

Chapter 2

Alternatives to Christian Ethics

Detailed Chapter Outline

Chapter Introduction

RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

JUDAISM

ISLAM

HINDUISM

BUDDHISM

HUMANISM

OBJECTIVISM

BEHAVIORISM

Chapter Preview Questions

1. What are the fundamental beliefs of Judaism?
2. Why is the Qur'an central to the Islamic faith?
3. What are the main ideas asserted in objectivism?
4. How is humanism an alternative to Christian ethics?
5. How does behaviorism seek to understand human nature?

Chapter Objectives

1. Compare the beliefs of Christians, Jews, and Muslims.
2. Define objectivism, humanism and behaviorism
3. Understand the meaning of "the moral life" in various faith traditions.
4. Consider whether varying philosophies can lead to the same conclusions.

Lecture Topics

1. **Variations in American Judaism:** As a class, review the differences in the observances of rituals in the various forms of American Judaism. Discuss how the theology differs from group to group and analyze the effect that has on ethical concerns. In what ways do ethics differ for Orthodox Jews and Reform Jews? In what ways are they the same?

2. **Alternatives to Christian ethics:** Discuss with the class some of the alternative ethical models to Christianity. How does the significance of human beings change in each version? In what ways does each theory deal with the relative importance of the individual?

Research Topics

1. Humanist Paul Kurtz asserts that his beliefs are based on science. Many Christian thinkers also state that their beliefs are not counter to and are even supported by science. How are Christianity and science compatible and how are they radically different? Is it necessary to adopt spirituality over science in order to be a humanist?
2. According to B. F. Skinner, humans merely respond to their environment instead of acting autonomously. Research Skinner's supports and learn about the direct they took his thoughts. Also, look into thinkers who completely disagree with Skinner's ideas. Discuss the ways they believe that Skinner went wrong.
3. Different traditions in Judaism consider the idea of morality from varying perspectives. An Orthodox Jew might consider an act immoral that a Reform Jew would not. Consider what this difference means. Is morality all relative? Analyze the idea of moral relativism within the spectrum of beliefs presented by Judaism.

Questions for Classroom Discussion

1. What is morality, and how does it change based on the actor's religious beliefs?
2. What is the significance of the Talmud and the Torah?
3. How does Islam link religion and the state?
4. How can we define Hinduism considering its various beliefs and practices?
5. In what ways are Hindu ethics subjective and personal?
6. What is the link between Hinduism and Buddhism?
7. *Consider this situation:* Juan is a humanist. He does not believe in God or follow any religious text for moral direction. But Juan is regarded by the people who know him as a deeply moral person. *What is the basis of Juan's morality?*
8. *Consider this situation:* Ann passes a homeless man on the street who asks her for money. She has cash in her pocket that she could give him, but she decides that she would rather use the money to pay for gas to get to her business meeting. Ann believes that getting herself to the meeting would be a better use of the funds because she will gain valuable business information. *What ethical system has Ann employed?*