

Christian Ethics (CL3)

Teleology (Goals Ethics)

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Christian Ethics (CL3)

Oct. 1 – Intro to Ethics; Christian Ethics

Oct. 8 – Ethics, Morality and Religion

Oct. 15 – Authority in Christian Ethics

Oct. 22 – Basis for Ethics; Teleology

Oct. 29 – ***Mid-Term Break***

Nov. 5 – Duty Ethics (Deontology)

Nov. 12 – Virtue Ethics

Nov. 19 – Conclusion; Final Exam

What is Ethics?

- **Ethics, or moral philosophy**, is the branch of philosophy that investigates the questions ***“What is the best way for people to live?”*** and ***“What actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances?”***
- In practice, ethics tries to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, crime and justice.

The Basis for 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.**

The Basis for Ethics

- All ethics is done from a particular point of view.
- Christian ethics is different in that a Christian who believes all things come from God will answer ethical questions differently from a scientific materialist who believes matter is all there is.
- Christian ethics is rooted in the Hebrew prophets, who called people to renewed covenant with God by living with justice, kindness, and humility; and then in Jesus, who taught love for God and for our neighbors.

The Basis for Ethics

- The Hebrew prophets focused on the requirements of justice in relations & reverence for God before all.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8


- Jesus continued this, proclaiming that God was open to all people – inaugurating a new covenant based on the old, and in reaction against immorality.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. Galatians 5:19-23

The Basis for Ethics

- The Greeks had no sacred Scripture on which to rely, so they focused on other means of choosing.
 - ❖ Following desires was not sufficient – desires change.
 - ❖ Consult oracles or using magic to make decisions seemed inconsistent and somewhat irrational.
 - ❖ They could emulate ancient or Homeric heroes.
 - ❖ Or – a new thought – they could try to use *reason* to determine right choices leading to the good, and especially fulfillment of good goals. (Enter Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.)
- This Greek philosophy – especially Neoplatonism and the “natural law” approach of the Stoics – became very influential in the development of Christian ethical approaches and systems.

The Basis for Ethics

- It is important to note there is still no ONE Christian approach to ethics.
 - Ethical approaches vary based on historical, cultural and doctrinal differences – Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestants, and many sub-varieties.
 - Ethical approaches especially vary based on doctrinal *emphases*: **creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny.**
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The Basis for Ethics

- Various factors & emphases affecting Christian ethics have been reflected in different stances that provide ways to relate to surrounding society & human efforts:
 - ❖ **SYNERGY** seeks ways for Christians to work with other understandings of human good.
 - ❖ **INTEGRITY** maintains a distinctive Christian witness.
 - ❖ **REALISM** warns Christians against overestimating their own power and virtue.
 - ❖ **LIBERATION** stresses that freedom from oppression is central to the Christian message.

The Basis for Ethics

- Understanding your particular point of view, however, is not the same thing as solving moral problems.
- The moral question is not, *What do I believe?* It is, *What should I do?*
- Here, Christian ethics comes into conversation with other ways of thinking about ethics, for all ethical approaches uses one or more of three primary ways of arriving at a moral decision: **teleology** (*goal oriented*); **deontology** (*duty or rule oriented*); and **areteology** (*virtue oriented*).

Teleology: Goods, Goals, and God

- Teleological ethics uses reason to determine the goals or goods at which our actions should aim, and to guide action toward the achievement of a good goal.
- What makes an **action** right is that it aims at good results. What makes a **person** good is that he or she accomplishes good things.
- The challenge to teleology is determining what is *really good*, which of competing goods are *best*, and how accurately we can *predict the future* (since we are making moral decisions today based on future outcomes).

Christian Teleological Ethics

- Aristotle said ethics is about making decisions that lead to *happiness (eudaimonia)* – the goal everyone naturally wants – learned slowly, step-by-step, based on experience.
- Christian ethics seems to disagree – Jesus said the blessed or joyful (*makarios*) are the meek, merciful, peaceable & persecuted (Matt. 5), and all depends on relationship with God.
- Augustine emphasized the uniqueness of God's reality to explain why God alone is to be loved and why no other object of love can supply true happiness.

Moral Realism & Moral Idealism

- **Moral realism** is the belief that goodness or rightness is part of the reality of whatever it is we accurately identify as good. Goodness exists independently of ideas we have about it.
- **Moral idealism** says instead that moral values are not real properties, but are only “ideas” assigned by people – either individuals or groups – and therefore subject to change. (Especially evident in *materialism* and *naturalism*, popular with some scientists and all atheists today.)

Ethical Naturalism

- **Utilitarianism** – the belief that ethical choices can and should be made based on the greatest good for the greatest number of people, especially 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?*”)

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