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A Philosophy of Education for Ethics Instruction  
in the Junior High School Department of  
Reform Jewish Religious Schools  
by: Fredric S. Pomerantz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and  
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In this work the scope of ethics instruction in the junior high school department of religious schools of the Reform Jewish movement is examined. In order to overcome certain problems in this teaching program, this thesis is the foundation upon which a teacher's manual on the philosophy of education for ethics instruction will be based. There are two major divisions in the thesis.

Part one takes the following form: A statement giving our opinion of the essential nature of Reform Judaism is presented. In light of this definition, the importance of ethics instruction in the training of a Reform Jew is demonstrated. Then, so as to see the inherent strengths and weaknesses, and so as to consider the necessary innovations, a survey of ethics instruction currently operative in Reform religious schools is undertaken. In an attempt to evaluate the recommended textbooks for ethics instruction, each is critiqued for goals, methodology, and implied philosophy. Each textbook is then evaluated in terms of the stated essence of Reform Judaism, and as a function of the curricular goals for the specific ethics courses.

The second part of this thesis is intended to provide the teacher with a better background upon which instruction in ethics can be based. Here, the nature of ethics is examined, and specific ethical systems are demonstrated. The process of making moral choices is considered. Terms such as "good" and "obligation" are discussed as examples of the type of notions our students should be trained to understand and to apply in their life situations. Absolutism and relativism are discussed and systems demonstrated. Finally, the implications of this thesis are extrapolated and proposed for use in ethics instruction in the junior high schools of the Reform movement.

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## CHAPTER I

## ETHICS INSTRUCTION IN REFORM JUDAISM

This work is intended to be the initial step in the construction of a teacher's manual on the philosophy of education for ethics instruction in the junior high school department of religious schools of the Reform Jewish movement. Towards this end, the following program will be pursued. A statement as to our opinion of the essentials of Reform Judaism will be presented, and in the light of this definition it will be demonstrated why ethics instruction is so important in the training of the Reform Jew. A survey of ethics instruction currently operative in Reform Religious schools will be examined so as to see the strenghts and weaknesses inherent, and to consider the innovations necessary. The textbooks recommended for ethics instruction will be critiqued in an effort to uncover the direction and goals each author pursues, to examine the methodology each author utilizes, and to determine the implicit philosophy each author represents. The textbooks will then be evaluated as a function of our conception of the essence of Reform Judaism and as a function of the goals for ethics instruction in the religious schools of the Reform movement.

The second part of this work, in which the nature of ethics is examined, and specific ethical systems are demonstrated, is intended to provide the teacher with the foundation for a better background upon which instruction in ethics can be based. The process of making moral choices will be examined. A discussion of the terms "good" and "obligation" will be presented as an example of the kind of abstract notions which our students should be trained to understand and to apply in their life situations. Following an analysis of the terms authoritarianism and relativism absolute and relativistic ethical systems will be examined.

This examination and analysis will be made in order to provide a better understanding of the elements underlying the non-authoritarian, relativistic system of ethics instruction which we propose for use in the religious schools of the Reform movement. The implications derived in the individual steps of this work will be extrapolated, and the implications will be proposed for acceptance in the ethics instruction in junior highschool classes of religious schools of the Reform movement.

#### A. Reform Judaism

The philosophy of ethics instruction proposed in this work will be a function of our opinion as to what constitutes the essence of Reform Judaism and will be a function of the characteristics arising out of that definition. Both the philosophy of ethics instruction and the definition of Reform Judaism are not meant to be definitive. Rather they are meant to be models for the teacher's own instruction.

Of the numerous definitions of Reform Judaism proposed, the following<sup>1</sup> is closest to our own position:

The principle which constitutes a primary element in the meaning of the term Reform Judaism- implicit in the religious practice of most non-Orthodox Jews- is that of polydoxy. In order to define this principle and best understand Reform Judaism the main events which led to its emergence will be reviewed briefly.

Before the nineteenth century, Jews generally understood the term Judaism to refer to a single religious system which represented the Jewish religious tradition as a unified, continuous, religious structure. This conceptualized system, which is essentially the same as contemporary Orthodox Judaism, was characterized by the following

beliefs: The factual belief of the revelation at Sinai as described in Exodus. The affirmation that the Jews, through Moses, received a revelation at Sinai which climaxed a series of lesser revelations to Abraham and other Jews. In this revelation, the commandments that God wishes Jew and non-Jew to observe were revealed as God's will. In these and other revelations to Moses the Pentateuch and Talmud were revealed. From these revelatory experiences the characteristic beliefs of what we call Orthodox Judaism were derived.

These beliefs can be represented by the following:

- 1) One, eternal, benevolent God, the sole creator of the universe, exerts providence over human affairs.
- 2) The revelation to Moses at Sinai is infallable and external.
- 3) God rewards those who follow his commandments and punishes those who disregard them.
- 4) During the messianic era, ushered in by the Messiah, God will judge all men.
- 5) There is an afterlife.

Immediately preceding the nineteenth century many influences upon the Jews who had entered western culture predisposed these Jews to placing less credence in the beliefs that are the underpinnings of Orthodox Judaism just explained. The natural and supernatural evidence necessary to support the Orthodox system was discredited by an increasing number of Jews. It has been suggested that there were three major influences at work. The decreased credibility of miracle and revelation claims of religion, which was attributable to the success of the scientific method used in scholarship. The application of this scientific method - critical study to the examination of Bible and Talmud. And the refutation by Hume, Kant and others of the Aristotelian and medieval proofs for the existence of God.



These influences continued and by the end of the nineteenth century the beliefs and authority of Orthodox Judaism could not be subscribed to by an ever increasing number of Jews who could not accept the evidence for these beliefs and authority.

More and more Jews were in quest for a religious structure which could be substantiated through evidence apprehended externally through sensation, or internally, as in the communion of prayer, and substantiated by private, personal experience.

By the process of natural selection these people gained their satisfaction through the principle we have called polydoxy; the primary element in Reform Judaism. With the exception of the thought that there exists the kind of evidence which would substantiate absolute authority for specific religious beliefs, in a polydoxy all opinions on the great themes of religion are of equal worth, institutionally.

A Polydox institution such as Reform Judaism rests on the following beliefs: There is no objective evidence for faith in a religious belief. Since no such evidence is available, the institution must affirm the individual's freedom. No person, or institution, is established as the arbiter of religious truth on the basis of evidence that is not publicly verifiable. No person has rights over another person unless he can objectively establish those rights. In a polydox religious community such as Reform Judaism each person is his own authority.

Therefore, we see the major characteristic of Reform Judaism to be the freedom of the individual. The Reform Jew is free to use any of the present or past Jewish systems as guidelines in constructing his personal religious system, in formulating his own moral responses, in deciding upon meaningful ritual and ceremony. There is no deity dogma.

A Reform Jew may identify with the God concept of a specific Jewish system, or he may see the God idea as a progressive attempt, through history, to seek out values and purposes, and to sanctify human life, or he may find meaning in human existence that takes place in and through himself.

However, because no religious authority, institutional or Scriptural, has authority over him, and because individual freedom is the major characteristic of Reform Judaism, Reform Jewish youth must be prepared by the religious school to understand his opportunity and to achieve necessary skills to make authentic responses to his ongoing life situations.

#### B. Purpose of ethics instruction in Reform Judaism.

Ethics has been called a "moral philosophy," a "theory of morals," or as referred to above "the examination of life."<sup>2</sup> This last definition is particularly useful for our purposes. The student should be trained to make a rational examination of his life situations, so that he can best utilize his freedom and best exercise his obligation to be the arbiter of his ongoing moral decisions. Ethics instruction should equip the student to understand terms like "good" and "right" since he will make moral decisions in situ on the basis of the good and the right he perceives. Ethics instruction should equip the student to understand the idea of "obligation," since through his freedom he will have to determine the "ought" in a life situation. Ethics instruction, then, should train the student to perfect his "moral decision apparatus."

However, the purpose of ethics instruction in Reform Judaism is not only to develop the student's religious life. The student should also be prepared to assume his place as a responsible citizen in secular society. The student should not only be prepared to determine how to best steer his life, but he must also be prepared to direct his life

in a fashion that considers the welfare of his fellow citizens. Thus, through ethics instruction in the religious school, the student will be exposed to the problems that have here-to-fore been restricted to a university course in ethics. He will consider the problem of moral principles. By beginning a systematic study aimed at helping him make decisions involving right and wrong, he will work towards his own definition of morality. In this systematic study, the problem of freedom will be considered. The student will be exposed to a formal examination of the problem of moral obligation. The student will attempt to understand the questions "what is moral freedom" and "can we control choices." This formalized study will introduce the student to the problem of casuistry. This will lead to an examination of value judgements of an ethical nature. The student will consider the question of whether or not it is possible to establish moral codes. Casuistry will lead the student into an examination of what actions are morally good. Though the problem of moral psychology might be considered by some to be outside the scope of religious school instruction, it is entirely within our scope of concern. Students would study how it is that humans apply moral principles to their daily lives. They would study the significance of will and conscience in the application of these moral principles.

The nature of the ethics instruction proposed here is far different from the instruction now used in our religious schools. To demonstrate the necessity for this new instruction we will now turn to an examination of current ethics instruction in our Religious Schools.

### C. A survey of current ethics instruction in reform religious schools

Instruction in ethics is recommended for the seventh and eighth

grades of a religious school, as explained in the curriculum guide published by the Commission on Jewish Education of the Reform Movement.<sup>4.</sup>

The proposed seventh grade course is entitled, "Personal Ethics". The recommended textbook is The Right Way, by Lillian S. Freehof. The proposed course for the eighth grade is entitled, "Social Ethics". Selections from the bi-weekly magazine, Keeping Posted are used as source material, there being no recommended textbook. The possibility for ethics instruction is proposed for the ninth grade under the heading of "supplementary material". The Recommended textbooks are The Still Small Voice and The Still Small Voice Today, by William B. Silverman. Because of the time and energy necessary for study of the other recommended courses for the ninth grade, it is highly unlikely that this supplementary material will be considered in most of our schools.

There has been serious difficulty in the application of these proposed courses. Throughout the country increasing numbers of Reform religious schools are abandoning the proposed instruction in ethics. The measured efficiency of these recommended courses has been low in studies done in schools throughout the country.<sup>5.</sup> Examining possible causes of this phenomenon it can be shown that the philosophy implicit in the curricular goals and in the recommended textbooks does not demonstrate high correlation with the implicit philosophy in our definition of Reform Judaism. It can also be shown that the methodology of instruction, and the methodology of the textbooks, does not make optimum use of recent insights gained into the instruction of ethics and values. Let us turn now to the examination of curricular goals for ethics instruction.

The following goals can be abstracted from the Reform curricular

guide as the basic aims of ethics instruction in the seventh grade course entitled, "Personal Ethics": (1) To help the student confront the challenge of his increasing freedom, (2) To help the student meet his life problems "through Judaism," (3) To help the student confront realistic life experiences requiring decision and participation, and (4) To help the student live by "the traditions of the Torah" and in the "service of God." Helping the student confront the challenge of his increasing freedom and helping the student confront realistic life experiences requiring decision and participation are compatible with our description of the Reform Jew's life tasks. The other two abstracted goals are not specifically defined for the experiences of a Reform Jew. The suggestion that a student can be shown that his life problems can be met "through Judaism" is harmfully ambiguous.

Initially, Reform was described as a specific Jewish system. The harmful ambiguity in the unspecified term, Judaism, is that the student can easily be confused. He can assume that Judaism is a singular, organic system whose statutes are binding upon him. This goal might lead to unclear teaching. It might lead to the assumption that if the sources are diligently searched, ultimately a "Jewish ethical response" can be found which will serve the in situ life problem of a student. This ambiguity can also lead to instruction that will describe Judaism as a single, unified religious system. Curricular goals should clarify and substantiate the notion that there have been many Jewish systems and notions that arise out of one specific Jewish system that may be inappropriate for a particular moral decision. Instruction must lead to the awareness that "Judaism" doesn't solve life problems, but rather helpful notions can be abstracted from specific Jewish ethical systems that can provide the basis for

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problem solution.

The final abstracted goal for ethics instruction, namely, helping a student live by "the traditions of the Torah" and in "service of God" is also confusion to the student in a Reform religious school. It might be argued that the terms, "the traditions of the Torah," and "service of God" are meant to be emotive rather than empirical. Even so, one cannot use emotive terms as a basis for directing religious school instruction. Further, in order for Reform Jews to use the varied Jewish systems as guides, they should know what is meant by such terms as "the traditions of the Torah" and "service of God." In the religious school the student should begin to define such terms for himself.

The definition of terms and the evolution of principles would be made much easier if the goal of the curriculum included the instruction of ethics as a formal discipline in the manner of university instruction. Having examined the goals, let's look at curricular process.

The only vehicle of instruction for the seventh grade course is the recommended textbook, The Right Way. No other materials are suggested. As has been proposed, curricular process should also include instruction in ethics as a formal discipline, with the newly aquired skills applied in the consideration of the text. There is no provision for including discussion of open-ended hypothetical cases from which students could deduce principles and methodology. Most cases presented in the textbook contain implicit, obvious resolutions. An additional paperback work such as Pike's new casebook for ethics instruction would give added dimension to this course in "Personal Ethics".

The curricular goals for the eighth grade course in "Social Ethics"

will now be examined. The course goals are the following; (1) To train the student to perceive and react to social problems in terms of his Jewishness. (2) To help the student perceive the national and international problems which a righteous man should act upon. (3) To help the student understand the directions in which a Jew should proceed to help bring about the "Messianic Age". (4) To bring the student..."to live Torah in its broadest applications", (and in so doing)..."carry on out Israel's mission in service to its God." Certainly, the goal to help the student perceive the social problems upon which a righteous man should act is compatible with the philosophy of Reform Judaism. Here even the emotive meaning of righteous conveys the intent of the goal, though the student would have to work towards a concrete meaning of the term "righteous man". The first goal, perceiving problems in terms of Jewishness, is valuable if the attitude accepted is that one can better grasp universal problems by means of a particularistic referent. However, students must be made aware of the fact that working towards the erradication of the social problem is primary and the Jewish perception and response to that problem is his only means of solving that problem.

Consideration of the third and fourth goals, proceeding towards the "Messianic Age" and "living Torah-Israel's mission "in service to God, recreates the same kinds of problems discussed in the consideration of the curricular goals for the seventh grade course in "Personal Ethics". Even if the terms are meant to be emotive they have no place in a precise statement of goals and objectives for course instruction. If the terms are not meant to be emotive, they certainly have no place in a curricular guide for instruction in a Reform religious school unless they are clearly and precisely defined within the framework of the philosophy of

of Reform Judaism. It is seen that formal goals must be precise and meaningful in order for the instruction to have relevance to the real world.

Having examined goals let's look at curricular processes. There is no textbook for the eighth grade course. There is no source book or case book. Selected articles from the bi-weekly magazine Keeping Posted are used as the basis for class discussion. This is grossly insufficient for such an important course. A valuable process here would be to invite guest speakers from selected social action agencies or foundations in the community followed by class (committee) visits to the agency or to areas where the agency operates. In this way the student would see real life situations against which he could test his ever developing ethical system of moral principles. He would be in a situation where he would employ casuistry and moral judgements of an ethical nature, instead of dealing with abstract classroom situations.

A gross omission in the curricular processes of both the course on "Personal Ethics" and "Social Ethics" is lack of a vehicle to handle the question of the "New Morality". The student should confront the implications of the "new sexuality" arising out of the new morality as it is important for his immediate needs. In truth there is no new morality. There is just a redefinition of the culturally based value judgements of an ethical nature on sex issues, politics, individual freedom, etc. Our junior highschool students are being influenced by these changing norms and we neglect our responsibility as religious educators if we neglect these issues. We must prepare our students for freedom.

We have seen how the actual instruction is not meeting the goals we have set, how much of the implicit philosophy of the texts and the courses is not in concert with our definition of Reform Judaism and how much of the current instruction does not develop the student's awareness of his moral obligations nor develop his capacity for moral choices.



## CHAPTER II

## CRITIQUE OF ETHICS TEXTBOOKS RECOMMENDED FOR REFORM RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

Here we examine the recommended textbooks for the junior high-school classes. Each will be critiqued so as to give the reader insight into its strenghts (so that these may be emphasized in the classroom) and to give insights into its weaknesses (so these may be overcome in the classroom). In addition, the goals and methodology of each of the books will be discussed so as to increase its potential as a teaching vehicle. An attempt will be made to discover the goals, purposes and values of the author. It will be determined whether these are overt or covert. The underlying principle of each text will be sought. The intrinsic proposals of the author will be clarified. It will be determined whether the author allows for open-ended problem solution or whether he leads the reader through a series of steps to discover his own pre-formed notions.

It is hoped that the reader may deduce from the general discussion valuable insights and techniques which will be useful in ethics instruction.

A. The Right Way

The textbook recommended for the seventh grade course in "Personal Ethics" is, The Right Way, by Lillian S. Freehof. From the editor's introduction we learn that the purpose of this book is to teach ethics to young people, emphasizing Jewish ethics in particular. The method is to use short stories involving ethical situations and then to have the students discuss the arising ethical situations. Further, it is hoped that the students will bring their own experiences from life situations into

the discussion. It is intended that the book shall lead a student to "formation of mind set" and the development of favorable attitudes in direction of "righteous action."

Each of the sixteen stories is followed by supplementary sections. Ethics of the Fathers serves as "a point of departure" for ensuing discussion. In a section entitled "Questions on the Chapter," selections from other divisions of Jewish literature and from secular sources are included to give further insight into the initial quotation from Ethics of the Fathers. These questions lead from particulars in the story to the reader's own attitudes to similar situations in his own life. "Problems to Think About" are questions for discussion not directly relating to the short story. "Essays" or "Project" presents principles underlying the situation under discussion put into practice. The implied intent is an internalisation of the desired principles. Last is "Recommended Reading for the Student's Pleasure." These are sources in Jewish and secular literature with an emphasis towards popular reading. The themes are peripheral to the main topic of the story but have the apparent intent of reinforcing the material under consideration.

Let us consider methodology. Are the goals of the text carried through in the work? Certainly the attempt to have students discuss ethical situations arising out of the stories is obtainable. The stories are the major feature of the book. By employing the technique of "problem solving" the stories demonstrate the use for the student. He then practices the technique in the exercises at the end of the story. The stories describe universal problems, so though written eleven years ago, and a bit below the level of our students now, they have the potential to carry through their intent. The five categories of activity

that follow each story conform with optimum methodology to promote class discussion and peak pupil interest. J.L. Childs presents a list of suggestions, which tested most efficient for classroom discussion of values. The categories used in the text include all of Child's major suggestions.<sup>8</sup>

The major criticism of methodology is this: The book aims at teaching ethics, but nowhere is there anything that resembles a survey of various existing philosophies of value (ethics). Ethics is not presented as a discipline. The book does not teach ethics, nor does it give insights into various ethical systems so that the student might work towards developing his own ethical system. Russell shows how such a systematic presentation should accompany the "cause and effect discussion technique" in that it involves the ideas and ideals presented intellectually as part of the organized subject matter of the course. Russell holds that reading about systematic value systems helps develop the child's own value system.<sup>9</sup>

The implied philosophy of the text will now be considered. What is the criteria which the author uses as a basis for consideration of what is "right" or "wrong," "good" or "bad?" At first it might be assumed that the text is based on naturalistic ethics; that the correct response is perceivable in the nature of things. However, this view is discounted when Jewish sources are presented as if they had the force of absolute authority. It might be assumed that situational ethics, a form of relativism, was the philosophic base, as the characters in the stories seem to choose the good without reference to any system or person of external authority. Nowhere does the author link the philosophic base of the book to the essentials of Reform Judaism. There is a hazy tendency operative in this text; we shall try to guess its basis.

Above it has been said that inherent in Reform Judaism is the opportunity to rationally pick and choose elements from various of the past Jewish systems and use these elements as a guide for contemporary and future moral responses. This book exhibits the unspecified implication that the "best" parts of all these past Jewish systems have merged into an idealized amalgum from which a Jew is to receive direction and to which the Jew owes some sort of unspecified allegiance. It seems assumed that parts of these past systems have merged into an idealized "essence of Judaism;" this essence having some sort of authority. This is not a revealed authority which grows out of an "ought." The case for "ought is never made.

Whatever the philisophic base of the author, it should be defined. Then the author can go on to show the relationship of the ethical system basic to the text to the other various possible ethical systems from which a Reform Jew may build his own theory of morals.

#### B. Keeping Posted

The Reform curriculum has no recommended textbook for the eighth grade course in "Social Ethics." Rather it is suggested that the bi-weekly periodical, Keeping Posted, be used as a source from which to draw material for discussion on social ethics. <sup>10</sup> The magazine has grown from a "current events" centered publication to one that also includes discussions on issues relating to the Reform Jewish teenager, as well as articles designed to deepen and reinforce classroom instruction.

Although general material is also intended to be drawn from the eight page magazine for application to the consideration of "Social Ethics," there are two regular features that are especially designed

for this purpose: (1) "What Do You Think?", and (2) "Let's Face the Issue." The intent of these items seems to be to motivate the teenager towards "an examination of life" by challenging him to make thoughtful decisions on contemporary issues and to encourage students to discuss the ethical situations arising out of these issues. Also it aims at allowing students to bring their own life experiences into the discussion, thus applying ethical theory to their own problems.

Let us consider the methodology. As in the Freehof text, the technique employed in these items is also "problem solving." This is directed towards the reader in "What Do You Think" and it is demonstrated in "Let's Face the Issue." In the latter the reactions of students, usually a confirmation class of a specific temple, to the problem under consideration are printed, so that the reader may either have a referent with which to compare his views, or consider a number of different responses from which he can make his own judgement. The method seems well suited to promote class discussion and to put the students into a decision making situation.

However, selected items from a bi-weekly magazine is a woefully inadequate source upon which to base the teaching of ethics. This method does not inform. It merely provides for the opportunity for reaction. We must teach the skills and convey the information necessary to make rational ethical decisions. A proper textbook is a priority for this course.

The implied philosophy of the text will now be considered. Here too, we are at a loss to determine the basis for making decisions on the problems posed. How is "Good" and "Bad" determined? To a much lesser extent than in the Freehof book, there seems to be an undercurrent of the idea that "x" is the Jewish thing to do. Here too, that mysterious amalgam

of the idealized essence of all past Jewish systems seems to be exerting a subliminal force. An opportunity to teach the philosophy of morals to teenagers is missing. A sort of behaviorist-oriented report on a variety of possible responses to a specific situation is demonstrated.

C. The Still Small Voice (The Story of Jewish Ethics)

The Still Small Voice Today (Jewish Ethical Living)

These two books by William B. Silverman are suggested for possible supplementary work in ethics for the ninth grade. <sup>11</sup> They will be considered together as they are really part of one work, separated by time and could be called volumes I and II.

From the author's forward in the Still Small Voice, we learn that the purpose of the book is: to offer an introduction to the subject of "applied Jewish Ethics;" to give moral insights derived from the Bible or Rabbinic Literature, to highlight the significance of Judaism as a way of life by statements and quotations from contemporary Jewish thought and literature, and finally, to challenge the students to quest for an understanding of Judaism as a living faith applicable to all phases of their life. In his forward to The Still Small Voice Today, the author adds the goals of affording an insight into the ethical teachings of "post biblical religious literature" and the "sacred institutions of Judaism," and strengthening Jewish youth in the search for "an answer to a divine mystery; the mystery of the 'Still Small Voice.'"

Let's examine the content of the books, discovering in the process the values communicated. The author uses a quasi narrative technique. The reader follows the members of a particular religious school class as they

considered the material presented by "Rabbi Mayer." The reader shares their reactions, their questions, their insights. Following each story at the end of the chapter is a variety of activities, excercises, statements, case histories, questions and suggested readings, meant to motivate and reinforce the main item considered by the class.

The author's covert purpose seems to be to establish a close relationship between the reader and the "God-given," "God-inspired" literature which is under consideration. Namely: Torah (here the five books), prophetic literature, psalms, the wisdom literature, pirke avot, talmud and midresh. This list is extended in The Still Small Voice Today. From each body of literature the author excerpts certain inherent ethical systems. In The Still Small Voice Today, the same purpose seems evident. Here, through the vehical of the fictional class in pursuit of the "still small voive", the author makes a systematic consideration of: The ethics of Jewish Worship, the ethics of the synagogue, the ethics of Holydays and Festivals, the ethics of the codes, Hebrew ethical wills, the ethics of the Jewish moralists, mustics, and philosophers. Also considered are the ethics of the Hasidim, ehnics of Jewish beliefs, the ethics of social action and the ethics of the messianic age.

Let us consider methodology. We will first determine if the author has met his pre-stated goals. Two of the six goals stated above have been met. The author has offered moral insights drawn from the Bible and Rabbinic Literature. He has given insight into the ethical teachings of the post biblical religious literature. However, the intent and direction of the other goals seem ambiguous and confusing. These goals do not seem to be compatable to the philosophy of Reform Judaism, discussed above. There is a confusion. More then an ethics textbook, these volumes seem to be a survey course in selected Jewish literature with an attempt made by the

author to help the reader relate to these selected writings. Perhaps the author is trying to help the student understand what Judaism is and to understand his own Jewishness. Perhaps the author is defining ethics as the following of all precepts and statutes in past Jewish systems. However, the goals seem confused. One cannot help but feel that students might be similarly confused.

As opposed to the other texts under consideration, Silverman uses the technique of "discovery;" not problem-solving. He leads the reader through a series of puzzle-like steps to a pre-determined conclusion.

A confusion exists as to the age level at which these books are aimed. While the narrative stories seem to be written below the level of the ninth grade student, the lists of selections and quotations, uninterpreted and unexplained, seem aimed at a more mature readership.

The method of instruction, even with provision for personal response to questions, is catechism-like. There appears to be a right, a good, a value that is inherent in each selection of literature or institution considered. If all the steps are followed correctly the student moves toward discovering the "Still, Small Voice" which seems to equal truth, if not divinity. No provision is made to developing the individual's capacity for decision directed through self. Open-ended possibilities do not exist.

The implied philosophy of the text will now be considered. Silverman seems to be a theistic absolutist. The basis for ethical decision seems to be the "spark" of divinity inherent in the systems under consideration. There seems to be no room for the "rational choice" which we have shown to be so important in Reform Judaism. The good is to be discovered



in the documents. As in the other texts there is an implication that Judaism is one system. It is collective, undifferentiated. It seems to generate its own authority. These texts, as they stand, without clear cut, strong, qualification by a knowledgeable teacher, do not seem to have a place in the curriculum of the Reform religious school.

We have seen some of the inherent problems in the recommended textbooks used in our religious schools. We have seen that many facets of these textbooks are inhibiting, preventing the student's awareness of his moral obligations, and preventing him from developing his capacity for moral choices.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NATURE OF ETHICS: BACKGROUND FOR ETHICS INSTRUCTION

Chapters one and two were concerned with the pragmatic problems encountered in current ethics instruction in Reform religious schools and with specific suggestions for the improvement of this instruction. Chapter three will be an attempt, in survey fashion, to acquaint the teacher with a more specific understanding of ethics as a discipline. Obviously, this is intended to enrich the teachers background so that his teaching might be more effective. Constant attempt will be made to relate topics under consideration to application in the Reform religious school. Attempt will be made to relate the discussion to the tasks facing the student as he tries to understand ethics as a discipline.

#### A. To What Does The Term, "Ethics" Refer?

In order for instruction to be clear and specific it is important that the instructor specifically define the basic terms of the course. In asking the question, "to what does the term ethic refer?" the instructor must be aware that there is no single definitive answer. Rether, many definitions and explanations can be examined for the purpose of securing an insight that will help the individual evolve the definition that will be most meaningful for him and for his students.

For the purpose of this overview, the following definitions and explanations of ethics are presented: Ethics has been defined as,  
"the examination of life."<sup>12</sup> It has been referred to as, "the science of conduct."<sup>13</sup> In these definitions ethics is seen as a systematic inquiry into man's moral behavior. It is seen as an attempt to discover

the rules that ought to govern human action and the "good" that is worth seeking in life. Others would describe ethics differently. Lazarus, who wrote from the viewpoint of an Orthodox Jew, said that the purpose of ethics was: to assign definite boundaries to all human instincts "clamoring for satisfaction," to establish order among contradicting demands and to harmonize "...the opposing claims that arise in social intercourse."<sup>14</sup> Still others have said that ethics is a study, or discipline, which concerns itself with judgements of approval or disapproval, "...rightness or wrongness...goodness or badness, virtue or vice, the desirability or wisdom of action, dispositions, ends, objects or states of affairs."<sup>15</sup>

At this point it might be helpful to acknowledge the confusion about the exact meaning of the term "ethics" as opposed to the term "morality." Among philosophers it had been the custom, and still practiced by some today, to confine the terms morals and morality to the realm of theory. Ethics, then, was the "theoretical examination of morals."<sup>16</sup> However, here the practice of many modern writers, who make no differentiation between the terms ethics and morals, will be followed. Thus, ethics can be referred to as a moral philosophy or a theory of morals.

The necessity for the Reform Jewish student to build his capacity for ethical decision making has been referred to in the discussion of Reform Judaism above. With this in mind, some of the theories concerning the way moral choices are made will now be examined.

#### B. How Are Moral Choices Made?

Casuistry is the technical name given to the process whereby

man applies his moral principles to a specific situation and makes a moral decision that is a function of his principles. Casuistry is the discovery of what things are morally good or morally bad. It is the means by which we perceive what actions, things, events or states of affairs are right.<sup>17</sup> The student is familiar with the term, value judgement. When a person makes a value judgement of an ethical nature, he is employing casuistry.

For meaningful ethics instruction it is important that the teacher, and ultimately the student, be aware of the different theories on how these value judgements, these moral choices, are made. For this reason the following definitions and explanations are given: Ethics may be concerned with a psychological or sociological analysis of our moral choices. Here the intent is to discover the basis for approval or disapproval. Of what does approval or disapproval consist? There is an attempt to understand why man approves or disapproves a specific act or thing. This direction may be seen in the ethics of Hume<sup>18</sup> and Schopenhauer<sup>19</sup>. The study of moral judgements may also be concerned with the establishment or recommendation of certain courses of action with the pursuit of certain actions, ultimate goals or ways of living. This is the basis for moral judgement. Here, one views these courses of action as right, or good, or virtuous, or wise, as opposed to other actions which are wrong, or bad, or vicious or foolish. This approach is demonstrated in the ethics of Kant.<sup>20</sup> In this view the interest is more in action than approval of action, more in guidance than in the explanation of the action. This has direct relevance for instruction in the religious school. It should be discussed for its importance to the philosophy of Reform Judaism. The main purpose here is to arrive at, and set up, some ideal standard of

conduct. An ideal end, a summum bonum, is searched for. The evolution of an overall ethical criterion, or first principle, is the goal. The teacher should be aware that some moralists who take this approach deny that ethics is a cognitive science or discipline. These moralists hold that such ethical first principles are merely preferences and not the results of intensive examination and decision. By inferring that such first principles are preferences they hold that they cannot be judged true or false. This view can be seen in the ethics of men like Nietzsche<sup>21</sup>,  
Santayana<sup>22</sup> or Russell<sup>23</sup>.

### C. A Discussion Of The Term, "Good"

The definition of the term good, and a discussion about the nature of goodness will be an important foundation for ethics instruction in the religious school. If moral choices are based on the good, good must be reduced to definable terms. Thus, this survey must pose the question, "Is good definable?" Further, is goodness subjective or objective; relative or absolute? If the good is known there is a basis for casuistry. To this end the attempt to define good has taken many different directions.

In an attempt at insight we will examine a few diverse definitions of "good": The emotive theories of A.J. Ayer, for example, hold that "good" and other value terms have only emotive meanings.<sup>24</sup>

Intuitionists and non-naturalists often hold that goodness is an undefinable intrinsic, and therefore objective or absolute property.<sup>25</sup> This can be seen in the work of G.E. Moore<sup>26</sup>, W.D. Ross and N. Hartman<sup>27</sup>. Metaphysical and naturalistic moralists usually hold that goodness can be defined in metaphysical or in psychological terms. Here, the statement that x is good usually means that a certain attitude is taken towards x

by some mind or groups of minds. For some, value is objective or absolute in the sense of having the same locus for everybody. For example, Aristotle's definition of the good is that which all things aim, as seen in his Ethics Book I. For others, the locus of values varies. Here it is felt that different things will be good for different individuals or groups. These views can be seen in the ethics of Hobbs<sup>28</sup>, William James<sup>29</sup> and R.B. Perry<sup>30</sup>.

Moving now from the discussion of the nature of the good, the question is now posed, "what things are good?". In the classroom instruction this will involve the application of ones derived moral principles to specific situations. If the nature of the good is known by an individual he can readily apply this principle to any situation demanding a moral resolution.

Historically, application of moral principle is the main issue between those who say good is pleasure, satisfaction, or some state of feeling, and between those who say that virtue is a state of will or knowledge, or a state of intellect. Lets look at two differing positions. Holding the good to be pleasure of satisfaction are some of the Sophists, the hedonists and the epicurians. One can see aspects of this in the ethical writings of Hobbs<sup>31</sup>, Hume<sup>32</sup> and Mill<sup>33</sup>. Holding virtue, or knowledge, or both to be good or supremely good are Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.<sup>34</sup> This can be seen in the ethical writing of Hegel.

#### D. A Discussion Of The Term, "Obligation"

There are certain types of moral judgements in which the consideration of the good is not the primary faction. One such judgement deals with the concept of "obligation." Here too, casuistry is involved when man attempts to determine what he ought to do in response to a speci-

fied situation. We are concerned with judgements of obligation. We consider judgements as to the obligatoriness, the wisdom, or the foolishness of various courses of action and kinds of conduct. Judgements are made enjoining, recommending or condemning certain lines of conduct. In the theory of obligation one may be interested in analyzing and explaining our various judgements of obligation or setting forth certain courses of action as "the wise," the "right," etc. In the meaning of obligation we find the same kind of question as obtained in the theory of value; (i.e. emotive, intuitive, specific attitude).

Obligation is also defined as meaning that act which is conducive to the welfare of society as a whole. How then, do we know what acts are right, or what acts should be done? Ethical theories concerning this can be put into two categories. Axiloligical theories is when one tries to determine what is right entirely by reference to the goodness or value of a particular thing. Thus, the theory of obligation is dependent on the theory of value in consideration of motive, comparative amount of good, and that which is most conducive to the good of the person or group involved. Deontological theories is when one attempts to pose what one is obligated to do. He refers to any ethical system which doesn't make the theory of obligation entirely dependent on the theory of value. An action may be considered to be obligatory without the consideration of the goodness of anything. It is what we ought to do.

This brief survey has by no means meant to be thorough. It has attempted to give insight into some of the specific problems that are dealt with in the discipline of ethics. It is hoped that the reader will pursue the references given with the brief problem-statements so as to make his teaching more effective. Here again, the discussion is meant to

be demonstrative, so that the teacher will extract those items that will give a better understanding of the tasks and skills needed to evolve an ethical system that is compatable with the philosophy of Reform Judaism.



## CHAPTER IV

## ETHICAL SYSTEMS; ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE

A consideration of the search for the "good" was presented above. Such a search is not necessary in an authoritarian ethical system. In this kind of system the good is defined for the individual who accepts the system. Authority becomes an ethical principle when the "good" and the "right" are not determined by a person's will or desire but in accordance with an external specific objective entity. The entity is given the authority, the power and the right to expect conformity by the subject to an external code. The inherent truth of the code is verified by the nature of that entity.

Unlike Reform Judaism, ethical authoritarianism is the type of moral philosophy that results when authoritarian criteria are taken to be fundamental. These are criteria that justify actions by appeal to an authority external to the subject.

## A. A Discussion of External Authorities

Revealed Scripture, a revered leader, tradition, customs, civil laws are diverse examples of external authority. The most frequently defended authoritarian ethics is based on the authority of God.<sup>35</sup> Often found in periods of relative stability is an authoritarian ethics based on custom and tradition. The practice of one's social or ethnic group seems to define moral good and evil. This is especially true if the group is large and its practices have been longstanding, and if the subject relates to the group.<sup>36</sup>

In a discussion of various external authorities, Fromm makes a classification of two types. "Rational authority" draws its power from its competence. If the person functions well in the task with which he is entrusted, his authority is respected. Rational authority is always tem-

porary. Its acceptance depends on performance subject to scrutiny and criticism. It is most common in political institutions. The second type, "irrational authority," has power over the people as its source. This power can be physical or it can be abstract, with anxiety or helplessness being the lot of those under its authority. Power, fear and dependence are hall marks of the irrational authority. Criticism of the authority is forbidden.<sup>37</sup>

Formally, authoritarian ethics denies man's capacity to decide what is good or bad. The norm giver is always an authority transcending the subject. Such a system is not based on reason, but on the subject's awe of the authority, his feeling of weakness or dependence, on his surrender of his right to make decisions to the authority. Materially, or according to content, authoritarian ethics answers the question of what is good or bad primarily in terms of the interest of the authority, not the interest of the subject, although the subject may derive considerable psychic or material benefits from the arrangement.<sup>38</sup>

It is obvious that the above discussion could concern the individual's surrender of areas of his own authority to many different institutions. For our purposes we will deal with the transfer of that right to ecclesiastical institutions; namely to what has been designated in some circles as divinely revealed scripture (written and oral) and to institutions which are said to stem directly from the verbal revelation from God to man. Here we imply that moral values, norms, principles, and laws that stem from these institutions are universally valid objects of acknowledgment.<sup>39</sup> Implicit here is the assertion that objective, absolute truth is possible.

## B. Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism will be considered as an example of an absolute, authoritarian system. The Orthodox Jew must affirm the following position: There is one eternally true and valid moral code. This code applies with rigid impartiality to all Jews. Further, there is but one law, one standard, one morality for all Jews and this standard is absolute and unvarying. Orthodox Judaism is a system where Torah is viewed as the "Jewish design for living."<sup>40</sup> All of Torah (the ecclesiastically sanctioned written and oral law, including its sanctioned embellishments) is binding upon the Orthodox Jew. Unlike Reform Judaism, ethical decisions are not required; only conformity with ethical responses already prescribed, is necessary. For the Orthodox Jew God is the source of this moral code; the specific ethical decisions. He has revealed his will through communication with man and for the Orthodox Jew the communication is embodied in Torah.

For the Orthodox Jew, the implied ethical system in the book of Amos, for example, represents the will of God, perceived and recorded by Amos:

1. Do not sell righteous and needy people as slaves for financial gain.
2. Do not oppress the poor and afflicted.
3. A man and his father may not have sex with the same woman.
4. Do not take advantage of the poor through legal measures.

(Amos II: 6-8)

The important issue isn't whether these and other injunctions lead man to the "good" and "right," rather their worth for the Orthodox Jew is determined by the fact that they come from God.

The following is the ethical system (God given for the Orthodox Jew) implicit in the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus:

1. Be holy (like your God)
2. Revere your parents
3. Observe the Sabbath
4. Do not make idols (to worship)
5. Leave part of your harvest for the poor and the wayfarer
6. Don't steal
7. Don't deal falsely or lie to your fellow man
8. Don't rob your neighbor
9. Pay your workers at the end of each day's work
10. Don't take advantage of handicapped people

As one examines the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus one sees an inherent ethical system that seems to be very close to what we would call the nonnormative ethics of western culture. However, for the Orthodox Jew the following ethics, also from Leviticus 20, have as much weight as the injunctions above. Obedience, not reason, is the criterion.

1. Do not allow different breeds of cattle to crossbreed
2. Don't wear a garment made of two kinds of material
3. Don't eat any meat with blood in it
4. Don't trim the hair around your temples.

Starting with verse 10, of the 20th chapter of Leviticus, an ethical system is presented that explains under which circumstances people should be put to death. For the Orthodox Jew, the following are God Given:

1. If a man has sex with his wife and his mother-in-law, all three must be burnt, (Verse 14).
2. If two consenting male adults have homosexual relations, both of them shall be put to death, (Verse 13).
3. A man or woman that is a wizard or medium shall be stoned to death, (Verse 27).

One who views the Bible with absolute authority must not question the "good," the "right," the "value" of these codes. Similarly this injunction from Deuteronomy 21:18ff:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and, through they chastise him, will not give heed to them. Then shall his father and mother bring him out to the elders of the city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of the city, 'this our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard'. Then all the men of the city shall stone him with stones.

Through the acceptance of the "oral law" as divinely inspired, Pharasaic Judaism worked out a system of ethical injunctions and were able to soften the more brutal aspects of written law. As an example, the selection above from Deuteronomy was softened with the discussion found in Sanhedrin VIII 5, and Sanhedrin 72a. Here every conceivable means was employed to circumscribe the problem until it would have finally been impossible to secure a conviction of the offending son. In the Talmud, Sanhedrin 72a, the entire matter was treated as hypothetical and academic, and it was argued that the execution of the son (in this case) prevents murder and protects a potential victim; that there would have been a victim taken for granted.

From this we see how problems result in ethics instruction from an unclear position regarding the "Truth" of Scripture. Students must be brought to an authentic understanding of their relationship to the ethical systems of the Bible. In the classroom and in textbooks should Bible and oral law be accepted as divine, authoritative and absolute? This position is not in concert with the principles of Reform Judaism. This means that if the Bible is to be considered authoritative, because it came

from God, whose ethical precepts are authoritative and absolute, than all the ethical precepts are authoritative and absolute, and all the ethical precepts found in the Bible have the force of "irrational authority" as defined above by Fromm.

Unless one is prepared to accept the concept of the divine revelation of Torah, or unless one is prepared to prove process for discriminating between those precepts which were divinely revealed, and those precepts which were man made, then it is absurd to claim verbal divine origin (absolutism and or authoritarianism) for specific statutes while eliminating others. It is easy for the Orthodox Jew to extract specific ethical systems from oral law that seem in concert with Western cultural norms:

1. Who is a hero, he who conquers his will---Mishnah Avot, 4.1
2. The world exists only out of self restraint in strife---  
Hullin, 89a
3. Happy is he who controls his inclination---Avodah Zara, 19a
4. Be not wicked in your own esteem---Mishnah Avot, 2.13
5. One pang of conscience is worth more than many lashes---  
Berakot, 7a
6. Remove the burrs from yourself before you remove them from  
others---Baba Batra, 60a
7. He who deceives or lies to man is as if he deceives or lies  
to God---Sifre Num. Naso 2, 2a
8. One must not promise to give something to a child, and not  
give it to him, because thus he is taught to lie---Avot, 46a
9. The hypocrites fall into Gehinnom---Sota, 41b
10. Anyone who robs widows and orphans is as if he robbed God---  
Exodus Rabbah, Mish. 30, 8

One could extract elaborate lists of appropriate responses and compulsory commandments from the literature to which the Orthodox Jew is bound, but to which the Reform Jew might choose to accept as directive. However, because Torah is seen as authoritarian and absolute, the Orthodox

Jew is required to follow debilitating legislation. For example, the laws which give women lower status and puts them under sometimes horrifying circumstances in cases of divorce, or death of husband. As just one other example, one would have to regard a deaf person (and treat him in matters of law) as one would an imbecile or a minor (Holin 86a), not to be trusted with important matters; to deny him many religious privileges (Yebamot 109, 113a, Gitin 71a). The logical conclusion to which an Orthodox Jew would have to carry these disabilities was shown in a shocking incident in Israel last year as reported in the Jewish Chronicle:

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A deaf and dumb man, already married, wed his sister-in-law in Ashdod last week and divorced 24 hours later, with the sole aim of obviating the need for him to participate in the chalitza ceremony.

In the case of the deaf and dumb man, the difficulty was in his inability to pronounce the chalitza formula so that the widow could remarry. The two chief rabbis of Israel decided that there would have to be a 24 hour marriage followed, after consummation, by divorce. Without even making a value judgment as to the "right" or "wrong" involved, this gives insight into the consequences an Orthodox Jew might endure while carrying out prescribed, authoritarian statutes. Choice is not involved here.

For the contemporary Orthodox Jew the system is the same as for the Pharasaic Jew. One need only look at the Shulchan Aruch to be aware of the compulsory ethical responses already programmed for most life situations. It has been argued that by the means of the Shulchan Aruch the Jew can be assured that he is living the holy life. But through the Shulchan Aruch and the concept of verbally revealed Torah, which is its base, the Orthodox Jew lives the unexamined life. He chooses this like view, but once he transfers his internal authority to the "irrational authority"

operative in Orthodoxy, for him ethics instruction consists of memorising the ecclesiastically sanctioned responses.

### C. Authority: A Function of Revelation

It has been shown that the type of revelation necessary to support divine authorship of (and commensurate authority with) Torah, as defined and followed by Orthodox Jews, is termed "verbal revelation." We have seen that the system springing from "verbal revelation" is alien to the essence of Reform Judaism. As a step towards an examination of relativism it will be helpful to make an examination of different categories of revelation. In this, we will follow the model suggested by Reines.

Verbal revelation suggests that a communication from God (or divine mind(s) ) is perceived and recorded or preserved by human beings. The communication is in the form of words so that the words as well as the composite ideas have the sanction of divinity. In this case not only the ideas in (e.g.) Torah are binding, but the words that express the ideas are also binding. Therefore, verbal revelation is infallible and not susceptible to change or embellishment, except through the medium of further verbal revelation. We have shown that this is unacceptable in Reform Judaism. Dynamic Revelation is either a product of God's influence as perceived through man's natural faculties, such as reason or imagination, or is the report of men who have seen some divinely inspired event. In this case, we would say that part of Torah is inspired by God, while other parts are produced by man. Thus, one could choose to ignore those parts produced by man and give credence to those parts considered divinely inspired (the timeless and universal). This view makes the concept of revelation fallible. Since determination of which parts of Torah are divinely



revealed and which parts are not is done by man in following ages, and since human reason is considered fallible, the content of Torah that is chosen as divine is always dubious. The constant question will be: Which part of Torah is divine in origin and which part is human? Here we move towards the importance of "the examination of life" upon which to make a choice. Natural Revelation is considered to be "the response and creation of human minds in their search through history for values, purposes and divinity in life and existence."<sup>45</sup> Viewing Torah as an example of natural revelation, one may accept and reject ideas and words at will. We now view revelation as a product of human minds and as such it is entirely fallible. Therefore, all notions in Torah are subject to change and development. There is no claim for any part of the revelation to be divinely inspired.

Thus, we see that dynamic and natural revelation could fit into the scope of Reform Judaism. In either case, to greater or lesser degrees, the document of Torah is fallible, and therefore not by nature authoritarian. Moving towards an understanding of the individual's response to life situations, with or without scriptural guide, we now go to a consideration of ethical relativism which will give us further insight into the tasks and opportunities implicit in Reform Judaism.

#### D. Ethical Relativism

Here we imply that ethical truths are relative as opposed to rigid and absolute. "That the rightness of an action and the goodness of an object depend on or consist in the attitude taken towards it by some individual or group, and from group to group."<sup>46</sup> Stace's discussion of relativism takes the following line: Any ethical position which denies that there is a single moral standard, applicable to all men may be called a species of ethical relativism. There is not one moral law, code or standard.

All standards are subjective. We will examine this concept in order to better understand Reform Judaism.

There are four general points that could be made in favor of ethical relativism: First, there have been a great many different moral standards in the past as well as the present. Any attempt to judge one as better than another is based on bias of our own. Secondly, the view that moral judgements are based on emotions has given support to the position of the ethical relativists. Emotions change from time to time in the same individual although he might remain in the same situation. Also, different individuals feel different emotions even when in the same situation. Thirdly, the notion of moral judgment being absolute has been shown to be unrealistic by the logical positivists; (radical empiricists). They hold that if a judgment is to have meaning the words of which it consists must refer to things which are directly experienced by the senses, or are analysable into things which are directly experienced by the senses. They hold that the notion of "ought" is incapable of being analyzed. Thus, their position is that moral judgments are not really judgments but commands, or wishes, or explanations made by the subject. Finally, ethical relativists point to a lack of agreement among those who espouse absolute ethics concerning the basis upon which their ethics are founded. They cannot agree, or prove, the source of a universally binding moral code.

There are those who would oppose any notion of the possibility of a relativistic system because such a system implies that man is free and that this implication is nonsense in this post-Freudian world. They would argue that the conflagration of the force of the "pleasure principle" (eros) and the "reality principle" (dynamic repression) saps man's energy and opportunity for choice. Also they would feel that in our subconscious, compulsive search for childhood regained (escaping work + death-seeking depend-

dence + eros), there is no freedom to choose. But to the extent that we can discover eros and play in the midst of repressive society; to the extent that we can forego dependency and know that we can find meaning in life in and through ourselves; we achieve a freedom and from this freedom we can make choices. In this view, ethics is not only "an examination of Life" which can result in the good choice, the best choice, the true choice. It can lead to the real choice and this leads the subject to authenticity.

A relativistic system which includes the potential for authenticity through choice will now be examined, so as to serve as a model which may lead our students to a better understanding of their task as Reform Jews.

#### E. Situational Ethics

Arising, phoenix-like, from the "ashes of deity" after the assault of the "Death of God" theologians in Protestant religions, situational ethics (or "new morality" or "contextual ethics") was at first the frustrated attempt to deny deity's passing and allow him to "live on earth in the acts of goodness (they) performed, and in the hearts of those who cherish (their) memory." This explanation is burlesqued to draw attention to the way in which the two popularizers of situational ethics (Robinson and Fletcher) have distorted and burlesqued its essence with their overdependence on the emotive term, agape, or "love."

Situation ethics will be used as a model because of its value as a pedagogic device for the students in our religious school. They are very much aware of the existence of "the new morality" though they know the popularized version. By attempting to arrive at the essence of this known system it is hoped that they can be moved to a better understanding of the essence of Reform Judaism, utilizing the concept of relativism as a demon-

strative tool.

F. Situational Ethics: The Popular (Mis) Conception

As popularized by Robinson in Honest to God<sup>48</sup> and by Fletcher in Situational Ethics<sup>49</sup> this system is seen as a new thrust in "Christian Ethics" stressing the primacy of love without law. It is explained as a reaction against the "old morality" of laws, rules and principles as guides to moral conduct. The system begins with the specific problem situation rather than with laws, principles or rules. That is, what God would have the Christian do (what Jesus would have done) in the moment of the specific problem situation. The response is determined without reliance on laws of conduct but with only "love" as the guiding principle. Decisions have primacy, not conclusions.

Fletcher argues that there are only three approaches to follow in making moral decisions: The legalistic is the apparatus of prefabricated rules and regulations or organized religion. Antinomianism is a lawless or unprincipled approach like libertinism. A contemporary example would be seen in the four volume work, The Playboy Philosophy.<sup>50</sup> The last approach is the situational where there is an in situ decision based on "love."<sup>51</sup>

Robinson's major points could be abstracted in the following: First, the old morality is deductive, beginning with absolute, unchanging, eternally valid standards. Secondly, the new morality emphasizes the priority of persons over principles. And finally, the new morality is inductive and begins from "unselfregarding agape" in the particular situation.<sup>52</sup>

The popular image of situational ethics is an easy target for

for critics who rely only on Robinson and Fletcher for a notion of the essence of the system. Ofcourse, it is foolish to try to reduce all of the various Christian systems to an emotive term like agape. Further, the question could be put, if the system is people centered and situation oriented; why include an emotive term like agape? Why not merely take an existentialist attitude? Further, the question might be put; if the system is really relativistic, why bother with the term, agape? Then too, to infer that the "Christian thing to do" can be found in the specific situation seems like a naturalistic theory where one attempts to perceive the inherent good. Finally, if the system is relativistic, people, rather than institution oriented, why limit it to a Christian system? To answer these questions, one must understand the essential nature of situational ethics, currently defined.

#### G. Situational Ethics Explained: A Model for Ethics Instruction

To understand this system one must go back to the writings of Bultmann, who in turn was influenced by the late work of Bonhoeffer. Then one must come forward proceeding past Fletcher and Robinson to Pike and to the school of "New Theology" starting with Altizer and coming forward to Shinn. This new morality grew out of the devastation of Christian theologians who could no longer believe in the "up there, out there" God who had been conceived as the author of the scripture upon which they depended for their security and meaning in life. Agape was a means to achieve an unfortunate attempt to keep alive what these theologians believed was the essence of what the Scripture was attempting to achieve. The God of a verbal revelation was gone for them and they were trying to preserve the idealization of that revelation. These theologians now use other, more meaningful terms. They talk about the choice in the situation leading man

to his optic possibility for authenticity. Here the emphasis is on man's choosing who he is. They talk about man's "intentionality," his search for authentic selfhood. Like the existentialists they talk about a subject's being is a possibility of being.

There is a difference between the situationalists and the existentialists. In this difference, we see a similarity to the position of Reform Judaism. The Christian theologian advocating the new morality might still use the old term agape but now it symbolizes that he is working out of a reference which is called Christian. He need have no loyalty to any Christian system, past or present. He denies the Jesus myth. The word God might have no meaning for him. Nevertheless, he might see past Christian systems as an attempt by man to find sanctity in life, to find values, to evolve a code of life that would blunt life's hardships. He might extrapolate certain values from these various systems that guide his life and give him a basis upon which to make moral judgments. However, in the moment of decision, he is prepared to ignore his guides and standards if a specific decision, outside the limits of these, seems to be more in concert with the good, or the right, or the true, as he perceives it.

The movement in situational ethics now seems to be towards an individual understanding his own position vis-a-via God and Scripture. Then that individual trains himself to make the situational decision. An example of training to make the situational decision is seen in Pike's You and the New Morality, 74 Cases.<sup>53</sup> Cases with open-ended possibilities are posed and the individual comments on alternative possibilities. The cases for the following: First, they bring an individual to his own view and relation towards Scripture in terms of authority or literature. Secondly, it gives an over-

view of some of the basic elements in the discipline of ethics. The book also encourages a person to exercise his own authority in moral decisions. It demonstrates that a person has possibilities with matters of a sexual nature. Finally, the book attempts to dispel "handovers" from the old (authoritarian) morality.

Pikes book shows us a direction for our own instruction in our own classrooms. We must assist our students in understanding their identity as Jews. We show them what part past systems and scripture can play in their quest for identity. We help them decide how to use scripture and past systems as a guide for moral decision. Consequently, the student must have a firm understanding of the nature of Reform Judaism and an understanding of their freedom as Reform Jews.

#### H. Implications for Ethics Instruction in Reform Religious Schools

This work points to the following implications for instruction in ethics in our religious schools: The student should be given a clear understanding of the nature of Reform Judaism. He should be trained to begin to develop his own concept of Reform within the broad possibilities available. He should be brought to an understanding of his position vis a vis the literature and the codes of past Jewish systems. Through his freedom in Reform Judaism, the student should be encouraged to embark on a perpetual "examination of life." In order to best make moral judgements, he should be acquainted with the discipline of ethics. The student should be exposed to decision-making situations as part of his formal training. He should investigate the scope of his social responsibilities. Contemporary situational ethics can be used as a model for the student to best understand the processes operative in his Reform Judaism.

The ethics instruction should be aimed at bringing a student to an understanding of truth that can be perceived. He should be helped to actualize his potential, reaching his authentic self through rational examination. This ethics instruction should enable the student to make value judgements of an ethical nature, based on meaningful moral principles, and to carry out the consequences of these judgements.

#### <sup>54</sup> I. Sample Lesson Plan for Ethics Instruction

##### "The Ten Commandments and Ethical Response"

#### I. Objectives:

- A. To provide the student with an opportunity to apply knowledge gained from academic instruction in the discipline of ethics to existential problems.
  1. To help the student better understand the implications of absolute and relative ethical systems in his own life situations.
  2. To reinforce the student's academic understanding of ethics through the consideration of decision-oriented cases and the application of the principles operative in these cases to the student's own life experiences.
- B. To help the student develop his ongoing concept of the nature of Reform Judaism.
  1. To help the student work towards understanding the role of Scripture in determining ethical responses.
  2. To help the student understand his freedom as a Reform Jew for making a moral choice, and to develop his capacities to deal with that freedom.
  3. To enable the student to apply the academic instruction on the nature of Reform Judaism to specific concrete situations



- C. To show the student that for the Reform Jew scripture alone cannot supply the basis for in situ moral decision.
1. To use the Ten Commandments as a model for the possibilities of Scripture.
  2. To help the student see the ways that Scripture can be utilized as one of many factors that determine ethical response.
  3. Provide a consideration of the other factors that can be joined with scripture in formulating ethical response.

## II. Motivation

- A. Present a consideration of "close ended" case histories in which the obvious ethical choice required is in direct conflict with one of the Ten Commandments.
1. Challenge the students to defend the "breaking of the commandments" in each specific case.
    - a. Show the relative nature of the Ten Commandments.
    - b. Invite students to share experiences (personal or non-personal) where it was imperative to "break these or other Mitzvot.
  2. Challenge the students to explain how ignoring certain of the Commandments in certain situations is within the possibilities of Reform Judaism.
  3. Briefly discuss the three instances in which an Orthodox Jew is permitted to ignore the sixth commandment: pikuach nefesh, idolotry and incest.
    - a. Demonstrate the method of extrapolating the principle of abrogating this commandment and its wider application in

## Reform Judaism.

- B. Present a consideration of "open ended" cases in which the students have to make the complicated decision of whether or not to break one of the Ten Commandments.
  - 1. Challenge the students to defend and explain their decision.
  - 2. Discover is certain of those who opted not to break the commandments see the Commandments as absolute or whether other factors were operative in the decision.
    - a. Providing a reinforcement of the consideration of absolute vs. negativism.
    - b. Looking for other factors which could lead to the decision of not breaking the Commandments.
- C. A pre-assigned debate-discussion on the proposition: "A negative particular destroys an affirmative universal" will be oriented to the consideration of the absolute or relative nature of Scripture.
  - 1. To consider other factors than Scripture which mitigate moral response.
  - 2. To have students give examples of how they would employ these factors in their life situations.

### III. Audio-visual aids

- A. To make the open ended cases seem more poignant, an opaque projector will be used to show pictures of the people involved in the cases sighted.
- B. Each of these cases will be presented by tape recorded narration with the characters speaking their own parts.

### IV. Methodology

A. Schedule of instruction

1. Review of goals of previous week's lesson.
2. Statement of goals and procedures for current lesson.
3. Briefly review previous consideration of absolutism vs. relativism in Scripture.
4. Propose usage of Ten Commandments as model for Scripture.
5. Presentation of close ended cases
6. Discussion of decisions and implications for the Reform Jew.
7. Presentation of open ended cases .
8. Discussion of decisions.
9. Brief debate-discussion .
10. Teacher's summary, application to students' life situations.

B. Examples of "close ended" cases

1. A C.I.A. Agent has been arrested on Mainland China on charges of espionage. He knows that there is no chance that he can avoid a death sentence, the evidence against him being so overwhelming. He has figured out a fake confession that, while being believable, will not disclose the nature of the information he has gathered, or the nature of his real work in China. May he ignore the Commandment "Thou shall not bear false witness?"
2. In the Apocraphal story of Judith, the heroine was prepared to go out from beseiged Jerusalem to sleep with the Syrian commander Holofernes, so that she might have the opportunity of killing him, thus freeing her nation.

She did not have to commit adultery since she killed him while he was in a drunken stupor. His army fled in fear when they found him mysteriously dead. Should she have been willing to break two of the Commandments to save her nation and it's people?

C. Open ended case:

1. Mr. Roth seeks advice from a friend. Mrs. Roth has been in a mental institution for ten years. She is incurably catatonic. The physicians see no hope for recovery. Mr. Roth has fallen in love with Mrs. Stone, the widow of one of his friends. He feels an obligation not to divorce his wife, Indeed in his state, adultery is the only grounds for divorce. Mr. Roth was on the verge of beginning to live with Mrs. Stone. Do the Ten Commandments serve as a guide in this situation? What should Mr. Roth do? What should the friend suggest?

## Footnotes

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