

“Ethics: The History of a Problematic”

Winter 2015 -- Gray Cox

TF 2:35 Turrets II

Office Hours: Th 1-4, Davis second Floor and by chance or appointment ;-)
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Course Description

This is a course on the history of ethical thinking in the West. It deals with ways that philosophers from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas, Bentham, Kant, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, A. J. Ayer, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Sara Ruddick, Gandhi, Nozick, Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre have addressed questions like the following: What is the best way to live as individuals – and what does this imply about how we should structure our society? Why are there so many types of moral disagreements in modern societies? Why do these disagreements never seem to end but go on indefinitely? Are there ways to resolve these disputes that are persuasive between ethical traditions and across cultures? M, HS, HY

The central text for the course will be MacIntyre’s *AFTER VIRTUE* which provides a systematic narrative for the history of Western ethics that claims to diagnose its core problems and provide solutions. This will be available at Sherman’s Bookstore along with a second text we will use, Immanuel Kant’s *GROUNDING FOR THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS*. Other key texts and passages from the philosophers central to that narrative will be examined in detail and interpreted in light of their historical contexts using material from texts such as W. T. Jones *HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY* and Copleston’s *HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY* – xeroxes or pdfs of these materials will be provided.

The goal of this course is to help students develop skills to critically analyze philosophical texts and arguments in both their theoretical and historical contexts.

Course methods will include mini-lectures, class discussion, other activities (e. g. role plays) and student presentations.

Assignments will include a series of 2 presentations in class, an essay on a philosopher and 2 problem sets.

Class presentations on a philosopher: Everyone does 2 class presentations (normally with a partner) of the ideas and historical context of a thinker being covered in the course -- a 10-12 minute presentation to the class providing the following information and reflections: Who is the thinker? What are the principal facts of her or his

life and the context in which she or he lived? Who and/or what were they responding to in their argument? What are the key doctrines or methods they introduced? What is a real life example that it might be interesting to apply their theory to? What is a question about their theory that it would be interesting to discuss? Each presentation should be accompanied by a short (one page) handout that provides a bullet list of key points and questions presented. (Useful starting points to develop these presentations will normally include Jones' and Copleston's histories as well as the primary texts from which excerpts will be drawn for the whole class to read.)

Essay on a philosopher -- a 8-10 page essay that uses a similar format and deals with: Who is the thinker? What are the principal facts of her or his life and the context in which she or he lived? Who and/or what were they responding to in their argument? What are the key doctrines or methods they introduced? What is a key problem or puzzle about their theory and why is it a problem or puzzle? How might they have dealt with it? (This could include the option of changing one or more of their views. If it does, be sure to consider what difference this change might make.) NOTE: This paper is due on Monday of Week 8. It will be discussed in conference one on one and then can be rewritten if you choose.

The two problem sets are designed to provide everyone with a chance to develop depth in their insights into the different thinkers and questions explored in class and integrate their critical understandings of them. Preliminary drafts of the questions for the problem sets are included in Appendix I below.

For students who take this course for a letter grade, the weighting of work will be a mix of class participation and homework (20%), in-class presentations of philosophers (20%), first problem set (15%), second problem set (20%), and essay on a philosopher (25%),

Class Outline

(Note: The slots “ _____ ” are for sign ups for teams to present on the thinkers.)

1/6 Introductions – and historical overview – survey of Socrates to Sartre and beyond as background, introduction of Socrates as a thinker – presented orally and with a handout

1/9 Jeremy Bentham, “The Principle of Utility” from INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF MORALS AND LEGISLATION, ch. 1,2,4 & 5
http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=278&layout=html#chapter_20717 and available on the portal

John Stuart Mill, from UTILITARIANISM, CH. 2 and ON LIBERTY, Introduction _____ available on the portal

And “Sermon on the Mount” , BIBLE, Matthew 5-7,
<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205-7&version=NIV>
recommended: wikipedia article on Bentham's design for a prison as a “Panopticon” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon>

- 1/13 Immanuel Kant, GROUNDING FOR THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS, translated by Jonathan Bennet through section II, at:
<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/kant1785.pdf>

 recommended, Jones Vol. IV pp. 68-90 on Kant's ethics
- 1/16 Kant, GMM, remainder
- 1/20 Existentialist approaches to ethics: Sartre selection from "Existentialism and Human Emotions" _____
 & selection from Simone de Beauvoir's THE SECOND SEX _____
 Conflict Resolution approaches to ethics: Gray Cox, "The New Entrepreneurial Ethics" from THE EARLHAMITE, 1991
 and COA website on Ethical Research Review Board
<http://www.coa.edu/errb.htm>
- 1/23 The Problematic AV, ch. 1-2;
 Jones Vol. V, pp. 118-121 on G. E. Moore _____
 and Jones Vol. V, pp. 241-245 selection from A. J. Ayer's LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND LOGIC _____
- 1/27 Emotivism, AV, ch. 3;
 and selection recommended from Alison Jaggar "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology", ch. 21 in FEMINIST SOCIAL THOUGHT: A READER, ed. Diana Tietens Meyer _____
- 1/30 The Enlightenment Project, AV, ch. 4
 Kierkegaard in Jones, Vol. IV, pp. 209-227 _____
 DUE: Short problem set Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Existentialism and Emotivism
- 2/3 The Failure of the Enlightenment Project, AV ch. 5 & 6
 Carol Gilligan, selection from IN A DIFFERENT VOICE _____
- 2/6 The Nature of Social Reality, AV ch. 7 & 8,
 Max Weber's "The Three Pure Types of Legitimate Authority" and "Legal Authority with a Bureaucratic and Administrative Staff" _____
- 2/10 Nietzsche, AV ch. 9 and readings from Preface and Section 1 of ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALS _____
- 2/13 Virtue, AV ch. 10 & 11,
 Sophocles' ANTIGONE, <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/antigone.htm>
 and on video online at <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v6500520enmWbc7f?h1=Antigone>

- 2/17 Aristotle, AV ch. 12 and selections from Jones Vol. I, pp. 255-287 _____
- 2/20 Medieval Theory, AV ch. 13 and selections from Aquinas, Jones Vol. II, pp. 257-272 _____
 And Epictetus' ENCHIRIDION _____

- 2/24 The Nature of Virtues, AV ch.14
Ayn Rand, selection from THE VIRTUE OF SELFISHNESS _____
http://marsexxx.com/ycnex/Ayn_Rand-The_Virtue_of_Selfishness.pdf
- 2/27 Historical Contexts of Virtuous Lives, AV ch. 15
- & 16
recommended: selection from Sara Ruddick's MATERNAL THINKING
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- DUE Essay on a Philosopher

Ethics: The History of a Problematic -- 2015

Revised Final Syllabus and Final Problem Set

- 3/3 Justice as a Virtue, AV ch. 17
and selections from John Rawls _____ Kayla
and Robert Nozick _____ Erin
- 3/6 MacIntyre, AV, ch. 18 & 19 and video at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbmPXX08jpA>
- 3/10 Negotiation and Ethics
Gray Cox, “Three Ways of Practicing Peace”, ch. 16 from THE WAYS OF
PEACE (Recommended: “The Horizons of Peace”, ch. 17 from THE WAYS OF
PEACE)
- 3/13 Final Problem Set Due
In class debate on two topics:
1.) Should the US send ground troops to defeat ISIS? More generally, when, if at
all, should the United States be allowed and/or obligated to intervene militarily in other
countries?
2.) In the future, when, if at all, should AIs be treated as persons and be granted
rights such as free speech, life, property ownership and/or voting?

Appendix I – Final Draft of Problem Set Questions

You should answer three of the questions below (or some other(s) we agree on as a class). You should not answer more than one from under any letter heading. (For example, if you answer #1, then do not answer 2 or 3. You can pick any three of the letter headings in choosing the three questions you will answer. Try to keep your answers clear and concise and the overall length of your answers under 6-7 pages. In answering each it is important to make specific reference to the relevant philosophers studied during the course.

A.

1. How might an Aristotelian theory of ethics (e. g. Aquinas’, Aristotle’s or MacIntyre’s) avoid the fundamental problems of the Enlightenment project?

OR

2. What are the principal challenges to virtue ethics and how might MacIntyre’s version of it deal with them – and do better than others, such as Aristotle’s? (E. g. what are the challenges that Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bentham, Kant, Rawls or Nozick might offer?)

OR

3. To what extent and in what ways can a utilitarian, Kantian, virtue ethic or other theory of ethics (e. g. a conflict resolution approach) provide a compelling alternative to cultural relativism?
- B.
4. How are questions of ethical theory gendered and/or determined by class, nationality or other historical circumstances? (And in what way does your answer to this question involve an acceptance or rejection of the “naturalistic fallacy?”)
OR
5. Discuss how our present social and historical context is different from that of one or more previous ethical theorist and what implications this may have for how we should think about the challenges and possible solutions for ethics today.
- C.
6. What is the proper role of teleology in ethics and how is it grounded (e. g. in reason? Nature? The human condition? God?)
OR
7. What is the relevance of social science, psychology and other sciences to ethics? Are there universal laws of society or human nature that tell us how we can, will or should act?
OR
8. Is ethics grounded in or tied to metaphysics and/or epistemology? Do our beliefs about the nature of reality or the nature of knowing determine how we should live our lives (or vice versa)?
- D.
9. What is the proper way to understand the relationship between ethical theory and practical living? Do you need an adequate version of either to have an adequate version of the other?
OR
10. What is the relationship between ethics as a theory of how individuals should live and justice as a theory of how communities and nations should live? Are they one theory with two parts or two separate enterprises?
- E.
11. What are the best ways of dealing with ethical “gray” areas? With dilemmas? What role should they play in our thinking about ethics?
OR
12. What are the proper roles of tradition, feeling, reason, creativity, conflict resolution and problem solving methods in dealing with ethical situations?