

Philosophy 104, Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2005  
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Lecture Notes, January 31

## I. Review of Syllabus and Requirements

Office: Powdermaker 350J  
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Office hours: M, W, 12:15-1pm

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're unjust?

We obey customs, or religion?

But there are many conflicting customs.

The Aztecs practiced human sacrifice.

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're 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.

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.

Euthyphro first tries to define holiness as prosecuting wrongdoers, such as he is doing.

Socrates does not like this definition, because it provides only an example.

There are other holy things.

Socrates wants a tool to help him understand the nature of holiness, and to allow him to determine, for any act, whether it is holy.

Next, Euthyphro defines holy as that which is pleasing to the gods, and the unholy as that which is displeasing to the gods.

Socrates says, "I certainly did not ask you to tell me what action is both holy and unholy: but now it would seem that what is loved by the gods is also hated by them."

This is because the gods may disagree.

So, Euthyphro's second definition leads to a kind of contradiction.

Euthyphro responds by saying that there are acts which are neither holy nor unholy, and that his act is pleasing to all the gods.

Euthyphro thus amends the definition:

Holy = What is pleasing to all the gods.

Unholy = What is displeasing to all the gods.

Lastly, given this definition, Socrates asks whether the holy becomes holy from the love of the gods, or vice versa.

This question is one of the most famous in all of philosophy.

We will start class with it, on Wednesday.