

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 9, Eclectic Model of Christian Ethics Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 9, Eclectic Model of Christian Ethics, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. James S. Spiegel's lecture on Christian Ethics proposes an **eclectic model** that integrates insights from **utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics**. He argues that a complete Christian ethic must consider **consequences, duties, and character**, all of which are emphasized in Scripture and exemplified by Jesus Christ. Spiegel contends that these major moral theories, often developed by those who believed in God, offer genuine insights into moral truth. Furthermore, he suggests an **eclectic approach to ethical knowledge**, drawing from both **natural law and divine command ethics** as means through which God's moral will is revealed.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Apologetics → Christian Ethics).



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3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 9, Eclectic Model of Christian Ethics

Briefing Document: Eclectic Models of Christian Ethics

I. Executive Summary:

This briefing document summarizes Dr. James S. Spiegel's argument for an eclectic approach to Christian ethics. Spiegel advocates for a model that integrates the key insights of utilitarianism (consequences), Kantian ethics (duty and rights), and virtue ethics (character). He argues that this multifaceted approach is not only philosophically sound but also deeply rooted in scripture and exemplified by the life of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Spiegel proposes an eclectic understanding of ethical knowledge, drawing from both natural law and divine command theory.

II. Main Themes and Important Ideas:

A. The Need for an Eclectic Model:

- Spiegel begins by questioning which single ethical theory Christians should adopt after surveying major philosophical and theological perspectives.
- His central argument is that an "eclectic approach" is the most suitable, as it "affirms the insights of many of these theories."
- He presents a model that specifically incorporates the strengths of utilitarianism (utility and consequences), Kantian ethics (duty, obligation, justice, and rights), and virtue ethics (character traits like courage, generosity, patience, kindness, and self-control – what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit).
- **Quote:** "My view that I would recommend is a kind of eclectic approach that affirms the insights of many of these theories."
- **Quote:** "Here is a graphic that represents the eclectic model that I recommend, which affirms the insights, especially of utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics."

B. Scriptural Support for the Eclectic Model:

- Spiegel argues that all three components of his eclectic model (utility/consequences, duty, and virtue) are consistently emphasized throughout scripture.

- He points to:
- Attention to the **consequences** of actions in Old Testament case law and the New Testament.
- Numerous **rules and commands**, as well as references to **rights, justice, and obligations**, indicating a focus on deontological concerns.
- Repeated **endorsement and exhortation to act virtuously** in both testaments, including Paul's metaphor of the fruit of the spirit.
- **Quote:** "In Old Testament case law all the way through the New Testament, there is repeated attention to the consequences of our actions... There's also a lot of attention to deontological concerns, lots of rules and commands in scripture, and lots of references to rights, justice, and obligations... And again, when it comes to virtue, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, a lot of endorsement and exhortation to act virtuously."

C. Jesus Christ as the Embodiment of the Eclectic Model:

- Spiegel asserts that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled and embodied all three domains of his eclectic model.
- He argues that Jesus was:
- Perfectly obedient to the law (duty).
- His actions and words maximized good and benefits (utility/consequences).
- He perfectly displayed all the virtues (virtue ethics).
- **Quote:** "So, Jesus fulfilled all three of these domains. He was perfectly obedient to the law. Everything that he did, you might say, maximized the good and had maximal benefits for people in terms of the consequences of his actions and his words. And he perfectly displayed all of the virtues, all of the fruit of the spirit."

D. Limitations of Mono-Theoretical Christian Ethics:

- Spiegel believes that any Christian ethic focusing exclusively on one of these moral considerations is "a truncated Christian ethic, an incomplete Christian ethic."

E. Secular Insights and the Role of God in Morality:

- Spiegel highlights that major proponents of utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and potentially virtue ethics (Aristotle) were believers in God.
- He emphasizes Kant's claim that "God, freedom, and immortality" are essential for the possibility of morality, arguing that without God, there is no ultimate judge or accountability.
- **Quote:** "At any rate, for Kant, God is absolutely crucial for the possibility of morality. And Aristotle also was a theist of sorts... one could argue that his ethic ultimately depends upon God."

F. Eclectic Approach to Sources of Ethical Knowledge:

- Spiegel extends his eclectic approach to the sources of ethical knowledge, advocating for the integration of natural law ethics and divine command ethics.
- He argues that God's moral will is made known through:
- **Natural Law:** Primary and secondary precepts discernible from nature and our bodies, which communicate truths about utility (consequences), duty (natural sense of obligation/conscience - *sensus divinitatis*), and virtue (natural admiration for virtuous traits).
- **Special Revelation:** Primarily the Old and New Testaments, which offer diverse literary forms that further illuminate utility (narratives showing behavioral outcomes), duty (commands and obligations), and virtue (character portraits, both positive and negative examples).
- **Quote:** "Ultimately, when we're talking about ethics, we're talking about the moral will of God... God makes known his moral will to us through natural law... But also, he communicates to us through special revelation, especially in the books of the Old and New Testaments."
- **Quote:** "The biblical texts take a variety of forms... In the narratives, we find a lot of clear communication regarding what sorts of behaviors tend to produce what sorts of results... Then, we have all these commands in scripture... Then, we have various character portraits from scripture... we learn a lot more about vices by studying those characters."

III. Conclusion:

Dr. Spiegel presents a compelling case for an eclectic model of Christian ethics that draws upon the strengths of utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics. He grounds this approach in the multifaceted nature of scripture and the perfect moral example of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, his advocacy for an eclectic understanding of ethical knowledge, incorporating both natural law and divine command, provides a comprehensive framework for discerning and living out God's moral will. This perspective encourages Christians to appreciate the valuable insights within various ethical traditions while ultimately anchoring their understanding of morality in God's character and revelation.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 9, Eclectic Model of Christian Ethics

A Study Guide for Spiegel on Eclectic Christian Ethics

Key Concepts and Theories

This section outlines the central ideas presented by Dr. Spiegel in Session 9 on Eclectic Models of Christian Ethics.

- **Eclectic Approach:** The central thesis is that a comprehensive Christian ethic should draw insights from multiple ethical theories rather than adhering strictly to one.
- **Three Pillars of Christian Ethics:** Spiegel identifies three crucial domains that must be included in any robust Christian ethical framework:
- **Utility/Consequences:** Consideration of the pleasurable and painful outcomes of actions, aligning with utilitarianism.
- **Duty/Deontology:** Emphasis on obligations, justice, and rights, reflecting Kantian ethics.
- **Virtue/Character:** Focus on character traits like courage, generosity, and self-control, inspired by virtue ethics.
- **Scriptural Basis:** Spiegel argues that all three of these domains are consistently emphasized throughout both the Old and New Testaments.
- **Christ as the Embodiment:** Jesus Christ perfectly exemplified all three domains: obedience to law (duty), actions maximizing good (utility), and flawless display of virtues.
- **Incomplete Single-Theory Approaches:** Any Christian ethic that focuses exclusively on only one of these three domains is considered incomplete or truncated.
- **Secular Insights:** The eclectic model recognizes that valuable ethical insights can be found in various philosophical traditions, even those originating from non-Christian thinkers.
- **Theistic Underpinnings of Ethics:** Spiegel notes that major proponents of utilitarianism (Mill), deontology (Kant), and virtue ethics (Aristotle) held some form of belief in God, suggesting a potential reliance on theism for a complete

ethical system. Kant specifically argued for the necessity of God, freedom, and immortality for morality.

- **Sources of Ethical Knowledge:** An eclectic approach also applies to understanding how God reveals moral truth.
- **Natural Law:** God makes his moral will known through the natural order, including inherent understandings of utility (what promotes good consequences), duty (natural sense of obligations), and virtue (admiration for good character). Calvin's concept of *sensus divinitatis* is mentioned in this context.
- **Special Revelation:** The Bible, in its various literary forms (narratives, commands, character portraits), provides further and clearer understanding of utility (consequences in narratives), duty (divine commands), and virtue (examples of virtuous and vicious characters).
- **The Moral Will of God:** Ultimately, ethics is rooted in the moral will of God, with God's nature being the definitive standard of moral truth (referencing the Euthyphro problem).

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the central argument of Dr. Spiegel's session on eclectic models of Christian ethics?
2. Name the three primary domains or pillars that Spiegel argues are essential for a complete Christian ethic.
3. How does Spiegel support his claim that these three domains are important for Christian ethics?
4. According to Spiegel, why are ethical theories that focus exclusively on one domain considered incomplete?
5. What does Spiegel argue regarding the ethical insights derived from secular philosophical traditions?
6. What were Kant's three essential requirements for the possibility of morality, according to Spiegel?
7. Explain how Spiegel believes God communicates his moral will to humanity through natural law.

8. In what ways does Spiegel suggest that special revelation, particularly the Bible, contributes to our understanding of ethics?
9. How does Spiegel connect the three domains of his eclectic model to the person and character of Jesus Christ?
10. What is presented as the ultimate foundation for ethical truth in Spiegel's discussion?

Answer Key

1. Dr. Spiegel argues that a comprehensive and robust Christian ethic should adopt an eclectic approach, drawing valuable insights from multiple ethical theories, particularly utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics, rather than adhering to a single perspective.
2. The three primary domains that Spiegel identifies as essential for a complete Christian ethic are utility and consequences, duty and deontology (including obligations, justice, and rights), and virtue and character traits.
3. Spiegel supports his claim by pointing to the repeated emphasis on these three areas throughout Scripture, from Old Testament case law to the New Testament, including commands, considerations of consequences, and exhortations toward virtuous living.
4. Spiegel contends that theories focusing exclusively on one domain offer a truncated or incomplete understanding of Christian ethics because they fail to account for the full range of moral considerations highlighted in Scripture and exemplified by Christ.
5. Spiegel suggests that even though these insights come from secular philosophers, they can be seen as genuine insights into Christian truth, particularly noting that major proponents of these theories were believers in God to some degree.
6. According to Spiegel, Kant argued that God, freedom, and immortality are absolutely essential for the possibility of morality, as God provides a judge, immortality allows for accountability, and freedom enables moral responsibility.
7. Spiegel explains that God communicates his moral will through natural law by weaving natural prescriptions into the fabric of nature, revealing truths about utility (beneficial actions), duty (a natural sense of obligation and conscience), and virtue (our admiration for good character).

8. Spiegel indicates that special revelation in the Bible enhances our ethical understanding through various literary forms: narratives illustrate consequences, commands reveal duties, and character portraits (both positive and negative) expand our understanding of virtue and vice.
9. Spiegel argues that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled all three domains: he was obedient to the law (duty), his actions maximized good (utility), and he flawlessly displayed all virtues (character), making him the embodiment of moral truth.
10. Spiegel presents the moral will of God as the ultimate foundation for ethical truth, asserting that God's very nature is definitive of what is morally right.

Essay Format Questions

1. Critically analyze Dr. Spiegel's argument for an eclectic model of Christian ethics. What are the strengths and potential weaknesses of combining insights from utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics within a Christian framework?
2. Discuss the relationship between Scripture and the three domains of ethics (utility, duty, and virtue) as presented by Spiegel. How effectively does he demonstrate that these themes are central to both the Old and New Testaments?
3. Evaluate Spiegel's claim that an exclusive focus on a single ethical theory leads to a "truncated" Christian ethic. Provide examples of how prioritizing one domain (e.g., duty alone) might result in an incomplete moral understanding.
4. Explore the significance of Spiegel's assertion that even secular ethical theories can offer "genuine insights into Christian truth." How does this perspective broaden or challenge traditional approaches to Christian ethics?
5. Analyze Spiegel's discussion of the sources of ethical knowledge, including natural law and special revelation. How do these two sources complement each other in his eclectic model, and what are the potential challenges in interpreting them?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Eclectic:** Deriving ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources. In ethics, it refers to combining elements from different ethical theories.
- **Utilitarianism:** An ethical theory that determines right from wrong by focusing on outcomes. The most ethical choice is the one that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number.
- **Kantian Ethics (Deontology):** An ethical theory that emphasizes duty, obligations, and rules. Morality is determined by whether an action aligns with universal moral laws, regardless of the consequences.
- **Virtue Ethics:** An ethical theory that focuses on the development of virtuous character traits as the foundation for ethical behavior. Actions are considered right if they are what a virtuous person would do.
- **Consequences:** The results or effects of an action. Utilitarianism places significant emphasis on the moral relevance of consequences.
- **Duty:** A moral or legal obligation; a responsibility to perform a certain action or avoid another. Deontology centers on the concept of duty.
- **Virtue:** A trait or quality deemed to be morally good and is valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being. Examples include courage, generosity, and honesty.
- **Natural Law:** A philosophical theory that posits the existence of a moral order inherent in the universe and discoverable through reason and human nature.
- **Special Revelation:** The belief that God makes himself known through specific, supernatural means, primarily through the scriptures (the Bible).
- **Divine Command Ethics:** An ethical theory that asserts that morality is based on the commands or will of God. What is right is what God commands.
- **Sensus Divinitatis:** A Latin term, notably used by John Calvin, referring to an innate sense or awareness of God's existence within human beings.
- **Euthyphro Problem:** A philosophical dilemma that asks whether something is good because God commands it, or whether God commands it because it is good. It explores the relationship between God and morality.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 9, Eclectic Model of Christian Ethics, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Eclectic Christian Ethics

1. What is an eclectic model of Christian ethics, and why does the author recommend it? An eclectic model of Christian ethics, as recommended by the author, is an approach that affirms and integrates the insights of multiple major ethical theories, specifically utilitarianism (focusing on consequences), Kantian ethics (emphasizing duty, justice, and rights), and virtue ethics (highlighting character traits). The author recommends this model because he believes that each of these theories captures essential aspects of morality that are also emphasized throughout Scripture and exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. He argues that focusing exclusively on one of these areas leads to an incomplete or "truncated" Christian ethic.

2. How do utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics contribute to a comprehensive Christian ethic according to this view? Utilitarianism highlights the importance of considering the consequences of our actions, particularly in terms of pleasure and pain, which aligns with the scriptural attention to the outcomes of behavior. Kantian ethics underscores the significance of duty, obligation, justice, and rights, all of which are frequently addressed in biblical rules and commands. Virtue ethics emphasizes the development of moral character traits like courage, generosity, and self-control, which resonates with the biblical concept of the fruit of the Spirit and exhortations to virtuous living.

3. How does the author connect these secular ethical theories to Christian truth? The author argues that the insights of these major moral theories, even though developed by secular philosophers, can be seen as genuine insights into Christian truth because these same themes are consistently present in Scripture. Furthermore, he points out that some key proponents of these theories, such as Kant and arguably Mill and Aristotle, believed in God and even argued for God's necessity for morality. He sees the emphasis on utility, duty, and virtue in these philosophies as reflecting God's own moral character and will.

4. How does the life and character of Jesus Christ support this eclectic model of Christian ethics? The author contends that Jesus Christ perfectly embodied all three domains of morality: maximizing good consequences through his actions and words, perfectly obeying the law and fulfilling all obligations, and flawlessly displaying all virtues or the fruit of the Spirit. This serves as a central point in arguing that a complete Christian ethic must incorporate all these elements, as they are all reflected in Christ himself.

5. What does the author say about the sources of ethical knowledge within an eclectic Christian framework? The author proposes an eclectic approach to the sources of ethical knowledge as well, affirming both natural law ethics and divine command ethics. He believes God makes his moral will known through the natural order (natural law), which includes our understanding of utility, a natural sense of duty and conscience, and our admiration for virtuous character. Additionally, God communicates moral truth through special revelation, particularly the Old and New Testaments (divine command ethics).

6. How does the author see natural law contributing to our understanding of utility, duty, and virtue? The author suggests that natural law, as God's natural prescriptions woven into creation, reveals truths about utility by showing which actions tend to lead to good or bad consequences. It also contributes to our sense of duty through a God-given conscience that makes us aware of basic obligations. Finally, our natural admiration for virtuous individuals can be seen as an outworking of God making his moral will known through natural law in the realm of character.

7. How does special revelation (Scripture) contribute to our understanding of utility, duty, and virtue? The author explains that Scripture, in its various literary forms (narratives, commands, character portraits), further enhances our understanding of utility by showing the consequences of different behaviors. It reinforces our understanding of duty through numerous rules and commands, highlighting obligations and rights. Furthermore, by presenting examples of both virtuous and vicious characters, Scripture expands and clarifies our understanding of virtue and vice.

8. What is the significance of the cross in the author's graphic representation of the eclectic model? In the author's graphic, the cross is centrally located to symbolize that Jesus Christ fulfilled and embodies all three domains of moral truth – utility, duty, and virtue. It is meant to communicate the idea that Christ is the ultimate representation of a complete and balanced moral life, thereby supporting the need for a Christian ethic that integrates these three essential aspects.