



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

- 1) 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.)
- 2) 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, over-arching, 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*.)
- 3) 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*.)
- 4) 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.)
- 5) 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.)
- 6) 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.)