



Topic: Situation Ethics

Option:

Essential Richer Reading – you must read this for your lessons ☒

Recommended Richer Reading – advised as it would enhance your understanding further ☐

Further Richer Reading – widening your knowledge beyond A-levels ☐

Richer Reading title: “X. An appendix: Two other Corruptions and Four Other Cases”

Type: Partial chapter from Fletcher’s book - Situation Ethics: A New Morality (1966)

Reading intention: (*importance of the text, what students will gain from it*)

- To see Fletcher’s intention for Situation Ethics in Practice
- Being able to apply situation ethics to life examples
- Reading and understanding primary sources like this chapter will help you develop reading comprehension of complex texts

Core content to take away:

- 4 examples Fletcher uses in his work
- Understand how Fletcher intended his theory to work
- Identifying criticisms of Fletcher’s examples

Exam help:

- These can be used as a concise reference in your essays when explaining how Situation Ethics works in practice

Task for this reading:

1. Read through the text example by example
2. After you have read each example, write its title as a subheading e.g. Christian Cloak and Dagger
3. Summarise the case in 3-5 bullet points.
4. After the summary, briefly discuss according to Fletcher whether this was the “most loving” action. Use ideas from the 4 working principles and 6 propositions in your answers.
e.g. In the case of Christian cloak and Dagger, Fletcher suggests X is the right decision. This is because proposition 2....

Reminder 6 propositions:

- Love only is always good: ‘Only one ‘thing’ is intrinsically good; namely, love: nothing else at all’
- Love is the only norm (rule): ‘The ruling norm of Christian decision is love: nothing else’
- Love and justice are the same: “Love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed, nothing else.”
- Love is not liking: “Love wills the neighbor’s good whether we like him or not.”
- Love justifies the means: “Only the end justifies the means; nothing else,”
- Love decides there and then: “Love’s decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively.”

Reminder 4 working principles:

- Pragmatism
- Relativism
- Personalism
- Positivism

CHRISTIAN CLOAK AND DAGGER

I was reading Clinton Gardner's *Biblical Faith and Social Ethics*² on a shuttle plane to New York. Next to me sat a young woman of about twenty-eight or so, attractive and well turned out in expensive clothes of good taste. She showed some interest in my book, and I asked if she'd like to look at it. "No," she said, "I'd rather talk." What about? "Me." That was a surprise, and I knew it meant good-bye to the reading I needed to get done. "I have a problem I can't get unconfused about. You might help me to decide," she explained. This was probably on the strength of what I was reading.

I learned that she had been educated in church-related schools, a first-rate college, and was now a buyer in women's shoes for a Washington store. We agreed, however, to remain mutually anonymous. Her problem? "O.K. This is it. One of our intelligence agencies wants me to be a kind of counterespionage agent, to lure an enemy spy into blackmail by using my sex." To test her Christian

sophistication, I asked if she believed Paul's teaching about how our sex faculties are to be used, as in First Corinthians. Quickly she said, "Yes, if you mean that bit in the sixth chapter—your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. *But*," she added, "the trouble is that Paul also says, 'The powers that be are ordained of God.'"

The defense agency wanted her to take a secretary's job in a western European city, and under that cover "involve" a married man who was working for a rival power. Married men are as vulnerable to blackmail as homosexuals. They did not put strong pressure on her. When she protested that she couldn't put her personal integrity on the block, as sex for hire, they would only say: "We understand. It's like your brother risking his life or limb in Korea. We are sure this job can't be done any other way. It's bad if we have to turn to somebody less competent and discreet than you are."

So. We discussed it as a question of patriotic prostitution and personal integrity. In this case, how was she to balance loyalty and gratitude as an American citizen over against her ideal of sexual integrity?

SACRIFICIAL ADULTERY

As the Russian armies drove westward to meet the Americans and British at the Elbe, a Soviet patrol picked up a Mrs. Bergmeier foraging food for her three children. Unable even to get word to the children, and without any clear reason for it, she was taken off to a prison camp in the Ukraine. Her husband had been captured in the Bulge and taken to a POW camp in Wales.

When he was returned to Berlin, he spent weeks and weeks rounding up his children; two (Ilse, twelve, and Paul, ten) were found in a detention school run by the Russians, and the oldest, Hans, fifteen, was found hiding in a cellar near the Alexander Platz. Their mother's whereabouts remained a mystery, but they never stopped searching. She more than anything else was needed to reknit them as a family in that dire situation of hunger, chaos, and fear.

Meanwhile, in the Ukraine, Mrs. Bergmeier learned through a sympathetic commandant that her husband and family were trying to keep together and find her. But the rules allowed them to release her for only two reasons: (1) illness needing medical facilities beyond the camp's, in which case she would be sent to a Soviet hospital elsewhere, and (2) pregnancy, in which case she would be returned to Germany as a liability.

She turned things over in her mind and finally asked a friendly Volga German camp guard to impregnate her, which he did. Her condition being medically verified, she was sent back to Berlin and to her family. They welcomed her with open arms, even when she told them how she had managed it. When the child was born, they loved him more than all the rest, on the view that little Dietrich had done more for them than anybody.

When it was time for him to be christened, they took him to the pastor on a Sunday afternoon. After the ceremony they sent Dietrich home with the children and sat down in the pastor's study, to ask him whether they were right to feel as they did about Mrs. Bergmeier and Dietrich. Should they be grateful to the Volga German? Had Mrs. Bergmeier done a good and right thing?

"HIMSELF MIGHT HIS QUIETUS MAKE"

A staff doctor asked me to drop in on Jim. In his middle forties, married, five children, Jim had been in the hospital for more than a month, in a series of biopsies, X rays, blood tests, even exploratory surgery, to diagnose a breakdown in his digestive system.

He explained that a year or so earlier he'd started having cramps after meals, went the "Tums route" with patent medicines of various kinds—nothing helped. A doctor said it might be an ulcer, but Jim was too busy for a GI series and kept at his work as construction engineer for a big builder of roads, bridges, and the like. We were just getting into things when the nurse arrived to ready him for some more tests. He thought they were to be final and would wrap it up one way or another. I left saying I'd be back again the next afternoon.

I found him in the solarium, looking very down and out. He thought we ought to go back to his room to talk, and when we got there he told me: "They say I have about three years, maybe less, that only a miracle can save me. They can only give me some stuff that will keep me alive a while. I can leave here tomorrow but can't do any work, just rest and take pills." After a pause he added: "The pills cost \$40 about every three days. Who can afford that? They say if I stop them, then six months and I've had it."

We discussed it a bit and then he blurted out: "You know what is really bugging me? The company has me insured for \$100,000, double indemnity. That's all the insurance I have. It's all I can leave Betts and the kids. If I take the pills and live past next October, then the policy will undoubtedly be canceled when it comes up for renewal. If I don't take them, at least my family will have some security. If I kill myself, they get even more. If I take the pills, borrow the money for them, and then the policy lapses, that will mean that they are going to be left penniless and in debt so that even the house goes. Over the hill, the poor house, and the kids farmed out. If I don't take the pills, I'm killing myself same as if I commit suicide with a razor or gas, seems to me." He closed his eyes.

"What would you do? How does it look to you? I want to do the right thing." We talked it over.

SPECIAL BOMBING MISSION No. 13

Early on August 6, 1945, the *Enola Gay* lifted off the airstrip on Tinian and a few hours later in broad daylight dropped a new weapon of mass extermination (they called it "Little Boy") on unsuspecting Hiroshima.³ They had pretended to be on a routine weather mission, just as Powers did later in his famous U-2 over Sverdlovsk in 1960.

When the crew saw the explosion, they were silent. Captain Lewis uttered six words, "My God, what have we done?" Three days later another one fell on Nagasaki. About 152,000 were killed, many times more were wounded and burned, to die later. The next day Japan sued for peace.

Harry Truman had known nothing of the bomb until after his inauguration, following President Roosevelt's death. When Secretary Stimson told President Truman that "the most terrible weapon ever known" would soon be ready, he appointed an interim committee to consider how and when it should be used. They were all distinguished and responsible people on the committee. Most but not all of its military advisers favored using it. Winston Churchill joined them in favor. Top-level scientists said they could find no acceptable alternative to using it, but they were opposed by equally able scientists.

Admiral Leahy opposed its use altogether. Arthur Compton and E. O. Lawrence, among the nuclear physicists, wanted a warning demonstration first. So did Admiral Strauss. Assistant Secretary of War McCloy and Under Secretary of the Navy Bard agreed that the Japanese ought at least to be told what they were now faced with. On the other hand, intelligence experts said the Japanese

leaders were "blind to defeat" and would continue fighting indefinitely, with millions of lives lost, unless something like Little Boy shocked them into realism. Subsequently, however, the U.S. Bombing Survey declared that the Japanese "would have surrendered prior to November first in any case."

In June the Interim Committee reported to the President, recommending that (1) the bomb be used against Japan as soon as possible; (2) it should be used against a dual target of military installations and civilian concentration; (3) it should be used without prior warning of its coming or its nature. (One of the scientists changed his mind, dissenting from the third point.)

A final discussion of these three issues in the report was held in the White House, with President Truman present, questioning but as yet undeclared. Also present were the Secretary of War, vigorously defending the report as a whole; the Assistant Secretary mainly opposed; General Marshall was for it, Rear Admiral Strauss against it; Scientist Enrico Fermi was for it, Scientist Leo Szilard against it. This meeting and discussion was *it*—now was the "moment of truth," the moment of decision.

³ F. Knebel and C. W. Bailey, "Hiroshima: The Decision that Changed the World," *Look*, June 7, 1960.