

Biblical Moral Reasoning and Orientation in Mission Command Transcript

Quick recap

This lesson focused on biblical moral reasoning processes used in moral orientation and Mission Command, distinguishing between the ways we reason and the content of our moral decisions. Jeff explained five moral reasoning systems: the ME system (focusing on personal wants), authoritarian ethics (following leaders), social ethics (following the group), virtue ethics (measuring acceptability by character qualities), and principle-based ethics (following external requirements). The presentation traced these reasoning systems through various philosophical and religious traditions from ancient to modern times, including figures like Confucius, Socrates, Kant, and Gandhi, while connecting them to biblical concepts and military ethics applications. Jeff emphasized that while different systems may lead to similar conclusions, the reasoning processes themselves shape how we conceptualize and apply moral concepts in our lives and professions.

Philosophers' Influence on Military Ethics

Jeff discussed the influence of various philosophers on military ethics and international humanitarian law. He outlined a spectrum of philosophers from Nietzsche and Schmitt on the right (who focus on realism and human agency in ethics) to Foucault on the left (who is a modern, post-colonial view), with figures like Walzer, Rawls, Ramsey, and Johnson in the center (who are modern realists) focusing on how biblical just war theory influences military ethics through moral reasoning. Jeff emphasized how these different moral reasoning systems influence how just war concepts are applied in military practices and international law. Jeff also demonstrated how these applications are active in Holy Scripture.

Historical and Philosophical Context

Influence Chain Mapped:

From ancient philosophers (Confucius, Greek/Roman thinkers) → through world religions → theological interpreters (St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Christian reformers) → modern philosophy (Bentham, Mill, Kant, Gandhi) → military/political applications (Nietzsche, Carl Schmidt, von Crevald, Rawls, Walzer, Ramsey, Johnson, Foucault).

Key Modern Thinkers for Military Profession

- Friedrich Nietzsche: systems of power in modern militaries
- Martin von Crevold: application to mission command
- John Rawls: international humanitarian law and law of nations

- Michael Walzer: just war theory applications
- Paul Ramsey & Frederick Turner Johnson: just war in specific military operations
- Michel Foucault: military discipline effects on individuals, political revolutions

Moral Reasoning Worldview Distinctions

Jeff explained the distinction between worldviews and faith, emphasizing that faith is based on practices while worldviews involve systems of belief. He discussed how worldviews shape moral orientations and ethical practices, particularly in military professions. Jeff introduced a concept of building a "land navigation system for Moral Reasoning based upon Seven moral reasoning systems that are present within multiple cultures and religious beliefs.

Moral Reasoning based upon Selfish and Social Worldviews.

Jeff discussed the human tendency to act selfishly, using biblical passages to illustrate this point. He referenced Judges, Isaiah, and Matthew to show how people often follow their own desires rather than a shared moral framework. Jeff explained that this self-directed approach to moral reasoning can lead to both good and bad decisions, but ultimately requires individuals to rely upon self or authoritarian guidance in challenging situations.

Jeff also social, ethics of care systems, and he explained how these systems influence decisions within groups and organizations, using examples from the military and Christian contexts.

Key Outcomes

How we reason is as important as what we reason—and that multiple moral reasoning systems influence our ethical practices similar to the ways that land navigation tools guide travel and elements of mission command. All are parts of our Christian faith.

Foundational Assumptions

- Worldviews and beliefs shape moral orientations
- Moral orientations direct ethical practices
- Faith is based on direct applications of our belief systems to our vocation.

Eight Moral Reasoning Systems Identified:

- **The ME System** – Answers the question, "What do I want?" – The most widely used system globally, focused on individual desires; can lead to situations where "everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes" 34

- **Authoritarian Ethics** – This is a part of the ME system and it answers the question, "Which way is the leader going?" or "What does the leader want?" This type of moral orientation determines what is right by following-the-leader system. Here authority dictates the means and ends for ethical practice. This system includes Divine command authority – which derives from the worldview of obedience and loyalty – It reasons -- "God said it, I believe it, that settles it").
- **Social Ethics** – Asks "Which way is the crowd going?" – This is a moral reasoning system that determines what is right based upon social relationships, power dynamics, and context. In this system consensus decides the means and ends for ethical practices.
- **Virtue Ethics** – Asks "What is acceptable?" – This system operates like an internal, moral map based upon personal values/virtues such as prudence, justice, courage, temperance to determine ethical actions. This system developments character by following exemplars to avoid excessive or deficient behaviors. For example the virtue of courage can be degraded by actions that are brazen, self-centered, and foolish OR by actions of cowardice.
- **Principle-Based Ethics (Deontology)** – Answers the question, "What is required?" – This moral system functions like a compass pointing toward fixed direction. It relies upon principles/laws that are unchanging. This system is externally focused upon individual and social duty to determine ethical practices. It uses categorical imperatives and rule of law. Just war theory, and the law of armed conflict are examples of this system.
- **Utilitarian Ethics (Consequentialism)** – Answers the questions, "What works?" or "What is most beneficial. This system functions similar to the way that way points and endpoints operate in a land navigation process. This system determines ethical practice by measuring progress or cost-benefit analysis based upon consequences and desired results. This system focuses upon destinations, end states, and the means to achieve the end.
- **Situation Ethics** – Answers the question "What is appropriate?" based upon context. Here context determines ethical practice. It functions the way that terrain influences the route of travel in land navigation. This moral reasoning system focuses upon context and situational awareness to determine ethical practices. This system seeks to determine virtues, principles, and utility based upon changing situations.

- **Moral Foundations Theory** – Answers the question “What is tolerable or acceptable?” This moral reasoning system is an evidence-based research framework that shows how humans determine ethical practice from their perceptions of moral senses (care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority, sanctity). These senses are universal but specifically developed within individuals similar to the way we develop taste buds. Thus, individual preference determines right or wrong and moral reasoning is based on our instincts and intuition as we “feel what's right or wrong” before we think about “what's right or wrong.”

Biblical Examples of these Moral Orientation Systems:

- The ME system: Judges 21 ("everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes"); Isaiah 53 ("all we like sheep have gone astray") 4
- Authoritarian: Matthew 5 (Jesus' "You have heard it said... but I say to you"); divine command authority 6
- Social: Matthew 18 (group consensus through Holy Spirit); Matthew 25 (parable of sheep and goats).
- Virtue: Mark 10 ("whoever would be first must be servant of all"); Galatians (fruits of Spirit); 2 Timothy (developing pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith).
- Principle: Matthew 7 (golden rule); John 13 ("new commandment... love one another").
- Utilitarian: John 4 (woman at the well—kingdom purposes); Matthew 22 (marriage in heaven parable).
- Situation: John 8 (woman caught in adultery); Philippians 4 ("whatever is true, honorable, just... think about these things"); Colossians 3 ("whatever you do... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus").
- Moral Foundations - *Holy Spirit given as an intuitional guide John 14: 25-ff and 20:22, - Galatians 5: 22-ff (Fruits of the Holy Spirit).*

Applications of Moral Reasoning within Mission Command

All moral reasoning systems actively operate in mission command doctrine

- **Authoritarian & Social** systems fill military cultures through chain of command and unit cohesion.
- **Principles (Deontology)** operate through orders, doctrines, rules of engagement, and laws.

- **Utilitarian** systems define mission end states to measure mission accomplishment.
- **Situation Ethics** requires situational awareness—sensitivity to changing contexts in operations. This is Intelligence used in mission planning and operational leadership.
- **Virtue Ethics & Moral Foundations** address the impact on troops leadership, and unit morale — This is how the status of soldiers, and the effects of illegal/immoral orders impacts wellness and mission accomplishment.

Practical Scenario

Suppose when you are called to account for your ethical actions, do you use only one moral reasoning system or do you use many? For example, "I followed orders" may be the standard correct answer for a soldier. However, this answer may be insufficient to what is required of you by national, religious, and cultural norms. This type of reasoning has been convicted during international humanitarian trials. However, integrating all eight moral reasoning systems can provide a comprehensive, justification for our ethical decisions. For example:

- I followed this order from my commander (authoritarian).
- My actions were in good order of my unit and followed the expectations of my service, nation, culture, and religion. (social/ethics of care)
- My actions followed the Rules of engagement met (Principles)
- My actions achieved the Commander's end state and protected my unit (utilitarian).
- My actions were consistent and appropriate for the circumstances I encountered (situation)
- My actions protected my troops and my own physical, mental, and spiritual health (virtue/care).
- I can look at myself proudly and I have a good conscience (Moral Foundations)

Synthesis of Moral Reasoning -- These reasoning processes exist in all cultures, though cultures may disagree on what is important while sharing commonality in how they discuss and morally reason.

Land Navigation Analogy:

Moral reasoning is like land navigation using multiple tools simultaneously or in appropriate combinations to determine our route of travel and arriving safely at our destination -- not choosing between individual tools OR blindly following one, while disregarding the others. We integrate map, compass, destination, terrain, leader, or group, as an art form to arrive safely at goals.

GPS Metaphor:

Multiple moral reasoning systems function like multiple satellite fixes in a GPS to guide our location and route of travel. The more data points from different and multiple perspectives create more accurate positioning and route planning.

Core Teaching:

"How we think influences what we think and what we do"—we are not blank slates but born into families and cultures that shape our moral reasoning from birth; Scripture itself is "God's attempt to reason with humanity and direct our actions."