

Religion and Morality: Ships Passing in the Night?

Christ Church, Georgetown

Adult Forum

November 6, 2016

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A Couple of Perspectives

“...faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid.” --Christopher Hitchens

“If men are so wicked with religion, what would they be if without it?”
--Benjamin Franklin (in a letter to Thomas Paine)

Religion and Morality: Questions Asked (and Answered?)

- Religion's key questions include:
 - How can we make sense of life, death, and suffering?
 - How can we live as a faithful community?
 - How do we relate to supernatural forces?
- Morality's key questions include:
 - How should we act toward one another?
 - What sorts of actions are right and wrong?
 - What types of actions and attitudes constitute "the good life"?

Are Religion and Morality Independent?



Religion

Morality

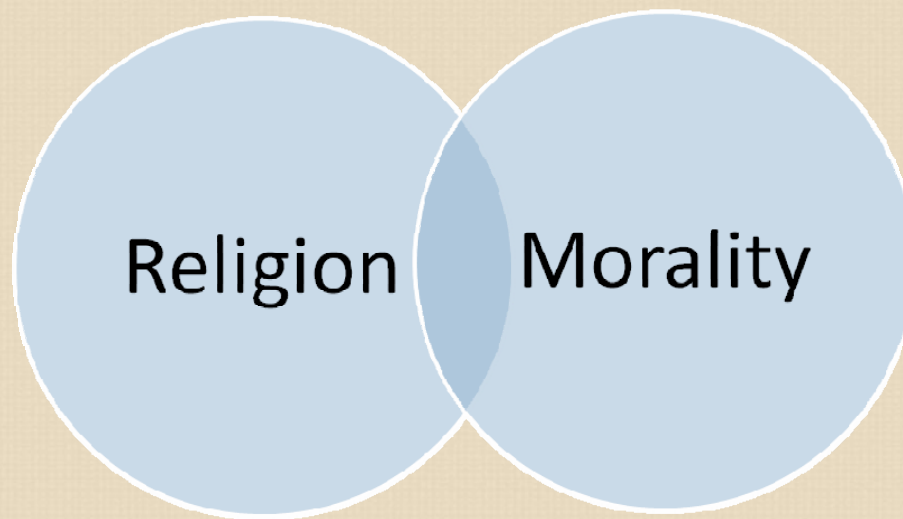
Ethical Action and Christian Identity

Theological Arguments for a Connection:

- God's relevance for creation
- God's authority over creation
- God's concern for how human beings act
- God's moral goodness



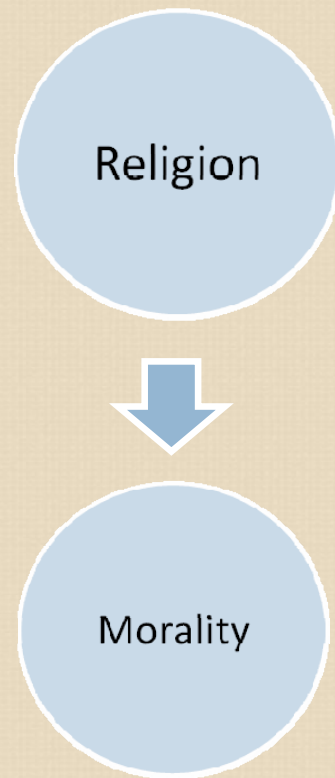
Religion and/or Morality?



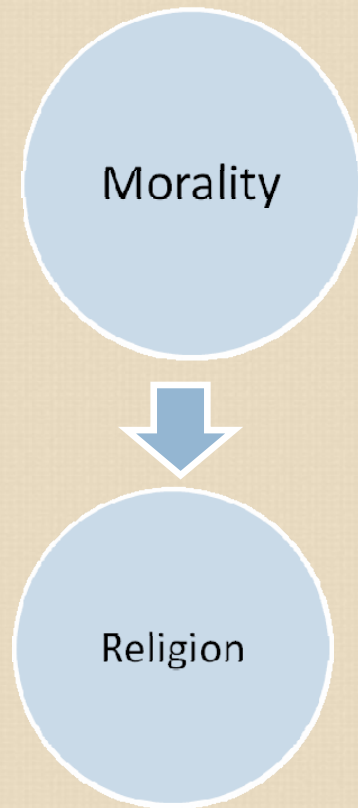
The Claim of Superiority

Religion and morality both generally claim to be superior to non-religious or non-moral values

The Priority of Religion



The Priority of Morality



The Sacrifice of Isaac (Caravaggio)



Abraham's Dilemma: Reflections

- Is the command coming from God? Could it come from God?
- If God commands it, should Abraham obey?
- Is the commanded act a murder or a sacrifice?
- Does Abraham experience this as a dilemma?
- Do we experience it as a dilemma?
 - If so, why?

Abraham and the Morality of God

- “Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

A Social Imperative To Be Moral

- Living in a pluralistic society requires people to share moral but not religious beliefs—a “moral point of view”
- The impossibility of proof

A Religious Perspective

- Religious motives and meanings for moral action
- Sufficient but not necessary

Some Basic Moral Values/Intuitions

- Compassion/empathy
- Care for the weak and helpless
- The intrinsic value of human lives—we are ends, not means
- Autonomy of each individual person

Summary Points

- Are religion and morality complementary or in conflict?
- Conscience and the “moral law within us”
- Is Christianity morally unique?
- Why be a Christian?

Summary Quote

“A Christian isn’t necessarily any nicer than anybody else. Just better informed.”

--Frederick Buechner

Questions or Comments?