

September 3

Will Our Theory of Morality Destroy Us?, by David Carlin

<https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2016/10/07/will-our-theory-of-morality-destroy-us/>

The prevailing theory of morality in the United States today, especially among the younger generation, but by no means limited to the younger generation, is a theory that may be called Moral Liberalism. This theory comprises two principles: (1) the Personal Liberty Principle, according to which all conduct is morally permissible, provided it does no harm to non-consenting others; and (2) the Tolerance Principle, according to which we are obliged to tolerate the behavior of others, provided it does no harm to non-consenting others.

This theory has been used over the past half-century to justify many forms of conduct that used to be considered immoral – for example, premarital sex, unmarried cohabitation, having babies out of wedlock, abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and physician-assisted suicide.

To be sure, some of these forms of conduct seem condemnable even on grounds of Moral Liberalism, e.g., abortion, which does a great deal of harm – indeed nothing less than lethal harm – to a non-consenting other, namely the unborn baby. But the champions of abortion get around this difficulty by simply denying that the unborn baby is a human being. The denial is based, of course, on either ignorance or dishonesty, but it has worked; that is, it has been psychologically effective for the many millions of moral liberals who approve of abortion.

The widespread adoption of Moral Liberalism over the past half-century has entailed the rejection of an earlier theory of morality, that is, the Christian theory, which condemned premarital sex, abortion, homosexuality, and so on; and with the rejection of the old-fashioned Christian theory of morality has come, quite logically, a widespread rejection of Christianity itself.

Of course, many persons, both Protestant and Catholic, who hold a Moral Liberalism theory of morality, still consider themselves Christian, but theirs is a bastardized form of Christianity. That is, it is a “Christianity” that has

dropped much of its traditional Christian baggage, both doctrinal and moral. It is the kind of religion that is often called liberal or progressive Christianity. It is a kind of halfway house on the road from classical Christianity to outright atheism.

When it comes to morality, this bastardized Christianity attempts to blend – incoherently and rather ludicrously – Moral Liberalism with the ethic of Jesus. It does this by reducing the ethic of Jesus to a single principle, love of neighbor. Now Jesus certainly advocated a love-thy-neighbor ethic, but in doing so he didn't mean to trump or nullify traditional rules of morality pertaining to, e.g., sexual conduct.

But progressive Christians argue, in effect, that Jesus, who they grant was a great man, didn't fully appreciate the implications of his love-thy-neighbor ethic. How could he have done so, living as he did so many centuries before modern science and technology? Poor Jesus – he didn't even own a smart phone. But we modern Christians, thanks to many centuries of experience and to the vast intelligence we have acquired by being modern men and women, now at last realize that love-thy-neighbor means we have to tolerate, and even be supportive of, practices like fornication, unmarried cohabitation, abortion, homosexual sodomy, same-sex marriage, and suicide for terminally ill persons.

Personally speaking, I fear that Moral Liberalism, having largely destroyed Christianity in America (though there are, I grant, some encouraging holdouts among Evangelical Protestants and old-fashioned Catholics), will sooner or later destroy America itself. Think about some forms of conduct that become morally permissible once we accept Moral Liberalism:

- (1) Polygamous relationships – provided they are consensual and among adults.
- (2) Adultery – provided the “innocent” spouse gives consent, either express or implied; or provided, when this spouse has not given consent, the adultery is effectively concealed from this spouse in such a way that his/her feelings are not hurt.
- (3) Incest – provided the partners are consenting adults and that precautions

are taken so that pregnancy will not result.

(4) Statutory rape – provided the technically underage person happens to be significantly more mature psychologically than the average young person, that is, mature enough to give genuine consent.

(5) Sex with animals – provided the animal suffers no pain.

(6) Suicide – provided the person committing suicide is in his/her right mind.

(7) Duels to the death – provided they are between consenting adults

(8) Modern gladiator fights to the death – provided these involve consenting adults only

(9) Religious human sacrifice – provided the sacrificial victim is a consenting adult.

I don't mean to say that Moral Liberalism will actually lead to these forms of conduct. For instance, I am doubtful that sex with animals will ever catch on. I imagine, however, that the next few decades will see a considerable increase in adultery. Just as young persons today routinely expect that their eventual spouse will have had a number of earlier sexual partners (hardly anybody takes premarital virginity seriously anymore), so in the future married persons will come to expect that their spouses will have occasional adulterous relationships. I think there will be a notable rise in polygamous relationships and incest. And I wouldn't be terribly surprised if duels to the death were to become a relatively popular spectator sport.

But my aim here isn't to predict what *will* happen. My aim is to point out three things: (1) that these developments *can* happen, and logically should happen, in a society that embraces Moral Liberalism; (2) that Moral Liberalism is an absurd moral theory, given that these consequences logically flow from it; and (3) that a society that embraces an absurd moral theory will, if it doesn't soon renounce that theory, destroy itself.