Is it ever right to break a commandment? Is it ever right to lie?
Corrie ten Boom lied to save Jews from Nazis.
Oliver North lied saying “I had to weigh lying and lives”.
Jewish midwives lied to save baby boys’ lives. (ex. 1:15-19)
Rahab lied to save the Jewish spies (Josh. 2)

Ethics—deals with what is morally right and morally wrong

Christian ethics—deals with what is morally right and wrong for a Christian

Ways man has decided its basis for morality throughout the years
1) **Might is right**—the strongest determine what is right and wrong
2) **Morals are mores**—each culture determines what is right for itself
3) **Man is the measure**—each person determines what is right for themselves
4) Human race is basis of right—
5) **Right is moderation**—(Aristotle)—pride is moderate between vanity and humility. Courage between fear and aggression.
6) **Right is what brings pleasure**—Epicureans (pleasure defined also as contentment)
7) **Right is the greatest good for the greatest Number**
8) **Right is indefinable**
9) **Right is what God wills**

Two Types of Ethics
1) **Deontological**—duty centered.
   A) rule determines result
   B) rule is the basis of the act
   C) rule is good regardless of result
   D) result always calculated within the rules
2) **Teleological**—result centered
   A) Result determines rule
   B) Result is the basis of the act
   C) Rule is good because of result
   D) Result used sometimes to break rule

There are six major ethical systems which answer the question, “are there any objective ethical laws?”
1) Antinomianism
2) Generalism
3) Situationism
4) Unqualified absolutism
5) Conflicting absolutism
6) Graded absolutism

They all answer the question, “Is it ever right to lie?” differently.
Antinomianism

definition—“against or instead of law”. Idea that there are no binding moral laws. Everything is relative.

_Lying is neither right or wrong. There are no laws._

Basic beliefs

1) There are no God-given moral laws—They either believe there is no God, or that He has not placed moral laws on us.
2) There are no objective moral laws—Morality is the subjective choice of the individual and are relative to those who choose to live by them.
3) There are no timeless moral laws—whatever laws we follow are temporal, and change from place to place as well as time to time.
4) There are no laws against laws—Most don’t argue for a need of civil/moral laws. They argue these are not based on anything eternal.

Major philosophies of Antinomianism

1) **Hedonism**—(epicurean) pleasure is the essence of good and pain the essence of bad
2) **Skepticism**—Suspend judgment on all matters. Every issue has two sides and can always be issued to a stalemate.
3) **Intentionalism**—An act is right if it is done with a good intention, it is bad if done with a bad intention.
4) **Emotivism**—all ethical statements are only an expression of our feelings.
5) **Nihilism**—“God is dead and we have killed him. When God died all objective values died with him. We must will to do our own good.”

Positive Contributions

1) **Stresses individual responsibility**—This view places emphasis on an individual’s responsibility
2) **Recognizes an emotive element**—Not all alleged “rules” or “norms” are divine imperatives. Many are personal feelings.
3) **Stresses personal relations over rules**—“The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” Mark 2:27

Criticisms

1) **It is self-defeating**—The statement “there are no absolutes” is an absolute statement in itself
2) **It is too subjective**—It would be like a game without rules. Anyone literally could do anything they want.
3) **It is ineffective**—As long as there is more than one person in this world, their will be conflict. Their has to be some kind of standard. No society has ever survived in anarchy.
4) It is irrational—It breaks the laws of contradiction. Hate cannot be right for the situation and love also be right for the situation—it doesn’t make sense.

Generalism

definition—belief in ethical laws that are generally binding.

*Lying is generally wrong—but in specific instances it is okay.*

Generalists (sometimes called utilitarians) claim not to be antinomians since they believe in the value of ethical laws in helping people determine which action will probably bring the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Basic Beliefs
1) Morality is determined by whether the result of an action would bring good things or bad things. “The end justifies the means”
2) When an action would bring both good and bad results, one must weigh which result would bring the most good for the most people. One should act so as to produce the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. **Utilitarian calculus.**
3) Ethical rules are not categorical, but only hypothetical. We can only say “if I act this way, the greatest good will probably result—but there is no way of knowing this for sure.
4) Exceptions to rules are dealt with in two different ways
   A) act-utilitarians—There may be an exception to any rule or norm if the result would justify breaking it. Everything is judged by the result.
   B) Rule-utilitarians—Rules should never be broken (unless there is a conflict between two or more) because making exceptions to any ethical law is a practice which leads to greater evil than good. If there is a conflict, choose the law which will serve the greater good.

Positive Benefits
1) Recognize the need for norms—they are not antinomian, they see the need for rules to help benefit self and society.
2) Offers a solution to conflicting norms—when moral principles conflict, the conflict is not absolute, there is always a possible exception. Choose what would give the greatest good for the greatest number.
3) Some generalists have “unbreakable norms” (rule-utilitarians)

Inadequacies
1) The end does not justify the means—
   A) Hitler’s goal was to have a more perfect race
   B) Nixon’s goal of national security—watergate
   C) Plantation worker’s goal of keeping product cheap—slavery
2) Generalism offers know absolute norms. It is merely “suggestions” to follow.
3) **Utilitarian acts have no intrinsic value**—the act of saving a life is only good if the life is saved. If not, it is a waste of time.

4) **ambiguous terms**—
   A) “end” ethic is based on what will bring the best results in the long run. But how long is long? Anything beyond our present is outside of our knowledge. Only God knows the future, so only God can be a true utilitarian, and He is not.
   B) “good”—what is good? Unless there is an objective standard (which is rejected by generalists) good is different for each person
   C) greatest number or greatest individuals?—what is good for the greatest number is seldom good for minority groups.

**Situationism**

**Definition**—There is one moral absolute—the law of love.

*Lying is sometimes right if it is the loving thing to do.*

**Basic Beliefs**

1) Only one thing is intrinsically good—love. Situationists believe that something is good because God wills it. Absolutists believe God wills things because they are good.

2) The only absolute rule in decision-making is love. Every law is breakable by love.

3) Love and justice are the same. Justice is love distributed. Justice means to give others their due. Love is everyone’s due. It must borrow the utilitarian calculus to bring the greatest good for the most people. i.e. a murderer—more love is shown to more people by locking a murderer up than by showing them mercy.

4) Love wills the neighbors good whether we like him or not. Good does not equal pleasure.

5) The end justifies the means. There are no intrinsically good acts. The means cannot justify themselves. Any means sought for its own sake is wrong. Ex. Law and order show lawyer knows where dead bodies are and won’t tell because of attorney/client privilege.

6) Love’s decisions are made situationally. They are not universally applicable but each situation is different.

**Difficult examples**

1) altruistic adultery—German mom captured by Russians in WWII. The only way out of camp for women was pregnancy. She seduced a guard, became pregnant, and was sent home.

2) Patriotic prostitution—spy has sexual relations as part of job

3) Sacrificial suicide—terminal patient takes life to spare expense and suffering of family.

4) Merciful murder—burning plane begging to be shot. “Last of the Mohicans”
5) Overcrowded lifeboat—throwing people overboard to save the rest?

Benefits
1) It is absolutism (in theory)
2) Resolves issue of conflicting norms.
3) Gives due value to differing circumstances.
4) Stresses love and value of persons.

Criticisms
1) Too general—same as saying “follow nature” or “live according to reason” It doesn’t help with tough decisions.
2) The situation shouldn’t determine the meaning of love.
3) Rules out many absolutes

Unqualified Absolutism

Definition—there are moral laws that admit no exceptions and these never conflict with each other. All moral conflicts are only apparent—they are not real. Sin is always avoidable.

Lying is never right, even in trying to save a life.

Basic beliefs—
1) God’s unchanging nature is the basis for moral absolutes
2) God has expressed his unchanging nature in the form of his law.
3) God cannot contradict himself.
4) Hence, no two moral laws can contradict (conflict with) themselves.
5) All moral conflicts are only apparent.

Dealing with difficulties

Key Verse
1 Cor. 10:13  There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

1) God can give a third way. (Daniel provided an alternative for his diet).
2) God can intervene. (Sarah avoided adultery in Egypt. Daniel in the lion’s den. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abedneggo in the furnace. Corey Tin Boon—they are under the table)
3) Silence is better than a lie.
4) We are not responsible for others sin.
5) Not all intentional deceptions are lies. (i.e. head fake in basketball. In war, we are expected to “posture”, or be deceptive)

Positives

1) It bases morality on God’s nature.
2) It stresses rule over result (deontological).
3) It trusts in the providence of God.
4) Always a way to avoid sinning.

Negatives

1) Fatal exceptions
   A) Abraham preparing to kill Isaac
   B) Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter
   C) All intentional deceptions aren’t lies
2) Third alternatives aren’t always possible
3) Causes sins of omission
4) Tendency to lead toward legalism

Conflicting Absolutism

Definition—Moral laws sometimes conflict with each other. Man is still responsible to keep both. We must choose to commit the lesser sin and ask for forgiveness.

Lying is a sin, but it is forgivable.

Basic Beliefs

1) God’s moral laws are absolute
   Psalm 119:160 Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.
   Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
2) Moral conflicts are unavoidable
   Originally this was not the case—man’s depravity has caused this situation.
3) One has the responsibility to do the lesser evil
   Not all sins are equal
   John 19:11 therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.
   Matthew 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, he shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.
   Matthew 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.
   Matthew 22:36-37 Master, What is the greatest commandment? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
Some sins call for excommunication (1 Cor. 5), some call for death (1 Cor 11:30, 1 John 5:16) There is an unforgivable sin.

All sins being equal is a misinterpretation of James 2:10.

4) It is still counted as sin, but it can be forgiven—it is always sin to violate one of God’s laws, even if we have no choice. But, we can be forgiven of it.

Positive Attributes
1) It preserves moral absolutes
2) It has a moral realism—not every decision is neat and clean
3) Moral conflicts are rooted in man’s depravity.
4) It is a solution without exception.—It is completely simplistic

Criticisms
1) A moral duty to sin is a contradiction
2) How can you be held responsible for what is unavoidable?
3) Jesus must have sinned—Jesus was tempted in all points as we are. That means he had to face conflicting norms and chosen to break the lesser of the two laws. The alternative is that because Jesus was perfect, conflicts did not occur for him. This would lead us to
4) Jesus was not our complete moral example.

1Pe 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Graded Absolutism

Definition— Moral laws sometimes conflict with each other. Man is responsible to keep the greater commandment. Breaking the lesser commandment is not counted against him.

Lying is sometimes right if there is a higher law that has to be kept.

Basic Beliefs
1) There are higher and lower moral laws
2) There are unavoidable moral conflicts
3) No guilt is imputed for the unavoidable.

Greater vs. lesser laws
1) love for God over love for man
2) Obey God over government (Acts 4-5)
3) Mercy over Veracity

Positives
1) It is a form of absolutism
2) It has moral realism
3) It sucessfully answers moral conflicts without sin.
Criticisms
   1) Graded absolutism doesn’t differ from situationism
   2) It is not absolutism. (how can something be absolute, yet not obeyed?)
   3) How do exemptions differ from exceptions?