DPLS 745 Leadership & Personal Ethics

Fall 2011 2 Credits
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Thursdays from 6:00-10:00 p.m.
Sept. 8, 22, & 29 Oct 13 & 27

Immediately below these remarks, you'll find the Syllabus for the Fall 2011.

Accordingly
Session 1: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*;
Session 2: Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism";
Session 3: Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*;
Session 4: Fromm, *The Art of Loving*;
Session 5: May, *Love and Will*.

Sometime over the next couple of days, I will open the Blackboard site for our course and post a prolix document called “The Big Aristotle Document.” Since you’ll have the chance to peruse it, I think you'll find it's self-explanatory. These sprawling notes relieve me of my overreaching want to lecture, knowing that this is not a lecture course and that our purpose instead in gathering these five evenings is to have worthwhile conversations about serious matters.

In these remarks, I want to reflect in a historical way on my choice of texts for our course, which I initially selected without having thought too much about how dated they are, from one point of view, or how much they belong to a period in intellectual life that might sometimes appear like an endangered species.

Aristotle is a perennial source for philosophical reflection, and I don't believe I have too much more to say about the justification for encountering his moral philosophy here, whatever reservations or enthusiasms each of us might bring to the table. It'll be worth it.

Otherwise, the remaining texts fall between 1944 and 1969, i.e. beginning in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Sartre gave his famous lecture as soon as Paris was liberated. Frankl, who had been interred at Auschwitz and other camps, originally brought out *Man's Search for Meaning* in 1946. Fromm's *The Art of Loving* came out in 1956. Frankl and Fromm were both German-speaking Jews, and Judaism is a deep and profound source for their thought and outlook. Although the late forties and early fifties are in many ways a long way off from 1969, May's classic *Love and Will* seems more in hindsight to be a late work in a then-fading genre and a body of themes and reflections that perhaps makes us think of these authors in the past tense more than the present, the world of half a century ago.

Sartre himself is in no danger of being forgotten today. His reputation has weathered the storm of anti-humanist philosophical critiques originating in Heidegger's influential *Letter on Humanism*
(1947), on the one hand, and French structuralism and poststructuralism on the other hand, especially after 1968. (These criticisms are internally related to Sartre's project inasmuch as they belong to so-called "continental philosophy," while the dominant tendencies in Anglo-American philosophy, especially in the period in question, appeared in an altogether different philosophical style. At the time, the two philosophical traditions, continental and Anglo-American, were worlds apart.) Together with Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre coined the term "existentialism"; he is the greatest representative of twentieth-century existential thought; and this is how his philosophy is known. Now that some decades have passed, when first it was fashionable to be an existentialist, and then it was fashionable to declare the end of existentialism, Sartre's thought has proven to be durable enough over time that there is still a thriving cottage industry of Sartrean studies today.

By comparison with Sartre, the circumstances seem different for Frankl, Fromm, and May. What these thinkers share in common with Sartre is their respective commitments to existentialism. And they follow Sartre in regarding their matters of existential concern--freedom, meaning, love, and will--as fundamentally humanistic in character. On the other hand, the most obvious point of departure they share in common is their commitment to depth psychology and psychoanalysis. Sartre held psychoanalysis more at arm's length and worked out a critique of Freud. In their nearness or farness from Freud, then, Frankl comes closest to Sartre, identifying logotherapy as the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" after Freud and Alfred Adler. Together with Karen Horney, Fromm is the major theorist of neo-Freudianism. Among the members of Freud's "Committee," however, May considered himself to be most in debt to Otto Rank, "the great unacknowledged genius in Freud's circle." In descending degrees of distance from Freud, I suppose the series moves from Sartre to Frankl, Fromm, and May. What Frankl, Fromm, and May share in common, then, partly with Sartre and partly not, are existentialism, humanism, and psychoanalysis.

Our course is definitely not a course in psychoanalysis or depth psychology, which it would be redundant of me to say that I have no portfolio to teach. What we're after instead is a certain approach to philosophical questions as they arise in personal ethics, namely, the approach of existential phenomenology. But our authors' relation to psychoanalysis is also a benchmark of what some people might think of as their obsolescence. In fact, it's a little startling today to think of how, once upon a time, in so strange a place for it as the United States, Freudian psychology was the dominant paradigm. In part, this was owing to the influence of Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, who invented public relations, and in part also to the Freudian influence emanating from the University of Chicago at a certain moment of its history. The stereotype in popular American culture might be called the "Woody Allen syndrome." But psychoanalysis seems to have fallen from grace in contemporary scientific psychology, a science noteworthy still today for its diversification as one trend overtakes another.

Why select such a dated literature for our course? After all, world circumstances have changed dramatically since the mid-twentieth century, profoundly shaping the fate and fortune of the world of ideas. Without pretending an exhaustive enumeration, at least three indices are prominent. With so-called "globalization," a eurocentric outlook has obviously become untenable. With women's liberation as a worldwide idea whose time has come, a patriarchal outlook is likewise increasingly untenable (even President George W. Bush proclaimed himself
to be a feminist when the United States overthrew the Taliban government of Afghanistan). And with revolutionary developments in science and technology, it might also appear that an existential-phenomenological approach to the being, meaning, and significance of the human animal is as obsolete as the medieval faculty psychology of the occult powers of the soul is deemed to be in the mainstream of the going intellectual culture.

However saturated in a European milieu our authors are, Aristotle defines *epagoge* as "grasping the universal in the clearly known particular." If we were reading the Dali Lama instead, we would be reading an author saturated in the milieu of Tibetan Buddhism. It may be the case that our authors carry a universal message in and through the mediations of their own particular times and places. It's a question of cultural translation, which also presupposes an antecedent willingness on our part to listen to what they have to say, in order to discover whether they have anything to say to us.

Again, for anyone thinking within the proximate neighborhood of Freud, a certain patriarchal residue is perhaps unavoidable, but I would argue that there's nothing intrinsically patriarchal in the thought of Frankl, Fromm, or May (although I would not say the same of Aristotle). Sartre's feminism is clear and unequivocal. And I would be inclined to argue vigorously that there's nothing intrinsically masculinist in an existential-phenomenological approach to the specific range of questions that arise insofar as a personal ethics is concerned.

Finally, developments in science and technology are one thing, their interpretations for the meaning and significance of one's own self-understanding another. In the latter sense, however, I believe we have come up against a limit situation that we'll be required to negotiate one way or another. Research results from empirical investigation bombard us daily; advances occur so rapidly that only specialists are able to keep up; today's latest technology is obsolete tomorrow. But self-understanding and the understanding of our own humanity goes by an altogether different pulse. For one thing, it's much slower: it pours like molasses; it moves like a glacier or the Roman Catholic Church. There is therefore a standing temptation to adapt the latest scientific and technical developments to the extant conceptual modalities that are already easily available to us, and in a great many cases reliably so. After all, new conceptual modalities do not simply appear out of thin air or appear overnight (and this would be an objection to the overworked word "paradigm": today we hear of "paradigm shifts" morning, noon, and night; but in the history of human thought, arguably regardless of society or culture, time or place, things aren't like that; ideas in the serious sense aren't like this year's fall fashions). At issue for us are the appropriate and best conceptual modalities with which to grasp our own humanity and personality (in the philosophical sense), in the context of the continuously metamorphosing development of one's own self-understanding. In societies like ours, the most recent developments in science and technology are bound to be accorded a certain pride of place in how we think about this. But in the absence of a wholly new way of thinking so unbeknownst to us we have no way of thinking it, we nevertheless have ample and rich, seminal and fertile resources already at our disposal in the myriad traditions of whatever it is that has been taken up and handed down from one generation to the next, some small slice of which we can encounter. So the question concerns the resources that are best for the task at hand in personal ethics. I will briefly argue that the limit situation we confront today and must negotiate one way or another concerns a rapidly emerging if not already dominant notion of what a person is, a notion
that has its conceptual roots historically in the philosophy that affiliated itself with the seventeenth-century revolution in physics (the Copernican Revolution and the Scientific Revolution). This philosophy is mechanistic materialism. It is exemplified in the thought of the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In the absence of an elaboration here, I will come to the point and call it the machine view of the person.

Here is where my own fundamental prejudice (I would hope in the Gadamerian sense) comes to the fore in our course. Needless to say, you are by no means required to share it! If the machine view is still today the dominant discourse of scientific materialism concerning our humanity and personality, then in the context of Ignatian pedagogy and Jesuit higher education, I want to plant a countercultural flag through the reclamation of a counter-discourse. And there is a word inscribed on the banner: it is "personalism." Personalism is the generic name for a philosophical way of proceeding that has diverse world sources; the sources I'm most familiar with through my own training are Catholic, Scottish, and American. Personalism per se is neither religious nor a secular religion. But the fundamental idea is this: any conception of reality that is not fully adequate to the reality of the first and second persons, singular and plural, is an inadequate conception of reality.

An example of such an inadequate view is the machine view. To put it schematically and with admitted oversimplification, today it goes like this. The scientific and technological revolutions of our time, still ongoing, are the information revolution and the biogenetic revolution, which are really two aspects of the underlying metaphor and concept of information-processing. A research program of artificial intelligence is rapidly underway. Its horizon would be the construction of an artificial intelligence in every respect indistinguishable from our own (and differing from it only in clearly specifiable and unique ways, lacking nothing not also present in human intelligence; these differences perhaps even surpassing it, possibly on some distant event horizon to eclipse it). The counterargument is really very simple: human intelligence is partly algorithmic, partly creative; but machine intelligence is completely and ruthlessly algorithmic. There is therefore an aspect of human intelligence that a machine cannot mimic (because it is a machine; or, if it could mimic the creative novelties of human intelligence, it would no longer be the machine intelligence in question, and I would hedge my bets by suggesting that we'd cross that bridge as we came to it).

The going view, then, is (a) that thinking is information-processing, and (b) that we are information-processors: they are silicon-based, we are carbon-based, they are dry, we are wet, but these differences in materials are secondary, because the DNA molecule is an information-processing machine. (Notice, incidentally, that these are philosophical claims, not the results of specialized scientific research.)

On the other hand, in order to know we were not machines, we would have to have a method of access, or more profoundly, an ascesis, that would grant us a way of proceeding in the reality of the first and second persons, singular and plural. In turn, there is an element of interiority involved, which I think it is easy to misunderstand but can be properly understood (it is not Gilbert Ryle's "Ghost in the Machine"; it is not B.F. Skinner's "inner man").
One personalist method of approach or way of proceeding is existential phenomenology, which happens to be coincident with humanism in our selected authors. Since "humanism" is a rubber bag, its clarification and exposition are in order. Sartre, in the Catholic France of Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel, and Jacques Maritain, didn't use the term "personalism," and neither do Frankl, Fromm, or May. But they're certainly close enough for horseshoes.

Our course is a course in personal ethics. It seems to me that we are therefore required to ask: what is a person?

I'd like to close by leaving the parting thought to Bernard Lonergan, writing in 1972 in Method in Theology (his second masterwork, after Insight: A Study of Human Understanding [1957]). At the time, the latest scientific and technological innovation was cybernetics. Here he is writing against reductionism and its successor in systems engineering in the human sciences (in the state of the question ca. 1970 as between Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills). Where we want him, he begins, "So mechanistic determinism used to be part of science; now it is a discarded philosophic opinion." Today we can say: if only it were so! In the context of the twin revolution of our time, it seems that mechanistic determinism is alive and well. "In the human sciences," Lonergan continues, "the problems are far more acute. Reductionists extend the methods of natural science to the study of man. Their results, accordingly, are valid only in so far as a man resembles a robot or a rat and, while such resemblance does exist, exclusive attention to it gives a grossly mutilated and distorted view....[Although general system theory] rejects reductionism in all its forms, systems engineering involves a progressive mechanization that tends to reduce man's role in the system to that of a robot, while systems generally can be deployed to destructive as well as constructive ends....Both in the natural and in the human sciences, then, there obtrude issues that are not to be solved by empirical methods" (pp. 248-49).

By the way, nothing I've talked about here needs to determine how we begin our course on September 8. I just wanted you to have some idea of the rationale behind the choice of texts.

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Meeting dates
We have five meetings scheduled, all Thursday evenings from 6-10 pm. Sept. 8, 22, & 29 Oct 13 & 27

Written work
Your written work will be due before my grades are due in the Registrar's Office. You will be writing reflective essays grounded in our reading, rather than a research paper. Your options will be to write either (1) a single essay on one or more of our books, in the neighborhood of fifteen to eighteen pages in length; or (2) two smaller essays, each on one or more of our books, each in the neighborhood of eight to ten pages in length.

The prototype of a research paper is a journal article for a research journal, and you are certainly free to write with the idea of publication in mind. But our aim in the course is philosophical
reflection rather than quantitative or qualitative research in some determinate topic or area. Consequently, the aims of writing are exposition, critique, and reflective self-appropriation, having read, conversed, and thought deeply about the books that constitute the backbone of our course.

Moreover, whereas the style and tone of research are more impersonal in nature (depending on what one takes "objectivity" to be as a philosophical matter), a reflective essay, which might (or might not) be written more impersonally, inscribes the effort to concentrate one's own mind with the aim of making a personal record of one's own thought. Therefore, what I have in mind is not quite as free-form as a diary or a journal entry, which one typically sets out to write solely for oneself (although when we write, a "reader" is always presupposed), but your writing for the course will head more in that direction than in the direction of a report on the results of some or another statistical investigation and analysis.

You are to imagine yourself initially as entering into a conversation with our authors (on the Gadamerian view that reading and writing are like listening and speaking). Our authors are in some sense addressing you personally; they have something to say to you. On that premise, your aim in reading is to bring the "voice" of the author into the lifeworld of your own lived experience (as if you were going out for a walk or coffee or drinks with a friend). As you come to understand what your "friend" has to say to you, your first responsibility in active listening is to demonstrate that you have grasped what your friend has said (the conversational requirement of listening to the voice of another is an ethical as well as a hermeneutic imperative). Having listened well, which would show up in writing in the quality of your exposition, you have the same freedom as you accorded your friend to respond as seems best to you, whether to agree, to disagree, or to raise further questions (which would show up in writing in the quality of critique, where "critique" here has roughly the same meaning it has in "literary criticism").

In the European and Anglo-American traditions of philosophical investigation and reflection, the medium of its dissemination and development has been the written word, and it can be distinguished from literature on the one hand and the empirical or observational sciences on the other hand by virtue of conducting its investigations and reflections in the modality of argument, which essentially entails the exchange of positions with counterpositions in the attempt to discover what might possibly count as true. This search for truth through the sustained development of arguments (not in the sense of marital spats or office quarrels but in the sense of offering and developing reasons) is an integral moment in the process of forming and formulating beliefs (unless one simply believes what one believes in a manner essentially indifferent to what might possibly count as true).

From this point of view, having beliefs is a matter of holding-for-true. In turn, what one holds for true carries certain responsibilities, the key to which is one's own assumption of the responsibility for what Bernard Lonergan called the "transcendental precepts": be attentive; be intelligent; be reasonable; and be responsible. One's own personal commitment to these precepts, the willingness to become the custodian or steward of one's own intellectual acts and habits, taking responsibility for them as the integral characteristic of thinking for oneself, which is in turn the condition of the very freedom of thought, is the heart of reflective self-appropriation, and we might agree with Lonergan that reflective self-appropriation (self-knowledge and its
entailments) is the aim of philosophy. Finally, then, a reflective essay is a written record of one's own attempt to live up to this obligation, to hold-for-true in the ongoing search to discover what might possibly count as true.

**Thematic organization and texts**
Our course in leadership and personal ethics is thematically organized under four headings: character, freedom, meaning, and love. Our texts are Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, and Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*.

**The first and second meetings: character**
Our first two meetings will focus on Aristotle's classic work, the *Nicomachean Ethics* (in Terence Irwin's English translation). The NE is composed of ten books altogether. In our first meeting, we will focus on the first five books; in our second meeting, the latter five. If the proposition is true that "leadership," as opposed to mere "power-wielding" (Burns, 1978), necessarily includes a moral dimension; and if the proposition is true that the exercise of "leadership" is personal and inter-personal in nature; then there is an integral, organic connection between leadership and character (where "character" is the moral dimension of human personality). A conversation about character and character-formation can be either poorly conducted or well conducted. Although Aristotle's lectures are two and a half millennia old, he nevertheless provides us with a more or less rigorous, more or less complete method, organized on the basis of a normative, evaluative distinction between "virtues" and "vices," for understanding, thinking about, and assessing what a sound moral character is; and not merely as the property of an atomic individual, but in the context of a healthy, morally awake, morally sensitive community.

**The third meeting: freedom**
If ethics is a "science," then perhaps Aristotle was right to think of it as a "practical" rather than a "theoretical" science. In a practical science, however, more than one correct conclusion follows from true premises. Hence, there cannot be an "ethics algorithm." Or: only a free being is capable of moral judgment and the ethical qualities of action. But what is human freedom? The great founder of twentieth-century existential thought, Jean-Paul Sartre, offers a profound meditation on the situation of a free being in his lecture, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (included in a little book called Existentialism and Human Emotions). Sartre may be correct or he may be mistaken. In any case, his lecture affords us the opportunity to spend an evening thinking about what freedom is and what it means to be free, and particularly its place in personal character and conduct.

**The fourth meeting: meaning**
Suppose we are free in the morally relevant sense. Is the reality of a free being a world without meaning or purpose? The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, reflecting on his experience in a Nazi concentration camp, takes up a challenge from the great German classicist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche had thematized what he called "the will to power." Frankl argues that even more fundamental than the will to power is the "will to meaning." Three times in his little book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he quotes Nietzsche against Nietzsche, paraphrased as follows: the one who has a "why" to live, can live with almost any "how." Frankl argues that the
will to meaning satisfies a human need as vital as our needs for food and shelter. What does it mean for a free being to live a meaningful life?

**The fifth meeting: love**

Frankl had argued that the existential need for a meaningful life could be satisfied through work, love, and redemptive suffering. Of these three existential sources, perhaps love occupies a privileged place, shaping our work and redeeming our suffering. But how can we think and talk about "love" without sounding like a Hallmark greeting card? Another great psychologist and philosopher might be able to help us out, namely, Erich Fromm, who wrote a beautiful little book called The Art of Loving. Fromm gives us the opportunity to think about the meaning of love as we exit our course.

I look forward to meeting and working with each of you, in the hope of mutually engaged, informed, literate, and most of all thoughtful and probing conversations.

Tom Jeannot
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