

## U3A Port Phillip

Term 4, 2018

### Philosophy of humanism and the posthuman

#### **Notes on Class 2**

#### **1. Enlightenment values: Reason; rationality**

##### ***Descartes:***

- I think, therefore I exist (individualistic premise)
- Mind-body dualism: “the ghost in the machine”
- Mind as capacity to think, reason
- Mechanical philosophy – the material world, including bodies, operate according to mechanical principles
- Animals, lacking mind, are automata

##### ***Contrast Aristotle:***

- Man.... A *social* animal
- The good person = the good citizen – no ‘self’ apart from society
- Reason, rationality is unique to man but not a way of separating man from animal

##### ***What do enlightenment writers mean by ‘reason’, ‘rationality’?***

- Process of (rule-governed) thinking – logic: *if...then...*
- A (unique) attribute of homo sapiens
- Involves deliberation **vs** emotion; instinct

##### ***Immanuel Kant:***

- practical reason: “if...then...” reasoning governs our lives
- Morality is a matter of reasoning: e.g., the categorical imperative which states that lying is always wrong because if everyone engage in it, communication would break down. I.e. involves a logical inconsistency;
- universalism (anti-relativist): moral values are applicable to all without exception

## **2. Reason and morality**

**Kohlberg's Dilemma** – a psychological experiment designed to show the stages of moral development in children. It presumes a Kantian view of moral maturity in which reasoning rather than emotion (empathy) is paramount. It is challenged by Carol Gilligan who exposes the gendered nature of this supposedly objectivist account.

### **Stages of Moral Development:**

**Kohlberg:** moral development is the development of an autonomous self, capable of being motivated by abstract principles understood as a kind of "mathematical" solution to conflicts of interests. **This is a very Kantian approach to morality**

*Emphasis on:* reason and logic; explicit principles; impartiality; autonomy; rights/obligations; self-reliance. *Modelled on* the contract

**Gilligan:** moral development is the development of a self-in-relation. Morality is understood in terms of the preservation of valuable human relations. Progress from stage to stage is motivated by increasing understanding of human relationships.

*Emphasis on:* relations; responsiveness to situations; compassion, empathy; inter-connectedness; responsibilities; trust. *Modelled on* caring relationship - e.g., parent-child relationship

## **3. Reason, Self, and Society**

Implied contrast of reason **vs** emotion

Reason implies a theory of the self characterised by autonomy; independence; self-sufficiency; separateness

Implications for a **theory of society: the social contract theory**

## **4. Social Contract Theory**

- *the natural condition of mankind is a state of war: "where every man is Enemy to every man ... and the life of man, solitary, poor nasty, brutish and short."* (Thomas Hobbes)
- *Society exists because it is in the interests of us all to have peace.* (cf. William Golding's view in *Lord of the Flies*)
- "social contract"
- Underlying social atomism: we are basically egoistic rather than altruistic:
- An *atomistic* ontology

These reflect two **theories of human nature**: ‘it’s a dog eat dog society’ (“Man is wolf to man”) vs ‘we are basically social animals – cooperative, and helping ...’

#### 4. Relations with Others

Our view of relationships with others, and hence of society, will vary according to whether we view the self as atomistic (separate, etc) or as relational

<i>atomistic self</i>	<i>relational self</i>
<i>transactional (contractual)</i> <i>customer; consumer; taxpayer</i> <i>self-interest</i> e.g., Kantian ethic	<i>care; concern</i> <i>citizen; “we”; community</i> <i>communal interest; common good</i> e.g., care ethics

*The relational self is the basis of the **ethics of care** developed mainly through feminist theories of writers like Virginia Held, Nell Noddings, Carol Gilligan. These writers do not deny the value of autonomy, independence, etc., but argue that these can only arise on the basis of secure relationships. They are not virtues that can be cultivated in isolation from other people.*

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#### **Advance Notice:**

\*\* Make sure you view the segment on Hanson’s “It’s OK to be white” featuring the response of lawyer, Nyadol Nyuon, on *The Drum* ABC TV Tuesday 16 October 2018 (use Iview – it’s about mid-way through the program). This is relevant to Class 4 or 5. However these programs don’t stay on Iview very long.

#### **Preparation for Class 3**

Read (or read about) John Stuart Mill’s essay *On Liberty* – especially, arguments in support of liberty; limits of freedom of speech; distinction between private and public spheres.

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/milljs/#SH2e> section 2e; or

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/#LibeFreeSpee> sections 4.5, 4.6

- Consider the strengths and shortcomings of Mill’s arguments in the light of recent challenges, e.g., the decision by 4 Corners to interview Steve Bannon; cartoons –

Charlie Hebdo and lampooning Mahommet; Mark Knight on Serena Williams; George Brandeis' "right to be a bigot"; attempted repeal of section 19c of Anti-Discrimination Act; the Ruddock review in defence of religious freedom,....

- Is there a case for censorship? Under what circumstances? Who should decide?
- What is the appropriate response to public defenders of causes like extreme right patriotism; holocaust denial; etc.: 'de-platforming'? or debating?

Mary Wollstonecraft: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Vindication\\_of\\_the\\_Rights\\_of\\_Woman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Vindication_of_the_Rights_of_Woman) on *Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)*

We will also make brief reference to John Locke's views on natural rights, private property and tolerance. See <https://www.iep.utm.edu/locke/#H4>

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**SOME GENERAL REFERENCES** - These are relevant to past and ongoing topics that you might wish to explore further. More references will be added as we progress.

Two very good general references are the following internet encyclopaedias.

<http://plato.stanford.edu>

[www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu)

Wikipedia can also be useful as a general reference

To help navigate through philosophical names, concepts etc., the following might be useful: [www.philosophypages.com](http://www.philosophypages.com)

FURTHER REFERENCES FOR CLASS 2:

- Thomas Hobbes's "state of nature" and the social contract: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/> section 5
- On Carol Gilligan's response to the Kohlberg dilemma, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol\\_Gilligan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Gilligan)  
<https://psychology.iresearchnet.com/developmental-psychology/social-development/gilligans-theory-of-feminine-morality/> (more detailed – psychology rather than philosophy)
- On ethics of care: <http://www.reallylearning.com/two-kinds-of-care-transactional-relational/>

See also writers Virginia Held, Eva Kitay, Nel Noddings, e.g., [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nel\\_Noddings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nel_Noddings)

- Empathy and ethics:

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/emp-symp/#H6>

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/05/130522085436.htm>

<http://subcortex.com/IsEmpathyNecessaryForMoralityPrinz.pdf>

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