



Philosophy and Human Values

Rick Roderick, Ph. D.



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RICK RODERICK

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Duke University

Rick Roderick was born in Abilene, Texas in 1949, and received his bachelor's degree at University of Texas, Austin, Texas. He did post-graduate work at Baylor University, and earned his Ph. D. at University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

From 1977 to 1978, he was the editor of the Baylor Philosophy Journal, and from 1977 to 1979 he was a member of the Phi Sigma Tau National Honor Society of Philosophy. He was the recipient of the Oldright Fellowship at the University of Texas and served as associate editor to The Pawn Review, and Current Perspectives in Social Theory. He is the undergraduate director of the Duke Marxism and Society Program. He is the author of the book Habermas and the Foundation of Critical Theory (1986), as well as numerous articles in professional journals. He has presented over 24 papers, and published 13 reviews and literary criticisms.

From 1977 to present, he has taught Philosophy, first at Baylor, then University of Texas and now at Duke. His areas of specialization are Marx and Marxism, Social and Political philosophy, Critical Theory (Habermas and the Frankfurt School), 19th Century Philosophy, and Contemporary Continental Philosophy. He also teaches Ethics, Logic, History of Modern Philosophy, Aesthetics and Existentialism.

Lecture One: Socrates and the Life of Inquiry

- I. The trial and death of Socrates inaugurated the Western philosophical tradition.**
 - A. Investigation turned from movement of stars and composition of the earth toward human matters by separating scientific from philosophic discourse.**
 - B. Dialogic form posits dialogue as essential to knowledge.**
 - C. It is essential to have knowledge of oneself.**

- II. Socrates had an argument against relativism.**
 - A. Is the idea that truth is relative itself a relative truth -- or is it an absolute one?**
 - B. Human Meaning:**
 - 1. What are you doing -- now, and in life?**
 - 2. Do meanings transcend the here and now?**
 - 3. When a term or set of terms that are very important to a society (e.g. "virtue", "patriotism") are questioned, society is in danger. This was true of Socrates' Athens and of our condition.**

- III. Several themes are pursued throughout the lectures.**
 - A. Ask and try to localize in history what it means to be a human being.**
 - B. Explore ways of living, including the socratic way of critical inquiry.**
 - C. The "fallibilist" philosophy is believing passionately in certain things but realizing that the beliefs may be wrong.**
 - D. This type of critical inquiry, if it can be carried out at all, can be carried out when societies are troubled and the meanings of words are debated and redefined.**
 - 1. The way we describe and understand our lives is inextricably connected to the way we live them.**
 - 2. Under these conditions it may not be possible to expand localized useful definitions.**

Lecture Two: Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics

- I. Conflicting ideals of excellence in Roman Society.**
 - A. Hedonism is doing what makes you happy.**
 1. Epicureans pursued higher pleasures in moderation.
 2. It is associated with a rising empire and its values.
 - B. Stoicism involved fortitude and cultivating apathy to difficulties of life.**
 1. Happiness was the best thing, but was unattainable.
 2. It is associated with a falling empire and its values.
 - C. Christianity is a slow ascension, based on Stoic thought.**
 1. It is spread through the spoken word and fire of the sword.
 2. There is a hierarchical society arranged with differential relations to God.
 3. It offers solace to the inevitability of human suffering in a way that the Stoics did not.
- II. A brief note on modern criticism of democracy:**
 - A. Max Weber said quantitative relations are more important than qualitative where rules and procedures are followed.**
 - B. Franz Kafka was also a critic of democracy.**
- III. Anselm's argument for the existence of God:**
 - A. This is an argument between only two interlocutors. If you are neither the fool who has said there is no God, or the believer, this argument has no bearing on you.**
 - B. God is defined as a being, greater than which cannot be conceived.**
 1. It is greater to exist in the mind and reality than in the mind alone. Therefore, God must exist in reality because if he did not, we could conceive something greater.
 2. This is perhaps one of the most eloquent arguments in philosophy.

Lecture Three: Kant and the Path to Enlightenment

- I. Modernity began after the French Revolution.**
 - A. Max Weber's understanding of modernity includes notions of bureaucracy, the state, and the rationalization of modern life.**
 - B. Before modernity, humans were defined as collected atoms.**
 - C. After the Revolution, authority was seen as that of the autonomous individual. Autonomy became central to ethical decisions.**

- II. In Kant's ethical theory, individuals judge their actions as right or wrong.**
 - A. Kant presupposes that there is a moral law.**
 - B. He begins with a series of identifications to answer how the moral law possibly gives a pure abstract form of a moral law that will ask if it is really moral.**

- III. Kant's categorical imperative gives a single moral rule general enough to cover the ten commandments and the golden rule and exclude all that won't fit those kinds of patterns.**
 - A. Act so you can will the rule of your action to be a universal law.**
 - B. It is an imperative because it is a command, and it is categorical because it is not hypothetical.**

- IV. Kant drew principles from the categorical imperative.**
 - A. Always treat others and yourself as though you were an end and never a mere means.**
 - B. Always act under the practical postulate that our will is free.**
 - C. Always act so you can regard your own will as making universal law and be willing for everyone else to act just as you did.**
 - D. Human capacity to be a moral agent gives each human dignity.**

- V. The "kingdom of ends" is where all of us in our mutual relations with one another treat each other as ends and not as mere means.**

- VI. Mill (utilitarianism) vs. Kant (Deontology):**
 - A. Mill argued we should always act so as to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number.**
 - B. Kant argues we should act as if our actions are universal.**
 - C. Both of these theories ignore actual lives and complexities of ethnic, gender and class relations.**

Lecture Four: Mill on Liberty

- I.** Another objection to Kant is the question of what happens when you are trying to will a universal principle in a situation when two principles are good and yet you cannot do them both.
 - A.** It is not just right or wrong. You must choose the one that leads to the best results.
 - B.** In an embodied context it may not do a bit of good to know the rule, illustrating that the moral life is full of ambiguity.
- II.** Freedom in the 19th Century is addressed by Mill's commentary on liberty.
 - A.** Mill tries to show where the grounds are for the government's interference with our liberty, a question of legitimacy, not of power.
 - B.** The harm principle posits that the only legitimate ground for social coercion is to prevent harm to others. Once you give this power up, it is over.
 - C.** The offense principle, which Mill would not support, posits society has a legitimate right to socially coerce to prevent "offending" others. Such offense undermines the moral tone of society.
 - D.** One must make a distinction between self-regarding actions and other-regarding actions in the harm principle. (Some argue that there is no such thing as a self-regarding action.)
 - E.** The principle of paternalism is that we can interfere with people for their own good.
 - F.** An added dimension of the harm principle: social coercion can be used if decisions are encumbered by craziness, drunkenness or if freedoms of others are interfered with.
- III.** There are limitations to Mill's account of freedom.
 - A.** It is an account of "negative freedom" only, a freedom from constraint.
 - B.** He says nothing about positive freedom to act.
- IV.** Hegel argues that freedom is the meaning and the point of human history in general. Overcoming obstacles is gaining freedom.
 - A.** The challenge of freedom is to find the new boundaries and then to figure out how to break them down.
 - B.** Marx wrote that philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point is to change it.

Lecture Five: Hegel and Modern Life

- I. Hegel was conservative.**
 - A. The culmination of this long historical process is that history proper came to an end.**
 - B. Right wing Hegelians took Hegel to be fundamentally right and therefore applied his method over and over.**
 - C. To left wing Hegelians such as Marx Hegel's is a classic text but has an ambiguous legacy.**

- II. Marx criticized capitalism.**
 - A. A criticism of capitalism is a criticism of Hegel because for Hegel, capitalism coupled with liberal democracy is the highest achievement of humanity.**
 - B. The democratic state is in contradiction with the imperatives of the capitalist economy.**
 - 1. We are used to these contradiction in our current society. This was not true in Marx's time.**
 - 2. The secret of capitalism is the shift in identity from what you are in a society to what you own or have.**
 - C. Marx identified several effects of capitalism.**
 - 1. It reduces human needs to those which can be bought and sold in the market place.**
 - 2. It produces from nature more technological abilities than in all of history.**
 - 3. These come into contradiction because of the imperative of the economy to make a profit and to fulfill all these new needs.**

- III. Marx's ideology:**
 - A. If you really want to know how someone thinks, look at their surroundings. This outlook, "materialism," criticized ideas by examining.**
 - B. Moral or philosophical dilemmas must be understood in terms of being different for different classes.**
 - C. There is a difference between a theoretical approach and an approach rooted in daily life.**
 - D. You must not let your life be reduced to poverty or work.**
 - E. Before moral problems arise, there are preconditions for human life that have to be fulfilled such as food, shelter, health care and freedom to pursue other goals besides work.**

Lecture Six: Nietzsche: Knowledge and Belief

- I. There are no water-tight distinctions between philosophy and politics.
 - A. The priority of politics is marked even in the Greeks.
 - B. These set the necessary conditions within which human beings can pursue things, such as a good life for themselves.
 - C. There is a severe problem with the writings of Marx.
 1. He assumed that workers shaping and forming their own modes of work would not fall victim to the power of the state.
 2. The state would step in place of a capitalist class and exploit their labor.
 - D. The process of a world becoming bureaucratically more complex and intrusive at the level of the state is a world phenomenon, and is not localizable.
- II. Nietzsche was a critic of modernity.
 - A. Nietzsche held the view that knowledge is a form of power, which was the subject of his most important book, From Where Do Distinctions Come?
 - B. He speaks of the Greeks' understanding of virtue, vastly different from our own.
 1. They knew who and when to con.
 2. Excellence was multi-dimensional and honored a fully developed person, not a proficient functionary.
 - C. He gives us a genealogy of our uses of words.
 - D. Eternal problems change radically depending on where you happen to be in history.
 - E. Knowledge, truth, and objectivity, good and bad, have conditions for possibility and these conditions change.
- III. Nietzsche criticizes Christianity.
 - A. He suggests that Christianity inculcates us in bad reading.
 - B. Superficially, beneath the Old Testament's doctrine of love and compassion is submerged a doctrine of resentment and hatred.
 - C. He argues that love is meaningless without discrimination.
 - D. He criticizes Christianity's distinction between earthly and carnal kinds of love.

Lecture Seven: Kierkegaard and the Contemporary Spirit

I. A recap of Nietzsche:

- A. Power is intertwined with things which are not dependent on power, such as truth and goodness.
- B. The Greeks were straight-forward with their idea of virtue. It was based on excellence and the fulfillment of human powers.
- C. Christian morality grew out of a slave context. Its doctrines of love and compassion were rooted in resentment of a power that could not express itself.
- D. God is "dead."

II. Kierkegaard

- A. In a place where all are Christians, ipso facto, none are Christians.
- B. Kierkegaard did not believe that each one of us are individual subjects some how separated from each other like monads.

III. The Sickness Onto Death:

- A. Kierkegaard argues that psychology is in principle impossible.
- B. The self is not a substantial thing but a deep relation, and it's not even that relation but the relating of relations.
 - 1. We are a synthesis between our desire for freedom and our recognition of brutal necessity.
 - 2. Because we are a relation, we are incomplete.
 - 3. This despair constitutes the self.
- C. Kierkegaard describes a morally ill person who is struggling with death yet does not die. (sick onto death)
- D. The hope is to find a way to die.
 - 1. Suicide is not acceptable.
 - 2. Despair is the reaction to the struggle to be human in inhuman conditions.

IV. The relation to human values and social systems:

- A. The 19th century story was the replacement of manual labor with machine labor, while the 20th century story will be the replacement of intellectual labor with machine labor.
- B. Humans driven to this extent of socialization would greatly prefer death but are unable to do it.
- C. In the postmodern culture, images are more real than the real thing, and patriotism is cynical.
- D. Things no longer look like human values but rather human commodities.

Lecture Eight: Philosophy and Postmodern Culture

- I. A recap of the lecture series:
 - A. Retrace the history of the accounts of human values given in Western Philosophy, and you'll probably find a dead end with some rather ordinary philosophic problems.
 - B. Hegel reminds us that human values and moral and ethical problems arise in historical circumstances.
 - C. Society and history has to do with economics and the state.
 - D. Culture is less systematic. A culture based on spectacle and images has a peculiar nonsystematic character.
- II. Freud outlines the process of economic building with cultural unawareness.
 - A. The conscious mind is a very small part of our psychic life.
 - B. Freud's goal was for the unconscious (id) to become the conscious (ego).
 - C. Mass culture turns the conscious to unconscious.
 - D. We can tune out the culture, however, we cannot destroy it.
- III. Civilization can be seen as a drama between eros (love) and thanatos (death).
 - A. The mechanism of one side has clearly gained the upper hand (thanatos).
 1. However, eternal eros might come in and strike a blow for the other side.
 2. This is about to be a global situation that will be difficult to solve because there are no concrete walls.
 - B. We must reinject resistance into or at least put up a simulation of resistance to it.
 1. The worst thing we can do is to be unanimously for something.
 2. We have not yet written the last obituary for radical democracy.
 - C. St. Paul's answer is in Corinthians. It is a masterpiece of sophistry, rhetoric and bitter invective.
 - D. Philosophy is disconsolate in principle.
 1. Hegel said dialectics or philosophy does not run from detestation but tarries with it awhile and looks it in its face.
 2. The structural principles of our society are as barbaric in their structure as they ever were, perhaps more so.

SUGGESTED READING TO ACCOMPANY

Philosophy and Human Values

Plato's Meno - perhaps the classic Socratic dialogue. The topic is can "excellence" (virtue) be taught. Both in style and content, this is a founding document of Western self-understanding.

Mill's On Liberty - a brilliant defense of what Isiah Berlin calls "negative freedom", namely the right of the individual to be free from state coercion.

Kierkegaard's The Sickness Unto Death - a fascinating challenge to our various projects of achieving authentic selfhood, written in a difficult but beautifully ironic style.

Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents - a dramatic work of incredible sweep, it presents a powerful dialectic of the development of human beings.

Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals - a devastating attack on traditional morality and moral theories, this work offers a kind of gateway to the most recent debates on modernity and postmodernity.

Hegel's Reason in History - a classic statement of the Western understanding of the role of human beings in the development of the modern world.



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