Ethical Practice --- Homework Assignments #2 --- Spring 2006

(A) Homework answers should be **brief essays** -- no less than 1/2 page single-spaced/ no more than one page for each question. If you double-space, think of each answer to be about a page. [Thus, writing three essays will require more than one page!] ALL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE TYPED AND THE PAGES STAPLED TOGETHER. Please invest in a small stapler. You are free to do constructive critique, comparisons, applications to your own experience, creative extensions of the ideas, etc. You may write in 3rd person or 1st person. Extend yourself; write beyond your first stopping point. Use all that you know and more. Be creative and insightful and interesting!

(B) The homework answers will be collected at the end of each class. Each day’s homework is worth 1 1/2 points; the 2 assignments for a week are worth THREE points. Over the course of the semester you can earn 30 points -- a full three letter grades! -- just by faithfully doing your daily work. ASSIGNMENTS HANDED IN LATE WILL GAIN NO CREDIT, unless you have called within 24 hours of missing a class to report that you will be or were absent. Please hand in hard copies of the homework. Only in BIG emergencies will I accept homework as email attachments.

(C) If something is bubbling up in your life that has relevance to our work, you may substitute a “Wild Card” for one only of the three questions on a particular homework. Some of the best learning results from such reflection on what you are facing in the moment.

(D) Please title each set of homework questions as below: Assignment 13 (for Mon. April 4th, 2005).

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(1) On Rachels. What is James Rachels' view of morality (or ethics)? Explain this as if to a high school honors class. Do NOT just repeat what is in the book!

(2) On Rachels. Compare Rachels' view of ethics with the approach we have been taking to ethics. For example: class mission and the various chants, Z&Z, B&L, Traffic Light Model; MP-Pat-NMP; Star of David model, etc. How are the two approaches alike? Where are they different? Discuss carefully.

(3) Compare Rachels' views with our one sentence mini-method: To say “X is wrong” is roughly equivalent to saying “There is reason and reason enough based on ethical criteria and the facts of the case to disapprove doing X by myself and others.”

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**Assignment 14:** Given on Mon. April 3rd for Wed. April 5th: Read *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, chapter seven: “The Utilitarian Approach” pp. 91-101 and chapter eight “The Debate over Utilitarianism,” pp. 102-116. For more on utilitarianism, see our enrichment material under the RED of harm.

**Remember: The Red and Orange Groups present on the next class, Mon. April 10th.**

(1) After getting a sense of utilitarianism and its application in chapter 7, look at how such a system can be stated in three propositions (p.102). Show using your own examples what the three propositions mean. [Remember that utilitarianism defines as right what produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number – i.e. choose the action (or policy) out of several options what will produce the most good and the least harm to the whole society. It is a societal ethics and it realizes that not everyone can be made happy with every decision. It is enough that such and such an action is the best all things considered – with each member’s pleasure and pain being factored in.]

(2) Write an essay showing the kind of objections that can be brought against each of the above propositions.

(3) How might the objections to utilitarianism be answered? How might the insights of utilitarianism be integrated in an expanded ethical theory? [Hint one like the Star of David model that includes rights as well as utility.] Discuss.
Assignment 15: Given on Wed. April 5th for Mon. April 10th: Read The Elements of Moral Philosophy, chapter 9: “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?” and chapter 10: “Kant and Respect for Persons.” For more on Kant and a rights-based approach, see our enrichment material under the GOLD of fairness.

Note: The Red and Orange groups present today (Mon. April 10th¹); the Yellow and Green groups on the next class.

The presenting group may hand in homework for this class and homework for next class at next class.

(1) Chapter 9 examines whether moral rules need be understood as absolute. The basis for the discussion is Kant's first formulation of his Categorical Imperative. Discuss the value of Kant's notion of universalizability -- how some points from logic -- e.g. Step 4 of my Star of David model -- are essential to a mature ethics.

(2) In my Star of David Model, it is clear that one can universalize -- as Kant tends to do -- over an absolute position (In ANY situation whatsoever, ANY moral agent whatsoever should do or not do Z. -- an "always or never " absolutism). However, I have argued that one can universalize over a qualified position (In certain situations or with certain exceptions, all or certain agents should do or should not do Z. This allows for ethical positions with "built-in" exceptions. E.g. Except in cases of justified self-defense or just war . . . ., one ought not kill persons.) Is the new possibility of universalizing over qualified positions an improvement over Kant's absolutism? Why or why not?

(3) Chapter 10 centers on Kant's second formulation of his Categorical Imperative and the issue of punishment. First, explain Kant's reasoning. Second, step back and comment on the reasoning. (I am challenging you to do more careful thinking.)

Assignment 16: Given on Mon. April 10th for Wed. April 12th: For the time being, skip over chapter 11 and read The Elements of Moral Philosophy, chapter 12: “Feminism and the Ethics of Care.” Also read the enrichment material for this on the class website at D4: Two Views of Moral Development.

The Yellow and Green Groups present today (April 12th)

The presenting group may hand in homework for this class and homework for next class at next class.

(1) Look first at the Kohlberg-Gilligan setting for the rise of feminist ethics. What according to Rachels lies at the core of such ethics?

(2) From the material presented in class and on the ethics enrichment webpage, explain the difference between Kohlberg's theory in the early formulation where stage 3 and 4 are defined conventionally and his later theory where stage 3 and stage 4 are defined differently. [that is, stage 3 is defined as ideal role maintaining (and enhancing) and stage 4 is defined as ideal system maintaining (and enhancing).] In this revised version, is Kohlberg as susceptible to the Gilligan critique or not? Discuss thoughtfully.

(3) In my book Living Large, chapter 15 and Appendix XVI, I have offered a way of thinking about the shift from the modern paradigm with what I have called its five seductive "Ss" to the Trans-modern, emerging Ecological paradigm. How does the more relational approach of the Trans-modern worldview resonate with feminist ethics? Discuss thoughtfully, paying attention to interconnection, intersufficiency, interweaving of seen and subtle, intergenerational time and intercollaboration.

Mon. April 17th falls within the Easter Holiday. No Class.

Wed. April 19th is the due date for the Service Learning Papers to be turned in. No additional homework to be handed in on April 19th.

Remember: the Blue and Indigo Groups present next class (Monday, April 24th).


The Blue and Indigo Groups present today (Aril 24th); Violet and Ultra-violet present next class.

The presenting group may hand in homework for this class and homework for next class at next class.
The utilitarians often look to an ethics of rules. The Kantians often look to an ethics of duties and later rights. The ancients took a different approach. They centered on cultivation of virtues. What are virtues? Surely, there are career-related virtues -- that is, specialized virtues for those in specialized occupations (doctors, lawyers and Indian chiefs). Are there also key human virtues that everyone needs to cultivate in order to actualize themselves as the humans that they are? Discuss thoughtfully. [Food for thought: Recall E. M. Adams’ notion of the Prime Imperative for Persons -- reprinted at end of these questions and also on our ethics enrichment web site.]

(2) Answer either 2a or 2b: (2a) What does Rachels see as some of the advantages of virtue theory? What does he see as some of the limitations? Discuss. [Note that the virtue side of ethics arises on the Green of the Traffic Light especially when we move from minimal to aspirational ethics.] OR (2b) Why does Rachels believe that an "ethics of care" is a part of a larger project called virtue ethics? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Also, is The Art of Possibility a part of virtue ethics or something else? Discuss creatively.

(3) Read and digest the material in chapter 14: "What would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?" In this chapter, Rachels presents a set of parameters that he believes any candidate for a full moral theory must included. Explain his thinking here and apply those parameters to what we have been about this semester. You might think of the the moral theory I have presented as including such feature as (i) the domains (cultural, institutional, interpersonal), (ii) the Traffic Light Model in its minimal version and aspirational version, (iii) the Star of David Model, (iv) the MP-Pat-NMP material, (v) the Kohlberg-Gilligan material among others. If we thought of this as attempting to be a full moral theory would it meet the parameters of what Rachels calls "a satisfactory moral theory" or not? Discuss creatively.


Violet and Ultra-Violet Groups are presenting today – Wed. April 26.

The presenting group may hand in homework for this class and homework for next class at next class.

(1) How does Thomas Hobbes argue for a social contract? Does such an approach give an answer to the question: "Why be moral?" Discuss.

(2) Discuss some of the advantages of social contract theory as Rachels presents it.

(3) Discuss some of the limitations of social contract theory as Rachels presents it. Are there things to be included from social contract thinking in a wider moral theory? If so, what would you say should be retained?

Assignment 19: Given on Wed. April 26th for Mon. May 1st: Go back and read Rachels, chapter 2: "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism." Also read my material on Cultural vs. Ethical Relativism in the enrichment material for this class.

You now have sufficient knowledge of ethics and ethical theory to look at some of the questions that often arise. One of those questions is relativism – cultural and/or ethical relativism.

(1) How does Rachels define cultural relativism?

(2) Note: some ethicists (including me) draw a distinction between cultural relativism (OK as an empirical method in the social sciences) and ethical relativism (not OK since not a coherent doctrine). Rachels does not make this move. He sees cultural relativism as a theory about the nature of morality. How does Rachels present what he calls the Cultural Differences Argument? What does he see as the implications of taking seriously such an argument? Do you agree or not and why?

(3) What does Rachels believe that we can learn from cultural relativism? Where does he see cultural relativism as falling short? What would be a reasonable position to take? Discuss thoughtfully.
Assignment 20: Given on Mon. May 1st for Wed. May 3rd: Read Rachels, chapter 4: Does Morality Depend on Religion? Also read the material on philosophical ethics and religious ethics in the enrichment material for this class.

You now have sufficient knowledge of ethics and ethical theory to look at some of the questions that often arise. One of those questions is the relationship between philosophical ethics and religious ethics.

(1) Plato himself asked the question: Is something "right" because God commands it or does God command what he does because it is right (in the nature of things)? If you follow the first, that is called Divine Command theory. What problems does this raise?

(2) Those who reject Divine Command Theory often turn to a natural law view -- that things are right or wrong depending on their natures and once God creates certain natures then he is bound to respect them. Such a God is a reasonable God. Explain and evaluate natural law theory.

(3) Even those who accept scripture as sacred do not escape the issue of interpreting scripture. What are some of the issues here? (Recall that at the time of the American Civil War, many Christians cited passages from scripture to justify slavery. Now they have reinterpreted such passages.) Is there any way for religious groups to revise their understanding of scripture in the light of new insights? On what criteria might they do this? Discuss.

This concludes our formal homework assignments (except for those who chose to avail themselves of permission to turn in homework later when they had class presentation on the day homework was due. They need to present the make-up homework this next week.

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On Monday May 8th, we will bring this course to completion, deal with any homework questions not yet discussed in class, review, and distribute the open-book, take-home cumulative final.

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Wed. May 10th is Reading Day.

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Our class mission is "to come to life more fully
so as to act more wisely and more effectively
to reduce suffering
and promote possibility
for our common life."

Quotations:

The prime responsibility of persons is
to define and live a life of one's own --
a life worthy of one (in the sense of being able to pass rational scrutiny )
as a human being and
as the particular individual one is.

E.M. Adams, A Society Fit for Human Beings

If I am not for myself, who will be?  If I am only for myself, what am I?  And if not now, when?

Rabbi Hillel (1st century CE)

The Rotary Clubs have the following FOUR-WAY TEST of the Things We Think, Say or Do.

Is it the truth?
Is it fair to all concerned?
Will it build good will and better friendship?
Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Two things fill me with awe: the starry sky above and the moral law within.

Immanuel Kant (18th century CE)