

Christian Ethics (CL3)

Virtue Ethics

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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

- 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*).

Areteology: What Makes a Good Person

- Areteological (or *Virtue*) ethics emphasizes the role of one's character and the virtues that one's character embodies for determining or evaluating ethical behavior.
- "Virtue Ethics is a classification within Normative Ethics that attempts to discover and classify what might be deemed of moral character, and to apply the moral character as a base for one's choices and actions."

Areteology: What Makes a Good Person

- **Key concepts in virtue ethics come from ancient Greek philosophy:**
 - *arete* (excellence or virtue)
 - *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom)
 - *eudaimonia* (flourishing)
- **Virtue theory is not in conflict with deontology or teleology:** those two viewpoints deal with actions a person should take, whereas virtue theorists argue that developing morally desirable virtues will help aid moral actions.
- **Virtue ethics focuses on *being* versus *doing*;** morality stems from the character of the actor, rather than being a reflection of the actions.

Historical Development of Areteology

- Plato discusses the Four Cardinal Virtues.
- Aristotle's moral theory focused on virtues and the achieving of *eudaimonia* ("happiness").
- Virtue theory was in histories of Roman historians Livy, Plutarch and Tacitus (1st-2nd cent. AD).
- Cicero (2nd century AD) brought virtue theory into Roman philosophy.
- Virtue theory was incorporated into Christian theology by St. Ambrose of Milan (4th century)
- Virtue theory developed extensively in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. (13th century)
- Virtue theory diminished in the Renaissance (14th-17th cents.) with waning interest in Aristotle, but re-emerged late 1950s in Anglo-American philosophy (the "*aretaic turn*").

The Cardinal (or “Hinge”) Virtues

➤ The Four Cardinal Virtues of Ancient Greece

- Prudence
- Justice
- Temperance (or restraint)
- Courage (or fortitude)

➤ The Three Theological Virtues of St. Paul

- Faith
- Hope
- Charity (or love)

➤ The Seven Heavenly Virtues

- Chastity, Temperance, Charity, Diligence, Patience, Kindness, Humility.

Criticisms of Virtue Ethics

- The “Justification Problem” – which virtues should be included, and why those & not others?
- Cultural relativity – may change with cultures.
- Chronological relativity – may change with time.
- “Non-codifiability” – the virtues do not address directly nor necessarily lead to moral action.
- Virtue ethics may not be different from or even add anything to teleological or deontological ethics. (i.e., Kant’s ontology was developed in his “*Doctrine of Virtue*.”)
- Virtue ethics may be practically unrealistic (an “unsustainable utopia”).

Future Directions of Virtue Ethics

- Recent approaches to virtue ethics have included non-Aristotelian forms (*agent-based* versus *agent-focused*).
- There is a growing interest in ancient Chinese (and other non-Western) ethics.
- Despite remarkable growth in recent decades, virtue ethics is still much in the minority, especially in the area of applied ethics. Growth is predicted, however, especially in ethics of environment, business and biotechnology.
- Serious doubt, however, exists as to whether there can ever be a virtue ethics of politics.
- As virtue ethics has always emphasized the importance of moral education and the training of character, there is now a growing movement towards virtue education.





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?*”)