



AN EVALUATION OF SACRIFICIAL ADULTERY IN JOSEPH FLETCHER'S SITUATIONISM.

Barnabas E. Izegege, Ph.D.

Department of Philosophy. Faculty of Arts, University of Delta, Agbor.
barnabas.izegege@unidel.edu.ng

&

Mark-Anthony Adione Nwoko, (ESq)

Vanjaycraves4Christ@yahoo.com

Abstract

The problems associated with correctness, objectivity and legality of morality, have remained a continued engagement among ethicists, regarding what morality authority and decision making. And Joseph Fletcher happens to be one of such scholars who, in arguing against moral objectivity in decision making introduced a middle course kind of ethics, known as situationism, as a mediation for ethical legalism. This paper is poised to critically examine Fletcher's situationism, a response to universalist or absolute approach to the question of morality. It will adopt the analytic and expository methods in answering some of the questions this paper shall be preoccupied with like, what is situationism? What are the fundamental principles of situation ethics? What are the types of moral decision making? How can we apply situation ethics to contemporary issues such as the morality of abortion, euthanasia, surrogacy, and terrorism among others? The relevance of this study is that, it shows that some actions are not right or wrong in themselves, but situations determine their rightness or wrongness of actions. In other words, it treats moral actions differently and uniquely. Consequently, Fletcher's situationism is teleological and gives preference to consequences as a determinant factor of moral decision making. Also, this paper also attempts some criticisms to Fletcher's idea of situationism.

Keywords: *Situationism, Morality, Utilitarianism, Teleology, Abortion, Absolute Morality.*

Introduction

The main thrust of ethics has been to evaluate the actions and inactions of human agent. That is, human actions are either morally right or wrong. However, to evaluate and examine the rightness and wrongness of human action have been the major concern of ethics. Thus, to examine human actions, there are no universally acceptable moral rules or codes that are agreed among the ethicists. This is because, there are many ethical theories which have been postulated overtime in the history of ethics. Hence, to determine whether an action is morally right or wrong, this is done in relation to certain ethical theories like egoism, altruism, utilitarianism, divine command theory, among others. This shows that there are multiple and various ethical theories in ethics which can be applied to different issues at different times. However, each ethical theory mentioned above stands on its own. The reason for this assertion is that, each ethical theory is an authority which of course regards other ethical theories as inadequate to resolve moral dilemma. Egoism for instance maintains that an action is morally right if it satisfies the interest of the agent and wrong if otherwise. This is different from altruism which is a position that an action is morally right if it looks after the interest of others, albeit, the agent is not oblivious of his interest. Unlike an egoist, altruist is self-denying, self-sacrificing and



a selfless agent. The point here is that, each ethical theory is right on its own. This is not to say that they are not problematic. In fact, different ethical theories have been rejected by different scholars based on several arguments.

In the history of ethics, two major contrasting theories have emerged. On the one hand is consequentialist theory of morality and on the other hand is non-consequentialist theory of morality'. The latter is a moral theory that states consequences is irrelevant in determining the rightness or wrongness of human action. As such, an action should be performed out of the motive of consequence. The most important thing to note is that an action should be judged solely on whether they are right and people solely on whether they are good based on some other (many non-consequentialists would say higher) standard or standards of morality.¹ This is to say that an act or people are to be judged moral or immoral regardless of the consequences of actions. Non-consequentialist theories have also been regarded as deontological moral theories. Ethical theories under this category includes: Divine command theory, Kantianism, Ross's Prima Facie Duties and Virtue ethics.² The former on the other hand states that consequences matter in determining the morality or immorality of an action. This suffices to say that consequences are significant and morally indispensable in judging an action to be right or wrong. The proponent of this moral theory emphasizes on the consequences that resulted from a given action. However, different consequentialist moral theories disagree on who should benefit from these consequences. Consequentialist moral theories also referred to as teleological moral theories". Ethical theories under this classification are: Egoism, Utilitarianism and Situation ethics. As the title of this paper suggests, situation ethics offer itself as a seeming solution to moral dilemma faced by a moral agent. Its best-known expositor has been J. A. T. Robinson; its most incisive spokesman, the American, Joseph Fletcher.³

The main thrust of this paper is to examine situationism as propounded by Joseph Fletcher. Some of the questions this paper shall be preoccupied with are, what is situation ethics? What are the tenets of situation ethics? How can we apply situation ethics to contemporary issues? And so on. On a final note, we shall examine some criticisms against Fletcher's situationism.

The Meaning of Situationism

Situationism is a term coined by Joseph Fletcher⁴ an Episcopalian Priest in 1966 as a response to what he felt were the failures of legalism inherent in ethical systems that propose moral standards to govern and determine the actions and human behavior, and at the same time rejecting antinomianism; a total abandonment of rules and principles. Put otherwise, situation ethics essentially means that there is no ethical standard that can be uniformly or consistently applied, for each situation demands its own standard of ethics. In fact, there is no action you cannot perform if in your judgment, the action is for a good cause, and if you have the proper motive in performing it.⁵ Situation ethics are based on a single principle which enables man to enter every situation armed with the experience and precedents of past situations, but willing to lay them aside if the principle of love agape is better served by so doing. Situationism sees loving as the only prescribed duty and denies that there are any other, more specific, divine laws to keep, we cannot leave the matter there. This view holds its attractiveness to its identifying with what Fletcher called the whole mind-set of the modern man, our mind-set⁶ an outlook which Paul Ramsey correctly if turgidly summed up as prejudice in favor of individualistic freedom, normlessness, traditionless contemporaneity, and modern technical reason.⁷ Situation ethics denies that any action is intrinsically evil. This assertion is a reaction to Christian ethics which maintains that certain actions are intrinsically evil, meaning that such actions are always even whenever and wherever they are performed irrespective of the situation in which they are performed. Fletcher, in his book, *Situation Ethics*, he maintains that:



*Every situation is unique, consequently the same kind of action cannot remain morally the same in all situation. Whether an action is to be considered as good or evil depends on the situation in which it is performed. Goodness or badness is not something that can be found inherent in certain actions as properties of such actions. They are not properties inherent in actions, but predicates, and whether an action is to be predicated with the term Good or Bad depends on the situation in which it is performed.*⁸

The above quotation shows that an action may be good at a point and bad at another point. As a consequence, the generalization of an action as an evil act is not acceptable and tenable. An action, rather than follow a stated and universalized moral standard in judging an action as right or wrong, we should always act in accordance within the confines of a particular situation which is considered as a morally right and significant action as far as it will promote morally good action and bring about the greatest amount of happiness.

Fletcher sighted an example of a family which was scattered during the Second World War. The man was captured and taken to a prison camp in Wales; the wife too was captured and taken to a prison camp in Ukraine and the children. The man, however, was soon released and he came back home to Germany, and after weeks of searching, found his children. But neither he nor the children had any idea where his wife was, and they were desperately looking for her. News got to his wife in the prison camp in Ukraine that her family was together again and were desperately looking for her. But she could not be released because release was granted only on either of two conditions, namely, serious illness with which the camp could not cope, or pregnancy in the case of women. This lady, Mrs Bergmeier, decided to become pregnant so that she could be released and go back to join her family. She arranged with one of the prison guard to make her pregnant, and he did. Her condition was medically verified and she was sent away from the camp. She rushed back home to her family and explained to her husband what she did that enabled her return home. He was very happy to see her back and entirely approved of her action. When the baby was born, he was cherished as the savior of the family. The husband was even grateful to the prison guard who did it.

Now, from the above illustration sighted by Fletcher, the question that comes to mind is, is the action morally good or bad? Christian ethics which is predicated on the doctrines and practices that are governed by the scriptures, an authority book which dictates moral rightness or wrongness according to the Christians will answer that the woman's action is morally wrong because it is an action that is against the commandment of God vehemently against adultery. As such, to the Christians, it is a morally wrong action. On the contrary, Fletcher's situation ethics considered the action as a morally right action because what guarantees moral rightness or wrongness is the situation that warrant such an action. Thus, the woman has acted rightly because that is the best action in such situation she finds herself. However, this does not generalize or universalize the action as a morally right action. The reason for this is that, no situation ever faces us with a choice of evils; the traditional view to the contrary is one more product of the mistaken intrinsic theory. The situationist holds that whatever is the most loving thing in the situation is the right and good thing. It is not excusably evil, it is positively good.⁹ To illustrate, Fletcher is ready with blandest aplomb to justify not as lesser evils, but as positively good such acts as killing one's baby abortion, therapeutic fornication, patriotic prostitution, and so on. He also insists on saying that in principle, even killing innocent people might be right, and in some situations lying and bribery and force and violence, even taking life itself, is the only righteous and good thing to do in the situation'.¹⁰ The question we shall further ask is, what are the fundamental principles of situation of ethics?



Fundamental Principles of Situationism

According to Fletcher, the fundamental principle to situation ethics is love. One does not just follow blindly the moral rules or stated laws. However, love is the only absolute law which must guide human actions and behavior. This love in question is the agape love which is a love for a person because of God and the love God extended to other people. Fletcher puts in his words opines that:

*Follow a moral law or violate it according to love's need. For example, Alms giving is a good thing if... The situationist never says Alms giving is a good thing. Period! his decisions are hypothetical, not categorical. Only the command to love is categorically good.*¹¹

Fletcher identifies six fundamental principles to situation ethics. These principles are grounded in other four foundational assumptions which we shall later discuss in this paper. Moreover, the six fundamental principles center around the concept of "love and consequences" which guide the moral act and behavior of an agent. Love according to Fletcher is, like good itself, is axiomatic, extensive, categorical, like blue or sour or anything else that simply is what it is, a primary concept not definable in terms of something else.¹² The fundamental principles are:

Love is intrinsically good: The assertion that love is intrinsically good implies that love is good in itself and cannot be anything but good. This is because, to Fletcher, there is no situation in which love can become bad. This is grounded on the assumption that the law of love has no exception. This particular proposition outlines the fact that according to situation ethics, agape love is good in itself and without the application of love an action can neither be described as good or evil. An action can only be described as good or evil depending on the circumstances and consequences. This proposition explains that agape love shows purity.¹³

Love is a moral truth: Situation ethics recognizes many other moral norms, but none of them is absolutely true, except love. None of the ethical theories like utilitarianism, Kantianism, egoism, among others are binding in all situations except love. This particular proposition is derived from the New Testament when Jesus replaced the Torah (Jewish holy book) with the principle agape. Jesus put this into practice when he made the decision to heal a sick person on the Sabbath day. This rejected the obligation that one must rest on the Sabbath day, showing that the Ten Commandments are not absolute and can be broken when love demands it. Therefore, this proposition says that love should replace any moral code, religious or state law. As such, the only moral truth that should guide a moral agent towards attaining moral significant consequences which brings about more happiness and good consequences is love.¹⁴

Love and Justice are identical: A moral agent cannot claim to love a person while at the same time being unjust to him. Love goes beyond the demand of Justice. Justice is the minimum requirement of love. This principle simply states that love and justice are inseparable.¹⁵ As such, love is the same as justice. In other words, when there is love, there is justice. This further implies that a moral action grounded on the principle of love brings about justice which is fair distribution of resources, duties, opportunities, and so on among all parties concerned. This is also practically saying that an action which does not promote equal opportunities among the people should be discarded. In other words, if a society is built on the principle of love proclaimed by Fletcher, such a society will not experience backwardness, unequal opportunities and uneven distribution of goods and services. In short, when there is love, there is justice. Put otherwise, love leads to justice.

Agape love is selfless love: Love is much more than just a like. Love goes beyond liking. In other words, this is repeating one of the Ten Commandments Love thy neighbor. They both mean the same thing; both are referring to the principle of agape which is unconditional love rather than sentimental



or erotic. It refers to the desire to do a good deed or bring something positive to someone else's life. For example, just smiling at the bus driver in the morning could be seen as a good deed because you may cheer up an otherwise taken for granted member of our community. Agape love includes acts such as deeds which are done by a person and yet he/she expects nothing in return. This particular proposition really sums up the whole of the theory of Situation Ethics.¹⁶

Love justifies its means: Joseph Fletcher believes that the end satisfies its means, if the end is love. Once the end is love, any means employed to achieve it is justified. This proposition outlines the fact that Situation ethics is a teleological approach to ethics. This means that the bearer of a moral dilemma should not act before they have thought of the consequence certain actions may have. In the case of Situation Ethics an action would not be taken unless its consequence was the most loving outcome. Put differently, only consequence matters in an action.¹⁸

Moral behavior should assume all situations are unique: Love decides where to act and when not to act, depending on the situation. This again has been derived by a teaching written in the New Testament that Jesus gave. The bible has always stated that adultery is wrong as outlined in the Ten Commandments. During the time Jesus was with us the penalty for such a crime was death. There was an instance however where both parties could not be proved of adultery and only the woman was condemned. Her punishment was to have stones thrown at her until she was dead. Jesus however said to her prosecutors that the first man to throw the stone should be that who has never sinned. None of the men threw the stones because they had all committed some sort of sin within their life and therefore the woman's life was also spared. This shows us that each individual should be approached with a fresh mind and not based upon any rule but that of love. According to Fletcher, all situations are unique in themselves and each situation determines how one should act. As a consequence, Fletcher rejects any moral theory that is grounded on stated rules and moral codes which are absolute and rigid. Hence, an action that is morally good in a particular situation may be morally bad in another situation. Thus, we cannot hold claim to an action as necessarily right or wrong, because, rightness or wrongness of an action is dependent on situations. Thus, situations confer rightness or wrongness to an action.¹⁹

From the above analysis on the six fundamentals of love, Fletcher maintains that love is the principle of utility - it is a principle that can be applied in every situation, and which will enable us to achieve the greatest good. In another way, he defines love as always good, the only norm, and is justice distributed. He opines that love is not necessarily liking, and only the end of love justifies the means. It makes a decision there and then as to how to act in each individual situation. He proposes four presumptions of situation ethics which shall be discussed in the next section.

Four Presumptions of Situationism

Fletcher identifies four presumptions or what some scholars refer to as the four working principles of situation ethics. The presumptions are: pragmatism, relativism, positivism, and personalism. These presumptions according to Fletcher are the fundamental basis of situation ethics.

Pragmatism: This is a movement in philosophy founded by C. S. Peirce and William James and marked by the doctrines that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is pre-eminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief. In relation to situation ethics, it demands that a proposed course of action should work, and that its success or failure should be judged according to the principle. Put



differently, situation ethics is pragmatic in the sense that it insists on the workability of any principle in practice. Any principle which turns out to be unrealistic and impracticable in practice is rejected.

Relativism: This is a doctrine that emphasizes the importance of the context of inquiry in a particular question. In relation to situation ethics, it rejects any absolute moral theory. It maintains that moral rightness or moral wrongness of an action is relative; it all depends on the situation. What is good in one situation is bad in another situation.

Positivism: This recognizes the fact that love is the most important criterion of all. As such, it adopts the empirical approach to moral decision making.

Personalism: This is a system of thought that maintains the primacy of the human or divine person on the basis that reality has meaning only through the conscious mind. That is, it demands that people should be put first. As such, situation ethics is preoccupied with the wellbeing of a moral agent.

Variant Approaches to Moral Decision Making

Joseph Fletcher was interested in answering the difficult and sometimes troublesome and perplexing question concerning how agents employ normative principles in ethical dilemmas. To do this, he maintains that Situation Ethics is a method of arriving at moral decisions. Thus, he identifies three approaches to moral decision making. There is on the one hand legalism, on the other hand, antinomianism and lastly, Situationism. The questions are, what is legalism? Is legalism compatible with situation ethics? Legalism sees moral rules and principles not as guides but absolute norms that must be obeyed at all cost and in all situations. Legalism further looks at the letter of the law and insists on its observance while ignoring the spirit of the law. To the question of compatibility, Fletcher rejects legalism because he believed that absolute rules and laws demand unthinking obedience which constrain a moral agent to act rightly in some situations. The importance of this to morality is that, it serves to encourage agents to invent clever and new ways around rules and laws which are absolutistic in nature.

On the other hand, is antinomianism which derives from two Greek words, anti (against, instead of) and nomos (law). An antinomian is one who does not believe there are any ethical laws. Fletcher contends that by antinomianism one enters into the decision-making situation armed with no principles or maxims whatsoever, to say nothing of rules.²⁰ The decisions of the antinomian are random, unpredictable, and erratic. Antinomianism is a lawless, principleless approach to moral decision making. It rejects all moral laws and principles and insists that man is free to take any decision he deems fit in any situation. A typical example of an antinominalist is Jean- Paul Sartre the French existentialist philosopher who rejects the whole idea of universal laws and insists that man is condemned to be free. Antinomianism is rejected by Fletcher because he well understood the consequences of believing that no absolute rules and laws exist which are capable of governing all cultures in all places, and of all times. Both legalism and antinomianism are extreme and unrealistic. It is evident that Fletcher rejected legalism and antinomianism because they are not coterminous with the tenets and principle of situation ethics which is grounded on love. Thus, as against legalism and antinomianism, Fletcher synthesizes both legalism and antinomianism and proposed the theory of Situationism. According to him, Situationism is applied ethics,

Situationism in this sense accepts that there are universal moral principles. But it sees them only as guides in one's decision making. It does not see them as directives or as absolute laws which must be obeyed at all cost. According to him, moral decisions cannot be made on the basis that some things



always are right and some things always are wrong; rather, each moral decision should be made in view of the specific situation on the basis of love alone.

The situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems. Just the same he is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so.²¹

Fletcher views Situationism as differing from both legalism and antinomianism in that it keeps law in a subservient place.²² Law therefore is subservient to love at all costs. If love is best served by stealing, murdering, lying, etc., then the laws regarding stealing, murdering, lying, etc., are set aside. For Fletcher, the end justifies the means.²³ In fact, Fletcher made his position quite clear when he wrote: Jesus said nothing about birth control, masturbation, fornication, or premarital intercourse, sterilization, artificial insemination, abortion, sex play, petting, and courtship. Whether any form of sex (hetero, homo, or auto) is good or evil depends on whether love is fully served.²⁴ Furthermore, he says:

People are learning that we can have sex without love, and love without sex, that baby making can be (and often ought to be) separated from lovemaking. It is, indeed, for recreation as well as for procreation. But if people do not believe it is wrong to have sex relations outside marriage, it isn't unless they hurt themselves, their partners, or others... All situationists would agree with Mrs. Patrick Campbell's remark that they can do what they want as long as they don't do it in the street and frighten the horses.²⁵

It is evident from the preceding analysis that situationist rejects the idea of absolute rule. Nevertheless, it is not against rule, but rules that constrain human actions in case of moral dilemma. More reason why Fletcher contends that there are no rules none at all.²⁶

An Ethical Approach to Resolving Moral Dilemma

One of the aims of this paper is not to regurgitate in entirety the theory of situation ethics as propounded by Joseph Fletcher. Rather, this theory will also be put to test in case of moral dilemma and confusion. In other words, in this section, we shall underscore how to apply situation ethics to various professions and events as they occur in our day to day activities. Some cases will be cited to illustrate the practicality of situation ethics to moral issues.

Consider the case of a group of newly-arrived Irish immigrants 150 years ago. They decided to make their way from Boston across North America to settle in the Minnesota where there was a bank managed by the Archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis, John J. Ireland, who personally guaranteed low-interest mortgages to poor Catholic immigrants who would farm the land. Journeying through Ohio, the immigrants spotted some Indians. Having been told that the Indians killed settlers, the immigrants decided to hide in a forest somewhere along Lake Erie. Moment by moment, the Indians honed in on the immigrants. One woman was holding her baby who had been asleep but was now awakening and about to cry. Instinctively, the mother put her hand over the baby's mouth because she knew that, if the baby made any noise, the Indians would immediately discover the immigrants and kill them. As the Indians drew nearer and nearer, the mother noticed that she was suffocating her baby. If the mother kept her hand over her baby's mouth she would kill her child. But, if she took her hand away, the baby would cry and the Indians would kill the settlers. What should the mother do?²⁷ Let us call this case 1.



An individual is headed to her best friend's apartment. As this individual turns the corner, she sees that the apartment is on fire. Racing to the scene and standing outside of the apartment, she knows with absolute certainty that two people are inside: her best friend who is a hair stylist and her best friend's lover who is skilled in vitro neurosurgeon. Judging from the ferocity of the flames, she is pretty certain that she will have just enough time to dash into the house and rescue only one of the two persons in the apartment. Who should she rescue first?²⁸ Let us consider this as case 2.

From the two cases cited above, the essence of ethics is to provide us with a moral reason to act in certain ways rather than otherwise. Utilitarians²⁹ for instance will argue that in case 1, the mother should of course cover the mouth of the baby, because, without doing so, this will adversely lead to the death of other immigrants. As such, we must promote the interest of greatest number of people affected by a certain moral action. In this case, the child will be sacrificed for the survival of other immigrant. This is also applicable to the second case. A utilitarian will support saving the life of the doctor as this will bring about the greatest number of happiness. Of course, without doubt, utilitarianism has been faced with diverse problems, but that is not our concern in this paper.

In **Kant** ethics³⁰, he will say that what matters is not the consequence but the motive of an action guarantees the rightness or wrongness of an action. For Kant, duty is imperative and categorical, not hypothetical. In other words, for him, it is the duty of the woman to protect her child not minding the consequences that may follow. Kant will also say that either saving the life of the hair stylist or the doctor does not matter, what matters is that, if we consider it our duty to save their lives, then we should do that out of the sense of duty and not for the consequences it will bring about. In short, we should try and save them, then at the end, we may successfully save the hair stylist or the doctor.

Ross³¹ in his own way will argue for the promotion of a morally significant outcome in a moral action. As such, we must promote a greater prima facie rightness over a prima facie wrongness. In case 1, Ross will say that if protecting the child's life does not bring about a greater significant of moral rightness over moral wrongness, then it should be discarded. This is also the same for case two.

And in our ordinary day life, common sense requires that a woman protects her child in all circumstances. According to Situation Ethics as propounded by Fletcher, the best decision should be grounded in love and not in any rules or moral code which seems absolute. Fletcher in his book, *Situation Ethics* (1966) outlines three fundamental principles that should guide us in case of moral dilemma. First, help the person whose need is greater; second, perform the action that helps the greatest number; and lastly, help the person who is more valuable. Using this principles or guide to resolve the moral cases cited above, Fletcher will apply the second principle which is the promotion of action that helps the greatest number. In that sense, the woman should suffocate the child, as this will bring about the greatest help to the greatest number of people. On the second case, Fletcher will also apply the second principle and argue that the doctor should be saved since saving the doctor is derivative. That is, other lives will also be saved through the doctor. Because situationists think that only one thing is ethical, to love other people, all other considerations are moot. It is this logic which critics find objectionable, namely, that anything and everything is permitted (which can include killing, jealousy, generosity, stealing, etc., because none of these actions are ethical or unethical in their own right). According to Fletcher, these actions become unethical only if an agent does them out of hatred or indifference; likewise, these actions are ethical if performed out of love.



A Critical Appraisal of Fletcher's Situationism

Situationism is not without some criticisms as identified by different scholars. Yet, as a philosophical enterprise, we cannot rule out the fact that it has answered some questions too. As such, before we consider the weaknesses of situation ethics, we shall admit some of its positives. One of the strengths of situation ethics is that, individual cases are judged on their own merits, irrespective of what has been done in similar situations in the past. In other words, a case judged wrong in the past does not determine the rightness or wrongness of the similar case at present. Thus, each case is unique on its own; while circumstances determine the nature of its rightness or wrongness. Another strength is that, individuals are not subject to rules that bind them. As mentioned earlier, it serves to encourage moral agent to invent clever and new ways around rules and laws that are absolute. Again, situation ethics grounded on love, seeks the well-being of others even if the course of action is not one of preference. One of the arguments against Fletcher's situation ethics is that, despite his attempt to be anti-legalistic, the application of one principle only in itself, makes it a legalistic approach. To say no rules apply and yet to also say the only rule is love, offers something of a logical contradiction. Fletcher is overly optimistic about the capacity of human beings to make morally correct choices, and not to be influenced by personal preferences. He seem to forget that Human beings need the guidelines offered by rules to avoid moral chaos. In other words, we cannot out rightly dismiss rules as a guide to moral choice. In fact, a moral choice premised on the principle of love is itself a rule.

Another problem with situation ethics is, the theory that justifies adultery, murder, and even genocide in the interests of love. Surely Fletcher is guilty of calling good, what is in reality, evil. An instance will further justify this criticism. Take the case of Mrs. Bergmeier, we are told, her motives to get home to her family made her act of sacrificial adultery a good thing. But was it really the case? Was it actually a good example of Christian love and ethics? William Banowsky, in his book, *The New Morality: A Christian Solution*, pointed out that despite the fact that Mrs Bergmeier's purpose may have been noble in her own eyes, she ...cunningly exploited a fellow human being to serve her purpose. Would situation ethicists really believe that she treated the guard as a person-or a thing? Was the guard a married man? Did he have a family? In her concern for her own family, Mrs. Bergmeier lost sight of love's interest for his family.³² In short, Mrs. Bergmeier uses the guard as a means to achieve her own end. And in such instance, the guard is treated as a thing and not as a human person. This according to Kant is the greatest offence to humanity. We must note here, that a bad means in this instance, cannot not justify a good end. If and only if her this end (adultery) was good.

Bernard Eller, carried the case of Mrs. Bergmeier even farther. Suppose, Mrs. Bergmeier got out of camp but was some 200 miles away from home and it is winter. She will starve to death unless she gets food. Suppose she goes to a farmhouse nearby, but the farmer will give her food only if she grants him sexual favors. So, she does. Then suppose she is hitchhiking home and a truck driver offers to give her a lift, but only for sexual favors, which she then grants. If sacrificial adultery was right with the guard, surely it would be right with the farmer and the truck driver. But suppose she finally arrives home, only to find her family destitute and starving, so she commits sacrificial adultery as a prostitute to raise money for her destitute family. To point is, Fletcher has taken adultery to be a good thing in some circumstantial cases.

Fletcher's theory also justifies murder. Suppose a young woman is jilted by her fiancé, enters a state of depression, and then is comforted by a married man as he has an affair with her. Fletcher would argue that this fornication and adultery would be good. But consider the rest of the story. Suppose the man's wife learned of his adulterous relationship, divorced him, and eventually committed suicide. One of his sons, disillusioned with the immorality of his father and his mother's death, turns to a life



of crime and eventually ends up in prison for the murder of three people. Another son, likewise disillusioned, becomes a drunkard and is killed in an auto accident that also kills three others. Now, with all the facts in, will situationists tell us that the adulterous relationship was the loving thing to do? The point, of course, is this: even when one suggests that love is the criterion for ethical decisions, he presupposes some standard for determining what love really is. In most instances of situation ethics coupled with this love principle, the word love should be spelled lust.

Situationism assumes a sort of infallible omniscience that is able to always precisely predict what the most loving course of action is. The ideology assumes that love is some sort of ambiguous, no-rule essence that is a cure-all for moral problems. At its extreme Situationism is not substantially different from nihilism, and a subtle relativism for, as Joseph Fletcher confesses, For the situationist there are no rules none at all.³³

Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that situation ethics is a rejection of legalistic and antinomian approach to moral decision making. As such, Fletcher synthesizes the two approaches and come with the idea of Situationism which avoids the dogmatism of legalism and the nihilism of antinomianism. Situation ethics as shown in this paper is predicated on love which is the only true form of morality. As such, Fletcher rejects rule-based morality because it constrains the moral decision of a moral agent. The relevance of this discourse to morality is, it shows that some actions that seem wrong are in some situations not wrong. In other words, it treats different actions differently and uniquely. Situation ethics is teleological and gives reference to consequences as a determinant factor of moral decision making. However, it is not without its own criticism which we have discussed above. But, importantly, it teaches us to act out of selfless love.

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- Situation Ethics is a term coined by Joseph Fletcher in 1966 in his popular book *Situation Ethics*. So, in this paper, we shall use his book for most part of this paper. For his original text, see, Fletcher, J., 1966. *Situation Ethics. The New Morality*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster.
- Fletcher, J., p. 6
- Fletcher, J., p. 58
- Fletcher, J., 1968. 'Reflection and Reply', in *The Situation Ethics Debate*, Harvey Cox (ed.), Westminster Press, Philadelphia, p. 202
- Fletcher, J., 1966. P. 28
- 9Fletcher, J., 1966. P. 28
- Fletcher, J., 1967. *Moral Responsibility: Situation Ethics at Work*. SCM Press, p. 181; *Situation Ethics*, p. 75.
- Ibid., p. 26
- Ibid., p. 145



Fletcher's fundamental principles are the expositions on the notion of love as a basis for morality. In this sense, Fletcher assumes that with the inclusion of love as a basis for morality, all other moral dilemma is resolvable. Thus, the hallmark of morality is predicated on the concept of love.

Fletcher, J., p. 56

Ibid., 69

Ibid., 87

Ibid., p. 103

Ibid., p. 120

Ibid., p. 134

Ibid., p. 22

Ibid., p. 26

Ibid., p. 31

Ibid., p. 28

Ibid., p. 139

Ibid., p. 120

Ibid., p. 51

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Ibid.

See, William. F. L., 2002. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. U.S.A: Wadworth.

See, Kant, I., 2005. —Ethics is based on Reason in *Ethics: Contemporary Readings*, eds. by Gensler, H. J., Spurgin, E. W., and Swindal J. C., New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

See Ross, W. D., 2002. *The Right and the Good*. Edited with an Introduction by Philip Stratton-Lake. Oxford: Oxford University Press; rpt. of original 1930 edition.

Banowsky, W. S., 1968. *The New Morality: A Christian Perspective*, Campus Evangelism, p. 19

Fletcher, J., p. 51