Lecture 4: More Ethical Theories

I. Divine Command Theory: An action is right if God commands (approves of) it, wrong if God forbids (disapproves of) it
   A. Objection: Euthyphro
      1. Socrates: Is what is just just because the gods love it, or do the gods love what is just because it is just? A dilemma: either make justice arbitrary, or abandon the theory
   B. Responses:
      1. Justice not rooted in God’s commands, but in God’s nature, which is not arbitrary
      2. Robert Adams: We have two meanings for justice, our ordinary meaning, and God’s meaning. If the two differ too much, justice becomes an incoherent concept. But since they don’t diverge (that much??), justice defined by God remains coherent and viable

II. Egoism: Self as center
    A. Psychological egoism: everyone is, in fact, selfish
       1. Glaucon (as devil’s advocate), Thomas Hobbes
          a) Social contract
       2. Objections: it is unfalsifiable
    B. Ethical egoism: An action is right if it truly is in your best interest, long term
       1. Glaucon, Hobbes, Ayn Rand
       2. Objections: it is self-defeating, as seeking happiness, in itself, doesn’t lead to happiness

III. Hedonism: Pleasure as center
     A. Psychological hedonism: people ultimately seek pleasure and avoid pain
        1. Freud
     B. Ethical hedonism: An action is right if it maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain
        1. Epicurus:
           a) Necessary versus unnecessary pleasures --- avoid unnecessary pleasures
        2. Utilitarianism? If hedonism is not construed as a form of egoism

IV. Feminist approaches: Ethical theory has been male-dominated and lacks a woman’s perspective
    A. Difference feminism: Men and women are indeed different, but our society has consistently valued and respected men’s perspectives at the expense of women’s perspectives
       1. Carol Gilligan’s interpretation of Lawrence Kohlberg’s experiments:
          a) 11 year-old boys and girls
2. Women consider personal relationships, practicality, specific situations more so than impersonal principles, odd thought experiments, and general theories
   a) Ethics of care: compassion, reciprocity, community, dependence
   b) Virtue theory: concerned with personal development