

The Ten Commandments:

The Sixth Commandment

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not murder

- Exodus 20:13 (NRSV)

You shall not kill

- Exodus 20:13 (RSV)

The Sixth Commandment

meaning of the verb *rasah* (“to kill”)

controversial

- murder: 1 Kings 21:19 (hence NRSV translation)
- unintentional killing: Deut 4:41-42
- execution of a convicted killer: Num 35:30

Fretheim (after Exodus 21:12, Num 35:20-21):

“any act of violence against an individual out of hatred, anger, malice, deceit, or for personal gain, in whatever circumstances and by whatever method, that might result in death (even if killing was not the intention)”

The Sixth Commandment

Jesus' Extension of the Commandment

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement, and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 5:21-24

The Sixth Commandment

New Testament Extension of the
Commandment

“All who hate a brother or sister are
murderers. . . .”

- 1 John 3:15

The Sixth Commandment

At the core of the Commandment:

- The need to see the “Face of the Other”
- The holiness / sanctity of human life

The Face of the Other

Buber: “I it” vs. “I You”

Martin Buber

1923: “I and Thou”

two modes of experience, attitudes to the world:

- world of objects = “I it”
- encounter with Another = “I Thou” or “I You”

The Face of the Other

Buber: “I it” vs. “I You”

I it

- we objectify, conceptualize, fit into the “box of our understanding” that which we see, hear, etc (“it”).
- the “normal” experienced world of space and time

I You

- the “You” can never be objectified, or “boxed” into our understanding. A “You” has no borders, cannot be measured. A “You” “fills the sky”
- an encounter, a transitory event (the “event of relation”)
- can be called love
- comes to us by grace

The Face of the Other

Levinas: Totalizing vs. “I You”

Emmanuel Levinas

1960's: contrasted “I You” not only with “I it” but with “totalizing”

- **“totalizing:”** the project of Western Philosophy: a search for truth that is a search for underlying unity, commonality, obliterating difference
- **“I You” encounter**
 - difference, not unity, is fundamental
 - the Other is “always beyond me” an infinity that can never be grasped. We can approach the Other but never reach the end of him/her

The Face of the Other

Levinas: The Original Ethical Relation

The “**original ethical relation**”

- my being is secondary; my responsibility to the Other comes first
- this “unshirkable ethical responsibility” is what makes me a unique self. Our “testimony” before the Other defines us. This starts with God as the Other. God calls, we answer “Here I am Lord.”
- Abraham in Genesis 22:1-
- Samuel in 1 Sam 3: 4-
- Isaiah in Isaiah 6: 8-

The Face of the Other

Levinas: The Face

“I You” encounter

- We meet the Other as Face
- The Face is my master in its need, its nakedness and vulnerability
- The Face gives me orders “Do not kill”
 - we are responsible for the Other in its need, when it is in danger of death

The Face of the Other

Murder as the Extreme Consequence of Not Seeing the Face of the Other

Murder is the extreme failure of not seeing
the face of the Other

The Holiness of Life

Human life is holy because:

1. Human life belongs to God. It is:
 - God's *creation*
 - God's *property*. Its disposition is God's prerogative alone
 - (the metaphor of life as a "gift" must not be taken "literally." The blessings of life are gifts to us; but our life itself still belongs to God)
2. Every human person has an intrinsic value and goodness, for each is a being made by God in the *image of God*

The Holiness of Life

Murder as a Reversal of God's Creation

Murder is a reversal of God's creation -- for each human life is God's creation:

Genesis 4:9. God to Cain:

“Your brother's blood(s) is crying out to me from the ground”

- A cry of anguish from the earth (creation)
- Murder kills the individual, all the future children and creative work yet to be done by the individual
- Murder destroys an entire world (Saving a life can save an entire world)

The Holiness of Life

Murder as a Usurpation of God's Ownership of Life

Murder is a usurpation of God's ownership of life, for human life belongs to God, is God's property:

Implications for any shedding of blood:

- Life is not for human beings to do with as we wish
- If we take a human life for any reason we must:
 - discern God's intentions
 - act as "an agent of God"

The Holiness of Life

Murder as a Blasphemy Against God

Murder is a blasphemy against God, for it
destroys a being made in the image of God

Are We all “Murderers”?

Extrapolations on the Shedding of Blood

New Testament:

Jesus in Matthew 5:21-24: anger and insults of Another are liable under the Sixth Commandment.

1 John 3:15: hate of Another liable

Talmudic extrapolations:

- embarrassing, shaming another
 - causes blood to drain from their face
- acts that destroy aspects of life that may not be recovered
 - rape
 - causing Another to lose their livelihood

Are We all “Murderers”?

Extrapolations on the Shedding of Blood

Common theme:

Doing anything that denigrates Another, that causes the “death” of part of the human spirit or the human heart is wrong

A positive version:

We should encourage, nurture in the Other all that enriches, enhances the human spirit and heart

Resisting Wickedness and Evil that Threatens the Other

Responding to the face of the Other, to its needs and vulnerability, its possible danger of death, requires us to protest and resist wickedness and evil

Calvin, on the positive application of the Sixth Commandment:

“. . . that we should not only live at peace with men. . . but also should aid, as far as we can, the miserable who are unjustly oppressed, and should endeavor to resist the wicked, lest they should injure men.”

Resisting Wickedness and Evil that Threatens the Other

There is an evil which most of us condone and are even guilty of: indifference to evil. We remain neutral, impartial, and not easily moved by the wrongs done to other people.

Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself. . . . A silent justification, it makes possible an evil erupting as an exception becoming the rule. . . . The decay of conscience fills the air with a pungent smell. Good and evil, which were once as distinguishable as day and night, have become a blurred mist. But that mist is man-made. God is not silent, He has been silenced.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

Suicide

Genesis 9:5: “For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning. . .”

Our life belongs to God; it is not our right to decide when to end it

Who is suicide a sin against?

Capital Punishment

Israel's limited use of capital punishment had to do with violations of God's created order. It was considered a matter of world restoration under God:

- Exodus 21:12-17
- Exodus 22: 18-20

When might capital punishment be justified as a restoration of the world under God?
Is "setting an example" sufficient justification for capital punishment?
Can a secular state act as an agent of God?

Euthanasia

Adage to physicians: “When God puts his hand on, take yours off.”

- (When does God put his hand on? How can we tell?)

Can we ever

- take our hand off when God has not put his hand on?
- use our hand to actively push the Other to God when God has put his hand on?
- use our hand to actively push the Other to God when God has not put his hand on?

War

Arguments justifying war and the killing in war have included:

- defense of self
- restoration of the World to God

What criteria must be met for a war to be “just?” How “broken” must the world be before it is not longer tolerable and war necessary to “restore” the world to God?

We are called to resist evil and wickedness. Is bloodshed sometimes unavoidable in resisting evil? Why? How sure must we be that there is no better alternative?

Abortion

The debate over the ethics of the *practice* (vs. the more complex issue of the *legal availability*) of abortion:

- is not a debate about the holiness of human life (in general both sides uphold the holiness of human life)
- centers on the question: What is human life and when does it begin?

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