

## **Phil 77800 [90392] Greco-Roman Ethics and its Influence on Christianity**

**Tues,Thurs 11:45-1:45pm** 4 credits

Professor Richard Sorabji

Cross-listed with Classics

***Begins: September 11***

***Ends: October 25***

Registration limit 12

A set of translations in the region of 100 pages will be prepared as required reading for the course and handed out at the beginning. The reading below, ordered for library reserve and partly available on-line, follows the descriptions of the topics, and is to help with the two papers due, a short paper on Oct 1st on the first topic, Conscience and a term paper on Oct 21st on any of the topics. The term paper may be on a new topic or a substantial development of the short paper. The first half of the course will be on topic 1: Conscience. The second half will be on Will, which is the seat of conscience according to Bonaventure, while the misnamed weakness of will in Aristotle is treated by Aquinas as a model of how conscience can go wrong. The topic of Will brings in the Struggle against Temptation and Freedom from emotion, and so I have broken up the description of topic 2 into four inter-related topics.

### **Conscience and Will**

#### **Topic 1. Conscience**

The Bible says so little that Christians filled in the concept from pagan thought, where it started 500 years before Christ. At first, the Greek concept was connected with awareness of fault in oneself, and derivatively of faultlessness, and was connected with self-awareness. The more positive idea of awareness of what was right was encouraged by some remarks of St Paul later. But the related idea of Socrates' guardian spirit is still negative, at least as presented in Plato, although the awareness is not of fault committed, but of fault to be avoided. Such awareness of possible fault can avert wrongdoing, reform wrongdoers, or give a sense of rectitude, though it does not yet reveal what is right.

Thus a sense of fault can be good as well as bad, and there is good shame and bad shame, both of them earlier concepts than that of guilt.

Self-awareness has a special terminology in Plato and Cicero when it involves awareness of fault. And such self-awareness was positively encouraged by the self-interrogation exercises of Pythagoreans and Stoics, which Christians copied. But when it leads to repentance, pagans and Christians can have different views about the value of repentance: forgiveness or reform? There was also a question about whether one could be aware that one was at fault at the very moment of committing wrong (a question wrongly called weakness of will).

In self-awareness, one may watch oneself. But one can be watched instead by conscience, a guardian spirit, God, the public, or a real or imagined mentor. When the watcher is conscience or Socrates' guardian spirit, does it use a natural language or mentalese?

There was a massive increase in references to conscience after 100 BC, especially in Latin writers in Rome, but also in a Greek Epicurean who went to Italy, and who, before

the Christians, described the practice of confession. Cicero and Seneca in Latin particularly attacked what they saw as the Epicurean concept of conscience, and themselves put new emphasis on the pleasures of good conscience. A Greek Stoic in Rome raised a question which Christians took up from Origen through the Middle ages, whether conscience was innate.

Saint Paul wrote in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and may have heard about conscience from Greeks in Corinth in connexion with eating meat sacrificed to idols. He made two important contributions. Clear conscience is not infallible, and should not necessarily be taken as justification. Saint Jerome would later start a tradition in which what is infallible is not conscience, but something higher, a self-watching or *sunderesis*, which was thereafter taken to be infallible, though we were not infallible in our use of it. Aquinas and Kant held to the fallibility of conscience, and Aquinas explained it on the analogy of Aristotle's weakness of will, which goes against one's deliberately chosen policy. But he went beyond St Paul in saying that one is obliged to follow conscience. Gandhi, who translated Plato's *Apology* and knew the Bible, speaks as if conscience should be followed in preference to scriptures, and seems to treat it rather more like Socrates' infallible guardian. But other Greek philosophers had emphasised the difficulty of recognising faults or how to apply moral principles.

Saint Paul further connected conscience, but only loosely, with the idea of an internalised natural law, thereby influencing later Christians to make the connexion tighter. The idea of natural law had been developed by Aristotle and was internalised in Cicero, and the Latin-writing Christian Lactantius explicitly refers to Cicero and Seneca in working out a connexion between conscience and internalised law.

Joseph Butler took up the Stoic ideal of acting according to nature, and connected it with acting according to a human nature governed by conscience.

With such varied contributions to the concept of conscience, it is not surprising that there was much disagreement on what sort of thing it was: is it psychological, or a law internalised in our psychology? If psychological is it a form of reason, of will, a feeling, is it above reason, must it be contrary to inclination, is it a capacity, a disposition, or an act?

Bentham called Hutcheson's moral sense a fiction and excluded conscience from the springs of action. Freud treated it as a manifestation of the super-ego. Has the idea now fallen into disuse? If so, is this for good reasons?

*Ordered for library reserve*

*On Greco-Roman pagan ideas the two most useful studies are*

1. Henry Chadwick, 'Conscience in ancient thought', printed for the first time in English, in his *Studies in Ancient Christianity*, Ashgate, Aldershot & Burlington Vermont, 2006, Ch.20.

2. Comparing Paul with pagan ideas, C.A.Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*, SCM Press 1955.

*Ancient*

3. A.C.Lloyd, 'Nosce teipsum and conscientia', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 46,1964, 188-200.

4. Douglas Kreis, 'Origen, Plato and Conscience (*sunderesis*) in Jerome's Ezechiel commentary, *Traditio* 57, 2002.

### *Middle Ages*

5. O.Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Louvain 1942-1960, 103-349, esp. Jerome 103-5, Bonaventure, Albert, Aquinas, 203-235, overview 338-349.
6. Timothy Potts, 'Conscience' in N. Kretzmann et al., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1982, pp. 687-704.
7. Timothy Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1980.
8. Douglas Langston, 'Medieval theories of conscience', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, on-line.

### *Conscience in the Reformation*

9. Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith, Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin*, Augsburg Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1993.

### *Medieval to Modern times*

10. Douglas C. Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues, From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*, Pennsylvania State University 2001.

### *On Seneca*

11. Schadi Bartsch, *The Mirror of Nature*, Chicago University Press, 2006m Chs 4-5.
12. G.Molenaar, 'Seneca's use of the term conscientia', *Mnemosyne* 4, series 2, 1969, 170-180.

### *On Philo*

13. R.T.Wallis, 'The idea of conscience in Philo of Alexandria', *Studia Philonica* 3, 1974-5, 27-40.

### *On shame*

14. Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, University of California Press 1993.
15. Rachana Kamtekar, 'Aidôs in Epictetus', *Classical Philology* 93, 1998, 136-160.

### *On language of conscience*

16. Curzio Chiesa, 'Les origines de la 'révolution linguistique'', *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 117, 1985, 261-284.
17. Murat Aydede, 'The language of thought hypothesis', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, on line.

### *On Joseph Butler*

18. Nicholas Sturgeon, 'Nature and Conscience in Butler's Ethics,' *Philosophical Review* 85 (1976) 316-356.

### *On Jeremy Bentham*

19. Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, vol.1, Jeremy Bentham, Ch.6, available on line

### *On Gandhi*

20. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Penguin Books 1982.
21. Raghavan Iyer, *The moral and political thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, 1973.

### *Classic works*

22. The Bible
23. Euripides, *Medea*, Loeb edition.
24. Euripides, *Hippolytus*, Loeb edition.
25. Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper, Hackett, 1997.
26. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols, Oxford University Press, 1984.

- 27 Seneca, all 6 Loeb volumes.
- 28 Epictetus, all 4 Loeb volumes.
29. Cicero, Loeb volumes of
- (a) On the Republic, On the Laws
  - (b) De Finibus (= On Ends)
  - (c) Tusculan Disputations
  - (d) De Officiis (= On Duties)
  - (e) De Natura Deorum (= On the nature of the Gods)
30. Thomas Aquinas (in an English translation),
- (a) *De veritate (On Truth)* Question 16.
  - (b) *On Sentences* Book II, d.24, question 2 and d.39, question 3.
  - (c) *Summa Theologiae*, I, question 79, and Ia IIae (=first part of the second), questions 19 and 94.
  - (d) *Commentary on Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 7, chapter 3
31. Boris Henig, Cartesian conscientia in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 2007.
32. Kant, Lectures on Metaphysics of Morals, 1793, recorded by Vigilantius, 27, 614-620, in *Lectures on Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, ed. Peter Heath and J. Schneewind, 1997.
33. Joseph Butler, *15 Sermons* in vol. 1 and *Dissertation on Virtue* in vol. 2 of *The Works of Bishop Butler*, ed. J.H.Bernard, London & New York 1900.
34. Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation* 1.6-13

#### *Forthcoming*

Richard Sorabji, 'Self and Morality: Cross-Cultural Perspectives', *India International Quarterly*, Delhi 2007.

Richard Sorabji, 'Conscience: Pagan and Pauline contributions to the concept', *Studia Patristica*, Leuven 2009.

Richard Sorabji, 'Meaning: ancient comments on five lines of Aristotle', in Christopher Shields, ed., *Oxford handbook on Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, 2007-8.

## **Topic 2. Will**

Conscience has above been connected with will and with weakness of will. Will in its turn is connected with Struggling against better judgement, Resisting temptation, and Freedom from emotion. Discussion and translations of some of the relevant texts can be found in Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. The relevant chapters of this book should be on restricted web access for course members, and the paperback is in print from Oxford University Press.

### **2a Will**

The concept of will is a composite of several distinct ideas that are found in separation in Greek and Roman philosophy: freedom, responsibility, will power, and others. It was Augustine who put them all together around 400 CE. That was not necessarily clarifying, but we are still sufficiently influenced by him to talk of weakness of will and free will. Does the idea of will really help us to understand freedom or responsibility or giving in to temptation? Or were the Greek and Roman treatments better?

*Ordered for library reserve:*

1. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Ch. 21.
2. Thomas Pink and M.W.F. Stone, eds, *The will and human action : from antiquity to the present day*, London : Routledge, 2004 (contains the same Sorabji paper).

### **2b Struggling against better judgement and divided self**

Plato makes Socrates deny that such struggle is possible, but Plato himself recognises it in the *Republic* when he allows that Leontius so struggled, at the cost of revealing a divided soul. It is alleged that his soul must have been divided, since one thing cannot simultaneously have opposite desires about the same thing. But Pseudo-Plutarch protests that one can have simultaneous opposite capacities, and are not desires comparable with capacities? Plato becomes increasingly sensitive to different reasons why one can want the course one thinks worse, but Aristotle goes back to Socrates and concedes his position that one cannot want to go against one's better judgement, except through some form of ignorance. His innovation is to put new stress on ignorance as inattention and explain that various types of attention-failure can allow violation of one's policy judgements (*prohairesis*). Since Stoics, except for Posidonius, deny Plato's division of the soul, they have to postulate that one's unitary reason oscillates between the better judgement and the worse. The Christians inherit this debate. Among them Origen and Augustine deny two souls in us, but accept two wills to explain the cases of struggle. One may act with less than one's full will. Moreover they accept something like the Stoic idea of conditional willing. Christ engaged in a conditional willing ('If it be thy will, let this cup, pass from me') comparable to Stoic willing with the reservation 'if it be God's will'. Does the conditional willer actually will?

*Ordered for library reserve*

1. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Ch. 20

### **2c Resisting temptation**

While the Stoics had techniques for resisting emotion, Christians adapted Stoic views to create techniques for resisting temptation to sin. Christ and Jewish patriarchs were seen as having goals of impassivity like the Stoic goal. The 'pre-passions' or 'first movements' which the Stoics tried to nip in the bud were reinterpreted as 'bad thoughts'. The Stoic art of avoiding emotion thus became a Christian art of avoiding temptation to sin, and the concentration on bad thoughts opened up new gradations of question about whether one dwelt on the thought, enjoyed it, or put oneself in the way of it.

Evagrius, a 4<sup>th</sup> century CE Christian, found himself as a desert hermit assailed by the 8 involuntary bad thoughts of gluttony, lust, avarice, distress, anger boredom (*akêdia*), vanity (concern with others' opinions) and pride (belief in self-sufficiency). These evolved into the 7 cardinal sins, but they were not yet sins, nor emotions, only temptations. It was up to us whether they turned into sins, or lingered. He describes the sequences of bad thoughts which assail the hermit in his hot desert solitude with the vividness of a novelist like Trollope. The most innocent and even saintly thoughts can turn into bad ones in no time, and one must study the sequences of thoughts in order to defeat the bad ones. Thus we may progress towards the Stoic-Christian goal of impassivity.

But the Christian Augustine thoroughly disapproved of this approach to temptation. He agreed that sin starts when we enjoy or prolong bad thoughts. What he was against was the view that one might reach the stage of sinlessness or Stoic impassivity through one's

own efforts. But Evagrius agreed that one needed Grace from God to succeed. Moreover, Augustine misinterpreted Stoic pre-passions. He inferred that the Stoics disagreed with him only verbally, because Aulus Gellius' Latin report of the Stoics used an ambiguous word, when it said that the Stoics allowed the pre-passion of *pavor*. Augustine took it to mean that they abandoned impassivity by allowing real *fear*. In fact the pre-passion that the Stoics allowed was only *jitters*.

*Ordered for library reserve.*

1. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Chs 22-24
2. *Evagrius of Pontus*, translated by Robert E. Sinkewicz, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

### **2d Freedom from emotion**

Augustine disagreed with Christians like Evagrius in another way. He was on Aristotle's side, rather than that of the Stoics, on the question of whether freedom from emotion was desirable for humans. Aristotle believed that moderate emotions were the thing to aim at. Similarly for Augustine, even unpleasant emotions have been needed since man left Paradise, and pleasant ones were enjoyed in Paradise and will be in heaven. By contrast, one Jewish and many Christian thinkers had sided with Evagrius, in treating Stoic freedom from emotion as an ideal for certain humans, and Evagrius' techniques to achieve this were taken over by Benedictine monasteries. This did not stop these Christians writing consolation letters for *ordinary* people which urge no more than Aristotle's moderation of emotion (*metriopatheia*). Seneca too had done that in writing to non-Stoics, in spite of being a Stoic himself. Augustine's attack on anyone seeking freedom from sinful emotion was motivated by his belief in original sin inherited from Adam's fall from Paradise. This supposedly made us helpless to avoid sinning. There were other Christians who agreed with him, and if allowing bad thoughts to linger is counted as a sin, it may be hard to disagree that sin cannot be avoided.

Are the Stoics or Aristotle right? We all have some emotions that we do not want, so we may learn from the Stoics how to get rid of these. But why do the Stoics seek to remove most of them? It is partly that they prefer serenity, and partly that pleasant emotions are inextricably tied to unpleasant ones, and that ordinary love turns to hate. They also have a special view of their own, that very few things matter and that undesirable emotion is due to thinking that many things matter. The case against them is not always well argued. For Stoic eradication of emotion is not suppression or gritting of teeth, but re-evaluation of whether things matter and of whether one's first reaction is appropriate. Nor do the Stoics remove all motivation. They explain how the desires which they call selections will be unemotional, helped also by being put in conditional form, 'if God wills'. Freedom from emotional judgements is imaginable from Epictetus' description of methods for training students. In a different context freedom from emotion was further pictured by Aristotle and others as an appropriate state for God or of the next life, if there was one (which he seems to deny). But would such a state be human or humane? For ordinary people are not emotions of the highest value, even though we should not share Romanticism's glorification of all of them?

What did other philosophers think about the debate between Aristotelians and Stoics on the desirability or undesirability of emotions? Some saw the two states as ideals for different people (Philo, the Jew) or for different stages of a philosopher's progress (Plotinus). Freedom from emotion is associated with the Presocratic Anaxagoras, the

followers of Socrates and the Cynics, such as Diogenes who lived in a tub. Pyrrhonians sceptics also claimed to free themselves from emotion, but not from unpleasant sensation. The 'natural anger' of one late Epicurean is not so far from Stoic freedom from anger. Augustine and others were wrong to call the dispute merely verbal. All those on the Stoics' side thought that freedom from emotion really could be achieved, and the claim that the Stoics did not mean it depends on misinterpreting their key terms, like 'pre-passion' (misinterpreted by Augustine), their concession that there are some good emotions (*eupatheiai*), or their agreement that one has a duty to select certain things even though they are not valuable in themselves. These need to be understood correctly, in order to understand their case.

*Ordered for library reserve*

1. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Chs 25, 13-14.