

AN EVALUATION OF MORAL DECISION MAKING IN JOSEPH FLETCHER

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an evaluation of Joseph Fletcher's approach on making moral decisions. Joseph Fletcher's theory of Situation Ethics proposes a distinctive model of moral decision making grounded in the primacy of agapeic love as the sole normative principle. This paper critically examines Fletcher's account of moral reasoning, focusing on its philosophical foundations and implications for ethical judgment. By rejecting both legalistic rule-based morality and antinomian arbitrariness, Fletcher advances a contextualist approach in which moral rightness is determined by the demands of concrete situations. The study analyzes Fletcher's six fundamental principles and four working principles as a coherent framework for ethical deliberation. It further evaluates the philosophical strengths of this approach, including its emphasis on practical reasoning, moral responsibility, and sensitivity to human circumstances, while engaging with major ethical objections such as moral relativism, subjectivism, and the erosion of universal moral norms. Using analytical, hermeneutical and evaluative methods, the paper argues that despite these criticisms, Fletcher's model contributes significantly to contemporary ethical theory by offering a nuanced account of moral decision making that mediates between absolutism and relativism.

Keyword: Joseph Fletcher, Moral, Decision-Making, Situation Ethics, Implications.

INTRODUCTION

Situation ethics states that in every situation each individual is responsible for reviewing the rules, norms and guidelines for action, then implementation or setting aside those rules so that love is best served. According to Fletcher (1966), "it is an old posture with a new and contemporary look (p.13)." He attempts to free man from legalism by providing a system of decision-making, which presupposes individual responsibility and states that everyman must decide for himself what is right. He says that moral decisions often fall into three categories: legalism, anti-normianism and situationism. Perhaps, because Fletcher came from a Christian background he describes the ultimate goal of every moral decision as love, the love of which only God is capable of but which all people should strive to achieve. For

the non-Christians, Fletcher suggests that love must be defined as some other highest good. With this, he came to the conclusion that situation ethics is the best course of action to follow in every moral decision making issue. To set the stage, he defines four principles namely: pragmatism, relativism, positivism and personalism as contributing to situational ethics. Together, these principles describe a method, which is about making decisions rather than looking them up in some identified source. He supported his situational ethics with six propositions that are based on love, which is set forth to show how love works in ethical decision-making.

According to Ourka (1998), “situation ethics accords morally decisive weight to particular circumstances in judging whether an action is right or wrong (p.789).” We shall now see if moral decision making, is an invitation to anarchy or a potent weapon in the contemporary war to free man from conformity, from fear and from crippling guilt. At this point, an evaluation of Joseph Fletcher's moral decision making becomes inevitable.

MORAL DECISION-MAKING

The main issue here is how one is to act when faced with a moral decisive situation in decision-making? In other words, life presents us with situations where decisions are not so clear-cut. Saying yes to one perceived good often means saying no to another. Indeed, Eboh (2005) observes that, “it is often difficult to take a moral decision in a given situation because of the many other facts which may surround such a situation” (p.34). The point is that there are many realities to be taken into consideration in moral decision-making. At this point, one may ask: “what moral decision am I to take in a moral situation?”

ROUTES TO DECISION MAKING

There are three main alternative routes to follow in making moral decisions. They are: (1) the legalistic way, (2) the anti-normian way, the extreme opposites i.e. a lawless or unprincipled way; and (3) the situational way. All these three have played their part in the history of Western morals.

1. **Legalism:** Legalism is the most common and persistent approach to decision making. It triumphed among the Jews after the exile and has dominated Christianity constantly from very early days. There exist a series of well-defined and absolute laws (secular, cultural and religious) that the individual must implement in every situation. Legalism sees moral rules and principles not as guides but absolute norms that must be obeyed at all costs and in all situations. With this approach, one enters into every decision-making situation armed with already-made rules and regulations. Fletcher (1966) affirms that, “legalism looks at the letter of the law and insists on its observance while ignoring the spirit of the law” (p.18). However, questions arise as to whether in a particular case the law truly applies or as to which of several more or less conflicting laws is to be followed. In this case, the legalist applies casuistry.
2. According to Fletcher (1966), legalism in the Christian tradition has taken two forms: In the catholic line of thought, it has been a matter of legalistic reason, based on nature or natural law. Hence, he says:

These moralists have tended to adumbrate their ethical rules by applying human reason to the facts of nature, both human and sub-human and to the lessons of historical experience. By this procedure they claim to have adduced universally agreed and therefore valid natural moral laws (p.21).

In the protestant line of thought, it has also followed the same deductive catholic tactics. From this perspective, Fletcher observes, that they have taken scripture and done with it what the Catholics do with nature. Their scriptural moral law is, they argue, based on the words and saying of the law and the prophets, the evangelist and apostles of the bible (Fletcher, 1966, p.21). As such, for him it is a matter of legalistic revelation in the protestant line of thought. However, both the catholic line of thought and the protestant line of thought are legalistic. Not even the fact that the catholic moralists deal also with revealed law and the protestant also have tried to use reason in interpreting the saying of the bible, Fletcher still maintains that both of them, by and large, have been committed to the doctrine of law ethics, which is legalism.

3. **Anti-Normianism:** This is the approach with which one enters into the decision-making situation armed with no principles or maxims whatsoever. Literally, the term antinomianism means 'against law'. Here, each individual enters the decision making process with no laws, guiding principles or maxims, believing that they will make the right decisions spontaneously in the moment, and base on the unique situation. Some anti-normianists believe this 'right decision' information comes to them from an outside source such as the Holy Spirit or the combined wisdom of the ages under the guise of intuition. Anti-normianism is a lawless and principless approach to moral decision-making. It rejects all moral laws and principles and insist that man is free to take any decision he deems fit in any situation.

Among the Hellenistic Jewish-Christians, anti-normianism took the form of libertinism. They believe that by grace, by the new life in Christ and salvation by faith, laws or rules no longer apply to Christians. Their ultimate happy faith was now assured and it no longer mattered what they did. The negative result of this form of anti-normianism led to an increase of legalism. Another form of anti-normianism was a Gnostic claim to special knowledge so that neither principles nor rules were needed any longer even as guidelines and direction pointers. Those who go by it claimed that they will just know what was right when they needed to know. As such, their moral decisions are random and unpredictable. Making moral decisions is a matter of spontaneity.

3. SITUATIONISM: The third approach to decision making is situationism. If legalism and anti-normianism are the two ends of the spectrum, situationism falls between them. Here, each individual has an understanding of the general rules and guiding principles of his or her culture and theology, and uses the information to evaluate the situation and then adopts or rejects the 'rule' so that love or highest good can be served in the situation. Situationism accepts that there are universal moral principles but it sees them only as guides in ones decision-making. 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 way, he is prepared

in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so. Omoregbe (1993) observes that for the situationists, “moral principles are not directives or absolute laws which must be obeyed at all costs” (p.257). Situation ethics goes path of the way with natural law, by accepting reason as the instrument of moral judgement while rejecting the notion that the good is given in the nature of things. It also goes path of the way with scriptural law by accepting revelation as the source of the norms while rejecting all revealed laws or norms except the command to love. The decisions taken by a situationist are hypothetical and not categorical. Only the command to love is categorically good. Thus, Fletcher (1993) says, “situation ethics aims at a contextual appropriateness- not the 'good' nor the 'right' but the fitting” (Pp.27-28). There are various names for this approach: Situationism, contextualism, occasionism, circumstantialism or actualism. These labels indicate of course, that the core of the ethics they describe is a healthy and primary awareness that circumstances alter cases. Situationism places emphases on the situation more than anything else in determining which action is right or wrong in any given situation.

Nevertheless, the three different approaches to decision making, it is important to point out at this early stage that there is no one of these approaches that has the absolute answer to the issue of making a moral decision. Eboh (2005) explained this point better when he says that what needs to be highlighted in the moral spheres is that there is always a blending of colours, never one colour, but always a mixture of colours in which each colour is a shade of human factors in moral decision making (p.35). What is being stressed here is that there is need for prudence while making any moral decision, and not to follow one of these approaches fanatically.

FLETCHER'S MORAL DECISION-MAKING

Fletcher proposed his new morality, in other words, situation ethics, as the mediation between legalism, in which there exists a series of well-defined and absolute laws that the individual must implement in every situation, and anti-nomianism, in which each individual enters the decision-making process with no laws, guiding principles or maxims, believing that they will make the right decision spontaneously in the moment and based on the unique situation. The new morality makes use of principles, but it treats them as maxims and not as laws or precepts that must be followed at all cost. Therefore, principles or rules are illuminators and not directors. Fletcher however, calls for the suspension of the laws, so that only love and reason really count when it matters. Fletcher's moral decision-making is summarized in the words of Kirk (1966), when he said that every man must decide for himself according to his own estimate of conditions and consequences, and no one can decide for him or impugn the decision to which he comes (p.45). However, this decision must be made in love. In other words, Fletcher tells us that for the situationist, there are no rules, none at all, but then proceeds to give us six propositions based on love: love only is always good, love is the only norm, love and justice are the same, love is not liking, love justifies its means and love decides there and then in the situation. Fletcher describes these propositions in situational ethics as the six propositions on which

situational ethics rest. These propositions are to be considered as guidelines or maxims to be used.

SIX PROPOSITIONS BASED ON LOVE: FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Love at times, is explained as a powerful emotion involving an intense attachment to a person or an object, and a high evaluation of them. On the other hand, love has also been understood as not involving emotion at all, but only an active interest in the well-being of the person or the object. On other accounts, love is essentially a relationship involving mutuality and reciprocity, rather than an emotion. Moreover, there are many varieties of love. They including: erotic love, philia love and agape love. Different cultures also recognize different types of love. Love has as well, a complicated nature, because it has strong links with early experiences of attachment. It can exist in personality at different levels of depth and articulateness, posing serious problems for self-knowledge. Nussbaum as cited in Omoregbe (1997), “it is a mistake to try to give too unified an account of such a complex set of phenomena” (p.34).

Love has been understood by many philosophers, moralists and psychologists to be a source of great richness and energy in human life. But, even those who praise its contributions have seen it as a potential threat to virtuous living, as we shall see in the criticism against situation ethics. Fletcher, while treating situation ethics, was also preoccupied with posing accounts of reform or ascent of love, in order to demonstrate that there are ways of retaining the energy and beauty of love, while removing its negative implications. His treatment of love was the agape love or Christian love, which he based on six propositions. These propositions were used by Fletcher to support his situation ethics.

a. Love only is always good: The first proposition employed by Fletcher (1966) to explain and support the situation ethics is that, only one thing is intrinsically good, namely, love. He said that the main issue in all ethics is value. So, he asks, “where is it, what is its locus? Is the unworthiness or worthiness of a thing inherent in it? Or is it contingent, relative to other things than itself? Is the good or evil of a thing, and the right or wrong of an action, intrinsic or extrinsic?” (p. 19).

The issue of the goodness or badness of a thing or an action has troubled many philosophers, starting from the ancient period. According to Fletcher, this question has to be settled first, before we can solve the problems of ethics. The Christian ethics is not spared in this regard. In the middle Ages, Ockham and Scotus postulated the view that any “good” is nominal. Situation ethics, at the level of human value judgment is likewise nominalistic. Thus, Fletcher (1966) writes, “the whole mind-set of the modern man, our mind-set, is on the nominalists side” (p.20). As such, it follows that in situation ethics, nothing is worth anything in and of itself. It gains or acquires its value only because it happens to help or to hurt persons. For the situationist, good and evil are extrinsic to a thing or to an action. It all depends on the situation. Apart from helping or hurting people, ethical judgements or evaluations are meaningless. Christian situation ethics asserts firmly and

definitely the love of neighbour. It is this love that is always good and right, intrinsically good regardless of the context. However, love is not a thing but a principle expressing what type of real actions Christians are to call good. According to Fletcher (1966), all actions done in love are always good. Thus, he writes, "...whatever is the most loving thing in the situation is the right and good thing" (p.20). The contention here lies in the difference between the Christian morality, which believes certain actions to be good or bad in themselves, and the new morality, which holds that no action is intrinsically good or bad.

b. Love is the only norm: The second proposition of Fletcher is that, the ruling norm of Christian decision is love. Love is a univalent norm. Christian situation ethics reduces law from a statutory system of rules, to the love canon alone. As such, love replaces law. The situationists believe that through their decisions on the situation, they redeemed the law from the letter that kills and brings it back to the spirit that gives it life. Therefore, law and general rules always have to be refined back from legalistic prescriptions to the heart principle of love. The situationist accepts that love commands us to follow law, only if the law serves love. Thus, Fletcher (1966) writes "love only employs law when it seems worthwhile" (p.20). The law of love is better off than the love of law. According to Fletcher, Augustine made love the source principle, the hinge principle upon which all other virtues hang. Thus, he quoted Augustine (1938) to have said, "love with care and then what you will, do" (p.65). Love is not one virtue among others or first principle among equals. It is the source of all virtues. The love in question here, is the Christian or agape love. It is not friendship or romantic love. When you love, according to Fletcher, whatever you do will be right and as such love is the only norm.

c. Love and Justice are the same: The third proposition of Fletcher is that, love and justice is the same thing, for justice is love distributed. This proposition exposes the shortcomings of both the law ethics and Christian ethics says Fletcher. The tension between love and justice explains most of the moral problems we encounter. Augustine, for all his insistence on the centrality of love, was compelled to explain that love's administration needs more than goodwill, and can be done only by a high degree of thoughtfulness and prudence. Love and justice are one and the same, since both go out to others through prudence. Thus, Fletcher (1966) writes: "Prudence gives love the care-fullness it needs. With proper care, love does more than take justice into account, it becomes justice" (p.21). When we see love in this way, we are forced to pull back from the sentimental idea that love is not "intellectual." Here is precisely the serious difficulty of love. How are its favours to be distributed among so many beneficiaries? We never have one neighbour at a time. How are we to love justice, how are we to be just about love, how are love and justice related? If to love is to seek the neighbour's welfare, and justice is being fair as between neighbours, then how do we put these two things together in our acts in the situation? The answer, according to Fletcher, is that love is justice, justice is love. For, even if we define justice as giving to persons what is their due, what is it that is due to our neighbour? It is only love. To support his argument, Fletcher (1966) quoted the saying that goes thus: "owe no man anything except to love" (p.22). Again, granting that justice is giving to each man what is his due, how are we to calculate, weigh and distribute "dues" among so many? It is through love. Any instance where love and justice are not the same, according to Fletcher, means that the

love in question is not agape love. No matter what their arguments were, Fletcher insisted that they were wrong in separating love and justice.

d. Love is not liking: The fourth proposition is that, love wills the neighbour's good whether we like him or not. As such, 'love is not like.' To love Christianly, according to Fletcher, is a matter of attitude, not of feeling. Love is discerning and critical, it is not sentimental. This aspect of love was expressed by Quick (1938) when he said, "... in eros, desire is the cause of love, in agape, love is the cause of desire" (p.75). Agape's desire is to satisfy the neighbour's need, not one's own. However, agape love precedes all desire of any kind. It is not at all an emotional norm or motive. According to Fletcher, loving concern can make something like telling a lie, right. Mere liking cannot. Kierkegaard (1983) also observes that, "to say that love is a feeling or anything of that kind is an unchristian conception of love" (p.54). There is nothing sentimental about Christian love. There can be no command, no obligation, and no duty to love, if love is affection. Love seeks the good of everybody. The Christian ethics teaches us to love our neighbour, even the enemy-neighbour. However, this does not mean that one should lose or abandon the sense of good and evil. It simply insists that they should be rated. Whether an enemy is liked or not, the enemy is still a neighbour and as such, deserves to be loved. This is the obligation of the situationist. According to Kierkegaard (1983), "the commandment, love thy neighbour as thyself, means, thou shalt love thyself in the right way (p.54)." We cannot love others, if we are not able to love ourselves. The radical principle of love your enemy, has to be qualified in the calculations of the situation. It is right to deal lovingly with the enemy. To love is not necessarily to please or to like.

e. Love justifies its Means: The fifth proposition is that only the end justifies the means. According to Fletcher, it is an absurd abstraction to say that the end does not justify the means. In the perspective of situation ethics, it is amazing that almost unanimously, this proposition has managed to hang on with bland and unchallenged acceptance. Just as Socrates saw that the unexamined life is not worth living, so too did Fletcher assume that the proposition that the end does not justify the means, is an unexamined ethical maxim that is not worth living by. Therefore, we have to raise the question: what justifies a means? According to Fletcher (1966), it is either the end or nothing. Thus, he writes: "Unless some purpose or end is in view to justify or sanctify it, any action we take is literally meaningless" (p.23). Every action without exception is haphazard if it is without an end to serve. Action only acquires its status as a means. That is, it only becomes meaningful by virtue of an end beyond itself. And ends in their turn need means. It is the co-existence of means and ends that puts an action in the realm of ethics. That only the end justifies the means does not mean that all ends justify all means. The negative impression that is usually associated with the proposition that the end justifies the means is, according to Fletcher, from the intrinsic theory, under which logically, a thing is either good or evil. He insisted that good and evil are not properties, but predicates or attributes. Thus, he writes, what is sometimes good may at other times be evil, and what is sometimes wrong may sometimes be right, when it serves a good enough end, depending on the situation (Fletcher, 1966, p.23). Nothing therefore can justify an act except a loving purpose or end. The only self-validating end in situation ethics is love.

f. Love decides there and then: The sixth proposition of Fletcher is that loves decisions

are made situationally not prescriptively. Fletcher said that people normally prefer prefabricated and pretailored morality. They want to lean on strong, unyielding rules. Thus, he writes, “people like to wallow or cover in the security of the law... they prefer the comfortableness of law” (Fletcher, 1966, p.23). The situationist, cutting himself loose from the hand of unyielding law, with its promises of relief from making decisions, determines that as a man of goodwill, he will live as a free man by making his decision in the situation through love. The situationist way of dealing with decision is too full of variable to please some people, who prefer sanctioned laws. This according to Fletcher is not love's way. The law ethics causes so much conflict of conscience by paying lip service to moral laws that are constantly flouted in practise because they are too rigid to fit the facts of life. Any real decision-making must be made there and then in the situation, insisted Fletcher. He went further to say that there is no way to answer the question whether a thing or an action is right or wrong without giving a concrete instance of the case. There is no room for universals. In the words of Berdier (1907), “every moral action should have in view a concrete living person and not the abstract good” (p.34). When love reigns and not law, the decisions of conscience are relative. Fletcher (1966) noted that the core difference between law and love is that, “loves decisions are made situationally not prescriptively” (p.24). Situation ethics insists that decisions are to be made there and then in the situation with some working principles and not looking up for already made decisions.

FOUR WORKING PRINCIPLES

To set the stage, Fletcher defines four principles as contributing to situational ethics. Together, these principles describe a method, which is about making decisions rather than looking them up in some already identified source.

a. Pragmatism: Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition founded by William James, Charles Pierce and John Dewey. Fletcher's explanation of pragmatism was inspired by the state of affairs in America, when pragmatism was seriously invoked. He sees pragmatism as a legitimate tool of ethics. American pragmatism has always trained its sights primarily on Pilate's question, “What is truth?” The ethical question on the other hand is, “what is good?” For the situationist, the question of the truth and the good are not really separable matters. Thus, James (1907) observes: “the truth, to put it briefly, is only the expedient in our way of thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in the way of our behaviour” (p.97). Some philosophers also saw the question of the 'truth' and the 'good' in line with the situationist. Dewey saw them as what give satisfaction, and Schiller saw them as what works. The good is what works, what is expedient, what gives satisfaction, etc. Fletcher claimed that the question asked by Socrates, “What is goodness?” gets from pragmatism the same answer Pilate got. The good like the truth is whatever that works. According to Fletcher (1966), pragmatism is “a practical or success posture” (p.24). He went further to say that pragmatism expresses the genius and ethos or style of life of American culture, and of the techno-scientific era. Unlike the classical ethics and aesthetics, which treated the good and the beautiful separately, pragmatism summed them up together. However, pragmatism is not a self-contained worldview. It is a method and not a substantive faith. According to W. James (1907):

A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards actions, and towards power (p.97).

For a thing to be correct or right according to Fletcher, that thing – a thought or an action – must work. The question that comes to mind at this point is: a thing must work to what end, for what purpose, to satisfy what standard or ideal or norm? Pragmatism as such is utterly without any way of answering this question. Yet, this is the decisive question. It is only after the above questions are settled can pragmatism be applied. Fletcher, however, maintained that he applied pragmatism from a Christian perspective, and that the norm is love.

b. Relativism: Relativism is another principle employed by Fletcher in explaining his situational ethics. Craig (1998) made the following observation about relativism: “someone who holds that nothing is simply good, but only good for someone or from a certain point of view holds a relativist view of goodness” (p.450). Just like pragmatism, Fletcher maintains that the most pervasive culture trait of the scientific era and of contemporary man is relativism. Thus, Craig (1998) writes: “our thought form is relativistic to a degree that our fore fathers never imagined” (p.450). The situationist avoids words like 'never' and 'always' as he avoids 'absolutes.' Relativism is always in relation to something. To be absolutely relative is to be unpredictable and unjudgeable. According to Fletcher, there must be an absolute or norm of some kind if there is to be any true relativity. This is the central fact in the normative relativism of situation ethics. In Christian situation ethics, the ultimate criterion is agape love. It relativizes the absolute; it does not absolutize the relative.

c. Positivism: The third working principle employed by Fletcher in his attempt to explain situation ethics is positivism. It originated from separate movements in the nineteenth century social science, and early twentieth century philosophy. Key positivist ideas were that: philosophy should be scientific; metaphysical speculations are meaningless, the theoretical parts of good science must be translatable into statements about observations, etc. According to Lenzer (2001), “positivism is a term frequently used to characterize a number of theoretical positions in philosophy as well as in the social sciences (p.89).”

Furthermore, the positivism used by Fletcher to explain situation ethics is the theological positivism. He maintains that there are two ways to approach religious knowledge or belief, they are: theological naturalism, in which reason deduces faith propositions from human experience and natural phenomena. The other approach is theological positivism, in which faith propositions are posited or affirmed voluntaristically rather than rationalistically. Thus, Christian ethics posits faith in God and reasons out what obedience to his commandment to love requires in any situation. According to Fletcher, ethical decisions seek justification, whereas cognitive conclusions seek verification. He went further to say that we could not verify moral choices.

d. Personalism: The fourth principle employed by Fletcher is personalism. Yandell as cited in Stumpf (1971), “personalism is the thesis that only persons and their states and characteristics exist, and that reality consists of a society of interacting persons (p.234).” Ethics deals with human relations. Situation ethics put people at the centre of concern, not things. Fletcher, while supporting situation ethics, remarked that the disciples were commanded to love people, not principles or law or object or any other thing. Thus, “anything, material or immaterial, is good only because it is good for or to somebody” (Fletcher, 1966, p.27). In Christian situation ethics, there is also a theological side to personalism, says Fletcher. God is “personal” and has created men in his own image. Personalism is therefore, the first order concern in ethical choices. In Kant's maxim, this says “treat persons as ends, never as means holds” (Acton, 1966, p.56). In some situations, even if a material thing is chosen rather than a person, it will be for the sake of persons not for the sake of the thing itself. Love is to people, by people and for people.

Nevertheless, Fletcher concluded his four working principles by saying that when we put these working principles together: pragmatism, relativism, positivism and personalism, their shape will be obviously one of action, existence and eventfulness. The situation ethics is an ethic of decision making in love, there and then as the situation demands.

EVALUATION

From the forgoing, Fletcher's work consists of case histories, vividly and dramatically told portraying crucial moral situations. However, in most of the cases presented by Fletcher, even hardbound legalist could solve them even as sympathetically as Fletcher. One of such cases presented by Fletcher is that 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 the prison camp in Ukraine and the children were all scattered. 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 gets to his wife in the prison camp in Ukraine that her family was together again and was desperately looking for her. But she could not be released because release was granted only on either of the two conditions namely: serious illness with which the camp could not cope or pregnancy in the case of a woman. This lady Mrs. Bergmeier, decided to be pregnant so that she could be released and go back to join her family. She arranged with one of the prison guards 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 explain to her husband what she did that enabled her return home. The husband was very happy to see her back and entirely approved of her action. In view of this, Fletcher asked if her action was morally right or wrong. Traditionally, Christian ethics would have no hesitation in condemning it as adultery, an intrinsically evil action, which no situation can justify. But situation ethics approve it as a good action in view of the situation in which it was performed. Notwithstanding, Fletcher applies the principles of situation ethics to a number of cases, including the following: Abortion, Euthanasia, Adultery, Premarital sexual relations, Contraception, telling the truth etc.

In situation ethics, there are a lot of commendable as well as objectionable points. After a

critical study of Fletcher's moral decision-making, I can say that it is neither an invitation to anarchy nor is it a potent weapon in the contemporary war to free man from conformity, from fear and from crippling guilt. Woods as cited in Stumpf (1971), situational ethics are a natural response to the modern situation but as the study of Christian ethics advances, it is likely that they will be seen to have been the ethics of a transitory situation, an interim ethics (p.456). If situation ethics has issues, which dispose people to look with favour upon it, it has still more issues that ought to make people distrust, reject or discard it.

a. Merits of Fletcher's Moral Decision-Making: Fletcher's moral decision making, treats each situation in a unique manner. It is opposed to any uninformed or unimaginative application of a legalistic ethics to a complex contemporary situation. It gives attention to concrete human situations. It emphasizes the importance of right intention in any situation. It recognizes some of the real difficulties, which may arise from legalistic ethics and moral laws. It recognizes the true place and function of Law. Laws are but illuminating guides not authoritative commands. Laws are for people not people for law. Laws are to be respected for the wisdom they embody and the help they give, but not to be worshipped or idolized as unbreakable and unbendable absolutes. If there must be an absolute, it is love says Fletcher. Love does not command it invites. Without love even the most legalistically correct actions are immoral. With love no legalistic presumptions are needed for a full moral life. Fletcher's new morality promotes Christian love. It gives "love" a place of pride in every human situation. It says many beautiful and agreeable things in favour of agape love. Fletcher was correct to some extent in maintaining that the same kind of action cannot remain morally the same in all situations. Bearing this in mind, one is encouraged to look critically at every situation before acting. This in turn, widens one's sense of morality and place one in a position to make the best moral decision when faced with a moral problem. Fletcher new morality, calls for more critical intelligence, more factual information and more self-commitment to righteousness. It aims to widen human freedom, which is the other face of responsibility. In the final analysis, after all must have been said and done, one point about situation ethics still remains very vital. It has succeeded in enriching the history of man.

b. Demerits of Fletcher's Moral Decision-Making: Fletcher went to the extreme in treating each situation as a unique case. Situation ethics do not go beyond the singular situation. As such, there is no way of intellectually organizing discrete singulars. Therefore, situation ethics makes ethics as an organized body of knowledge impossible. Fletcher's moral decision making is opposed and contradicting to Christian ethics. It is in opposition with the conception of any universal moral law. It rejects the view that the proper procedure of making moral decisions is to recognize the relevant universal moral law and to apply it to the particular case with prudence. It sees this method of making moral decisions as misleading. For the situationist, no action or thing is absolutely good or absolutely bad. However, our common sense experience proves to us beyond all reasonable doubt there are actions or things, which are absolutely good or absolutely bad. Such things include: telling lies, murder, fornication, etc. If goodness or badness is not intrinsic to a thing or an action, it follows then, that goodness and badness resides in the situation. As such, a situation can then be expressed in a general rule as good or bad. This brings us back

to the same point of departure. By trying to go against this view, Fletcher is simply trying to say that there are no objectivity in ethics. Although Fletcher emphasized the importance of right intention in his moral decision making approach, he did not emphasize the necessity of right acts. Encouragement was given to the false principle that the end justifies the means. And the sacrifice of the Christian martyrs was made to appear useless. Granted that there are real difficulties, which may arise in applying universal moral laws, such difficulties are not enough reasons for Fletcher to deny universal moral laws. A law can be both a guide and a command. By denying the commanding authority of the law, Fletcher's new morality leads us to antinomianism. Fletcher's new morality promotes Christian love. However, even when we endorse all the good things he said in favour of love, the question asked by Fagothey in relation to love as was treated by Fletcher, needs to be answered by the situationist. Fagothey (1976) asked: "is it clear enough to be a reliable guide? How do I know that this is the loving thing to do, and not that?" (p.53). According to Fletcher, love is to be judged by the good it does to others. This process is a principle of utilitarianism. His principle that love is the only norm is a very weak theory, which is capable of causing disaster when applied to ethics. His concept of love is ambiguous and misleading. If "love" can justify breaking virtually every moral law, one wonders what the content of such "love" could be. While the motive of love is a noble one, it is not in the Christian tradition to present it as the exclusive motive for moral actions.

CONCLUSION

The controversy about the way, which Christians ought to accept or reject the situation ethics, has disclosed sharply opposed views. However, Fletcher went to the extreme in his treatment of the new morality. He should not have made a total rejection of all moral laws. Moral laws have been acknowledged to be of great value in many ways. If there is the need for the rejection of any moral law at all, what ought to be rejected is the conception of the universal moral law to which there are no exceptions. In other words, this is to be made not through moral irresponsibility but in obedience to what is believed to be the human obligation of love towards God and neighbour. The whole operation of making exceptions should be very critical. There are, however, universal moral laws of action, which require no exceptions. A look at some hard cases might disclose the various ways in which the application of some universal moral laws can be unsatisfying. Despite these possible defects of some laws, one should at least, welcome their assistance as embodying many lessons drawn from centuries of practical experience.

Nevertheless, in an age when the study of traditional ethics is somewhat retarded, and when a great deal of ethical discussion is not constructive, careful attention should be given to any movement of ethical thought which appeals to a large number of serious minded people. Situation ethics certainly deserves sympathetic investigation. It rightly emphasizes the necessity of a proper study of the facts of each moral situation. Also, it rightly indicates some of the defects and dangers of legalism in the expression and application of the moral standards. These two points are in fact, a recovery of emphases, which have been a characteristic of a sound moral tradition. The error in some situational ethics has been an inadequate analysis of the manifold forms of the moral standard, and of the fundamental

structure of the human situation to which the standard applies. If there is to be situation ethics, it must be worked out in the human situation as understood in the traditional moral understanding of the world, the soul and God. Hence, it still requires reformation. Although situation ethics and its influences are no longer strong in the modern society, the issues that it sought to address are still relevant today.

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