

Christian Ethics (CL3)

Deontology (Duty 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

- 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*).

Deontology: Following the Rules

- Deontological (or *Duty*) ethics says that moral thinking is about the use of reason to identify duties and apply them in particular situations.
- A “duty” may be a law, a rule, a social convention, or simply an inherent sense of what is right or what is required.
- What makes an action right is that it conforms to duty. What makes a person good is that he or she does right actions according to established duties and rules.

Biblical Deontology

- The Ten Commandments.. only part of 613 *mitzvot* in the Old Testament.
- Jesus said the *Greatest Commandment...* and the *Second...*
- *“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right.”*
1 Peter 2:13-14
- Reason, authority, agreement, & conscience all work together in some ways of thinking about deontology in Christian ethics.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) & Natural Law

- For Aquinas, duty is known by a rule of practical reason that tells us how our human nature requires us to act.
- Three things identify a law:
 1. Law is a rule of reason directed toward the common good.
 2. Law is given by proper authority.
 3. Law must be published and made known.
- The beginning of all law is God's eternal law, reflected as *natural law* in all things – though humans can use reason to decide whether to follow the natural law.

Natural Law

- Because the natural law is part of human nature, there are some duties that everyone knows – including a duty to recognize and worship God, and for maintaining human societies, like an obligation to create governments, obey laws, and refrain from harming others.
- Human law should be shaped by natural law.
- Natural law provides a strong basis for individual moral accountability.
- In a conflict between human authorities and conscience, we must obey conscience.


The Importance of Natural Law

- Aquinas' natural law became foundational to much of later Christian ethics, especially in the Catholic tradition.
- After the Protestant Reformation natural law provided a starting point for modern international law, as Catholic and Protestant scholars established rules for trade and commerce, and to limit the damages of war.
- Appeals to natural law ethics became less frequent as modern nations developed more extensive systems of laws, but were revived as the world struggled post-WWII.

Reason, Sin & Human Nature

- Christian and Jewish thinkers have especially made use of the idea that some moral rules are universal and part of nature because it locates the origins of morality in the same act of creation in which God made human nature.
- But this raised the question of whether fallen people still had enough of the human nature God gave them to know what is required.
- For the Protestant Reformers, human nature had been so damaged by sin that unaided reason lacked a secure knowledge of anything that nature (or God) requires.

Pacifism, Integrity and Realism

- Critics of the Reformers asked, "Why not abandon the sword, since we do not need it? Let others take on that task, since there is never any shortage of people who want power. We will devote ourselves to living as true Christians."
 - Michael Sattler, the Swiss Brethren & the Schleithem Confession of Faith.
 - Ethics of Integrity and Pacifism.
 - Ethics of Realism and the tension between love and justice.
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Calvin -- A Third Use of the Law

- John Calvin (1509–1564) sided with Luther, believing sin has changed human nature, limiting the powers of human reason, so the use of natural law that Thomas Aquinas taught is impossible.
- Calvin saw **THREE** uses for the Law:
 1. It convinces fallen human beings of their sinfulness.
 2. It restrains the evil they would do if left to make their own choices.
 3. It guides Christians to know what they ought to do and encourages them to do it.







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?*”)