

Philosophical Theology 1 (TH5)

**Philosophy of Ethics
Philosophy of Aesthetics**

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Lakeside institute of Theology**



Philosophical Theology 1 (TH5)

Aug. 15 – Intro to Philosophical Theology; Logic

Aug. 22 – Truth & Epistemology

Aug. 29 – Metaphysics

Sept. 5 – ***No Class***

Sept. 12 – Philosophy of Religion

Sept. 19 – Philosophy of Science; Human Nature; Philosophy of Politics

Sept. 26 – Ethics: What is Right?; Aesthetics: What is Beautiful?

October 3 – Conclusion; Final Exam



What is philosophy?

- Literally, it is *a love of wisdom* – *phileo* is Greek for “love,” *sophos* means “wisdom.”
- Philosophy is the critical examination of our foundational beliefs concerning the nature of reality, knowledge and truth; and our moral and social values.
- Philosophy is the means and process by which we examine our lives and the meaning in our lives.
- **Philosophy is the attempt to think rationally and critically about life’s most important questions in order to obtain knowledge and wisdom about them.**

Philosophy of Ethics – What is right?

- “If you knew you could get away with a very profitable crime, would you do it?”
- What is “right?”
 - The thing that brings the most benefit to me?
 - The thing that brings the most benefit to others?
 - The thing that brings the most benefit to the *most* people?
 - What does it mean to act “morally,” and what are our motives for doing so?
 - How far should we (or will we) go to act morally and do what is right, even if the results are unpleasant?
 - If all our understanding of logic, epistemology, metaphysics, human nature, and God Himself doesn't translate into better living, what good is it?

Philosophy of Ethics – What is right?

- **The problem is that it's sometime difficult to discern what course of action is best.**
- **How do we discern moral truth?**
- **What principles are there to guide us in moral decision-making?**
- **Or is there even such a thing as moral truth?**
- **Is morality rather just a matter of opinion and emotions?**
- **And what role does religious belief properly play in ethics?**
- **The philosophy of ethics seeks to confront the need to find a connection between ethical theory and ethical practice, especially since some ethical situations are not morally clear.**


Philosophy of Ethics – What is right?

- **There appear to be *common sense* principles which apply to ethical decision making:**
 - The **principle of autonomy** – people should be allowed to be self-determining.
 - The **principle of utility** – maximize pleasure and minimize pain.
 - The **principle of justice** – all people should be treated fairly and equally.
 - The **principle of the sanctity of life** – respect all human life as sacred.
- **But what if two or more of these ethical principles seem to be in conflict in a given case – how do we resolve this?**
- **This is why we need an *ethical theory* – a general framework for moral decision making.**


Philosophy of Ethics – What is right?

- Ethical theories not only aim to prioritize moral principles; they also aim to tell us the meaning of moral terms, concepts, and principles.
- Every ethical theory asks what it means to make a moral judgment such as “Honesty is good” or “Bin Laden is bad.”
- Moral theories aim to tell us the real meaning of such terms as **duty**, **right**, **obligation**, **justice**, and **virtue**. Such theoretical concepts pertain to the branch of ethics called **Metaethics**.
- **Normative Ethics** seeks to address the practical implications of moral theory – the rightness or wrongness of particular actions, policies or laws.

Philosophy of Ethics – What is right?

- **One of the most basic ethical questions:**
 - **Is there absolute moral truth?** That is, are there moral values that are true for everyone, regardless of culture or personal preference?
 - **Moral Objectivists** are those who believe there are universal moral standards.
 - **Moral Relativists** are those who deny there are universal moral standards.
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Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Relativism

- **Ethical Relativism – The view that there are no universally true moral values.**
 - If ethical relativism is correct, what is the meaning of moral judgments, such as “Honesty is good” or “Adultery is wrong”?
 - The answer, according to the relativist, is that such statements merely reflect people's preferences.
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Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Relativism

- **Cultural Relativism** – The view that the key to understanding moral convictions is the culture.
- Anthropologists have proposed that, given the difference in what are considered “normal” practices in cultures, calling a behavior “habitual” is the same as calling it “morally good.”
- What begins as merely advantageous patterns of thought and behavior, over time are accepted as the standards of right and wrong in a culture (“*mores*”).

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Relativism

- **Cultural Relativism therefore can be summarized as follows (the *Plurality Argument*):**
 1. Moral values differ from culture to culture.
 2. There therefore is no objective moral standard.

- But multiple perspectives on a topic does not mean there is not one *correct* perspective.

- If cultural relativism is true, then there are no grounds for criticizing the practices of any culture. (*Cannibalism? Slavery? Child prostitution? Female genital mutilation?*); moral progress would be impossible; and all moral reformers are corrupt.

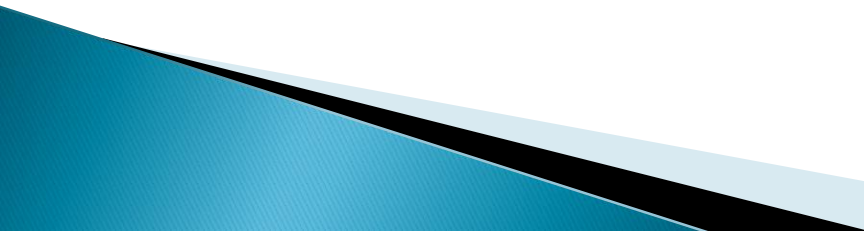
Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Relativism

- **Moral Subjectivism** – The view that moral values are relative to individual people rather than people groups. (Whatever a person prefers is what is morally right.)
- Like cultural relativism, moral subjectivism denies the existence of any universal truth.
- But if moral subjectivism is true, then no one can ever be mistaken in their moral judgments; we have no grounds ever to be critical of another person's moral choices (rapists? serial killers? pornographers?); and no debate on ethical issues is possible, ever.

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Relativism

- **Emotivism** is the effort to apply the *verification principle* from *logical positivism* to ethics, with the conclusion being that no ethical statements can be empirically verified, so such statements have no cognitive content and are merely expressions of *feelings* intended to arouse actions.
- *Emotivism* therefore denies that moral statements have any real meaning or truth value, but rather are nothing more than emotional outbursts. There cannot be any normative moral standards according to *emotivism*, and so no possibility of any rational consideration of ethical questions.


Philosophy of Ethics – What is right?

- **Nihilism** is the view that life is meaningless, and comes out of a complete rejection of metaphysics, of God and of the Western theistic worldview.
 - Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) proclaimed “God is dead” (meaning Western people no longer believed in Him), and that therefore moral values have no foundation and “everything is permitted.”
 - Nietzsche and other nihilists then were faced with the challenge of trying to find meaning in a meaningless world; to create value in life when real values were no longer available.
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Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Relativism

- **Existentialism** is the view that human beings do not have a fixed nature, but that our natures evolve as we experience life – or *exist*. We are capable of defining ourselves and our own destinies, but also are left to create our own sense of meaning and purpose.
- Atheistic existentialists (*Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre*) took the same route as nihilists, trying to find meaning and value for themselves.
- Theistic existentialists (*Kierkegaard, Marcel, Buber*) emphasized the need to approach God through radical faith, which goes beyond reason.

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Objectivism

- **Moral Objectivism** – The belief that there is a **universally true ethical standard, a moral code that applies to every person.**
 - Moral statements have a truth value that is independent of cultural practices, individual preferences, and human emotions.
 - When a person declares, for example, that “Stealing is wrong” or “Giving to charity is good,” these judgments describe the acts in question, and **NOT** simply cultural or personal attitudes toward them.
 - Moral objectivism is today, and has always been, the dominant view of ethical philosophers.
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Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Objectivism

- **But what IS the universal moral standard proposed by Moral Objectivism, and from where does it come?**
 - ***Naturalistic ethical theories*** propose that the universal moral standard is found in natural facts, such as human self-interest, pleasure, or reason.
 - ***Nonnaturalistic ethical theories*** claim the moral standard transcends the natural world.
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Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Naturalism

- **Ethical Egoism** – The belief that one’s basic moral duty is to always act in one’s own self-interest; that it is *right* to be selfish.
- *Ayn Rand* said humans are an end in themselves, and whatever best enables human beings to survive must be our ultimate guide in ethics.
- Rand praised human competition and denounced altruism and self-sacrifice as counterproductive.
- *Psychological egoism* – the claim that humans always pursue their own self interest.
- Rand’s moral theory is a direct adaptation of Darwinian and capitalistic ideas to ethics. (“*Greed is good.*”)

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Naturalism

- But, contrary to ethical egoism, in competition, not everyone can win.
 - The theory is also fundamentally unjust, making right whatever I believe is in MY best interest, and so supporting the strong over the weak, those in power over those who are oppressed – and so would encourage slavery, dictatorships, bullying, etc.
 - It also defies any common sense evaluation that says altruism and self-sacrifice are good.
 - And how can we even know what actions will contribute to one's long-term self-interest?
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Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Naturalism

- **Utilitarianism** – the belief that ethical choices can and should be made based on the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.
- ***Psychological hedonism*** – the claim that as a matter of fact all human beings seek pleasure.
- ***Ethical hedonism*** – the thesis that pleasure is the highest human good.
- ***The Principle of Utility*** – the suggestion that every action can be evaluated based on whether it increases or diminishes happiness. (But *whose* happiness? And what is the definition of “*happiness*?”)

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Naturalism

- **Kantian Ethics** – Immanuel Kant emphasized moral duties, completely apart from any consequences. (Because morality is part of human rationality, one does what is right as an act of good will, no matter the consequences.)
- ***The Categorical Imperative*** – one should never will a course of action that would result in a contradiction of one's own will, and whoever abides by this principle has good will.
- “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should be a universal law.” (*“Can you universalize the rule of your action.”* or, *What would happen if everyone acted this way?*)

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Naturalism

- **Rule Utilitarianism** – propose that we should focus on consequences, but of general moral rules rather than individual acts (versus *act utilitarianism*). But this does not help us when challenged by apparent conflicts in moral rules.
- **Virtue Ethics** – a return to a more ancient focus on which qualities should be possessed by a *good person*, on the premise that *personal character* is the best guide to ethical decisions.
 - **Intellectual Virtues** – those that can be taught
 - **Moral Virtues** – those that can only be developed through practice.
 - Virtues almost always lie midway between 2 vices.

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Nonnaturalism

- **Natural Law Ethics** – defines human good in terms of our ultimate purpose, and we are made rational so we can perceive prescriptive laws as moral norms. (That the important moral truths are self-evident to us, if we choose to be aware.)
- Aquinas proposed that, in the event of an apparent conflict of moral truths in which both good and evil can result, we follow the principle of double effect:
 1. The evil consequence is not directly intended.
 2. The evil consequence is not the means for producing the good effect.
 3. There is proportionate reason to perform the act despite the evil consequences.

Philosophy of Ethics – Ethical Nonnaturalism

- **Divine Command Theory** – the moral standard is determined by God’s command.
- Divine commands impose obligations because:
 - God created, sustains and owns the universe.
 - A beneficiary is rightly obligated to the benefactor.
- We can ultimately go further and say that moral good is not just based on what God commands, but on His own moral perfection. God Himself is the moral standard.

Philosophy of Ethics – Conclusion

- We must rejected ethical relativism, while still acknowledging some elements of cultural relativism, subjectivism and emotivism.
- As Christians, we must affirm some version of moral objectivism, especially as represented in Divine Command Theory, with an emphasis on morality based on the moral character of God.

Philosophy of Aesthetics – What is Beauty?

- Is beauty simply a matter of personal opinion?
- Or is beauty a real quality that exists in some things and not others, no matter what individual people think?

Philosophy of Aesthetics – What is Beauty?

- Human beings have an inherent desire to make, appreciate and enjoy beautiful things. But... “What is art?”
- 1. Any human-made object?
- 2. Whatever is presented as art? (the institutional theory)
- 3. The product of the artistic process?
- 4. Whatever brings (or tends to bring) aesthetic pleasure to those who experience the object? (paradigm case approach)
- 5. Human-made objects created to be enjoyed for their beauty.
- 6. Human-made objects that are enjoyable for their beauty.

Philosophy of Aesthetics – What is Beauty?

- **“What is the function or purpose of art?”**
- 1. Mimesis – art as imitation.
- 2. Expressionism – art as expression of emotion.
- 3. Formalism – art as significant form.
- 4. Marxism – art as ideology and political power.
- 5. Christian aesthetics – the Imago Dei and world projection.

- There is wisdom in affirming an eclectic Christian view of art and its function.

Philosophy of Aesthetics – What is Beauty?

- **Aesthetic Subjectivism** – beauty really is in the eye of the beholder; there is no objective quality to beauty, so no piece of art is superior to any other. (related to *moral subjectivism*)
- **Aesthetic Objectivism** – there is an objective quality to beauty, which is why great works of art are almost universally recognized as such.
- But what is the nature of these “objective standards?”

Philosophy of Aesthetics – Art & Ethics

- **Aestheticism** – the idea that art and the artist are not susceptible to moral evaluation or judgment.
- **Moralism** – the belief that art is wholly subservient to ethics – good art must serve an ethical purpose.
- **Ethicism** – says moral attributes in art are relevant, but not wholly determinative of aesthetic merit.

Philosophy of Aesthetics – Art & Ethics

- **The Christian View of Aesthetic Value**
 - God has shown aesthetic concerns.
 - God is still the source of all beauty.
 - God's nature is as a beautiful being.