

## DCT Review

- The problem is whether an action is good because God says it is good, or God says it is good because it is good
- The issue is whether right and wrong are independent of anyone's say-so, including God's authority
- Two horns:
  - (i) if we say God's say-so makes actions right, then God's wishes could have been otherwise and God's goodness is an empty concept
  - (ii) if we say God's say-so conforms to independent standards of right and wrong, then morality exists independently of God

## Further Problems with DCT

- If God's wishes make an action right or wrong, then to know God's wishes one must appeal to scripture or church tradition or some direct link to God
  - Problem is that scripture is silent on many ethical issues, contradictory on other issues, or just ambiguous.
  - Also, church tradition on certain ethical issues has changed over time.
  - And, we are often wary of anyone who says they have a direct line to God

## Scriptures and abortion

- Do the scriptures say that the fetus is a human being from the moment of conception?
 

Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."
- Often used to support the claim that the fetus has full moral status/"consecrated" to God

Following from Rachels

## Scriptures and abortion, continued

- In context, the passage is not about moral status of a fetus or sanctity of life:
 

"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, Do not say, 'I am only a youth' for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.
- What is this passage really about?

## Scripture and Justification

- Scripture often does not address many particular moral issues
- So, what is the reason for quoting scripture out of context?
  - Is it to show God's wishes or to use the scripture for a predetermined objective?
  - Is it ethical to use scripture to support one's predetermined moral position, especially when that scripture is taken out of context or misconstrued for one's purposes?

## Moral Status of Fetus in OT

- In Exodus, the penalty for murder is death
- But, the penalty for harming a pregnant woman who later miscarries is a fine
- OT did not place the same value on the fetus as on adult humans
- So, if God's wishes are the standard, then since God is silent on the issue one might think abortion is permissible

## Church Tradition, pre-17th Century

- Today, the Church is strongly against abortion
- But, was this always the case?
- Aquinas: fetus has no soul until several weeks after conception when the fetus begins to take human shape
- Aquinas' view adopted by the church at Council of Vienne, 1312

## Church Tradition, post-17th Century

- Using microscopes, scientists thought they saw little people in the fetus
- Homunculus view of fetal development caused a change in conservative view
  - Abortion was wrong because it kills a homunculus/human being
  - Modern view of fetal development shows this view is incorrect—the change in view was based on faulty science
- Has the church changed its moral stance to reflect the scientific facts?

## Church Tradition, modern times

- Church's view is still against abortion, despite science and the Council of Vienne
- English common law followed early church tradition and did not criminalize abortion, even late term abortions
- In U.S., there were no laws criminalizing abortion until late 19th century.
- Supreme Court's decision on Roe v. Wade did not as much overturn a long tradition of criminalization of abortion as it was restoring a long tradition of non-criminalization

## Origins of moral conviction?

- Where do people's moral convictions come from?
- History shows that scripture and church tradition is interpreted, or reinterpreted, differently through the centuries
- Should one appeal to scriptures or church tradition to decide moral truths?
- If scripture or church tradition is the source, what accounts for the changes in views over time?
- Is one's morality really derived from scripture and church tradition?
- Or, is one's morality imposed upon scripture and church tradition?

## Kai's *Ethics without God*

## Kai's Secular Ethic

- If God is dead, is it possible to live a meaningful life?
- If God is dead, is it possible to live a moral life?
- Are purposes of "purely human devising" worth striving for?

## Ethics from a Secular Point of View

- Religious Moralists argue that a conventional or relative ethic is contrary to human nature. Without God,
  - there is no overarching purpose or meaning
  - without such purpose or meaning, humans will despair.
  - Assumption: One cannot create meaning, it must be found
- Kai argues that one does not need religion, God, or any religious conception to support moral convictions

## Permanent Sources of Human Happiness

- One can live a happy life (i) if one finds lasting sources of satisfaction in one's life, (ii) if one finds and achieves certain goals, and (iii) if one rids oneself of the impossible expectation that there is "one big thing" which will make that person permanently happy
- What are the permanent sources of human happiness?
  - Free from pain and want
  - A life of reasonable pleasures
  - Security and emotional peace
  - Human love and companionship
  - Creative employment and meaningful work
  - Reducing human suffering

## Impossible Expectations Argument

1. One can find happiness if one is not controlled by impossible expectations
2. To be free of impossible expectations is to not think that there is "one big thing" that will make one permanently happy
3. Only those who hold some secularist view think there is not "one big thing."
4. Only a secular view is free of impossible expectations.

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5. Thus, only a secular view can find happiness.

## Does Suffering Have a Justification?

- Religious man needs to find some overall justification, "scheme of life," for suffering
- Non-religious does not need nor thinks there is some justification, but thinks suffering should be struggled against

## Does Secularism Lead to Egoism?

- Secularism is concerned with other's well-being
  - Why must the secularist be concerned with other's well-being? If some "scheme of life" is rejected, won't one just seek one's own interests?
  - Justice demands that one consider other's interests and occasionally sacrifice one's own happiness to another's interests
- What notion of justice is Kai employing here? Is this a purely conventional or relativistic notion? Or, is Kai endorsing something stronger?

## Justifying Justice

- Can the secularist justify justice without appeal to religion or God? Can justice be justified only on religious grounds?
- Religious justification is "simpler" than adhering to the secularist's two principles:
  - Religious moralist: One ought to do what God wills
  - Secularist: i) treat every man as an end and never as a means, and ii) happiness is good
  - Kai thinks the mysteriousness inherent in DCT makes the religious moralist's notion of justice more complex than the secularist's

## Secular Justification of Justice

1. Humans are social creatures and part of a community
  2. The concept of community implies binding principles and regulations
  3. An egoist, even in seeking to satisfy his own interests, is a social creature and part of a community
  4. A rational egoist will realize that the best society for seeking one's own interests is one in which each person's interests are given equal consideration.
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5. Thus, a rational egoist will endorse a principle of respect for others.

## Questions about Kai

- Is Kai arguing for moral relativism (moral truths are made true by someone's say-so) or some objective moral standard?
- How might one rectify the relativistic tone at the beginning of the article with the objectivist tone at the end?
- What two principles does Kai appear to ground his secular ethic? Are these the only two principles necessary?
- Do you find Kai's arguments persuasive? How might a religious moralist respond?

## Next Class

- Read: "What's culture go to do with it?"