

World Religions in Greater Indianapolis

Teaching Module

October 30, 2015

Teacher: **Barry LeBlanc**

Humanities Discipline: **Introduction to Ethics (PHIL 102)**

World Religion: **Judaism**

Teaching Module Title: **Ethics and Judaism • Part 1**

Teaching Module Goals

1. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between religion and ethics by applying ethical theories to Jewish beliefs and practices.
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of ethical relativism by using its lens to evaluate Himmler's justification of the Holocaust.
3. The student will explore issues of animal ethics by comparing selected Jewish ethical traditions with those of secular philosopher Colin McGinn.

Assigned Readings and Websites

PHIL 102 Introduction to Ethics required textbooks:

- Louis Pojman, *How Should We Live? An Introduction to Ethics*
 - Pp 47-64 ("Who's to Judge? Ethical Relativism")
 - Pp 89-105 ("Religion and Ethics")
- Colin McGinn, *Moral Literacy: How to Do the Right Thing*
 - Pp 18-29 ("Animals")

Other books / websites:

- John Bowker, *World Religions: The Great Faiths Explored & Explained*
 - Pp 125-147 ("Judaism")
- "Ten Commandments" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Commandments
- "Hebraic law" <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Hebraic-law#ref7346>
- "Maimonides on Ethical and Intellectual Virtue" <http://www.iep.utm.edu/maimonid/#H7>
- "Heinrich Himmler's justification of the Holocaust" <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/h-posed.htm>
- "Issues in Jewish Ethics: The Treatment of Animals" <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/animals.html>

Study Questions

1. The Ten Commandments (Bowker, 128-129) are the epitome of divine commands. One of the criticisms of Divine Command Theory (DCT) is that "it seems to make morality into something arbitrary" (Pojman, p95). Which of the Ten Commandments lend themselves to this criticism and why?
2. [Hebraic law](#) features two types: (1) casuistic, or case law, and (2) apodictic law. Define and give an example of each these.

3. Pojman identifies five ways that morality may be enriched by religion (pp 98-103). How is each of these expressed in Judaism? For example, how does waiting for the Messiah (Bowker, pp 130-131) express the belief that cosmic justice will prevail in the universe?
4. Maimonides (Bowker, pp 125, 128, 132) was one of the most influential philosophers in Jewish history. How does [his emphasis on studying the commandments](#) counter the claim from modern antireligious secularists that “religious morality is an inferior brand of morality that actually prevents deep moral development” (i.e. the “check-your-brains-at-the-door” criticism; see Pojman, p 91)?
5. The Holocaust (Bowker, 146-147) represents for many the depths of human evil—and rightly so. Evaluate [Heinrich Himmler’s famous justification of the Holocaust](#) in the light of ethical relativism (Pojman, p 63). In your evaluation, be sure to answer this question: if all ethics are relative, can the Holocaust be justified?
6. [Judaism’s concern for the welfare of animals](#) is impressive. For example, animals are to rest on Shabbat (Sabbath), as are humans. What are some other Judaic expressions of this concern? How does this view compare with McGinn’s position on animal rights, and why might they differ?

Reading Quiz

Take the reading quiz on Blackboard. The quiz allows unlimited attempts, so take it repeatedly to maximize your grade and master the material in preparation for the cumulative final.