



Newsletter No. 7

It is good to call certain things “bad”

Dear Friends,

“Good and bad are but social constructions!” A young man tells us during a long discussion in the little hours of the night. Until he realises his wallet was stolen. How can they do this to me! Shouts the victim as he blocks his credit card and follows the procedure to get a new driving license. “Well”, the thief could think, “why not? My idea on this matter differs from yours, I certainly need this money more than you!”

It is not asking too much of a person to accept a moral certitude. On the contrary, every one profits of it, because only certitudes really protect. If my rights depend on circumstances, they will in the long run depend on those who interpret them. And this is anyways already too subjective.

The Dutch professor in Philosophy of law, Andreas Kinneging describes in this newsletter what objectivity of good and bad imply.

Your Europe for Christ! Team.

PS : don’t forget, a daily Our Father for a Europe based on Christian values! Because if we hadn’t a Father in the heavens, everything would be allowed.

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“Is it right to call certain things wrong?”

By Andreas Kinneging

Is there a moral right and wrong? The question is more urgent today than ever before, because the confusion about it was never as great as it is today. More people than ever believe that right and wrong are but subjective notions. In their eyes, right and wrong are what an individual, or a group, or a culture happens to believe to be right and wrong. Nothing more. And if what these individuals, groups, or cultures happen to believe about right and wrong changes, right and wrong are changed, since they are nothing beyond these very beliefs.



Now, it is clearly true that there are many differences of opinion between people. We stand out as a species for our ability to differ with others. But some things are not subject to *opinion*.

In a school class of six-year-old children, opinion might differ greatly as to what the sum of two plus two is. But no one would conclude that the answer is *subjective*. There is only one correct answer to the question: four. Note that the correctness of the answer does not depend on how many children have given it. It remains the only correct answer, even if only a minority comes up with it. Even if only one child comes up with it. Yes, even if none of the children has got it right.

Something similar can be said in regard to the question what is morally right and wrong. Of certain behaviours one could say, no, this is never good for me, this is never good for the other, this is never good for the community. Of other behaviours we could say the opposite, yes, acts of kindness or honesty for example are always good for the other. How do we know? There is a variety of sources: There are the Ten Commandments and their deep significance given by Christ himself. But there is also our own experience: "It is written on their hearts", says Paul in his letter to the Romans. If it hasn't been buried too deeply, we can "*read*" this law inside of us. Psychology and sociology confirm its validity: Every single person and society as a whole *need* it to be kept in order to *flourish*.

Society could not function if theft or murder were legal. A person could not live happily if marriage was not allowed or religion and education forbidden. A child could not grow up healthily without love and attention. An enterprise would not be sustainable or make profits without collegiality, punctuality and honesty. The knowledge of what is right and wrong is like an *instruction manual* for one's own person and for living with others.

That there are different views on right and wrong has no bearing on what they *are* in fact. It is quite possible that of many of these views only one is correct. Or none at all. And it might be the case that some are closer to the truth than others, just like, in our example, children that answer 'three' and 'five' are closer to the truth than children that answer 'ten' or 'seventeen'.

Subject matters that are objectively right and wrong have to be recognized also by the state. It was done so partly through the proclamation of human rights catalogs. Even though one could now criticise that too many arbitrary things are called a human right, it is a great achievement. But a nation's law must also recognize that human life must not be directly taken, not even if the human life is yet unborn. Here, we also have to keep our minds on guard: wrong laws don't make wrong things right.

This *instruction manual* is something mankind has to discover, just like its mathematical construction. It has to be discovered, but once discovered, it will also have to be remembered and passed on from generation to generation.

All great past civilizations have discovered parts of the moral construction of the world, of what is right and wrong, often overlapping each other -hence, their similarities. The deepest and most comprehensive understanding of right and wrong was achieved by Christianity, however, building upon foundations laid by Greek philosophy and Jewish religiosity. We better not forget it- and remember to pass it on to the next generation.

Prof. Andreas Kinning is professor for Philosophy of Law at the juridical faculty of the university of Leiden in the Netherlands. One of his main fields of interest is the humanistic and Christian tradition regarding moral, legal and political philosophy – ranging from Plato to Dietrich von Hildebrand. His most recent book, published in 2005, is called 'Geographie van Goed en Kwaad' (Geography of Good and Evil).