

# Ethics

The Study of How to Act/ How to Behave

# So, What's an Ethical Question?

- Pretty much everything from the 10 Commandments to genetic cloning could fall into this category.
- Should judicial punishments be based on personal circumstances?
- Are there ideal standards and judgements?
- Can people be born with traits that cause them to act differently, maybe even immorally?

# Confucious

- Thought about being and knowing, but was mainly concerned with acting right and relationships with other people.
- social harmony is the most important thing. To act in harmony with society is to act morally.
  - think of a symphony.
  - Other people determine how you act.
  - Big into hierarchy.

# The “We” Culture

- Confucian thought is to modern Asia as Judeo-Christian thought is to the West.
- Collectivism vs. Individualism.

# Western “Me” Culture

- Value freedom and equality.
- Look to your own mind rather than others in society in order to “play their part.”
- Look to rules that should apply equally to everybody.
- Encourages competition over cooperation.

# Why I'm So Important

- Western religion focuses in an individual's relationship to God.
- Western philosophy focuses on the individual's relationship to ideal truths.
- Western science focuses on the individual's relationship to physical laws of nature.
- Western capitalism focuses on the individual as an economic unit.
- American democracy sees all individuals as free rather than connected to each other.

# Religion's Role in Individualism

- Stresses individual's role with God, downplays society.
- In the Bible, society was usually a bad thing.
- rejects “conventional thinking”
  - Pharisees, The Great Schism, Protestant reformation, etc.
  - When thinking becomes conventional, people in the West often react, against it by stressing individualism.

# Truth and Me

- Western Individualism focuses on *being* first, and on *doing* second.
- If you're accountable to God for your actions, you'll be less likely to focus on how your actions affect others.
- Aquinas: actions depend not on society but on divine truth.

# Aquinas

- “Human law is law only by virtue of its accordance with right reason, and by this it is clear that it flows from Eternal Law.”
- If you think like this, you’ll look to your own ideals rather than to others for clues about how to act.

# Capitalism and Me

- Before capitalism, you played your role and inherited estate and station from your parents.
- Capitalism allows for much greater social mobility. Much easier to gain or lose than in a collective society.
- The push to go make your own money encourages people to see themselves as free, independent individuals.

# Individualism

- All of this individualism affects Western culture in thinking about how to act.
- most westerners tend to accept an “I’ll take care of me, you take care of you” philosophy on ethics.

# How Should We Deal With Social Convention?

- Confucius: Follow it for the sake of a harmonious society.
- Plato: Figure out whether it corresponds to ideal forms of virtue.
- Descartes and the rationalists: disregard it and obey reason.
- Locke and the empiricists: Agree to follow it in order to avoid trouble.
- Kant and the idealists: Obey the one true conventions, namely, treat others as you'd want to be treated.
- Kierkegaard and the existentialists. Look through it to the real you.
- Marx: Figure out how it promotes the forces of production and rebel against it.
- Foucault and the post-structuralists: Keep struggling with it; you can't escape its power.

# The Least You Need to Know

- Confucius based his ethical philosophy on the idea of harmony.
- People in the East tend to be more collectivistic than Westerners, who tend to be more individualistic.
- In the West, religion, philosophy, science, capitalism, and democracy have all promoted individualism.