

Philosophy 104, Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2006  
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Lecture Notes, January 30

## I. Review of Syllabus and Requirements

Reviewing syllabus:

Dates are tentative.

Most materials, including lecture notes, are available on line.

Exams should include no surprises. Questions will be taken directly from the reading guides.

The paper assignment will be detailed.

Office: Powdermaker 350J

(718) 997-5287

Office hours: M, W, 12:15-1pm

In quizbooks, on first page, write:

Email, or other contact

Student status

Major

Why you are taking this class

Anything else I should know

General Grading Guidelines:

C: What the philosophers say.

B: Why they say it.

A: Whether they are right or wrong, and why.

## II. What is Ethics?

Ethics is the study of right and wrong, good and bad, fair and unfair, just and unjust, virtuous and vicious.

Morality is a set of rights and wrongs, goods and evils.

We probably all think we are ethical people, but what makes us so?

We obey laws? But what if they are unjust?

We obey customs, or religion?

But there are many conflicting customs.

The Aztecs practiced human sacrifice.

The Aghori Hindu sect in India practice cannibalism. (See link on website)

We follow our instincts? But is this infallible?

We use reason in addition? But still, is this infallible?

Furthermore, do we unwittingly participate in unjust institutions?

Slavery, like capitalism, had many defenders.

Is our attempt to spread democracy like imperialist attempts to civilize barbarian peoples?

This course will not tell you what is right or wrong, but may give you some insight into how to decide that for yourselves: reasons *why*.

Distinguish moralizing (1st order) from moral philosophy (2nd order).

We are not here to moralize, but to consider how one moralizes.

### III. Separating Ethics from Religion.

We will proceed in this course to discuss morality in a completely non-religious manner.

This raises two questions.

First, does morality, as is often supposed, come from God?

Second, can one have ethics without religion?

As we start to study ethics, it is important to note that religion has played an important role in our ethical history.

But it can not be the main factor.

We start by reading an excerpt from Plato's dialogue 'Euthyphro'.

In this dialogue, we will find an argument for separating morality from religion.

The 'Euthyphro' seeks to answer, "What is holiness?"

We might think of this, instead, as "What is ethical?" Or "What is good?"

The same formal, philosophical questions apply.

At the beginning of the dialogue, Euthyphro claims that he has to prosecute his father because it is the holy thing to do.

In ancient Athens, criminal trials were prosecuted by individual citizens.

Socrates himself is soon to be prosecuted by three Athenians (Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon) for corrupting the youth and teaching new gods.

Socrates is amazed to find that Euthyphro would claim to know so well what is holy that he could charge his father with murder.

### IV. Read the excerpt in groups of two or three.