



Lesson Guide

Lesson 2 - Philosophy and Ethics: Says Who?

Introduction

In this second installment of our worldview tour, Dr. Tackett takes students into the northeast quadrant of the compass for an introduction to Philosophy and Ethics, the two outside pillars of our Temple of Truth or framework of foundational concepts. In essence, the message of this lesson parallels the precept of Proverbs 23:7 – “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” The heart of the discussion lies in the thought that there is a formal and vital connection between our ideas about the nature of the world (philosophy) and our understanding of right and wrong behavior (ethics).

Themes

Philosophy, according to Dr. R. C. Sproul, is “a scientific quest to discover ultimate reality.” This would seem to indicate that philosophical ideas about truth are closely aligned with the biblical definition given in Lesson 1: truth = *reality*. In this connection, it’s worth noting that the 1828 edition of Webster’s Dictionary included the following affirmation: “true religion and true philosophy must ultimately arrive at the same principle.” Significantly, Webster’s original definition of the word also asserted that philosophy aims “to enlarge our understanding of God.” God, of course, has been edited out of subsequent editions of the dictionary. This is consistent with the perspective of contemporary culture, which has been taken captive by the unfounded *assumption* that “the cosmos is all there is or ever was or ever will be” (Carl Sagan). Another way to say this is that current thought pictures reality as a closed box – a *cosmic cube* – in which there is no room for anything that cannot be sensually or materially perceived. The problem is that with the lid of the box closed and God excluded, philosophy is deprived of a universal reference point and thus crippled in its “scientific quest for ultimate reality.” As a result, it cannot answer the most basic questions about *right* and *wrong* behavior.

Points to Watch For

Dr. Tackett persuasively argues that even the most outspoken adherents of “cosmic cube” thinking and relativistic ethics – thinkers like Carl Sagan and William Provine – cannot possibly *live* by their own reductionist and materialistic principles. On the other side of the coin, he suggests that many contemporary Christians have been unwittingly taken captive by the assumptions of our age (“conformed to this world”). He concludes the lesson by challenging students to *think* more aggressively about what it means to be “transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Romans 12:2).

Discussion Questions (Pick 3 or 4 for your discussion time)

(Make these questions your own. That is, don’t just “read” them, but become familiar with them so that they don’t appear as simply an item to get through. Go through them yourself before your group meets and ponder them.)

1) Opening Question: (this may be the only question you need to ask)

- A. Ask your guests to list what they saw on the tour. Here are some of the key items: Taken captive by lies; Barn's study; gently instructing opponents; seeing them as captives; hollow and deceptive philosophy; assumptive language; "the cosmos is all that is"; made of "star stuff"; the cosmic cube; true philosophy and true religion arriving at the same principle; worldview presuppositions; universals and particulars; spiritual naturalism; naturalistic philosophy implications; personal vs formal worldview; conforming to the world; metamorphosis. [Add your own]
- B. Ask your guests to point out the ones that were particularly interesting or striking to them and why.
- C. Ask if this particular area struck anyone else as well.
- D. Ask if there were other items that they saw that stood out to them. (You may want to read back through the list if you need to.)

2) Why are so many people – even those who argue adamantly for the “cosmic cube” perspective – so obviously uncomfortable with life “inside the box”? How do they attempt to deal with this difficulty?

(Though estranged from God, man still bears the imprint of His image. Somewhere deep down inside, he feels the need of the transcendent; he senses the reality of the “God-shaped vacuum” in his heart that only the Creator can fill. Ecclesiastes 3:11 states, “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.” Those who are unwilling to look outside “the cosmic cube” for the fulfillment of this need try to find ways to “bring God inside” by identifying Him in some way or other with “the stuff in the box.” This is the source of spiritual naturalism, paganism, pantheism, and panentheism.)

3) What do we mean by *universals* and *particulars*? How are they related? What bearing do they have on our quest for answers to the “Big Questions” of life? (*Universals* are broad, overarching, all-inclusive truths. They are in effect the *answers* to the *Big Questions* – e.g., “Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? What are reason and logic? What do we really know and how do we know that we know it?” The *particulars* are the specific details of life and the physical world as we observe them. The *particulars* are like beads on a string or threads in a tapestry; the *universals* are the pattern or plan by which the beads or threads are organized into a meaningful whole. *Universals* lend significance to the *particulars*; but knowledge of the *particulars* will not necessarily lead us to an understanding of the *universals*.)

4) Dr. Tackett asserts, “You won’t find the answers to the Big Questions inside the box.” Why not?

(We define the *particulars* as “the stuff inside the box.” As indicated above, *particulars* by themselves can never lead us to *universals*; there is no pattern in a pile of beads or threads. To perceive the pattern, we must look to an overarching plan that only exists *outside the box*.)

5) What, according to Dr. R. C. Sproul, is the distinction between *morality* and *ethics*? How has confusion on this point precipitated a *crisis in ethics* in the modern world? (*Morality* is simply a description of what *is* – the customs that govern the behavior of a given group of

people. *Ethics* concerns itself with what *ought* to be – how the same group of people *should* behave as measured against some higher standard of right and wrong. Mankind, by rejecting this higher standard (the *universals*) has confounded the two, thus creating what Sproul refers to as *statistical ethics*, a system that basically asserts that what is *normal* is *right*, and that behavior can only be judged against the background of “survey data” or popular consent.)

- 6) **How does the biblical worldview stand opposed to the “cosmic cube” worldview?** (Stated simply, the biblical worldview leaves the lid of the box open, allowing for divine intervention. The biblical worldview concludes that God is at work in the daily lives of men.)

Is it possible for a Christian to be deceived and “taken captive” by the empty philosophies of the world? If you *have* been deceived, how do you know? How? (The warnings we are given in Scripture – passages like Romans 12:1, 2 and Colossians 2:8 – indicate that Christians can very easily be taken *captive* to lies if they do not remain vigilant and conversant with the truth. The best way to guard against this danger is to examine ourselves constantly against the standard of God’s Word. We need to examine our lives and see if our actions and behaviors reflect the beliefs we claim to hold.)

Tour Guide Notes: Spiritual Naturalism Lesson 2: Philosophy & Ethics: Says Who?

This concept deserves a little more attention than what we gave it in the DVD especially because of the increased attention to “spiritualism” in our culture.

Naturalism, of course, is easy to define because its adherents maintain that all of reality exists within the natural realm. This is the essence of Sagan’s statement “The cosmos is all that is, ever was, or ever will be”. In a classic sense, naturalism has assumed that all of reality is made up of only things “physical”: matter and energy. This gives rise to the notion that man is a material beast and a material beast only. There is no spiritual essence to man. Additionally, the honest naturalist has to deal with the logical conclusion that the thoughts of man must come solely from the physical firings within the synapse of brain tissue, leaving man without a “soul” or “spirit” and giving rise to the notion of behaviorism and Dr. William Provine’s statement that man has no free will.

This position, however, leaves man in a difficult position. He inherently knows that he does have a free will because he can choose whether or not he is going to put on the red shirt or the blue shirt, whether or not he ties his left shoe first or right shoe first. He can even fold his arms or snap his fingers, once, twice, or even three times if he chooses. So, pure naturalism leaves man cold. He also has this innate sense that there is something about him that goes beyond the physical. He may not call it a “soul” because he may not be able to define the soul. But he knows that he is more than physical.

Secondly, we do not like a cold universe. We want something beyond the physical. When man rejects the true God, he generally will replace Him with something tangible, but will imbue that physical thing with spiritual characteristics. Here is where we get sun-gods and moon-gods, Nile gods and Baals. In our day, we get witches and ghosts, pantheism, The Force be with you, and all sorts of spirit-filled elements. Our movies and TV shows are filled with spirit-filled elements. It creeps under the door, it invades your body, it rises from the pond or it possesses the little girl next

door. Many religions end up with a physical god, no matter how big or powerful.

So, we have simply added a third element to the box: spirit. You may find it interesting to know that Carl Sagan's was a pantheist. He believed that the cosmos was all that there was, but he believed that it was a spirit-filled universe.

We shouldn't be fooled by all of this. It is not a movement that we should embrace simply because people are "spiritual". Satan and the demons are spiritual. Much of the evil that we deal with is "spiritual". What is missing in all of this is the clear acknowledgement and acquiescence to the transcendent creator God who has revealed Himself to us through His creation and His Word. That kind of a God is unacceptable to spiritual naturalists though, because that kind of a God represents a holiness that restricts their drive to do what they want to do.

Psalm 2

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

"Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."