

with love—one should always do whatever would be the “loving thing.” Fletcher based his philosophy on the following six propositions:

1. Only one thing is intrinsically good—love.
2. The ruling norm of Christian decision is love.
3. Love and justice are the same.
4. Love wills the neighbor’s good whether or not we like our neighbor.
5. The end justifies the means.
6. Love’s decisions are made only in specific situations—they can’t be prescribed ahead of time.

Fletcher’s book offers numerous examples of ethical dilemmas, allowing his readers to make up their own minds about what would be the “loving thing” to do.

One ethical dilemma involved the decision facing President Harry Truman concerning the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This situation involved causing thousands of immediate deaths to shorten World War II and save even more lives. Another dilemma might involve an elderly man who must make a decision about whether to take an expensive medication that might extend his life for a short period of time but would create financial hardship for his family. Fletcher raises questions without really providing answers, but he certainly seems to imply that dropping the atomic bomb and engaging in passive euthanasia could be the “loving thing” to do.

*Deontology:* The Greek word *deon* means *obligation or duty*. Accordingly, deontologists hold that an action must be based on its intrinsic worth, not based on the consequences of the act. Deontology is the opposite of utilitarianism, pragmatism, and situation ethics. This view argues that good ends can never be used to justify unworthy means.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant is the most prominent defender of deontology. In his 1785 work *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explains his notion of the categorical imperative. Kant says that the determination of what is right must be prior to the determination of what is good. One should not justify immoral acts based on a claim that these acts might serve some long-term societal good. In particular, Kant says that human beings must never be used merely as a means to an end.

Consider an example from Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics*: A group of Irish immigrants in the 1830s are traveling through Ohio when they spot some Indians and take refuge in a nearby forest. The immigrants have been told that the Indians kill settlers. One woman is holding her sleeping baby but realizes that the baby is about to wake up and cry. As the Indians draw closer, the mother notices that she is suffocating her baby. If the mother keeps her hand over her baby’s mouth, she will kill her child. If she takes her hand away, the baby will cry and the Indians will kill the settlers. What should this mother do?