

[1973. In *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Carl F.H. Henry, ed. Washington D.C.: Canon Press.]

CLARK, GORDON HADDON. Only one of Gordon H. Clark's (1902-) books, *Reading in Ethics* (New York, Appleton, Century, Crofts), coedited with T.V. Smith, is wholly devoted to ethics. But ethics holds a prominent place in his *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), and *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Nutley, N.J., Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961) and bulks large in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (Ronald Nash, ed., Nutley, N.J. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968).

The task of ethics is moral guidance, which demands universal moral rules (alternative to moral skepticism), which in turn requires a theory of moral justification. Clark's revelational ethics is a theory of moral guidance based on what he conceives to be a rationally justifiable theory of moral rules. The source of moral guidance is propositional divine revelation (the Bible) in which are given definite universal laws governing such matters as capital punishment, war, and sex. He does not deny the difficulty of application of rules to some particular problems, but argues that competing systems can give no guidance at all.

Empirical ethical theories are logically unjustifiable, since they lack any valid inductive argument able to derive moral obligation from observable phenomena. The primary failure of deductive theories, on the other hand, is the lack of valid argument from abstract principles to specific situation. To avoid the failure of these theories, Clark proposes that moral reasoning start with the axiom of revelation, "the Bible is the Word of God." Biblical revelation is both absolutely true and factual, and in it is found the justifiable moral postulate, "The right is what God legislates." God is the sovereign creator of all things, including the moral law. Conceivably he could have created the world with a different physical order, and there is no a priori reason why this should not apply to the moral order also. On a theistic interpretation, "honesty is the best policy precisely because God has made the world that way. Anything God does is right because he does it" (*Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, p. 188). Apart from God's sovereign legislation, custom or habit is the only source of the expectation that honesty is the best policy.

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