethics of sex is proposed as a topic in which natural law ethics may be seen to be corroborated by The URANTIA Book. Pattern in pair relationships is presented on many levels: The Universal Father and the Eternal Son—73.1; 90.1-2; 1154c,d; the Eternal Son and the Infinite Spirit—111.2; mortals and Havona natives in creature-trinitizing liaisons, 250.2-4; The Michael Son and the Creative Spirit, 235.last; 236c; 377.3; Adam and Eve, 581.1, 586.3; Andon and Fonta, 711ff; pair associations 432d.

Our very human nature is designed for integration of all all levels, material, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual (1229.1!). It is suggested that in order to experience maximum personal integration, it is necessary to act on material and emotional levels in accord with spirit standards in pair relationships. Otherwise internal conflicts and disharmonies result.

To recognize law leads to joyous living (952a); the harshest attitudes of the Gods are reserved for those who trample upon what they say "as they speak to their creation in the laws of spirit, mind, and matter . . ." (1638b)

Idealism. When we consider universe patterns as ideals, the question arises about what are the implications of ideals. Just because something is an ideal does not mean it is expected of a given individual. (1133.2-3)

One way to soften the impact of ideals is to use a variant of the notion of "prima facie duties." Suppose I say that I have a duty to my family. But if the Creator Son comes walking by and calls me to the full-time service of the Kingdom, that familial duty is transcended by a higher duty. Some duties, in other words, can override others. (The Richard Purtill handout is an attempt to



work out a theory in some detail based upon this common-sense recognition.) The danger of this idea is that it can empty the concept of duty of its proper and legitimate power. The same thing, obviously can be said of ideals. The fact that we are not expected to reach the ideal today can be used to legitimate ethical laziness. (1457d)

Rodan's idealism was particularly healthy, in that he saw God as the ultimate nexus of ideals, a living divine energy that could be personally experienced NOW, even as the idealist strives progressively towards the remote goal.

If we distinguish apostle-level morality, loyalty to the highest universe standards (1570b) from disciple-level morality, we can raise the question whether the ethical standard of monogamy is a requirement of disciple-level morality today. The strongest support for a no answer comes perhaps from 927c; idealism must not be confused with extreme asceticism. The strongest support for a yes answer comes from 1457d and especially from 1115.3, which says that revelation, to be acceptable, must maintain and extend, not dilute, the standards of the previous religious tradition.

We looked at the thought, sometimes alleged in criticism of natural law theory, that from premises about matters of fact one cannot validly deduce conclusions about matters of value or ethics. With certain types of examples, this maxim, "You can't derive an 'ought' from an 'is'" is clearly correct. Facts and values are different; the propositions that express them cannot logically be inferred from each other. When we speak of the highest facts of universe reality and purpose, however, the point tends to lose its sharpness of application.

With the natural law theorists, then, we can ask, "What universe patterns govern my situation? What laws of matter, mind, and spirit are relevant to this decision?"

### III. Seeking to do the greatest good to the greatest number for the greatest length of time.

The handout on utilitarian theory (cf. MVCR, Chapter 4) shows, first, how close that theory comes, in its best formulations, to revealed truth, and, second, that the "utilitarian" concern for the good of each individual, and hence for the good of the whole, explains the apparently coldhearted policies and narration of genocide in primitive times. Without the leverage provided by these crucial reflections, it may be impossible to demonstrate that the principles of planetary evolution, as portrayed in The URANTIA Book, is in fact consistent with the truth of the brotherhood of man.

The ethical theory of utilitarianism is that one should act to bring about the maximum good to the greatest number of people. What is good? Many utilitarians have identified good with happiness. If happiness be defined subjectively, this is convenient for free-market economic theory and democratic political theory. Happiness has been defined by Jeremy Bentham as pleasure (which, in turn, is evaluated in terms of its intensity, duration, proximity, certainty, and degree of admixture with pain).

Modern utilitarians attempt to calculate "social costs" by measuring all values in terms of some common quantitative unit, such as dollars. The handout on the Ford Pinto case illustrates the main problem with this procedure. We would like to be relieved of ever having to put a price tag on a human life or deciding how many dollars are worth spending in the interest of safety, but in reality, such decisions cannot be avoided.

Sissela Bok's book Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation is summarized in a systematic way in the handout. Though sensitive to various types of ethical consideration, she comes out, on the whole, as a utilitarian. This topic



is fruitfully studied in conjunction with passages from The URANTIA Book including the following: (1) secrecy in the larger universe: 114ff; 144.4-145.3 (cf. 1317.2); 147.2; 147.5; 149.1; 258b; 208.3-4. (2) secrecy in human evolution: 790c-791a; 992a; (3) Jesus' secrets: 1391.4; 1396; the injunction to do good deeds in secret; the injunction to the beneficiaries of healing not to tell others; the secrets that were to be kept for a certain period, e.g., until the resurrection or ascension—or pending a time when "all shall be revealed" (1820.2-3); the teaching that was given only for a single individual or group (1767.4); Jesus' openness in Samaria (1616.1); the use of parables to filter out insincere listeners (1689.3); the timing of the proclamation of the epochal fact of Jesus' divine Sonship (1747.4);

#### IV. Obedience to moral law

According to Kant (cf. MVCR, Chapter 3), we each have reason capable of discerning our duty. This view is identical to that advanced at 192b. Kant formulated supreme moral law in three propositions, roughly, (1) always act on principles that you can consistently will everyone to act on; (2) treat all persons as ends, never merely as means; (3) and act autonomously, not as a slave to inner or outer compulsion; act from the principles determined by free moral consciousness, not out of material compulsion.

The first two of these principles may be seen as extensions of the golden rule. See the handout, "Levels of Meaning in the Golden Rule." A sustained reflection on pp. 1650-51 is appropriate in this connection.

Read also R. M. Hare's article, "Abortion and the Golden Rule," in MVCR, pp. 274-279. On that topic, see also 569d-570a; 770c; 1130c; 2073d. What attitude toward abortion can you infer from these passages? What can you not infer from these passages? Why do you think the authors did not make pronouncements that would totally answer some of the questions raised in the current discussions about abortion?

The article, "Seduction and Rejection," by Marilyn E. Herzog is to be studied, not primarily as an argument on the topic of the ethics of sex, but as an example of thinking about persuasion. In our sex-and-money-and-power-oriented society, distortion of truth and manipulation of persons is perhaps the most pervasive form of evil. Note the kind of attention Herzog gives to these concerns. Ask whether she succeeds in respecting the individual's right to an autonomous decision. The model of a free decision, as I would infer that from various passages in The URANTIA Book is, roughly: consider the facts; interpret the meanings; weigh the values; then (surrender—p. 1002c—or in some way suspend the momentum of inclinations and) decide, fully, freely.

#### V. Ethics in Social Evolution

Thomas Hobbes is famous for his "pessimistic" view of human nature and its need for social force in order to establish peace. (cf. MVCR, Chapter 5) Hobbes in fact anticipated to a striking degree teachings of The URANTIA Book: 763.4; 783.4. Ethics does and must evolve: 589d; 577; 596d.

Today we face great dangers to civilization: 764.2; 804-05; 2082.3; 1488ff; 1302. Read Christopher W. Morris, "The Ethics of Nuclear Deterrence: A Contractarian Account" (MVCR 203-213) as an attempt to take the realities of evolution into account. Is he successful?

The assurances that the gospel of Jesus will one day rule this world, that more epochal revelations are on the way, that we will eventually attain light and life, are a fitting conclusion to this unit on ethics.