A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY TO WOJTYLA/JOHN PAUL II

(Links to online collected works and related works are in Blue)

Recent scholarship has uncovered some interesting links to Greek Ancient Philosophy coming from an early Exodus community of Jews who instead of going to Israel branched off and went to Greece during the time of wandering in the dessert. This was a permitted departure that Moses gave a group under a kind of "leave now or never" scenario. Archeological evidence shows a group left and went to Greece. This may explain hints of monotheism which influenced Egyptian and Greek thinking from around 1500 B.C.

Other evidence suggests Hindu *Vedas* and *Bagavad Gita* influences on the Greeks. For example, There may be evidence of this in Socrates' discussion of reincarnation but also in his views of the afterlife, reward and punishment after death and certain ethical positions. These Hindu texts date to at least 1500.B.C. and in some cases may go back as far as 5000 B.C.

Aside from these historians have cited the pre-Socratics around 800 B.C. forward (those before Socrates such as Zeno, Parmenides etc. and the post Socratics (Those influenced by Socrates) as the beginning of the golden era of Greek and Western thought on philosophy, and ethics. This period saw an unusual number of geniuses in Greece of all fields from Architecture and Math to Philosophy and Ethics. Historically, it is considered a strange period of unusual enlightenment and progress in the philosophical sciences and the physical sciences which aside from the possible influences above seems to have arisen as if out of nowhere on the shoulders of these unusual geniuses. This period is so impressive that later Christian philosophers point to it as an example of "natural philosophy" or "natural law" which they claim is in us as a part of creation but generally does not flourish so strongly or so accurately without the light of grace as seen in Judaism and Christianity.

600 B.C. saw great progress in law in Ancient Greece which prepared the soil for one such as Socrates. Socrates had an almost obsesive drive to get to the heart of things and define the real meaning of something such as "justice" etc. This began the process of fighting with the "Sophists". The Sophists (wise ones - self-proclaimed) travelled ancient Greece and charged large sums to teach the sons of rich men how to win their day in court by appearing the more correct. Socrates despised this practice and wanted to see youth educated in virtue and the pursuit of goodness not merely profit and victory in court.

Over time Socrates and his disciples won this fierce battle and are considered one of the founding blocks of Western Civilization. It was a time when accurate descriptions, logic and virtue defeated skepticism and shameless profiteering. The Romans coming later were so impressed with Greece that when they conquered it they threw out many of their gods and thinking and adopted that of the Greeks. Western Civilization is often considered the marriage between Greek/Roman philosophy and Jewish/Christian Revelation. While Christianity eventually replaced the panacea of Greek gods the model for human psychology which comes out of Greek mythology is truly impressive if each God and Goddess, good and bad are seen as aspects of human qualities and potentialities.

The result of this history is what is called Western Culture and Western Thinking.

In philosophy the progression of thinkers generally goes like this. (very abbreviated)

Socrates - executed in 399 B.C. by his own city of Athens. The "Dialogues of Plato" are about conversations with Socrates written after his death by Plato.

Contributions among others:

Plato will take his discussions and show that what Socrates was after is the identifying of "essences" or the "what" of something. What makes something what it is in contrast to something else that may look similar. Clarity and science, according to Aristotle, begin with Socrates. In fact Aristotle will go so far as to say that all the distinctions he makes are contained in seed form in Socrates.

Plato - roughly 20 years old when his mentor Socrates is executed. He vows to make Athens pay by fulfilling Socrates prophecy that an army of young thinkers would replace him. He founds the Academy which is still a force (though a corrupted one by then) in 400 A.D.

Contribution: The **Academy** makes science and intellectual pursuit a part of a formal education. The idea of Universities begins here. Preserves the distinctions and discussions of Socrates and shows the importance of these pursuits to the soul and afterlife. Argues that these are even more relevant than wealth and power to the human being.

Aristotle - circa 325 B.C.

Aristotle is a giant of an intellect.

Contributions: Founded the **Lyceum**. Together with the Academy of Plato these two schools are considered the forerunner of the modern University. Aristotle codifies the philosophical gems in the dialogues of Plato and formalizes them into a more scientific language giving structure to Metaphysics, Ethics, Politics, Anatomy, and Animal Classifications. He is responsible for the first "scientific" categories and classifications we still use today. He goes so far as to chart the relationship between tides and the moon. "Philosophy" to Aristotle is very broad and includes what we would call "science" today in the sense of material sciences. The reasons medical terms and scientific terms are in Latin to this day is that these are the translations of the classifications in Greek that Aristotle started.

Aristotle's Metaphysics and Nichomachean Ethics through later thinkers make up the bulk of Christian descriptions of Ethics, the Eucharist, the study of "Being" or ontology, metaphysics and the many great distinctions we will find in Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas has so much respect for this giant of scientific clarification that in all his works he refers to a thinker by name with the exception of Aristotle whom he calls simply "the philosopher".

Augustine - dies 400 A.D. Augustine is a great synthesizer and thinker in his own right. He is a pagan convert to Christianity who becomes a great Bishop and intellect even in his own time. He authors more books (enough to fill a room) than most people can read in a life-time. He lives at a time

when Christians are now getting a little over confident and are beginning to ask things like: "Who needs the Greeks they were just pagans" He strikes back by adopting and expanding many of the ideas of great Greek and Roman authors and showing the usefulness of all truth and science wherever it comes from. He is famous for coining the phrase: "Faith seeking understanding, understanding seeking faith".

Contribution: Augustine is considered the champion of Plato. Plato in the style of Socrates approaches philosophy in a manner we might say is more from the heart. Plato suggests a realm between God and man which is called the "Ideas" or "Pure Perfections". It is from this realm that things down here get their participation in any given "essence". So, for example there is a pure horse with no actual body in that realm which is everything a horse can be. Horses down here participate to a greater or lesser degree of perfection in "horseness" as it is found in that realm.

Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas will reject this claim as not actually real but worthwhile as an exercise of the mind. Augustine sees it as a way to translate the attributes of God down to the created order or even as an expression of various Angelic beings assigned to look over a given aspect of creation. From this time on Western philosophers are often separated into: those who side with Plato or those who side with Aristotle regarding the existence or nonexistence of this other realm.

Augustine's' writings are more poetic and incorporate many personal experiences (which is why he is considered the forerunner of phenomenology). His work "Augustine's' Confessions" has consistently been the second most sold book after the Bible for hundreds of years. His works are full of the praise of the creator who saved him from his wayward life while at the same time touching on the most profound philosophical issues and even most every day events.

He considers both originally and critically (arguing with other authors) the most fundamental questions of human life, existence, philosophy and faith. Those considerations are often approached from the perspective of reason alone without the aid of revelation since he is arguing with non-

believers. This makes him one of the architects of the distinction of the sciences of Theology and Philosophy.

He argues vehemently against the skeptics (often called "academicians" from what had become of Plato's Academy) of his day which is why he is an important progression in these thinkers. All of them contribute to the defeat of ancient skepticism and demonstrate that we can know things and know reality even if our knowledge should be humble and open to correction. Ancient skeptics tended to be materialists, rejected the immaterial soul, afterlife and claims of objective right and wrong opting for a kind of situation ethics basesd on relationships and personal advantage.

He plays an important role in phenomenology and "realist philosophy" at a time when thinkers of 1800's and early 1900's were looking for a different perspective or approach from the Aristotelian/ Aquinian systematic, logical approach to things. In fact, Augustine is considered in their tradition and Aquinas quotes him very often.

Augustine contributes to the growing body of teachings on the immortality of the human soul, the non-material nature of the human soul, an understanding of metaphysics (nonmaterial intelligent beings like God, angels) He wins the debate about the importance of truth wherever it may come from. Science in the modern sense and the possible (when understood correctly) complementarity of faith and reason receive much from Augustine. His forceful eloquent arguments contribute to logic, poetry, the arts and the body of Catholic cultural works which inspire millennia of fruitful work.

Thomas Aquinas - circa 1200 A.D.

After the so called "dark ages" formal learning had all but dissapeared in many of the sciences other than what came through religious formation. The texts of Aristotle, Plato had been lost. A new era of intense learning begins to take place in Europe and a few thinkers emerge with an emphasis on the need to recover philosophy as a distinct science and aid to faith and theology. Following the re-discovery of the lost texts of the ancient Greeks by Muslim archeologists and thinkers Aquinas and these other thinkers argue for the necessity to recover the Catholic tradition of profiting from faith and

reason. A similar attitude had emerged as in Augustine's day and these thinkers had to make the case as to why these pagan authors were valuable. Few did this with the passion and original development of Thomas Aquinas. He is considered the great medieval synthesizer who brings together Greco/Roman philosophy and Catholic Theology expanding on the distinctions of Aristotle and applying them in a manner previously missed. He also is able to clarify deep philosophical distinctions useful to understanding the Catholic understanding of revealation giving it a kind of attractiveness to unbelievers. Other great names of that period should be noted like John Dun Scotus, Bonaventura etc.

His use of Aristotle and clarity of distinctions resulted in never before seen clarifications on the Eucharist, Ethics, Logic, Metaphysics, Virtue and Piety. The Church has used his formulations more than any other author to explain doctrines about revelation.

His work Summa Theologica is a training manual for seminarians. It is peppered throughout with important philosophical distinctions which make the lessons understandable as much as possible from reason and logic. His work Summa Contra Gentiles is a more "purely philosophical" work since it is directed to "gentiles" or unbelievers but it is much shorter and does not deal with as many topics. His short work "*De Ente et Essentia*" or "On Being and Essence" is considered by some the quintessential work on ontology and metaphysics and makes the case for understanding the distinction between "to be" and "what something is" or "Being" and "Essence". His clarification on "matter" and "form" build a strong case for and ability to conceptualize purely spiritual beings such as God, Angels and even "things" we distinguish without material makeup such as the difference between "Love" and "Justice" or "Hope" or "Forgiveness".

Aquinas continues to contribute to the development of teachings which Augustine contributed to with a more systematic method like that of Aristotle. A shift in Catholic thinking (emphasis) takes place now from Plato/Augustine to Aristotle/Aquinas. This will shift back again or rather find a kind of complimentary combination in the personalist movement of realist phenomenology and John Paul II.

Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II: (collected works not online at this time)

From about 1600 on following Descartes and "enlightenment" thinkers a new skepticism is born in Western thinking and takes a strong hold. The prevailing Aristotelian/Thomistic teaching of the day had also become a bit weak in that it was reiterated but not well elucidated, understood or explained. In this condition it was not in a good position to defeat the new skepticism the way its founders did which was to either convert their honest opponents through clarifications and explanations or silence unethical opportunists by exposing their superficiality and lack of learning in real debates.

ETHICS CLARIFICATIONS

In order to consider the different ways that ethics can be done we must be sure that we understand some important terms and the way they are used, historically and in this class.

Let's consider doing ethics from Philosophy and doing ethics from Theology.

Philosophy:

Philosophy uses reason to answer life's questions or to consider life's questions. There are no prerequisites to doing philosophy. Anyone can and everyone does do philosophy.

An example of Ethics done from philosophy is Aristotle's, "Nichomochean Ethics".

Aristotle was a pagan philosopher who lived around 325 B.C. Without the use of **Revelation** as we know it he created one of the most respected guides to ethics simply from reason.

Theology:

Based on Revelation Theological Ethics is taken from a combination of Philosophy (or human reason) and Revelation. It is only natural that we use our reason even when considering Theology.

In order to "do Theology" rather than simply read the theology of someone else we must hold certain positions which are the result of the answers we choose to a few questions.

The first one is philosophical. It considers the question: Does God exist?

We must answer this from reason first to approach an opinion on Theology and Revelation otherwise our reasoning is circular.

We can't say: "I believe God exists because the Bible tells me so." To believe in the bible we must first claim that God exists.

When we ask the question: "Does God exist?" we are asking a philosophical question. To say it is a philosophical question means that anyone could ask this question without any reference to religion or passed down beliefs about revelation. If you were abandoned on an Island as an infant and managed to survive you could eventually ask yourself this question. The island scenario is a good "test" to see if something is "philosophical" or "theological." You could not ask: "Do I believe in Christianity?" since you would never have heard of it. You could ask: "Is there a supreme being?" or something similar.

There are several different philosophical answers to the question: 1. Does God Exist?

Theist - Yes

Atheist - No

Agnostic - Maybe

Deist – God exists but there was never any revelation

To do theology we must obviously answer the question "yes". Next we must ask: 2. Did God reveal? The answer to that must also be – Yes.

If we claim God exists and we believe God revealed then we can do Theology which is the study of that body of information we claim was revealed.

If we don't believe they are revelation we cannot really do Theology. Theology is done by the believers in a revelation.

So, what is revelation?

We don't mean "I had a revelation"

Revelation:

Revelation is a real action of God to communicate and reveal something to Humans.

For example, Jews believe this happened with: Abraham, Moses and the Ten Commandments. Christians believe this happened with those things plus with the New Testament and Jesus.

Western Culture is partially based on belief in these "Judeo/Christian Revelations"

There are different views about Revelation and what was revealed among Christians.

Revelation is believed to have happened in two ways: Catholics and Orthodox believe: Revelation is in two forms:

Those are:

1. Bible

2. Tradition:

Tradition refers to what was revealed to Jesus through the Apostles but was not written in the New Testament. These are known through official Church Teaching.

Tradition is a special word. It does not refer to traditions as in the case of using certain songs, incense and customs. It refers to actual revelations preserved in the memory of the Church.

Protestants came into existence starting around 1520 A.D.

With the protestant reformation there were some changes in belief regarding revelation: Protestants believe Revelation comes only through Scripture.

"Sola Scriptura" was a key phrase of protestant leaders. Protestants differ with Catholics and Orthodox on several issues. With regard to Revelation the most important difference is probably that protestants do not believe that the Church is an "Institution" with bishops, priests and deacons. (However, that is true about most protestant churches it is not true about all of them.)

Since there is no institution then there is no ability for the institution to preserve revelation in the form of “Tradition,” The conclusion is that only the Bible can be trusted as official “Revelation”.

For most protestants there are no ordained Priests or Bishops. There are some exceptions to this among Anglicans, Episcopalians, and a growing number of newer protestant churches which are reconsidering the changes introduced at the time of the reformation.

This course draws on several philosophical systems. Since this is a philosophy course and not a Theology course, this course does not contain much reference to Catholic Ethics which is usually a combination of of Aristotle’s Ethics and ethics based on Revelation from the Catholic perspective. However, you are welcome to use your faith perspective and theological references but try to learn how to phrase those along the lines of what can be established by logic and reason. Those things which are strictly theological in your views should be references as a kind of “cross-reference”. It should sound something like this:

“This is similar to what I believe from (Christianity) (Judaism) (Islam) namely, that . . . “

It is good to be able to see how things compare but be sure to be able to distinguish philosophical claims from theological claims.

In an ethical question there are two aspects:

1. Subjective: What I perceive things to be

2. Objective: What things really are.

The goal of ethics is to bring the two together in my understanding and practice.

Here are some Kinds of Ethical Systems (Philosophical). You may notice some of our authors fall into some or several of these categories.

1. Egoism: Just do what you want.

2. Emotivism: What feels correct. Values are based on attraction to what seems good.

3. Deontological: Duty: Just do what our duty is.

4. Formalism: categorical imperative.

5. Utilitarianism: The end justifies the means. It emphasizes the best possible outcome for the most people.

All of these are modern ethical theories. An Aristotelian would say they have insights but make a similar mistake which is they over emphasize the subjective.

The reason most modern Ethics over-emphasize the subjective is due to the widespread belief among modern philosophers which doubts our ability to know things. This is called "skepticism" and it comes in various degrees of intensity.

6. Aristotle offers an- "Object oriented Ethics".

This seeks to take into account both the subjective and objective aspects of reality.

It goes something like this: The world is full of objects. The better I know them, the better I can relate to them. Virtue is what helps me relate or "choose" correctly. In ethics we have a unique object which is also a subject – a person. When we encounter another person we encounter another individual "I" who also has self – determination, and rights. This means ethics is not dependent only on my perceptions but on the real existence of the other person.

An ethics class is difficult to understand without this insight from classic ethics:

The Structure of the Moral Act:

When we look at ethics we are evaluating **actions** and **omissions.**

Actions are pretty clear. That is when I do something.

For example, If, I rob a bank, it is considered a morally evil action. If, I feed the poor, it is considered a morally good action.

Omissions are when I don't do something.

For example, if, someone insults me and I don't insult them back that is usually considered a morally good omission, (provided I'm not shirking some responsibility to expose evil or protect good)

On the other hand, if I decide not to feed my children today simply because I don't feel like the hassle that is considered a morally evil omission.

There are two aspects of an act which we must evaluate when evaluating the "goodness" or "evil" of an action.

Those are: "**The Means**" and "**The End**" (The End is not same as the results)

"**The End**" is the goal. "The End" is sometimes called "The Object" – It is the thing chosen or sought. It is the reason for my action or avoidance of an action.

"**The Means**" is how I get there.

Example: I want to become a better person. "become a better person" is the **end** or goal.

I decide to volunteer at a local charity. "Volunteering at a local charity" is the **means** I choose to accomplish the goal of becoming a better person.

Sometimes we can confuse the **end** with mere results or consequences.

They are not the same in this context. There can be many results or consequences they are not necessarily the **end**.

Some consequences are ones I intend. Some, I do not intend. Consequences can be different. They can be good, bad, neutral and/or unforeseen. Here is an example. Let's say I never intended or

expected to run into a buddy at the local charity. Once I got there it turned out that our friendship grew stronger as a result of our work together. This is a good consequence but it was not the **end** of my action. It is not why I went. It was unforeseen but good. We can't anticipate all those consequences of our actions but we do have to make reasonable considerations regarding consequences that we can foresee. For example, there is nothing wrong with target practice. The goal is to become better with my aim which is also a good goal or end. However, if I shoot too close to public gatherings, roads or the like the obvious other results and consequences of my action can cancel the good sought. It becomes a bad action. A similar thing happens if my overall goal is to misuse my improved aim.

So, both the "means" and the "end" must be good for the action to be good.

"Intention"

Good intentions cannot make bad actions good. But, bad intentions can make a good act bad. For example, the "kiss of betrayal".

"Circumstance"

Circumstance can change the character of the action.

Medical intervention to save life is a good example here. Normally, it is a bad idea to go around sticking knives in people. However, the surgeon does this to save life or improve health. Here the circumstance is important. We have to be careful with "circumstance."

It is easy to justify wrong actions by claiming "the circumstances permitted it." o

Virtue:

Natural virtues come through habit which is formed by repetition There are many virtues such as courage, humility etc.

Aristotle speaks of four important ones called the “Cardinal Virtues”:

Prudence – binds all the virtues in that it shows us how much, when, how to apply, etc.

Temperance – proper use of our appetites, i.e. in relation to food, drink, sex etc.

Justice – rendering what is due

Fortitude – strength in the face of adversity

The “Theological Virtues”:

These three are: Faith, Hope, Charity

Natural virtues must be obtained through repetition but the Theological virtues can come as a gift of grace. They can be “infused” in a person by God’s gift. It is important to know this distinction when reading some ethical literature since there is also a kind of natural Faith, Hope, Charity which Aristotle speaks of. The natural virtues of faith, hope and charity have to do with human relations and our relationship to other persons in the community. The theological virtues assist us in this but they refer to the ultimate goal of heaven and eternal life. This ultimate goal is also what Socrates had in mind when he spoke about “improving the soul.” and being ready for the “judges of the next world”. These are both mentioned in the “Apology” which is written by Plato about Socrates final trial and condemnation to death. Socrates was the teacher of Plato. Plato was the teacher of Aristotle.

Faith: Helps me “see” invisible realities. Believing in what is unseen. For example, Goodness, God, Angels, reward or punishment as a coming reality in the next life.

Hope: That I will obtain what is not yet obtained. To be with God

Love: Ultimately, this refers to love of God over love of self when there is an apparent conflict. Sometimes “Love” is called “Charity: In the human realm, Love goes beyond Justice. It goes beyond what is due and gives good things out of the abundance of goodness I am able to freely create without getting a reward here and now.

Natural Law: The theory of Theologians and Christian philosophers that there is an ability of humans to know right and wrong without Revelation. This they call Natural Law. They often site Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius as example of this since they came up with similar conclusions without the use of what we call “Revelation.”