

# Frontier Wars in Ethics

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Fr Kevin McGovern,  
Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics:  
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# Outline



1. Strengths & Limitations of Traditional Ethics
2. The Enlightenment and the New Morality
3. Deficiencies of the New Morality
4. Implications

# Strengths & Limitations of Traditional Ethics



- Responsibility with exceptions
- Based on reason and revelation
- Human dignity based on *imago Dei*
- Teleological
- Doing and Being
- Virtues
- Common Good
- **Activist Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, environmental ethics**
- **Authoritarian**
- **Slow to change**
- **Some say, some reappraisal about sex and sexuality**

# The Enlightenment and the New Morality



- **David Hume** (1711–1776)
  - sought the basis of morality in the emotions (e.g. “moral sentiment,” “sympathy”)
  - BUT why should we follow these ‘moral’ emotions rather than our ‘immoral’ ones?
- **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804)
  - sought the basis of ethics in reason and duty (e.g. the Categorical Imperative)
  - BUT why should we follow the Categorical Imperative?
- **Jeremy Bentham** (1748-1832), **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873)
  - sought the basis of morality in consequences (“utilitarianism”)
  - BUT even if we can work out what is best for everyone, why should we do this?

# The Enlightenment and the New Morality (cont'd)



- **Frederick Nietzsche** (1844-1900)
  - efforts so far had presupposed traditional moral content
  - Nietzsche rejected traditional moral content!
- **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804)
  - moral values do not come from outside – either from God or from nature
  - instead, “each man his own moralist”
  - pure autonomy became the only basis and the only content of ethics
  - “moral relativism”

# Deficiencies of the New Morality



## Traditional Morality

- Responsibility with exceptions
- Based on reason and revelation
- Human dignity based on *imago Dei*
- Teleological
- Doing and Being
- Virtues

## The New Morality

- Autonomy with exceptions
- Basis is unclear
- Human dignity based on actual capacity for reason
- Not teleological
- Little emphasis on Being or the Virtues

# Deficiencies of the New Morality (cont'd)



## Traditional Morality

- **Common Good**
- **Activist Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, environmental ethics**

## The New Morality

- **Individualistic, with little sense of the common good**
- **Limited Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, sex and sexuality, environmental ethics**



# Implications

- 1) Feel proud of traditional morality
- 2) Work for appropriate reappraisals within traditional morality
- 3) Multiculturalism
- 4) Conscientious objection
- 5) Promote the common good
- 6) Promote the virtues
  - as revealed by our mission and values
  - as exemplified by our founders and by Jesus Christ