

HPRS4902

Assessment 2

An Examination of Contemporary Ethical Dilemma

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There are no simple answers to what drives a person or groups to be contrary to instruction, law, or accepted societal norms. It could be through necessity, a sense of civic liberty, a learnt or instilled hatred, a desire, or even simple misunderstanding. In all events, there is an opposition to some form of authority, rule, or accepted societal practices, and can often be accompanied by a sense of victimhood. There are instances due to wanton disobedience, but in general, there is usually some feeling of unfairness, or a concept of a better alternative. In examining the motives that may compel acts of non-conformity, examples from historical biblical events will be used; not for their comparative nature, but for the ethical considerations involved. Faith along with non-faith analysis will be conducted in an endeavour to establish if the ethical concerns represent in similar ways.

Betrayal

The first theme examined will be betrayal, which is morally and ethically unsound for a variety of reasons and is generally outside of societal normality. There are numerous types of betrayal; within relationships, business, politics and law to name just a few.^{1;2;3} It is also possible to betray one's faith. All faiths have a set of principles to guide followers in the ways of its particular religion – admittedly, this may vary slightly, even within one religion, for various reasons, but the major principles remain the same. There are also 'degrees' of betrayal. It is probable that each of us will have encountered someone who considers themselves to be of a religious faith, yet, their day to day practices may not align with the principles in place. Some individuals for example, may not consider gambling, working on a Sabbath, or having intimate relations before marriage as wrong in the eyes of the Lord, whilst others consider these things a sin and a betrayal of faith.⁴ Are we able to pick and choose which aspects of our faith we adhere to? So we have to begin with this understanding. If we take adultery as an example, we see a double betrayal; a betrayal to one's partner, and a betrayal to the commitment of vows before God. This kind of betrayal can be driven by lust, love, or disillusionment of one's current situation. The consequences of adultery are not insignificant, we are causing pain to another person, and we are committing a sinful act toward God. What in this event may the outcome be, 'But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when desire has conceived, it engenders sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death' (James 1:14-15).

The Bible is littered with examples of betrayal - Cain and Abel, Samson and Delilah, Saul and David; the list goes on. Second to numerous betrayals of God, the most known betrayal is that of Judas betraying Jesus (Matt. 26:14-17, Luke 22:3-7). When looking at this event it appears to fall into the category of both relationship and faith betrayal. What could prompt such a

¹ Mark R. Leary, *Interpersonal Rejection*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

² Dennis S. Reina & Michelle L. Reina, *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace: Building Effective Relationships in Your Organization*, 3rd edn., (Harpenden: EDS Publications Ltd., 2015).

³ Jan D. Sinnott & Joan S. Rabin, eds., *The Psychology of Political Behavior in a Time of Change*, (Gewerbestrass: Springer, 2021).

⁴ Lee Strobel. Foreward. In: Matt Brown, *Truth Plus Love: The Jesus Way to Influence*, (Zondervan, 2019).

betrayal, and what were the ramifications of the betrayal? Sanjo Leonard looks at Judas' faith crisis, and suggests that he succumbed to his previous nefarious ways. Leonard also writes,

While there is no doubt Judas betrayed Jesus, that he was a thief at some point as an apostle, and that Satan used him as a pawn in his evil schemes, we simply do not know enough about Judas's life or his past and can only guess as to who Judas was and why he did what he did.⁵

Although no description of the 'why' exists, Jesus already knew what would occur (John 6:64, 70-71). Was Judas fulfilling a prophecy, and was this betrayal destined as part of God's plan? The outcome of Judas' actions resulted in death for both, Jesus on the cross, and Judas by his own hand, not able to live with his guilt (Matt. 27:3-5). Guilt seems to be a frequent companion of betrayal. There are exceptions to this feeling of guilt, psychopathy for example could be cause for an emotional deficit which may close off feelings of remorse, but generally speaking, when we know we have done something wrong, it is hard not to feel guilty. When talking about feeling sorry, Peter Randall describes, 'The main driving force is that of conscience: the amalgam of moral emotions, moral reasoning and moral conduct. There is no morality without conscience and empathy for others is its fuel'.⁶ If the devil was in Judas as Jesus had said (John 6:70), then had Judas' conscience finally won the battle, albeit late, prompting him to take his own life for his deeds against Jesus, or was it shame that was the guiding hand in his demise? Randall also writes, 'The experience of shame is the strongest signal that we may no longer be considered worthy...'.⁷ Alternatively, it may have been the fear of being rejected by the apostles, and subsequently his sense of belonging that directed him toward his decision.

In today's world, focus is too often seen shifting from 'service to others', to 'service to self'; phrases like 'it's a dog eat dog world' and 'look out for number one' can lead us to minimise the immorality of betrayal. We are also seeing the emergence of a 'blame culture', where individuals are reprimanded rather than identifying underlying causes, which can lead the individual to shifting the blame to another individual unfairly to avoid consequences; another form of betrayal.⁸ Conversely, we have also stepped into a 'cancel culture',⁹ which although can seem quite cruel and unforgiving, may have a positive impact on how we view betrayal. All actions do have consequences, and it appears that the degree of guilt felt is directly proportionate to the severity of the potential outcome.

Disobedience

Like betrayal, there are various forms of disobedience, some of which are morally and ethically wrong, and some of which have little, or un-perceived consequences, and again like betrayal, can be carried out for a number of reasons. For this example, we will be looking at disobedience to the rule of law, which can also have varying degrees of severity. Many of us

⁵Gary Black, Jr. Foreward. In: Sanejo Leonard, *Shaken Faith: What You Don't Know (and Need to Know) about Faith Crises and How They Affect Spiritual Growth*, (Oregon: WIPF & Stock, 2015), p.88.

⁶Peter Randall, *The Psychology of Feeling Sorry: The Weight of the Soul*, (Sussex: Routledge, 2013), p.229.

⁷Ibid., p.79.

⁸Adrienne Hardwick, 'Blame Culture: Definition and Explanation' *The Oxford Review Briefing: People and Organisational Research*, (2025), <<https://oxford-review.com/oxford-review-encyclopaedia-terms/blame-culture-definition-and-explanation>> [accessed 02 August 2025].

⁹Eve Ng, *Cancel Culture: A Critical Analysis*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

will have undoubtedly broken a minor law or legislation at some point in our lives, innocently or not. A good example of this was during the recent pandemic, when people were either unaware of the changes in rules, or simply were unwilling to comply. We can also look at the number of people caught speeding in the UK, the percentage of which on motorways alone is 45 percent.¹⁰ Then there are the more serious offences such as theft, assault, criminal damage, and murder. Murder is undoubtedly a most heinous act, which the majority of people could not even imagine committing, (we will not consider military actions in this example as it is considered lawful killing in combat) and would most certainly consider it morally and ethically wrong. However, if a person's life is in danger, it is not considered a crime, if in defence, the assailant dies, (providing that reasonable force was used in the defence).¹¹ Yet this is still a dilemma for the victim of the assailant, whom under any other circumstances would recoil at the prospect of taking a life. When a person is blind with rage – for serious example, seeing a loved one being tortured – the consideration for the assailant's life would probably be very much diminished. However, there may still be present a sense of dilemma for other reasons. As Peter Garber writes, 'And when it comes to our own behavior when faced with an ethical dilemma, are we more influenced by the principles we might be violating, or by the punishment if we are caught'.¹²

Let us now examine choices and responsibility within moral and ethical decisions, and what may influence these. As Carol Gilligan describes, 'The essence of moral decision is the exercise of choice and the willingness to accept responsibility for that choice'.¹³ Interestingly, Gilligan's work looks at the differences in gender in relation to the topic, which we will examine more closely later on. The influence over moral and ethical decisions is based on consensus, and therefore closely related to our social environment. What we see, hear and experience whilst growing up impacts our decision-making processes. Even within households however, this can vary within societies.¹⁴ When we look at 'gang culture' for example, which unfortunately has been reported as being involved in many killings, we see how peer pressure and intimidation can have a major impact upon the acts an individual is willing to commit; this sometimes involves threats to an individual's own life if they do not obey a request, which in a way, denies the person's freedom of morality over mortality.¹⁵

¹⁰Department for Transport, 'Vehicle speed compliance statistics for Great Britain: 2023', <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/vehicle-speed-compliance-statistics-for-great-britain-2023>> [accessed 5th August 2025].

¹¹ J D Spicerzeb Solicitors, 'Guide to self defence laws in the UK', <<https://www.jdspicer.co.uk/site/blog/crime-fraud/guide-to-self-defence-laws-in-the-uk>> [accessed 4th August 2025].

¹² Peter R. Garber, *The Ethical Dilemma*, (Massachusetts: HRD Press, Inc., 2008).

¹³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.67.

¹⁴ Ferdinand Vieider, 'Social Influences on Individual Decision Making Processes', *Timbergen Institute Research Series* 447. <<https://tinbergen.nl/list-of-phd-theses/keywords=Ferdinand+Vieider>> [accessed 06 August 2025].

¹⁵ Interior Immigration Enforcement Legislation: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Fourteen Congress, First Session, February 11, 2014 By United States. Congress. House. Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security <https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Interior_Immigration_Enforcement_Legisla> [accessed 6 August 2025].

When searching for literature on disobedience and killing, we find the Bible to be a good source. It provides many accounts of both; no doubt due to the timespan it covers, and the historical periods therein. A fitting example can be found in (Ex. 1:15-22), which describes how the Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah to kill all newborn males born to Hebrew women.¹⁶ The text provides only a brief description of his justification for this terrible demand, recording how the Pharaoh felt that the Hebrew people would grow in such number that they would uprise against Egypt. As we have discussed previously, ethics are generally based upon consensus, but it is not clear from the text if the Pharaoh took advice from his vizier or any other official. There are however, Jewish commentaries, and accounts by Flavious Josephus which describe Pharaoh's sacred scribes advising that a male would be born who would save the Israelites.¹⁷ Louis H. Feldman describes Josephus' account,

‘...the blame is placed upon one of the Pharaoh’s sacred scribes who predicts to the king that there would be born to the Israelites one who would surpass all others in virtue and who would win everlasting renown and who would abase the sovereignty of the Egyptians’.¹⁸

Does this indicate that Pharaoh's belief in his sacred scribes' portents, which effectively indicated Egypt's demise, overruled any moral or ethical considerations he may have had? It somewhat reflects the 'do it or else' message as we saw in the gang culture example.

The other part of the text, 'the disobedience' relates to the midwives and their refusal to kill the male newborns. Although there is no direct instruction from God against killing before he issues the ten commandments, his disapproval of Cain killing Abel (Gen. 4:8-16) is an example. In their disobedience, the midwives acted not only with empathy, compassion, and morality, but also with a fear of God (Ex. 1:17). However, as described by Lynn Cowell, that may not be fear as we perceive it today,

The word translated *fear* in verse 17 is quite different from the type of fear Shiphrah and Puah may have had towards Pharaoh. This fear is the Hebrew word *yare*: to be afraid, be frightened, to revere, to respect or to be awesome. It a fear that comes from a combination of love, hope, and reverence, not extreme apprehension.¹⁹

In his book discussing ethical trends, Aiden E. Wurtzel discusses 'ethics of care', which he attributes differently in women and men. He also describes the difference in attachment a mother has to a son as opposed to a daughter, citing Chodorow (1978) 'It is women themselves who foster reproduction of the maternal function when they treat their sons differently from their daughters, promoting detachment in the former and hindering it in the latter'.²⁰ Sons may

¹⁶ Eli L. Garfinkel, *The JPS Jewish Heritage Torah Commentary*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2021).

¹⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p.85.

¹⁹ Lynn Cowell, *Fearless Women of the Bible: Finding Unshakable Confidence Despite Your Fears and Failures*, (Michigan: HarperChristian Resources, 2022), p.7.

²⁰ N. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) pp.30-39. In: Aiden E. Wurtzel, ed., *Trends in Contemporary Ethical Issues*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2006), p.153.

also often be cherished over a daughter during their early years, as sons will generally leave the home to reside near their wife's family and so will be more absent, whereas a daughter may tend to stay close to her parents.²¹ These tendencies may have been a contributing factor in their view of the newborn males, which could have assisted in the midwives ability to disobey the Pharaoh, even when they may have put themselves in danger for doing so.

Both examples discussed have shown many variables which may be involved in ethical decision making. From peer-pressure and fear to empathy and love, it seems ultimately down to choice; even when there seems to be no choice. We have also considered consequences such as punishments which may be associated with that choice such as reprimand at one end of the scale, to loss of life at the other. Although sometimes difficult to see, there appears to be a similarity between the modern day examples and the Biblical examples in the underlying concepts of thought, deliberation and emotional impact.

²¹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

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<https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Interior_Immigration_Enforcement_Legisla> [accessed 6 August 2025].
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