

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

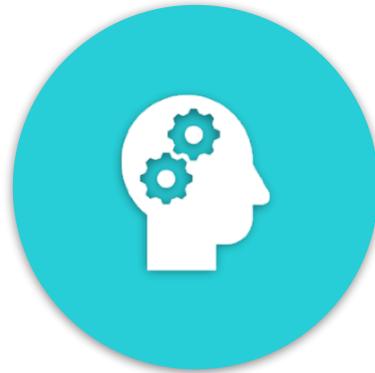
**How Should We Live As
Christians?**

Session One: February 7, 2021

NICE TO MEET YOU!



TELL US ABOUT YOU



ANY PREVIOUS
PHILOSOPHY?



WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE
TO GET FROM THIS CLASS?

ABOUT ME

I am a member of CPC. I am a management consultant by day and a philosopher 24 X 7. I received his doctorate in Philosophy at Indiana University and taught History of Philosophy, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion at Indiana University.

My wife Lisa and I live in Hinsdale with our two daughters: Britta, a freshman at Wellesley College, and Tate a sophomore and Nazareth Academy We have owned a consulting firm together for twenty years. We consult to clients around the world on membership and marketing, primarily not-for-profits.

The questions we will be studying have captivated me my entire life. I hope these next four weeks will let share my enthusiasm with you and help you see your life as Christians in a new light.



WHAT'S THE PLAN?

We often think of ethics as about what's right and wrong. Christian Ethics is larger than that. It is about how we should live as Christians, in relation to God, to others, and ourselves. What are we called to do? What does it mean to follow Christ? What kind of life is a good one? Our morality is bound up with these questions, which help us understand not just the right way of *doing*, but of *being*, and why?

This course will look at Christian Ethics from a variety of perspectives. We will study "classic" ethics, Protestant ethics, as well as liberation, feminist, Black and other voices with the goal of expanding our worlds and making ourselves a little uncomfortable. We will look at the challenges of Christian life today through these various lenses to understand what they mean for us in the real world.

Dates	Topic
Feb 7	New Testament, Augustine, Scholasticism
Feb 14	Protestantism and Christian Humanism
Feb 21	Liberation Theology
Feb 28	Black, Feminist, and Other Perspectives

CHRISTIAN ETHICS = MORAL THEOLOGY

“Ethics is faith doing.” – Joseph Sittler

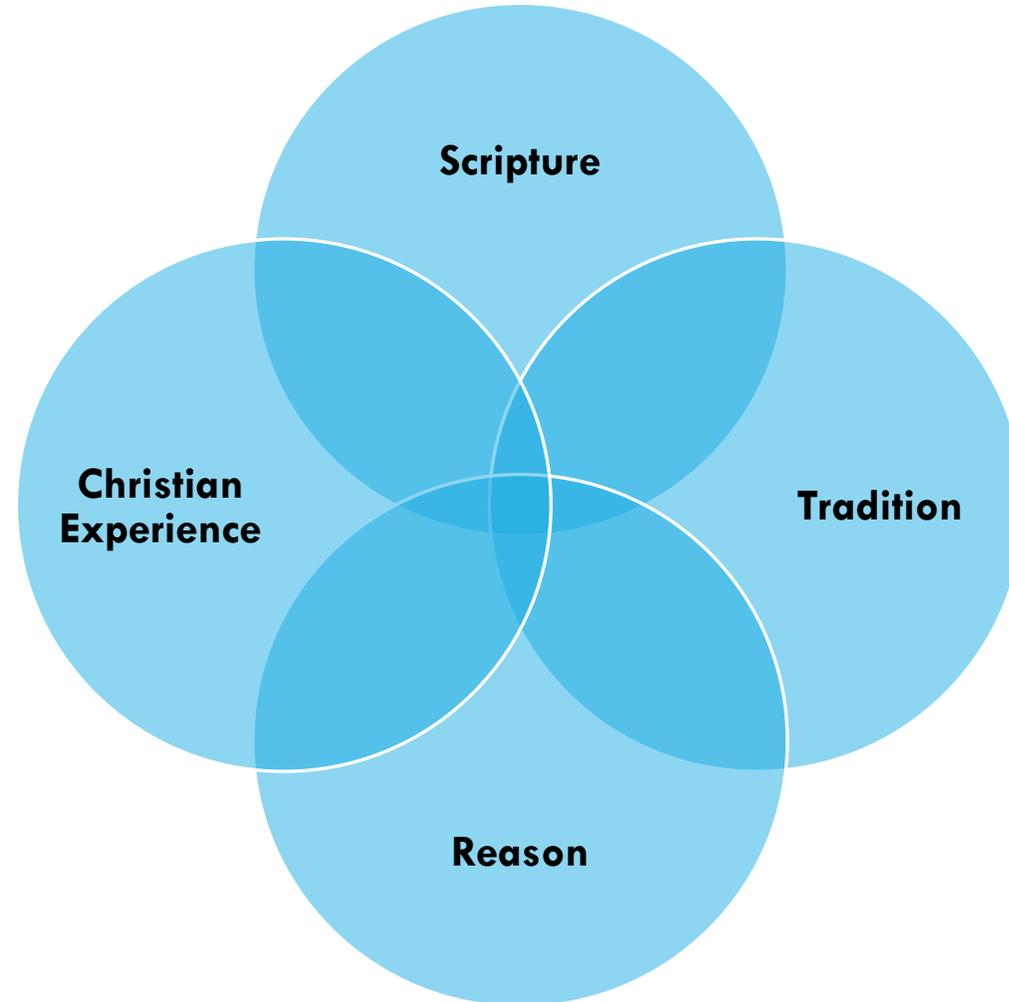
A branch of theology for most of history.

After Enlightenment, an attempt to bridge theology and reason (e.g., philosophy)

In 20th century and today, grapples with social and political issues, as well

SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The Wesleyan Tradition

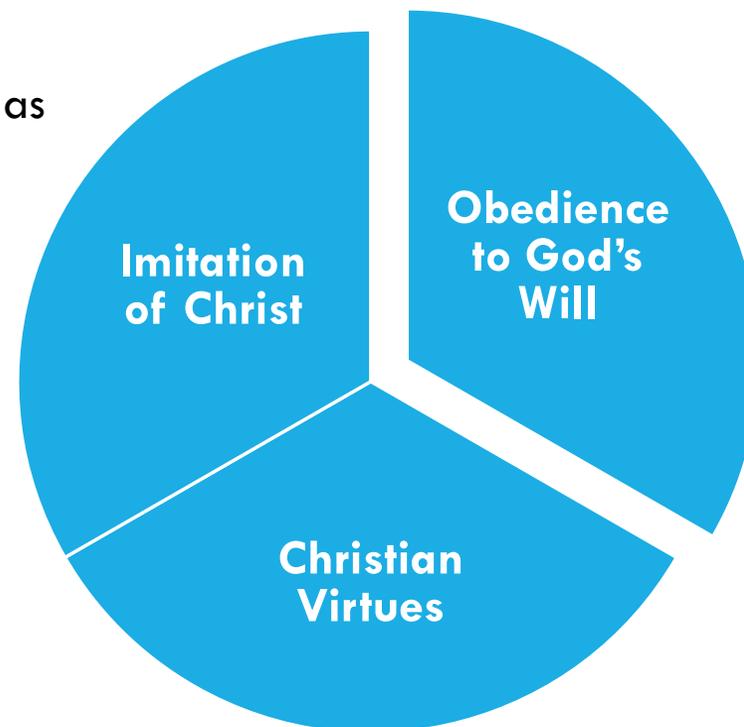


Others:

Gospel Law
Holy Spirit
Natural Law

ETHICS IN THE BIBLE

Love one another as
I have loved you



Ten Commandments

Sermon on the Mount

THE HEBREW TRADITION

“Deontological” Ethics = Based on rules, duty, obligation
(not virtue or consequences)

Obedience to divine authority

Discovered in Hebrew scripture (Old Testament)

Interpreted the Torah and other Rabbinic literature

Jesus never proposed a comprehensive ethical system
because he upheld the Jewish tradition:

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the
Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill
them.” – Matthew 5:17*

Christianity never really broke with this concept of
divine law revealed in scripture

Sets up powerful tensions for Christian ethics

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Conflicts with the Western tradition (Greece and Rome) in which ethics was a question of living well, not doing right

How to judge someone who breaks the law with good intentions or keeps it with bad intentions?

How to reconcile external sanctions (like going to hell) with love as the highest command? Can you love God and your neighbor just to save yourself from damnation?



STOICISM

Founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in the early 3rd century BC.

“Virtue is the only good” and is sufficient for happiness

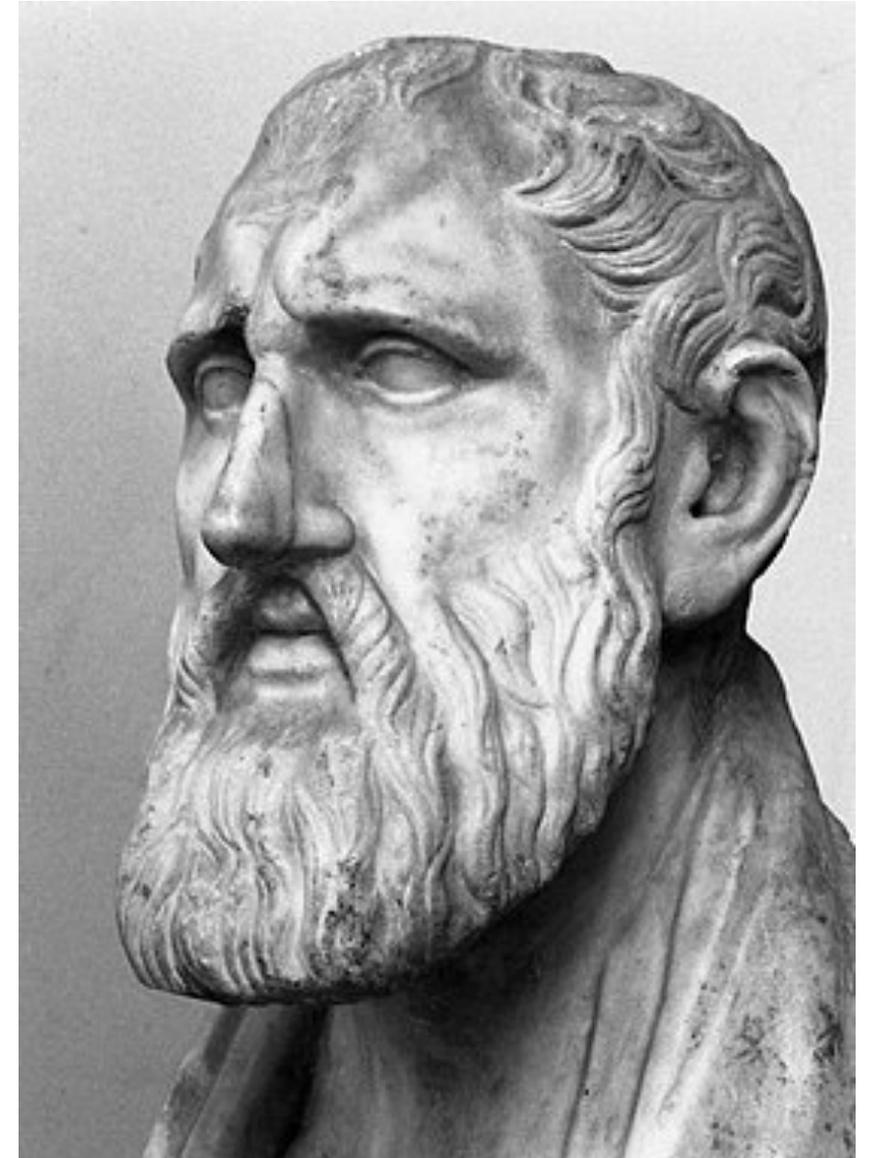
Health, wealth, and pleasure are neither good nor bad

We should maintain a will that is in accordance with nature

Monotheistic and believed the world has a rational plan, anticipating Christian theology in some ways

Flourished in the Greek and Roman world until the 4th century AD

Was the dominant moral world view at the time of Christ and Early Church



THE EARLY CHURCH

Paul was exposed to Stoicism and adopted Stoic themes in his Epistles

Wanted to establish Christianity on a solid intellectual foundation

First Christians largely followed Jewish traditions

Educated Greeks came into the church and some became Bishops – the “Fathers” of the Church

Stoicism was seen as a competitive world view to be bested

Did not define a doctrine but addressed specific local problems and questions borrowing from local problems and traditions

Attempted to think through Roman society in Christian terms.

Began to define the orthodox Christian approaches to and positions on morality – Sexuality, slavery, the role of women



PLATO (427-347)

Virtue Ethics = About moral character (not rules)
Happiness / well-being (*eudaimonia*) is the highest good
Virtues (*aretê*) are what you need to attain it

Your soul is your essence

Three parts: Reason, Spirit, Appetites

Good Life = Proper functioning of all three

Chariot analogy

Reason must hold the reins

Philosophy is the highest pleasure

Bodily pleasures are inferior



AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354-430 AD)



Humans = Souls

Body is a means to a spiritual end

Happiness is union of soul with God after death

Highest pleasure is spiritual existence in the next world

Bodily pleasures are a threat to happiness

Happiness comes through faith in Christ, not reason

Rejects the primacy of reason in ethics

Motives matter. Not enough to fear punishment. You have to love.

Only God's grace can save us from original sin and allow us to love him.

We are not free to choose good or evil. Adam chose evil.

This Augustinian view prevailed until the 11th century

PETER ABELARD (1079 - 1142 AD)

Emphasis on intentions

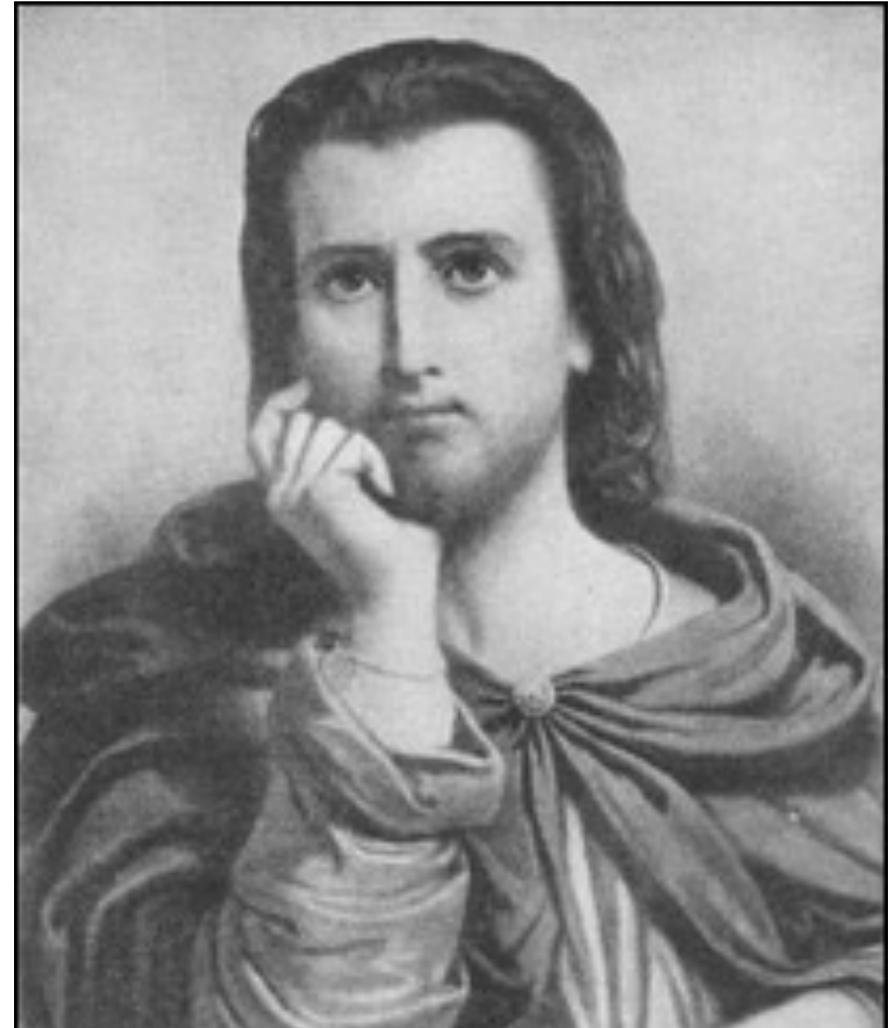
It is not the deed that is wrong

Nor is it the desire to do it

It is wrong to mentally consent to an illicit desire

Had a huge influence on those that followed, but they had almost nothing to say about ethics

Most important contribution was to entrench the “Scholastic” form of philosophizing and the ascendancy of Aristotle



ARISTOTLE (384-327 BC)

Dominant force in Western thought for much of history

Wrote extensively on a wide range of subjects, most influentially on logic

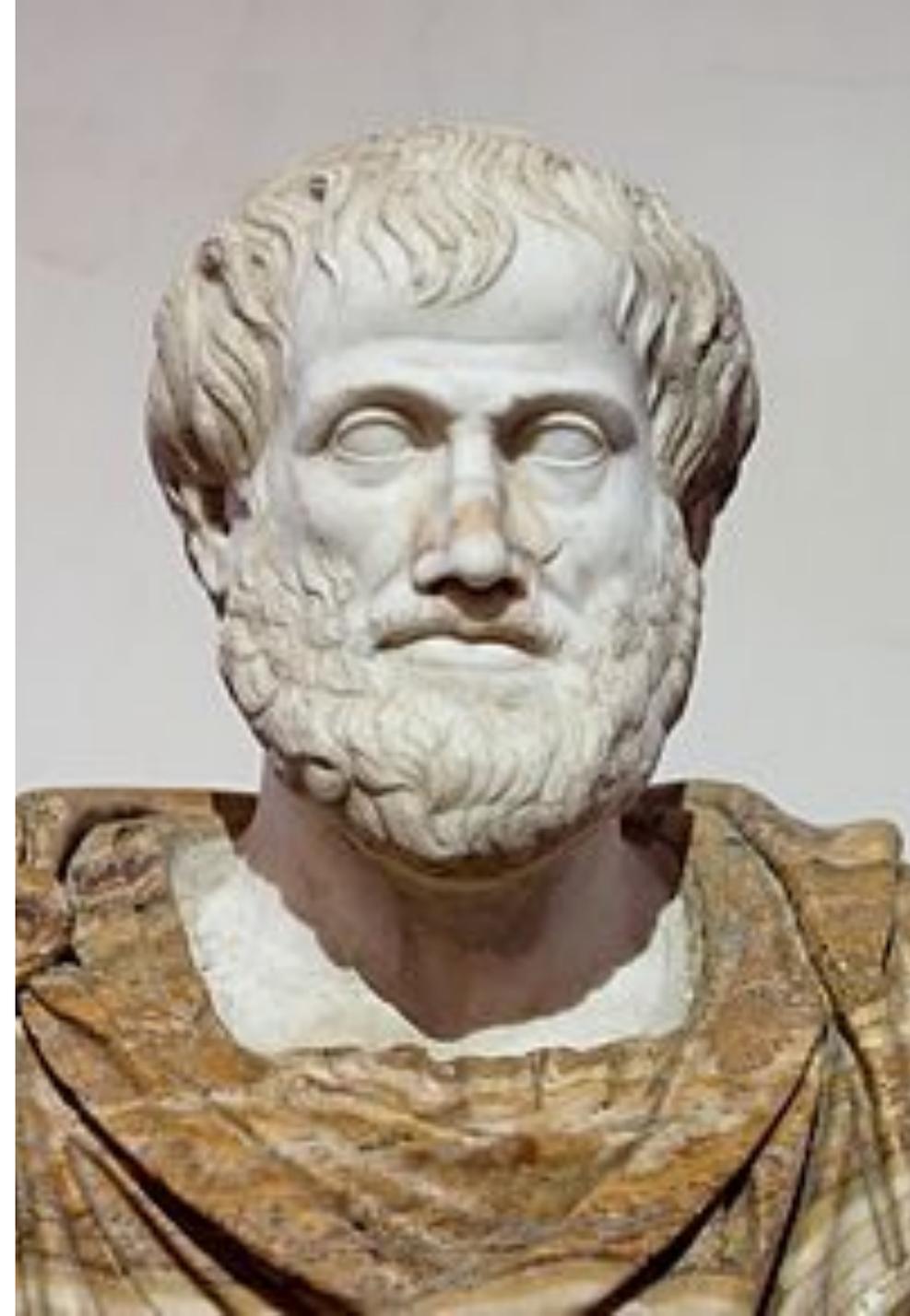
All human action is directed at the highest good (*sumum bonum*) which is *eudaimonia*

Virtue = excellence, which is the proper function of a thing

The function of humans is reason

Moral decisions are situational

Men of good character make wise moral decisions by choice



THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274 AD)

Scholasticism was the dominant method of learning in Medieval Europe, based on rigorous disputation based on Aristotle's logic

Attempted to synthesize the teachings of the Church with Aristotelian philosophy

Summum bonum is the love of God, which cannot be fully realized in this life, and is only realized by the grace of God

We can have limited happiness in this life through virtue

Morality is not defined by arbitrary will of God, but spring from our nature

"Natural Law" can be divined by reason and reflection, supplemented by Christian revelation

Became the received view of the Roman Catholic Church



PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER



Scripture and early Christianity were born in the Jewish tradition in a world dominated by Stoic moral sensibilities

Church Fathers tried to reconcile Christianity with the Roman world they lived in, which formed the basis of orthodox Christian teachings

Augustine gave all of this an intellectual foundation, grounded in the philosophy of Plato. Happiness comes through faith alone and not reason.

Aquinas synthesized Church teaching with Aristotelian philosophy, locating virtue in human nature to be discerned by rational thought.

The Reformation would turn all of this on its head.