THEORIES OF ETHICS

An Introduction to Moral Philosophy with a Selection of Classic Readings

GORDON GRAHAM

ROUTLEDGE

Theories of Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy with a Selection of Classic Readings

This book offers a comprehensive survey of the major schools and figures in moral philosophy, from Socrates to the present day. Written entirely in nontechnical language, it aims to be introductory without being elementary, so that readers may quickly engage with selected readings from classic sources. The writings of major philosophers are explained in a structured exploration of recurrently important issues about right and wrong, good and evil, and social relations and religious meaning.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2011
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's
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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Graham, Gordon, 1949 July 15–
Theories of ethics : an introduction to moral philosophy with a selection of classic readings / Gordon Graham.
p. cm.
1. Ethics. I. Title.
BJ1025.G69 2010
171--dc22
2010024808

ISBN 0-203-83512-3 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN13: 978–0–415–99946–5 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–415–99947–2 (pbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–203–83512–8 (ebk)

For my daughter,
Kirsty

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Preface

This book has a protracted history. Early versions of several of the chapters were written and published as a textbook over twenty years ago when I taught moral philosophy at the University of St Andrews. Some years later, when I was Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen, these were revised and others added to make up what was in effect a new book with a different title for a different publisher. Now that I teach in the United States, it has undergone a further transformation.

In large part these transformations reflect my better understanding of moral philosophy and how it should be taught. I remain convinced, as I was at the outset, that the rigor and clarity of analytical philosophy are indispensable intellectual virtues and wholly in keeping with the tradition of moral philosophy. I appreciate better now than I once did that that tradition has itself an important history, and the subject is best studied in combination with a feeling for that history, and for its critics—of whom Friedrich Nietzsche is unquestionably the most important. Thanks chiefly, though not exclusively, to American philosophers, I now see a much clearer continuity between contemporary moral philosophy and the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, etc. than was evident in the days when everything was focused on the *language* of morals.

This current volume has several important features that previous ones lacked. It gives morality's egoistic rival much fuller and more sympathetic treatment. It pays more attention to the relation between morality and social order, including important themes that first surfaced in the eighteenth century in the social theories of Adam Smith, Bernard Mandeville, and others. It both draws on and discusses important new work by recent philosophers such as Christine Korsgaard, T. M. Scanlon, and Bernard Williams. Perhaps most strikingly, a whole chapter is devoted to environmental ethics. This is not so much because "the environment" is such a major topic at the moment, but because ethical concern with Earth and our place on it stands out from other branches of "applied ethics." Nowadays this comprises a more or less separate subject, but attempts over the last few decades to frame an "environmental philosophy" hold out the prospect of an interestingly new theme in the ancient debate about ethics and religion. Finally, this book includes extracts from major philosophical works because my experience of precepts at Princeton has shown me the great value to students of reading these in combination with a philosophical narrative that makes connections between them.

Gordon Graham
Princeton Theological Seminary, November 2010

1
Ethics, Truth, and Reason

1.1 Right and Wrong

This is a book about ethics, about right and wrong, and about good and bad in human life. But can we really tell moral right from wrong? Morality, many people think, is not like science, which deals in facts, but a matter of values, about which we can only have personal opinions. According to this point of view, there aren't any moral facts, and this explains why people disagree so much over ethical questions. While science is objective, morality is essentially subjective.

This is a common view of ethics. It is also an ancient one. Indeed, moral philosophy as an intellectual inquiry may be said to have its origins in a debate about the truth or falsehood of this very idea. The subjectivity or objectivity of morality provides the focus for the earliest complete works of philosophy—Plato's dialogues. In several of these dialogues, Plato constructs dramatic conversations between his teacher, Socrates, and various figures well known in ancient Athens. Many of these people were called "Sophists," a group of thinkers who held that there is a radical difference between the world of facts and the world of values, between *physis* and *nomos*, to use the Greek words, the difference being that when it comes to matters of value, the concepts of true and false have no meaningful application. By implication, then, in ethics there is no scope for proof and demonstration as there is in science and mathematics; ethical "argument" is a matter of rhetoric, which is to say, a matter of *persuading* people to believe what you believe rather than *proving* to them that the beliefs you hold are true.

We know relatively little about the historical Socrates outside the pages of Plato's dialogues, but it seems likely that Plato represented his famous teacher accurately when he portrayed him as arguing vigorously against the Sophists. Certainly, whatever about Socrates, Plato himself believed and argued with great subtlety that there are indeed right and wrong answers about good and bad, and that we can use our powers of reasoning to discover what these are. He further believed that it takes a certain measure of expertise to get the answers right, and that philosophy plays an important part in acquiring that expertise.

One way of describing the issue between Socrates (or Plato) and the Sophists is to say that it is a disagreement about the objectivity of morality. While the Sophists believed that good and bad and right and wrong reflect *subjective* opinion and desire—how we as human beings and as individuals feel about things—Plato and Socrates believed that good and bad and right and wrong are part of the objective nature of things—how the world

around us really is. And it is with this debate that moral philosophy in the Western tradition began.

There is more to the historical dispute between Plato and the Sophists than this short summary implies (the Sophist Protagoras is more properly described as a relativist than a subjectivist, for example) but the point of referring to it is not to introduce a study of the ancient world, but to draw a connection between the origins of thinking about ethics and a contemporary debate along very similar lines. When modern students (and others) first begin the business of thinking about ethics, they generally incline to the view that morality is essentially subjective. This is in contrast to other historical periods when most people would have taken the opposite view, and held that just as there are scientific laws, there are moral laws that lay down right and wrong quite independently of the likings or dislikings of human beings.

This is an oversimplification, of course. As the existence of the Sophists shows, in times past there were people who were subjectivists, and at the present time there are plenty of people who are objectivists, implicitly if not explicitly—human rights activists and environmental campaigners for example, both of whom generally think that human rights and environmental values generate universal and inescapable obligations. So, subjectivism and objectivism are both "live" philosophical options, and this means that if we are to make a rational decision between them, we have to consider reasons for and against either position. Once we do so, we have begun to engage in philosophical thinking. But the crucial question is: Which view *is* correct?

1.2 Relativism and Subjectivism

A lot of people think that the subjectivity of morality is obvious. If so, it should be relatively easy to produce good reasons in support of the subjectivist point of view. What might these reasons be? Among the most commonly cited are three interconnected claims: the first is that people hold all sorts of conflicting moral opinions; the second is that they do so because of the impossibility of proving the superiority of one moral view over another; the third is that proof is impossible since there are no observable moral "facts." One way of assessing the plausibility of subjectivism, then, is to ask about the truth of these claims and what, if they are indeed true, they actually imply.

Now the first proposition—that there are serious moral disagreements between people—can hardly be denied. Nor is this just a matter of individual disagreement; from ancient times it has been noted that such differences are to be found between entire cultures. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus provides a famous example of this. He recounts an episode in which the King of Persia induced horror on the part of both Greeks and Callatians by asking them to adopt each other's funeral practices. What the Greeks took to be right and proper—burning their dead—the Callatians regarded as utterly abhorrent. But since, by contrast, fire burned just the same both in Greece and in Persia, Herodotus draws the implication that moral practices are unlike physical phenomena because they are relative to cultural contexts. While the laws of nature remain the same everywhere, rules of conduct differ from place to place.

This example has often been used to illustrate the position known as "ethical relativism," the belief that ethical views are always relative to some particular culture or other. The ethical relativist says (continuing with this example) that cremation of the dead is right *for the Greeks*, but wrong *for the Callatians*. By implication, there is nothing right or wrong per se, or universally. If this is true, however, why stop at differences between *groups* of people?

There are also differences of the same kind to be found between individuals. Something can truly horrify one person, while another person can find it quite acceptable. What is called "subjectivism" is really just an extension of relativism from the level of the social group to the level of the individual. But if moral differences are relativized to individuals, this seems to suggest that, when it comes to ethics, there is no truth of the matter to be discovered; what I feel to be right is right *for me*. If you feel it to be wrong, then it's wrong *for you*.

It is not hard to find examples from our own time and culture that lead people to this subjectivist conclusion. One of the most vexed moral issues of the modern Western world is abortion. Everyone can readily agree what medical procedures will result in an abortion, but there is nothing like the same agreement on whether abortion is morally right or wrong. One way of putting this is to say that, when it comes to abortion, agreement is easily reached on matters of medical *science*; on matters of medical *ethics* there is radical disagreement.

It seems easy to multiply examples like this. For instance, everyone can agree on the relative effectiveness of different methods of capital punishment—lethal injection versus the electric chair, say—just as everyone can agree about which methods of euthanasia minimize suffering. What they cannot agree about is whether the use of these methods is morally *justified* or not.

So, at any rate, it appears. But appearance is not reality. Is it really the case that there is far more difference of opinion on moral than on medical or scientific matters? One point worth making is that, while moral *disagreement* hogs the headlines, so to speak, there is actually a lot of moral *agreement* in the contemporary world. It would be difficult to find anyone who thought rape, murder, or theft a good thing, or believed honesty, loyalty, and generosity to be evil things. Everyone condemns slavery, the sexual molestation of children, and cheating at sport. This is not to say that there are no cheats or child molesters, or even that there are no slaves. But there is no one who openly owns up to these things as a matter of pride. This marks these off from the sort of example that impressed Herodotus. The Athenians and the Spartans were proud of the way they did things, and they were horrified by the practices of others. Often child molesters are not suitably horrified by what they have done, but they are never openly proud of it as an alternative lifestyle; in those relatively rare cases when they do not seem to be at all ashamed of their deviant behavior, it is usually some indication of mental impairment.

What these remarks demonstrate is that the extent to which moral opinions are widely contested can be exaggerated. This comes about mainly because, for obvious reasons, most attention focuses on the subjects about which we *do* disagree—abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, genetic engineering, and factory farming, for instance—and not on the ones we agree about—slavery, child prostitution, famine relief, and so on. In fact, there is little moral disagreement on a very large range of issues.

Conversely, the extent of scientific *agreement* can be greatly exaggerated, mostly because it is only when there is general consensus within the scientific community that scientific beliefs come to be widely shared. But at every stage in its history, including the present, natural science has been marked by radical disagreement between expert practitioners. The greatest names in science—Bacon, Newton, Darwin, and Einstein—generally had difficulty in getting their ideas accepted and the everyday practice of science is one in which people are constantly claiming to refute and disprove each other. The history of science also reveals dramatic disagreements *across time*. The mechanics of Sir Isaac Newton completely displaced the Aristotelian physics that had dominated science for many centuries, and then Newtonianism in its turn was displaced two centuries later by Einstein's theory

of relativity. This is par for the course, in fact. Science lives by one generation disputing the hypotheses of the generation that preceded it.

1.3 Proof and Probability

A moral subjectivist might reply by pointing to what still seems a striking difference between science and ethics. Einstein didn't just disagree with Newton; he *disproved* him. Science does not merely change; it *progresses*. In ethics and morality, by contrast, opinions *change* over time, but they don't progress, and though people come to share the same opinions, this is not because they have been shown to be true. Over time, science can prove or disprove a hypothesis, but in morality there is no possibility of proof or disproof, just consensus or disagreement.

This is the second of the reasons listed above that subjectivists tend to advance in favor of their view—there is no such thing as moral proof. Now in order to consider the force of this claim, we need to be clear about what "proof" means. One type of proof is logical or mathematical deduction. In valid proofs of this kind, reasoning leads us from agreed premises to an incontestable conclusion. If it is proof of this kind that the subjectivist has in mind, it is important to see, as Aristotle observed a long time ago, that the chains of reasoning we call proofs must have a *starting* point. We cannot reasonably demand that the starting point of a proof itself has a proof, or else we would be launched on an infinite regress in which nothing ever got proven. So *any* proof of this kind, whether in mathematics or morality, has to start with agreement on *some* proposition. That agreed proposition provides the premise of any argument offered in proof, and the subjectivist has given us no reason to think that people can never agree on moral beliefs forming the premises of such proofs.

But in any case, logical proof is very rare. Outside of mathematics and logic, hardly any aspect of human life makes significant use of strict proof (and even mathematicians and logicians can, and do, disagree). An alternative to logical proof is legal proof, the sort of proof that is required in courts of law. Legal proof, however, operates with a different standard. In criminal cases, the prosecution must show that its claims about the accused are beyond *reasonable* doubt, not beyond any *possible* doubt. In civil cases between parties in dispute, the standard is a little weaker even. To sustain my side of the argument, I only have to prove that my story is *more probable* than that of my opponent. That is good enough for a judge to find in my favor.

Now if we were to apply a *legal* rather than a *logical* concept of proof in morality, it would not be nearly so obvious that there could be no moral "proofs." It is certainly true that individuals who are determined to maintain, or to dispute, some particular moral view often raise merely possible doubts, or demand certainty before they will agree with their opponents, and so an impasse is reached. But why should we take cases like this to be typical? If it is good enough for the law to stick to *reasonable* doubts, and to judge in accordance with *probability*, why is it not good enough in morality also? The lesson to be drawn is this: Even when it is impossible to prove conclusively and beyond any doubt that some moral belief is false (or true), this does not mean that it cannot be shown to be more or less reasonable.

In any case, absence of either kind of proof would not show, as subjectivism contends, that there is no *truth* of the matter. It only shows that we cannot (for the moment) know what it is. The point here applies just as much to matters of fact as to matters of value. Take this simple example from the study of history: On which day of the week did the marriage of English King Henry VIII to his second wife, Anne Boleyn, take place? We know it was a

weekday, but the sort of evidence that would settle the question—church records, etc.—no longer exists. We cannot prove even beyond reasonable doubt that it was Tuesday rather than Wednesday. But it would be very odd to conclude from this that there is no truth of the matter. There unquestionably is. Either they were married on a Tuesday, or they were not, irrespective of our ignorance.

The general point is this: Legal proof is a more plausible standard than logical proof for moral argument, but even by that standard there may be things we can't prove. Still, the observation that sometimes we can't *prove* our ethical or moral beliefs doesn't show them to be importantly different from historical or scientific beliefs. There are plenty of factual matters that don't admit of proof. The example of Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn is just one instance, and history provides indefinitely many more. But so do natural sciences like geomorphology, climatology, and physiology where the complexity of certain issues makes some questions irresolvable. How large an area did the last ice cap cover? Is industrialization the cause of global warming? What is the cause of Lou Gehrig's (motor neurone) disease? None of these questions has a definitive answer (at the present time), but this obviously doesn't provide any support for the idea that there is no truth of the matter regarding them.

Furthermore, though the absence of proof, even of a legal kind, means that more than one opinion concerning these issues can find rational support, it does not follow that *anything* goes. Some opinions are more and others less reasonable: The last ice cap certainly didn't reach the equator, industrialization is at least a *plausible* explanation of global warming, and Lou Gehrig's disease is not caused by injury. What these examples show is that it is both false and naive to think that (a) "factual" questions are matters upon which informed and disinterested minds are sure to agree and (b) if one opinion cannot be "proved" to be rationally superior to every other, all opinions are equally "valid." In fact, morality does not seem so very different from many other contexts in which human beings try to arrive at reasoned opinion.

Subjectivism about morality is very resilient, however, and even confronted with these truisms, philosophical subjectivists are unlikely to concede defeat. There is still a crucial difference, they will say, between science and ethics and facts and values. Suppose there are irresolvable disagreements in history, geomorphology, medicine, and so on; this is a purely contingent matter, something that just *happens* to be the case. Further historical or scientific evidence could be uncovered that would prove the case one way or another. *It happens* that we don't know on which day of the week Henry married Anne, and at the present time we don't know the cause of Lou Gehrig's disease. But in both cases we *could* know, and maybe one day conclusive evidence will turn up. Morality is different. Moral disagreements are irresolvable *in principle* because there is no equivalent to empirical evidence. In other words, *there are no moral facts* that would provide the proof.

1.4 Moral Realism

It is on the basis of this third claim that subjectivism is sometimes called, in more technical language, "noncognitivism," which means "not a matter of knowledge." What some people believe to be right, others believe to be wrong, and of course, both sides may well speak of their moral disagreement *as though* it was a dispute about a matter of fact, about how things really are. But according to the noncognitivist, it isn't. In the history of philosophy this view was most famously expressed and endorsed by the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume.

> Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not the object.
>
> (Hume, 1739, 1967: 468)

The view that Hume is opposing is often called "moral realism," the theory that moral values, such as wickedness and generosity, are real properties of people and their actions in the way that square and round or hard and soft are properties of physical objects. Now such a view faces a major problem: If there actually were such moral properties, compared with ordinary, everyday physical properties, they would be decidedly "queer," as the twentieth-century philosopher J. L. Mackie famously put it.

Three aspects of this "queerness" are usually cited. First, while properties like light and dark, hot and cold, loud and soft, and sweet and sour can be discovered through the senses of sight, sound, touch, and taste, we can't see or hear or feel right and wrong or good and bad. Second, as Gilbert Harman once pointed out, even if we could observe moral properties, they would still differ from physical properties like hot and cold. For, while physical properties figure in explanations of why we observe them, this doesn't seem to be true of moral properties.

> Observation plays a role in science that it does not seem to play in ethics. The difference is that you need to make assumptions about certain physical facts to explain the occurrence of the observations that support a scientific theory, but you do not seem to make assumptions about any moral facts to explain the occurrence of so-called moral observation. . . . You need only make assumptions about the psychology . . . of the person making the moral observation. In the scientific case, theory is tested against the world.
>
> (Harman, 1977: 6)

Harman's idea (and example) is this: Suppose I see boys setting a cat on fire. To explain my feeling the heat of the flames, there has to be heat there. To explain my feeling of moral revulsion, on the other hand, it is only necessary to appeal to my moral beliefs; there doesn't have to be any "moral horror" out there in the world for me to feel.

The third objection to postulated moral properties is also one that Hume makes, and one to which J. L. Mackie gave an influential restatement in a book on ethics, significantly subtitled *inventing* right and wrong. Hume thinks that the perception of properties is "inert." That is to say, merely seeing or hearing something will not of itself lead to action. The fact that say, a sweater is yellow does not in itself suggest or imply any action. Only some desire such as liking or wanting or hating it does. Now action is of the essence in ethics. Morality is not just about studying or explaining the world in the way science is; it's about recommending and following courses of conduct. From this it would seem to follow that moral "properties," if they did exist, would be lacking in the very thing we want—what philosophers sometimes call "action guiding force." Mackie puts the point this way: Moral reasoning has to yield "authoritatively prescriptive conclusions," but if "we ask the

awkward question, how can we be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity . . . none of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception . . . will provide a satisfactory answer" (Mackie, 1977: 39). You cannot literally *see* what you ought to do.

This third point is closely related to a problem widely referred to as "the naturalistic fallacy." Once again, it is David Hume to whom we owe one of the most famous articulations of the problem. Towards the end of that section of the *Treatise* from which the passage quoted earlier comes, he says:

> I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning . . .; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but it is however, of the last consequence.
>
> (Hume, 1739, 1967: 469)

Hume thinks that trying to derive an "ought" from an "is" is logically invalid; statements of fact cannot of themselves have prescriptive implications. If so, then propositions referring to "real" moral properties could provide no rational basis for action since, being descriptions of how the world *is*, we could not infer from them how the world *ought* to be. Actually, the position is worse than this for the moral realist, because according to another version of the naturalistic fallacy, we cannot even infer good and bad from is and is not. This can be shown by what is known as the "open question argument." For any natural property, it always makes sense to ask "Is it good?," and the fact that this question *always* makes sense shows that "good" and "bad"' cannot be the names of natural properties in the way that "hard" and "soft" are. For example, suppose someone claims that happiness, say, is a naturally good thing. We can always wonder about this; we can always ask "*Is* happiness good?" Now if happiness were good in and of itself, this question would make no more sense than the question "Are hard things hard?" since the only answer we can give is obvious—"Of course!" But the question "Is happiness a good thing?" *does* make sense; the answer isn't obvious, and people can dispute it.

This version of the naturalistic fallacy was formulated by the twentieth-century Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore in a book entitled *Principia Ethica* (the Principles of Ethics). Moore's book influenced discussion for many years, though not everyone has been persuaded by the open question argument. In any case, even if the argument is a good one, it does not amount to a conclusive refutation of moral realism. This is illustrated in the fact that Moore was himself a kind of moral realist, someone who believes that there are indeed moral properties. Moore's response to the difficulty that he himself had formulated was to declare that goodness is a "non-natural" property, and indefinable in the way a color like yellow is. We can't give a definition of "yellow" that will enable us to class all yellow things together; we just *see* that yellow things have the property of yellowness in common. In a similar fashion, Moore thought, we just "see" that things have the indefinable property of goodness. In *Principia Ethica* he contends that *consciousness of* personal affection and beauty has this indefinable goodness, and he declares this to be the "ultimate and fundamental truth of Moral Philosophy" because "it is only for the sake of these things . . . that anyone can be justified in performing any public or private duty" (Moore, 1903: 189).

For a time, Moore's view was found persuasive, but most philosophers would probably agree that, having identified a major difficulty for moral realism in his analysis of the naturalistic fallacy, Moore simply dug himself in deeper with the appeal to non-natural properties. Though Moore himself is cautious about how his fundamental truth is to be "cognized," non-natural *properties* seem to require a non-natural *sense* by which they are apprehended. What could this special sense be? Sometimes people at this point appeal to "conscience," but if the naturalistic fallacy shows that we cannot infer value judgments from natural facts by means of ordinary perception, the introduction of an internal detector of "non-natural" facts simply shrouds the whole issue in even deeper mystery.

1.5 Moral Rationalism

There is, however, a different tack to be taken. In the *Treatise*, Hume allows for two spheres in which reason can operate—"matters of fact" and "relations of ideas." The first of these is the one with which we have been concerned so far. Are there matters of moral fact that we can perceive and to which we can refer? The moral realist wants to say "yes," but there seem to be major obstacles to doing so. What, though, about "relations between ideas"? In his use of this expression, Hume clearly has in mind mathematics and logic. It is true that 2 + 2 = 4, for example, and yet this is not something we can open our eyes and see, or put our hands on and touch. Now Hume assumes that moral judgments could not be like this, but it is an assumption we might question. Consider this little argument:

1. You promised to pay back the money you borrowed.
2. Promises ought to be kept.

So

3. You ought to pay back the money you borrowed.

From the point of view of logic, this argument is valid. That is to say, anyone who accepts the premises (propositions 1 and 2) is logically obliged to accept the conclusion. But since the conclusion (proposition 3) takes the form of a moral prescription—a proposition that tells us what the morally right thing to do is—it seems, contrary to Hume and subjectivists in general, that we *can* arrive at moral conclusions on the basis of reason.

Of course, it will be replied that this type of example doesn't prove very much because while the first premise (You promised to pay the money you borrowed) is factual, a claim about something that happened, the second (Promises ought to be kept) is not. It is a moral principle to which the person to whom the argument is addressed needs to subscribe before he or she is obliged to accept the conclusion.

At first sight this seems plausible. "Promises ought to be kept" does sound like a moral principle, and if the arguments against moral realism are sound, we have to agree that it cannot be construed as a factual claim about some special sort of moral property—"to-be-keptness"—that promises have. It can nevertheless be argued that this second premise, in something like the manner of a mathematical proposition, is true in virtue of relations between ideas. That is to say, if you understand the concept of a promise and if you understand what "obligation" means, you will have to agree that promises ought to be kept. In other words, the ideas of making promises and being under an obligation to keep your promises are related. That is why the principle "Promises ought to be kept" can be said to express a relation between ideas.

This is not quite the relation Hume had in mind. He thought that relations between ideas always took the form of analytic truths, or propositions that were true by definition. But the relation between making a promise and being obliged to keep it is more complex than this, and it has been explored in detail in a very famous essay, "How to derive an 'ought' from an 'is'," by the American philosopher John Searle. Searle draws a distinction between regulative rules and constitutive rules.

> Some rules regulate antecedently existing forms of behavior. For example, the rules of polite table behavior regulate eating, but eating exists independently of these rules. Some rules, on the other hand, do not merely regulate but create or define new forms of behavior; the rules of chess, for example, do not merely regulate an antecedently existing activity called playing chess; they . . . create the possibility of . . . that activity. . . . The institutions of marriage, money and promising are like the institutions of baseball or chess in that they are systems of such constitutive rules . . .
>
> (Searle, 1964, 1967: 112)

The ideas of making a promise and being obliged to keep it are related not by linguistic definition, but by a constitutive rule. On this account of the matter, Hume is partly right—reason does range over relations between ideas—and partly wrong—moral matters *can* be reasoned about, because at least some moral principles concern relations between ideas. The moral realist models moral reasoning on perception, and Hume correctly rejects this model. But there is an alternative model, which we may call "moral rationalism," which focuses not on any faculty of perception, but on our ability to think and judge.

In Hume's own time this alternative was advanced by his most astute philosophical critic, Thomas Reid (1710–1796). Reid observes, with Aristotle, that

> In all rational belief, the thing believed is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles. When men differ about deductions of reasoning, the appeal must be made to the rules of reasoning . . . But when they differ about a first principle, the appeal is made to another tribunal; to that of common sense.
>
> (Reid, 1788, 1969: 380)

What Reid means here by "common sense" has often been misunderstood. He does not merely mean *widely held opinion* about right and wrong, but rather principles that lie so deep in human affairs and transactions that denying them would make most of what we do senseless. Among the common sense principles relevant to morality that he cites are these: Some things human beings do deserve praise, and others blame; if an action is not voluntary, it cannot be praised or blamed; we can be blamed for *not* doing things, as well as doing them. Principles like these have a status that even very widely held moral beliefs do not. Consider the belief "Slavery is always wrong." This is not something that many (if any) people would deny nowadays. But in times past there were highly successful and enduring social systems (the Roman Empire, for instance) in which people did not believe this. Given this fact, it would be merely stipulative to declare that the wrongness of slavery is a principle that "must appear self-evident to every man" as Reid declares his principles must. It is easy to see, by contrast, that any meaningful system of conduct (even if we don't call it moral) must draw a distinction between the things we do voluntarily and those we don't, and allow that failure to act can be as bad as acting.

Alongside such principles of moral action, Reid lists some other truths that govern rational conduct more broadly—for instance, "a greater good is to be preferred to a lesser one, and a lesser evil to a greater one," "human beings are essentially social," "commonly it is a lack of honesty not intellectual ability that clouds moral judgment"—and on the basis of general principles and truths such as these, he thinks we can work out what duties we have to ourselves and to others. The advantage of this idea of "working out" what we ought to do over any conception of "perceiving" right from wrong is that it puts moral reasoning on a par with reasoning in general. Whereas moral realism requires both a special kind of property and a special way of "seeing," moral rationalism need only hold that in morality, as in anything else, we have to reason in accordance with some indispensable principles, pay attention to facts, understand the concepts we employ, and do so with fair-mindedness and impartiality. Moral reasoning so conceived is no different from the sort of reasoning that goes on in a court of law, say, where advocates on either side try to construct good and convincing arguments based upon rules of reasoning, factual evidence, and legal concepts, and it is no different from the sort of reasoning that that goes into public hearings or planning inquiries when people are ranged on different sides.

There are of course *some* differences. One is that most laws and legal principles are established by law making bodies—parliaments and so on—for which there is no obvious moral equivalent. Reid held that God is the ultimate source of the moral law—an idea to be discussed in a later chapter—but he did not think that moral agents have to believe this. Everyone, believer or unbeliever, has a "conscience . . . which he cannot disobey without acting unnaturally and being self-condemned" (Reid, 1788, 1969: 365). Reid's conception of conscience, though, is not that of an occult faculty of perception, but rather the capacity to reason about moral matters—the very same capacity that we call on in all of practical life.

The capacity to invoke general principles of practice and reason about their application is enough to provide an answer to the Sophists and other subjectivists. Morality is an aspect of human life that can engage our rational faculties as well as our feelings. People going to court often do so with a passionate sense of justice or injustice, but their only guard against these feelings being misplaced is to construct good and less good legal arguments with clear conclusions about what ought to be done. Such arguments never amount to conclusive proof beyond all possibility of doubt or disagreement, but only proof beyond *reasonable* doubt or in accordance with what seems most probable. Even so, legal argument is a good way of resolving disagreements, a good way of deciding what to believe about the allegations that are made against people and what decisions it would be right and proper to take in the light of such allegations. Exactly the same can be said for morality. Moral rationalists like Reid need not hold that reason has the means to answer every moral question at every level, and thus the power to resolve every disagreement conclusively. Rather, they need make only three relatively modest claims. First, there are no grounds to declare reason powerless with respect to morality *from the outset*, which is to say, before even we start to think about the issues. Second, provided we accept that our conclusions will in all likelihood fall short of absolute proof or incontrovertible demonstration, the most plausible and intelligent approach to moral questions and disagreements is just to see how far clear and cogent reasoning—assembly of the relevant facts, proper application of the relevant concepts, and adherence to the rules of reason—can take us. Third, belief in the rationality of morality does not need to be underpinned by a metaphysical "realism" or by the invocation of a special moral "sense." If other forms of practical reasoning do not need these false supports, neither does morality.

In many ways Reid's conception of common sense finds an echo in the concept of a "form of life" that appears in the *Philosophical Investigations* of the twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Wittgenstein's philosophical method is highly distinctive and his main concerns do not include the traditional topics of moral philosophy. Nevertheless, there is a lesson to be learned from his analyses of mind and language that is pertinent here. Wittgenstein repeatedly emphasizes the fact that human beings do more with words than name properties or formulate propositions about the world in which they find themselves. Among the many other things they do is ask questions, issue commands, pay compliments, give greetings, express wishes, warn, praise, encourage, say prayers, and so on. All these are what Wittgenstein calls "language games." The point of this metaphor is to direct our attention to the fact that, although there is a recurrent tendency for people to assume that language starts with naming objects, in fact when children learn a language they are learning how to engage with other people in *doing* things. Language, we might say, inducts children into a form of life, a way of being in the world, and such induction is only possible because by nature human beings have a whole range of desires, reactions, and responses in common. It is this shared background that makes language possible and underlies our ability to understand and cooperate with each other.

Now we can apply this insight to what is generally called "morality." Human beings do differ from one another in attitudes and opinions, but the language they use to express these differences is something they share, and are able to share only because of a more fundamental common ground. Both the subjectivist and the realist tend to think of morality as primarily cognitive—a matter of believing *propositions*—but morality is first and foremost practical—a matter of performing, praising, recommending, condemning, and deciding on *actions*. To see this is to understand that Hume is wrong and Reid is right; morality is not about emotional feeling, but about practical judgment.

1.6 Objectivism

Feelings can be strong or weak, but there is no right or wrong about them. If, as Hume alleges, morality is a matter of feeling, then there is no right or wrong there either. Social convention and childhood training may bring it about that people's moral feelings are generally similar, but outrage and indifference need not track the gravity or insignificance of the action or event that prompts them. Someone who was more morally incensed by bad table manners than by murder would be unusual, no doubt, but they could not be said to have made a mistake of any kind. They just feel as they feel.

This is an inescapable implication of all forms of subjectivism, and it is the main reason why Reid thinks that in matters of morality, moral judgment must determine what we ought to feel rather than allowing our instinctive feelings to determine how we ought to judge. For Reid, moral judgments arise from the exercise of practical rationality and this implies that such judgments aim to be objective. The disagreement between Reid and Hume may thus be classified as one version of the ancient philosophical dispute between objectivists and subjectivists. Can this long-running debate be resolved?

One promising approach to its resolution favors Reid precisely because it lays heavy emphasis on the idea of practical judgment, rather than moral truth. In all sorts of spheres we exercise judgment about right and wrong without thinking that there is a special realm of truths that we could or should discover (or prove) to guide our judgment. This is evident in artistic judgment. There is a right and a wrong speed at which to play a musical march, for instance. Play it too fast, and it loses its dignity; play it too slow and it becomes a dirge.

Both speeds are wrong, but not in any realist sense. What sort of thing could the facts be that made it wrong? Indeed, there are contexts in which it could sound *right* to play the march fast—for humorous effect, for instance—and this too would be a matter of judgment. In these cases right and wrong aren't determined by personal liking or loathing, but neither are they determined by some special realm of fact that we "apprehend" by a mysterious faculty. They are determined by experience and deliberation.

Practical judgment of this kind is not confined to specific occasions or particular actions. When Reid gave his students lectures on *Practical Ethics*, he set a much more general conception before them.

> It is the prerogative of Man in his adult state to be able to propose to himself and to prosecute one great End in Life . . . The brutes are incapable of this [and] carried away by the appetite or Instinct which [is] strongest at the time . . . We have a Superior Principle given us by the Author of our Being, by which we can, from an Eminence as it were, take a view of the whole Course of human Life; and consider the different Roads that men take . . . When we thus take a general view of human Life we can not but perceive that some Roads we may take lead to Ruin and infamy, others are mean and below the dignity of our natures. . . .
>
> (Reid, 2007: 32)

The remainder of this book is concerned with "the different Roads" that human beings have proposed to themselves as the "one great End in Life." However, the history of philosophy reveals two rather different emphases, captured in part by Searle's distinction between the "constitutive" and the "regulative" alluded to earlier. Sometimes people have construed the great End of life as essentially a personal pursuit: What principles, values or ideals should regulate my life? At other times, it has been interpreted in a more social way: What are the principles most appropriate to the sort of society in which human beings should strive to live? What rules should constitute the social relationships between individuals? Since in recent times, the second of these options has been more prevalent, this will provide the subject matter for Chapter 2. Thereafter, some of the candidates for personal values and ideals will be explored.

2

Contractualism

Moral Rules and Social Agreement

Chapter 1 concluded that there are good reasons to endorse philosophical doubts about both the existence of moral "properties" and a special moral "sense" ("conscience," perhaps) by which they are "perceived." But this need not lead us to endorse subjectivism, the view that moral beliefs can never be objectively right or wrong. Objectivism about morality can be freed from the metaphysically problematic idea of moral "truths" that we "apprehend" and explained in terms of the concept of practical judgment. Practical judgment is the sort of assessment we make of right and wrong in all sorts of fields—legal hearings, planning inquiries, book clubs, college exams, investment management, and fashion shows, for example. In all these activities we make extensive use of the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and better and worse. In forming preferences and making decisions between alternatives, people are not passive victims of the feelings they happen to have; they can transcend immediate feeling by exercising their capacity for *rational* judgment. By acknowledging some indispensable logical principles, making sure we are clear about the concepts we are using, paying careful attention to facts, and maintaining openness of mind, we can avoid partiality and thus *impartially* distinguish between good and bad decisions. This is enough to bridge the gap that subjectivists make so much of—the gap between what is and what ought to be. Indeed, it effectively collapses the distinction, since we need impartial judgment in establishing the facts just as much as in deciding what we ought to do.

For present purposes, this conclusion enables us to move on from the debate between moral realists and moral subjectivists. In twentieth-century moral philosophy this important debate was so prominent it overshadowed other philosophical debates that have figured just as prominently at other times. One of these concerns the contrast between morality as a sphere of personal endeavor, and morality as the foundation of social life. Should we think of morality as the individual's attempt to realize goals and ideals that will make his or her life a good one? Is morality about how a life is best spent? Or should we think of morality as a set of rules that constrain individuals in their relations one with another? Is morality about finding the rules that will enable individuals with contrasting life styles to belong to one society?

2.1 Justice and Beneficence

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the philosopher Adam Smith (1723–1790), a friend and contemporary of David Hume (and also a foundational figure in economics), notes a deep distinction within what we generally think of as morality. There is, says Smith,

> [a] remarkable distinction between justice and all the other social virtues . . . [W]e feel ourselves under a stricter obligation to act according to justice, than agreeably to friendship, charity or generosity; . . [T]he practice of these last mentioned virtues seems to be left in some measure to our own choice, but . . . somehow or other, we feel ourselves to be in a peculiar manner tied, bound, and obliged to the observation of justice.
>
> (Smith, 1790, 2002: 93)

People can rightly be criticized for being unfriendly, miserly, or failing to contribute to a good cause. In the end, though, that is their choice. Nothing does or should compel us to be friendly. But we are *not* similarly free to ignore the principles of justice. Injustice is to be *condemned*, not merely *criticized*, because it is *wrong* in a stronger sense than mere bad behavior. This is indicated, Smith observes, by the fact that it is justifiable to *force* people to act in accordance with justice. "[F]orce may, with the utmost propriety, and with the approbation of all mankind, be made use of to constrain us to the rules [of justice], but not to follow the precepts of the other [social virtues]" (Smith, 1790, 2002: 93).

Smith explains this important difference in terms of the necessary conditions for social life. He calls friendliness, generosity, and so on "beneficence" (i.e., doing good). But in terms of social structure,

> beneficence is the ornament which embellishes, not the foundation which supports the building. . . Justice, on the contrary, is the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice. If it is removed, the great, the immense fabric of human society . . . must in a moment crumble into atoms.
>
> (Smith, 1790, 2002: 101)

Smith is drawing a distinction here that an important strand in moral philosophy thinks crucial. While personal virtues like friendliness and generosity are certainly to be valued, we can get by without them. But justice is indispensable for social life. That is why it warrants force—compelling people to act against their choice or preference. At the same time, most people think that at some level, morality essentially involves the freedom of individuals to make their own moral choices. This point is easiest to see if we compare morality with the law. If you obey the law of the land, you are a law-abiding citizen regardless of whether you think the law to be right. You are also law abiding regardless of whether you respect the "majesty" of the law, or merely obey from fear of punishment or hope of social reward. The point is that whatever your attitude and your reasons, you have acted legally if you simply comply.

Morality is not like this. If you merely *comply* with moral principles—because you are told to, because you want to impress people, or because you are afraid of what people will say—you have acted *in accordance with* morality, but you have not acted morally. A key feature is missing. To act morally you have to freely choose to do what is right *because* it is right, and not for any other reason. Yet if what Smith says about justice is correct—that we are in some way "tied, bound, and obliged to [its] observation," then we seem to have a paradox. Morality requires us to be both bound and free.

2.2 Promises and Contracts

One important solution to this conundrum lies in exploring the concept of promises and contracts. We are *free* to make promises or not to make them, but having made them, we are *obliged* to keep them. This establishes an important moral difference between people's relationships to each other. Suppose that someone needs to be taken to hospital. Anyone might offer a ride out of simple kindness, but kindness doesn't oblige anyone in particular. It doesn't tell me why *I* should take them in *my* car. But suppose I had *promised* to do so. Then there is a difference between me and other people. I have an obligation that they do not. "*You* should do it" other people can say, not because of it's a matter of helping the sick, but "because *you* promised to." It has to be true, of course, that I did actually promise to help. But when it *is* true, there is no moral wiggle room. The obligation is rooted in a specific fact about me—my free past action. The fact that I promised is no less of a fact than that the hospital is five miles away. And just as this second fact has practical implications—it will take 15 minutes to get there, for instance—so does the first fact—it's me who has the obligation to give the ride.

Even if, morally speaking, everyone should help people in need, there is thus an important moral difference between someone who has promised to help and someone who has not. Promises make a difference because we are not relieved of our obligations just because we no longer *want* to do what we have agreed to do. A promise made a year ago is still a promise even if it doesn't suit me to keep it *now*, and the same point can be made about contracts and agreements more generally.

Agreements with others are devices by which we freely limit our own freedom, and thus bring it about that there are things we *have* to do, whether we want to or not. It is important to see, though, that this conflict between what I ought to do and what I want to do is not merely psychological but rational. There is a famous episode in Homer's *Odyssey* that illustrates the point. Odysseus, on his homeward journey from Troy to Ithaca, encounters the Sirens, creatures who sing with a haunting beauty powerful enough to lure sailors to their death on the rocks around their island. Having been warned about them, but wanting nonetheless to hear their remarkable song, Odysseus has his men plug their ears with beeswax so that they will hear nothing, and then tie him to the mast to keep him from escaping. As they pass the island, true to form the Sirens begin to sing so beautifully that Odysseus, despite his better judgment, tries to break free. He is only prevented from doing so by two of his men binding him even more tightly until the ship has passed beyond the island. By instructing his men to do what they did, Odysseus freely chose to constrain his own future actions in ways that he had judged rational. Nonetheless, when he finally heard the Sirens sing, Odysseus was not free. He was physically prevented from doing what he wanted. This contrasts with the promising case; we are rationally obliged, not physically or psychologically compelled, to keep our promises. Breaking them is always possible, and this is what makes moral obligation compatible with autonomy or self-determination.

This interesting logical feature of promises has suggested to some philosophers that there may be a way in which the basic principles of morality could be rationally grounded in social *agreement*. It is an idea with a long philosophical history. In Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*, which was composed over 2,000 years ago (somewhere around 365 BCE), Socrates remarks that "in right and wrong and matters of religion—people [who] are ready to affirm that none of these things is natural, with a reality of its own" still think that "public decision" can make them true (*Theaetetus*: 172b). The view to which Plato is alluding here is often called "contractualism" because it invokes the idea of a social contract, which

is to say, an agreement among members of society. The idea is a simple and attractive one. If Adam Smith is right that justice is the main pillar that upholds the immense fabric of human society, but, if at the same time, the moral autonomy of individuals has to be respected, the solution would seem to lie with a public decision in which individuals agree just what the rules of justice are that they will all be obliged to keep.

In the history of contractualism two key concepts figure prominently—the idea of a "state of nature" or prepolitical condition and a "social contract" forged by agreement. Different philosophers say different things about these, and sometimes call them by different names, but almost all employ the same argumentative strategy, namely a thought experiment which invites us to abstract from the world of social and political structures to a state of nature, and by reasoning about this state of nature uncover grounds for a social contract that individuals in society can agree should regulate relations between them. Such a social contract provides the moral basis of law, which can then be justifiably used to protect the rights and enforce the duties embodied in the contract.

Though this strategy has proved highly attractive to many philosophers, it faces at least one obvious difficulty. If appeal to the social contract is to carry the sort of obligatory implications that the force of agreement gives to promises in general, it has actually to be consented to. But, though occasional historical episodes something like this have taken place—the Icelandic *Althing* (assemblies) of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries might be an example—there is no well-documented case of a prepolitical society in which all the people have at one time gathered and agreed the rules for their mutual support and co-operation. In other words, there is no clearly recorded instance of *explicit* consent to a social contract. Is there any way round this difficulty? Is there any other type of agreement that will do the job of explicit (or, to use an older term, express) consent? The philosophy of contractualism has largely been driven by the need to supply an answer to this question.

2.3 John Locke and "Tacit" Consent

John Locke (1632–1704) is arguably the greatest of all English philosophers. His lengthy *Essay on Human Understanding* was published towards the end of his life in 1698, and it constitutes one of the major defences of philosophical empiricism. In the same year, Locke's *Two Treatises of Civil Government* appeared. Though published anonymously, and probably written a decade earlier, Locke's *Second Treatise* has had as great an influence on political philosophy as the *Essay* has had on epistemology and philosophy of mind. In his *Second Treatise*, Locke elaborates and defends an idea that was extremely radical in its time (which may explain the anonymous publication), namely that kings actually owe their kingship to the people they govern, since the authority of the ruler is ultimately derived from the consent of the ruled. The powers that princes, presidents, prime ministers, etc. exercise are not theirs by right, but only by consent of the governed, since those powers are simply the rights of individuals transferred to the state for purposes of more effective enforcement and protection.

Though the distinction we are inclined to draw nowadays between politics and morality would not have been so sharply drawn in Locke's day, his *Two Treatises* are works of political philosophy. Locke did not think that what he calls the "social compact" could *constitute* natural justice. He takes it for granted that the moral rights and duties by which individuals are bound have been established by God. Nevertheless, he is not purely concerned with relations between rulers and ruled; he is equally concerned with the obligations that individuals have to each other. Locke wants to show that

> Every Man, by consenting with others to make one Body Politick under one Government, puts himself under an obligation to every one of that Society, to submit to the determination of the *majority*, and to be concluded by it; or else this *original Compact*, whereby he with others incorporates into *one Society*, would signifie nothing, and be no Compact, if he be left free, and under no other ties, than he was before in the State of Nature.
>
> (Locke, 1689/90, 1960: 376, emphasis original)

The agreement, then, brings certain mutual obligations into existence. Whether we describe these as moral or political obligations, the difficulty we have already identified arises. How could real obligations be generated in the absence of explicit agreement ("express consent" in Locke's terminology)? Locke's answer is that implicit agreement ("tacit consent") will do just as well.

> There is a common distinction of an express and a tacit consent, which will concern our present Case. No body doubts but an *express Consent*, of any Man, entring into any Society, makes him a perfect member of that Society, a Subject of that Government. The difficulty is, what ought to be looked upon as a *tacit Consent*, and how far it binds, i.e. how far any one shall be looked on to have consented, and thereby submitted to any Government, where he has made no expression of it at all. And to this I say, that every Man, that hath an Possession, or Enjoyment, of any part of the Dominions of any Government, doth thereby give his *tacit Consent*, and is so far forth obliged to Obedience to the Laws of that Government, during such enjoyment, as any one under it; whether this his possession be of Land to him and his Heirs for ever, or a Lodging only for a week; or whether it be barely travelling on the Highway.
>
> (Locke, 1689/90, 1960: 392, emphasis original)

Clearly Locke's concern here is still with the grounds of political obligation, but the same sort of argument can be and often is made about our moral obligations. Those who avail themselves of the advantages of moral rules can be taken to agree to those rules tacitly. Storekeepers can only prosper if people pay what they owe. Cheats depend upon others abiding by the rules; fraudsters rely upon the honesty and trustfulness of the people they defraud. In their attempts to keep their illicit dealings hidden, wrongdoers reveal their dependence on a moral order that is generally observed, and this enables us to say *implicitly* they endorse the very rules they break.

The familiar idea of honor among thieves reflects the fact that co-operative activity must at some level generate social obligations. But tacit *consent* is a perplexing explanation of how this comes about. The problem is that we can only assert that someone has consented (agreed) to something, if they have had the chance to *dissent* (disagree). Yet if we take Locke at his word, there is no possibility of disagreeing. One of his examples illustrates this. Suppose that for the sole purpose of registering my *rejection* of the social contract, I entered a country "Lodging only for a week" and "barely travelling on the Highway." By Locke's account these minimally necessary actions that I can't avoid taking in my efforts to register *disagreement* can and should be interpreted as *agreement*—given tacitly.

To this logical problem, we can add a practical one. The society to which the vast majority of people belong is one into which they were born, not one they elected to join. They didn't choose to be born into it, and their continuing to belong to it is equally a matter

beyond their choice. David Hume was the first to make this point, in his essay "Of the Original Contract."

> Should it be said that, by living under the dominion of a prince which one might leave, every individual has given a tacit consent to his authority, and promised him obedience; it may be answered, that such an implied consent can only have place where a man imagines that the matter depends on his choice. . . . Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artisan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives, from day to day, by the small wages that he acquires? We may as well assert that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean and perish, the moment he leaves her.
>
> (Hume, 1741/42, 1963: 461–462)

In short, there may indeed be a common distinction between tacit and express consent, as Locke alleges, and it may be that sometimes we can assume a person's agreement even where it has not been expressly given. But my participation in society is not sufficient in itself to show that I have consented to the basic principles of conduct that enable that society to function.

2.4 John Rawls and "Hypothetical" Consent

Express consent derives from words that have been spoken; tacit consent dervives from actions that have been performed. In both cases the consent is actual, and the problem is that, with respect to rules whose purpose is to determine what is and what is not acceptable social behavior, there is virtually no one whose consent to them can be said to be actual, whether express or tacit.

A different approach to the problem of consent is to be found in the twentieth century's most influential political philosopher, John Rawls (1921–2002). In his famous book *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls's equivalent of the state of nature is the "Original Position." This is also an imaginary circumstance in which people are placed behind a "veil of ignorance" and asked to decide about the kind of society in which they would be willing to agree to live. The point of the veil of ignorance is to ensure that people do not simply choose the kind of society that suits them best. So, at the point of deliberation, they do not know whether they are rich or poor, full bodied or disabled, talented or talentless, male or female, etc. The idea, of course, is to introduce impartiality into their deliberations; if the rules of social engagement are to be fair, they cannot be slanted in favor of one section of society or one type of person. But equally, it would not be rational (Rawls thinks) for someone to agree to a society in which he or she was a permanent member of an underclass, and the whole point of deliberating about the fundamental moral rules that regulate social conduct is to come up with a set of rules that can command the rational assent of all those to whom they apply.

It is this second point that is most important in the present context. The purpose of Rawls's thought experiment (at least on one interpretation) is to arrive at some fundamental principles to which rational self-interested people would agree. He comes up with two such principles in fact. The first says that we should allow individuals as much freedom as is compatible with an equal amount of freedom for all. The second says that individual wealth should be distributed according to what is called "the Difference principle," whose purpose is to limit the possible gap between rich and poor.

The aim of Rawls's thought experiment is to arrive at the principles of justice that ought to shape political principles and social institutions. These principles of justice rest on a basic intuition that fairness is fundamental to justice, and they are aimed at answering this question: What political principles are consistent with a "morally well-ordered society" (an expression he uses)? His theory might thus be said to straddle the moral/political divide, and for that reason his thought experiment relates more obviously to morality than does that of Locke. Furthermore, while the idea of a legitimating consensus by agreement is equally key to his theory, Rawls makes no appeal to *actual* consent, whether explicit or implicit. His appeal is to *hypothetical* consent, and what his thought experiment shows (if it works) is that a society structured in accordance with his two principles of justice *would* command the consent of rationally self-interested people thinking fairly.

Many critics have argued that Rawls's thought experiment does *not* work, that there are defects in the reasoning he uses to get from the original position to the two basic principles. In particular, it has often been argued that his conclusion relies upon attributing to the people in the original position a very conservative attitude to risk. Rawls supposes that people weighing up the pros and cons of different social arrangements would always prefer to play safe. They would rather that freedom was given to practices they detest than run the risk of unwelcome limitations on their own behavior, and they would rather be protected against poverty than given the chance of immense wealth. However, we know that some people are naturally disposed to take a gamble. People less averse to risk than Rawls assumes would estimate their interests differently, and accordingly they would not be rationally bound to make this choice. If so, it would be rational for them to reject the two principles he formulates.

This is a very brief summary of a long-standing debate, and there are further replies that the Rawlsian can make. So let us suppose for the sake of argument that Rawls's argumentative strategy *does* work. Even if it does, the resulting *hypothetical* consent cannot play the role that actual consent does. At the heart of contractualism lies the idea that you can justifiably be asked to do what the rules of morality require you to do, because, whatever you may or may not *want* to do, you have agreed to those rules. Now if we try to formulate this principle using the concept of hypothetical agreement, it does not work. I can justifiably be asked to comply with rules to which I have actually agreed. Appeal to *hypothetical* consent is required only if I have *not* actually agreed. The claim is that under certain conditions I would agree; that is the force of calling it hypothetical. What are those conditions? One is that I am a fully rational agent. Now *perhaps* it is plausible to say that I am bound by rules which, if I were fully rational, I *would* agree to (not everyone accepts this claim), but where does this leave those who are *not* fully rational? It seems that it leaves them free of any such obligation.

This point needs to be stated very carefully. In referring to people who are not fully rational, we are not referring to people with serious mental incapacity, but only to people who are unlikely to go through deliberations as complex as those Rawls offers us. It cannot be said of someone that they *would* have accepted the conclusions of a rationally valid argument if they are people unable or unwilling to follow arguments. So the binding force of hypothetical consent (if it has such force) cannot be applied to them. It seems we must conclude that such people are not bound by the rules by which more rational people would be bound.

This is an unfortunate implication, because the whole point of the Rawlsian thought experiment is to establish the obligations and restrictions with respect to freedom and justice that apply to *all* members of society. His theory is supposed to provide a rational

grounding for the basic social rules which everyone can legitimately be compelled to observe, and the existence of nonfully rational people implies the existence of a group who cannot be legitimately compelled to comply.

One possible response is this. So long as Rawls's principles are indeed grounded in reason, then I am rationally justified in applying them to all members of society, whether they are fully rational or not. The problem with this response is that the concept of consent falls out of the reckoning altogether. Let us suppose that I am justified in getting you to consent to rationally well-grounded rules of social behavior even if you have not fully understood the reasoning. After all, this is often what happens in legislatures; elected representatives do not always have the time or information to explore fully the rationale behind the laws they pass. Whether they have followed all the reasoning or not, however, once they *have* agreed to them, governments can legitimately require them to follow the law, whatever their feelings may be once the full implications are clear. But the legitimacy of this requirement rests not on the good reasons the government can give, but on the *actual* consent the elected representatives gave. The appeal to *hypothetical* consent is motivated precisely by the absence of such actual consent, and the most impeccable reasoning cannot make good this absence. Once we see this, the only further possibility is to forget consent altogether, and appeal directly to the force of the reasoning itself.

2.5 T. M. Scanlon and Unreasonable Rejection

An important alternative to Rawls in contemporary moral philosophy has been offered by another Harvard philosopher, T. M. Scanlon, in his book *What We Owe to Each Other*. Scanlon thinks that while the assumptions about fairness and rational self-interest behind Rawls's thought experiment might be plausible "about the particular case of the justice of social institutions, it does not seem likely that there are equally plausible claims about the morality of right and wrong in general" (Scanlon, 1998: 244). So instead of starting with a semitechnical thought experiment, Scanlon bases his version of contractualism directly on what he takes to be an idea that anyone seriously interested in moral argument will accept, namely "a conception of generic points of view and the reasons associated with them which reflects our general experience of life" (Scanlon, 1998: 205). That is to say, it is a fact that real discussion about serious matters always takes place somewhere in between the affirmation of personal perspectives by specific individuals, on the one hand, and the formulation of universally acknowledged truths, on the other hand. Individuals fall into categories that they share with other people—the vulnerable, the rich, the poor, the talented, and so on—and such categories inevitably generate differing standpoints on moral and social issues. It is true that such differing standpoints could be left just to confront each other and conflict between them be settled by superior power, majority votes, or even a random procedure such as tossing a coin. But serious discussion about and between *moral* standpoints always seeks reasons.

> A person who regards a joke as funny, or a person or a scene as beautiful, may be quite unable to articulate the standards, if any, to which her judgment is relative. But I cannot claim that an action is morally wrong without having some idea of what objection there is to it.
>
> (Scanlon, 1998: 198)

Putting these two features together, Scanlon defends a version of contractualism according to which "our thinking about right and wrong is structured by . . . the aim of finding

principles that others, insofar as they too have this aim, could not reasonably reject" (Scanlon, 1998: 191). Accordingly, the key feature of this version lies in "its appeal to the notion of reasonableness rather than rationality" (Scanlon, 1998: 191). In order to decide whether a moral principle that I am inclined to endorse is right or wrong, I must entertain the possibility of alternative standpoints on the issue, and ask whether, from those standpoints, it would be reasonable or unreasonable to reject that principle.

> In order for a principle to be reasonably rejectable there must be some relevant standpoint from which people typically have good reason either to refuse to accept that principle as part of their own practical thinking or to refuse to recognize it as a ground that others may use to justify their conduct.
>
> (Scanlon, 1998: 218)

It is only if rejection would be unreasonable that I can have grounds to affirm my view over others and declare it to be that by which their conduct must be regulated.

It is a little misleading for Scanlon to call his moral theory a version of contractualism, since it involves nothing like a contract. There is a connection, nevertheless, in its appeal to a kind of necessary reciprocity on the part of people seriously interested in coming up with moral principles that everyone can be asked to endorse. Set out briefly, though, it may seem somewhat question begging. What makes something a genuine standpoint as opposed to merely a personal position or group loyalty? And what is to count as "reasonable" rejection? Can such vague tests actually produce substantial results? Scanlon acknowledges the dangers of both vacuity and circularity, and he devotes the larger part of his lengthy book to exploring and defending plausible answers to these important questions. It is obvious, for instance, that any proposal about social regulation will generate at least two standpoints—those who would benefit and those who would be constrained by it—and these standpoints are distinguishable from the personal opinions of those who may occupy them. It is also plain that simple material well-being cannot exhaust the ideas of benefit and constraint; people care about things other than their health, safety, and standard of living. Building on observations such as these, Scanlon goes a considerable distance towards showing that the charges of circularity and vacuity are much harder to sustain than might appear at first.

But for present purposes, regardless of whether or not he succeeds, the test of "reasonable rejection" still differs importantly from hypothetical consent. It does not require us to predict what people would or would not consent to. Rather it determines what it would be unreasonable for them *not* to agree to. If this test is satisfied, then we can say that the principles that survive it can justifiably be required of all members of society. There is nonetheless an important lacuna here. In a passage already quoted Scanlon says the aim of moral thinking is "finding principles that others, *insofar as they too have this aim*, could not reasonably reject" (emphasis added). But what about people who do *not* have this aim? Do the principles not apply to them? Or can we discount their opinions as unreasonable? We might put the matter another way. Scanlon says, in effect, that if we are going to go in for moral reasoning at all, this is the way we have to do it. But suppose I respond by asking "Why go in for moral reasoning?"

This is not an idle question. Since the time of Plato, philosophers have grappled with two distinct ways in which the claims of morality are typically rejected. The first can be called "epistemological scepticism," since it denies that anyone can objectively tell moral right from wrong. This was the topic of the previous chapter. A quite different challenge comes

from the position known as "egoism." An egoist is someone who does not (or need not) doubt the possibility of telling moral right from wrong, but an egoist raises a question. I know what the rules are, and I accept that these are the closest we can come to mutually acceptable rules. But why should *I* obey them? I know what it means to be moral, but why should I *be* moral? Such an egoist could agree that Scanlon has successfully formulated a test by which the reasonableness of moral principles can be judged. There remains the issue as to whether the egoist should go along with the principles that pass the test.

To understand this possibility, it is helpful to consider sporting competitions. We can all agree that there is good reason to reject proposals for changes to the rules that would systematically favor or disadvantage a specific race or class. We only have to imagine ourselves occupying the standpoint of members of that race or class. In formulating the rules of the contest, therefore, something like Scanlon's test has real application. Even so, once recognizably reasonable rules are in place, individual athletes can still ask themselves whether they are going to abide by them. People who improperly break the rules are not always found out. Sometimes this is how they win competitions, and it is just because breaking the rules can bring this kind of advantage that the question "Why should I obey the rules?" is a real one. Does anyone really think the reply "You just should" is an adequate one?

A familiar alternative answer starts with the thought "What if everyone did?" and goes on to argue that since the result would be a complete collapse in which there would be no winning or losing, breaking the rules is self-defeating. Now there are two important observations to be made about this second answer. First, if it is a reasonable guess—which it nearly always is—that everyone is *not* going to cheat, then there is an important gap in the argument. It cannot serve as an adequate response to what is called "free riding," which is taking personal advantage of general conformity. Egoists can consistently accept that most people will follow the rules; the question is why they should go along with this when it is to their advantage not to.

When the argument is extended to social behavior more broadly, it seems even weaker. That is because social systems can survive quite a high degree of criminality and dishonesty. Stores can be profitable, for instance, despite a large amount of shoplifting that goes undetected and unpunished. Banks can make money on loans despite serious defaulting on contractual deals that cannot be enforced. Publishing houses and recording companies can operate successfully despite widespread violations of copyright. And so on. In short, if the only answer to the lawbreaker is that the price of lawbreaking is social collapse, this is no answer at all.

2.6 Bernard Mandeville and *The Fable of the Bees*

When we turn from the law to morality, the philosophical challenge of providing an answer to the egoist is even greater. Criminals do not have to be persuaded to obey the law; they can simply be compelled to obey the law. But the contractualist rightly sees that at some level morality has to be freely chosen, and this means that it has to be shown to be worth choosing. This is the special challenge morality faces, and it was most famously put to the test in *The Fable of the Bees*, a pamphlet published in 1723 by an eighteenth-century physician, Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733). At the heart of Mandeville's pamphlet, which is subtitled "Private Vices, Public Benefits," is a satirical poem called *The Grumbling Hive* that he had written nine years earlier. This poem describes a social system in which each individual seeks personal advantage rather than the welfare of others or the good of the whole. Contrary to the familiar predictions about social collapse, the relentless pursuit of

individual gain generates a flourishing colony of bees. As the poem puts it, though "every Part was full of Vice, Yet the whole Mass a Paradise." But out of this flourishing society, Mandeville imagines, moralists arise, and they begin to "cry aloud, *The Land must sink for all its Fraud*" and "all the Rogues cry'd brazenly, *Good Gods , Had we but Honesty.*" Ironically, however, the Land only sinks once the fraud has *ceased*, as soon, that is to say, as the "Knaves turn'd Honest" (the subtitle of the poem). All the acquisitive desires that had spurred people to ever higher levels of invention, consumption, and conquest are suppressed, individual energy is dissipated, and the general benefits that it had produced are lost. The grumbling hive descends into lethargic inactivity and "So few in the vast Hive remain, a hundredth Part they can't maintain." Mandeville draws a moral:

> . . . .Fools only strive
> to make a Great an Honest Hive . . .
> Without great Vices, is a vain
> EUTOPIA seated in the Brain
> Fraud , Luxury and Pride must live
> While we the Benefits receive.
> (Mandeville, 1723, 1997: 23–35)

For most of his life Mandeville lived in obscurity, and his *Fable* might have passed without notice, if it had not been brought before the courts for prosecution on the grounds of its immorality. Almost overnight he became famous, and he has remained so ever since. The poem outraged the morally minded, but it articulates a point that Mandeville elaborated at length in a second edition and in subsequent essays, and it draws attention to an important phenomenon acknowledged and investigated by several major writers of the eighteenth century (notably Adam Smith), even when they strove to distance themselves from Mandeville's excess. This is the phenomenon known as "spontaneous order." When individuals seek their own personal advantage rather than striving to benefit society as a whole, their activities need not in fact result in unsustainable chaos, but can generate an order. The order is spontaneous rather than the outcome of deliberately chosen rules, but it nonetheless benefits everyone.

The most familiar example of this phenomenon is a market. Buyers go to market to purchase the goods they happen to want at the lowest price they can. Sellers go to market to get the best possible price for whatever goods they have been able to produce, and they must compete with each other for trade. Neither buyer nor seller is altruistically motivated (i.e., seeking the good of others). But, empirical investigation shows that a freely operating market can result in the best prices for both buyers and sellers, and it can regulate supply and demand in extremely efficient ways. It thus constitutes a far better means of meeting needs and accommodating competing interests than any preconceived set of rules aimed at securing "fair" prices or assessing "right" amounts would do. Furthermore, it does not matter whether individual buyers and sellers are greedy, mean, or ambitious; the good of the whole is still served. Indeed part of Mandeville's point is that greed, pride, ambition, and so on will stimulate people into producing more, wanting more, and bargaining harder, all of which will make the market work even better.

Mandeville's *Fable* prompted the moral philosophers of the eighteenth century (notably Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith in Scotland) to seek ways in which this important truth about spontaneous order could be reconciled with a continuing belief in the natural benevolence of human beings and its importance for human society, and there is much

more to be said on this point. In the limited context of examining the strengths and weaknesses of contractualism, however, the important point is this. Egoists can plausibly reject the idea that a set of agreed moral principles is a necessary prerequisite for social life, and this means they can reasonably deny that there is any compelling ground for them to engage with moral thinking at all.

Mandeville means to go further than this. He thinks that those who preach altruism—the importance of a moral regard for others—are inevitably hypocrites; it would be contrary to their own interests if people took their moralizing seriously. Physicians can't want everyone to be healthy, otherwise they would be out of a job. Lawyers cannot have successful careers without criminals. Priests have no role if there are no sinners to save. We need not follow Mandeville this far. Nonetheless, in addition to showing that an orderly society is not necessarily dependent on morally well-motivated citizens, the *Fable of the Bees* also shows that moral altruism is not self-commending. There is an intelligible, and perhaps defensible, point of view from which egoism is preferable. So the next task is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of egoism at greater length.

3
Egoism

Chapter 2 ended with Mandeville's challenge to conventional morality. Maybe it is possible to come up with moral rules that no one can reasonably reject. But why should I live my life by them, or even try to live my life by them? Why shouldn't I just pursue the kind of life I personally find enjoyable and rewarding? These sound like the questions of an egoist, and so they are, but if Mandeville is right, this is not the end of the debate. The morality that tells us to put other people first serves the interests of hypocrites, chiefly, people who don't practice what they preach. And if it were sincerely put into practice, this would leave society a lot worse off.

3.1 Egoism Versus Altruism

Egoism derives its name from the Latin *ego* for "I," and it is usually contrasted with altruism, from the Latin *alter* for "other." This reflects the tension between egoism and morality, because at the heart of morality is the key notion that I should be moved, and constrained, by others' needs and desires as much as my own needs and desires. Morality, we might say, stands or falls with altruism.

Egoism is powerfully represented in two of Plato's dramatic dialogues, the *Gorgias*, where Socrates argues at length with (amongst others) a character called Callicles, and the *Republic*, in the earlier part of which the egoistic point of view is articulated by a character called Thrasymachus. Both Callicles and Thrasymachus argue that things are only valuable to us insofar as we desire them, and that the good life, consequently, consists in being successful at getting what you want. If this requires the domination of others and the suppression of their aims in pursuit of your own, so be it. You lead the best life when you get what you want, regardless of how this affects others.

One way of putting their point is this. Many people live in countries where corruption is widespread and the laws are lax. Suppose I live in such a country and at some point face a choice between advancing my career dishonestly or acting honestly at the expense of my career prospects. Why should I be honest? It is worth repeating a point made in Chapter 2: This question is not the same as the sceptical doubt about objectively distinguishing honesty from dishonesty. I may well accept that the action I am contemplating really is dishonest. Indeed, it is only if I *do* accept this that I can be conscious of a dilemma; if honesty is a function of feeling, then I can dissolve the dilemma by suppressing the feeling. Faced with a *real* dilemma, however, it still makes sense to wonder *why* I should prefer honesty to career advancement. In other words, the conflict is not between subjective and objective

interpretations of "honest," but between the claims of altruism (obligations to others) and egoism (self-interest). The egoist's essential insight is that people don't need to be given reasons to pursue personal advantage, but they do need to be given reasons not to pursue personal advantage. What reason do I have to be honest when it is against my interests to do so?

This example should make the distinction between subjectivism and egoism clear. At the same time, it might lead us to overlook an important difference between philosophical egoism and plain selfishness. Normally selfishness just means a character trait that some people have and which makes them seek and promote their own comfort and satisfaction before that of anybody else. Selfish people are people who, for instance, always try to get the best seat, the finest steak, the one remaining strawberry, or the largest glass of wine for themselves. By contrast, egoism is a philosophical doctrine according to which practical reasons—reasons for me to do things—have to be grounded in what matters to me. My needs and desires matter to me in a way they can't matter to other people; the pain in my shoulder cannot matter to you in the way that it does to me, and vice versa. Nonetheless, I can care about other people. When I do, then I care about their needs and desires as well as my own—but only because I care about those people. For example, parents often sacrifice a lot for the sake of their children, and it would be very odd to call such sacrifices selfishness on the part of the parents. Yet their motivation can still be egoistic; they care about what happens to these children because they are *their* children. This kind of caring for others contrasts with altruism, which says that the happiness and suffering of other people should matter to us irrespective of *who* they are. Since happiness is good and suffering is bad, any increase or decrease in them matters *impersonally*.

Selfishness is hard to defend, but once we separate egoism from selfishness, we can begin to see the outline of an argument in favor of egoism that is not so easily rejected. Egoism doesn't *prevent* us from acting in the interests of others (i.e., the people we care about). But neither does it *require* us to act in the interests of others. All it says is that if I am to be given motivating reasons to act, those reasons have to connect with things that matter to me. So if you are going to give me reasons to consider the interests of other people, those other people have to matter to me.

3.2 Psychological Egoism

To assess the merits of egoism, we have to ask whether this claim about reasons for action is true. One long-standing contention made in its favor lies in the claim that in reality people only ever do what they want to do; it may *seem* that people act altruistically from time to time, but this is mere surface appearance. This thesis is generally known as "psychological egoism," because it makes the most fundamental explanation of human action rest upon a certain state of mind, namely wanting or desiring. In other words, on this interpretation egoism says that ultimately all human actions must be explained in terms of the desires of the people whose actions they are. If, deep down, people didn't want to do what they do, they wouldn't do it.

It is common for this idea to be held up as a truism, something so obvious that no one could seriously deny it. Yet, far from being a truism, psychological egoism appears to be false—at least on first inspection. Aren't history and everyday life full of examples of people doing something other than what they want? Here are some examples: I continue to make polite conversation with guests when what I really want is go to bed, a captured rebel persists in his silence out of loyalty to his comrades while longing for his torturers to stop, and a martyr refuses to renounce her faith even when her life is at risk and she has no desire

to die. The last two are special cases, perhaps, but insofar as they are genuine instances of people acting contrary to the way they want to—and they seem to be—then the claim that people *always* do what they want must be false. In that case, it cannot therefore serve as a convincing argument for egoism.

Defenders of psychological egoism usually reply that instances like these are not counterexamples to the thesis at all. There must be some sense, they say, in which I want to be polite *more* than I want to get to bed, some sense in which the rebel really wants to be loyal to his comrades *more* than he wants the pain to cease, and some sense in which the martyr wants to be faithful *more* than she wants to live. Otherwise, surely, I would in fact go off to bed, the rebel would answer the questions, and the martyr would renounce her faith.

This reply has two important features. First, it makes a claim about what *must* be the case and not merely what *is*. Psychological egoism started out as an empirical claim about human motivation—that as a matter of fact the actions of human beings are always best explained as the pursuit of some desire. Now it turns out to be a claim about necessity—that all actions *must* flow from desires, otherwise the agent in question would never have performed them. But we only have reason to think that desire *must* underlie action if psychological egoism is true. If psychological egoism is false, this assertion is groundless. So the reply *assumes* the truth of the very doctrine it is supposed to be defending—a clear instance of a circular argument.

Second, it uses "want" in a special and somewhat idiosyncratic way. The most straightforward description of the rebel and the martyr is that their loyalties are in conflict with their desires. By insisting that they are nonetheless doing what they want to do, psychological egoism is saying that their loyalty is *a kind of* desire. But *what* kind of desire? If "want" is being used in its most straightforward sense then, as we have seen, this just begs the question. If, on the other hand, "want" is being used in a special sense to mean "the decisive motivation" then it follows that, contrary to what we might think, psychological egoism is in fact compatible with explaining why we do what we do on the basis of a wide range of motives and not simply "wanting." Doing something just because you want to is certainly *one* such ground, but thinking that it would be kindly, polite, clever, or fashionable are also intelligible motives. Common experience suggests that these other sorts of motive can carry the day even when you *don't* want to. The psychological egoist wants to deny this, and accordingly lumps all these motivations together under the heading "wanting"—wanting to be polite, wanting to be fashionable, wanting to be kind, wanting to be clever, and so on. But this introduces a new and different sense of "wanting." It no longer means one motive among others—"having a personal desire for"—but something much more abstract—just "being motivated towards" (by something or other).

By making this move, though, psychological egoism becomes empty. Once "wanting" just means having *some* motivation, then it is true by definition that every motivated action must have *some* motivation behind it, and it is trivially true that the explanation of action must identify the real motivation. This is a far cry from the claim that psychological egoism appears to be making at the outset, namely that out of all the different kinds of motivation that *could* lie behind human actions only one is ever truly effective, namely wanting or desiring in the narrow sense.

To summarize, psychological egoism begins with this substantial and challenging claim—people only ever do what they want to do. Confronted with counterexamples that cast doubt on this generalization about human beings, the psychological egoist reinterprets the concept of wanting. This saves the thesis, but at the expense of substance. The result is that psychological egoism is either challenging but false or true but *trivially* true.

3.3 Rational Egoism

Morality is essentially altruistic, which is to say concerned with other people besides ourselves. Psychological egoism was called into play in an attempt to support the claim that so conceived morality is a nonstarter, because by their very nature human beings only ever act egoistically. The previous section rehearsed the arguments that can be brought against this claim. But even if they are conclusive, the egoist's rejection of morality can take another tack—abandoning any factual claim about the psychological motivation of human beings, and instead advancing a claim about how rationally they ought to be motivated. For obvious reasons, this alternative version is known as "rational egoism." It accepts that people can indeed be moved to act by conventional opinion or from a feeling of pity, but it contends that these are not rational motivations. The only really good *reason* for doing something is that you want to do it. Rational egoism is a normative doctrine, and this means it is aligned to the dispute between Socrates and Callicles much more closely than the psychological version. That is because Plato's two dialogues are focused on normative rather than quasiscientific questions. That is to say, through the medium of Socrates's exchanges, Plato is investigating questions about what we ought to do, and why we ought to do it.

Why is it more rational to act in pursuit of our own desires than on any other ground? Answering this question raises an issue about the burden of proof. Does the egoist have to prove to the rest of us that living by our own desires is the best way of living? Or does the burden of proof fall on those who reject egoism? In other words, who has to prove what to whom? Unless this can be settled, the argument cannot really begin.

This is a common problem in philosophy. In the law courts, arguments between prosecution and defence are governed by a legal principle—the presumption of innocence. This places the burden of proof firmly on the prosecution. The defence doesn't have to prove innocence; it only has to show that the prosecution's efforts to prove guilt have failed. There is no equivalent principle for philosophy in general, but in the particular case of egoism, it has often been thought that the burden of proof clearly lies on the moralist. Egoists appeal solely to the individual's own desires. In acknowledging that a desire—for health or happiness, say—is mine, I necessarily have a reason to pursue it. This means that people who urge me to let that desire be overridden by other considerations—as moralists do—must accept that the burden of proof falls on them to explain why these other considerations should carry any weight.

To put the same point another way, rational egoists *recommend* that I should always do whatever I want. Since *ex hypothesi* (by the very nature of the case) I already want to do it, there is no logical space, so to speak, to ask whether I have reason to do it. But when moralists appeal to considerations other than my personal desires, there *is* a logical gap that needs to be bridged. They have to explain why I should ignore the reason to act that is automatically generated by my desire. For example, as I am on my way to the theater for the last night of a production I particularly want to see, I come across a road accident in which other people have been injured. A moralist, we may suppose, will tell me that I ought to stop and assist, even if this means missing the production, whereas an egoist will tell me to do what I want. But the reasons I can rehearse to myself in deciding between the moralist and the egoist are not equally balanced. Since I *already* want to go to the theater, I don't need additional reasons for continuing with that intention. Rather, I need reasons for *not* doing so. Moralism has to supply me with reasons; egoism doesn't have to supply me with reasons since they are operative already. This shows that the burden of proof is on the moralist.

Of course, in itself this doesn't imply that there need be any difficulty in meeting that burden. The presumption of innocence doesn't mean that it is always difficult to prove people guilty. Some legal cases are, as we say, open and shut. Nor does this claim about the burden of proof imply that reasons of the right sort—moral reasons—cannot be given. Most of us probably agree that in the theater/road accident case it should be relatively easy to find persuasive reasons in favor of abandoning my intention of going to the theater. This possibility, though, is quite compatible with holding that the *burden* of proof always falls on the moralist, and this confirms the idea that, in the absence of reasons to the contrary, by the very nature of the claim it makes, rational egoism is the default position.

If the burden of proof really does rest on the critics of egoism, what can they say against it? One suggestion that occurs to most people is that egoism runs contrary to an idea that has long influenced the way we think about our relations with others. This is the Judeo-Christian commandment that I should love my neighbor as myself, a commandment closely related to Christ's "Golden Rule" of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt. 7:12). As a rule of conduct, it has gained widespread acceptance among people who have no express Christian allegiance. It is also the principle (or something very like it) that underlies Scanlon's attempt (considered at length in Chapter 2) to make reciprocal "reasonableness" the basis of morality. The discussion of Scanlon led to Bernard Mandeville's cynical contention that "morality" so conceived breeds cant and hypocrisy, and that a world in which people attend to their own needs and desires before those of others is not only less hypocritical, but likely to be better for everyone. A still more radical viewpoint is to be found in the nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). For Nietzsche, morality is not just hypocritical or ineffectual; it is positively contemptible, a degenerate way of thinking that any self-respecting human being will want to abandon.

3.4 Nietzsche and the Genealogy of Morality

Nietzsche defends this startling contention in a book entitled *On the Genealogy of Morality*. A "genealogy" is an explanation of how something came about, and Nietzsche aims to reveal the deep defects in the modern conception of morality by explaining how it came into existence. Probably most people suppose that something called "morality" is a universal feature of human life at all times and places. Nietzsche denies this. He finds a radical cultural break between the ancient world of Greece and Rome, and the Judeo-Christian world that emerged from it. The former was structured around values that discriminated between people in accordance with their attributes and accomplishments. It operated only with *relative* distinctions of good and bad, in which the better was always to be preferred to the worse. We are familiar with this kind of distinction still in sport and art (both of which we owe to the ancient world), where it is not effort or intention that matters, but success. First prize goes to the fastest or the strongest person or the most beautiful painting or most compelling story, not to the most well-intentioned competitor or the would-be artist who made the biggest effort. In the ancient world (by Nietszche's account, at any rate), *all* assessment of human merit took this form. Since it is better to be clever or handsome or talented (i.e., noble) than to be stupid, ugly, or talentless (i.e., ignoble), noble and accomplished people are to regarded as *better* people than ignoble people who have never accomplished anything—not infrequently despite their best efforts or strong motivation.

The values of the ancient world were "aristocratic" in the strict sense. That is to say, the values of the ancient world gave preference to the best. One natural implication of such a

view is the division of society into ranks. These ranks are not hereditary families—"aristocratic" in the modern sense—nor are they simply social groups. They are hierarchically organized in accordance with relative superiority. The lower ranks are subject to the higher ranks because they are simply less good at being human beings. It is only by serving the higher ranks that the lower ranks can contribute to the improvement and perfection of human good. In the extreme case, this is what justifies slavery, but the case for hierarchy can be made without recourse to this extreme. In athletics everyone accepts the principle that the race should go to the swift. One implication is that training and other resources should be concentrated on those most likely to be swift, and they should be denied to the slow. Similarly, on Nietzsche's aristocratic principle a well-ordered society will give preference to the more noble.

By contrast, Jewish culture had an altogether different focus. The Ten Commandments by which society should be regulated derive their meaning from divine law and human sin, which are two concepts that had no counterpart in the Greco-Roman world of the noble, the ignoble, and the enslaved. Nietzsche thinks that there is a crucially important difference here. By deploying the concepts of divine law and human sin, Judaism introduces a distinction between good and *evil*, not simply good and *bad*. In athletics, music, or sculpture there is a natural *inequality* between people; some are good at these things and others are bad at them, but no one would think of describing someone who was bad at sport, painting, or philosophy as evil. In relation to divine law, however, there is a radical *equality*; anyone can keep and anyone can break God's commandments. The person who keeps them is good, however limited their accomplishments in other respects. The person who breaks them is evil, regardless of their artistic skills, athletic prowess, or intellectual achievements.

Judaism encountered the classical world when it became part of the Roman Empire. It was with the rise of Christianity, however, that these two systems of values came into radical conflict. Once Christianity had successfully pervaded the Empire, the ideal of human nobility was discarded, and a radically different set of values took its place. Central to them was the figure of Jesus Christ. Born in the humblest of circumstances, this wandering preacher with delusional ideas of his own importance attracted a few uneducated followers—Nietzsche is specially scathing about the disciple Peter—before being executed as a criminal. There are no notable intellectual or political accomplishments in Jesus' short life—nothing to compare with Plato, or Homer, or Julius Caesar for example. Yet despite this inauspicious life, Nietzsche observes, it is Christ, not Caesar, who eventually becomes the ideal—a perfect human embodiment of the divine, heralded as "King of Kings." Why did this happen, and what effect did it have?

Nietzsche finds the explanation in what he calls "the slaves revolt in morality." "This Jesus of Nazareth," he says, "as the embodiment of the gospel of love, this 'redeemer' bringing salvation and victory to the poor, the sick, the sinners . . . was seduction in its most sinister and irresistible form" (Nietzsche, 1994: 20). The Christian ideal glorifies poor people, slaves, and social outcasts. This is evidently absurd. How could the ugly be better than the beautiful, the stupid better than the clever, and so on? But the seductive character of the ideal lies in the fact that it resonates with a deep psychological *ressentiment* on the part of the mass of ordinary people leading inconsequential lives, the envious loathing which contemplation of nobility always induces in the ignoble. The image of Christ as God sanctifies this *ressentiment* by completely replacing the relative distinction between good and bad with the alternative absolute distinction between good and evil. God is absolutely good, humanity is evil, and salvation lies in abandoning our humanity for divine transformation.

Such an abandonment brings about a serious reverse in values. Being an excellent human

being counts for nothing; the rich, the clever, and the accomplished are all inherently evil. Conversely, being a wretched specimen of humanity does not matter either; the small minded, the talentless, and the ugly can nonetheless be "saved" through faith. The result is that all the wonderful manifestations of our humanity—the great accomplishments in art, philosophy, science, sport, or politics are cast off as worthless, and human beings are launched upon an incessant internal war with themselves, obsessed with sin, ridden by guilt, driven to the ascetic excesses of monks and nuns or pleasure-hating Puritans, and condemned to the manipulative machinations of priests and theologians.

Nietzsche is unsparing in his criticism. "The Christian conception of God," he writes, "is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: perhaps it even represents the low water mark in the descending development of the God type" (Nietzsche, 1895, 1968: 140). And a crucial consequence of this low water mark is morality. "Nothing in our unhealthy modernity is more unhealthy than Christian pity" (Nietzsche, 1895, 1968: 131). "Christianity has been up to now mankind's greatest misfortune" (Nietzsche 1895, 1968: 181). The "up to now" is important. In a book entitled *The Joyful Science*, Nietzsche famously declares that "God is dead," but the death of God ushers in both the need and the opportunity for a *Revaluation of All Values*, a revaluation that will take us *Beyond Good and Evil*, and allow us at last to celebrate the fact of being *Human, All Too Human*. (These are all titles of works, or projected works, by Nietzsche.)

3.5 The Nietzschean Ideal

Nietzsche never completed his *Revaluation of All Values*. After a life dogged by illness, he became insane in 1889, and he remained in the care of his sister for the remaining 11 years of his life. Early commentators detected something of this insanity in his writings, but it is now widely agreed that while his style does have elements of literary excess, he offers a penetrating and challenging critique of conventional Christian morality that unquestionably requires and deserves an answer. This critique is not a challenge for Christians only. Nietzsche rightly saw that what he had called into question was not just something we might classify as "Christian ethics," but the whole idea of morality. Indeed, in some ways Nietzsche presents atheists with an even more pressing challenge, since they share his basic premise—that there is no God. If there is no God, there is no divine law, and thus no sinning against it. What could set a standard for human conduct? At this point, a modern secularist is likely to invoke concepts of the common good, human rights, or justice. But on examination these will turn out to be pale secular substitutes for Christian moral theology. Nietzsche contemptuously dismisses "vengeance seekers disguised as judges with the word justice in their mouths as poisonous spittle" (Nietzsche, 1994: 96). They persist in "the democratic idiosyncracy of being against everything that dominates and wants to dominate" and thus continue to affirm the merits of altruism over egoism. They share with the Christian ethic of self-denial a belief in "the 'unegoistic' as a moral value" but "only bad conscience, only the will to self-violation provides the precondition for the *value* of the unegoistic" (Nietzsche, 1994: 64, emphasis original). What we need, Nietzsche contends, is not an atheistic set of rules prescribing altruism, but a new model that will replace Christ, and give us

> just one glimpse of something perfect, completely finished, happy, powerful, triumphant . . . a glimpse of a man who justifies man *himself* . . . an instance of a man who makes up for and redeems man, and enables us to retain our *faith in mankind*.
>
> (Nietzsche, 1994: 27, emphasis original)

Nietzsche's alternative model for the most admirable type of life employs one of his most famous concepts—the *Übermensch*. The German word *Übermensch* is literally translated as "overman," often rendered "superman" and sometimes "higher man." None of these translations is entirely satisfactory, though I shall use the last. The first means nothing in English. The second has the comic book connotations of Clark Kent. The third carries overtones of eugenics—the periodic attempts people have made to biologically engineer superior human beings and/or occasional genocidal attempts to eliminate inferior ones. It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that the concept of the *Übermensch* came to be associated with the Nazis' adulation of the (supposedly superior) Aryan race. Nietzsche's own intemperate language lends some support for this association. He refers admiringly, for example, to "the magnificent *blond beast* avidly prowling around for spoil and victory" while at the same time deploring "the superabundance of failed, sickly, tired and exhausted people of whom today's Europe is beginning to reek" (Nietzsche, 1994: First Essay §11, emphasis original). Nevertheless, the association has no deep intellectual basis. Nazism was a product of the reparations imposed on Germany after World War I, nearly three decades after Nietzsche wrote these words. Unhappily, the contingent association between Nazism and Nietzsche was the work of his sister Elizabeth, who, though a devoted and effective literary executor of his work, committed, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, "'the highest treason" to her brother's ideas when she "tried to place Nietzsche in the service of national socialism" (Deleuze, 2001: 65).

Careful examination reveals that Nietzsche's views have very little to do with Nazism. Indeed, it is worth noting that he is repeatedly on record as denouncing both anti-Semitism and German nationalistic fervor. In extolling the virtues of the poet Goethe, for example, Nietzsche describes him as "the last German before whom I feel reverence," and he declares Goethe's life to be "not a German event but a European one." And while he speaks with enthusiasm about the fearsome Vandals and Goths, he immediate adds that "between the old Germanic peoples and us Germans today there is scarcely an idea in common" (Nietzsche, 1889, 1968: 25–26).

It is in the context of Nietzsche's reflections on Goethe that we find the fullest description of the higher man.

> [A] strong, highly cultured human being, skilled in all physical accomplishments, who, keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom; a man of tolerance, not out of weakness, but out of strength, because he knows how to employ to his advantage what would destroy an average nature; a man to whom nothing is forbidden, except it be a weakness, whether that weakness be called vice or virtue. . . . A spirit thus emancipated stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism.
>
> (Nietzsche, 1889, 1968: 114)

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is not a racial type, but a universal higher man who excels in all aspects of the distinctively human nature that Christian humility declares sinful. What makes such a person higher, however, is not merely this element of excellence, but that he has, in a compelling phrase "a spirit that is sure of itself." The higher man confidently *wills* his way of life. That is to say, he takes pride and satisfaction in both the powers and the limitations of his humanity and in his accomplishments as a human being. His attitude to life is one of gladly affirming his existence, while fully acknowledging its contingency and mortality.

All the alternatives, Nietzsche thinks, fall woefully short of this ideal. Pessimists, like the philosopher Schopenhauer, preach renunciation and thereby refuse to live life at all. Christians look beyond the real world they find themselves in to a nonexistent heavenly one. Moralists urge us to conform to rules of "right" conduct, but whether expressed in terms of human rights, the common good, or justice, obedience to them is tantamount to subservience—slavishly following the will of the majority. Only the *Übermensch* accepts his humanity for what it is. He determines for himself what the values of his life will be, and he exercises the sort of self-mastery over intellect and feeling that the realization of those values requires. Having abandoned every inclination to look towards the supernatural, such a person successfully asserts his own will against the pressure of conventional morality and social norms. "His life is justified before itself and remains justified—this life which shouts at every one of us: 'Be a man and do not follow me—but yourself! Yourself" (Nietzsche, 1887, 2001: 98. The final sentence is a quotation from Goethe).

Being a man is being *yourself*. This is what makes Nietzsche's ideal a version of egoism. Only the affirmation of the ego is truly admirable. In later writings Nietzsche articulates it further with the concept of "eternal recurrence." Though there is debate about how exactly this idea is to be interpreted, we can usefully interpret it as a sort of thought experiment in which the value of my life is tested. The higher man passes this test because he views the life he has willed with such deep satisfaction that he can contemplate its recurring infinitely many times with perfect equanimity. Since there is nothing in it with which he is dissatisfied, there is nothing about it that he would change.

If we think of eternal recurrence as a test, though, it is difficult to see that only Nietszche's higher man can pass it. In fact, it is possible to interpret his most hated rival to this ideal—Christian humility—as passing the very same test. In the New Testament Jesus tells us that "the meek" shall inherit the earth. Meekness (humility) sounds like an ideal of life at polar opposites from Nietzche's higher man. Yet they may not be as antithetical as they appear. A person whose meekness arises from personal timidity, unquestioning compliance with conventional opinion, and a will too weak to assert itself, undoubtedly compares very unfavorably Nietzsche's characterization of the higher man. But what about the person whose humility is a result of mastering a naturally impetuous personality and deflating any inclination to boastfulness by means of education? Isn't such a person plausibly described in the same terms—as a

> strong, highly cultured human being, . . ., keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself [who acts] not out of weakness, but out of strength, because he knows how to employ to his advantage what would destroy an average nature?
>
> (Nietzsche, 1889, 1968: 114)

In the same passage Nietzsche says that the *Übermensch* is "a man to whom nothing is forbidden, except it be a weakness" (Nietzsche, 1889, 1968: 114). He himself wants to forbid some things, notably Christian pity. The problem is that these things need not arise from weakness. They could be chosen as an exercise of life and strength. Jesus, St. Paul, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Mother Julian, Catherine of Siena, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, David Livingstone, Martin Luther King, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu may all have been mistaken, but they can hardly be called weak. Their lives, in fact, are admirable examples of the exceptional strength of will and purpose.

In one of his last attacks on moralism, Nietzsche writes as follows: "Let us consider finally what naivety it is to say 'man ought to be thus and thus'" (Nietzsche, 1889,

1968: 56). Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, a luxurious prodigality of forms, and transformations, and some pitiful journeyman of a moralist says "No, man ought to be different. He even knows how man ought to be, this parasite and bigot" (Nietzsche, 1889, 1968: 56). The difficulty is that in commending the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche falls foul of his own strictures, because no less than the pitiful moralist, he knows how man ought to be. Possibly, his test of eternal recurrence would allow Nietzsche to discriminate between the "wealth of types," though at a minimum this would require him to reconsider his description of the vast array of human life styles as a "luxurious prodigality." But the example of the strong-willed Christian shows that it will not allow him to be discriminating enough; some of the modes of life he wants to *condemn*, he will also have to *commend*.

The fact is that Nietzsche's philosophy of value suffers from precisely the same fault as all forms of egoism; it is either false or vacuous. The rational egoist admires the exercise of individual will, especially when it goes against the flow of conventional moral opinion. But since the individual will can as readily be exercised in *affirming* conventional morality, his admiration and his preference for the unconventional is groundless. This is because rational egoism can only give an account of subjective value—strength of will—while in reality requiring some account of intrinsic value as well—what things it is *best* to will.

3.6 Desires and Interests

By pursuing Nietzsche's philosophy this far, we have in fact returned to the dispute between Socrates and Callicles. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates is able to refute Callicles by the use of counterexamples. He invites him to consider the case of sexual predators on children, who get what they want in opposition to conventional moral scruple, and invites Callicles to endorse their way of life. And he cites the example of a bird that eats and excretes simultaneously as the perfect desire satisfaction machine, asking Callicles if this is not a perfect exemplar of the sort of "good life" he is commending. Callicles angrily rejects these counterexamples and declares that he has nothing of the sort in mind. But in doing so he is clearly inconsistent. If we understand egoism to be the doctrine that the best life you can have is the one you choose for yourself without regard for the inhibiting effects of conventional morality, other worldly religion, or the impact on other people, then egoism must rank the life of the drunkard (who is quite content, let us say, to lie comatose among the garbage of the city) on a level with that of a political leader whose strength of will and visionary purpose bring law, order, and prosperity to his war-torn country. Callicles is, of course, deeply reluctant to make this equivalence, and that is how Socrates forces him to abandon the egoistic principle upon which he had built his argument. But it is an equivalence that logic obliges him to make.

Nietzsche is caught in a similar dilemma. He writes "The value of egoism depends on the physiological value of him who possesses it: it can be very valuable, it can be worthless and contemptible" (Nietzsche, 1895, 1889, 1968: 97). Just what is to be understood by "physiological" here is not altogether certain, but we should think of it as a vitality or presence that some people exhibit and others do not. If this is right then we can just as readily point to St. Paul, whom Nietzsche loathed, as to Cesare Borgia, whom Nietzsche admired. Both lives were filled with a powerful sense of purpose that enabled them to transcend conventionality and pursue self-chosen goals in the face of adversity. The problem is that Nietzsche, like Callicles, wants to condemn one and praise the other.

Now it might be argued that these observations are fully in accordance with an alternative and more plausible version of rational egoism than the one Socrates attacks. This

version says that the best life is the one that is best for me. It does not say that what I want or will here and now accords with the best life for me. We might express this by saying that egoism says you should prefer to promote your own *interests* over the interests of other. But it does not say that this necessarily gives you reason to pursue your own *desires*. My desires are those things I experience as longings or inclinations. My interests are those things that are of fundamental importance to my life and well-being. Something is in my interest if it promotes that well-being. But what is in my interest need not always coincide with what I want or desire at any given moment, even on reflection. For instance, suppose I am a cigarette smoker who develops early signs of respiratory disease. I decide to give up smoking, but for some considerable time I continue to experience a powerful *desire* to smoke. I do not yield to this desire, however, because I recognize that it is not in my interest to do so; it is not good *for me*. Or, to change the example, I may be the sort of person who would far rather play computer games than study. But if doing so puts my educational prospects at risk, giving in to this preference would work against my own interests. I would thus have good *self-centered* reasons to resist what is nonetheless a strong personal inclination. It follows that if I am an egoist about my *interests*, there will be occasions when I have good reason not to do what I want or feel like doing.

The best life, on this conception, is not one in which you succeed in getting what you want whenever you want it, but one in which you succeed in securing what is in your interests over the longer term. This revised form of egoism has some advantages over the simple desire version. Though it doesn't sound much like Nietzsche, it does provide the basis of a reply to the sorts of counterexample that Socrates uses against Callicles. We can now say that it is not in the interests of the drunk or the pedophile to give in to their self-destructive desires. Consequently, egoism is not committed to commending these modes of life.

However, the problem is avoided only temporarily. If "what is in my interests" is defined by what I *will* to be in my interests, the vacuity returns. If, in full knowledge of the facts, the smoker decides to continue smoking, then that is up to her. If, having seen the social opprobrium that such a life is sure to attract, the pedophile nevertheless spurns conventional opinion and willingly opts for the life of the pederast (so long as he can escape prevention and punishment), then he too can claim to be a rational egoist. If having read Nietzsche, I determinedly model my life on St. Paul rather than Borgia (despite the scorn of the Nietzscheans), I can claim the status of a higher man no less than the would-be Cesare Borgia.

The only way to avoid the vacuity is to replace the question "What *shall* I will?" with the question "What *ought* I to will?" But this requires that there be some external standard by which to determine my will. The possibility of such a standard is just what Callicles and Nietzsche deny. Without it, however, their egoism becomes empty. This is revealed by the fact that at a certain level, Plato agrees with the revised version of egoism. He too believes that it rational to do what is in my best interests, and that the best possible life I can lead is the one that is good *for me*. His dispute with Callicles and Thrasymachus is first about what this life actually consists in, and second about how what we would call "morality" enters into it. Plato thinks that it is *directly*, not just indirectly, in my interests to do what justice requires of me. If I follow my crudest desires, I cannot make my life less degrading or disgusting by resolving to like it. And I can only meaningfully take pride in *real* accomplishments. In short, in asking how I want to live my life there is no avoiding the question of how I *ought* to want to live it. This is why the pursuit of the good life is a matter of discovery and not just an exercise of the will. It involves inquiry into the precise nature of universal and enduring values—What *is* justice? What *is* beauty? What *is* knowledge?—questions that Plato's other dialogues address.

In several of these dialogues a further strand of thought comes into play. When people speak in favor of egoism over altruism they often conflate two different though closely related ideas. Sometimes they mean to praise doing my own thing, whatever my own thing may be. But sometimes they mean spending my time on the things I find most pleasing or gratifying. In this conflation, egoism becomes confused with hedonism—the doctrine that gratification and pleasure (and the avoidance of pain) are the essential ingredients of a good life. It is worth holding the two ideas apart, because this is in fact a distinct philosophy of value. Hedonism (from the Greek word for "pleasure") is a philosophy that Plato also wants to reject, and the arguments surrounding it are well worth exploring. But it requires a chapter to itself.

4
Hedonism

4.1 Egoism and Hedonism

Egoism is the rejection of altruism. It makes each individual the focus of his or her own life in preference to any moral concern for the rights or well-being of other people in general. Among major philosophers, it is Nietzsche who endorses egoism in its most uncompromising form, reserving his greatest admiration for individuals who pursue their own purposes with a strength of will that overrides not only the superstitious hesitations of the religiously inclined as well as conventional opinion about right and wrong, but even the ideas of justice and equality that are central to secular morality.

The problem with Nietzsche's view (as with the view espoused by Plato's opponents) is that, by making strength of will the touchstone of an admirable human life, it cannot accommodate its objection to a life lived in accordance with conventional morality or religious faith, when that life is deliberately chosen and vigorously pursued. St. Paul deliberately "enslaves" himself to Christ, thereby acting contrary to Nietzsche's deeply held contempt for Christianity. But Paul exhibits an affirmation of the will no less strong than cultural icons like Goethe, whom Nietzsche so greatly reveres. This inconsistency is avoidable only by an appeal to an external standard of value, which is a standard that can be used to adjudicate between equally strong affirmations of the will.

What might such a standard be? In the history of philosophy a doctrine closely associated with the egoism steps in to answer this question. The doctrine is an ancient one known as "hedonism," from the Greek for "pleasure." The association between egoism and hedonism is sometimes so close that it is not always easy to distinguish the two views. Nietzsche holds that egoism comes naturally to human beings. Ethical codes, like Christianity, which rule against this natural impulse inevitably fly in the face of something implanted in us by evolution and can only persist at the cost of gross psychological distortion. The most dramatic version of such a code is to be found in the ascetic practices of religious enthusiasts—fasting, sexual abstinence, hair shirts, and so on, famously described by David Hume as "the monkish virtues." The purpose of these practices is to suppress the individual's will and bring it into conformity with divine law. For the most part, they do so by attacking our appetite for pleasure, especially bodily pleasures such a food and sex.

It is here that the connection between egoism and hedonism is to be found. The egoist thinks that having a will of our own is the natural condition for human beings; the hedonist thinks that when human beings are not deflected by false religious and altruistic doctrines, they naturally seek pleasure and the avoidance of pain. It is in our nature to do what we

want, but it is equally natural for us to want to do pleasurable things. The two views, though importantly different, are often conflated. The conflict between what I want to do and what God or morality tells me to do is often experienced as a conflict between doing what is enjoyable and doing what conventional opinion or religious teaching holds to be right. This is reflected in a corresponding conflation between moralism (a rejection of egoism) and Puritanism (a religious suspicion of pleasure).

But even when we are careful to keep the two apart, hedonism seems a natural ally of egoism. This is because to most minds morality is constraining. It is viewed as a set of rules that I *have* to obey, an obligation that takes no account of what I *enjoy* doing. Once we think of it in this way, though, it seems inevitable that we will be led to this question: Why should I forgo pleasure just because morality tells me to? Hedonists have an interestingly different answer to egoists. Where egoists demand further reasons, hedonists think there can never be a reason to forgo pleasure. That is because pleasure is the only truly valuable thing there is.

4.2 The Cyrenaics

"The Cyrenaics" is the name of the ancient school of philosophy that first advocated the philosophy of hedonism. The name is derived from the birthplace of their founder, Aristippus of Cyrene, a North African Greek town in what is now Libya. The Cyrenaics held that pleasure, and pleasure only, is universally recognized by all human beings to be desirable. Conversely, pain is a natural evil just in the sense that it is acknowledged the world over as undesirable. Consequently, commending a life that has as much pleasure and as little pain as possible in it as the best life kind of life one can lead appeals to values that human beings of all cultures and periods can appreciate. This is the force of saying that pleasure is a *natural* rather than a conventional good, and pain is a *natural* evil.

In this respect, pleasure and pain differ markedly from such things as honor and disgrace. The difference has two aspects. In the first place, honor is not universally regarded as something good, nor is disgrace universally regarded as something bad. In some cultures people have a very strong sense of family honor, for instance, and they regard anything that sullies the family name with horror. In other cultures people have no such sense. In the second place, just what counts as honorable and which things are to be regarded as disgraceful are matters that differ from culture to culture. Whereas the things that cause pain cause it anywhere, the things that cause disgrace in one context may be quite without significance in another. For instance, in some societies it is a terrible thing for an unmarried woman to become pregnant; in others it is not a matter of any great consequence. In some societies a husband whose wife commits adultery is a cuckold to be ridiculed; in others such a husband is a victim to be pitied. By contrast, in *any* society it is a terrible thing to be badly burned or be diagnosed with a cancerous growth. One effect of this difference is that, unlike pleasure and pain, ideals based upon the pursuit of honor and avoidance of disgrace often disintegrate in the face of quite different and competing conceptions of what life should be like. We can deliberately *reject* the idea that unmarried pregnancies are disgraceful, whereas we cannot reject the fact that burns are painful. Another effect is that honor and disgrace are values highly dependent upon the customs and practices of particular times and places. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, which recounts the story of an unmarried mother in Puritan New England, describes a degree of shame and social ostracism that simply does not occur in contemporary Britain, say, where over 40% of children are born out of wedlock. By contrast, the world of *natural* values remains constant.

In these two ways, pain and pleasure differ from other values. This is what is meant by calling them "naturally" good and evil—a feature that seems to put hedonism at an advantage over other possible philosophies of value. Or so the Cyrenaics and others thought. It is a question to which we will return, but first there are other problems to be raised. If we accept for the moment that pleasure is the only natural good and that this gives us reason to make the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain our main aim in life, we are still faced with this question: What mode of life will result in the greatest amount of pleasure? According to the Cyrenaics, who held the popular version of hedonism, the best life is one as full as possible of *bodily* pleasures—food, drink, sex, and the like. This is a vision of the good life that still has its devotees. But if we were to take it seriously, we should soon discover that though pleasure and pains may be opposites—one good the other evil—in the most straightforward contexts they generally accompany each other. The result is that in the pursuit of bodily pleasure it is virtually impossible to avoid bodily pains.

For example, the pleasure of a good meal is in part dependent upon appetite, which is to say hunger. It is only by suffering (at least to a small degree) the pangs of hunger that we can really take pleasure in the feast that follows. Similarly, many people find it pleasurable to get wildly drunk, but drunkenness is usually be followed by nausea, headache, and hangover. Or again, the injection of heroin is said to induce a bodily and mental sensation of unsurpassed pleasure, but it also numbs the senses so that those under its influence frequently injure themselves and suffer considerable pain and discomfort later. Nor is the pleasure of sex unalloyed. Some people—all of us at some moments, perhaps—find what is commonly regarded as illicit sex alluring. But to engage in it in the world as it is would be to run the risk of venereal disease, herpes, AIDS, and other painful, sometimes fatal ailments. Even relatively safer forms of sexual gratification—pornographic shows and movies, for instance—usually bring some downside with them, if only the exorbitant price of compulsory drinks and the tawdry accommodation in which they are customarily offered.

The Cyrenaics ideal of the good life, therefore, is more attractive in theory than it is likely to be in real life. If we take it seriously, we shall see that it is unrealizable and hence worthless as an ideal. This is a point worth stressing, because hedonism does have a kind of allure, and this is in part related to its appeal to nature over against convention. Faced with moralizers forever preaching to us about duty or with the religious joy supposedly beloved of the pious, people often have the sneaking suspicion these attitudes are artificial in some important sense, held in place only the constraints of upbringing and convention. Left to our own devices, the thought is, the vast majority of human beings would opt for a life of pleasure, a life, moreover, filled with pleasures of the most straightforward kind. But in fact, as we have seen, even if social convention and constraint is discounted altogether, it is far from clear that such a life would indeed be possible. There are innumerable examples close to hand. One is gluttony. It is probably true that gluttony is no longer regarded as much of a sin—witness eating competitions—but those who indulge too much in the pleasure of eating become obese and thus subject to all the ailments obesity commonly brings, including diabetes, heart disease, and physical incapacity. Another is cigarette smoking. Most people smoke for the pleasure it gives, but once again smoking brings with it a very high risk of painful and sometimes incurable diseases of the heart and lungs. Occasionally those who suffer life-threatening illness as a result of smoking or overeating think that the pleasure they have had more than compensates even for such a dreadful end. But their judgment that the pleasure *outweighed* the pain does not alter the fact that the pursuit of a life filled with pleasure and devoid of pain has proved to be impossible.

4.3 The Epicureans

This impossibility, however, is purely contingent. It is not a logical one. There is no *necessary* connection between drunkenness and hangovers or sexual promiscuity and AIDS. These pleasures bring pains just because of the way the world happens to be. One implication we might draw from this observation is that the flaw in the Cyrenaics' conception of the good life does not lie in their giving pride of place to pleasure, but in their giving pride of place to some *kinds* of pleasure, namely straightforward bodily ones. This is a point observed by, amongst others, the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, who gave his name to an alternative version of hedonism—Epicureanism. (From what we know of Epicurus this is something of a misnomer, since his own philosophical interests seem to have been chiefly concerned with quite different questions).

This alternative version of hedonism has influenced common speech. An epicure is someone who savors the finer things of life—good wine, good food, good company, urbane literature, elegant dress, and so on. This use of the word faithfully reflects the Epicureans' view that if life is to be filled with pleasure, it can only be filled with those pleasures that, generally, do not have accompanying pains. Now these, we should observe, will be relatively mild and gentle pleasures—good wine but not too much of it, delicately flavored light meals of the sort that will appeal to the gourmet but not the gourmand, music and drama that delight but do not stir up debilitating emotions, and so on. In fact, as this range of examples indicates, the Epicureans' philosophy of pleasure and the good life contrasts quite sharply with popular conceptions of hedonism. It contains very little that would commonly be described as an indulgence, which is where the allure of hedonism generally lies. Indeed, far from licensing indulgence, it requires its adherents positively to forswear many of the things that people generally find most pleasurable.

It does so, of course, because only refined and gentle pleasures are capable of filling a life, since they are pleasures without accompanying pains. It is evident, though, that such pleasures have to be acquired. That is to say, preferring fine wines, light meals, urbane wit, and delicate drawings to copious quantities of food and drink, horror movies, stand-up comedy, and pulsating music (say) can only come about as a result of considerable constraint on the part of the pleasure seeker. We do not naturally restrict ourselves to a glass or two of the best wine. Left to their own devices, more people will take pleasure in the noise and rhythm of rock 'n roll or heavy metal than will savor the delicate harmonies of Boccherini's *Minuet*. This raises an important question. If Epicureanism advocates a life of pleasure of the sort we must *learn* to acquire, can it continue to claim the "natural" appeal that seems to be hedonism's great advantage over other philosophies? The excesses of Cyrenaic hedonism are mitigated in the Epicurean version. But if Epicureanism requires us to relinquish natural pleasures and pains, the gain would appear to be more than outweighed by the loss.

To summarize, hedonism relies on the contention that pleasure is a natural good—the only natural good there is, in fact—and that pain is, conversely, the only natural evil. We have now seen, however, that were we to seek to maximize the pleasure in our lives and minimize the pain, we would have to adopt an Epicurean style of life, which is quite different from the one that hedonism is commonly thought to recommend. Seriously reflective hedonism is, then, a real philosophy of life; it gives us clear guidance about the best way to live. But the way of life it prescribes will not appeal to everyone. Those who aspire to political greatness or artistic achievement, say, will find it unworthy; those who seek passion and excitement will find it dull. This means that the kind of life reflective hedonism

recommends is *not* universally appealing, because, once we have given it serious thought, we come to see that the life of pleasure recommends only *some* pleasures. Though it may be true—or at least not obviously false—that pleasure in the abstract is a natural rather than a conventional value, we cannot automatically infer from this that any particular set of pleasures will be naturally appealing. Many can only be acquired if we set aside our natural proclivities and instinctive appetites, including the ones that the most plausible version of hedonism must end up recommending (e.g., fine wines, light meals, etc). Whatever other merits these may have, since their acquisition requires restraint, they cannot be declared *naturally* good in the sense that appears to give hedonism such a promising start.

4.4 John Stuart Mill on Higher and Lower Pleasures

A defender of hedonism might respond to this conclusion by saying that it overlooks an important possibility. Epicurean pleasures are not superior to Cyrenaic ones simply because they don't bring pains in their wake. They are intrinsically *more* pleasurable than low-grade ones. If it is pleasure that makes life worth living, as hedonism claims, and if it is true that "higher" pleasures are more pleasurable, then they are preferable on hedonist grounds. In short, we can and ought to evaluate and discriminate *between* pleasures. This possibility is explored by a much more recent philosopher—John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). Mill is best known for his advocacy of Utilitarianism, a doctrine to be examined at length in Chapter 8. Utilitarianism has an importantly hedonist component (also to be explored further), but there is one aspect of Mill's defense that is directly relevant here.

Like the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans, Mill believed that pleasure is a natural good and pain is a natural evil, but he also thought that, while the pleasurable life is the best life, some pleasurable lives are evidently superior to others, even sometimes when the pleasure enjoyed might appear to be conspicuously less. By way of illustrating this possibility, he used an example that subsequently became famous. We can imagine a pig whose life is pretty well filled with swinish pleasures and we can imagine a Socrates whose philosophical endeavors, though intensely enjoyable, have nevertheless given rise to a somewhat frustrating perception that their ultimate outcome is a true appreciation of just how little he knows. The pig is fully satisfied and Socrates is dissatisfied—partially, at any rate. Confronted with this phenomenon, it might appear that hedonism has to commend the life of the pig as the superior one. But Mill thought it obvious, as most of us will probably agree, that the life of a Socrates dissatisfied is better than the life of a pig satisfied. If this is true, it naturally raises this question: How can the hedonist belief in pleasure as the only thing that is good in itself explain this difference? It is in connection with his attempt to offer such an explanation that Mill introduces a distinction between "higher" and "lower" pleasures. Pleasure is indeed the touchstone of value, he thought, but some pleasures are higher such that their pleasure outweighs lower pleasures, and this makes them better.

How can this be? Surely, if we declare some pleasures better than others, we must be invoking a standard of "better" other than the standard of pleasure itself. The existence of such a standard, however, must imply that pleasure is not the only good there is. In that case, hedonism is effectively abandoned. There are two moves that can be made in an effort to avoid this conclusion. First, it is sometimes said that the difference between higher and lower pleasures is to be explained in terms of *quantity* of pleasure. A higher pleasure brings *more* pleasure. However, such a distinction is entirely superficial. It cannot establish any fundamental difference between pleasures because it makes higher and lower pleasures commensurable, which is to say measurable on the same scale. Normally lead is heavy and

feathers are light, but they are commensurable, which means that a lot feathers can in fact weigh the same as a little lead. Similarly, if higher and lower pleasures are commensurable, we can arrive at a pleasure equivalent to the highest of pleasures if only we add enough of the lowest pleasures together. For instance, suppose we take the reading of Shakespeare to be a higher pleasure and the eating of donuts to be a lower pleasure. If the only difference between the two is quantity of pleasure, we can attain the equivalent of a pleasure in great drama if we eat a large enough quantity of donuts.

It is perfectly possible to accept this conclusion. Many people probably do think that pleasures are commensurable, and though they may never have expressly drawn the implication that the pleasures of Shakespeare or Beethoven can be compensated by sufficient numbers of donuts or episodes of a soap opera, they may be happy to do so. However, this is tantamount to agreeing that *quantity* of pleasure cannot provide us with the means to discriminate between pleasures in the way that Mill wants, thus denying that there is any real difference between higher and lower pleasures.

Mill himself, however, did not appeal to quantity. He thought that higher pleasures brought a different and better *quality* of pleasure. Now while the appeal to quality certainly avoids the problem that the appeal to quantity encounters, it is difficult to know whether it provides any alternative solution at all, at least, in the way Mill explains how we are tell higher quality pleasures from lower quality ones. His method of discriminating between the two makes crucial use of different resulting preferences on the part of people who have experience of both. On the face of it, this seems a sensible procedure. How could anyone decide between the respective merits of x and y, except by giving careful consideration to both? This, however, is only a necessary condition of rational adjudication between the two; it is not a sufficient condition. In other words, while it is indeed impossible to decide between two things if we are ignorant of one of them, experience of both is no guarantee that we are in a position to make such an adjudication.

For instance, suppose we ask someone who has listened to both opera and country music which is the higher pleasure and her answer is "opera." There are two possible explanations for this answer. It could be that the two sorts of music generate different qualities of pleasure, that the person who has experienced both has the sensitivity to discriminate between these qualities, and that she has found the pleasure opera gives her to be of a higher caliber than the pleasure she experienced from country. This seems to be how Mill imagines it works. Unfortunately for him, there is an alternative and equally *good* explanation, namely that there is no qualitative difference; she simply finds listening to opera more pleasurable than listening to country.

To distinguish between qualitatively higher and lower pleasures, it is evidently essential that the adjudicator's preference is to be explained in the first way, not in the second way. Otherwise, the move from quantity to quality has accomplished nothing. Yet how could we ever know that this was so? *Whichever* is the true explanation, her verdict will always come out the same. But if we cannot know that the first is the true explanation, we do not have a method of discriminating between quality of pleasures. The unhappy result is that however much testimony we assemble from however large a number of judges, we will never be accumulating evidence for the claim that some pleasures are higher and others are lower. Each and every verdict will be open to precisely the same ambiguity of interpretation.

Mill did not actually use the method he advocates. He thought he already knew which pleasures were higher in advance of *any* method. Consequently, if someone who had tried both had actually told him that (say) warm baths were a higher pleasure than philosophy, he would have dismissed this as the judgment of an ignoramus. This suggests that Mill's

appeal to the authority of competent judges is not to be interpreted as *evidence* of higher pleasures, but as a criterion or test. The judgment of people well educated (with respect to a specific activity) is superior because they are well educated, and a pleasure can be declared of higher quality if the relevantly better-educated people prefer it. So, for instance, we can say that a piece of music gives a higher quality of pleasure if it is a fact that those who know a great deal about music prefer it. Similarly, we can declare a wine to generate a higher pleasure if it is preferred by those who have done a lot of wine tasting.

There are several problems with this alternative strategy. Is there in fact sufficient unanimity between competent judges, or would we find that the quality of a pleasure varies depending upon whom we ask? Must competent judges prefer on grounds of pleasure, or are there other grounds upon which their preferences might be based? Even if these questions can be answered satisfactorily, there remains the same question as before. How do we know that those who have listened to a lot of music or done a great deal of wine tasting have *more refined* tastes, not merely *different* tastes from those who have not? Until this question is answered, Mill's account of higher and lower pleasures, whichever way we interpret it, remains a piece of arbitrary stipulation.

The appeal to higher and lower pleasures, then, accomplishes little and raises more questions than it settles. It is important to stress, however, that nothing that has been said so far runs counter to the view, which Mill obviously shared, that some of the activities in which human beings take pleasure are better than others. All that has been shown is that the mark of their being "better" cannot be that they are productive of a superior quality pleasure. We can indeed take pleasure in higher things, but what makes them higher is not the pleasure they give us, but something else about the activities themselves. From this it follows that there something other than pleasure must make things good, and hence that strict hedonism is false.

4.5 Sadistic Pleasures

Hedonists might reply that this refutation of their philosophy succeeds only if we first accept one of the premises from which Mill's argument began, namely that the life of a Socrates dissatisfied is better than that of a pig satisfied. But perhaps we need not accept this. Indeed, a consistent hedonist ought not to accept this. If pleasure is the only natural good, then *any* life filled with more pleasure than pain is as good as any other, and it is better than a life filled largely with pain and dissatisfaction. To accept this is to accept that, contrary to what Mill and perhaps most people think, Socrates has reason to envy the pig, since the pig leads a better life. The fact that neither we nor Socrates, given our abilities and interests, would find pleasurable the sort of life the pig likes misleads us into thinking that the pig's life is not a good one. But from a persistent hedonist's point of view, it *is* a good one, because it is the more pleasurable, and pleasure is the sole natural good. Of course, a human life filled with pleasure will contain many activities different from that of the pig, but it will not contain any more pleasure, and hence it will not be any better. Thus, it can be argued, hedonism avoids the difficulties which Mill's appeal to higher and lower pleasures encounters by denying that there are any differences in the merits of different kinds of pleasures.

Such a denial brings us back, in fact, to the dispute between Socrates and Callicles. Socrates, it will be recalled, drew Callicles's attention to the fact that, as far as satisfaction of wants goes, there is no difference between those who succeed in the demanding and ennobling tasks they set themselves and those who succeed in the lazy and vulgar lifestyles

with which they are content. The point can as easily be put in terms of pleasure. If pleasure is all that matters, we cannot justify a preference for the pleasure that a surgeon takes in saving the life of a child by means of an immensely demanding operation over the pleasure a sadist takes in the sufferings of the animal he is torturing. Yet it seems obvious to most people that there is a crucially important difference between the two.

This particular example is mine, but Callicles, it will be recalled, when presented by Socrates with a contrast between heroic and vulgar pleasures, accepts that there is indeed a difference to be explained. It is this acceptance which results in his losing the argument. Had he not accepted this difference, the argument would have had to take a different direction. Similarly, if thoroughgoing hedonists insist that, insofar as it is true that a torturer gets just as much pleasure from her trade as does a healer, the torturer and the healer lead equally good lives, then an appeal to alleged differences between the two cannot provide a counter to their thesis. A *consistent* hedonist does not have the problem to which Callicles opens himself up.

To some minds this just shows how depraved a doctrine hedonism is. But in terms of philosophical cogency, this is not so evident. In the first place, we should note that hedonists are not recommending torture as a way of life. Neither is hedonism necessarily egoistic, which is to say, concerned only with one's own pleasure. Hedonists need not deny that the lives of the torturer's victims are about as bad as can be. On the contrary, given the hedonist view that pain is a natural *evil*, they will positively assert this. Their view is rather that if someone with a highly abnormal psychology were to enjoy torture in exactly the way that most of us enjoy our favorite activities, then his life would be as enjoyable ours. Although hedonists would hesitate to expressly commend the life of the torturer, since she has caused a lot of pain and suffering, it is difficult to see that they can avoid regarding it as having *something* to be said for it, namely that she got a lot of pleasure from life.

It is this last point that flies in the face of received wisdom. Whereas hedonists may think that the sadist's getting pleasure from her hurtful activities does not shift the overall balance from negative to positive, they must regard it as a point on the positive side. To put the point another way, from the hedonist perspective, it would have been even worse if there was *no* pleasure to offset the victims' pain. By contrast, for most people it is this very same fact that makes the sadist's activities *worse*, not better. Applied to this sort of case, then, hedonism is sharply in conflict with conventional wisdom and highly unpalatable to normal sensibilities. Yet the mere fact that some view or other is unconventional or unpopular does not in itself show it to be false. Those who first advanced the view that Earth is not flat were also denying conventional wisdom. To refute hedonism as a philosophy of value, something more than appeal to counterintuitive examples of the sort we have been considering is needed. In order to find a most substantial objection, we should now turn to another Greek philosopher, Aristotle.

4.6 Aristotle on Pleasure

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was a student of Plato, for a time tutor to Alexander the Great, and director of the Lyceum at Athens, where he lectured on and conducted original research into almost every branch of human knowledge. Most of his thought has come down to us by means of lecture notes—sometimes his and sometimes those of his students, probably. It is in one such set of lecture notes, called *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*), that his thoughts on pleasure are to be found. Aristotle was not averse to the view that pleasure is a good. In fact, in *NE* he expressly says that "necessarily pleasure is a good," and he even

describes the chief good as "a kind of pleasure" (Aristotle, 2002: VII 13). But he thought that we cannot adequately assess the merits of hedonism unless we inquire closely into what is meant by "pleasure."

When hedonists recommend pleasure, just what are they recommending? We began with an opposition between pleasure and pain. It is in terms of this opposition that the Cyrenaic and Epicurean versions of hedonism are formulated. Yet it is clear that there is an important asymmetry between the two. The word "pain" can be used to refer both to a particular kind of bodily sensation and to any unwanted experience in general. A knife can cause a pain in my leg and an unkind remark can give me pain also. But the two sorts of pain are not the same. The first is a locatable sensation; the second is a psychological experience.

When we speak of pleasure, however, we cannot be referring to a locatable sensation. I can have a pain in my leg, but I can never have a pleasure. Of course, some bodily sensations can be pleasurable—the sensations associated with food, drink, and sex, for instance—but this does not make pleasure itself a sensation. The right thing to say is that food, drink, sex, and so on are productive of *pleasurable sensations*, not that they are productive of *pleasure*. This is an important point to grasp for two reasons. First, it throws a different light on the idea that pleasure is a natural good. Let us agree that there is reason to call physical pain a natural evil because it is a sensation which humans and other animals instinctively seek to avoid. (It should be noted that not all philosophers accept that pain is in this sense a natural evil, partly because human beings do sometimes appear positively to value pain (e.g., in initiation ceremonies).) But if there is no sensation of pleasure corresponding to the sensation of pain, then there is nothing that is a natural good in quite the way that pain is a natural evil. The most we can say is that there are sensations which are pleasurable—those associated with sex are an obvious example—and that people naturally seek these sensations. Whether they seek them *because* they are pleasurable is another matter. Consequently, even if we agree that human beings naturally seek sexual gratification, we cannot straight off conclude that they naturally seek pleasure. At the very least, the picture is more complex than it is with pain.

Second, while there are indeed pleasurable sensations, other things can be pleasurable also. A warm bath can be pleasurable, but so can a conversation or a game of tennis. Because they were unduly impressed with the pain/pleasure distinction, the early hedonists tended to overlook the fact that other things besides sensations can be pleasurable. When they spoke of pleasure, they thus focused upon pleasurable sensations. As Aristotle remarks:

> Since neither the best nature nor the best disposition either is or is thought to be the same for all, neither do all pursue the same pleasure, though all do pursue pleasure. . . . It is the bodily pleasures, however that have taken over the title to the name pleasure, because these are the ones we most often encounter, and because everyone shares in them; so because they are the only ones they recognize, people think they are the only ones there are.
>
> (Aristotle, 2002: VII 13)

In other words, pleasure is not one thing. Consequently, though it is true, on Aristotle's view, that human beings seek pleasure, this does not imply that they all seek one type of sensation. In fact,

> there are actually pleasures that involve no pain or appetite . . . pleasures [include] activities and ends . . .; and not all pleasures have an end different from themselves. . . this is why it is not right to say that pleasure is perceptible process.
>
> (Aristotle, 2002: VII 12)

What Aristotle means to emphasize here is that activities in which people engage for pleasure may differ in important respects. Someone may engage in sexual intercourse for the pleasurable sensations it produces. In this case, in Aristotle's language, the pleasure resides in the end of the activity, namely the sensations it produces. But not all pleasurable activities are like sex. Golf, for instance, gives great pleasure to many millions of people, but to play golf for pleasure is not to play for some end that can be characterized independently of the activity. The pleasure does not lie in a special sensation of the nervous system that swinging a golf club produces; it lies in the game itself. This is what Aristotle means by saying that "not all pleasures have an end different from themselves."

In short, there are indeed different kinds of pleasure, but pleasures are not sensations with differing degrees of intensity, which is the way crude versions of hedonism tend to think of them. Seeking pleasure can be a matter of seeking the means to induce pleasurable sensations, but it need not be. In most cases, pursuing pleasure means engaging in enjoyable activity. To enjoy what you are doing is to be thoroughly absorbed in it. This is what Aristotle has in mind when he says that pleasure is not a "perceptible process," but an "unimpeded activity." To be absorbed in an activity is to engage in it for its own sake, to regard it as a source of interest and value. If I enjoy restoring antiques, this means that I find the activity full of interest and worth engaging in irrespective of what other benefits (e.g., money) it may bring. But this necessarily carries the implication that the activity *itself* has value, independently of the pleasure it gives. Hedonism supposes that I enjoy the activity because it gives me pleasure. This is in fact the wrong way round. Rather, the activity gives me pleasure precisely because it is one that I enjoy. Aristotle elsewhere makes a similar point about about victory. To be victorious, and to be honored for it, gives us pleasure because victory and honor are themselves good things. Their goodness is not derived from the fact that they give pleasure.

Aristotle's analysis of pleasure casts a rather different light on hedonism. If we take hedonism to be the instruction to seek pleasure and enjoyment, we can see that this is not the simple injunction we might have supposed. Any such advice should really be expressed in the plural "seek pleasures." But this leaves us with the question "Which ones?" Aristotle, like Mill, will say "Good ones," but unlike Mill, he sees that the mark of their goodness must arise from something other than their merely being pleasures. At the most general level, Aristotle would say, the hedonists are right to want a pleasant life, and the pleasantest life is a happy one. The value of such a life is twofold—pleasure and happiness. But the pleasure arises from the happiness. So, if we want to know what a good life is, that is, the sort of life in which we ought to take pleasure, we need to know more about happiness than pleasure.

5
Naturalism and Virtue

One of the most compelling arguments against hedonism emerges from Aristotle's analysis of pleasure, but it would be quite wrong to infer from this that Aristotle rejected hedonism outright. On the contrary, he agreed with the hedonists in believing pleasure to be a highly desirable aspect of life. Their mistake did not lie in valuing pleasure, but in a mistaken conception of what pleasure is. They thought of pleasure as an experience of a special kind produced by certain activities. They thought of pleasure as an experience that explains why we value those activities, just as the fact that some activities cause us pain explains why we view them negatively. In other words, the hedonists construed pleasure as a kind of sensation, the positive counterpart to pain.

However, this is a mistake, though a mistake that later philosophers (e.g., Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)) have also made. It leads us to think that an activity is valuable if it is pleasure producing. On Aristotle's account, the relationship is the other way round; an activity is pleasure producing if it is valuable. So, I get pleasure from golf, for example, because I think it a good game to play, and I find it even more satisfying when I manage to play it well. If we apply this analysis to the good life in general, then, the focus of our aspiration should not be pleasure in the sense of psychological diversion or bodily gratification, but the pursuit of activities that are worth engaging in. That is why successfully engaging in them gives us pleasure and satisfaction. Taken in combination, the outcome of a good and rewarding human life is not *hedos* but *eudaimonia*.

5.1 *Eudaimonia* and the Good

Eudaimonia comes from Greek words meaning "good" and "spirit." It is often translated as "happiness," but this is not an altogether helpful translation. In fact, the English expression "being in good spirits," which comes closer to a literal translation of *eudaimonia*, conveys its meaning rather better than "happiness" does. It suggests something episodic, however, rather than something more enduring, so perhaps a better translation is "well-being." But whatever English equivalent we settle on, the point to stress is that the Greek word carries with it the idea of life in the world as one of active engagement, rather than simply passive experience. "The happy man," on Aristotle's picture, is not the person whose life is filled with pleasurable experiences, but the person who excels at all those activities and aptitudes that are characteristic of human beings. Well-being is misconceived as mere contentment with one's lot. It properly lies in the exercise of healthy appetites, the

imaginative and productive use of one's mental faculties, and the establishment of good personal, professional, and public relationships. It is this concept of human well-being that this chapter will explore.

For Aristotle, human beings are simply one type of animal, the species *homo sapiens*. Now this is incontestably true, however liable we are to forget it, and given this fact, we can expect to learn important things about ourselves by considering our natural constitution and our distinctive place in the natural world. The first step in learning these lessons is to see that the question "What is a good life?" can be asked for a very wide range of living things. Consider, for instance, the simple case of a potted plant. We know that there are conditions under which plants flourish and others under which they wither and die (e.g., too wet, too dry, too light, too dark, too warm, or too cold). Furthermore, just what these conditions are differ according to the type of plant (e.g., conditions that suit a cactus will not suit a tropical orchid). From this it follows that we can say that there are good and bad living conditions for plants.

In a similar way, animals sicken and die under different conditions. A horse cannot live on meat, a lion cannot live on oats, a fish cannot live on land, and a bird cannot survive under the water. But the good life for an animal is not just a matter of survival. A plant or an animal might survive, but in a weak, sickly, or malformed condition, so it is necessary to speak of *flourishing* and not merely surviving, if we are to distinguish what it is for a plant or an animal to live well. Now the conditions under which a plant or an animal flourishes we can call, along with Aristotle, the "good" for that thing, and given those conditions we can describe the thing in question as living well and being a good instance of its kind. A regime in which a lion, for instance, has the right amounts of the right sort of food, exercise, and company will produce a lion that is both physically in excellent shape and one whose behavior is just what is natural to lions. Conversely, as we know from the behavior of animals in zoos and circuses, if a lion is caged, isolated from its own kind, and fed without having to hunt, its physique will deteriorate and its behavior become neurotic.

In just the same fashion, Aristotle thought that we could discover the "good for man," and hence what it is for a person to live well. That is to say, it is possible to delineate both the sorts of activities that constitute human flourishing (i.e., those things in which it is natural for human beings to excel, and the conditions which make this possible). In this way, Aristotle arrives at a view of the good life importantly different from that of his predecessors. Whereas the hedonists and Plato looked for the one thing that was good above all else and good in itself (though of course each came up with a very different answer and also differed about how 'the good' was related to the good life), Aristotle's view carries the implication that there is no *one* good, that what is and what is not good must always be relativized to some natural kind or other. There is no such thing as "good, *period*," we might say, only "good *for*." What is good for a cactus is not good for an orchid, what is good for a horse is not what is good for a lion, and so on indefinitely, including what is good for a human being.

The good, then, is not some abstract object or property that, as it were, radiates its goodness independently of human beings and other creatures. Rather it is a mode of existence determined by the natures of different creatures. At the same time, to make good relative in this way is not to make it subjective in the way that Callicles, Thrasymachus, and so on do, because whether something is or is not good for a horse, a lion, or a sycamore tree is a matter of ascertainable fact. We cannot *decide* that oats are good for a lion, because lions either do or do not flourish on a diet of oats; so too with human beings. There is no need for us to resolve that parental care will be good for children or to reach agreement that

psychologically stable human beings are better than neurotics and psychotics. These are matters of discoverable fact.

Philosophers sometimes mark this difference by distinguishing between attributive and predicative uses of the word "good." An example of the attributive use is when I say "This cake is good." Now it is evidently possible to interpret this use (as subjectivists do) as declaratory or expressive; to say "This cake is good" just means "I really like this cake." On this interpretation, the word "good" very often does no more than to express personal liking or preference. But when I say "Aspirin is a good painkiller," I am using the word "good" *predicatively*, and what I say makes a claim about the world and does not merely express a preference. I may like the taste of aspirin (if it has a taste), but all the liking in the world will not make it *true* that aspirin is a good painkiller if, as a matter of fact, it is not.

On the Aristotelian conception the expressions "a good person" and "a good life" use the word "good" predicatively. Accordingly, we can ask in any particular case whether it is used truly or not. Our ability to answer the question, however, depends upon our understanding the proper basis for such judgments. Just as a good (specimen of an) orchid is one that exhibits all the things that make for excellence in a plant of that kind, so a good person is someone whose life exhibits those features that are distinctively human excellences. Thus, answering the question "Is x a good person?" requires us to know what human beings at their distinctive best are like, and answering the question "What sort of life ought we to want?" will consist in describing such a human being.

5.2 Human Nature as Rational Animal

But what *is* the good life for a human being? In the *Nichomachean Ethics* it is said to be "activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (Aristotle, 2002: 1094b), a pious sounding expression scarcely illuminating as it stands. Its meaning, however, is actually not so difficult to discern. Despite the initial impression this phrase may make on modern minds, Aristotle's conception of the good life for a human being has almost nothing to do with religion or even with morality as we normally understand it. The Greek word translated "soul" is *psyche*, from which we get our word "psychology." It refers to the mind or rational faculty that human beings possess rather than any spiritual essence. "Virtue" is a translation of the word *arete*, meaning "excellence," so that "in accordance with virtue" just means "in the best possible way." Thus, Aristotle's conception of the good life is one in which we use our minds to make, and act, and think in the best possible ways. This is, of course, the good life in the abstract. It needs to be given content by appeal to the actual nature of human beings.

It is important to emphasize here that Aristotle's emphasis on "rational" activities does not imply that intellectual endeavor or academic inquiry makes up the good life. Rather, it is intelligence in the full range of human activities that he has in mind, including the sort that potters, politicians, and parents may employ in their respective tasks and occupations, no less than scientists and philosophers. Indeed, Aristotle puts *phronesis* (practical wisdom) rather than intellectual brilliance at the center of a good life, because even the highest forms of intellectual inquiry need to be guided by good sense if they are to be pursued fruitfully and well.

The picture of the ideal human life that emerges from Aristotle's conception of the good is a moderate conception rather than a heroic one. It is bound to strike us as sound and sensible rather than exciting or inspiring. Aristotle thinks that those who can be shown to lead good lives are middle aged, well educated, financially secure, and socially respected.

Neither slaves, nor the poor, nor the ignorant, nor the stupid could lead good lives, for to be any of these things is to be deficient as a human being, much in the way that a tree may be stunted or an animal deformed. Moreover, those who single-mindedly pursue some one goal or strive to excel in just one thing (e.g., in sport, music, or politics), and who do so to the detriment of prospering economically, making friends, having a family, attaining social standing or getting a rounded education, also lead impoverished lives. Such a life is a distorted one in just the way that an apple tree which has been drastically pruned to produce a higher yield of fruit is distorted. For Aristotle, it is all-round general excellence that matters, not superexcellence in just one or two things.

One obvious implication of the view that the lives of slaves, the poor, and the mentally or physically handicapped are not good lives is that a humanly good life is reserved for the talented and successful. This has an offensive ring to modern ears, because declaring that the lives of the handicapped and so on are not good seems to imply that they lead morally worthless lives. However, the expression "a good life" has a moral connotation in the contemporary world (to be discussed in Chapter 7) that it did not have for Aristotle. If we make the mental effort to think past contemporary assumptions, we will see that Aristotle's conception implies only what most people would agree upon, namely that it is better to be free than to be someone else's slave, better to live in reasonable prosperity than in poverty, and better to be talented (or at least accomplished) in some things than in nothing. These judgments, for Aristotle, are neither fundamental moral or evaluative opinions with which others may or may not agree, nor are they the expression of his personal preferences, or even natural preferences of the kind to which the hedonists appealed. Rather they are statements of fact. This raises our next question: On what is this account of the "facts" based?

5.3 Ethics, Ethology, and Evolution

Aristotle, in common with most Greeks, thought that everything has a *telos* or end at which it naturally aims, and that depending upon the mode of existence of the thing in question, this end will be reached more or less well. Thus an oak tree is the end or *telos* of every acorn, and, given the right conditions, an acorn will develop into a tree of a certain shape, size, color, and so on. The *telos* of the acorn, then, is to be found in the sort of picture of an oak tree that appears in botany books. Such a picture does not show us what one particular oak tree looks like, as photograph would, but what *any* oak tree *ought* to look like. Given abnormal conditions (e.g., not enough water, too much exposure to sea breezes, etc.), individual trees will deviate from this end; they will be stunted or deformed in some way.

Judgments about the maturity or deformity of an oak tree are based on the biological nature of the species *quercus*, something about which we think we now know a lot more than Aristotle did, thanks largely to evolutionary biology and the science of genetics. But though we are here in the realms of genetics and biology, we can still refer to the *right* conditions and employ evaluative terms like "stunted" and "deformed." This gives us a clue to answering normative or evaluative questions about human beings. Facts about right and wrong and good and bad, on Aristotle's account, are derived from facts about the biology of things. Thus our knowledge of human good is a function of our biological knowledge of the species *homo sapiens*.

Aristotle was one of the greatest thinkers of all time, and by the standards of the ancient world, his biological understanding was highly advanced. He thought that each natural kind, including human kind, has a distinctive and discoverable function (i.e., a *telos* peculiar to that kind, and from that *telos* we can derive the good for that thing). Under the

inspiration of this conception, Aristotle himself produced work that made him both the founding father of biology and a major influence upon its development for centuries to come. But more recent biology, especially since Darwin, has made such great advances that, however impressive in its own day, Aristotelian biology has now been completely superseded. Does this mean that the ethical and evaluative implications of Aristotelianism are outmoded also?

For a good many years it was thought so, partly because modern biology no longer believes in the existence of radically separated species that have been distinct from the beginning of creation. Furthermore, biologists came to abandon the idea of studying the physiological character of plants and animals in terms of overall function. In modern biology we can describe the function of some part of the anatomy—the function of the heart in the anatomy of a lion, for instance—but we cannot sensibly talk about the function of the *lion*. The heart serves an end in the body of the lion, but the lion does not serve any end. Even if careful observation of lions reveals characteristic patterns of both physiology and behavior, modern biology holds that the explanation of these will be found, not in some *telos* towards which all lions naturally strive, but in their genetic structure, of which these characteristics are a manifestation or expression. Thus modern biology, rather than pointing us towards the study of individual species with a view to discovering their distinctive *function*, points us to the study of a microbiological structure that will reveal a distinctive *genome*.

It seems then that modern biology is not the sort of study that could allow us to derive facts about right and wrong and good and bad in the way that Aristotelian biology could. And yet Aristotelianism has undergone something of a revival in recent years. This is because, alongside biology, there has grown up a study much closer to Aristotle's. This study is one which may allow us to speak in some of the ways that he did. It is the study of ethology. The very name "ethology" indicates the connections of this relatively new science with the concerns of the ancient Greeks, because it is derived via Latin from Greek words meaning "the study and depiction of character." In its modern sense, ethology can be described as the study of animal behavior in its natural environment. Among its first well-known exponents was Konrad Lorenz, whose famous book *On Aggression* was based on an ethological study of wolves.

If we set ourselves to study not the physiology but the behavior of animals in their natural environment, we come to see, ethologists tell us, that there are conditions under which animals cannot thrive and in which their natural behavior may undergo destructive and even self-destructive alteration. For instance, the male of one species of fish is armed with a sting, whose purpose is to protect the egg-carrying female from predators. But if a male and female are removed to the safety and confinement of a small tank in which there are no predators, the male will eventually turn its sting upon the female herself. This behavior is clearly abnormal since it works to the destruction of the fish and its progeny, and it comes about because of the unnatural conditions in which they have been placed. These conditions are simply not good for the fish.

Examples of this sort can be multiplied very easily, and our understanding of natural function is further enriched by evolutionary biology. It is possible to show, in many cases, that functions like the protective sting just described emerged in the course of evolutionary adaptation. Plants and animals have developed the traits they possess because this equips them better for survival. Darwin's expression "survival of the fittest" is well known for the important part it has played in the advancement of the biological sciences. But "fittest" is a normative term that aims to describe what is naturally good and advantageous.

Can the sciences of ethology and evolutionary biology be extended to human beings? The combination of the two, together with explorations from the social sciences, has resulted in "sociobiology," the name of an inquiry specially associated with the Harvard entomologist E. O. Wilson, who wrote a famous book entitled *Sociobiology: the new synthesis*. Wilson's idea is that we should

> consider man in the free spirit of natural history, as though we were zoologists from another planet completing a catalog of the social species on Earth. In this macroscopic view the humanities and social sciences shrink to specialized branches of biology; history, biography and fiction are the research protocols of human ethology; and anthropology and sociology constitute the sociobiology of a single primate species.
>
> (Wilson, 1975, 2000: 547)

This sort of study aims to combine insights from evolutionary theory, genetics, ethology, and sociology in a way that will generate an account of what is the most natural, and hence most successful, mode of existence for human beings. Wilson's later, much shorter book *On Human Nature* is perhaps the most straightforward account of this approach, but something of the same sort can be found in Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape*, and later editions of Richard Dawkins highly successful book *The Selfish Gene*. More recently, the noted Dutch primatologist Frans de Waal has advocated the study of human beings as socially interacting animals with an evolved biology modeled on his studies of apes (and other animals). In *Good Natured: the origin of right and wrong in humans and other animals* (1996), de Waal aims to show that recognizably moral behavior is not confined to human beings, and that sympathy, co-operation, and even guilt and self-sacrifice can all be observed in other animals. He thereby suggests contra Dawkins and conventional interpretations of the survival of the fittest that selfishness is not our natural condition, and that an ethical concern for others has a deep biological root. The ambiguous title of his book neatly captures this; we are good by nature, and what is natural is what good for us.

5.4 Virtue Theory

Sociobiology might be said to be a modern equivalent of Aristotelian biology. It holds out the promise of answering the question "What is the good life for human beings?" Its philosophical importance is further underlined by the fact that Aristotelian ideas have made a significant comeback in moral philosophy also, as is evidenced by the titles of recent books by Alasdair MacIntyre (*Dependent Rational Animals*) and Philippa Foot (*Natural Goodness*). These philosophers (among others) think that there is much to be gained by focusing on the predicative rather than the attributive use of "good. They further believe that too much attention has been given to what are called "thin" moral concepts, such as good and bad and right and wrong, and not enough attention has been given to contrasting "thick" moral concepts, such as generosity, cowardice, foolhardiness, and prudence.

This approach to moral philosophy, often called "virtue theory," has three important attractions. First, it provides a plausible alternative to both ethical subjectivism and the kind of moral realism discussed in Chapter 1. As Alasdair MacIntyre writes:

> Whatever it means to say of some particular member of some particular species that it is flourishing, that it is achieving its good, or that this or that is good for it, in that it conduces to its flourishing – assertions that we can make about thistles and cab-

> bages, donkeys and dolphins, in the same sense of 'flourishing' and the same sense of 'good' – it is difficult to suppose either that in making such assertions we are ascribing some non-natural property or that we are expressing an attitude, an emotion, or an endorsement.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1999: 79)

The point applies equally to human beings as to other creatures. Words like "healthy, "intelligent, "outgoing," and "lazy" have real descriptive content. To call someone "good" or declare their actions "right" tells us almost nothing about what they are like or have done. But to describe them as lazy or intelligent is to convey a good deal of information about them.

Second, such descriptions are determined not by our liking or disliking, but by the facts of their actions. When people run away from danger, it is simply false for me to describe their behavior as "brave," however sympathetic I may be to their predicament and their fear. Conversely, if they hold their ground and confront the danger, this fact compels me to describe their action as brave, even if I have always disliked them and wish them ill; so too with all the other virtue words. I cannot properly be called "kind" if I laugh other people's distress, even if I care nothing about them. I cannot avoid the charge of laziness if I neglect my work and stand around doing nothing, even if I (and others) think the work is not specially interesting or important.

Third, the descriptive content of virtue words is such that it has a normative element built in, so to speak. While "good" and "bad" seem to say no more than "nice" and "nasty," words such as "generous" and "cowardly" are more like "nutritious" and "poisonous." To call something nutritious is both to describe it *and* to recommend it; to say that something is poisonous is to describe it *and* to warn against it on the basis of that description. In both cases fact and value come together, and they do so because nutrition is a function of the properties of the food and the nature of the creature for which it is nourishing. Oats are not nutritious to a lion, but they are to a horse, and this is because of the natural properties of oats, lions, and horses. In a similar way, virtue theory holds that generosity, bravery, kindness, and the like are character traits that count as virtues, not because people happen to applaud them, but because of the facts of human nature—our vulnerability and dependence on others.

What then is human flourishing? The answer to this question will provide the naturalist's account of the good life, but it is an answer that will only be arrived at with systematic and extensive investigation. That investigation may not follow exactly the sort of path de Waal lays out. Human beings are complex creatures around whose lives impressive social, political, and cultural structures have arisen over several millennia. Accordingly, any plausible account of their flourishing will have to take the social and cultural influences into account, as well as the biological and ethological influences. It will have to be as much anthropological as biological. The ambition, however, is that the central questions of moral philosophy will finally be answered by the sciences of anthropology and evolutionary biology in a way that is different from, but nonetheless much in, the spirit of Aristotle.

5.5 The Natural as a Norm

This is a highly attractive prospect to many contemporary thinkers, especially given the prestige of the life sciences. Yet significant philosophical difficulties lie in the way of completing that program. Ethology is defined as the study of the behavior of animals in their

natural environment, and this definition raises the first question: What *is* the natural environment of man? Wilson remarks: "*Homo sapiens* is ecologically a very peculiar species. It occupies the widest geographical range and maintains the highest local densities of any of the primates" (Wilson, 1975, 2000: 547). That is to say, unlike almost all other species (e.g., bears or tigers) human beings live in strikingly *different* environments—just compare the environment of the Inuit of the Arctic Circle with that of the Kalahari desert dwellers. And Wilson's point about population density also directs our attention to the fact that human modes of existence differ enormously. Think of the environment and lifestyle of someone resident in New York or London in contrast to that of an East African tribesman or the life of a Tibetan monk in comparison with the life of a Parisian socialite. These are differences far greater than any that obtain between other primates. Gorillas and chimpanzees live in only a few parts of Earth, and the size of the groups they live in are pretty much the same wherever they live. So, which of the vastly different environments in which human beings live is their *natural* environment, and which of the many modes of existence that history records is the *natural* one for them?

One response to these questions is to look beyond all the variety and search for some underlying unity. According to Wilson, "Human nature . . . is a hodgepodge of special genetic adaptations to an environment largely vanished, the world of the Ice-Age hunter-gatherer" (Wilson, 1978, 1995: 187). The underlying unity on this account is a distant evolutionary history in which human nature was formed, a nature that human beings share and can still be detected in the many environments in which they have made their home.

This idea—that the natural behavior of human beings is more easily discerned in relatively "primitive" societies such as those of contemporary hunter-gatherers—is one that many people find attractive and plausible. They have a sense that life in the modern city is a kind of cultural accretion on top of a more basic human mode of existence. Moreover, it is on the strength of this idea that judgments of relative superiority are often made. It is commonplace to hear the "naturalness" of the life of the North American Indians, say, commended and contrasted with the "artificiality" of the life of the commuter in a modern city. And there is a quite widely held belief that, for instance, the European nuclear family is not as natural as the extended family which still persists in less developed parts of the world.

This use of "natural" as a term of commendation is widespread—think of the expressions "natural childbirth" or "natural remedy"—and for that reason extensively used by advertisers: "100% natural," whether applied to food or fibers, is a selling point. Its negative counterpart, "unnatural," is not so commonly used nowadays (though at one time certain sexual desires and practices were described as unnatural), though the term "artificial" often serves much the same purpose. But whichever terms we use, any naturalistic account of value requires us to be able to do two things—to draw a distinction between the natural and the unnatural and to explain why the former is preferable. Neither task, as we shall see, is easily accomplished.

How are we to know what is and what is not natural? The sociobiologist's answer is straightforward enough in outline. What is natural is what suits human beings as they have evolved, their "special genetic adaptations to an environment largely vanished, the world of the Ice-Age hunter-gatherer," to quote Wilson again. The problem with this criterion is that our knowledge of that distant history is very limited indeed. If, in order to determine what is and what is not natural for human beings, we need to know about Ice-Age hunter-gatherers, the truth is that we are largely limited to speculation. It will not do to appeal, as sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists sometimes do, to contemporary hunter-gatherers, because, as far as fitness to survive is concerned, the New York stockbroker is

as well *fitted* to survive as the Kalahari bushman, for the obvious reason that both *have* survived. Judged by the standard of ways in which it is possible for human beings to live given their evolved genetic inheritance, the two ways of life are at least equally good, and that of the New York stockbroker is probably better.

The implication is this. Presented with a choice between radically different styles of life, the question immediately arises "In which way should I live my own life?" The appeal to naturalness (i.e., suitability for creatures with our genetic inheritance) will not provide an answer. This is true, not just for the relatively abstract choice between lifestyles, but for almost all the other, more specific choices we might try to make on these grounds. There may indeed be many reasons to favor what is called "natural childbirth" over induction or Caesarian section, but these cannot be explained by or rooted in a sociobiological explanation of their naturalness. Similarly, a natural diet cannot be shown to enjoy any special relationship to our biological nature or our environment. When people speak of a "natural diet," they often have it in mind to draw a sharp contrast with what are called "junk" foods. Even if there are good reasons for recommending foods high in fiber and low in fat (though this is now contentious), one of them cannot be that these are natural foods. In the first place, many people naturally (i.e., left to their own devices) choose junk food. In the second place, a low-fiber and high-fat diet does not inevitably lead to death or ill health. Conversely, even healthy eaters sometimes die young.

But there is an even more important objection to the attempt to make natural a norm. The relationship between those who choose a healthy diet and the food they eat is not like the relationship between a tiger and the animals it hunts. Still, less is it like the relationship between a plant and the nutrients it extracts from the earth and the atmosphere. One crucial difference is this. Human beings can and do *think* about what they should eat and drink. They are neither driven by natural instinct alone, nor, in adult life, does it drive them very much. So, while a cow will simply turn away from meat, we can decide whether or not to eat it. In making this decision we can certainly take into account the fact that this food serves some useful biological function, but we can take other factors into account too, such as its taste, scarcity, or cost. All human beings do this in fact. It may be fashionable to suggest that less industrialized societies have more natural, additive-free diets, but the truth is that since time immemorial the poorest peasants in remote parts of India and China have added a wide variety of spices to their food, and they have reserved scarcer and/or more expensive foods for festive occasions.

The philosophical point is this. We naturally incline to certain foods more easily than others, and some of these foods serve certain biological ends especially well. Both facts are relevant in considering what to eat, and there may be some reason to call a diet that gives them pride of place natural. However, these are not the only facets of food that we can reasonably consider in constructing our diet. We are not obliged by nature or by anything else to lend them an importance above all others. We can *deliberate* about the merits of natural foods. The point can be generalized. There may be patterns of behavior and ways of life that we have good reason to call "natural." But from this fact, if and when it is one, nothing automatically follows about the good life. We can ask ourselves critically just how much weight we ought to give to it.

5.6 Is the "Good for Man" Good?

In these last examples "natural" has been taken to mean things to which we are instinctively disposed and which are well suited to our genetic makeup. The possibility of raising

critical questions about what comes naturally, in this sense, is in fact a very important one. So far we have been concerned to ask whether (when we replace his outdated biology with modern ethnology and evolutionary biology) we should endorse Aristotle's conception of the good as the good for (the species) man. What we have found is that it cannot provide a basis for deciding between a wide range of competing lifestyles. This is because it cannot single out just one form of life as naturally good for human beings, and even if it could, its naturalness would only be one consideration amongst others.

This last point leads on to a more profound criticism. Perhaps the way of life to which we are drawn by nature is something we have reason to resist. Perhaps some of the things that are *good for* human beings are not in fact *good* when viewed from a wider perspective. For example, it may well be natural for human beings to hunt and natural for them to take a real pleasure in the suffering and destruction of other animals. There is enough support for cruel sports in almost all times and cultures to suggest that the appetite for them, if not universal, is certainly deep seated and widespread. Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine a story which explains how bloodlust of this sort has evolutionary advantages, and hence is part of our evolved nature. But it is just as easy to see that from the point of view of the other animals involved, or from the detached point of view which concerns itself with pain and suffering wherever these are to found, this impulse in human beings, however natural or good for them, is not to be applauded or encouraged.

Similarly, I do not find it hard to imagine that ethology and/or evolutionary psychology might show racism or xenophobia to be deeply entrenched in the unself-conscious behavior of human beings. (There seems plenty of evidence for it.) I do not think, if such were found to be the case, that we would for long lack a plausible explanation of its place in our evolutionary development. If so, however, we would not necessarily have found reason to commend this natural human impulse or to cease to strive against its manifestation. Racial hatred may be as natural as maternal instinct, but that does not mean it is equally commendable.

In short, though earlier arguments have raised serious doubts about the possibility, even if the sciences of ethology, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology enabled us to outline with reasonable certainty and clarity a manner of life which we had reason to call the good for human beings, we would still be left with this question: Is the good for man good? To put the issue like this is to separate two questions which have so far been run together, namely "What is a good life?" and "What is good?" But the two questions are connected. One answer to the first is that the good life consists in *realizing* the good.

5.7 Natural Good and Freedom

At first it may sound implausible to think that what is natural to human beings (i.e., the conditions under which they thrive and the activities they instinctively delight in) might nevertheless be an unworthy way for them to live. Yet it is an idea with which the history of moral thought is quite familiar. The Christian doctrine of original sin, for instance, holds that there is a powerful inclination on the part of human beings to do what they should *not* do. For the moment, though, we should notice another objection. Human nature and the natural are *given*. That is, our nature and what is natural to us is something we discover, with the help of biology or some other science. It is a matter of fact. From the point of view of Aristotle and many of the ancient Greeks, this is one of the things that makes it a fitting basis for a conception of the good life.

But from another point of view, this is just what makes human nature and the natural an *unsuitable* basis for human action. To appeal to facts about our nature, and to try to

make them unalterable determinants of the way we live, is to disguise from ourselves a fundamental feature of the human condition, namely its radical freedom. Presented with a scientifically grounded account of the natural way of life for the species *homo sapiens*, we are still free to choose it or reject it.

To see the full force of this point, it is useful to think about zookeepers responsible for the health and welfare of the animals in their charge. It is easy to imagine that they might find the studies of ethologists and primatologists very valuable, since such studies could be expected to determine accurately the conditions under which their animals would flourish. They might even establish that certain animals simply *cannot* flourish in even the best conditions that zoos can provide (as seems to be the case with polar bears). In the light of this knowledge, the zookeepers are able to establish the best pattern of life for the different animals—what they should be fed, when they should be fed it, where they ought to sleep, how much exercise space they need, and so on. Once all these practices are put in place, the animals in the zoo will simply follow this way of life. They will do so quite unreflectively and because, though they enjoy the benefits, they have no consciousness of its merits, and they may to some extent have to be compelled to follow it. Provided the ethologists and so on have got it right, the way of life imposed upon them will prove best for them. Yet the animals themselves, obviously, are neither involved in the discovery nor the implementation of the regime under which they flourish, nor could they be involved since they lack the rational faculties that would allow them to be involved.

It is this fundamental difference that leads the philosopher Christine Korsgaard to reject any naturalistic philosophy of this kind on the grounds that it presents us with a "rebarbative picture of the virtuous human being as a sort of Good Dog . . . [who] . . . always does what he ought to do spontaneously and with tail-wagging cheerfulness and enthusiasm" (Korsgaard, 2009: 3). Korsgaard (whose own views we will return to in Chapter 7) does not think that ethical naturalism of this kind is faithful to Aristotle's most important insights, but she chiefly wants to emphasize the point that choice is an inescapable part of human life. Unlike other animals, "human beings" as she puts it "are *condemned* to choice and action" (Korsgaard, 2009: 1, emphasis original). Even if it were possible to outline just one style of life that could be called "natural" to human beings, we would still have to decide whether or not to follow it. Either that, or some political "zookeepers," who thought that their knowledge of human nature and the natural was superior, and for that reason authoritative, would have to deny us the freedom to choose. More importantly still, if we ourselves were to suppose that what is natural for us is authoritative, we would be denying our own freedom to choose.

One way of making this point is to say that we would be making our essence determine our existence, whereas "existence comes before essence." This is an expression coined by the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, and it leads us to examine the next philosophy of value—existentialism. But before that, a summary of the preceding chapters may be useful.

5.8 Summary

We have been asking the question "What sort of life would it be best to have and to pursue?" Chapter 1 addressed the sceptical challenge presented by subjectivists who hold that this question is a matter of subjective preference and not one that we can meaningfully reason about. That challenge can be met by distinguishing between *moral realism*, which falsely tries to base morality on a special moral sense, and *moral rationalism*, which appeals

instead to making practical judgments about the application of moral concepts in particular circumstances.

Chapter 2 then considered the possibility of human beings arriving at an agreed set of rules that would govern their relationships. The idea of such a social contract has a long history in philosophy, but it encounters some important problems. Given the absence of any actual agreement on the rules that will govern our lives together, it has to appeal to hypothetical consent—to what people under certain idealized conditions would agree. Unfortunately, hypothetical consent does not bring with it the kind of obligation that real consent does, and Scanlon's sophisticated attempts to replace consent with reasonableness are in the end no more successful. Besides, as Bernard Mandeville aimed to show with his *Fable of the Bees*, a vibrant social order is possible, and generally beneficial, when people strive to satisfy their own desires and pursue their own interests without any special regard for self-denying social rules.

We might go further, as Friedrich Nietzsche does, and press the case for egoism or the affirmation of self as a far more admirable and edifying ideal than the equal moral worth of all human beings that Christianity has bequeathed to us on the grounds that this egalitarian vision is driven principally by the resentment of the weak against the strong and is the enemy of both excellence and individuality. The problem with Nietzsche's anti-Christian alternative, however, is that it inevitably brings with it a radical relativism which leaves us free to endorse the very things that Nietzsche despises. In other words, Nietzsche's philosophy needs, but lacks, an independent criterion of what is truly valuable.

The ancient philosophy of hedonism aims to supply just such a lack. It makes pleasure its criterion on the grounds that only pleasure is a properly natural good. This gives it universal appeal, in the same way that pain is universally repellent—a correspondingly natural evil. Hedonism's invocation of the pleasure/pain criterion is an idea many people find attractively simple, but the problem lies in working out just what this means in detail. Upon reflection it seems that, contrary to expectations, hedonism must favor the restrained life of the Epicurean rather than the more alluring Cyrenaic ideal of constant gratification. In any case, there lies behind both versions a mistaken conception of pleasure as a sensuous experience produced by activity. Rather, as Aristotle points out, activities prove pleasurable because they are worth engaging in. With a few exceptions, such as food and sex, perhaps, the pleasure is a function of their worth, and not, as hedonists suppose, the other way about. This implies that the value of the various activities in which human beings engage is intrinsic to them. To understand this is to see that there is no compelling reason to give pleasure an especially important place in our lives. Indeed, many possible aspects of a human life *other* than the pleasure it contains contribute to its value.

Just what are these other aspects and how might we hope to knit them into a single coherent ideal? This is the question Aristotle expressly addresses in *Nicomachean Ethics*. He tries to answer it by giving an account of what is distinctive about human nature, and then defining "the good" as "the good for man" (i.e., for a creature with this distinctive nature). The arguments considered in this chapter, however, showed that this appeal to human nature is not entirely successful, even with the help of the modern sciences of ethology and sociobiology. First, it is impossible to specify a natural good for human beings that will enable us to decide between competing styles of life. Second, even if we could do so, this would not show that the attributes, attitudes, and activities that add up to human flourishing are good in a wider sense. The conditions under which human beings do best as a species of animal might be (and probably are) conditions under which a wide range of other creatures, both plant and animal, might be put at risk—a theme that will be

considered further in Chapter 9. What is properly called "natural" in human beings, and what may well lead to a vigorous flowering of the species in the sense in which Aristotle meant it, has its dark side (as the Christian doctrine of original sin holds), and in the absence of further argument we have no reason to regard this dark side as an aspect of life it would be good to promote.

In any case, Aristotelian naturalism overlooks one crucial respect in which human beings differ from other animals—their radical freedom. This is the concept from which existentialism takes its cue.

6
Existentialism

6.1 Kierkegaard and the Origins of Existentialism

The author whose themes have been acknowledged by existentialist writers as formative of their philosophical thought was an obscure nineteenth-century Dane, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Kierkegaard was a very curious man as well as a prolific writer, but his fame is chiefly as a religious thinker rather than a philosopher in the normal sense. By upbringing and persuasion he was a Protestant Christian, and for a time he aspired to be a country parson. Nonetheless, he reacted fiercely against many aspects of the Danish Lutheran church of his day. This reaction was volubly expressed in a large number of writings. But, though Kierkegaard's most passionate concerns related to the Christian faith, he was knowledgeable in philosophy. He reacted almost as passionately to the dominance of one of Berlin's most famous professors, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), whose Idealist philosophy had rapidly come to be held in high esteem across much of Europe.

Kierkegaard's objections to established Lutheranism and to Hegelian philosophy were at bottom the same. To his mind, both, in different ways, tried to make the demands of Christianity reasonable. In the case of the church, the Gospel was presented not as a radical challenge to the customary intellectual and social order of the world, but as the sort of thing to which reasonable and respectable men and women would naturally agree. He instances the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. In that story, Abraham, under the belief that God requires it of him, is represented as willing to take an innocent child, his own son, and murder him, though in the end the boy lives. Kierkegaard was struck by the fact that church people could listen to this story with attention and respect, whereas if one of their neighbors actually acted in the way that Abraham did, they would be scandalized. Similarly, in the mouths of Protestant pastors, all trace of the mystery of the Trinity or the absurdity of the Incarnation was smothered by sheer respectability till both doctrines lost anything that could be called challenging. On Kierkegaard's view

> The point is rather to do away with introductory observations, reliabilities, demonstrations from effects, and the whole mob of pawnbrokers and guarantors, in order to get the absurd clear—so that one can believe if one will . . . [because Christianity] has proclaimed itself as *the paradox*, and has required the inwardness of faith with regard to what is an offence to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks—and an absurdity to the understanding.
>
> (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 212–213)

In the case of Hegel, the transformation of the Christian Gospel was more self-conscious. Hegel claimed that his philosophical system, with which he aimed to encompass and explain all aspects of human knowledge and experience, was nothing less than an encyclopaedic rationalization of the Christian religion; it was the truth of Christianity converted into a form which would necessarily command the assent of all rational minds. For Hegel, to bring about such a transformation was to do Christianity a great service, to put it beyond the vagaries of faith or mere subjective opinion. But to Kierkegaard, it was nothing short of its destruction. To make Christianity rational was to turn it into a mere theory. As such, it might elicit our intellectual assent, but it would not demand and could not sustain what Kierkegaard calls the "inwardness" that real religious faith requires.

Moreover, on Kierkegaard's view the Hegelian "System" (which he mocks by spelling with a capital S) is worthless as a guide to life. "Having to exist with the help of the guidance of pure thinking is like having to travel in Denmark with a small map of Europe on which Denmark is no larger than a steel pin-point" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 310–311). Philosophical systems are too lofty, too far removed from practical living to be of any use. The trouble with speculative metaphysicians like Hegel, he tells us in another place, is that they must turn aside from their contemplation of space and time in order to blow their noses!

Kierkegaard's writings are full of this sort of remark, and they abound in paradox. Much of what he writes is suggestive, but it is difficult to reconstruct Kierkegaard's polemic into a consistent and sustained intellectual critique of academic philosophy. Partly this is because he wanted to avoid all systematic philosophizing. He wrote many of his books under a variety of pseudonyms, intending them to be the presentation of differing, and sometimes conflicting, points of view. The result is that his writings are often puzzlingly inconsistent. For instance, his analogy of the map suggests that a philosophical system is the right *sort* of thing (namely a guide) but on the wrong scale, whereas in countless other places what he writes implies that philosophy, or any form of thought which aims to arrive at demonstrable conclusions, is the wrong *kind* of thinking by which to try to address the fundamental questions of human existence.

Understanding Kierkegaard is further complicated by two facts. The first is that, since he published his books under pseudonyms, we cannot automatically identify the views expressed as his. First, for example, the advertised author of the *Philosophical Fragments* (which are far from fragmentary) and their *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (a postscript described as 'pamphlet' that runs to 630 pages) is Johannes Climachus, with Kierkegaard himself referred to as the editor. Second, there is Kierkegaard's insistence that we cannot grasp thought in independence of the person whose thought it is. There is a unity of living and thinking which must be appreciated if we are to understand an author. In his case this introduces another element of paradox. His writings are of a highly individualistic, anticonventional character. Yet to outward appearances his life was no more remarkable than most of his middle-class Danish contemporaries. He lived quietly on a private income inherited from his father and, apart from a broken engagement and an unpleasant brush with the press later in life, there is nothing about his life that could be called historic or dramatic.

Still, for all their confusing abundance, Kierkegaard's writings do address certain recurrent themes. In his earlier writings he describes three different ways of life—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. These are represented as mutually exclusive, requiring the individual to make a radical choice between them. It is in the later writings, notably in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, that the philosophical underpinnings of this requirement are set out.

Three of these form the basis of the existentialist point of view. First, the most fundamental questions facing a human being are essentially practical because the question "How shall I spend my life?" is inescapable. Whatever interest there may be in purely intellectual questions, they can never take priority over practical questions of living. This is something it is especially important to grasp in the context of religion. Christianity (or any other religion) is a way of living, not a theoretical explanation of the world or of human experience. It follows from this that it is a deep mistake to try to substitute a theological doctrine or a philosophical system for a religious faith (and it is no less mistaken to think of religious belief as a rival or alternative to natural science). "Speculative thought is objective, and objectively there is no truth for an existing individual, but only an approximation, since by existing he is prevented from becoming entirely objective" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 224). "Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other clause—that it must be lived forward" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 2: 187).

Second, it is not only fruitless, but misleading to try to demonstrate or prove the objective truth of the beliefs by which men and women are expected to live. This is because in matters of living, as opposed to questions of pure intellect (natural science is the most obvious case), "truth is subjectivity" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 212). What Kierkegaard means by this is that any religion or philosophy by which we are meant to live has actually to be *lived* by. Whatever the *objective* truth of Christian teaching, those who live by it have to accept its truth *subjectively* (i.e., as true for them). Between the presentation of a doctrine and its acceptance by those to whom it is presented, there is an essential and inescapable gap—a gap that cannot be closed by still further objective evidence or proof, but only by a subjective "leap of faith." (It is from Kierkegaard that this famous expression comes.) The twentieth-century existentialist Albert Camus expresses the same thought when he writes, "I understand then why the doctrines that explain everything to me also debilitate me at the same time. They relieve me of the weight of my own life and yet I must carry it alone" (Camus, 1942, 2000: 54), though it should be added that Camus is critical of Kierkegaard's analysis of the leap of faith.

But, third, though from the point of view of critical objectivity, the truth which edifies will always appear absurd, this does not imply that we are free to live by any old doctrine that takes our fancy. The attainment of practical, subjective truth is as at least as difficult as the intellectual effort involved in speculative theory.

> With regard, for example, to comprehension, a person of high intelligence has a direct advantage over a person with limited intelligence, but this is not true with regard to having faith. That is, when faith requires that he relinquish his understanding, then to have faith becomes just as difficult for the most intelligent person as it is for the person of the most limited intelligence . . .
>
> (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992, Vol. 1: 377)

The difficulty involved in the attainment of faith, however, is emotional rather than intellectual. Kierkegaard wrote several books with titles such as *Fear and Trembling, The Concept of Dread,* and *Purity of Heart*, and he had a great deal to say in general about the emotional conditions under which a real living faith emerges. In his view, "there is only one proof of the truth of Christianity and that, quite rightly, is from the emotions, when the dread of sin and a heavy conscience torture a man into crossing the narrow line between despair bordering upon madness—and Christendom" (Kierkegaard, 1938: §926).

Kierkegaard's overriding concern was with religious faith and with the demands of Christianity in particular. This emphasis upon Christianity continues to make him of interest as a religious writer. But many of the central elements in his thought can in fact be given a wholly secular treatment. Though some later existentialists have also been Christians, the most famous existentialist of all, the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980), was avowedly atheist. As we shall see, however, despite this important difference, the fundamentals of his thought are strikingly similar to those of Kierkegaard.

6.2 Sartre and Radical Freedom

It is Sartre who uses the expression "existence comes before essence." This is a succinct and memorable summation of what all existentialists, Christian and non-Christian, have in common. It means that in answering the basic question of existence—How should I live?—we must reject any appeal to the idea of human nature or essence, that is to say any appeal to a conception of human being that will be found in every individual and of which each individual is an instance. Part of the reason for rejecting this conception lies in the belief that human beings have no preordained, essential character. As Sartre puts it, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 28)

It is Sartre's atheism that leads him to reject the idea of human nature. There is no such thing as human nature on his view, because there is no God who could have created it. The only coherent way in which we can speak of a distinctive human nature is as a preconceived creative plan for human beings, similar to the plan an engineer draws up for a particular design of engine. Such a design—the essential character of the engine—precedes the existence of any actual engine, and each engine is a realization of that design. If there were a God, and He had conceived of human beings and then created them, we could speak of human nature and we could even say that human essence comes before existence. But there is no God and hence no preordained human nature.

Of course, if this were all there were to Sartre's argument, he could hardly claim that existentialists, both religious and nonreligious, share the common ground he claims, for it would amount to no more than an assertion of the truth of atheism—an assertion Christians and others would equally deny. But Sartre also argues that, even if there were a creative God with a preformed plan for human beings, there would still be an unmistakable sense in which existence must come before essence. This is because, like Kierkegaard, Sartre thinks that the question of existence is more a practical than a metaphysical matter.

In the lecture "Existentialism and Humanism," he too uses the biblical example of Abraham and Isaac to bring out this point. In that story, an angel commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. Were we to treat the story in a purely objective mood as a piece of history, we would ask whether Abraham really was addressed by a supernatural voice. No doubt many people today reject stories like this, because they no longer believe in the reality of angelic voices. But Sartre's main point is not about the literal truth or falsehood of the story. He sees that, even if there were no doubt about the reality of the supernatural voice, Abraham would have to decide whether or not it was the voice of an *angel*, a real messenger from God, or only an imposter (albeit a supernatural one). And this is a question that he must decide *for himself*. Moreover, he cannot be relieved of this necessity by the supernatural voice offering further assurances that it is indeed angelic. This would be like asking a potential forger to sign a declaration that his signature is genuine.

In a similar way, each one of us is addressed personally by the claims of any ethical standard or principle.

> If a voice speaks to me, it is still I myself who must decide whether the voice is or is not that of an angel. If I regard a certain course of action as good, it is only I who choose to say that it is good and not bad.
>
> (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 33)

For this reason, any answer to the question "How shall I live?" is inescapably existential. However authoritative, however objectively provable or unprovable, it requires the one whose existence it addresses to give it assent. Without such assent, Sartre thinks, any such answer is without practical import, and thus is no answer at all.

It is in this sense that human beings are radically free. Nothing we can imagine—no God, no human nature, and no science or philosophy—can decide for us the fundamental question of existence. Moreover, there is another side to this freedom. Because nothing determines the answer except ourselves, we alone are responsible for the decisions we make. Freedom liberates our will from the determination of any other agency, but it also leaves us solely responsible. This is why Sartre says

> Man is *condemned* to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does.
>
> (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 34, emphasis added)

The argument so far might be taken to imply that humankind's inescapable freedom is a logical truth, something we come to understand through philosophical analysis. At one level this is true. Sartre thinks that radical freedom arises out of the nature of the human condition. "There is no difference," he says, "between the being of man and his being free" (Sartre, 1943, 1957: 25). This remark comes from his largest philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*, in which he offers a full-scale metaphysical analysis of what it is for something to exist. There are, according to Sartre, two modes of existing—Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. What this rather obscure terminology is meant to capture is the contrast between things (e.g., stones and trees) that are just *there* and have no awareness of or value for themselves (Being-in-itself) and things, notably human beings, that are aware of themselves and whose consciousness of their own existence is central (Being-for-itself). The contrast has to do with a point about past and future that Kierkegaard also makes. Action, and thought about it, has to do with the future. Whereas the past is made and unalterable, the distinguishing feature of the future is that it is yet to be made. At present it is nothing, to be fashioned as we will.

It is the peculiarity of human beings that they are both physical objects (and thus Being-in-itself) and self-consciousnesses (and hence Being-for-itself). But the distinctive feature of Being-for-itself, or self-consciousness, is that it is a sort of nothingness, just in the sense that it can never be or become simply another object in the world. No matter how hard we try to think of ourselves as merely physical objects existing alongside all the other objects of the world, our consciousness always floats free, so to speak. It is always a subject, never an object. The point can be illuminated by this parallel. In order to have visual experience of anything, we need literally to occupy some point of view. But the point of view we occupy, though essential to sight, cannot itself figure as an object within the visual field. If I stand on a hillside, my position determines my field of vision. It is not within that field. If we are to see things at all, occupying some point of view is crucial. But the point of view is not itself something seen, and it could not be; so too with the subject of consciousness.

Subjective consciousness is an ineliminable precondition for the perception and understanding of objects, but it is never itself an object. It is not a *thing* at all.

Many people find this sort of philosophical analysis hard to understand and appreciate. Sartre himself did not suppose that his analysis would, by itself, be illuminating because he regarded the inescapability of freedom not merely as a conclusion from metaphysical analysis, but as an actual feature of lived human experience. For this reason, much of his thinking about freedom is to be found in novels rather than in formal philosophical works. In these novels different characters come to a deepening realization of just what a gulf there is between the way in which ordinary objects exist and the way in which human beings exist. As a result of this sort of reflection, they come to appreciate what it means to be free.

The experience is not a pleasant one, but one of anguish, since radical freedom is a difficult and painful condition to accept. This idea of an anguish which results from a true perception of the human condition is not dissimilar to Kierkegaard's "Dread," and it has an important part to play in Sartre's philosophy of value. But in order to see this we have to go back a little.

6.3 Anguish and Bad Faith

Sartre's remark that it is I who must choose to say whether a given course of action or way of life is good or bad for me might lead us to think that each individual may do as he or she pleases. But this is not so, at least, if "do as one pleases" means "take whatever course of action is most agreeable." What is true is that a good human life is distinguished not by *what* is chosen, but by the *manner in which* it is chosen. A wholly authentic or truly human life is possible only for those who recognize the inescapability of freedom and its responsibility. (The terms "authentic" and "inauthentic" come from another existentialist, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger.) And this recognition can be achieved only at the cost of anguish. Consequently, a good life—the sort of life that has meaning and value—is not easy to achieve.

Anguish arises from two sources. The first is the perception that in recognizing our radical freedom as human beings we are acknowledging that we are nothing, literally no thing. As a result, nothing can fully determine our choice of life for us, and hence nothing can explain or justify what we are. This sense of groundlessness was famously labeled "the absurd" by the French-Algerian writer Albert Camus. According to Camus, "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide" because confronted with their own absurdity human beings have to judge "whether their life is or is not worth living" (Camus, 1942, 2000: 11). Similarly, Sartre thinks that the existence of everything—Being-in-itself as well as Being-for-itself—is absurd. By this he means that existence is always a matter of brute, inexplicable fact. But the fact that we share our absurdity with everything else does not make us any the less absurd or make the human condition any easier to accept. Indeed, as we shall see, Sartre spends a good deal of time exploring the ways in which human beings strive to hide from themselves their own absurdity.

The second source of anguish is this. Acknowledgment of our freedom to make choices makes us, literally, creators of the world of value, and as a consequence we bear all the responsibility that brings with it, and this turns out to be immense.

> When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that everyone of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men. . . . What we choose is always the better, and nothing can be better for us unless it is

> better for all. If, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we had supposed, for it concerns mankind as a whole.
>
> (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 29)

If Sartre is correct in this, by being radically free (i.e., free not merely to respond to values but to create them) the individual in acknowledging that freedom takes on the responsibility of legislating for all mankind. One way of putting this would be to say that in acknowledging our radical freedom we must recognize the necessity of playing God, with the awesomeness that necessarily accompanies such a thought. In fact, Sartre himself says "To be man means to reach towards being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God" (Sartre, 1943, 1957: 556).

A true understanding of our condition as human beings, then, involves the recognition that at bottom our existence is absurd. To say that it is absurd is to say that it is without necessity or explanation. Human existence is a matter of brute fact and it is only by adopting God-like aspirations that we can bestow any meaning upon it. Not surprisingly, since, as T. S. Eliot once wrote, "human kind cannot bear very much reality," ordinary human beings are strongly inclined to avoid the anguish by hiding the truth from themselves. Sartre distinguishes three characteristic ways in which this is done.

The first of these is the least interesting. It is the response of those who think that, faced with alternative courses of action and modes of life, they can simply fail to choose. But this is an illusion. The decision not to choose is itself a choice, and it is a choice for which the individual is no less responsible than any other. Indecision leads to consequences as certainly as conscious decision does; idleness is one form of activity.

The second kind of response to anguish is the way of the serious minded. The serious minded are those people, often religious but not necessarily so, who assert that there is some objective source of value (God, perhaps, or just Goodness itself), and who profess to direct their lives in accordance with this. The hedonists and Aristotle are serious minded in this sense. So are Christians, Muslims, and Jews and any others who purport to find the source of all that is good somewhere other than in their own decisions and commitment. What such people fail to see is that the only way these objective external values can come to guide their lives is through their own commitment to those values as values. This is the point of Kierkegaard's stress upon the necessity of subjectivity. Alternatively, such serious-minded people seek the advice of others. But even when they receive it, they have still to decide for themselves whether to accept it. And as Sartre points out in the famous case of a young man who sought his advice during the Second World War about whether to join the free French army or remain at home with his mother, the choice of adviser can in itself represent a decision. Often we preselect the people whose advice we seek.

The third avenue of escape from the anguish is bad faith. Bad faith is perhaps modern existentialism's most famous concept, and almost as famous is the example of the waiter with which Sartre illustrates it. The idea is this: Faced with the terrifying realities of the human condition (i.e., its absurdity and responsibility), individuals may seek escape by ordering their lives according to some preordained social role. Instead of accepting their own subjectivity and freedom to choose, they may try to objectify *themselves*, adopt roles which they then act out, and think of themselves as mere functionaries. Such an individual is Sartre's waiter. He suppresses his personality and individuality and thinks of himself not as the individual he is, but as a waiter whose every action is determined by the job. But of

course, if existential freedom is inescapable, this attempt at objectification in a social role is doomed to failure. The best the waiter can accomplish is a sort of play acting.

> His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes towards the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope walker. All his behaviour seems to us a game . . . . the waiter in the cafe plays with his condition in order to realize it.
>
> (Sartre, 1943, 1957: 59)

What such pretence involves is a measure of self-deception. The waiter pretends to himself that his every thought and movement is determined by what it means to be a waiter.

> He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things
>
> (Sartre, 1943, 1957: 59)

But in his heart of hearts he must know that the role determines his behavior for only as long as he chooses to let it. At any moment, he can turn on his heel and leave his customers standing and their orders unfulfilled. He only pretends to himself that he cannot.

Self-pretence and self-deception are puzzling concepts. When I deceive other people, I know the truth and they do not. How, then, can I deceive *myself*, for this requires me both to know and not to know the truth? This is an important question, but the explanation of bad faith can make do with something less than self-deception in the fullest sense. It is enough that we can avoid reminders of the truth. The waiter knows that he could adopt a attitude quite different from those who come to his café, but he refuses to think about it. In a similar way, though with much more grievous results, of course, some Nazi commandants assumed the role of the obedient soldier, one who simply has to accept orders, and they refused to deliberate about any alternative. To describe these cases properly, we do not need to say that those involved both knew and did not know what courses of action were open to them. We need only say that they knew but would not think about it.

Nazi commandants may or may not have acted in bad faith (there is more to be said about this shortly). Sartre's primary concern is with more mundane roles that we adopt in an attempt to escape the anguish of radical freedom. Such attempts are futile because human freedom is inescapable. Acting in bad faith cannot accomplish what it is supposed to accomplish. Even so, it is still to be avoided since it constitutes an inauthentic way of living. This gives us a clue to the existentialist conception of the good life. It is the life lived in good faith. Though Sartre says relatively little about this ideal, we can see that it consists in the pursuit of consciously self-chosen values and purposes for which the chooser takes full responsibility. When it comes to fundamental moral and evaluative questions, he thinks,

> [t]here are no means of judging. The content is always concrete and therefore unpredictable; it always has to be invented. The one thing that counts is to know whether the invention is made in the name of freedom.
>
> (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 52–53)

There are four principal difficulties that the existentialist philosophy of value encounters. First, we may ask, is human existence absurd in a way that gives reason for anguish? Second, is it always, or even usually, better to act in good faith? Third, in what sense, if any, is it true that individual human beings are the creators of value? Fourth, are we really so radically free? It is best to consider each of these questions in turn.

6.4 The Absurdity of Existence

As we have noted, in company with many other existentialist writers, Sartre holds that human existence is absurd. What they mean by this is that there is no explanation of the existence of human beings in general or any individual in particular which will show that existence to be necessary. All existence is a matter of brute, contingent fact. To take this view is to take sides in a long-standing philosophical dispute, which dominated seventeenth- and eighteenth-century intellectual debate. On one side were philosophers who subscribed to what was called "rationalist metaphysics," notably Descartes (1596–1650), Spinoza (1632–1677), and Leibniz (1646–1716). They thought that there must be a reason for everything's being as it is. If there were not, the world would be unintelligible, a meaningless jumble of events. This belief that everything has an explanation is often called "the principle of sufficient reason."

In opposition to the rationalist metaphysicians were the philosophers generally called empiricists. Among these, John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) are the best known. They regarded the ambition to provide a sufficient reason for everything as a profound error. The empiricists were impressed by the results of experimental science, then still in its infancy. They saw that explanations of natural facts could be obtained by experimental inquiry into empirical facts (hence the name "empiricist"). To explain in this way, however, was to do no more that appeal to demonstrable contingencies—how things *are*, not how they *must* be. To the empiricists, the rationalists' mistake lay in supposing that matters of scientific fact could be explained in the same way as the propositions of logic or mathematics. Logical and mathematical theories can be demonstrated by abstract reasoning to hold by necessity. Scientific theories can only be shown by experimental reasoning to hold as a matter of contingent (i.e. nonnecessary fact).

When Sartre and others say that human existence is absurd they mean to side with the empiricists and deny that it can have any rationalistic explanation. They differ from the empiricists, however, in the implications they draw from this. In seeing the absurdity of human existence as a cause of anguish, they imply that the absence of a rationalistic explanation is an unfortunate deficiency, something that we need but cannot have if we are to make sense of our lives. From an empiricist point of view, however, to think this is to share the rationalist's mistake. The mistake lies in the false *hope* of supplying a logically sufficient reason for everything. But once we understand the contingency of existence, the right response is to abandon that hope; once it has been abandoned, the fact that human existence is not the sort of thing that can be explained in terms of a logically sufficient reason will not trouble us. Human existence is not a matter of logical necessity. It is a matter of contingent fact. But why should anyone want more than this?

The language of absurdity can mislead us. To conclude that human existence is absurd seems to provide some reason for despair. But if "life is absurd" just means "there is no logically necessary explanation of the existence of human beings," we have no reason for anguish, unless we think there should be such an explanation. According to empiricists, this is just what we ought *not* to think. The existentialists, it seems, have not wholly discarded

the rationalism with which they find fault. This is why they are sometimes described as "disappointed rationalists."

If this analysis is correct, there is a serious question to be raised about the basis of existentialist philosophy, as least as it has been expounded by more recent thinkers (though some of the same points can be made about Kierkegaard). However, it would be hasty to think that these important issues could be settled in a few brief paragraphs. The most we can do here is raise them in outline and then pass on to the other aspects of existentialism that ought to be examined.

6.5 Acting in Good Faith

The chief implication of existentialism with respect to human conduct is this: What you choose to do, how you choose to spend your life, is not as important as the way you choose it. Whatever the choice, it is at least valuable insofar as it is made in good faith. This means it is made in full recognition of the freedom and responsibility that attach to all human choice.

The idea that value attaches to the manner and motive behind the choices we make is a very plausible one. The familiar expression "it's the thought that counts" expresses something of this idea. The value of a gift can lie almost entirely in the spirit in which it is given. A gift given in bad grace may cost much more but be of far less value than a simple present more gracefully given. Similarly, an inquiry made out of nothing more than a sense of professional duty will be valued much less than the same words spoken in friendship. On a larger scale, the same thing applies. The poverty of St. Francis of Assisi can be regarded as a blessing, the path to an admirable life because of the spirit in which it was accepted. But just the same degree of poverty would be a misfortune in most other lives because of the resentment and disaffection that would accompany it. What such examples show is that the motive and intention of an action and the spirit expressed in it can all be important factors in the evaluation of that action.

We might all agree with this. But existentialists want to go further and claim, first, that the *principal* value attaching to an action or a way of life is the mentality of those who have chosen it, and, second, that of all the possible attitudes that might be taken into consideration, it is our attitude to freedom and responsibility that is crucial. Often we regard upbringing, culture, or genes as the formative influence in determining an individual's attitudes and personality—the things that make us what we are. To the existentialist, this is an important error. It is our own choices that determine who we are, and to pretend otherwise is bad faith. Consequently, to recognize our fundamental freedom to be self-determining is the only possible response of good faith. Such recognition is distinctively human, and for that reason good faith is the most important human achievement.

But necessarily, to recognize our freedom to determine for ourselves what we shall be places no constraints on possible choices. This means that any choice might be made in good faith. To choose to be a vicious criminal could be as much an expression of good faith as choosing to devote your life to those who suffer. The question then arises as to whether the fact that a vicious life is chosen in good faith makes that life any better.

A standard example used to explore this question is that of the sincere Nazi. No doubt many of those who served the Nazi Party and Hitler's government were mere time-servers who joined the Party or supported it solely for personal advantage or monetary reward. Then there were others who chose to do what they did in bad faith, disguising from themselves the truth about the regime that they were serving or pleading the necessity of

following orders. But there were undoubtedly *some* true believers, men and women who saw in Nazism a creed that they wanted to believe and freely chose to endorse it. Moreover, they willingly, even gladly, accepted the responsibility for fashioning a world built upon the values of *Mein Kampf*, even to the point of genocide, the attempted destruction of an entire race of people.

What are we to make of this third category, the *sincere* Nazis? This is a question that has been asked repeatedly since the end of the Third Reich by historians, theologians, philosophers, and, above all, survivors of the concentration camps, such Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel. Now the implication of existentialism would appear to be that though these people led wicked lives, the fact that they freely chose them and acknowledged their responsibility for this choice is a redeeming feature. But is it? It may be plausible to say on behalf of the sincere Nazi that at least she accepted responsibility and did not try to hide it. Is it any less plausible to say on behalf of the person who accepted his role in the Holocaust in *bad* faith that at least he had sufficiently decent feelings not to positively endorse it?

It is difficult to know how this disagreement might be resolved. One line of thought we might adopt on behalf of the existentialist says that the life of the sincere Nazi is objectively bad but subjectively good. If this means that, though her life was bad, it embodied those things that were values *for her,* we can hardly deny it. She did indeed choose those values; that is what is meant by calling her "sincere." But this does not advance matters. We know what she freely chose. We want to know whether the fact that she chose *freely* made it any better or not.

6.6 The Creation of Value

A more radical line of thought to which some existentialist writers have been drawn suggests that, at least in a range of cases, we cannot draw this contrast between subjective and objective value, because there is *only* subjective value. Kierkegaard says something like this about the decision to be a Christian: "It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence" (Kierkegaard, 1846, 1992: 116).

In a similar vein, Sartre says, "whenever a man chooses his purpose and commitment in all clearness and in all sincerity, whatever that purpose may be it is impossible to prefer another for him" (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 50). A little later on he remarks, "if I have excluded God the Father, there must be *somebody* to invent values" (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 54, emphasis added). What this seems to imply is that, at least for a range of cases, it is wrong to think of the individual as choosing between values. Rather, the act of choice itself confers value. In other words, we are ourselves creators of value. (Elsewhere, it is true, Sartre says things which appear to deny this implication, and it will be appropriate to consider these other remarks a little later.)

Are we creators of value? In asking this question we must be careful to ask who "we" are. Once this supplementary question is raised, two importantly different positions can be distinguished. One way of interpreting the question "Are we creators of value?" takes "we" to mean a group of some sort (e.g., the particular society in which an individual lives, the general cultural milieu in which the question is raised, or even the whole human race). Taken this way, the question "Are we creators of value?" means "Are values pre-established for individuals by the group to which they belong, be it their race, culture or society?" Many people, including a significant number of philosophers, think the answer to this question is "yes," and the philosophy of value they thereby accept usually goes by the

name of "relativism," a topic touched on in Chapter 1. The label derives from the fact that, understood in this way, something's being of value is *relative to* some context. It follows that questions of human value cannot be intelligibly raised purely in the abstract. Prised free of some particular historical, cultural, or social context, they simply do not make sense. If this is correct, human beings can be said to be "creators" of value just insofar as the context to which questions of value are relative is a human one. It is the context of human interests, preferences, and goals that gives things value.

A parallel to this kind of relativism is to be found in the law. Polygamy (marriage to more than one wife) is permitted in some legal jurisdictions, notably Islamic ones, and forbidden in others, notably Christian ones. To ask in abstraction from any legal jurisdiction "Is it illegal to marry two women?" is to ask a senseless question. The only answer that can be given relativizes it to a context: It is in England, but not in Saudi Arabia. The question only makes sense within the context of some body of law. Within such a context, there will (usually) be a straightforward answer; outside such a context there is no answer at all. Similarly, relativists think, all matters of value can only be discussed intelligibly within a human context, and it makes no sense to think of values as transcending specific human interests and desires.

Other philosophers (e.g., Plato) have construed matters differently. They have supposed that just as in matters of scientific fact, in matters of value there is mind-independent truth waiting to be discovered. Where true value lies is a question over which the whole of mankind could be confused and mistaken. Some of the issues here have already been dealt with in Chapter 1. But the slant existentialism puts on them is somewhat different.

When Sartre declares that there are no independent values for the serious minded to follow, and when Kierkegaard says that the truth which edifies cannot be objective, both mean to reject the Platonic conception of value. This is a more radical contention than the legal relativism just outlined. Though most philosophers would draw a distinction between objectivism and relativism, from the existentialist point of view they are equally "objective." This is because both of them make matters of value true or false independently of the individual. It might be true (as relativism holds) that certain forms of sex and marriage are to be valued only because of the sorts of creatures human beings are and the kinds of social institutions that have grown up over the centuries. But if this is indeed the case, it does not make these values any more a matter about which the existing individual can pick and choose than if they had been established facts before the advent of any human beings at all. Existentialism seems to go further than this, interpreting the question "Are we creators of value?" as a question that refers to individuals. It means "Is *each one* of us a creator of value?" Sartre likens the situation of anguished choice in which every individual is placed to that of military leaders who, by ordering an attack, may be sending a number of men to their death:

> All leaders know that anguish. It does not prevent their acting, on the contrary it is the very condition of their action, for the action presupposes that there is a plurality of possibilities, and in choosing one of these, they realise that it has value only because it is chosen.
>
> (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 32)

The final phrase of this quotation makes it clear that, for Sartre, the freedom of individuals extends beyond choosing their own values out of a pre-existent set, and, in some cases at least, it includes the freedom to create value, to *make* things valuable.

To see whether this radical version of existentialism is plausible, consider the following example. Dr. Samuel Johnson, the famous eighteenth-century literary critic and conversationalist, had some very odd physical habits.

> On occasion, when he suddenly stopped in his tracks, he would perform with his feet and hands a series of antics so strange that a crowd would gather around him laughing or staring. As if oblivious to their presence, he would either hold out his arms with some of the fingers bent, as though he had been seized by cramp, or he would hold them high and stiff above his head, or, alternatively, close to his chest, when he would agitate them up and down in the manner of a jockey holding the reins of a horse galloping at full speed. At the same time he formed his feet into the shape of a V with either the heels together or the toes. Having twisted his limbs into the required postures, with many corrections and alterations of their relative positions, he would finally take a great leap forward and walk on with the satisfied air of a man who had performed a necessary duty and who seemed totally unconscious of having done anything odd.
>
> (Hibbert, 1988: 201)

Psychological studies have shown that extreme mannerisms of this type are not as uncommon as we might suppose, but however frequently they are observed, it is still reasonable to be puzzled by them, in Johnson or in anyone else. "Why do this sort of thing?" we want to know.

A little girl once had the courage to ask Johnson directly and he replied gently, "from bad habit. Do you, my dear, take care to guard against bad habits." This, of course, is no real explanation at all, and it leaves his behavior as mysterious as before. It is possible to imagine things that he might have said which would have gone some way to explaining his behavior. For instance, he might have replied that people's lives were dull enough and that if he could give them a little harmless amusement, he was willing to spend the time and stand the cost to his reputation that this involved. No doubt we would still have questions to ask, but at least his story would be the start of an explanation, because it would connect his behavior with a pre-existent value, namely providing others with harmless amusement.

Suppose, however, instead of an explanation such this, Johnson assumed the extreme existentialist point of view and said that gyrating in the manner described was something he did indeed regard as a necessary duty and something to which he attached great value. Unlike the first explanation, this does not in fact make any sense of his behavior or give us a clue as to why he has, or we should, adopt it. Consequently, and despite his imagined assertion to the contrary, it does *not* bestow any meaning or any value. This is because it lacks any connection with values we can recognize.

In appreciating this point it is of the utmost importance to understand that *recognizing* values is not the same as *sharing* them. We may not be likely to share the desire to give harmless fun to complete strangers at our own expense, but we can recognize it as the sort of value we *could* have. Equally important is the observation that people can actually value things that are unintelligible or meaningless. To say that the individual cannot create values does not mean that Johnson could not really have attached importance to his little ritual. Presumably he did. What it shows is that his attachment, however deep, was not sufficient to *make* it valuable.

An existentialist might reply that his attachment to the ritual makes it valuable *for him*. There is reason to think Sartre would not reply in this way. He expressly denies that his

version of existentialism is "narrowly subjective." He wants to reject the distinction between subjective and objective, and he appeals instead to "inter-subjectivity," saying, "In every purpose there is universality, in this sense that every purpose is comprehensible to every man" (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 46). About the choice of an individual made in good faith, Sartre wants to say both that it rests upon shared values *and* that no one but that individual can make it.

But to my mind this retreat from the radical position is made at the expense of clarity. There is an uninteresting sense in which only Bill can make his own choice, namely the sense in which if any one else made it, it would not be Bill's choice. If this is what Sartre means by its being impossible "to prefer another choice for him," we must agree. But the truth of this does not remove the possibility of saying that Bill ought to have chosen differently. If the intelligibility of saying this is what Sartre means to rule out, then he has indeed embraced narrow subjectivity.

Once again, there is more to be said, but here there is space only to review general lines of thought. What we have seen is this. Faced with the phenomenon of the sincere Nazi, the existentialist must either simply assert that the sincere Nazi's good faith makes her actions better than the same actions performed in bad faith (an assertion that many will feel inclined to deny) or else the existentialist must argue that in some sense or other subjective endorsement is actually creative of human value. It is this latter claim that the example of Johnson puts to the test, and it is not easy to see how a satisfactory response to that sort of example could be formulated.

The arguments we have considered both for and against the existentialist's position are thus inconclusive. Despite these counterexamples, existentialists can continue to *assert* the individual's radical freedom from any natural or conventional values. This brings us to a fourth critical question.

6.7 Radical Freedom

The heart of existentialism is the doctrine of radical freedom. The human condition, we are told, is one of inescapable freedom (though not just this), and hence inescapable responsibility, which is to say an unremitting responsibility to choose our own values and commit ourselves to them. This idea conflicts sharply with familiar ways of speaking. We often say things like "I cannot come because I must . . .," and the "cannot" and "must" signify necessities which constrain our choices and our actions. They rule out courses of action as impossible. But if Sartre is right, such ways of speaking are deluded (or at the very least misleading), since there are no practical necessities and everything is possible for us—to accept, reject, or avoid.

Put like this, however, existentialism seems to be flatly false. It is not possible at every moment to choose any course of action if only because previous decisions may themselves have limited our present choices. If I eat my cake now, I am not free to have it later. Nor is it only my decisions that limit my freedom of choice. The decisions of others may do so as well. I may not be free to buy the stereo system I want because you have just bought the last one in stock.

It might be replied that these sorts of example do not count against the general thesis of radical freedom because they are instances of *logical* impossibility—it is logic that determines that I cannot buy what is not for sale and cannot eat what is already eaten. This says nothing more than that those courses of action that are not open to me are not open to me—a trivial truth of no interest. It places no restrictions upon my choice amongst those

courses of action that *are* open to me. Within the boundaries of the logically possible, I am still inescapably free.

However, even this amended version of the thesis also seems to be false. There are countries in which I am not free to buy a bottle of whisky anywhere except at a government liquor store. Here is a restriction on my freedom that is not a matter of logic, but a matter of law. An existentialist might reply that I am free to choose to break the law. This is true, but not enough to show that I am wholly free. Let us leave aside the important fact that this requires others to be willing to break the law also (I cannot sell liquor to myself). In saying that the citizens of such a country are not free to buy and sell each other liquor, I am of course speaking of legal freedom, and not of logical freedom. So though it is true that there is no logical bar to my buying liquor elsewhere, this does not show that I am free in the relevant sense. We can still distinguish between those logical possibilities that are legal possibilities and those that are not. It might be tempting to reply that, since the law can be broken, legal restraints are not restrictions on "freedom" properly so called. But this seems mistaken. A country in which I am legally free to speak out against the government is a freer country than one in which I am not, in a very straightforward sense of "free."

The general conclusion to which this example points us is that talk of "freedom" always needs some qualification. To be free is to be free with respect to something—logic or the law in the examples just given. But once we have seen this, we can also see that there are a good many important ways in which we can and cannot be free. For instance, I can invest wherever I want, but some investments are illegal and others are foolish. If my financial adviser were to say "You can't invest in that!" only on one possible interpretation would he mean that such an investment is logically impossible (the company in question no longer exists). It is just as likely for him to mean that it is financially impossible (the funds are not available) or that the proposed investment is illegal (you can't invest in cocaine) or that it is foolish (there are shares in many far more profitable firms available). Or, more rarely perhaps, he might mean that it is unethical or immoral, that a morally decent investor could not invest in it.

All these reasons present investors with constraints upon what they can and cannot do. They rule out actions on the grounds that they are respectively logically impossible, financially impossible, illegal, imprudent, and immoral. An existentialist might continue to insist, as in the liquor example, that it is only the first two of these that present real restrictions on freedom, since it is perfectly possible to act illegally, imprudently, and immorally. For this reason, only the first two can be said to be real constraints on our freedom. This is a thought that many people find compelling. What is logically or physically impossible does indeed seem to be impossible in a stronger sense than those things said to be legally or morally "impossible." But the important thing to observe is that logical and physical impossibilities are no more important than legal ones from the point of view of practical deliberation.

When we reason about what to do, we seek to restrict our choice of action; this is the point of the reasoning. We want to rule out certain courses of action. Of course, in order to be able to rule them out, we have to be able to consider them in the first place, so there must be a sense in which they are available to us. But in deciding against them on certain grounds, we are also acknowledging that there is reason to rule them out. The existentialist insists that all this ruling out on legal, moral, or prudential grounds cannot make the action impossible, and hence cannot eliminate our freedom to choose it. Sartre says that we are condemned to be free, because in the absence of God "it is nowhere written that 'the good' exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there

are only men" (Sartre, 1946, 1973: 33). But this is just to confuse freedom from one point of view with freedom from every point of view. To be free of a divinely created natural law is not thereby to be free of every constraint or restriction.

If this is correct, the radical freedom of which existentialism speaks is at best a mere logical freedom. Within the boundaries of logical possibility there are many other ways in which freedom of action may be constrained. But more than this, these additional constraints are not to be rejected but *welcomed*, since the freedom we ought to want is not unconstrained possibility of choice, but *rational* freedom. To see what this means consider the following example.

Suppose I am engaged in a piece of historical investigation or trying to arrive at a scientifically adequate explanation of some disease. In each case freedom is essential; I want to be able to arrive freely at the right answer. That is to say, I must avoid formulating my answer in accordance with what would please my professors, my political masters, or those who fund my work or with what would be fashionable and attract headlines. The only thing that matters is that I arrive at the right answer by the free process of rational thought. But to say that I must be free to arrive at my own answer is not to say that I am free to arrive at just any answer. Some answers will be ignorant and silly, however appealing they might be to my imagination, and they will be worthless from the point of view of the study in question. Of course, I am free to arrive at one of these worthless answers in the sense that it is always possible for me to ignore the principles of good reasoning and falsify the evidence. But this freedom is not what we have in mind when we speak of freedom of thought. Conversely, when I am free of external pressure, the fact that I arrive at the truth by obeying the rules of argument and evidence is no restriction on my freedom. The freedom that I want and is worth having is not any less valuable because it is bound by rationality.

What the example shows is that some constraints, far from being restrictions on freedom, are just what make freedom valuable. When I check my calculations and say "That answer can't be right," I am freely engaged in thought about necessity. It is of no consequence to be told that I am free (which, in an uninteresting sense, I am) to accept any answer I like. The same point may be applied to other kinds of freedom. We have seen that trying to arrive at the truth in mathematics, science, or history does not represent any illegitimate constraint on human freedom. On the contrary, it allows human beings to engage in the sort of freedom that is valuable, namely rational freedom. Similarly, to be free to choose your own values does not preclude an attempt to discover what is objectively good and evil. If in so doing we do discover the truth, this will no more be a fundamental rejection of freedom than the mathematician's pursuit of his subject.

This conclusion has important consequences for existentialist ways of thinking. To appreciate their full force, we need to see them in the context of a general review of the argument.

6.8 Summary

Existentialists hold that we are radically free with respect to our choice of values and style of life. In some deep sense we *define* ourselves and that for which we stand. One consequence of this radical freedom is that individuals have to accept full responsibility for what they do and are and believe. There is no God or external standard of the Good to which we can refer, and there is no sociological or psychological conditioning to blame. This condition of radical freedom, however, is not one that everyone welcomes. Indeed, for many it is a cause of anguish, and there is a strong inclination to hide from it by disguising the

origin and manner of human choice. In other words, it is common and easy to act in bad faith, and it is a real achievement to act in good faith. Moreover, since even our choice of fundamental values is radically free, whether we act in good or bad faith is the supreme test of our human worth and dignity, and this is true regardless of the values we choose and act upon.

At this point critics appeal to the case of the sincere Nazi. Doesn't existentialism oblige us to say that sincere Nazis were, at the very least, better than those who didn't really believe in the myth of the Aryan race and the desirability of the Holocaust? If so, it conflicts with a view at least as intelligible—that the clear-sighted endorsement of evil is *worse*, not better, than shamefaced duplicity.

Such an objection, of course, amounts to simple counterassertion, but it is counterassertion that existentialism needs reason to rebut. In pursuit of such a reason, we explored a more radical line of thought, namely that the sincere clear-sighted individual is the source of value. That is why there is nothing further by which his choices may be judged good or evil. Yet closer investigation of this reply shows how hard it is to make sense of the idea that value and meaning can be bestowed by individual acts of will. To say that individuals are free to choose their own values is more naturally interpreted as meaning that they are free to choose *between* pre-existent values.

Even this choice cannot be said to be radically free in the sense that existentialists have intended. The last section showed that there is no conflict between the idea of freedom and obedience to restrictions and constraints of certain kinds. Thought is not any the less free because it obeys the laws of logic. Similarly, our choice of values is not any the less free because it seeks to follow the truth about good and evil. What this shows is that subjective choices can be guided by objective values without any loss of freedom. It follows that a search for objectively rational values by which to lead our lives and determine actions need not be an exercise in bad faith.

Of course, to say that the free pursuit of rational values is possible is not to give any guarantee of its success. Many philosophers, from Plato onwards, have approached the task with considerable optimism however. The philosopher who held out the greatest hope for a rational investigation into the good life was the German eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. His ideas are the subject of Chapter 7.

7
Kantianism

For Plato and Aristotle, the central task of moral philosophy is to determine what the best life for a human being looks like. Within the broad conception of "the best life," however, there is an ambiguity. Does it mean the kind of life any clear-thinking person would reckon the most desirable? Or does it mean the kind of life there is most reason to admire and respect? For the Greeks, this is a false distinction, since the two more or less come to the same thing. More modern ways of thinking differ from the Greeks on just this point, because they draw a distinction between the most desirable or happiest life, on the one hand, and the worthiest or most virtuous human life, on the other hand.

7.1 Virtue and Happiness: "Faring Well" and "Doing Right"

This distinction between two senses of the best life came to real prominence first in eighteenth-century Europe. Although it is only then that we can see the distinction self-consciously drawn, it is arguable that its origin is to be found much earlier with the emergence of Christianity. As Nietzsche rightly saw, there is an innovative feature of the Christian religion that represents a deep and important break with the ancient world. This is its insistence that the poor and the meek can lead blessed lives, and, conversely that it is possible for the rich and powerful to stand condemned. As we shall see in Chapter 10, if these Christian ideas are to be discussed properly, they have to be examined within the larger context of religious conceptions of the good life. But there can be little doubt that they have had a large part to play in the formation of moral ideas that are now common. In particular, they led to a widespread acceptance of the distinction that provides the focal point of this chapter.

The distinction may be marked in a number of ways. One way is to contrast "faring well" with "doing right." It is a commonplace that even the most unscrupulous men and women can fare well enough. Indeed, since at least the days of the Hebrew Psalmists, people have been perplexed by the fact that it is often the wicked who prosper in life. Moral wrongdoing, it seems, is no bar to material success. Conversely, the murderous slaughter of infants and children shows that even complete innocence is no guarantee of faring well. In short, the two senses of a good life easily, and frequently, part company.

Now the ancient Greek thinkers, though they did not formulate this distinction expressly, were well aware of these familiar facts about happiness and virtue. In much of the philosophical writing that survives from that period, we can see attempts to accommodate such

facts. Aristotle, it is true, is uncompromising in his belief that to be deprived of the social and material benefits of this life is to be deprived of a good life. But Plato sometimes advances the idea that such benefits are not the benefits that matter. In fact, we can see this idea at work in the arguments we have considered already. When Socrates argues with Thrasymachus and Callicles, he several times suggests that those who get their own way and triumph over others only *seem* to get the best of it. In reality, he claims, they do almost irreparable damage to their own most fundamental interests—the good of their own souls. Accordingly, Socrates argues, faced with a choice between doing and suffering evil, people interested in their true welfare will choose to suffer evil rather than to do it.

The contrast between material profitability and spiritual loss is made explicitly in the New Testament. "What shall it profit a man," Jesus asks, "if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Often this utterance is used by Christians for purely rhetorical purposes. It is offered not as a challenging thesis so much as a reminder of something we all know, namely that "Man does not live by bread alone" (Deuteronomy 8:6; Matthew 4:4), to use another Biblical saying. But we lose the force of what Jesus is saying if we regard it merely as a pious sentiment with which everyone in their less worldly moments will agree. What we need to ask is just what contrast is at work in the question, and just what is meant by "the soul" here.

This is especially important because for many people, even if it is not always thought polite to admit it, the answer to the New Testament question seems utterly obvious : The unscrupulous person's profit is *the whole world*, and how much more could he want? It is this response and its implications that are explored in the famous story of Dr. Faustus, the man who gave his soul to Satan in return for unlimited material wealth and power.

The story of Dr. Faustus is based, probably, on a real sixteenth-century German magician, Johannes Faust. However, the legend which grew up about this man is much more important than the man himself. According to the legend, Faust enters into a pact with the devil, who promised to give him knowledge and magical power far surpassing anything human beings can normally attain and which would enable him to accomplish all his worldly desires. In return, Faust is required to give Satan his soul at death. To ensure that both parts of the bargain are kept, Satan sends one of his more devious servants, Mephistopheles, as his overseeing agent. It is Mephistopheles who both conveys the knowledge and power and is the instrument of Faust's death.

The original legend of Faust received sophisticated treatment at the hands of the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe in his famous play *The Tragical Life and Death of Dr Faustus* and in the German poet Goethe's poem *Faust*. What is important about this story in all its versions is the distinction it forces us to make between the two senses of the good life. If we are to find convincing reasons by which to persuade ourselves and others that Faust has the worst end of the bargain, we cannot appeal to his failure to achieve the good things that life has to offer. That is precisely what Satan guaranteed to supply. So the good that he loses out on, and the evil he brings upon himself, must be of a quite different order. There must be a difference in kind and not merely degree between the sorts of good and evil that are brought into question by the case of Faust. This means that we must elaborate a distinction between senses of the expression "the good life."

In doing this we might appeal to the rewards and punishments of an afterlife, as generations of human beings have done. Indeed, the story itself encourages us to do this. Such an appeal raises two distinct questions. First, is there an afterlife? Second, if there is an afterlife, do its rewards outweigh everything in this life? Both of these topics will be left to Chapter 10, though here we might observe that it is the second question which is more

important for a philosophy of the good life. For the moment, if we stick to this world, and if we construe Faust's loss as contemporaneous rather than in the future, we need to show, first, that the *materially* best life (which he undoubtedly enjoys) is not the *morally* best life and, second, that there is more to commend morality.

In other words, any adequate reply to the challenge represented by the story of Faust which aims to show that he makes a mistake must draw upon the distinction between material and moral goodness, between how we fare and how we behave, and between a *having* good life and *leading* a good life. We should notice, however, that it is not enough to respond to Faust and those who think like him merely by drawing the distinction. We also have to show why one sort of good life—doing right—is preferable to the other—faring well. This means, as Plato saw, showing why, faced with the choice, we should prefer to suffer materially rather than do evil.

7.2 Kant and the Good Will

The task is one that the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) set for himself. Kant is among the greatest moral philosophers of all time, and part of his greatness lies in the way he developed and refined the very idea of the moral life precisely in order to provide rational answers to these problems. His most celebrated work in moral philosophy is entitled *The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, and, as this title suggests, Kant aimed to lay out the fundamental, rational character of moral thought and action. He begins the book with an argument similar to the argument Socrates uses against Callicles—that material benefits and personal talents may be used well or badly and hence cannot constitute the fundamental principle of good and evil.

> Nothing in the world—indeed nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resoluteness, and perseverance as qualities of temperament, are doubtless in many respects good and desirable. But they can become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. Power, riches, honour, even health, general well-being, and the contentment with one's condition which is called happiness, make for pride and even arrogance if there is not a good will to correct their influence on the mind and on its principles of action so as to make it universally conformable to its end. It need hardly be mentioned that the sight of a being adorned with no feature of a pure and good will, yet enjoying uninterrupted prosperity [i.e. anyone like Faust] can never give pleasure to a rational impartial observer. Thus the good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy.
>
> (Kant, 1785, 1959: 9)

Kant's point is that however wealthy or talented we may be, such benefits can be abused. Great wealth can deliberately be squandered on worthless trivia or used to corrupt and belittle others. High levels of intelligence can be employed to evil ends, as when criminals and terrorists exploit their mastery of electronics or complex financial systems. Kant sees that, unless we are prepared to say that even in this sort of case these undoubtedly good things are *unqualifiedly* good, we must look elsewhere for the most basic standards of good and bad and right and wrong.

If material goods, natural talents, and acquired skills cannot be the fundamental standard, what can it be? The examples just given of the abuse of good things might incline us to think that what is important is the purpose to which wealth and talent are put. But, according to Kant, this cannot be so either because, however carefully we plan our actions, it is impossible to guarantee their outcome. (The Scottish poet Robert Burns expresses the same thought in a famous line "The best laid schemes of mice and men, gang aft agley" (i.e., go oft astray).) If, Kant says, we have a good will or intention in what we try to do, but "by a particularly unfortunate fate or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature" we are unable to accomplish the end in view, the good will that we had would still "sparkle as a jewel in its own right, as something that had full worth in itself" (Kant, 1785, 1959: 10).

An example may serve to make the general point. Suppose someone works for an international charity, collecting money and organizing supplies of medicines for refugee camps. In the wake of a great disaster, she makes a Herculean effort and manages to fund and to dispatch a massive quantity of much-needed medicine. Through no fault of hers, however, the storage facilities fail and the medicines become contaminated. Unfortunately, unaware of their poor condition, the aide workers nonetheless administer them to the refugees. The result is that the death rate in the camps rises to a level far higher than it would have done if no medicines at all had been sent. This is, of course, a great tragedy. Yet, even if the charity worker *feels* guilty, she is not *actually* responsible for this terrible outcome. The real fault must be laid at the door of "a particularly unfortunate fate or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature," and her efforts towards an end that failed to materialize, would "still sparkle as a jewel . . . that had full worth in itself."

Kant would make the same point with respect to the reverse kind of case. Suppose I maliciously recommend to someone I secretly loathe that he should invest his few savings in what I believe to be a hopeless commercial venture. As it happens, a series of unpredictable events turns the venture into an outstanding success. He becomes a very wealthy man who devotes much of his wealth to charitable causes. By this devious route, my evil intention has produced great benefit to him and to others. Nevertheless, I cannot claim this good outcome to my credit, and the mere fact that it happened does not mitigate any of the wickedness of my original action.

Intention and outcome, then, need to be separated, with the result that it does not appear to be *successful* action that matters ultimately. This is because, in the first example, the unfortunate consequences did nothing to sully the fine nature of the intention, and, in the second example, the beneficial results did nothing to alter its evil character. Thus it seems to be the intention behind an action (what Kant calls "will"), rather than the success or failure of that action, that is all important.

About intention and will, however, more needs to be said, because intentions can themselves arise from differing motives. The charity worker whose case was considered a moment ago can fail to bring about her good intentions and remain, so to speak, morally unscathed. But if we were to discover that her reason for attempting the relief work in the first place had nothing to do with the welfare of those involved but was rather a way of trying to win personal fame and glory, this would seriously undermine the moral merit in what she was doing. The same point is illustrated by the real case of bounty hunters in the American Wild West. These were people who aimed to do a good thing—bring violent and vicious criminals to justice. But often they themselves cared nothing for justice. They did what they did partly for monetary reward and partly because they enjoyed hunting down human beings. Such motives, on Kant's and on most people's view, completely destroy the moral worth of their actions.

But rather more contentiously, Kant also thinks that motivations of which we approve do not themselves carry moral worth. He says:

> There are . . . many persons so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy, and rejoice in the contentment of others which they have made possible. But I say that, however dutiful and amiable it may be, that kind of action has no true moral worth.
>
> (Kant, 1785, 1959: 14)

This is because it arises from *inclination*. Kant does not think, as some people have supposed him to, that you ought never to enjoy doing good. He does think, however, that there is an important difference between the actions of someone who spontaneously and with pleasure does what is right and the same actions done on the part of someone who performs them—perhaps with difficulty—solely *because* it is right. He invites us to consider the case of a person whose life has been easy and happy and who takes a great interest in others and attends to the needs of those in distress. Suddenly his life is clouded by some great sorrow. He finds that he can take no interest in the affairs of other people and is constantly overwhelmed by self-concern, though he still has the means to alleviate distress and the need to do so is as strong as ever.

> Now suppose him to tear himself, unsolicited by inclination, out of this dead insensibility and to perform this action only from duty and without any inclination—then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.
>
> (Kant, 1785, 1959: 14)

The reason Kant thinks that true moral merit and demerit attach to actions regardless of the feelings of those who perform them lies in his belief that inclination cannot be commanded, whereas action can. People can only be praised or blamed when they can be held responsible, so that praise and blame can only attach to action, not to feelings. You cannot make yourself glad to see someone, but you can nonetheless *welcome* them. You cannot help taking pleasure in the failures of people you dislike (what is called *Schadenfreude* in German), but you can, despite your feelings, act in a sympathetic way towards them. In other words, whatever your feelings, it is still up to you to decide whether or not to act on them. It follows, on Kant's view, that it is action, not sentiment, that determines moral worth.

We must combine this conclusion with the earlier contention that success is not morally crucial either. What matters fundamentally is that people should aim to do what is right because it is right. Whether or not their natural inclinations support or oppose this and whether their good intentions come off or not are both irrelevant. The first is irrelevant because we cannot command our feelings; the second is irrelevant because we cannot completely control the world about us. The only thing wholly within our control, and hence the only thing for which we can be praised or blamed from a moral point of view, is the *will*. This is why Kant says that it is only a good will that can be unqualifiedly good, and that the unqualifiedly good will is doing your duty for duty's sake.

Suppose we agree with this (for the moment, at any rate). There remains this important question. If the only unqualifiedly good thing is a good will, and if the good will is not good because of that in which it results, how are we to determine or demonstrate its goodness? In what does its goodness *itself* consist? Kant's answer is that the good will is a purely rational will. Seeing what he means by this, however, needs a good deal of explanation.

7.3 David Hume and Practical Reason

Philosophers have often elaborated a distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason. The distinction they have in mind is that between reasoning which is directed at telling you what to think or believe and reasoning that is directed at telling you what to do. In fact, however, the distinction is rather hard to draw—even the way I have just put it is open to objection since it is quite correct to speak of beliefs about what to do. But that there is *some* difference or other is fairly plain. Generally speaking, a piece of *theoretical* reason ends with a conclusion about what is the case (e.g., Smoking is a contributory cause of lung diseases), while *practical* reason ends with a conclusion about what ought to be done (e.g., You ought to take a course in economics before you leave college).

One account of the difference between theoretical and practical reason is that practical reason requires a *desire* on the part of the reasoner before the reasoning has any force. So, imagine an argument designed to convince you that you should take a course in economics before you leave college. It might run like this:

> The best paid jobs for graduates at the present time are to be found in the financial and commercial sectors. Employers don't want to recruit people who think they already know all about business. At the same time, they want people who are not totally unfamiliar with the relevant concepts and theories, and whose intellectual abilities aren't confined to strictly academic subjects like history and philosophy. So, to take a course or two in economics is to give yourself an advantage in the job market over both business graduates and humanities graduates.

As an argument, this has no doubt proved persuasive to many, but it is obvious that its force is a function of two things. First, the claims it makes about jobs in the finance sector and about company recruiters must be *true*. Second, the person addressed must *want* a well-paid job. If either of these conditions does not hold, the argument loses its force. If, for example, the person to whom I address this argument has a private income and so is not in search of a job at all, the conclusion "You ought to take a course in economics" doesn't apply.

This example of reasoning differs markedly from the case of establishing the cause of a disease. I am rationally obliged to agree that smoking contributes to lung disease if that is the conclusion the balance of evidence and argument favors, whether or not that is the conclusion for which I was hoping. What I want or do not want does not come into the matter. Of course, people sometimes allow their desires to blind them to the truth, but when this happens their belief is irrational, *contrary* to reason. In the case of practical reason, on the other hand, it is what you want that determines whether the reasoning applies to you.

Philosophers often express this point by saying that practical reason is *hypothetical*. That is, it takes the form "If you want such and such, then you ought to do so and so." If, however, you *don't* want such and such, nothing follows about what you ought to do. The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), who was mentioned briefly in Chapter 6, claims that *all* practical reason is hypothetical and dependent upon desire in this way. In a famous passage of his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he claims that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Hume, 1739, 1967: 415). By this he means that the use of reason can only be practical in so far as it points to the necessary means by which we can achieve ends that we independently desire.

Hume's view has what some people regard as a curious consequence, namely that we cannot reason about desires and cannot, therefore, declare any desire to be irrational. Hume in fact accepts this.

> 'Tis not contrary to reason (he says) to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter.
>
> (Hume, 1739, 1967: 416)

We need to be very clear about what Hume is saying here. He is not commending any of the attitudes that he describes. All three are abnormal, and they may even be said to be unreasonable, if by reasonable we just mean "what ordinary people would accept as sensible." No doubt if we were to come across someone who thought so much of himself that he really did express a preference to see the whole world destroyed rather than have a scratch on his little finger, we would be appalled at his attitude. Similarly, anyone who sincerely preferred to go through agonies rather than have someone quite unknown to him suffer the mildest discomfort would no doubt be treated as eccentric to the point of madness. And those who are self-destructive (i.e., those who seem positively to seek the things that harm them and belittle what is in their best interests) are generally recognized as psychologically problematic. But none of these attitudes, according to Hume, is strictly irrational, since no intellectual error of any kind is being made. There is no fact of the matter, mathematical-type calculation, or logically provable inference about which the person in question is mistaken. The difference between normality and abnormality lies entirely in the uncommon character of the desires these people have.

If this is true, it is clear that no appeal to reason could produce a conclusive ground for action because all such appeals come into play only in a subservient role to desire, and consequently Reason in the abstract is silent upon practical matters. This means that general principles like "You ought not to murder" must sooner or later depend upon some desire or other—the desire not to rob others of their most valued possession (life) or the desire not to cause anguish and suffering to friends and relatives. But what if someone does *not* have any such desires? What if they are complete nihilists in the sense that they care for nothing and nobody? Does this mean that the principle does not apply to *them*? And is there here the further implication that the principle would cease to apply to me also, if only I could induce in myself a state of mind in which I too no longer cared about the lives and feelings of others?

On the face of it, this seems quite unacceptable. Most people would say of those who are callously indifferent to the feelings of others not that they are free from obligations because they don't care, but that they *ought* to care. Yet if Hume is right, there is no further rational basis upon which this "ought" is to be based. They don't care and "tis not contrary to reason" that they do not. If Hume is right, how could feelings and desires be made subject to reason? You either have them or you don't.

7.4 Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

It was this question of practical rationality that caused Kant to try to provide an alternative account of practical reason to that of Hume, although he does not expressly discuss Hume

in the *Groundwork*. If we think of the conclusions of practical reason as imperatives (directives about what to do), these come, Kant argues, not in a single type, but in two different types. There are those that Hume rightly identifies as hypothetical, which is to say, imperatives whose force depends on our having the appropriate desire. This can be seen from the following imaginary dialogue:

> "If you want to run in the London marathon, you ought to start training" (hypothetical imperative).
> "But I don't want to run in the London marathon."
> "Well in that case, you've no reason to start training."

Hypothetical imperatives themselves fall into two kinds. The marathon case is an example of what Kant calls "technical" imperatives, which are instructions that point to the technical means to an aim that someone happens to have. These are different from "assertoric" imperatives, because although such imperatives also rest upon desires, these are not desires that someone just *happens* to have. Assertoric imperatives appeal to desires that human beings tend naturally to share (e.g., health, and happiness). Because these are widely shared, their existence can usually be assumed. When making practical recommendations about diet, for instance, we can just assume that people want to be healthy rather than unhealthy. The result is that assertoric imperatives are usually stated without reference to the end in view, and this appears to give them more general force than technical imperatives have. But despite this appearance, assertoric imperatives are not in fact universally binding. For example, the assertoric imperative "You ought to give up smoking because is it ruining your health" is normally treated as a knockdown argument (assuming there really is a causal connection between smoking and ill health). Yet someone *could* reply "I have no desire to be healthy," and though such a sentiment is highly unusual, if the person is really speaking the truth about themselves, then this is enough to dispel the force of the assertoric imperative. In cases like this, the value we had reasonably supposed to be common to us (i.e., good health) is not in fact shared, and the recommendation to action fails to apply just as much as in the case of a technical imperative.

What this shows is that assertoric imperatives are less obviously hypothetical than technical ones, but they are equally hypothetical from the point of logic. In contrast to both stand categorical imperatives. These have the very special property of resting upon no hypothetical condition whatever. They cannot, therefore, be rejected by denying any conditional desire. Their logical force holds irrespective of individual desires. It is imperatives of this sort that Kant thinks will block the move that Hume's account of practical reason leaves open.

> "You ought to visit your neighbour in hospital, because you promised to."
> "But I don't want to."
> "Whether you want to or not, you ought to keep your promises" (categorical imperative).

With the discovery of categorical imperatives, Kant thought, we have reached the heart of morality. Categorical imperatives transcend our wants and desires by presenting us with rational principles of action in the light of which those desires themselves are to be assessed. Philosophers usually express this by saying that such principles of conduct are overriding, that is, they take precedence over other sorts of consideration when we are deciding what to do.

In fact, this idea of overriding principles of conduct fits rather well with a view that many people have about morality, namely that it is a more important dimension to human behavior than any other. If we show that some proposal is likely to be unprofitable or unpopular, we are providing reasons against it, but we are not providing *overriding* reasons, because considerations of profit and mere popularity (or so it is commonly thought) should not take precedence over what is morally required of us. The profit motive is a rational one to have, but it must take second place to honesty. Making people laugh is a good thing, but not when it involves telling slanderous lies about others. In short, moral integrity requires us to give second place to popularity, profitability, convenience, and all other sorts of personal advantage.

This common belief about the overriding character of moral considerations is what makes Kant's conception of *categorical* imperatives appealing. Or at least it does so, if there are such things. So far, in fact, we have simply drawn a contrast between two basic types of imperative (since the technical and the assertoric are logically of the same kind). As yet, though, we have no clear account of how categorical imperatives are grounded in reason.

Now there is a real difficulty about providing such an account because it is so easy to see that hypothetical imperatives are grounded in reason *precisely in virtue of their being hypothetical*. "If you want credit for this course, you must sit the exam." If you *do* want credit, you can test the rational basis of this recommendation by checking the rules to see if it is true that credit is obtainable only by sitting the exam (and not by submitting a paper, for example). The rationality of the recommendation is simply a function of its truth. Or again, "If you want clear skin, you ought to use perfume-free soap." If you *do* want clear skin, it is open to you to test the truth of this recommendation by examining the effects of soap with and without perfume.

But in the case of a categorical imperative, there does not seem to be any truth to check. "You ought not to steal, if you don't want to end up in jail" can be checked by looking into facts about detection and conviction rates. But what facts can we look into to check the categorical "You ought not to steal"?

Importantly, it is no part of Kant's strategy to appeal to any realist moral "facts." That is where a large part of his genius lies. Rather, he thinks that we can check the rationality of categorical imperatives by examining them in the light of what he calls "pure practical reason." Kant calls it *pure* practical reason because on his view it involves no appeal to matters of empirical fact or sensory experience, but to principles of practical reasoning alone.

7.5 Pure Practical Reason and the Moral Law

Imagine a world of perfectly rational beings—for brevity's sake let us call them "angels." To say that such beings are perfectly rational is to say that they always *do* what we, being less than perfect, always *ought to do*. Kant expresses this by saying that what is *objective law* for angels (demonstrably the right thing to do) is also *subjectively necessary* for them (just what by nature angels are inclined to do). This is not true for us. What is objectively right is usually experienced by us as a constraint on action (something we *ought* to do), and the psychological force of this "ought" derives in part from the fact that our natural inclinations often lie in other directions. By contrast, for the angels there is no sense of constraint, no sense of being bound or required, and from this we can see that in a world of angels the laws of rationality would be like the laws of nature in this one. We could explain and predict the behavior of the angels by appealing to moral laws, laws of right and wrong, just in the way that we can explain and predict the behavior of liquids, gases, and

solids by appealing to the laws of physics. Angels do what is morally right as automatically as water runs downhill.

Now this supplies us, in fact, with a way of determining what the moral law is. Suppose I propose to perform an action for a reason (what Kant calls a "maxim"). I can now ask myself "Could acting on that maxim be a law of nature in a world of perfect beings?" If it could *not*, I have shown that the proposed action is not in accordance with pure practical reason, and, therefore, it is not morally right. This means it is contrary to a rational will to perform the proposed action for the reason given.

This is a formal statement of the principle, of course, abstracted from any particular case. Kant offers us four examples of the detailed application of his method of pure practical reason.

First, man who has suffered a great deal and anticipates even more suffering before his life is over wonders whether it would not be better if he took his own life. But he asks himself what his reason would be, and whether he could consistently will that people always act on this reason. His reason is that life holds out a greater likelihood of bad than good for him, and so the maxim under examination is "Whenever the future promises more bad than good, kill yourself." But immediately he sees, Kant argues, that this could not be a law of nature because it is precisely the fact of the future's looking bleak that provides us with a reason to work for its improvement. It is precisely because we have no food in the house, for example, that we have a reason to go out and get some. A world in which the would-be suicide's maxim held as a law of nature would pretty soon destroy itself, because everything that supplies good reason to work for the continuation of life would lead people to kill themselves. From this it follows, Kant thinks, that suicide is against the moral law.

Second, a man is in debt. He has the opportunity to borrow money with a promise to repay, but knows that in fact he will never be able to repay it. He is nonetheless tempted to make the promise, a lying promise, but he asks himself whether this would be morally right. Once again, the categorical imperative is appealed to, and he sees that, were it to be a law of nature that those in dire financial circumstances always made lying promises, it would lead immediately to the collapse of the institution of promising, since lenders would know that the money would not be repaid and would refuse to lend. It follows that lying promises are contrary to the moral law.

Third, a man has a natural talent for something, but an inclination to idleness tempts him to ignore it and hence fail to develop it. He asks himself whether there is anything morally wrong in this. And immediately he sees, or so Kant claims, that though a world of essentially idle and pleasure-seeking people is possible, it is impossible to will that such a world exist, since any rational creature will want to keep open the opportunities which different kinds of talent provide.

Fourth, a prosperous man sees many others around him in poverty and hardship, he but says, "What concern is that of mine? I have no desire to contribute to the welfare of the needy. And, should I fall on hard times, I have no intention of calling upon others myself." It is possible, Kant says, to imagine a world in which everyone takes that attitude, but it is impossible to will that, through your will, such a world come into existence. For then you would have robbed yourself of the help and sympathy of others which you are likely to want when times get hard.

These examples are meant only as illustrations of a general thesis about morality and it is to that thesis we must return. But it is worth remarking that most philosophers share John Stuart Mill's estimation of Kant's attempt to apply pure practical reason to particular examples: "when he begins to deduce from his precept any of the actual duties of morality,

he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction" (Mill, 1871, 1998: 51–52). None of the examples is convincing. Take the last. It depends upon the hard-hearted man wanting precisely what he says he does not mean to claim—the help of others should he himself fall upon hard times. It is certainly open to Kant to doubt that anyone would continue to hold this view once hard times were actually upon him. But if so, this is a result of the very human nature that Kant thinks has no part in pure practical reason, and it does not show that the principle "Offer and ask no help" cannot be consistently maintained, even if, as a matter of fact, it is not likely to be consistently maintained by those who hold it. It seems that Kant is conflating logical impossibility and psychological improbability.

Or consider the first example. This is supposed to show that suicide is impossible for a rational being. But it does nothing of the kind. We can consistently maintain that it is rational to commit suicide when circumstances are *very* adverse without thereby agreeing that suicide is justified in the face of any adversity whatever. It is only by equating the two that Kant's conclusion follows.

7.6 Universalizability

Still, if Kant does the job of illustration badly, this does not necessarily mean that the basic philosophy at work is unsound. What is important is whether the method he proposes for deciding what morality requires of us is satisfactory. That method consists of applying a test to every reasoned action. This test has subsequently become known in moral philosophy as "universalizability." This is the procedure of seeing whether your own reasons for action could apply to everyone equally or whether they amount to special pleading in your own case.

There are many sophisticated twists and turns that can be given to the philosophical elaboration of this test, but in fact it is not far in spirit from what is a common enough way of thinking. When some action is proposed, people often ask of themselves and others "What if everyone did that?" This is thought to be an important objection, but it is open to two different interpretations. Sometimes the idea is that the consequences of everyone's doing the action in question are highly *undesirable*. For example, I might object to your walking on the grass on the grounds that if everyone did so, the cumulative result would soon be no lawn. However, an alternative interpretation of the "What if everyone did that?" objection draws attention to the fact that there are some actions which it would be *impossible* for everyone to perform, with the result that any attempt to justify performing them must involve some special pleading on the part of the individual. For example, the advantage of cheating depends upon its being the case that most people don't cheat, so any attempt to justify *my* cheating must involve special pleading.

It is in this second test of universalizability that Kant is interested, and he gives it its first formal elaboration. It is important to see, however, that, in contrast to the first interpretation, he is not speculating upon what the general run of humanity would do, but rather what we could consistently will to be the behavior of all humanity. We are not asking "What *will* everyone do? but "What if everyone *were* to do it?", knowing, of course, that everyone will not. The test is about consistency, not consequences.

Kant's illustrations offer us a number of categorical imperatives—you ought not to commit suicide, you ought not to make lying promises, you ought to develop such talents as you have, and so on—but Kant argues that these can all be derived from one basic imperative from which all the laws of moral conduct can be derived: "I should never act in such a way

that I could not also will that my maxim should be universal law" (Kant, 1785, 1959: 18). What he means is that if you want to know whether what you propose to do is morally right or not, ask yourself whether you can consistently will that everyone, whenever they have the same reason as you do, should act in that way. Or to put it in philosophers' jargon, ask yourself if you can consistently universalize the maxim of your action.

Kant goes on, with an ever increasing degree of abstraction, to formulate two other versions of the categorical imperative. His argument is complex, and the resulting claim is that the fundamental moral law is one which requires from us "respect for persons." He formulates this version thus: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another always as an end and never as a means only" (Kant, 1785, 1959: 47).

This formulation has become known as the ideal of "respect for persons." Arguably, it has been more influential in Western moral philosophy than any other ethical idea, and to understand it properly a great deal needs to be said about it. But it is necessary here neither to trace all the steps by which Kant reaches this ideal, nor to explore the ideal itself more closely. For what we want to know is not whether respect for persons is a good moral principle, but whether the conception of the moral life in which it is one element is a conception that we have good reason to accept. And enough has been said about Kant's philosophy to allow us to summarize and examine this conception. First, the summary.

7.7 Summary of Kant's Philosophy

When we ask questions about the good life, there is built into them an ambiguity. We can mean the happiest life or we can mean the worthiest life. It is the latter that is more important since the person who *deserves to be happy* is a better human being than the human being who is merely happy. In fact, to be worthy of happiness is to lead a morally admirable life, even if a particular unfortunate fate has denied it the happiness it deserves. However, the morally good life does not consist in doing good, because whether the good we try to do actually comes about is not a matter over which, ultimately, we can exercise control. Between aspiration and outcome, misfortune may well intervene. The moral life does not consist in having the right sort of attitudes. Whether we are cheerful, friendly, generous, and optimistic or gloomy, reserved, parsimonious, and pessimistic is a matter of the nature with which we are born, and hence it is also something over which we can exercise little control. Consequently, our temper, good or bad, is not something which can properly attract either praise or blame.

What can properly be examined from a moral point of view is our will (i.e., the intention behind the things we do and say), because this is wholly within our control as rational agents. Be we rich or poor, clever or stupid, handsome or ugly, or jolly or gloomy, every one of us can aim to do what is right just because it is right, and if we succeed in this, we succeed in living a morally good life.

But how do we know what is right? We know it by considering what actions are categorically forbidden or required, not because of their consequences in general or their outcome in any particular case, but on grounds of pure reason alone. Morally right actions are those that pass the test of universalizability—a categorical imperative that ultimately implies respect for persons.

Kant's moral philosophy has generated a huge quantity of comment, interpretation, and criticism. A great deal of this has served to show that there are complexities in his thought of which even he may not have been wholly aware. Moreover, though his attempt to delineate a clear conception of morality pure and simple, and to give it a firm foundation in reason

is enormously impressive, there is a general (though not universal) consensus that Kant's philosophy fails. The larger part of this failure is usually thought to derive from features of his distinctive conception of the moral life. There are in fact three main objections. These have to do with the separation of intention and outcome, the test of universalizability, and the idea of doing one's duty for its own sake. We will consider each of these in turn.

7.8 Act, Intention, and Outcome

Kant holds that the moral worth of an action must reside in the will with which it is performed, or, as we would more naturally say, in the intention behind it. This is, as we have seen, because people can neither be held responsible for nor claim the merit of outcomes over which they have very imperfect control. It is both pointless and wrong to praise and blame people for things that they could neither prevent nor bring about. An unfortunate fate or a stepmotherly nature may bring our best intentions to nothing. It is to our intentions, then, that praise and blame must be attached.

Many people find this an intuitively appealing idea, and yet it is hard to see that it can be sustained for long. We may want to confine moral merit and demerit to the intentions behind an action, but it is very difficult to deny that actions and their consequences must also be taken into account. *Intending* to murder someone is wrong, presumably, at least in part because actually murdering them would be wrong, and whether I actually murder them is a matter of consequences. If I am to murder someone, it is not enough for me to pull a trigger or plunge a knife. My victim must actually *die* as a consequence of what I do. Similarly, intending to save someone from drowning is meritorious, presumably, because the action of saving them is so beneficial, and once more this is partly a matter of the actual consequences of my intention. It is not enough for me to have reached for their hand or pulled them aboard; they must go on living as a result. If, then, we are to concern ourselves with the moral character of intention, we are at the same time obliged to take success into account, and we cannot take as indifferent an attitude to outcomes, as Kant's way of thinking would suggest.

Someone might resist this conclusion by denying that *actions* are morally important. They might claim that what matters from a moral point of view is not what we *do,* but what we *try* to do. This is not a plausible interpretation of Kant, but it is a common thought. Many people think that moral right and wrong is not about accomplishing things or being successful, but about trying hard and doing your best. "At least you tried" is often offered as moral compensation for failure. ("It's the thought that counts" expresses the same sentiment.) Although the belief that trying is more important than succeeding is quite widely shared, at least one important objection can be brought against it. This objection arises from the fact that genuine attempts and intentions have to be *expressed in* actions. Trying to do something is not the same as doing it, certainly, but it is still the performance of some action or other. I cannot be accused of trying to murder you unless I have succeeded in some action or other (e.g., holding up a gun, firing it, waving a knife, or putting a poisonous substance in your food). If none of these actions or others like them take place, there is no substance to the claim that I tried to murder you. And this means that *some* consequential actions must take place if we are to talk even of the moral assessment of attempts.

Similarly, I cannot claim to have tried to save a drowning child unless I have succeeded in doing something else (e.g., reaching out my hand, running for a life belt, or pulling at his body). Were you to see me sitting perfectly still and accuse me of callous indifference to his plight, it would hardly do for me to reply that I had tried to save him but that an

unfortunate fate or a stepmother nature had intervened in every one of my attempts and robbed my good intentions of any result whatsoever. I cannot reasonably say that I have attempted to do something if absolutely none of my attempts have met with any success of any kind.

The upshot of this argument is really very simple. If we are to make a moral assessment of the lives of ourselves and others, we have to decide not only whether what we *meant to do* was right or wrong, but also whether what we *did* was right or wrong. Since doing anything whatever involves having *some* effect on the world, however small, this moral assessment cannot but be in part concerned with the success of our intentions. This means that success cannot be left out of the calculation in quite the way that Kant seems to imply. It is not enough, in short, simply to have a good will. A good will that accomplishes *nothing whatever* cannot shine like a jewel.

7.9 The Universalizability Test

Of course, none of this undermines the central claim that will and intention are of great moral importance. None of this shows that intentions do not matter. It is still the case that people who mean well, but whose good intentions do not come off for reasons quite independent of their actions, deserve moral commendation. From this it follows that at least some moral assessment is based upon considerations other than successful outcomes.

It is here that Kant's most widely discussed contribution to moral philosophy comes into play, namely his formulations of the categorical imperative. Kant claims to offer us a test by which our actions and intentions can be assessed. The test is quite independent of desired or actual outcomes. This is the test of universalizability. According to Kant, we have to ask ourselves whether an action we propose to perform could consistently be performed by everyone similarly placed and with the same reasons. And, he argues, such a test plainly rules out many of the sorts of actions the moral consensus of his day condemned (e.g., suicide, lying promises, and failure to develop one's own talents). We saw, however, that Kant's own illustrations of this principle are less than convincing. The fact that they do not work very well is not in itself conclusive proof that the test is a poor one, because it might be made to work better than Kant himself manages to do. But when we try to apply it more rigorously, it appears that the test is *too easily* satisfied.

In Chapter 6 we saw that the existentialist's ethics of authenticity—the idea that good actions are made good by the good faith from which they are performed—has difficulty in accommodating the case of the sincere Nazi. This is the person who engages *sincerely* in behavior widely recognized to be evil. Our intuitions suggest that this sincerity, far from making those actions good or even better than similar actions performed in *bad* faith, actually makes them worse. Indeed, it is arguable that bad actions become truly evil when they are freely, deliberately, and sincerely performed.

A similar objection to the Kantian ethics of intention can be found in what we might call the *consistent* Nazi. Let us characterize Nazis as people who act on the maxim "This person should be exterminated because he/she is a Jew." Now according to Kant's moral philosophy, we can put this maxim to the test by appealing to the categorical imperative—"Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." We might point out to Nazis that if it were a universal law of nature that Jews were regularly exterminated, and if they themselves were Jewish, they would have to be exterminated. Now as a matter of fact, it was not unknown for enthusiastic Nazis to be found to have Jewish ancestry, and if such people were to engage in some

argument which made theirs a special case, or if they were just to deny the facts, we could declare that their principles failed the test of universalizability. The reaction of these actual people was no doubt simple denial. But the logical point is that if they had been *consistent* Nazis, who not only conceded, but positively endorsed the idea that were they to be found to be Jewish they too must perish, we could not find fault with them on these grounds. To be prepared to promote political ideals which, taken to their logical conclusion, imply your own destruction may be a *psychologically unlikely* attitude of mind for most people. But it is certainly *logically possible* and displays consistency. However, if a policy of genocide is deeply mistaken from a moral (as well as every other) point of view, consistency in its application is hardly any improvement. And insofar as people are prepared to sacrifice *themselves* in a program of genocide, this reveals not their moral rectitude, but their fanaticism.

The same point can be made about one of Kant's own examples. Recall the man who prided himself on his independence and neither gave, nor asked for charity. Kant says that such a man could hardly will that were he himself to fall on hard times, it should nonetheless be a universal law of nature that no one assist him in his poverty. Now it may be psychologically unlikely that an individual in need could wish to receive no assistance (though surely we are familiar with people who are too proud to receive charity), but it is plainly not a logical contradiction. The opponents of charity can as easily apply their harsh doctrine to themselves as to others if they choose. Whilst we may remark upon their rather grim, almost inhuman, consistency, this does not make their action any better, because it does not make them any the less uncharitable. Once more consistency does not seem to bring objectionable actions any nearer to what we recognize as moral right and wrong.

The consistent Nazi objection is not merely a matter of comparing the results of universalizability with intuitive moral conviction. It can also be used to show that the test of universalizability is quite powerless when it comes to deciding between competing moral recommendations. Consider two contradictory recommendations: "Never kill people just because they're Jewish" and "Always kill people who are Jewish because they're Jewish." The case of the consistent Nazi shows that the latter of these recommendations, however loathsome, can be made to square with the demands of the categorical imperative, and it should be fairly obvious that the former can be made to satisfy it. But if contradictory proposals can *both* satisfy the test of universalizability, it follows that that test is unable to discriminate between good and bad recommendations. In short, it cannot tell us what to do. From this it follows that Kantian universalizability cannot provide the means by which to determine right from wrong.

The question of what Kantianism has to say about Nazism is not merely theoretical, but it arises in at least one specific instance. Hannah Arendt, in her famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, records how Adolf Eichmann, who was tried and executed for his part in the destruction of millions of Jews, astonished his examining officer when he suddenly claimed that throughout his life he had been guided by Kantian moral precepts.

> The examining officer did not press the point, but Judge Raveh, either out of curiosity or out of indignation at Eichmann's having dared to invoke Kant's name in connection with his crimes, decided to question the accused. And to the surprise of everybody, Eichmann came up with an approximately correct definition of the categorical imperative: 'I meant by my remark about Kant that the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws'. . . . He then proceeded to explain that from the moment he was charged with carrying out the Final Solution he had

> ceased to live according to Kantian principles. . . . [But] what he failed to point out to the court was that in this 'period of crimes legalized by the state', as he himself now called it, he had not simply dismissed the Kantian formula as no longer applicable, he had distorted it to read: Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as the legislator or of the law of the land . . . Kant to be sure had never intended to say anything of the sort . . . But it is true that Eichmann's unconscious distortion agrees with what he himself called the version of Kant 'for the household use of the little man' [in which what] is left of Kant's spirit is the demand that a man do more than obey the law, that he go beyond the mere call of obedience and identify his own will with the principle behind the law—the source from which the law sprang.

Arendt then goes on to comment:

> Much of the horribly painstaking thoroughness in the execution of the Final Solution that usually strikes the observer as typically German, or else as characteristic of the perfect bureaucrat—can be traced to the odd notion, indeed very common in Germany, that to be law abiding means not merely to obey the laws but to act as though one were the legislator of the laws that one obeys.
>
> (Arendt, 1963, 1994: 136–137)

We should certainly agree with Arendt that Kant had never intended to say anything of the sort, but the philosophical point of this concrete example is that there is nothing in the logic of his universalizability test that rules it out.

7.10 Duty for Duty's Sake

So far we have seen that Kant's view of the good life as the moral life is marred in two respects. First, the emphasis he places upon moral goodness residing in our will or intention to do our duty and not in the good or bad consequences of our actions is mistaken since a complete divorce between intention, action, and outcome is impossible. For this reason, there can be no question of judging an intention right or wrong without considering the goodness or badness of at least some of the consequences of that intention. This means that the moral quality of a life cannot be decided purely in terms of will and intention.

Second, even if we agree that intention must form a large part of our moral assessment, the idea of requiring the reasons upon which we act to be universally applicable (i.e., the requirement of universalizability) does not supply us with an effective test for deciding which intentions are good and which are bad. People can consistently pursue evil courses of action, and wholly contradictory recommendations can consistently be based upon the same reasoning. It follows that universalizability is not an effective test at all. Any action or mode of conduct can be made to meet it, and hence no course of action can be shown to be ruled out by it.

But besides these two objections there is a third. Kant observes, with some plausibility, that it is not enough to *do* one's duty. Morality requires that we do it *because* it is our duty and for no other reason. In other words, a morally good life does not consist merely in acting in accordance with moral right and wrong, but in doing so because of an explicit commitment to moral right and wrong. People who do not steal because they never have the chance to steal, do not have the inclination for it, or are fearful of punishment are properly contrasted with people who never steal because it is morally wrong to do so. This is what is

meant by saying that they do their duty for duty's sake. And according to Kant, acting on this reason exceeds in value acting in the same way for any other reason. It is worth recalling the passage quoted earlier where he says:

> To be kind where one can is a duty, and there are, moreover many persons so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy, and rejoice in the contentment of others which they have made possible. But I say that, however dutiful and amiable it may be, that kind of action has no true moral worth.
>
> (Kant, 1785, 1959: 14)

Now if the moral life is the life of duty for duty's sake, and the best (in the sense of finest) form of human life is the moral life, we seem to be led rather swiftly to the somewhat unpalatable conclusion that many happy and attractive human lives fall far short of the most admirable kind of life, and they may even realize nothing of it at all. Consider, for instance, someone who is talented and clever and who, being naturally disposed to use these gifts for the health and happiness of others, works hard on inventing and developing an ingenious device that is of great use to the physically handicapped. The work is enjoyable, though not especially well paid; much good is gladly done, but without any sense of doing one's duty. Is it really plausible to claim, as Kant does, that such a life has no true moral worth?

There is, however, an even more implausible and uncomfortable conclusion that seems to flow from Kant's conception of morality. The conclusion is that we must attribute high moral worth to deeply *unattractive* human lives, and hence prefer them to the sort of life just described. If this is indeed a consequence of the theory, its unpalatable nature is brought out by the following description of one of Anthony Trollope's characters in *The Eustace Diamonds*, Lady Linlithgow:

> In her way Lady Linlithgow was a very powerful human being. She knew nothing of fear, nothing of charity, nothing of mercy, and nothing of the softness of love. She had no imagination. She was worldly, covetous and not unfrequently cruel. But she meant to be true and honest, though she often failed in her meaning; and she had an idea of her duty in life. She was not self-indulgent. She was as hard as an oak post—but then she was also as trustworthy. No human being liked her;—but she had the good word of a great many human beings.

This rather appalling picture of rectitude, which knows nothing of happiness and does its duty despite unpleasant inclinations to the contrary, does not sound at all like the sort of life we ought to lead or to admire. This is especially true when it is set alongside the image of a happy, hardworking life in which a lot of good is done but where duty for its own sake plays little or no part. Of course, the defender of Kant's moral philosophy might use the same argument that has been employed at several other places in this book: It is not a good reason to reject a philosophical thesis just because it conflicts with what we commonly think; after all, what we commonly think about morality and the good life may be wrong, just as what people have thought about health and medicine has often been corrected by scientific investigation. Perhaps, then, lives like Lady Linlithgow's *are* to be admired as fine examples of the sort of life we ought to lead.

7.11 Korsgaard on Kant

This is not, however, the only line of defense. In a series of important books and essays culminating in *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (2009), the Harvard philosopher Christine M. Korsgaard offers an interpretation of Kant that aims to overcome the standard objections that have been rehearsed in this chapter. According to Korsgaard, the familiar distinctions that are crucial to understanding Kant—hypothetical *versus* categorical imperatives, will *versus* inclination, reason *versus* emotion, intention *versus* outcome—have generally been misapplied, and the fact that universalizability is a formal rather than substantial moral principle should be seen as one of its strengths, not a weakness. It is not be possible to recount her arguments in detail here, but even sketching them in outline will reveal how easy it is to underestimate the profundity of Kant's moral philosophy.

Korsgaard draws on Aristotle to lay out the background against which Kant's moral philosophy has to be understood. Fundamental to it is the concept of action, which is also fundamental to the human condition. "Human beings," she says, "are condemned to choice and action" (Korsgaard, 2009: 1). That is to say, we cannot avoid choosing and acting. However, whereas something like the same thought might be said to *haunt* existentialists, Kant's deeper insight, upon which Korsgaard seeks to build, is that it is precisely the inescapability of action that allows human beings to have personal lives.

"Action" is to be characterized as causing things to happen; that is why a radical separation between actions and outcomes is impossible. On other hand, actions are not *simply* causes. Physical objects and forces can cause things to happen, but they don't perform actions. The key feature of action lies in the fact that the cause is generated *within* the agent. When water pours down a mountainside so that a pool forms at the bottom, this is a simple outcome. It is not something the water is *trying* to do. By contrast, when a bird builds a nest, the cause of the nest's coming into existence is *not* a mere outcome. It is a result of the bird's internal drive for self-preservation. Although we can speak of a pool "failing" to form, this is not the water failing in the proper sense of the word; it simply doesn't happen. But a bird can *fail* to build a nest in the full sense, because this is what the bird is trying to do.

As this example suggests, and as Korsgaard expressly affirms, "both human beings and other animals act." But, she adds immediately, "human actions can be morally right or wrong, while the actions of other animals cannot. This must be because of something distinctive about the nature of human action" (Korsgaard, 2009: xi). What is that "something distinctive"? The answer is the power that human beings have to identify and reflect on their instincts and inclinations and decide whether or not to *let them be* causes. Unlike wind or water, birds can try and fail, but they cannot decide *whether or not* to try. Human beings can do this. More importantly yet, we can decide on what grounds we will try and on what grounds we won't. In other words, we can decide not only what actions to perform, but also (to use Kant's terminology) what the maxims of our actions will be. This is the point at which self-consciousness in the exercise of reason begins, and it is also the point at which the concept of responsibility comes into play.

> Self-consciousness opens up a space between the incentive [i.e. natural impulse] and the response, a space of what I call reflective distance. It is within this space of reflective distance that the question whether our incentives give us reasons arises. Our rational principles then replace our instincts—they tell us what is an appropriate response to what, what makes what worth doing, what the situation calls for. And so it is in the

> space of reflective distance, in the internal world created by self-consciousness, that reason is born.
>
> (Korsgaard, 2009: 116)

Interpreted in this way, Kant's fundamental endeavor is to characterize adequately what it is to be a person as distinct from a human animal, and he does so by identifying personhood with the ability to fashion the causes of action within us in accordance with rational principles. Extending his line of thought, Korsgaard argues that it is only through rational action so conceived that we can come to constitute the individuals we are. In this way the challenge presented by Thrasymachus or Callicles—Why should I be moral?—finds the deepest possible answer. Be moral or be *no one*.

There is an important parallel with strictly theoretical reason here. People who disregard the fundamental laws of logic do not thereby become interesting free thinkers with unique theories unencumbered by conventional ways of thinking. Rather, their thoughts amount to an unintelligible jumble, which is another way of saying that they don't succeed in thinking (or theorizing) at all. Similarly, the ultimate cost of ignoring the categorical and hypothetical imperatives that lie at the heart of practical reason is failure to act, and to ignore them completely, therefore, is to fail to be an agent. If Korsgaard is right in her claim that agency (the ability to perform actions) is what makes us distinctively human, then to ignore the fundamental laws of practical reason is to undermine our own humanity.

> [T]he way to make yourself into an agent, a person, is to make yourself into a particular person, with a practical identity of your own. And the way to make yourself into a particular person, who can interact well with herself and others, is to be consistent and unified and whole—to have integrity. And if you constitute yourself well, if you are good at being a person, then you'll be a good person. The moral law is the law of self-constitution.
>
> (Korsgaard, 2009: 214)

If self-constitution is at the heart of practical reason, doesn't this make it egoistic? In place of (or perhaps as a version of) the usual Golden Rule, Korsgaard offers us a platinum rule, namely "do unto others as you cannot help but do unto yourself" (Korsgaard, 2009: 183). Isn't this less than fully altruistic or other directed in the way we expect morality to be? As she herself puts it, "What is the relationship between maintaining unity in your soul and doing things like telling the truth, keeping your promises, and respecting people's rights?" (Korsgaard, 2009: 181) Her answer is that "the inwardly just person will also be outwardly just" (Korsgaard, 2009: 206). Is this true? Can't evil people be consistent and unified and whole? Here we encounter again the test case of the consistent Nazi. It is a case that Korgaard explicitly considers when she analyzes different possible psychologies, including that of "the tyrant," the person who radically discounts the rights of others. "The tyrant," she says,

> is more than ready to grant that any . . . Jew would deserve the fate he reserves for his victims. But he doesn't think there is any content, any content whatever, to the thought that he himself might have been . . . a Jew.
>
> (Korsgaard, 2009: 173)

As an account of the psychology of actual Nazis this may well be true, but it doesn't mean that it *has* to be so. "According to Plato and Kant," Korsgaard tells us, "integrity in the

metaphysical sense—the unity of agency—and in the moral sense—goodness—are one and the same" (Korsgaard, 2009: 176), but it seems implausible to lump together the person whose choices and actions are so disconnected that his agency is undermined with the person whose choices and actions arise from a consistent and calculated contempt for other people. Let us agree with Korsgaard, Plato, and Kant that to be good at being a person is to have a unity of purpose, intelligently expressed and rationally pursued over time. What the concept of the consistent Nazi suggests, however, is that it is possible to be good at being an *evil* person.

In any case, even if this is not possible, some philosophers will object that to explain moral goodness in terms of unity of agency is to get matters the wrong way round. My actions are not morally commendable because they express (or ensure) my personal integrity; personal integrity arises when we act in ways that take the interests of others into account and have beneficial consequences for them. From this alternative point of view, the morally good person is *not* the sort of person Kant describes (i.e., someone who strives to obey an abstract, rational law), but someone who seeks in all they do to bring about "the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people." This last expression is, in fact, the slogan of an alternative but no less influential school of moral philosophy—Utilitarianism.

The dispute between Kantians and utilitarians is a very profound one that set the agenda for moral philosophy over many decades. It is a dispute in which Korsgaard has important things to say, but for the purposes of an introductory textbook, it is perhaps best to leave Kantianism and allow its major rival to take center stage. This is the topic of Chapter 8.

8
Utilitarianism

Chapter 7 concluded with the question "If the heart of morality is personal integrity, how does the happiness and well being of others fit in?" We might extend the question. How does personal integrity relate to my own happiness? If Kant is right, it is not *being* happy that matters most, but *deserving* to be happy. Yet it seems reasonable to ask why should anyone aspire to prefer the latter to the former?

Kant's most important and enduring rival in moral philosophy works the other way round. It gives pride of place to happiness, and it determines our moral worth on the success with which we bring it about. This is Utilitarianism, which is the topic of this chapter.

8.1 Utility and the Greatest Happiness Principle

The term "Utilitarianism" first came to prominence in the early nineteenth century, but not as the name of a philosophical doctrine. It was rather the label commonly attached to a group of radical English social reformers at whose instigation many important social measures were brought into effect. The term derives from the word "utility," meaning "usefulness," and the social reformers were labeled in this way because they made the practicality and usefulness of social institutions, rather than their religious significance or traditional function, the measure by which they were to be assessed. But the reformers' idea of what was useful and practical did not always coincide with the view or interests of those who had to live in the institutions they reformed. It was the utilitarians who were behind the dreaded institution of the workhouse which replaced the old Elizabethan Poor Law, and into which the poor and unemployed were often obliged to go. Under this new system the poor were not left in their own localities and given financial assistance by town officials, as they had been since the time of Queen Elizabeth I, but were compelled to move into large institutions where food, lodging, and employment were provided under the one roof, hence the name "workhouse." Throughout the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, workhouses were constructed in many parts of England and Wales. These may have served social "utility" better than the ramshackle workings of the Poor Law, for they took vagabonds off the street and enabled financial limits to be put on the total cost of welfare. But the poor greatly feared the prospect of the workhouse, and the misery and degradation of those who lived in many of them, most famously portrayed by Charles Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist*, have become an indelible part of our image of Victorian England. It is this rather harsh conception of utility that lies behind the modern meaning of the word

"utilitarian," nowadays defined as "concerned with usefulness alone, without regard to beauty or pleasantness" (Chambers Dictionary).

Both this definition and the popular picture of the Victorian workhouse, however, are quite inappropriate when we consider the philosophical doctrine called "Utilitarianism," because its chief concern is with general happiness rather than social convenience. Indeed, the philosophical doctrine is in fact somewhat misnamed since, far from ignoring pleasure and happiness, its most fundamental doctrine is that "that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness." This famous expression, generally known as "the Greatest Happiness Principle" (GHP) predates the label "Utilitarianism" by several decades. It is to be found first in the writings of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), an Irish Presbyterian minister who became Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, where he had the distinction of being the first professor in Scotland to lecture to his students in English rather than Latin. Hutcheson wrote a treatise entitled *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, in which the formulation of the GHP just quoted is to be found (section 3, paragraph 8). But Hutcheson's main concern in his writings was elsewhere, and he did not develop the GHP into a fully elaborated philosophical doctrine. In fact, though he provides the first formulation of its fundamental principle, the founder of Utilitarianism as a moral theory is usually thought to be the English jurist Jeremy Bentham.

8.2 Jeremy Bentham

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was a very remarkable man. He went up to the University of Oxford at the age of 12 and graduated at the age of 15. He then studied law, and he was called to the bar at the age of 19. He never actually practiced law, since he very soon became involved with the reform of the English legal system, which he found to be cumbersome and obscure in its theory and procedures as well as inhuman and unjust in its effects. His whole life, in fact, was devoted to campaigning for a more intelligible, just, and humane legal system. In the course of this life he wrote many thousands of pages. He wrote in a very fragmentary style, however, often abandoned a book before he had finished it, and did not bother about its publication even if he did finish it. Indeed, several of the few books that appeared in his lifetime were first published in France by an enthusiastic French follower. The result is that Bentham left relatively little in the way of sustained theoretical writings. Nevertheless, he was the chief inspiration of the radical politicians of his day. He also founded an influential journal, *Westminster Review*, and played a part in the establishment of University College London, where his mummified body, with a waxen head, is still on public view.

Bentham was more of a legal and constitutional theorist than a philosopher. Not only did he study constitutions, but he also drew them up, and his services were occasionally sought by newly founded republics who wanted written constitutions. Bentham made the basis of his recommendations "utility." By this he meant not "usefulness without regard to pleasantness," but rather

> that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness.
>
> (Bentham, 1789, 1960: 126)

Such was Bentham's influence on subsequent philosophical theory that, while in common speech "utilitarian" still means what Chambers Dictionary says it does, a philosophical utilitarian is one who believes in promoting pleasure and happiness. Bentham believed, as he tells us in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, that "[n]ature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do" (Bentham, 1789, 1960: 125). Accordingly, the way to construct successful social institutions (i.e., institutions with which people can live contentedly) is to ensure that they are productive of as much pleasure and as little pain as possible for those who live under them. Thus expressed, of course, this is a social or political doctrine rather than an ethical one. However, we can easily extend the same sort of thinking to human actions and hold that the right action for an individual to perform on any occasion is that which will produce the greatest pleasure and the least pain to those affected by it. Bentham himself meant it to encompass both. He goes on to say:

> The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work. . . . By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: . . . I say of every action whatsoever; and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.
>
> (Bentham, 1789, 1960: 126)

In very much in the same spirit, we can extend the principle of utility to include not just actions, but whole lives. It thus becomes a general view of the morally good life according to which the best human life will be one spent in maximizing the happiness and minimizing the pain in the world.

One of Bentham's contributions to the theory of Utilitarianism was the elaboration of a "hedonic calculus," a system of distinguishing and measuring different kinds of pleasure and pain so that the relative weights of the consequences of different courses of action could be compared. In this way, he thought, he had provided a rational method of decision making for legislators, courts, and individuals which would replace the rationally unfounded prejudices and the utterly whimsical processes from which, in Bentham's view, political, judicial, and administrative decisions usually emerge.

From a philosophical point of view, some of Bentham's thinking is rather crude. The man who gave the doctrine greater philosophical sophistication was John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). Mill was the son of one of Bentham's close associates, James Mill (1773–1836). Among his many writings is an essay entitled *Utilitarianism*. It is this short work which made "Utilitarianism" the recognized name of a philosophical theory and at the same time provided its most widely discussed version. Here Mill expressly commends a divorce between the common and the philosophical uses of "utility."

> A passing remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for utility as the test of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure.
>
> (Mill, 1871, 1998: 54)

This is, he says, a "perverted" use of the term "utility," and one which has unfairly discredited the "theory of utility," which he restates in the following way:

> [t]he creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle . . . that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.
>
> (Mill, 1871, 1998: 55)

Mill intended his work to rescue the word "utility" from corruption, but despite his efforts, the words "utility" and "utilitarian" in common speech still mean something opposed to pleasure and only indirectly connected with happiness. Yet if the terminology of philosophical Utilitarianism remains somewhat specialized, the doctrine itself has come to have wide appeal in the modern world. Even a cursory glance at most of the advice columns in contemporary newspapers and magazines, for instance, will reveal that their writers assume the truth of something like the GHP. Moreover, they clearly regard such a view as not only correct, but uncontentious and incontestable. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that Utilitarianism has come to be the main element in contemporary moral thinking. A great many people suppose that there can be no serious objection to the moral ideal of maximizing happiness and minimizing unhappiness, both in personal relationships and in the world at large. When actions are prescribed that appear to have no connection with pleasure and pain (e.g., orthodox Jewish dietary restrictions) or when social rules are upheld which run counter to the GHP (e.g., Christian restrictions on divorce), it is those actions or restrictions which are most readily called into question, not the GHP itself.

And yet, as we shall see, Utilitarianism encounters serious philosophical difficulties. In order to appreciate the full force of these difficulties, it is first necessary to expound the doctrine more fully by introducing some important distinctions.

8.3 Egotism, Altruism, and Generalized Benevolence

Both Bentham and Mill make the principle of utility or the GHP the center of their moral thinking. Mill defines happiness in terms of pleasure, and Bentham makes no distinction between the two. This focus upon pleasure may raise a doubt as to whether there is anything new in Utilitarianism that has not already been discussed in Chapter 4 under the heading of "hedonism." Have we not seen already that pleasure and happiness cannot be the foundation of the good life, because people may indulge in loathsome pleasures and have radically different conceptions of happiness? Why do these objections not apply to Utilitarianism?

It is true, certainly, that some of the same issues as were discussed in the context of hedonism also arise in the discussion of Utilitarianism. If other people have sadistic pleasures, why should I promote them? This and similar questions will be considered in a later section. But for the moment it is very important to see that, contrary to the impression that may be given by Bentham and Mill's emphasis on pleasure, Utilitarianism does not imply or endorse an egotistical attitude to life. It does not attribute special value to the pleasure or happiness of the individual whose actions are to be directed by it. Indeed, Bentham says that in applying the principle, each is to count for one, and no one for more than one, a dictum Mill says "might be written under the principle of utility as an explanatory comment" (Mill, 1871, 1998: 105). What this means is that my pleasures and pains are not to be regarded by me as any more important than yours when it comes to deciding what is right and wrong for me or for anyone to do. My own pleasures and pains and those of others are to be calculated and compared exactly on a par. Egotism or self-centeredness, which

is related to, but is not the same thing, as the egoism discussed earlier, may be characterized as the attitude that gives pride of place to our own welfare. By contrast, utilitarians insist that everyone's welfare should be treated as equal. This ensures that Utilitarianism is not an egotistical doctrine.

But neither is Utilitarianism altruistic, if by altruism we mean the doctrine that the interests of others should be put before our own interests. Many people have thought altruism to be central to morality. No doubt this is largely because Western morality has been heavily influenced by Christianity, and in most Christian traditions self-denial has been regarded as a virtue. Arguably, Christianity does permit a measure of concern for self alongside concern for others—"Love your neighbour *as yourself*" is one of the New Testament's injunctions. However this may be, Utilitarianism certainly does allow us to be concerned with our own welfare, though not to the exclusion of others. If what matters is happiness in the abstract, one's own happiness is as important as anyone else's. But it is not any *more* important. This feature of Utilitarianism is usually called its attitude of "generalized benevolence," a term which is to be contrasted with both altruism and egotism.

As we shall see, there remains a question whether, and on what basis, the requirement to adopt an attitude of generalized benevolence can be shown to be obligatory. Why *should* I treat my own interests on a par with others, and why *must* I treat all others on a par? Can I not reasonably favor my children over other people's children? But before addressing these questions directly, there are other distinctions to be drawn.

8.4 Act and Rule Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism, as Bentham defines it, holds that that action is best which leads to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. (Actually, the addition of "the greatest number" is redundant. If we seek the greatest happiness, numbers will take care of themselves). It does not take a great deal of imagination, however, to think of special contexts in which this principle would condone some very questionable actions. For instance, children often spontaneously laugh at the peculiar movements of handicapped people, and we teach them not to do so because of the hurt this causes. But from the point of view of the general happiness, it could be the case that we would do just as well, or better, to encourage their laughter. On the assumption that the handicapped are a small minority, it is perfectly possible that the pleasure derived by the majority, if given full rein, would outweigh the pain caused to a minority and so accord with the GHP.

Counterexamples of this sort can be multiplied indefinitely. Imaginary cases show that the strict application of the GHP has results which stand in sharp contradiction to commonly accepted opinion. Some of the counterexamples philosophers have devised are rather fanciful, but they make the same point very clearly. Imagine a healthy and solitary vagrant who leads a mundane existence and contributes nothing to the common good. If there were in the same vicinity a talented musician needing a heart transplant, a brilliant scientist needing a liver transplant, and a teenager whose life was being made miserable by a defective kidney, then on anyone's reckoning the greatest happiness of the greatest number would be served by killing the vagrant painlessly and using his organs for the benefit of the other three. But such an action would, of course, be wilful murder of the innocent. It follows that under certain circumstances, Utilitarianism would not only condone, but morally require the intentional violation of the right to life.

In response to counterexamples of this kind a distinction is usually drawn between "act" Utilitarianism and "rule" Utilitarianism. Whereas the former (i.e., the version

Bentham espouses) says that every action must accord with the greatest happiness, the latter says that you should act in accordance with those *rules of conduct* that are most conducive to the greatest happiness. Drawing this distinction enables the rule utilitarian to say that, while there may indeed be occasions when an action commonly regarded as abhorrent would contribute more to the general happiness, the abhorrence arises from the fact that it is contrary to a rule which itself is the rule most conducive to the greatest happiness. The reason for condemning the wilful murder of the innocent is thus a utilitarian one, because the absence of such a general prohibition would greatly increase fear, pain, and loss amongst human beings, and hence it would create unhappiness. Moreover, since we cannot be sure of the consequences of each given action, and we could not reasonably take time to estimate and evaluate them in each and every case, we have to be guided by general rules. And the only acceptable criterion for those rules is a utilitarian one: Act in accordance with those rules which, if generally acted upon, will lead to the greatest happiness.

This amendment to the basic act Utilitarianism of Bentham was made by Mill. Mill regarded this apparent conflict between utility and justice, as is illustrated by the case of the vagrant, to be the biggest stumbling block to Utilitarianism. But, he claims,

> The moral rules which forbid mankind to hurt one another (in which we must never forget to include wrongful interference with each other's freedom) are more vital to human well-being than any maxims, however important, which only point out the best mode of managing some department of human affairs.
>
> (Mill, 1871, 1998: 103)

It is the importance of the rules of justice for the happiness of us all, according to Mill, that commonly gives rise to a feeling of outrage when any one of them is broken. But though we have this very strong and special feeling about justice and rights, upon reflection we can see

> that justice is a name for certain moral requirements, which, regarded collectively, stand higher in the scale of social utility, and are therefore of more paramount obligation, than any others; though particular cases may occur in which some other social duty is so important, as to overrule any one of the general maxims of justice.
>
> (Mill, 1871, 1998: 106)

This version of Utilitarianism, the rule utilitarian will say, is not vulnerable to the sort of counterexample so easily brought against the act utilitarian variety because it can explain—always in terms of utility—why some actions are forbidden in general, regardless of the finer measurements of the hedonic calculus. It can also explain the strong feelings people have about justice and injustice, because a concern with what is called "justice" is vital to everyone's happiness. And it can also explain why, in a few very rare cases, it may be right to overrule the dictates of justice.

One might wonder just why the imagined example of the vagrant sacrificed for spare part surgery does not fall within Mill's category of "particular cases" that allow us to "overrule the maxims of justice," and in due course we will ask whether drawing a distinction between act and rule Utilitarianism does provide a defense against the sort of objection we have just considered. But before we move to a general examination of the doctrine as a whole, there is one more distinction to be introduced and explained.

8.5 Utilitarianism and Consequentialism

Act Utilitarianism holds that actions should be judged directly according to their consequences for happiness. Since this seems to give rise to unacceptable applications, such as sacrificing the vagrant for spare part surgery, rule utilitarians accordingly amend it in favor of the principle that our actions should be judged according to rules which, if followed, will have consequences conducive to the greatest happiness. But either version has two distinct aspects, usually referred to as the "hedonic" and the "consequentialist." The hedonic aspect of Utilitarianism is its concern with happiness as the ultimate criterion of good and bad and right and wrong—a point of contrast with existentialism which makes freedom more central, and with Kantianism which gives pride of place to duty.

However, both these other doctrines can be contrasted with Utilitarianism in another way; they are neither of them consequentialist. That is to say, whereas Utilitarianism makes the consequences of an action the basis upon which it is to be judged, existentialism regards the authenticity or good faith with which an action is performed as the thing that gives it value, and Kantianism regards the will or intention behind an action to be what determines its moral value.

The difference between consequentialist and nonconsequentialist theories shows up most clearly in the different judgments they sustain in particular cases. Take the well-known example of Don Quixote, Cervantes famous hero who pursued the loftiest ideals with the greatest enthusiasm but in a hopelessly unrealistic way. In the eyes of a Kantian, provided the ideals and enthusiasm of such a man are of the right kind, the fact that nothing of the ideal is realized or that havoc may follow in his path is not decisive; such a person can nonetheless be morally worthy. Or consider the actions of someone like the French nineteenth-century painter Gauguin, who deserted his wife and family and sailed to Tahiti to pursue his true calling as an artist. To an existentialist, his being true to himself allows us to discount the impact of his actions upon others. In neither case is happiness or unhappiness especially important. This is not just because other things are more important than happiness, but because, in passing judgment on Don Quixote or Gauguin, it is not consequences that we should be judging, but the will with which, or the spirit in which, they did what they did. In taking this view, both theories differ markedly from Utilitarianism.

Utilitarian ethics, then, has two important aspects: the hedonic (its concern with pleasure and happiness) and the consequentialist (its focus upon the consequences of action). Moreover, the hedonic and the consequentialist aspects are not only distinct; they are separate since neither implies the other. An evaluative doctrine can be consequentialist without being hedonic and hence without being utilitarian. Consider the case of Gauguin again. Utilitarians are likely to think badly of Gauguin because of the consequential pain and anguish he caused his wife and family (though a utilitarian *could* argue that the pleasure given by his paintings in the longer term has outweighed the pain he caused at first). But it is not hard to imagine another principle which, though also consequentialist, concerned itself with a different type of consequence (e.g., artistic consequences). Someone who took the sort of view Oscar Wilde used to espouse and defend on his American lecture tours—that the best actions are those whose consequences protect and promote beauty to the greatest degree (a view sometimes called "aestheticism")—could argue that we should think well of Gauguin precisely because his action had good consequences—not for human happiness, but for art and beauty. Aestheticism of this kind is consequentialist without being hedonic, since it takes consequences for beauty, not happiness, to be the ones that matter.

What this shows is that Utilitarianism is not *the same as* consequentialism, and this opens it up to two different types of criticism. We might criticize utilitarians for focusing so exclusively on happiness or for their making everything depend on consequences. If either criticism were found to be substantial, this would signal the refutation of the doctrine as a whole. It is especially important to mark this distinction between the two aspects of Utilitarianism, because even if we think (as many do) that the importance of happiness cannot be exaggerated, it may still be the case that the consequences of an action are not all that matter. Whether there are substantial criticisms on either count is a question we shall now have to investigate. Let us begin with consequentialism.

8.6 Ascertaining Consequences

Consider this simple action. I toss a rock into a pool. This causes ripples to travel outwards until the original force is spent, at which point we can say that the consequences of my action are complete. There is an understandable tendency to think that all actions follow this pattern, although it does not take much reflection to see that this is not the case. It is true that, in general, actions do indeed effect changes in the world—by and large that is their point after all. Nevertheless, the consequences of most actions cannot be circumscribed after the fashion suggested by the rippling pool. The immediate consequences of an action have further consequences themselves, and in turn those consequences have consequences, and so on indefinitely. The situation is made yet more complex when we add negative consequences, that is, when we take into consideration the things that *don't* happen because of what we do as well as the things that do happen. One consequence of my buying a bottle of wine is that the wine shop makes money, but another is that the bookshop loses out on the purchase I might have made there instead. The addition of negative consequences greatly extends the number of effects that can properly be considered as the consequences of our actions. In fact, they are in the strict sense numberless, not because they are *infinite*, but because they are *indefinite*. This makes the total consequences of an action practically impossible to calculate, since there is now no clear sense to the idea of *the* consequences of an action at all.

To appreciate these points fully, consider the following example. A popular myth holds that the First World War was begun by a single action—the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in the streets of the Balkan town of Sarajevo. Though the assassination did take place, a better understanding of the historical complexities undermines its significance. But let us ignore these and suppose the myth to be true. The assassins were successful because of a mistake on the part of the Archduke's driver, who drove up a dead end and was forced to turn back. As the car halted in order to turn, the assassins got the chance which had evaded them all day. Thus Ferdinand was shot when he would otherwise have been driven safely home, had the driver not made his fateful error.

What are we to say of the driver's action in turning the wrong way? Its immediate consequence was that the Archduke was dead. But the consequence of that was the outbreak of a war in which many millions were slaughtered. That war provoked the Russian Revolution, which eventually brought Stalin to power, and it ended with a peace settlement under which Germany was treated so harshly that the settlement, far from establishing a long-lasting peace, itself became a major contributory factor in the rise of Hitler. With the rise of Hitler came the Holocaust, the Second World War, the development of nuclear weapons, and the use of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Considered from a utilitarian point of view, that one simple error must have been the worst action in history by a very wide margin.

Of course, there is something both monstrous and absurd about attributing responsibility for this vast chain of consequences to the Archduke's driver. To begin with, it must cross our minds to wonder whether most of the same events would not have happened anyway. Another equally natural response is to say in the driver's defense that his was an unintentional mistake and that it was the assassins, after all, who deliberately committed the murder. To respond in this second way is revealing. It has two distinct aspects. The first part of the defense looks beyond the consequences to the driver's intentions. The fact that this is a very natural response shows how contrary it is to deep-seated ways of thinking to assess the rightness or wrongness of an action *solely* in terms of consequences it has. The second part of the defense suggests that the chain of consequences may not be the same as the chain of responsibility. The assassination of the Archduke was certainly a consequence of the driver's mistake, but perhaps it does not follow from this that he is to be held responsible. The driver was responsible for the car's being halted in a side road, but it was the assassins who decided to fire. Why should the driver be saddled with responsibility for their decision?

Both these lines of thought are important, but a third objection to consequentialism observes that if we are to trace its consequences indefinitely in this way, we may as easily go back beyond the driver's action and construe it as a consequence of someone else's action. Why start the chain of consequences with him rather than the superior officer who assigned him to that duty? And why stop there? Why not see this assignation as the consequence of the actions of whoever appointed the superior officer? And so on indefinitely.

8.7 Assessment and Prescription

A consequentialist might reply to these criticisms as follows: We must distinguish between the appeal to consequences in assessing an action after it has taken place and the anticipation of consequences in recommending or prescribing a future course of action. If it really is true that most of the worst aspects of twentieth-century European history were consequences of that hapless driver's mistake, then it was indeed an appalling error. But of course consequences on this scale could not be foreseen at the time, and the driver cannot properly be accused of acting so as to bring about those consequences. In deciding to turn the car he made a fateful decision, but at the time he acted rightly if, as far as he could see, such a decision was likely to have good consequences. Concern with consequences before the event can obviously only be with *anticipated* consequences (since they haven't happened yet), whereas the concern with consequences after the event is with *actual* consequences. As a result, strange though this may sound, it can be right to perform an action which turns out to have been wrong, because "wrong" here just means ineffectual.

If we observe this distinction between assessment and prescription, a consequentialist might argue, we do not get the absurd or monstrous results that the example of the Archduke's driver was supposed to reveal. So long as we are clear that it is an *assessment* we are making, we can ask about the actual consequences of the driver's mistake independently of his responsibility for those consequences. The reason for taking his action as the starting point of our assessment and not looking further back to the things that gave rise to it is just that we have chosen to ask about the consequences of that action and not an earlier one. We can just as easily ask about the consequences of the assassin's action and find these to be horrific too. There is no uncertainty here provided we are clear about which action or event it is whose consequences we want to assess.

When it comes to holding people responsible, on the other hand, the position is quite different. If we enter imaginatively into the driver's situation, we have to decide what, as

consequentialists, it would be sensible to prescribe as his best action at the time and in the circumstances prevailing. Pretty plainly, having made his mistake, the recommendation would be that he should turn the car in order to take the Archduke back safely. He was not to know that assassins would by chance enter the same street at that moment. Therefore, because the *anticipated* consequences were good, even though the *actual* consequences were not, he chose rightly.

This distinction between deciding how to act and assessing how we have acted is obviously of the greatest importance for consequentialism, because we cannot know the consequences of our actions before we have taken them. As a result, a doctrine restricted to assessment after the event would have no practical application. But if we cannot assess actual consequences before the event, how are we to decide what to do? The answer is that we have to rely upon generalizations about cause and effect and follow general rules. We estimate the likely consequences of a proposed course of action on the basis of past experience, and we summarize our experience in useful general rules of conduct.

Does the distinction between assessment and prescription overcome the objections to consequentialism it was intended to meet? The first objection—that every action has an indefinitely long chain of consequences which it would be impossible to anticipate or assess—raises some very deep and difficult philosophical questions about cause and effect. Fortunately, I do not think we need to get embroiled in these for present purposes. Whatever way one looks at it, we can say with certainty that shooting people hurts and often kills them, and it frequently brings misery and grief in its train. We may be unsure just how far to trace the consequences of an action, or rather, which of the many consequences are relevant to moral assessment. It is plain, however, that we are indeed able to make limited judgments of this sort. Perhaps for practical purposes it is always necessary to draw a somewhat arbitrary line when estimating consequences, but so long as we can make some such estimate, we can raise the question whether it is chiefly or solely the agreed consequences of the action that matter. Consequentialists say that it is, and others (like Kant) say that it is not. The dispute between them can only arise once the relevant consequences have been agreed upon. Thus any difficulty about estimating the consequences in a more absolute sense cannot settle that dispute in favor of either party. In short, there is certainly a metaphysical difficulty about the idea of *the* consequences of an action, but it is one which need not trouble ethical consequentialism, so long as *in practice* the morally relevant consequences of an action are agreed upon—which they usually are.

The second problem is not so easily circumvented, however. This is the objection that it is unreasonable to say that people have acted badly because of consequences which were not merely unforeseen, but unforeseeable. We can usefully return here to an example from Chapter 7—someone who raises money and dispatches medical supplies to some disaster stricken part of the world. The medicines are badly stored, and as a result they become contaminated. The consequence is that those who are given them fall horribly ill, and in the end more people die than if no supplies had been sent in the first place. The Kantian thinks this sort of example shows that consequences are irrelevant to the moral merits of the action.

The consequentialist would reply, however, that consequences are relevant even to examples of this sort. What makes the action praiseworthy is that it was an attempt to prevent pain and promote health and happiness (i.e., an action whose probable consequences were good). Certainly, it is not enough for people to mean well; they must actually be motivated by an accurate estimate of likely consequences. What makes such a principle of action praiseworthy, consequentialists think, is the fact that, special cases apart, acting upon *anticipated* good consequences generally leads to *actual* good consequences.

8.8 Consequentialism and Spontaneity

This reply raises a further difficulty, however, which philosophers generally refer to as "the problem of spontaneity." Is it true that if, in general, people try to *anticipate* the consequences of their actions, this will tend to *result in* good consequences? Take the case of children falling into rivers. If potential rescuers pause to take stock and estimate the consequences of any attempted rescue, in most cases the children will drown. Similarly, in the case of plane crashes or earthquakes, time taken up in consideration of the consequences is more likely to increase than diminish the death toll. If more lives are to be saved in circumstances such as these, what is needed is spontaneity on the part the rescuers, a willingness *not* to stop and think, but to act spontaneously. Of course, spontaneous action does not always lead to the best consequences. I may save someone from death but thereby condemn them to a life of constant pain and misery. Or I might unwittingly pull a future Hitler from the flames. Had I stopped to calculate, these results might have been anticipated. This shows that sometimes it would be useful to estimate consequences. The trouble is that we cannot know these occasions in advance, and so the general good is better served if we do *not* try to estimate the consequences of our actions.

This is a curious conclusion. It seems that precisely because (in retrospect) the moral quality of an action is to be assessed in terms of consequences, at the time of its performance we should ignore any thought of consequences. More lives will be saved if people uncritically believe that you ought to try to save life *whatever the consequences*. In this way, it seems, consequentialist doctrines (e.g., "act so as to bring about the best consequences") are worthless as guides to action. In other words, if what has been said about spontaneity is true, the very belief that it is the consequences of an action that matter ultimately requires us *not* to be practicing consequentialists.

If we extend this line of reasoning from consequentialism in general to Utilitarianism in particular, we must conclude that a belief in the GHP requires us not to be practicing utilitarians, at least some of the time. The greatest happiness will not always be served by those who spend time and effort on calculating the greatest happiness; sometimes the greatest happiness will be better served by those who spontaneously follow their own instincts.

8.9 Act and Rule

At this point a utilitarian will be tempted to reply that throughout this discussion of consequentialism, the crucial distinction between act and rule Utilitarianism has been overlooked. While an act utilitarian, it will be recalled, believes that every action should be taken so as to maximize happiness, the rule utilitarian thinks that our actions should be determined by rules which, if generally followed, would lead to the greatest happiness. So a rule utilitarian might say this: It is true that people ought not to pause on each and every occasion to ponder the consequences of their actions. For one thing, we are not always able to estimate the consequences of our actions with any degree of accuracy, and for another, the *general* welfare and happiness does often need people to act spontaneously and be guided by their own instincts. But this only shows that people should follow *rules* of conduct. It may indeed be best for people to follow these rules in a wholly unreflective and intuitive way (at least on occasions), but the best rules for them to follow will still be utilitarian ones (i.e., rules framed in accordance with what is most conducive to the welfare and happiness of all).

It should now be evident that the distinction between act and rule Utilitarianism is a very important one, because it has been called upon to provide the means of replying to two

serious objections. To the objection that Utilitarianism too readily justifies the use of unjust means to utilitarian ends (our example was the murder of a vagrant to provide others with vital transplant organs), a rule utilitarian, such as Mill, replies that the rules and the deep sense of justice to which this sort of counterexample appeals are themselves to be explained in terms of the GHP. Also, to the objection that it would be a bad thing if our every action was guided by the GHP, the rule utilitarian replies that our actions should be guided by an adherence to rules which are themselves justified by appeal to the GHP.

It is thus very clear that a lot rests upon the rule version of Utilitarianism. And yet some philosophers have argued that the distinction between act and rule Utilitarianism cannot ultimately be sustained to the purpose for which it was introduced. The argument goes like this. Take a rule such as "Never punish the innocent." To many people this seems a fundamental principle of justice, but on a utilitarian account, the force of this rule, whether or not we call it a rule of justice, arises from its important connection with social utility. The greatest happiness of the greatest number of people in society at large will best be served if officers of the law consider this rule inviolable. Now consider a very familiar sort of counterexample.

In a frontier town three children have been abducted, sexually assaulted, tortured, and murdered. There is an enormous public demand that the local sheriff find the murderer. As time goes on and no one is arrested, public fear increases, unrest grows, and confidence in the forces of law and order diminishes. A man is arrested, and such is the circumstantial evidence against him that it is widely believed that the real culprit has been found. It becomes clear to the sheriff, however, that the man he has arrested is innocent and ought to be released, yet a lynch mob has gathered and is threatening to tear down the jailhouse unless the suspect is tried and executed or handed over to the mob. There is no immediate possibility of a fair trial, and it looks to the sheriff as though serious public disorder and considerable damage and injury are likely if he tries to resist the demands of the lynch mob. Should he execute a man he knows to be innocent?

Most people would recognize this as a real dilemma. Its imaginary nature should not mislead us. Dilemmas of this sort are common in the modern world. The following sort of case is only too familiar. Terrorists have taken innocent hostages and are about to detonate a bomb which will kill and injure many hundreds of people. The only way to stop them is to destroy their headquarters, killing the hostages at the same time. In contexts of this kind it is easy to utter the old maxim *Fiat justitia, ruat caelum* ("Let justice be done, though the heavens fall") until there is a real prospect of the heavens falling. The philosophical question here, however, is not how dilemmas like these are to be resolved, but how they are to be analyzed. A nonutilitarian who believes that justice cannot be reduced to or even explained in terms of utility will think that what we have is a straightforward clash between the general welfare and the rights of the innocent, in short between utility and justice. It is this clash that makes these sorts of cases dilemmas.

In sharp contrast, an act utilitarian will not be able to identify any element of dilemma at all. If the balance of general good over individual loss has been properly described, then it is as clear as anything could be that we should sacrifice the innocent. From the point of view of act Utilitarianism, these cases are in principle no different from any other calculation about good and bad consequences; if the good outweighs the bad, then there is nothing wrong with our action. There is no dilemma over which to agonize.

Few people would accept this view of the matter, and they are therefore inclined to reject act Utilitarianism. It is rejection on these grounds that Mill and subsequent rule utilitarians have hoped to forestall. The appeal to moral rules, they claim, can explain both why we

think there is a dilemma in this sort of case and how we are to resolve it. The thought is that though by killing the innocent in these special circumstances we may be acting for the best, it nonetheless requires us to violate a firmly held rule which is itself based on considerations of utility and to which a powerful *sense* of justice has become attached. The dilemma is essentially psychological rather than moral; what we judge the right thing to do conflicts with our attachment to the general rule.

This is Mill's account of the matter. He says of cases involving the rights of innocent parties:

> To have a right . . . is . . . to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask, why it ought? I can give him no other reason than general utility. If that expression does not seem to convey a sufficient feeling of the strength of the obligation, nor to account for the peculiar energy of the feeling, it is because there goes to the composition of the sentiment, not a rational only, but also an animal element, the thirst for retaliation; and this thirst derives its intensity, as well as its moral justification, from the extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility which is concerned.
>
> (Mill, 1871, 1998: 98)

Cases like those of the lynch mob and the innocent hostages, then, are explained by Mill as a conflict between rational calculation of utility and a deep "animal" attachment to a rule which is itself, in general, closely bound up with utility. But this account leaves one important matter unexplained. Why should we have the rule "Never punish the innocent"? Mill's answer is that, in general, this rule serves social utility. But plainly it does not always serve it, as the frontier town sheriff's dilemma shows. In fact, the following rule would serve social utility better: "Never punish the innocent unless serious social strife needs to be averted thereby." Between this rule and the particular case, however, there need be no conflict, because the more specific rule allows the execution of the innocent man.

If this is correct, then there is a very important implication to be drawn from it. The whole point of the rule version of Utilitarianism is that it purports to offer an alternative to the unacceptable act version. Now we have seen that it does not really do so. Faced with cases like those we have been considering, act utilitarians can offer no explanation of why we think there is a dilemma. But neither can rule utilitarians. They may claim that the dilemma arises because there is a conflict between what utility demands in the particular case and what is demanded by the normal social rule governing cases of that sort. We have just seen, however, that any such conflict can readily be eliminated by carefully refining the rule to take account of these special circumstances, in other words by coming up with an *amended* rule. It follows that on the rule utilitarian account of the matter there is no real dilemma. Thus rule Utilitarianism offers no more of an explanation than act Utilitarianism. To put it in philosophical language, act and rule Utilitarianism are coextensive.

8.10 Summary: Does the End Justify the Means?

We saw earlier that Utilitarianism is a consequentialist doctrine, according to which it is the consequences of actions that matter from a moral point of view. Though there is more to Utilitarianism than this, its consequentialist aspect gives rise to important questions and difficulties. In the last few sections we have been exploring these difficulties in some detail, but they can be summarized around the age-old question "Does the end always justify the

means?" Is an action always justified if it has good consequences, regardless of the intention with which it was carried out or the kind of action it is? Consequentialists may differ over what kind of consequences they regard as good, but they must agree in thinking that, since consequences are what matter, the end *does* justify the means. The arguments we have considered suggest that this is wrong.

First, we cannot sensibly speak of *the* consequences of an action. And even if we agree what to regard as the relevant consequences of an action, we cannot explain responsibility simply by following chains of consequences; we also need to consider aims and intentions. Second, sometimes the exclusive pursuit of good consequences seems to require us to undertake courses of action that run counter to our sense of justice. In these cases we need, at the very least, an explanation of the dilemma we feel. A theory such as act Utilitarianism, which takes the consequences of each individual action to be what matters, cannot do this. At best it explains why we think there is a dilemma when, in reality, there is none. This is just the objection that rule Utilitarianism aims to overcome. What the argument of the last section showed is that it does not succeed in doing so. If we focus solely on the utility of the consequences, we will always have reason to prefer a rule which permits rather than forbids objectionable actions.

Most people find these objections to consequentialism in general and Utilitarianism in particular to be highly persuasive. It should be recognized, however, that they are not conclusive. Like some of the objections to other theories we have encountered, they rely upon a conflict with widely held views. To be consistent, we must reject consequentialism if we are to persist with common views about responsibility, justice, and so on. But we could, with equal consistency, hold on to consequentialism and reject commonly held views. This does not necessarily mean that we can hold on to Utilitarianism, because there is another aspect of it yet to be considered—the hedonic aspect. It is to the examination of this second aspect of Utilitarianism that we now turn.

8.11 The Nature of Happiness

Almost since the first appearance of Utilitarianism, philosophers have wondered whether the idea of happiness—upon which it depends so heavily—can be made sufficiently clear and precise to do the job the GHP requires of it. Many of these criticisms, it seems to me, can be answered fairly easily; others can be answered less easily; still others can perhaps not be answered at all. It will be best to consider these in order.

Presented with the GHP, people often wonder what exactly happiness is. Neither Bentham nor Mill is very helpful here, because, based on a psychological contrast between pleasure and pain, both identify happiness with pleasure. As we saw earlier, Aristotle convincingly shows this to be a mistaken way of thinking. However, the fact that there is some confusion in these two writers should not lead us to the conclusion that we cannot ourselves be clear about what we mean by happiness. Actually, the application of Utilitarianism to everyday life does not really need an explicit account of happiness. It is enough if we are able to identify happiness and unhappiness in ourselves and others and distinguish between happy or unhappy resolutions to difficulties and alternative resolutions with different merits or demerits. For instance, we can usually distinguish happy and unhappy marriages. When a marriage is an unhappy one, the question of divorce often arises. In such cases it is often said that happiness is more important than keeping marriage vows. The fact that such a claim can easily be made is evidence that, even in the absence of a general account of what it is, happiness can enter into moral deliberation as one value distinct from others.

Sometimes, though, it is suggested that there is no *one* thing that we can label "happiness." Different activities and styles of life appeal to different people, and what makes one person happy may make another miserable. As a result, trying to secure other people's happiness can easily go wrong, and to work for happiness in general may be impossible. Now the claim that people differ in what makes them happy is obviously true. One woman may be happiest at home surrounded by children, while to another the same style of life is stifling captivity (a theme explored in Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours*, subsequently an award-winning film). But nothing follows from this about promoting happiness. A woman for whom domesticity is the greatest source of personal happiness can readily understand that this is not true for everyone. She can regard the promotion of happiness as hugely important and at the same time acknowledge that this does not mean prescribing the way of life that makes *her* happy as the road to happiness for *all* women. Indeed, she might expressly oppose any social convention that imposes her ideal of wife and mother precisely on the grounds that it makes too many women unhappy.

Such differences are real but do not impair our ability to tell happiness from unhappiness and hence our ability to act on the GHP. Moreover, it is worth reminding ourselves that, as Mill observes, though there are these differences, in general there is also a wide measure of commonality in the things that make for human happiness. By and large everyone finds sickness, injury, bereavement, hostility, and insecurity obstacles to happiness, though of course some people overcome them more easily than others. From this it follows that, though the interests and inclinations of individuals do differ, in practical deliberation there are at least some general guidelines we can follow for the promotion of happiness.

8.12 Measuring Happiness

Neither the absence of a general account of what constitutes happiness nor the existence of differences in what makes human beings happy presents a substantial difficulty for Utilitarianism. But a critic can point out that Utilitarianism requires much more than an ability to tell happiness when we see it. The theory also requires that it be measurable. Someone who accepts that we can tell happiness from unhappiness easily enough may well deny that we can quantify it. And yet this is what we must be able to do if we are to apply the GHP. We must have some way of estimating and adding up the happiness that each individual will get as a result of alternative courses of action if we are to achieve the greatest happiness.

The idea of measuring happiness or pleasure—for Bentham they amounted to the same thing—figures prominently in the thinking of Bentham. As we saw earlier, he tried to think out what later became known as a "hedonic calculus," a list of dimensions along which pleasure should be measured. In the fifth chapter of his *Principles*, he distinguishes between different sources of pleasure according to their intensity, duration, and so on, and he suggests how these are to be ranked in importance. We will not inquire here into the details of his scheme. One thing that is important to observe about it is that, though the name it was subsequently given—hedonic *calculus*—may be thought to imply the contrary, there are in fact no numerical calculations in it. Indeed Bentham does not use numbers at all; he only makes comparative judgments.

It is true that later utilitarians did use numbers, especially those who introduced utilitarian conceptions and ideas into economics. Indeed, the principal achievement of one of the most prominent, an English economist called Jevons, was precisely to introduce mathematical techniques to economic theory. One of the effects of this was the practice of representing interpersonal comparisons by graphs. The term used by the economists was not

pleasure or happiness, but "utility," and it is this term that has stuck. Economists still talk of "marginal utility curves." Whether what they say in this connection has much to do with the GHP is debatable, but there is no doubt that they require measurable quantities in order to theorize in the way they do. And to many who are unimpressed by the earlier objections, there really is something absurd in supposing that human happiness can be added up and represented on a graph!

Still, it is easy to mistake the true role of numbers here. No serious philosopher or economist has supposed that pleasure or happiness can be measured in the way that sugar, rainfall, or earth tremors can. No one thinks we might devise an instrument of measurement. What Bentham thought was that different pleasures could be compared in such a way as to bring out their relative importance, and there is nothing absurd about this idea. Such comparisons are being made everyday, for instance by children who have limited pocket money to spend and have to decide what purchase would give them more satisfaction, tourists whose holidays are coming to an end and have to decide which trips would be more enjoyable, or any individual choosing between a trip to the cinema or an evening at home. In general, human beings have to make comparisons of pleasure in a host of different contexts, not just for themselves, but for others. In choosing a surprise for your birthday, I may have to decide which of several possibilities would give you most pleasure. Even if, unlike Bentham, we distinguish between pleasure and happiness, we still find that making comparisons of degrees of happiness is something we do all the time. Parents may have to decide at which school a child would be happier. Children may have to decide whether it would make for the greater happiness of all concerned for aging parents to enter a retirement home.

Now if such comparisons can be, and regularly are, made, there is no reason why they should not be represented by the use of numbers. Suppose I have three courses of action open to me and try to estimate in each case what the impact on everyone's happiness would be. I decide that course A would lead to more unhappiness than course B, and that course B would lead to more unhappiness than course C. I have thus ranked the courses of action. But I might also think that course A would make people very much more unhappy than course C, whereas course B would only make them a little more unhappy. I may now represent this judgement in numerical terms, say by giving A a value of -10, B a value of +7, and C a value of +10.

To represent the matter in this way can help to make the comparative judgments clearer to myself and others. It might still be doubted, of course, whether, having employed numerical values, I am thereby enabled to employ the normal range of mathematical techniques (e.g., adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, and so on). The important point to stress, though, is that even if "quantification" properly so called is impossible, *comparative* judgments can be made, and they can be *represented* in numbers. Though the phrase "measuring happiness" is indeed rather misleading, this is all that need be meant by it. If this is correct, another standard objection to the hedonic focus of Utilitarianism falls.

8.13 Distributing Happiness

We come now to three objections to Utilitarianism that are also familiar but rather harder to answer than the two considered so far. The first of these has to do with distribution. The GHP tells us that every action we perform should promote the greatest happiness of the people affected by it. For the moment, let us accept this recommendation. In deciding what to do with respect to any action, however, there is a further matter to be resolved. How is the happiness which I produce to be distributed?

The importance of this question is graphically illustrated in a context made famous by the Oxford philosopher Derek Parfit—population growth and economic prosperity. Sometimes governments, especially in poorer countries, have taken an active hand in what is called "population control." Peasants have frequently been encouraged, and sometimes forced, to have smaller families than they would naturally choose to do, because of a belief that as poor populations expand, everyone inevitably ends up with a smaller share of the national product. In general, the rationale for this sort of policy has been some version of the GHP (i.e., the promotion of the greatest general welfare), and the idea is that, though it may be beneficial to the individual to have a large family, the resulting growth in population will contribute to greater economic misery all round. Accordingly, individual choice can justifiably be restricted in the interest of the greater happiness of all.

The factual claim at the heart of this policy—that more people inevitably means poorer people—is highly questionable. After all, people, even children, are not only consumers, but also producers of economic resources, and all developed countries are *both* more prosperous *and* more populous than they were in times past. Suppose, however, despite these serious reservations, that it is true. The relevant question here is that *if* it is true, does this imply, in combination with the GHP, that governments are right to engage in population control?

Now despite our intuitions and contrary to commonly accepted opinion, this is not an implication Utilitarianism can justify, because the GHP is only concerned with *total* happiness and it says nothing about how happiness (or welfare) should be *distributed*. From the point of view of the *greatest* happiness, a situation in which many millions live just above subsistence level is as desirable as one in which a much smaller number of people live in relative luxury. The use of numbers helps us to represent this very clearly. Imagine a population of 100 million people, all of whom have an average income of $1,000 a year. (Let us assume for the sake of the example that income is a measure of happiness or welfare.) The total welfare for a year may thus be calculated as 100 billion dollars. Take now a far smaller population, say one million people. Each has an income of $100,000 a year. The sum total in a year is also a 100 billion dollars. If we were to have a choice between creating either population, the GHP would give us no reason to prefer the second to the first. More strikingly, if we imagine that in the second population each person's income falls to $80,000, the GHP now gives us reason to prefer the large population of low-income earners.

It may be replied to this objection that the argument works only if we suppose that what the GHP is concerned with is total happiness, whereas nothing in the principle itself requires this, and we could interpret it in terms of *average* happiness. If we do, this odd conclusion about different populations does not follow. We have reason to prefer a society in which the average rather than the total happiness is higher, as it is in the second population described above.

This shift from total to average happiness does overcome the first version of the objection about distributing happiness. But it does not overcome all objections of this sort, because average happiness in a population is still calculated without reference to distribution within the population. This means that the GHP is indifferent on what appears to be a matter of great importance. Let us assume once more that income is a genuine reflection of welfare. The average income within one society might be $80,000, and yet the society be one in which many people's income falls below $1,000. In another, contrasting society, the average income might also be $80,000 with no one's income falling below $40,000. The first is a society in which there is great wealth, but also great poverty. The second is one in which there is no poverty, though less great wealth. Many people would think that, faced with a

choice, we have reason to prefer the second of these societies. This is a matter for debate, perhaps. The point to be made here is that Utilitarianism can contribute nothing to that debate. Since matters of distribution seem important, its silence on this score has to count as a serious deficiency.

The examples we have been considering have to do with societies and populations at large, but it is not hard to see that the same problem arises when Utilitarianism is invoked in a more personal context. We can easily imagine a family in which the happiness of a favored child is given precedence over that of every other child and contrast it with a family in which every child is treated more or less equally. The result might be, however, that total and average happiness are the same in both families. If so, most people would think that there was reason to prefer the second, yet Utilitarianism has nothing to say on this score. The fact that common sense suggests that in instances of this sort there *is* more to be said, combined with the fact that Utilitarianism has *no* more to say, seems to imply that its exclusive focus on happiness is a mistake. Neither total nor average happiness gives the full story. Fairness in distribution must also be taken into account. This conclusion brings us to the second objection: Happiness is not the only, or even the principal, value with which we should be concerned.

8.13 Mill's "Proof" and Preference Utilitarianism

Why should we suppose, as Utilitarianism does, that happiness is the ultimate value? This is a question which John Stuart Mill expressly addresses in the fourth chapter of *Utilitarianism*, where he attempts to provide what he calls a "proof of the principle of utility." His opening argument for this proof is very well known.

> The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end. What ought to be required of this doctrine—what conditions is it requisite that the doctrine should fulfil—to make good its claim to be believed?
>
> The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of other sources of experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so. No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good: that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons.
>
> (Mill, 1871, 1998: 81)

This argument of Mill's has been much discussed. Some philosophers have thought it fallaciously trades on an ambiguity in the word "desirable." Whereas "visible" only means "able to be seen," "desirable" can mean both "able to be desired" and "worthy to be desired." Once we have been alerted to this ambiguity, we can see that the fact that something is desired is evidence that it is *able to be* desired, but not evidence that it is *worth* desiring. Other philosophers have argued that, though this is a possible ambiguity, it plays

no part in Mill's argument. They construe him as saying that the only evidence that something *is* worth desiring is that people *find* it worth desiring, and that there is abundant evidence of this sort for the claim that happiness is desirable.

The fact that the interpretation of Mill's argument is uncertain makes any argument for or against Utilitarianism which rests solely upon its being read one way rather than another less than satisfactory. We will do better, therefore, to consider related implications of the proof—implications which Mill himself considers—and see whether or not these can lead to a more definite conclusion. One of these implications arises from the observation that, even if we accept Mill's argument as a proof of the value of happiness, nothing in it shows that happiness is the *only* value. This defect is important, however, because there are plainly many things besides happiness that people value as ends (i.e., for their own sake and not merely as a means to something else).

Mill's reply concedes that this is so, but he claims that anything we value for its own sake rather than as a means, we value as a *constituent part* of happiness. Having taken up music, for instance, because of the pleasure we derive from it, we come to value it for its own sake. Music becomes part of what happiness is for us. Though this reply has an immediate plausibility about it, it is fraught with difficulties. Mill himself provides an example which brings these difficulties to the fore. Money is valuable because it is a means to happiness. Sometimes, however, people come to love money for its own sake. Having formerly sought money merely as a *means* to happiness, being rich comes to be *part* of what happiness is for them. Or so Mill claims. But if we think a little further on the matter, this analysis becomes very unclear. The idea seems to be that, when money is valued as a means, it is valued because of the things it can buy, whereas when it is constituent of happiness, it is valued in itself. Suppose I spend money on an expensive and fashionable car. The possession of the car makes me happy. Or suppose, being a miser, I keep the money. In this case possession of the money itself makes me happy. In both cases the possession of something makes me happy. It seems a matter of indifference whether we say in the first case that the possession of the car was a means to or a part of my happiness. Similarly, it seems a matter of indifference whether we say, in the second case, that the possession of the money is a means to or a part of my happiness. Either way, neither the car nor the money is valued in itself; it is only valued because it makes me happy.

From this it seems to follow that Mill's distinction is no distinction at all. He has not actually managed to accommodate into his scheme of thinking values other than happiness which are valued in themselves. If we persist in the view that there are such values, then the supremacy of happiness has not been shown. But even if Mill's distinction between "means to" and "part of" were a good one, there is a further difficulty. It appears that other things that are valued in themselves can conflict with happiness, and there seems no reason to suppose that we must prefer the latter.

An example familiar to philosophers is that of the deathbed promise. Suppose I solemnly and sincerely promise a dying man that, once he is dead, I will set the record straight, so to speak, by telling his wife and family of his numerous but secret infidelities with the wives of friends and colleagues. Once he is dead he cannot be pained or distressed by my failure to keep my word. (Let us ignore complications about life after death.) On the other hand, his wife and family and former lovers will all face distress and embarrassment. The happiness principle demands that I break my promise to the dying man. Yet it is quite understandable that I should feel it more important to be faithful to my solemn promise to him than to protect the happiness of his relatives. What has Mill to say on the other side?

What he does say (though not in connection with this specific example) is that I desire to

keep the truth because I would be happiest doing so. But this need not be the case. Perhaps the act of revealing the dead man's sins is deeply distressing to me, not least because of my former attachment to him. Mill seems to say at this point in the argument that if I desire to tell the truth, it must be the happiest course for me, because "to think of an object as desirable (unless for the sake of its consequences), and to think of it as pleasant, are one and the same thing" (Mill, 1871, 1998: 85). This is, of course, a dogmatic assertion on his part. The issues it raises, and the reasons for rejecting it, however, have already been discussed in previous chapters and so we need not labor them here. The conclusion to be drawn is that Mill has not succeeded with his proof of the supremacy of the value of happiness.

The difficulty of proving the supreme value of happiness has been recognized by some philosophers who have nevertheless wanted to hold on to the general structure of Utilitarianism. Acknowledging that Mill's equation of desire and pleasure is without foundation, they have suggested that we might express the whole doctrine not in terms of happiness, but in terms of desire satisfaction or preferences; the right action is that which leads to the satisfaction of the greatest number of desires. This version of Utilitarianism, generally known as "preference Utilitarianism," has been much discussed and raises many interesting issues. But here there is room to mention only one. If the shift from happiness to desire satisfaction solves any problems, it also creates them. It seems right to say that happiness is a value, and hence the creation of happiness a good thing. The question is whether it is the only, or the supreme, value. But it is not obvious that desire satisfaction in itself is a value at all, just because some desires are bad. If a girl desires to sleep and a man, contrary to his own best instincts and hence to his happiness, has a strong desire to rape someone, I will maximize the satisfaction of desires by bringing the girl to him drugged sufficiently soundly to make her unaware that she has been raped. To act in this way seems unquestionably wrong, and it adds nothing in its favor to observe that at least it maximized the satisfaction of desire.

8.14 Motivation and the Limitless Moral Code

The preceding section concluded that Mill's proof of the supreme value of happiness does not work, and it can't be rescued by appeal to the more abstract notion of preference satisfaction. But even if it had, there is a third and final objection to Utilitarianism that is still to be considered.

We have seen that both the consequentialist and the hedonic aspects of Utilitarianism raise difficulties. Although it has taken some time to explore these properly, both sets of difficulties can be summarized in a similar way. The attempt to focus exclusively on consequences and happiness fails because other things besides consequences matter and happiness is not the only value. But suppose, for the sake of argument, we had been shown to everyone's satisfaction that, from the moral point of view, the right action is that action whose consequences lead to the greatest happiness. We could still ask why we should go in for morality at all. In its more familiar form this is the question "Why should I be moral?"

We have already considered aspects of this question (and answers to it) when motivated by philosophical egoism. Utilitarianism is not an egoistic doctrine, but the very same question is nonetheless a pressing one, once we set it within the broader perspective of "ordinary life." The egoist demands a justification for morality *however* it is conceived. The perspective of ordinary life raises a special doubt about the moral life *conceived along utilitarian lines*. This is the utilitarian conception of morality that makes it *boundless*. This boundlessness has two aspects. First, Utilitarianism makes moral questions and

moral demands incessant. Second, by making happiness in the abstract what matters, it is necessarily indifferent to *whose* happiness it is. Let us consider these points in turn.

Most people think of moral questions as occasional. That is, we go about our daily lives, within a framework of law and decency no doubt, but by and large free of moral questions. Moral issues do arise, and sometimes they arise very acutely. Moral questions are *special* questions, and when we are faced with them, they often require a certain amount of agonizing. The question "What shall I have for dinner?" is not (in the normal way) a moral question, and though it requires me to choose, it would be absurd to think that choosing involved anything in the way of heart searching. Almost all the questions I confront in the course of ordinary life are like this: What shall I wear to the office? Where should I go on holiday? Which sweater is better value? What color shall I paint my bedroom? These matters of ordinary life are not trivial or insignificant, but they do contrast sharply with certain others: Should I have an abortion? Should I assist my terminally ill wife to die peacefully? Should I blow the whistle on my colleagues? To make this kind of distinction is what it means to say that moral questions are occasional.

This understanding of the place and nature of morality in ordinary life may or may not be correct. It is, however, incompatible with a utilitarian view of morality. Since at every moment of every waking hour I could be engaged in action conducive to the greatest happiness, I am constantly confronted with moral questions. For every action I perform—at home, at work, at play—I can and must ask myself "Am I doing right?" Under a utilitarian regime, the question "What shall I have for dinner?" *is* a moral question, every time it arises. This seems a very demanding life to lead.

Of course, a utilitarian can always say that the common view of morality as occasional is wrong, that moral questions do arise constantly, and indeed if life is to be guided by utilitarian principles, this rejoinder is correct. The reply is not to the point, however. If moral demands truly are unremitting and leave no space for a contrast with ordinary life, this generates a good (i.e., nonegoistic) reason for asking very seriously the question "Why should I *be* moral?"

The other aspect of the limitless character of Utilitarianism is, if anything, even more disturbing. It can be illustrated with an example first discussed by the English social thinker William Godwin (1756–1836). Godwin was a convinced utilitarian and he saw that the commitment to the greatest happiness could give rise to painful choices. He imagines a case in which the house of the French Archbishop Fenelon, reputed to be a great benefactor of mankind, goes on fire, and the choice is between rescuing Fenelon or rescuing his maid. Godwin thought that the answer was clear; the right thing to do was to rescue Fenelon. A critic reading this raised a question about what Godwin's attitude would be if the maid in question were his grandmother. Godwin replied that in this case too, the right thing to do would still be to rescue Fenelon.

Some people were appalled at this reply, and philosophers have frequently discussed it and cases like it. But the importance of the example is not just as another counterexample to the application of Utilitarianism that is similar to many of those already encountered. The point rather is that the sort of morality Utilitarianism comprises can give rise to occasions when we are called upon, not merely to sacrifice our nearest and dearest, but to treat them exactly on a par with everyone and anyone else. Since our friends and relatives matter much more to us than strangers, even those we know to be benefactors, why should we do this?

One familiar answer is that it is morally right. Assuming, contrary to all the objections rehearsed so far, that the utilitarians are correct in their account of morality, this is certainly true. But once again it is not to the point, and hence it is not an adequate answer. The

question is not "Is treating our friends and relatives on a par with everyone else the morally right thing to do?" Rather the question is "Why should we do the morally right thing if this requires us to treat those who are special to us as though they were not?"

It is often said at this point that the demands of morality are overriding. That is to say, what morality requires of us takes precedence over every other consideration. This important claim is not confined to utilitarians. Kantians tend to say the same thing, though their focus is on personal integrity, of course, not human happiness. But either version inevitably raises a further issue. It is really true that morality is more important than anything else? The great religions would all deny this. They would hold that our duties to God take precedence over our duties to each other and that the sacred is more ultimate than the moral. More recently, a different doubt has been raised. Hasn't the idea that *human* welfare is all important been a major contributor to the environmental degradation and steady elimination of other species that now threaten the earth as a whole?

In Chapter 9 the arguments for a less humanistic and more environmental ethic will be examined. Chapter 10 will explore what we should say about morality and the demands of the sacred.

9
Ethics and Environment

For the greater part of its 2,500 year history, moral philosophy was almost exclusively focused on humanity. Both Plato and Aristotle rooted their moral philosophies in the distinctive properties of the human soul or psyche, and they attributed a key role to the right use of reason. Kant's moral philosophy also gives rationality a crucial role, and its most influential version makes "respect for persons" its basic moral principle. It is on this principle that declarations of universal human rights have been grounded, and it is the application of this concept of human rights that has gradually led to traditional local moralities being replaced by a global moral consensus that condemns slavery and advocates equal rights for all human beings regardless of ethnicity or gender.

Similarly, the earliest version of the utilitarian's alternative Greatest Happiness Principle (GHP) confines itself to human beings since it expressly speaks of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number of *people*."

9.1 Extending the Moral Sphere

In the late eighteenth century, however, moral concern began to be extended beyond human beings. A pioneering thinker in this respect was Jeremy Bentham, whose role in the development of philosophical utilitarianism was discussed at some length in Chapter 8. Having replaced reason with pleasure and pain as the touchstone of right and wrong, Bentham saw that this had important implications for the treatment of animals. In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, first published in 1789 (the year of the French Revolution), Bentham attacks the idea that there is a morally relevant "insuperable line" between human beings and other animals.

> What . . . should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?
>
> (Bentham, 1789, 1960: 283)

The point is a simple but compelling one. Most people will agree that it is morally wrong to cause unnecessary suffering. Now it may well be the case that when people assent to this as an important moral principle, they generally have *human* suffering in mind. The principle

is not in fact restricted in this way, nor does it seem that it could be. What makes the infliction of unnecessary suffering objectionable must be the nature of suffering itself—the pain, anxiety, and distress it involves. It follows from this, though, that *any* being, of whatever species, falls within the scope of the principle, provided only that it is capable of suffering.

No plants suffer—they don't have the right kind of nervous system—and perhaps not *all* animals do. It is incontestable that a great many do, however, including all the higher animals with which human beings regularly interact—dogs, cats, horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and so on. Accepting Bentham's insight, therefore, immediately extends the scope of moral right and wrong beyond humanity. And how could we not accept his insight? The fundamental contention upon which it rests is not an evaluative opinion, but a matter of fact. Animals with a certain kind of nervous system can feel pain, and human beings are not the only animals with such a system.

There is scope for debate about the range of suffering that nonhuman animals can be caused. Does it include mental distress as well as physical pain? Qualified opinion has changed over time, and it has come to be pretty widely accepted that animal suffering extends beyond physical pain, including mental states such as fear and anxiety. Some attributions still strike many people as fanciful (e.g., grief and embarrassment, for instance) and it is certainly true that with greater sensitivity to the real suffering of animals has come a strong tendency to anthropomorphize them (i.e., treat them as though they were human). So even though there are both physical and mental kinds of suffering that it is simply implausible to deny, there is still some scope for reasonable differences of opinion about what we may and may not do to other animals.

There is a rather greater scope for debate about just what counts as *unnecessary* suffering. Is animal suffering justified in the production of human food? Is it justified if it is necessary for research aimed at benefitting human health? Are we justified in causing animals suffering for the purpose of human entertainment or the production of better cosmetic preparations? It is probably true that most people nowadays would say "Yes" to the first pair of questions and "No" to the second, though these answers are by no means endorsed universally. Matters are not as open to differing opinions as this might suggest, however. Whichever way we go on the justification of using animals for human purposes, the principle that it is wrong to cause unnecessary suffering can be shown to retain considerable force by its further implications. Once equally effective methods of farming or training animals that do *not* involve animal suffering are devised, the principle clearly requires that the old methods must be abandoned and new methods of medical research that do not involve the use of animals must be preferred. In short, morally speaking, animals matter, even if they do not matter as much as human beings.

The central concept underlying Bentham's inclusion of animals within the sphere of morality is animal welfare, and it was in the course of the nineteenth century that several campaigning organizations devoted to animal welfare came into existence. Their effect has been considerable. In the interests of animal welfare, laws against using animals cruelly have been widely adopted and firmly enforced. Amusements such as cock fighting, bear baiting, and dog fighting have become illegal in many countries; circuses and hunting have become illegal in some countries; factory farming methods have come under critical scrutiny. Philosophically speaking however, a more significant change has been the attempt on the part of both theorists and activists to extend to animals a concept hitherto restricted to human beings, namely rights. According rights to animals is more contentious than appealing to their welfare, chiefly because the possession of rights is not straightforwardly empirical in the way that the ability to suffer is. Claims to rights have to be grounded in

an ethical theory, and not all the theories that philosophers currently advocate can obviously be made to do this. For instance, since it makes no sense to think of animals entering contracts, even hypothetically, the contractual theories in which human rights are often grounded do not seem to offer much by way of a grounding for animal rights. One result of the fact that the concept of animal rights is necessarily more complex than the relatively simple appeal to animal welfare is that it is much more open to dispute, and it is much more widely disputed.

The language of animal rights has nonetheless gained fairly wide currency, and yet, even if we could formulate a philosophical theory by which the concept can be satisfactorily grounded, it would still not constitute the kind of revolution in moral thought that some people think essential. To appeal to animal rights, no less than appealing to animal welfare, focuses ethical concern on individual members of certain higher species. Ethical obligations generated by animal rights, just like those based on animal welfare, effectively construe (some) animals as quasihuman beings. In other words, nonhumans are worthy of moral consideration only to the extent that they share some of the features characteristic of humans (e.g., being bearers of rights or having the capacity to suffer). In an important sense *either* way of thinking thereby continues to put humanity at the center of ethics. We can see this if we assume (contrary to his own opinion) that Bentham's insight about welfare applies also to rights, and that both concepts properly range beyond human persons to animals. It still remains the case that neither can encompass the whole natural world of vegetation, wild life, landscape, and wilderness.

It is precisely this limitation that *environmental* ethics seeks to overcome. By displacing human beings from the center of ethical concern and advocating respect for nature in its own right, it sets human and animal welfare, interests, and rights within a much larger evaluative context, and it makes them subject to that context. The name for this larger context varies—the environment, nature, the earth, the biosphere—are all importantly different terms. However, the main point to emphasize is that whichever term we use, environmentalism (as I shall refer to it) aims to break with all previous ethical theories. Whereas social contract, virtue theory, existentialism, Kantian deontology, and utilitarianism have been humanity-centered (with the late inclusion of some other sentient animals), environmentalism rests on the supposition that human concerns must no longer be given supremacy, but they must find their significance within a much larger evaluative framework.

9.2 Pollution, Sustainability, and Climatic Change

The speed at which environmentalism has gained a respected moral voice and even widespread acceptance is very striking. Environmental values are second only to human rights in generally being held to transcend differences between human beings who are otherwise divided by competing religious and political creeds. How has this come about? The answer lies in the powerful combination of three, somewhat loosely connected, but pressing concerns. Historically, the first of these was pollution, and in particular the negative effects of very extensive use of synthetic chemicals in fertilizers and pesticides. A hugely influential cause of this concern was the publication in 1962 of *Silent Spring* by Rachel L. Carson (1907–1964), an American marine biologist and nature writer. *Silent Spring* brought environmental concerns to the attention of the American public, partly because it made the bestseller lists and partly because it was so vehemently attacked by the chemical industry. The book eventually led to a nationwide ban on DDT and other pesticides, and it generated

such popular concern with environmental issues that it resulted in the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency, thereby making "the environment" a politically significant topic in a vigorously democratic culture committed to free speech and public debate. Carson's book was primarily an empirical investigation into the real costs and benefits of using synthetic substances extensively, but the title invoked a compelling image of a world in which human misuse of technology would lead to a springtime in which birds no longer sang. It symbolized, in other words, a destructive antagonism between economic interests and the natural world. Moreover, Carson's work was in the new field of ecology, the scientific study of natural systems of biological interdependence. Ecology rests upon the fundamental insight that the actions of individual human beings can have global consequences. It is, we might say, a new, nature-based version of John Donne's famous observation that "No man is an island, entire of itself."

Environmental pollution is not the intentional outcome of individual actions. It is the unintentional outcome of general practices. Accordingly, it cannot be assessed in terms of ethical principles that have been framed for the purposes of providing moral rules for individual human agents. It is this global dimension that connects the early concern with pesticides to the much larger topics of economic degradation and climate change. With respect to the first of these, it is also possible to identify a single publication as having special importance. *Limits to Growth*, published just a decade after *Silent Spring*, was the work of four authors. Its aim was to model the consequences of interactions between Earth's resources and an expanding human population committed to economic growth. Five variables were examined—world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion—and the ability of technology to increase resources. The book argued that sustainable use of natural resources would require both population control and limits to economic growth.

Limits to Growth and other similar works introduced an influential concept—sustainability. It is now commonly used to evaluate the relation between a wide variety of human practices and the consumption of natural resources. Sustainable systems—of fishing, farming, heating, lighting, transportation, and so on—are those that do not require major consumption of natural resources for their long-term maintenance. Sustainability might thus be said to be a new, environmental value that generates responsibilities to a world wider than that of human beings and other sentient creatures.

The topic that gave environmentalism its most powerful stimulus extended concern still further, to Earth as a whole. This is climatic change or global warming, which is an increase in the average temperature of the Earth's near-surface air and oceans. Here too we can identify a single source as especially influential, namely the first report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in 1990. The IPCC was established by the World Meteorological Organization in 1988. Its report, based upon a survey of scientific research conducted by others, concluded not only that substantial rises in average temperature were taking place, but that the principal cause lay with the carbon emissions generated by human activity. Assessing the impact of human activity on climatic trends, and predicting the eventual effect of this, is largely a scientific matter. Before the IPCC's first report, debate had been largely confined to the scientific community, but this and subsequent reports generated widespread agreement that global warming is a result of human activity, and it may very well lead to catastrophic results.

A small number of scientists dispute the consensus view, and moral philosophy, obviously, has no contribution to make to the scientific debate. Global warming is a topic of interest to moral philosophy, nevertheless, because of an accompanying claim that (insofar

as it is a reality) it can provide support for two key features of environmentalism. The first of these is the idea that individual actions have to be understood as taking place within ecological systems upon which they may thus have an impact. The second is that ecological consequences have global significance. The implication of these two ideas is that my decision to operate an automobile, for example, cannot be assessed simply in terms of the costs and benefits of that decision to me, my family, or even my society. Since I unavoidably drive my automobile within an ecological system, the significance of my decision has to be assessed on a far broader (ultimately global) context.

Moreover, insofar as the global costs outweigh the global benefits, this constitutes a problem that is indifferent both to national and cultural boundaries, as well as to historic period. It is evidently foolish to think that any one country or group of countries can make its borders impervious to environmental pollution, climatic change, or the depletion of natural resources, and it is just as foolish (if rather less evident) that the present cannot be ecologically sealed off from the future. Acid rain, exhausted oil wells, and climatic change are all phenomena with *global* significance, because they have consequences for Earth as a whole and for its future.

9.3 The Land Ethic

Taken together, the messages of *Silent Spring*, *Limits to Growth*, and the IPCC reports have given considerable impetus to the thought that our understanding of moral responsibility needs radical revision. Many people have become convinced that ethical thinking must transcend its previously limited nature and free itself from an exclusive concern with human beings (along with a few of the "higher" animals). One way of expressing conviction is to say that our newly acquired understanding of ecology calls for a correspondingly new ethic.

A central question of this chapter is the necessity and cogency of this aspiration to formulate a genuinely new ethic that is better suited to environmental awareness. It is an aspiration that has brought the writings of another American naturalist, Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), to prominence. A professor in the Agricultural Economics Department of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Leopold's best-known book, *A Sand County Almanac*, was not published until 1949, a year after his death. On first appearance, it received very little attention, but subsequently it came to be ranked alongside Carson's *Silent Spring* as one of the two most important books in the emergence of the environmental movement, especially in the United States.

The first three parts of *A Sand County Almanac* consist in descriptions of nature and the seasons. It is only in the fourth and final part that Leopold turns to issues of environmental responsibility. This part comprises three essays entitled "The Land Ethic," "Wilderness," and "Conservation Esthetic." The first of these is the best known, and in it Leopold reflects on the history of ethics and its limitations.

> There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. . . . The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations. The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity . . . All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community, but his ethics prompt him also to

> co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for) . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land.
>
> (Leopold, 1949, 1970: 238–239)

Leopold is clear that "a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (Leopold, 1949, 1970: 240), and he amends the idea of right and wrong accordingly. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold, 1949, 1970: 262) On this account, then, the ultimate context within which ethical judgments must be made is the "biotic community." What is this exactly? It is clear from the illustrations he gives that Leopold had relatively local, self-contained biotic communities in mind. Yet these communities must themselves be understood to be subsumed within still larger ecological systems and, ultimately, in a single biosphere (i.e., Earth) whose unity is underlined by the phenomenon of global warming, something whose effects touches all localities. Thus Leopold's land ethic is transformed by the global consciousness, which more recent environmental issues have prompted to become an ethics that makes the well-being of the whole Earth its benchmark. The moral sphere, we might say, is identical with the biosphere.

9.4 Deep and Shallow Ecology

For those who subscribe to this "new" ethic and are persuaded of the reality and urgency of the problems with which it seeks to grapple, the essential question is a practical one: What is to be done? This is not a question that is easily answered, in fact. The interconnections to which ecology alerts us are highly complex, and in any case proposals for action have to command widespread agreement and co-operation that can prove hard to secure politically. There is also a potential divergence between two equally practical strategies. Should we try to counter environmental change by reversing the processes that are driving it, or should we try to devise ways of accommodating the change that will minimize its impact? There are hugely different implications for practical policies, depending upon which of these overall strategies is adopted, so that even without raising any fundamental questions about the theoretical basis of environmentalism, the questions of environmental ethics are legion.

These practical questions are evidently very important, but they are not philosophical ones. The question of interest to moral philosophy, like all ethical questions, is related to how we should think and act, but it is not *immediately* practical. What the philosopher wants to know is whether environmentalism has successfully formulated a *new* ethic. Does environmental ethics truly present us with a radical change from previous thinking, or does it, in the end, simply apply long established ethical values and principles to a new set of problems?

In the exploration of this question it is helpful to use a distinction that is owed to the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1912–2009). In a short, now famous article published in 1973, Næss draws a distinction between "shallow ecology" and "deep ecology." The first of these he characterizes as a fight against pollution and resource depletion whose central objective is the health and affluence of people in developed countries. The second is a contrasting orientation to the natural world inspired by both by our experience of being humans in nature and by our newly acquired ecological knowledge (Næss, 1973:

97). Among environmentalists, Næss's account of the distinction has been amended and amplified, and the specific reference to developed countries has generally been dropped. All these other versions, however, seek to establish the same basic division that Næss had in mind, namely the contrast between an *anthropocentric* concern with the problems of pollution, global warming, and so on and a genuinely *ecocentric* interest in the future and well-being of the planet. Anthropocentrism grounds respect for nature on human interests; ecocentrism aims at respect for nature in and of itself. Shallow ecology is anthropocentric; deep ecology is ecocentric. The philosophically interesting question is whether this crucial distinction can indeed be maintained.

I shall use the terms "deep" and "shallow" ecology without any special commitment to Næss's characterization of the difference. For present purposes, "deep ecology" can be understood as any explanation that derives human environmental responsibility from the needs of Earth/the biosphere/the global ecosystem itself, while "shallow ecology" is any explanation that makes environmental responsibility a function of human well-being now and in the future.

There is evidently nothing new about shallow ecology *as an ethic*. Environmental research may alert us to new dangers to human health and prosperity, but the moral imperative that we do something about them is no different in kind from the sort of moral imperatives prompted by phenomena like plague or famine. Indeed, insofar as industrial pollution is a threat to human health and global warming is a threat to future food supplies, these are just new forms of old dangers about which morally responsible people will be concerned. Deep ecology, by contrast, means to alert us to a different ethical dimension—a set of values that hitherto have not figured at all in our human-centered moralities. What might these be? As mentioned, Leopold specifies three—"the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." His essay is not very informative about what these might mean exactly, though it is clear that the principle contrast he has in mind is between a "land ethic," so described, and a severely economic conception of the value of land. More recent writing and opinion has converged on three somewhat similar values—biodiversity, sustainability, and natural beauty. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Despite the fact that many human beings live in poverty and have little protection against illness, most contemporary human beings are far healthier, wealthier, and longer living than at any time in the past—though in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, it has been calculated, living standards have moved little beyond those that prevailed in the Stone Age! Increased prosperity has been the outcome, in large measure, of agricultural, industrial, and medical technology. But if the benefit to humans has been great, arguably a correspondingly heavy cost has fallen on other species. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources has documented the extinction of 784 species between 1500 and 2006 CE. Since most extinctions go undocumented, scientists put the total number far higher—anywhere between 20,000 and two million during the twentieth century alone. This is an immensely broad range, and of course new species are regularly discovered. Even if we conservatively suppose that the actual number is close to the lower limit, it is clear that the rate of extinction has accelerated greatly, and that the number of new species has done little to offset this. It is highly probable, therefore, that Earth is at present dramatically less biodiverse than at any point in its past, and that biodiversity will continue to decline unless it is checked in some way.

Does this matter, and if so, why? A number of explanations have been put forward to show just why the decline of species matters. Biodiversity, it has been argued, has demonstrable benefits for agricultural production, human health, purity of air and water, scientific

and recreational interest, natural beauty, and stability of ecosystems. These various contentions are all compatible, of course, and they may all be valid. From a philosophical point of view, though, they do nothing to establish biodiversity as a distinctive environmental value. The first four clearly connect it with human benefit by contending that biodiversity matters because of the impact the disappearance of species has on the quality and variety of food, healthy living, and intellectual pursuits. The last two need not be interpreted anthropocentrically, but they explain the importance of biodiversity in terms of the other putative environmental values we are considering rather than making it an independent value. Even if it is true that biodiversity matters for ecological stability and the preservation of natural beauty, this still implies that biodiversity is not an environmental value in its own right. All the weight of the argument, then, must fall on sustainability and beauty.

In this context, the common appeal to "sustainability" is unhelpfully ambiguous. Its clearest application relates to the activities of forestry and fishing. Some methods of harvesting timber are devastating for the forests from which it is taken; the forests simply get destroyed, and the soil erosion that quickly follows makes replacement impossible, which in turn leads to flooding. Alternative methods of harvesting produce a limited supply of timber. Over the long term, this is more valuable because available indefinitely and without the same detrimental effects on the landscape. The crucial difference is that the amount harvested is determined by the capacity of the forest to renew itself and not by its commercial value at some particular moment in time. Similarly with fishing, there are methods whose success brings with it near total exhaustion of the fish stocks, and the collapse of the communities dependent upon them, while there are others that are much less lucrative in the short term, but sustainable indefinitely into the future since they are determined by the ability of fish stocks to renew themselves.

The destruction of forests and the elimination of sea life are both clear instances of environmental degradation often brought about by ill-considered human activity that has set a premium on short-term financial gain. The lesson to be learned from such instances is that it is rational to prefer sustainable methods. But it should be evident that, understood in this way, sustainability is something that takes its value *from human interests and purposes*. It introduces no new distinctively green value to the assessment of right and wrong. In this sense sustainability is a goal of shallow ecology. Though the epithet "shallow" tends to be used with a derogatory connotation, we should not allow this to make us think that sustainability is not a desirable goal. On the contrary, the arguments against factory fishing and factory forestry are good ones; it is just that they have no novel feature of the kind Leopold's land ethic promises. Shortsightedness in the use of valuable resources is a grave error, but it is not a *new* error.

"Sustainability," however, is often conflated with "stability," where the stability in view is that of ecological systems rather than systems of production. Ecology makes powerful use of the idea that, while ecosystems are not static, they do have a natural equilibrium that gives them stability over time. In any given year, for instance, a wetter summer may diminish the numbers of certain species within the system, while increasing the numbers of others. The defining feature of an ecosystem, however, is interdependence, and this means that these rises and falls will lead to corresponding adjustments; an increase in plant life leads to an increase in the animals that feed on it. In due course though, this increase reduces the plant population again. Thus, the system has a natural equilibrium that enables it to remain stable despite constant variation.

A sufficiently traumatic event can so drastically effect some populations of plants or animals that such an adjustment cannot take place, and the equilibrium of the system

is permanently altered. Human activity may have this result. Pesticides intended to control insects, say, destroy bird populations as well—a phenomenon to which *Silent Spring* alerted the world—or fertilizers intended to increase crop yields wash off fields into rivers and stimulate weed growth, thereby choking lakes. These are important consequences about which it is right that people should be warned. But is the destruction of ecological stability something bad in itself?

Two further reflections count against the idea that it is. First, although a sufficiently traumatic event may permanently disturb a given equilibrium, ecology assures us that a succeeding equilibrium will take its place. The succeeding equilibrium will have a different pattern of animal and plant populations and a different set of interdependencies—fewer large animals, fewer birds, fewer large trees, more insects, more rodents, more scrub, perhaps. We may well prefer the first and lament its passing, but we cannot justify our preference by appealing to stability or sustainability. The second ecosystem may be less inspiring, but it is no less stable. Second, changes of this kind can be, and regularly are, brought about by nonhuman factors (e.g., geological events and climatic changes). No environment was ever more catastrophically affected than Krakatoa in Indonesia when in 1888 a volcanic explosion destroyed two-thirds of the island. And we know that the retreat of an ice sheet many thousands of years ago turned a lush and fertile part of North Africa into one of the driest ecosystems on earth. In both cases, the events were parts of the process of nature, and in both cases different equilibria established themselves over time that proved just as stable as the ecosystems they displaced.

Once again, *from a human point of view* (i.e., habitation, food, and scientific interest) these changes may be regrettable, but that is a judgment that could only qualify as shallow ecology. The values upon which deep ecology must rest have yet to be uncovered.

9.5 Wilderness

Of the three possibilities we have been considering, there remains the value of natural beauty. This too can have a directly anthropocentric value (e.g., the preservation of wildlife and landscape in the interests of tourism, even eco-tourism). How can we set aside all such considerations and focus simply on the value of natural beauty itself? One topic that has risen to prominence in response to this anxiety—and does indeed provide a useful focus for discussion—is the preservation of wilderness.

There is not very much wilderness left on the landmass of the earth—at least as the term is generally understood—and since, as Leopold observes in his essay on "Wilderness," it is "a resource which can shrink but not grow" (Leopold, 1949, 1970: 278)—this makes the preservation of what remains a critical matter. We can define "wilderness" as any area of Earth that is currently free of human use for habitation, production, or recreation. This definition includes stretches of ocean as well as tracts of land, though it is usually land that people have in mind. In both cases, however, issues relating to the preservation of wilderness arise just insofar as these parts of the earth's surface *could* have a human use, as a source of minerals or fossil fuels, for example. This potential generates the following question: Why should humans forgo valuable benefits in order to preserve wilderness? If we can give a satisfactory answer to this question, then it seems that we will have found a genuinely ecocentric value that cannot be explained away anthropocentrically.

One obvious answer to the question is "natural beauty." Some of the world's remotest and wildest places are spectacularly beautiful, and economic development often takes place at the expense of that beauty. It can be argued, even, that their remoteness and wildness is

an intrinsic *part* of their beauty. If that is true, then it means that the beauty of wilderness is threatened not just by the impact of quarrying, test drilling, and the like on the landscape, but the very fact of human occupation itself. Once there is an established human presence, wilderness has lost something of the wild beauty that makes it what it is.

For my own part, I find this a persuasive line of thought. Yet, though I have stated the idea as compellingly as I can, it still does not seem sufficient to establish the value of natural beauty in the right way. Beauty is commonly supposed to be a purely *subjective* value, and if this is so, it would imply that along with beauty in high art and personal appearance, natural beauty lies only in the eye of the beholder. Subjective beauty provides us with a very weak basis upon which to deny the potential benefits of exploiting the resources of wilderness to people whose eyes behold it differently. Against this, however, others will insist (as I would) that beauty is not an individualistically subjective value, but it has an objectivity that transcends individual taste, often revealed by the test of time—the evidence that accumulates as the taste of generation after generation confirms the beauty of some things while relegating others to the realms of passing fashion. Yet, even if this alternative objectivist account of beauty is correct, natural beauty still cannot be declared a satisfactory grounding for deep ecology. It is false, let us agree, that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder; it is nevertheless true that beauty *has value* only for human beings.

This conclusion emerges when we consider Leopold's eloquent essay on on wilderness. Written in the first half of the twentieth century, the opening section (Leopold, 1949, 1970: 264–269) laments the steady disappearance across the United States and Canada of different kinds of wilderness (e.g., along the coastline, around the Great Lakes, and in the Rockies) and the disappearance of large numbers of magnificent animals and plants (e.g., the buffalo, woodland caribou and grizzly bear, coastal flatwoods, giant hardwoods, and prairie vegetation of exceptional beauty). Since Leopold wrote, this process of attrition has continued, and it is certain there is now much more to lament than then. In subsequent sections Leopold lays out three values that wilderness has uniquely—"Wilderness for Recreation," "Wilderness for Science," and "Wilderness for Wildlife." In extolling the value of wilderness for recreation, Leopold does not have such things as coach tours, motorboats, and campgrounds in mind. Indeed, he expressly dismisses "mechanized outings" as at best "a milk-and-water affair" compared to the true recreational value of small numbers of individuals travelling by canoe and pack-train. (Leopold, 1949, 1970: 270–272) Nevertheless, it is still the value of *human* recreation that he has in mind, and since the science he most expects to benefit from the preservation of wilderness is agriculture, it has to be conceded that both his first two explanations of the value of wilderness are in the end unmistakably anthropocentric. We should not infer from this, to repeat an earlier point, that they are any the less important values. Leopold makes a persuasive case for the preservation of wilderness on both counts, and though they still count as "shallow ecology" in Næss's terminology, his evident commitment to the cause of the landscape ought to be enough to counter any derogatory interpretation of this term.

Leolopold's third explanation—wilderness for wildlife—mixes human and nonhuman points of view. He certainly thinks that the loss of the grizzly bear through the destruction of its natural habitat is a loss for human beings. But it is surely incontestable that it constitutes a loss for grizzly bears as well. On a very straightforward level, the bears have *lost* their natural home. In this sense, the destruction (and thus preservation) of wilderness matters to nonhumans as well as to humans. Even so, we cannot include *natural beauty* in the loss of habitat. Its natural beauty is not an aspect of the habitat that can matter to the bears or any creature other than human beings. Visual beauty is no more in the eye of

the beholder than musical harmony is in the ear of the listener, and neither is the simple product of human preferences. Nevertheless, just as it is only human beings who have the necessary sensibility to hear harmonies, so only human beings have an aesthetic sensibility for landscape. Accordingly, while identifying environmental value with the value of natural beauty avoids reduction to practical utility or economic value, it still makes it a distinctively human value.

9.6 Nature and Gaia

The candidates for environmental value that the previous two sections have explored—biodiversity, ecological stability, and natural beauty—have all proved, in the end, to rest on things that matter *to human beings*. In Naess's terms, therefore, none of them can provide the philosophical resources for anything more than "shallow ecology."

Deep ecology, however, has one further resource. This lies in an appeal to "the sublime" rather than the diverse, the sustainable, or the beautiful. In an essay entitled "Must a concern for the environment be centred on human beings?" the philosopher Bernard Williams writes as follows.

> Human beings have two basic kinds of emotional relations to nature: gratitude and a sense of peace, on the one hand, terror and stimulation on the other . . . The two kinds of feelings find their place in art, in the form of its concern with the beautiful and with the sublime . . . [W]hen the conscious formulation of this distinction became central to the theory of art, at the end of the eighteenth century, at the same time the sublimity and awesomeness of nature themselves became a subject for the arts. . . . It is tempting to think that earlier ages had no need for art to represent nature as terrifying: that was simply what a lot of the time it was. An artistic reaffirmation of the separateness and fearfulness of nature became appropriate at the point at which for the first time the prospect of an ever-increasing technical control of it became obvious.
>
> If we think in these terms, our sense of restraint in the face of nature . . . will be grounded in a form of fear: a fear not just of the power of nature itself, but what might be called a *Promethean fear*, a fear of taking too lightly or inconsiderately our relations to nature. On this showing, the grounds of our attitudes will be very different from that suggested by any appeal to the interests of natural things. It will not be an extension of benevolence or altruism . . . nor a sense of community. It will be based rather on a sense of an opposition between ourselves and nature, as an old, unbounded and potentially dangerous enemy which requires 'respect' . . . [like the] healthy respect we have for mountainous terrain or treacherous seas.
>
> (Williams, 1995: 238–239, emphasis original)

Can Promethean fear ground deep ecology? One obvious question is whether such fear is anything more than a feeling, and an unwelcome one at that. Why should we not relish the fact that technical control has dispelled it, or at any rate relegated it the relatively painless contexts of paintings, novels, and movies? One interesting thought is that the ethical importance of the new science of ecology lies in its providing a rational basis for this Promethean fear. Science has revealed to us that we live in a world that makes it right to feel this way.

The most famous contention in environmental science that bears this interpretation is the "Gaia hypothesis," first formulated by James Lovelock in 1979. The hypothesis takes its name from the Greek supreme goddess of Earth, but though the name might suggest some

sort of neo-nature mysticism, the Gaia hypothesis is a strictly scientific explanation of the history of Earth that draws on extensive biological, geological, and climatological evidence. The precise meaning of the hypothesis has been much debated since its first formulation, and it has undergone some important revisions. But the fundamental idea has emerged largely unscathed, and it is regarded as a serious one by an increasing number of scientists. In his most recent version, Lovelock explains it as follows.

> Going outwards from the centre, the Earth is almost entirely made of hot or molten rock and metal. Gaia is a thin spherical shell of matter that surrounds the incandescent interior; it begins where the crustal rocks meet the magma of the Earth's hot interior, about 100 miles below the surface, and proceeds another 100 miles outwards through the ocean and air to the even hotter thermosphere at the edge of space. It includes the biosphere and is a dynamic physiological system that has kept our planet fit for life for over three billion years. I call Gaia a physiological system because it appears to have the unconscious goal of regulating the climate and chemistry at a comfortable state for life. Its goals are not set points but adjustable for whatever is the current environment and adaptable to whatever forms of life it carries.
>
> (Lovelock, 2006: 15)

The hypothesis that Earth is a dynamic physiological system that regulates global climate and chemistry is of sufficient theoretical novelty to warrant scientific investigation. But interest in it has gone far beyond the stricter confines of science because of the special relevance it is thought to have with respect to some of the phenomena with which we have been concerned in this chapter, notably global warming. Lovelock himself sees the hypothesis as having a direct bearing on this.

> [T]he fix we are now in over global change requires us to know the true nature of the Earth and imagine it as the largest living thing in the solar system, not something inanimate like that disreputable contraption 'spaceship Earth'. Until this change of heart and mind happens we will not instinctively sense that we live on a live planet that can respond to the changes we make, either by cancelling the changes or by cancelling us. Unless we see the Earth as a planet that behaves as if it were alive, at least to the extent of regulating its climate and chemistry, we will lack the will to change our way of life and to understand that we have made it our greatest enemy.
>
> (Lovelock, 2006: 17)

Against this background, it is easy to see how "respect for Gaia" comes to be regarded as the true and adequate ground of *deep* ecology, a connection that Lovelock expressly endorses. Shallow ecology takes human welfare to be of supreme importance, but in a pretty plain sense, if Lovelock is right, Gaia is more important than we are. The importance of Gaia needs to be stated with some care, however. Both critics and enthusiasts have tended to assume that identifying Earth as "the largest living thing in the solar system," and especially giving it the name of an ancient goddess, implies that it has personality and/or purposes. Lovelock and other proponents of the theory have been at pains to distance it from this erroneous implication. The idea is a more modest one that simply invites us to see biological, physical, and chemical processes in land, water, air, animals, and vegetation as interacting parts of a single ecosystem. Earth, so considered, is not an inanimate lump of rock as we often think, but an integrated entity with powers of self-regulation and recovery

much like those in plants and animals. Those powers, however, are of a magnitude more than sufficient to warrant Williams's "Promethean fear."

If, as its chief proponents have increasingly presented it, the Gaia hypothesis is a strictly scientific hypothesis, it has to be refined and tested by sophisticated empirical investigation. This needs to be interdisciplinary no doubt, but philosophy as such is not one of the disciplines relevant to that investigation. But insofar as Gaia is invoked as the concept in which deep ecology is most adequately grounded, there is scope for properly philosophical reflection and criticism. If the hypothesis were scientifically validated, would it provide ecological ethics the depth shallow ecology is said to lack?

In *The Revenge of Gaia*, Lovelock does use it in this way. He warns of a cataclysmic future for human civilization, which is possibly quite close at hand. Within decades, he predicts, large numbers of human beings will perish as a result of famine, flood, and drought. To be fearful of such a future, of course, is to fear for the future of human civilization, and to this extent he is at one with the shallow ecologists. However, fearful though he is for human life as we currently know it, he is not fearful for the future of Gaia, whose survival (if the basic idea is correct) may well *require* the destruction of most human beings. Indeed Lovelock explicitly makes this point:

> The Earth has recovered after fevers like [global warming] and there are no grounds for thinking that what we are doing will destroy Gaia, but if we continue business as usual, our species may never again enjoy the lush and verdant world we had only a hundred years ago. What is most in danger is civilization; humans are tough enough for breeding pairs to survive, and Gaia is the toughest of all. What we are doing weakens her but is unlikely to destroy her. She has survived numerous catastrophes in her three billion years or more.
>
> (Lovelock, 2006: 60)

If Gaia can survive global warming and similar environmental changes, albeit not entirely unscathed, then the future of Gaia cannot call for radically new policies. And if it is threatened destruction of human civilization that calls us to action, it is what shallow ecology has been saying all along. Either way, the Gaia hypothesis appears to be of no practical relevance. Moreover, as Williams perceptively notes at the end of his essay, even if this were not so, there is a sense in which practical action in the face of the sublime is deeply problematic.

> What many conservation interests want to preserve is a nature that is not controlled, shaped or willed by us, a nature which, as against culture, can be thought of as just there. But a nature that is preserved by us is no longer a nature that is simply not controlled. A natural park is still a park; a wilderness that is preserved is a definite, delimited, wilderness. The paradox is that we have to use our power to preserve a sense of what is not in our power.
>
> (Williams, 1995: 240)

Can the practical recommendations of Lovelock and others escape this paradox? Some have seen another dimension here. Suppose it is true that Earth comprises a single self-regulating organism, which can usefully be called "Gaia." Human beings are as much a part of Gaia as another other species, and they are inextricably connected with it. Gaia is the Being to which humanity owes its existence and continuation, and it is thus the context within

which human values must be understood. If so, wisdom warns us against a false and foolish sense of independence. It tells us to "plan our own destiny within Gaia," as Lovelock puts it (Lovelock, 2006: 141). In contemplating the disasters he predicts, he speaks of combating human *hubris* and of the "sin" humanity is committing in its environmental recklessness. In keeping with this religious language, his autobiography is called *Homage to Gaia*, and he highlights the need to "live and think as a deep ecologist" (Lovelock, 2000: 142), in contrast to the action plans of green political parties and the technological promises of renewable energy—human solutions in which he places little faith. This language introduces a new evaluative dimension; the identification of *hubris* (spiritual pride) and sin alert us to spiritual failings rather than moral mistakes, and homage involves much more than simply acting rightly. Its first concern is not with recommending practical policies and actions that would indeed be prey to Williams's paradox, but the inculcation of new *attitudes* to the world in which we live.

Lovelock is explicit about the similarities between environmentalism and religion, and what he says in large measure accords both with elements in Naess's original conception of deep ecology and some increasingly prominent strands in environmental philosophy. Noting this important shift from the moral to the spiritual is not intended as a way of dismissing or discounting it, but it does mark a move away from, or perhaps beyond, the ethical in this important sense. Confronted with the costs to humanity of its own wilful misuse of land, air, and sea, and their inevitability, we are not called to implement different policies or act in accordance with amended moral principles, as we are in the case of Bentham's extension of the unnecessary suffering principle to animals. If Lovelock is to be believed, any such policies will be wholly ineffectual given the pressing timescale. It is for this reason, rather than any perception of the paradox Williams identifies, that he moves to a different level, inviting us (in effect) to accept our collective sinfulness, engage in repentance, and strive for a new humility. These are the responses the Old Testament prophets urged upon the Israelites when they experienced (as they saw it) the famines, droughts, and floods that God had sent as punishments on those who had ignored His commands. And so it is with Gaia. If we characterize Earth as the Being to which humanity owes its existence, we thereby make it a direct rival to the One True God of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," the author of *Psalm 111* tells us. Wisdom for the present age, deep ecology asserts, must flow from a Promethean fear of Gaia.

There may be reasons to endorse or reject this new religion. This is a subject for another time. The main point to be observed here is that the quest for an environmental ethic has led us to environmentalism as a religion. This transformation is important. Morality is not religion. All the moral theories considered in this book have been articulated at length and examined in detail with only passing mention of explicitly religious or theological concepts. Of course, religion and morality—God and good—have long been thought to be connected in some way. But this is best made the topic of Chapter 10.

10
Ethics, Religion, and the Meaning of Life

In this final chapter we arrive at topics which many people expect philosophy, and moral philosophy in particular, to be specially concerned with, namely God, good, and evil and the meaning of life. Before considering these topics directly, however, it is helpful to return to some of the topics from previous chapters.

10.1 Morality and Ordinary Life

Chapter 1 quoted the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid.

> It is the prerogative of Man in his adult state to be able to propose to himself and to prosecute one great End in Life . . . we can, from an Eminence as it were, take a view of the whole Course of human Life; and consider the different Roads that men take . . .
>
> (Reid, 2007: 32)

Reid made this remark to his students at the University of Glasgow in the first lecture of a course entitled "Practical Ethics." By today's standards they were young—about 13 years of age—and he wanted to draw their attention at the start of their studies to a very special feature of the lives they were going to lead. It is easy to see that life of a plant, even though it might last several thousand years (e.g., the Bristlecone Pine) is simply a matter of continuous biological existence. The life of an animal, though it may live a fraction of this time, is by nature very much richer since it has essential elements that the plant does not (i.e., sensuous experience and physical activity). Yet even the life of an animal that can expect to live more than twice as long as a human being (e.g., the Bowhead whale) falls far short of human life. The crucial difference is that we have the capacity to *make* something of our lives, not merely undergo or experience them.

Reid summarizes eloquently a feature of human life that, as we saw in previous chapters, is an ancient theme in moral philosophy. In Plato's *Apology*, written almost 2,400 years ago, Socrates defends his philosophical inquiries against those who accused him of undermining authority, and he declares emphatically that an unreflective, unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology* 38a). In the passage quoted, however, Reid does not make express mention of ethics or morality. This raises an interesting question. Any attempt to consider which road we might take in life requires us to survey many different aspects of existence (e.g., education, occupation, personal relationships, hobbies, leisure time, and so on). How

are all these dimensions to be related? Is education simply for the sake of occupation? Are personal relationships more important than professional accomplishment? Is work for the sake of leisure? And so on. One way of interpreting the pursuit of "one great End in life" is to see it as matter of trying to make a coherent whole out of all these different (and sometimes competing) dimensions. If this is right, though, how does morality (or ethics) fit in to this great End?

Towards the end of Chapter 8, in the examination of Utilitarianism, we encountered a problem that relates directly to this question. Utilitarianism appears to generate a very *demanding* conception of morality. If the utilitarian is right, the demands morality makes on us are constant and indifferent to our personal loves, loyalties, and enthusiasms. This fact gives new life to the question "Why should I be moral?" The earlier egoist version can be criticized as emanating from a desire to put myself before everybody else, to make the world center on *me*, so to speak. But this new alternative version does not have this egocentric component. It only asks that morality should at least sometimes leave me alone to get on with lots of the valuable things that go to make up ordinary life.

The excessively demanding nature of Utilitarianism has been described as its requirement for *radical* sacrifice. That is to say, if the Greatest Happiness Principle (GHP) is to govern my conduct, then I must be willing to use my time, talents, and resources for the greatest good and the general happiness right up to the point where I am only marginally better off than the least well off, and I must be willing to rank this demand for radical sacrifice ahead of personal matters such as career goals, family life, and artistic interests. The heavy burden that such a conception represents makes it a highly unattractive prospect not just for egoists, but for anyone who thinks that there is more to life than moral rectitude.

Characterized in this way it is easy to regard the problem as one uniquely encountered by Utilitarianism. But this is not quite right. It may well be true that in certain senses, Utilitarianism is unusually demanding when compared with other moral theories, but something of the same problem can be seen to arise for *anything* we might call a *moral* theory.

Utilitarianism's great rival is Kantianism. In his essay "Persons, character and morality," Bernard Williams argues that in a way, the problem for Kantianism is worse. After all, Utilitarianism makes *impartial benevolence* the touchstone of its moral system rather than *altruism*, and this at least gives *my* happiness, and thus my career, family life, hobbies, etc., *some* weight in the calculation of general benefit. Radical sacrifice may be demanded, but only after a calculation that does not *exclude* the things that matter to me personally. By contrast, the distinctive elements of Kantianism, as Williams identifies them, are these:

> that the moral point of view is basically different from a non-moral, and in particular self-interested, point of view, and by a difference of kind; [it is] specially characterized by its impartiality and indifference to any particular circumstances and particular characteristics . . . except in so far as these can be treated as universal features of any morally similar situation; and that the motivations of a moral agent, correspondingly, involve a rational application of impartial principle and are thus different in kind from the sorts of motivations he might have for treating some particular persons . . . differently because he happened to have some particular interest towards them. . . . The deeply disparate character of moral and non-moral motivations, together with the special dignity or supremacy attached to the moral, make it very difficult to assign to those other relations and motivations the significance or structural importance in life which some of them are capable of possessing.
>
> (Williams, 1981: 2)

The problem Williams identifies here can be illustrated in any number of ways. If morality requires me to judge impartially, then I cannot rightly give special status to those whom I love. From the moral point of view, I have to treat them like everybody else, and that means that from a moral point of view, my love for them means nothing. If the moral point of view takes no account of my personal interests, then it bids me give up my philosophical studies in order to spend my time alleviating poverty. If moral requirements override all others, then, when the two conflict, I cannot justify time spent on leisure activities, except insofar as this restores my energies for still greater moral endeavor. In short, conceived in this way, morality is potentially the enemy of ordinary life. Far from making a coherent whole out of all the things that are worth doing, humanly speaking, it renders them insignificant in the light of a single, one might say obsessive, end.

Though Williams focuses on Kant, arguably the problem extends to any conception of "the moral" that attributes "special dignity or supremacy" to it. This is what Nietzsche thought, and it is why he made so much of the difference between good and evil and good and bad. Good and bad are judgments that can apply within and across all the evaluative dimensions of life. This enables us to adjudicate between them. A good hamburger is a better choice than a bad book. It's better to be good at playing the piano than to be bad at hospital visiting. A good father justifiably spends time at home with his family rather than scouring the streets for indigent people to help. But once we start employing the concept of evil (and its contrasting sense of good), we have introduced an incommensurable dimension. *Nothing* justifies an evil act; if good is the opposite of evil, we are *never* justified in refusing its demands.

Good and evil, Nietzsche held, were inventions of the Christian religion. With the death of God at the hands of science, Christianity could be expected to decline. What Nietzsche also saw, though, is that the concept of evil would not be so easily dispensed. That is why he urged post-Christian thinking to go *Beyond Good and Evil*. It has not really done so, however. No doubt this is in part due to events in the twentieth century. What adequate description can there be of the Nazi Holocaust, Stalin's Gulag, or the Cambodian killing fields if the concept of evil has been abandoned? How can we make respect for human rights fundamental to human relationships, both social and international, unless we can give them special dignity and supremacy? These are important questions, and yet they return us to the problem Williams identifies. Given that there is more to life than moral rectitude, how can we lend morality this kind of supremacy?

The conflict between morality and the claims of personal interest, family obligation, and so on can be termed a problem about the *authority* of morality. Why should it have authority over these other claims on our time and attention? This is a question that contractualism is sometimes intended to address, with its fundamental idea that morality should be thought of as the rules by which people *agree* to live. By putting agreement at the heart of morality, it seems we can bridge the gap between what each of us wants and what the interests of everyone requires of us. In Chapter 2 this idea was explored at length, and it was found to be problematic, but even if the arguments rehearsed there are unsound or unconvincing, we can now identify a further hugely important difficulty. Human agreement seems much too weak to secure the kind of special dignity or supremacy that is required.

The example of the Nazi Holocaust illustrates this. Following Germany's defeat in World War II, the surviving leaders of the Nazi Party were put on trial by the victorious Allies at Nuremburg. This unprecedented trial had to invent a new concept (i.e., crimes against humanity) for the very good reason that the ghastly events that took place in the concentration camps had been in accord with the law of the land. The Nazi leaders had not broken their own laws, and they were not subject to any other legal jurisdiction in which genocide

was a crime. Though it is a somewhat vexed question, historical research has tended to support the contention that a very significant proportion of the population of Germany knew about and was engaged in the policy of the Final Solution one way or another. So it is not wholly implausible to hold that the Nazi government had the tacit, if not express, consent of the population at large. The historical issue is not crucial. Even if the entire population had given *express* consent, this would do nothing to mitigate the horror of what was done. By the same reasoning, however, we must conclude that the policy of genocide was not *made* wrong by the postwar agreement of the Allies. Its wrongness transcends all such agreements. This is why the word "bad" seems so inadequate and why the word "evil" seems indispensible. It is also what the language of "crimes against *humanity*" is intended to capture. And yet this too seems to accomplish nothing. If one set of human beings (e.g., the Nazis or the Allies) cannot make these things right or wrong, neither can humanity as a whole. Should the whole of humanity accept something unjust as just (as it once accepted the institution of slavery), this would not *make* it just; it would only show how degraded human beings had become.

10.2 God and Good: Plato's *Euthyphro*

This is why, *pace* Nietzsche, many thinkers have thought that any defense of the supremacy of morality has to appeal to a higher authority than either international law or human consensus, and why at precisely this point appeal is made to the authoritative will of God. The move is a common one, yet a very ancient and famous philosophical dialogue—Plato's *Euthyphro*—is widely taken to have shown that this appeal is fruitless.

Euthyphro is a very characteristic Socratic dialogue. It takes its name from its central character, a man supposedly expert in the ways of religion and whom Socrates begins to question. The dialogue is set against a rather intriguing background. Euthyphro, a man of widely acknowledged religious devotion, meets Socrates outside a courthouse. It emerges from the opening remarks of their conversation that Euthyphro has brought an action in the courts against his own father, accusing him of murder. On hearing this, Socrates is somewhat astonished and not unnaturally supposes that the murder victim must be someone to whom Euthyphro is closely attached. But Euthyphro replies as follows:

> It is funny that you should think it makes any difference, Socrates, whether the dead man was an outsider or a member of my own household, and not realize that the only point at issue is whether the killer killed lawfully or not; and that if he did, he must be let alone, but if he did not, he must be prosecuted—that is, if he is the sharer of your hearth and table; because if you consciously associate with such a person and do not purify yourself and him by prosecuting him at law, you share equally in the pollution of his guilt. As a matter of fact, the deceased was a day-labourer of mine; we were farming in Naxos and he was working for us there. Well, he got drunk, lost his temper with one of our servants and knifed him. So my father bound him hand and foot and threw him into a ditch; and then sent a man over here to ask the proper authority what was to be done. In the meanwhile he not only troubled himself very little about the prisoner, but neglected him altogether, considering that he was a murderer, and it would not matter if he died. And that was just what happened; what with starvation and exposure and confinement, he died before the messenger came back from consulting the expert. That is why both my father and my other relations are angry with me: because on the murderer's account I am prosecuting my father for manslaughter,

> whereas in the first place (as they maintain) he did not kill the man, and in the second, even supposing that he did kill him, since the dead man was a murderer, one ought not to concern oneself in defence of such a person, because it is an act of impiety for a son to prosecute his son for murder. They have a poor comprehension, Socrates, of how the divine law stands with regard to piety and impiety.
>
> (Plato, 1954: 22–23)

The case so described is an intriguing one from both moral and legal points of view, though Socrates chooses to light on the last sentence, and he thereby leads Euthyphro to make the claim that, unlike the rest of his family, he is an expert on what the divine law does and does not require. With a strong touch of the irony for which Socrates was famed, he declares himself anxious to become Euthyphro's disciple so that he may himself come to be possessed of such great and valuable knowledge. It is with the questions he now raises that the philosophy proper begins. The dialogue falls into three main parts. It is the middle section that is generally thought most relevant to the subject of God and morality, though the third section will prove important also for the topics of this chapter.

In the first section of the dialogue, Socrates argues that it is only what *all* the gods agree on that could possibly be a guide to good conduct. It is hard for people in modern times to take much serious interest in talk of "the gods," but what this section effectively shows is that talk of "gods" in the plural is redundant, and that any attempt to give the good life a religious basis must appeal to one God. (It may also reflect the fact that Plato, and possibly Socrates, were themselves inclined to reject popular religion in favor of some sort of monotheism). This part of the argument is not easily cast into terms that relate it to modern thinking, except that modern versions of the argument that follows do require a conception of God as a supreme Being of infinite power.

In the second section, Socrates presents Euthyphro with a dilemma. Ordinary language often uses the word "dilemma" to mean any problematic choice, but, strictly speaking, a dilemma is a special kind of problem. It is a question that appears to have just two possible answers, neither of which, on reflection, is satisfactory. Nowadays the question Socrates poses for Euthyphro is couched in these terms: Is something good because God approves of it, or does He approve of it because it is good? What makes it a dilemma is that Euthyphro seems compelled to relinquish his appeal to God *whichever* way he answers.

By way of illustration it is helpful to consider an example in which moral and religious teaching are deeply allied—the famous story Jesus tells about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25–37). A man described as a "lawyer" asks Jesus about the secret of eternal life, and in response he is invited to summarize Jewish religious law. When he says that its essence is twofold—unqualified love of God and loving your neighbor as yourself—Jesus commends him for this answer. But then the lawyer asks, "Who *is* my neighbour?" By way of reply, Jesus tells the story of a traveler on the notoriously dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The man is set upon by thieves, robbed of his goods, and left for dead by the roadside. A priest comes along, but he passes by on the other side for fear of getting involved in violence or ritual impurity. Likewise, a Levite (a very respectable sort of person) passes by, leaving the injured man lying where he is. Finally, a Samaritan comes along. (It is important to know that the Jews of Jesus's time thought badly of Samaritans). Unlike the other two, he stops and helps the man, giving him medication and taking him to a wayside inn. He even leaves money with the innkeeper to cover the injured man's expenses. When Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three is properly described as neighbor to the injured man, he replies, "The one who showed him kindness" and is told "Go and do likewise."

This story has commended itself to generation after generation as an illuminating example of the love of neighbor that God commands Christians to show. But is the Samaritan's conduct good only because it accords with what God commands? Or is it rather that helping the injured is good in itself, and this is *why* God commands it? Suppose we answer "yes" to the first alternative, and we agree that there is nothing more to the goodness of an action than its being in accordance with the will of God. Then it seems that if God had required us to do the opposite of what we customarily think is right, it would be equally good; if God had commanded the Samaritan to cross the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and aggravate the victim's wounds, this would have been a good thing to do. But to think this is to think that what we take to be good and bad and right and wrong is not intrinsically, but quite contingently, which is to say *arbitrarily*, fixed by God. On this view there is nothing good about happiness or helpfulness *in themselves*, and nothing is necessarily wrong about causing suffering or injuring the innocent; it just so happens that God chose to declare these things good and bad (or good and evil), and He might as easily have chosen to condemn those who are kind and generous and praise those who are malicious or greedy (as the God of the Old Testament seems to do from time to time).

Most people are inclined to reject this horn of the dilemma. They think that God commands us to do what is good *because* it is good; that any Being properly called "God" is not a tyrant who acts in the manner of the infamous Roman emperors Nero or Caligula, wilfully and whimsically commanding one thing on one occasion, while just as readily commanding the opposite on another. A much preferable option is to hold that God sees the truth, commands what is *really* good, and forbids those things that are *really* bad.

If this alternative is the correct account, though, then the things that are good and evil are good and evil *whatever* God may think of them. Of course, if God is good as Christians (and many others) believe, then He will only command us to act in ways that are good. But in this case their *being* good is independent of His will, and hence it is neither based upon nor determined by it. Indeed, describing God as good in virtue of the goodness of the actions He commands makes God himself subject to a standard superior to His own will. Thus, the attempt to avoid making good and evil subject to a capricious will lands us on the other horn of the dilemma. God is not, after all, the foundation of good, but at best its revealer.

The upshot is that the appeal to God's supreme will was supposed to ground the special dignity that morality has in comparison with the values of ordinary life. What Plato's dialogue is widely held to show is that good and bad are dependent upon the will of God, in which case they are an arbitrary matter, or else they are not arbitrary, in which case nothing is accomplished by the appeal to God's authority.

10.3 Kant and the Harmony of Happiness and Virtue

Although contemporary moral philosophers tend to construe the argument of the *Euthyphro* in the terms in which I have just recounted it, the dialogue itself does not speak of "the good," but of "the holy," and the topic of discussion between Socrates and Euthyphro is not moral rectitude, but "piety." This difference is one that will be explored in a later section, but the tendency to convert Plato's dialogue about piety into an argument about moral right and wrong reveals yet again the powerful influence of Kant on moral philosophy. Kant's most influential work was the *Groundwork*, whose themes were discussed at length in Chapter 7. Kant himself thought these themes received their most thorough philosophical explanation in a different work—the *Critique of Practical Reason,* the

second of the three great philosophical critiques in which he lays out his entire philosophical program.

In Chapter II of Book II of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant expressly argues for a connection between God and morality, and he outlines a consequent conception of the holy. His argument is often referred to as a "moral argument" for the existence of God. This is not a wholly misleading way of describing it, but it is open to serious misinterpretation, and Kant has not infrequently been crudely and quite wrongly represented as thinking that we ought to believe in God so that our moral rectitude will be suitably rewarded in the afterlife. In fact, his concern is not first and foremost with the existence of God, but, more relevantly to the themes of this chapter, with the supremacy of morality.

Kant thinks that there can be no theoretical proof or even demonstration of God's existence. In his view, all the traditional metaphysical arguments (i.e., the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments) fail in what they attempt. However, as we saw in Chapter 7, he draws a radical distinction between theoretical and practical reason. Contrary to Hume, as well as to inflated modern views of the importance of science, Kant thinks that pure practical reason is of equal importance to speculative theory or empirical investigation as an exercise of our rational freedom. In certain ways, indeed, it could be said to be more important, because our humanity is *constituted* by freedom and reason.

Accordingly, if we are to be properly human, it must be possible for us to exercise rational freedom in action, that is to say to fashion our lives freely in accordance with the laws of reason. However, Kant identifies a deep difficulty confronting this possibility.

> Happiness is the condition of a rational being in the world, in whose existence everything goes according to wish and will. It thus rests on the harmony of nature with his entire end and with the essential determining ground of his will. But the moral law commands as a law of freedom through motives wholly independent of nature and of its harmony with our faculty of desire . . . Hence there is not the slightest ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between morality and proportionate happiness of a being which belongs to the world as one of its parts and as thus dependent on it. Not being nature's cause, his will cannot by its own strength bring nature, as it touches on his happiness, into complete harmony with his practical principles. Nevertheless, in the practical task of pure reason such a connection is postulated as necessary. We should seek to further the highest good (which therefore must be at least possible).
>
> (Kant, 1781, 1956: 129)

Kant is never easy to understand, but the heart of his argument is that it is rational to pursue the means to a happy life. It is also rational to pursue a virtuous life (i.e., resolve always to do what is morally right). As we saw in Chapter 7, these two requirements of reason can come into conflict; the path of virtue is not always the path to happiness and vice versa. However, the conflict can be resolved, to some extent, if we make our one great End in life not happiness (as the Epicureans did) or virtue (as the Stoics did), but *worthiness to be happy*, seeking, that is to say, only such happiness as we deserve. However, being ourselves dependent parts of the natural world and not the masters of it, we can never ensure that this aim is a possible one. It requires that the world, overall and in the end, does indeed harmonize virtue and happiness such that everyone is just as happy as they deserve to be. Thus pure practical reason sets a goal before us, but our own powers are too limited to ensure that it is a possible one. Yet if it is *not* possible, then the only goal that properly realizes our human potential for rational freedom is groundless, a false hope it could not be rational

to fashion our lives around. The only way to escape this devastating contradiction is to postulate the conditions under which rational freedom *is* possible. Practical rationality, in other words, requires us to postulate the existence of "a cause of the whole of nature, itself distinct from nature, which contains the ground of the exact coincidence of happiness with morality" (Kant, 1781, 1956: 129). In short, "it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God" (Kant, 1781, 1956: 129–130) because it is only "the Kingdom of God in which nature and morality come into a harmony which is foreign to both of them" (Kant, 1781, 1956: 133).

To appreciate Kant's contention properly, several points have to be borne in mind. This argument is an exercise in practical reason, not metaphysics. It is not intended, and cannot serve, as a theoretical ground for belief in God. What it offers us is not a philosophical or quasiscientific theory which might or might not turn out to be true, but the possibility of rational faith. This is the aspect of his argument that answers directly to the topic we have been discussing—the overriding importance of the moral. We can have faith in the special dignity and supremacy of human rights or the environment, to take two prominent secular contenders, but without the presupposition of a cause sufficient to harmonize happiness and virtue, this will not be *rational* faith.

Another important feature of the argument is that Kant does not represent the connection between God and morality in a way that makes it subject to the Euthyphro dilemma. It avoids the first horn, "because it does not make the knowledge of God and his will the basis of [moral] laws" (Kant, 1781, 1956: 134). It avoids the second horn because, though God himself acts in accordance with the moral law, these laws are "essential laws of any free will as such" (Kant, 1781, 1956: 134) and therefore constitute no independent restriction on God's freedom and rationality. In other words, God is not *subject to* the moral law in any subservient sense.

It is here that the true connection between morality and religion lies, according to Kant. As the supremely free and rational being God alone wills in accordance with the moral law to perfection. "The moral law is holy (unyielding) and demands holiness of morals" but for the "moral perfection to which man can attain is only virtue" (Kant, 1781, 1956: 134).

> In this manner, through the concept of the highest good as the object and final end of pure practical reason, the moral law leads to religion. Religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions, i.e. arbitrary and contingent ordinances of a foreign will, but as essential laws of any free will as such. Even as such, they must be regarded as commands of the Supreme Being because we can hope for the highest good (to strive for which is our duty under the moral law) only from a perfect (holy and beneficent) and omnipotent will; and therefore, we can hope to attain it only through harmony with this will.
>
> (Kant, 1781, 1956: 134)

10.4 Moral Action and Religious Practice

When Kant says that the moral law *leads to* religion, what exactly does this mean? He speaks of God as "an object of adoration," but on the other hand he writes as though the principle requirement of religion is simply conformity with the moral law regarded as divine commandment. This suggests, as many have thought, that Kant's argument results in a strictly ethical religion that gives moral action supreme importance in the conduct of life and leaves little or no place for distinctively religious practices. If this is correct, this

would imply that morality leads to religion in only the most attenuated sense. Moreover, it would imply a departure from human practice so radical as to leave us wondering whether that to which Kant thinks morality leads is properly called "religion" at all. Though it is commonly supposed that religions lay down rules for a morally good life, this is contrary to the facts about religious codes of conduct, because relatively little of what we find in the sacred literature of the world's religions is expressly to do with what might be called "moral conduct."

This is true of even the most familiar examples people use. Take the Ten Commandments, which are often supposed to be typical of a religious morality. The first four of these commandments concern our relationship to God, not our relationships with other people, and the remaining six take the larger part of their significance from this fact. Or consider Christ's "Sermon on the Mount." Though often spoken of as a piece of moral teaching, the Sermon is in fact much more concerned with how to pray and worship than it is with the details of ethical conduct. Again, the Qur'an has a great deal to say about how to keep in the right path ordained by God, but only a small part of this has to do with moral injunctions, and most of it has to do with "calling upon the Name." The principal duties of the Muslim are to prayer and worship. The same is true of the Sikh scriptures. Even the Buddhist scriptures, though much concerned with how to live, are interested in the religious path to release from this world rather than rules for morally upright living in it.

What even this brief survey suggests is that the great religions of the world are concerned with ethics only insofar as it is incorporated within the context of spiritual practices and religious observances undertaken for their own sake. Let us suppose that Kant's argument in the *Critique of Practical Reason* successfully connects morality with religion in a way that avoids the Euthyphro dilemma. If so, he has successfully shown that we can only speak of values as sacred (Kant's term is "unyielding") if we postulate the existence of God. But we are still left with this question: How is moral action to be connected with religious practice?

Interestingly, this brings us back to Plato's *Euthyphro*. We noted at the start of the previous section that Socrates puts his question this way: Is something holy because it is beloved of the gods, or is it beloved of the gods precisely because it is holy? Piety and holiness are not concepts that are easy to use nowadays, because there is a powerful tendency for them to be conflated with their degenerate forms of piousness, religiosity, and an attitude of "holier than thou." This is not how Plato understood them, of course, and we can recover something of the right way to think if we use the terms "sacred" and "honor" instead. Even convinced secularists sometimes speak of "sacred" values, and they think that there are things that ought to be venerated.

Towards the end of the dialogue (Plato, 1954: 11e) Plato raises a question which, superficially at any rate, relates rather closely to Kant. This concerns the connection between justice and holiness. Socrates wonders whether everything that is holy is just, whether everything that is just is holy, or whether the two only partly coincide. After some hesitation, Euthyphro offers the suggestion that "the part of justice which is religious and is holy is the part that has to do with the service of the gods; the remainder is the part of justice that has to do with the service of mankind" (Plato, 1954: 12e). Socrates takes up the idea of "service to the gods," and he speedily shows that it is problematic. Since the gods need nothing that we have it in our power to give them, it does not seem possible for us to be of service to them in anything like the way we can act in the service of our fellow human beings, whose wants and needs we can indeed provide. He thereby extracts from Euthyphro the concession that religious acts simply "please" the gods, and in this way he returns to the dilemma which has formed the major part of their conversation.

However, Plato overlooks, or perhaps has chosen to ignore, a special kind of action characteristic of religion, namely ritual. The hapless Euthyphro is forced to choose between actions which either benefit or please the gods. What is omitted are actions that honor and/or celebrate. We need not turn to the obviously religious to find illuminating examples of such actions. Birthday celebrations are a simple instance. These follow a certain pattern and can be done well or badly. But their success is not a function of what they accomplish or of how they are received. When we celebrate the birth of a baby, this is not any part of the natural process by which he or she came into existence, and celebrating the next birthday a year later has no causal role in making the baby one year old. But since the baby is for the most part unaware of such birthday events, we cannot suppose that the point is to please the baby.

The term "ritual event" has an aura of the occult and the esoteric about it, but in fact ritual events are a crucial part of human life. Their role is not to bring something valuable about, or merely to make life more enjoyable, and when they are performed entirely for their own sake, as Kant thinks moral actions should be, they become mere rituals. Rather their special function is to *shape* our lives. Quite what this means, why it matters, and how it relates to morality are issues that will become clearer when we have explored this question: What gives life *meaning*?

10.5 The Myth of Sisyphus

That religion is principally concerned with the meaning of life is almost a commonplace. But philosophers have found it difficult to determine just what is meant by "meaning" in this context. "Does life have a meaning?" is a question of which the meaningfulness may itself be doubted. One useful way of exploring the issues involved lies in thinking about the story of Sisyphus, a classical myth from the ancient world made famous in recent times by the Albert Camus's existentialist essay about the meaning of human life, to which he gave the title *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Sisyphus was a legendary king of the ancient Greek city of Corinth. He was reputed to be exceedingly cunning, and amongst the most fantastical deeds attributed to him is the story that, when Death came to take him, Sisyphus managed to chain it up, so that no one died until Ares came and released Death again. In the end, Sisyphus was condemned to eternal punishment for, amongst other misdeeds, betraying divine secrets to mortals. It is the form of his punishment that is of interest here. Sisyphus had to roll a large stone up a hillside. But things were so arranged that, just as the stone reached the top, it would tumble down to the bottom and he had to begin all over again. And so it would continue for ever.

It is important to see that the labors of Sisyphus are not objectionable because they are difficult or tedious, but because they encapsulate a perfect image of pointlessness. Sisyphus's life, spent in the way the myth describes, is a meaningless one; this is what makes it a punishment. And the meaningless arises from the fact that he is trapped in an endless cycle of activity where what he does at one time (pushing the stone up the hill) is completely undone shortly afterwards (when it rolls down again). It is the fact that nothing enduring is accomplished or attained that makes the whole thing pointless. Yet, having seen that in this way Sisyphus's life is indeed meaningless, we are at the same time usefully placed to ask what would give it meaning.

For Camus, the importance of the story lies in the fact that all our lives are like this. In a famous opening passage he says

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest . . . comes afterwards.
>
> (Camus, 1942, 2000: 11)

The question of meaning arises because the human condition is one in which "absurdity, hope and death carry on their dialogue" (Camus, 1942, 2000: 12). Camus sketches a number of possible responses to this absurdity. In most of them, the absurdity of existence is acknowledged, but that acknowledgment can take different forms. One, the least admirable is resignation, the simple acceptance of our "thrownness" (to use a term from Heidegger) that we occupy a world in which we simply find ourselves. But a second form of acknowledgment seizes upon the absurdity of existence with a kind of gusto, and it relishes to excess the things available for experience and consumption—a life marked perhaps by the old motto *carpe diem* (seize the day). A third form of acknowledgment is the "absurd hero," who is in revolt against the contingency of existence. "You have already grasped," says Camus in the final chapter of his essay,

> that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing . . . Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.
>
> If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy. . . .
>
> One does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual of happiness . . . There is but one world, however. Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable. It would be a mistake to say that happiness necessarily springs from the absurd discovery. It happens as well that the feeling of the absurd springs from happiness.
>
> (Camus, 1942, 2000: 108–110)

Camus wants to distinguish between attitudes to absurdity, but it is unclear what the criterion of discrimination is, because, in the end, it seems that the scornful attitude here described is to be commended and valued because it issues in a kind of happiness. On his analysis, this is a subjective state of mind, and the trouble is that it is a state of mind that can be achieved in other ways.

10.6 Subjective Value and Objective Purpose

This point is well brought out by Richard Taylor, an American philosopher who has also discussed the myth of Sisyphus at length. Taylor suggests two possible modifications to the story. Suppose that, while doing nothing to alter his task and conditions materially, the gods, in their mercy, inject him with a substance that has the curious property of giving him a desire to roll stones. As a result, whenever he is rolling the stone, however pointlessly, he is happy, and as the stone rolls down hill again, he grows restless and eager to begin his labors once more. This odd desire on Sisyphus's part is of course nonrational; it is, after

all, merely the result of a substance injected into him. But for all that, it gives his activities a value for him, since the existence of the desire allows him a measure of satisfaction with the life to which he has been condemned. We might describe the position in this way. Sisyphus's life has *subjective* value; it contains something that matters *to him*. However, it still seems meaningless. The endless rolling of a worthless stone remains pointless. Nothing about the activity itself has changed. The only thing that has changed is Sisyphus's attitude to it. And we might express this point by saying that, objectively speaking, there is no more purpose to his life now than before.

But Taylor also invites us to consider a second modification in the story. Let us imagine that Sisyphus rolls not one stone, but a series of stones to the top of the hill. This in itself does not alter the pointlessness of the activity, but suppose we add that the stones which Sisyphus rolls have a key part to play in the construction of a gloriously beautiful temple. In this case, all his efforts have a point beyond the satisfaction of chemically induced desires; they contribute to a project independent of his own personal satisfaction. We could express the difference by saying that, on this second modification of the story, Sisyphus's activity comes to have *objective* purpose, because the facts about the activity, and not merely about Sisyphus, have been changed.

We can see that, in the case of Sisyphus, subjective value at best renders his activity meaningful in a very limited way. Given the life to which the gods have condemned him, having the strange desire he does may make him happier, and this no doubt is why Taylor describes it as an act of mercy on the part of the gods. But though the fact that he is pursuing his own happiness makes his activity more intelligible, the things he finds his happiness in still seem fruitless and silly. Indeed, given other modifications to the story, we can intelligibly pity this Sisyphus more than the first if he not only enjoys rolling stones, but believes this pointless activity to be of the greatest importance.

In this he is unlike Camus's Sisyphus, who, though condemned, can at least shake his fist at the gods in recognition of that to which he had been condemned. Taylor's new Sisyphus is not only condemned, but deluded. He is not aware of the full extent of his condemnation, of just how pointless his life is. Yet does Camus's absurd hero really surmount his condition by scorn? Not in the right way. How can it be that I make my life meaningful by the recognition of its ultimate meaninglessness? Perhaps it is the case, as Camus alleges, that scornful recognition brings a kind of happiness, but the alternative Sisyphus is happy too.

Now consider Taylor's other scenario. Suppose it is the case that the stones Sisyphus so laboriously pushes to the top of the hill are indeed incorporated into an architecturally spectacular building. But suppose at the same time that Sisyphus does not know this. Then, though there is indeed a point to his labors, he himself cannot see it. His existence and activity remain *subjectively* valueless. He can take no satisfaction in them, and life will be, for him, as pointless a round of drudgery as it was before.

If this is a correct analysis, it seems that neither the provision of subjective value, nor objective purpose is alone sufficient to redeem the lot of Sisyphus. Would the problem be resolved if *both* the subjective and the objective conditions were satisfied? In a widely discussed essay entitled "The Absurd," Thomas Nagel contends that the kind of unity this requires is impossible. The objective and subjective points of view, he argues, are mutually exclusive. Nagel does not regard this impossibility as specially unfortunate, however, because he thinks that a sense of the absurd is the product of a confused desire to unify these radically diverse points of view. The confusion arises from the fact that human beings have essentially subjective activities and feelings that they can also view from an objective point of view; we can love and grieve, for example, and also study love and grief scientifically.

This ability to occupy an objective point of view makes us prone to a sense that the lives we view in this way are absurd or meaningless, but only because we mistakenly try to view our lives objectively and subjectively at the same time. The business of living, however, can only have subjective value, so not surprisingly it fails to meet the test of objectivity. What is important to human beings cannot be shown to be important in some other more objective sense. But Nagel thinks that it does not *need* to be shown to be objectively important, since it has the only kind of importance that matters—subjective satisfaction.

Richard Taylor, whose amplification of the Sisyphus myth we have been following, takes a different approach but arrives at a similar conclusion. Unlike Nagel, he does not think that objective and subjective meaning are in principal mutually exclusive. But he does think that subjective meaning is better, because humans cannot obtain the sort of objective meaning they seek. To see why he thinks this, we need to look at the story once more. On one modification Sisyphus remains condemned to repeat an operation that results in nothing while being made to feel happy with his lot. On the other modification, his activity is given a point—the contribution it makes to the construction of a magnificent building. Yet if we think about this further, Taylor says, we see that, though this gives the effects of human action *longer* duration, it is still *limited* duration. No matter how great a human achievement we consider (e.g., the Egyptian pyramids, Chinese civilization, or the Roman empire), we know that the passage of time has eventually reduced them to nothing. Here, by way of example, is an account of Akkad, the imperial capital of Akkadia, an empire that controlled a large part of the Middle East somewhere between four and five thousand years ago.

> [O]ne of the most magnificent cities ever built by the hand of man . . . it boasted the widest canals, the largest gate, the most people and a pyramid like temple two hundred feet wide at its base. Yet of this city not one brick stands . . . [and] archeologists cannot guess within ten miles where the king's palace stood.
>
> (Pelligrino, 1994: 128)

In reality, then, those activities we are inclined to rank as most valuable and enduring are no less part of a cycle of repeated creation and decay. Viewed from this point in time, the magnificence of Akkad is not more objectively valuable than far less enduring constructions. Its value lay in the political and economic interests of its inhabitants, and its value for us now lies in our intellectual and archaeological interests. Anything more "objective" is an illusion.

If this is true, then the two modifications of the Sisyphus myth we have been exploring do not really present us with the subjective and the objective as alternative ways in which lives can be made meaningful. Both make Sisyphus's life valuable and meaningful in an entirely subjective way. The only thing that could lend it objective value, on Taylor's view, is a kind of permanence, and *nothing* that human beings can hope to accomplish endures for all eternity.

10.7 Life, Time, and Eternity

In different ways, Nagel and Taylor reject the absurd as a genuine intuition into the nature of the human condition, and they explain it as a purely psychological phenomenon, a manifestation of feeling. Nagel thinks this feeling arises from a confused desire for objectivity in the necessarily subjective. And yet, it is hard to resist the thought that the first modification of the Sisyphus myth does illustrate a real possibility. Furthermore, it is a danger that is not

so unfamiliar in ordinary life, namely the inability of the even the most passionate desire to elevate the trivial and inconsequential to any level of significance. The Sisyphus who gives his heart and soul to rolling rocks seems more pitiful than the one who rages against his fate. In a more recent book, *The Last Word*, Nagel is less confident that the desire for a harmony between the subjective mind and objective reality is indeed misguided. While he makes plain his deep distaste for religion and his continuing resistance to any religious account of this harmony, his discussion of naturalism appears to acknowledge the need for something of the sort. "The process of trying to place ourselves in the world," he says, "leads eventually to thoughts that we cannot think of as merely 'ours'. If we think at all, we must think of ourselves, individually and collectively, as submitting to the order of reasons rather than creating it" (Nagel 1997: 143). This "order of reasons," he concedes, may have nothing to offer practical reason because it is at least intelligible that there are no objective values for ethics to track. But his "Kantian intuitions" make even this an unwelcome thought.

Taylor thinks that the existence of such objective values (at least as he incorporates them into his second modification of the myth) would not help us. He does not deny that the temporality of human life gives rise to a sense of its absurdity and a yearning for something more enduring, well expressed in the Christian hymn by Henry F. Lyte he quotes: "Change and decay in all around I see, O Thou who changest not, abide in me." Yet this yearning, however deep it may seem or feel, is ultimately in vain. Its satisfaction would have to lie in a world where all seeking, striving, and creating had ceased, and where, consequently, total boredom would overwhelm us. If there is one life worse than Sisyphus's pointless activity, it is the life in which there is no activity at all.

As it seems to me, however, this conclusion follows only if we confine ourselves to a certain conception of action and overlook (as the *Euthyphro* effectively does) the existence of ritual. As the example of a birthday celebration illustrates, the meaning of ritual does not lie in its efficacy, reception, or expressiveness. When I shake you by the hand, my action expresses something—a welcome, usually. The fact that the meaning of ritual is not derived from any of these frees it in a certain sense from temporality. In an essay on art and beauty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the German philosopher best known for his major work *Truth and Method*, makes this observation about Christian festivals:

> We do not describe a festival as a recurring one because we can assign a specific time to it, but rather the reverse: the time in which it occurs only arises though the recurrence of the festival itself. The ecclesiastical year is a good example, as are all those cases like Christmas, Easter, or whatever, where we do not calculate time abstractly in terms of weeks and months. Such moments represent the primacy of something that happens in its own time and at the proper time, something that is not subject to the abstract calculation of temporal duration.
>
> (Gadamer, 1977, 1986: 41)

To appreciate the important distinction that Gadamer is making here, compare the religious festival of Easter with the political ceremony of the US presidential inauguration. The meaning of the inauguration lies partly in its efficacy and partly in its reception. It *makes* the person who has won the recent election President, and it does so in a way that commands the allegiance of the citizens for whom he is now President. It also takes place in time and in history. This political act is effective for four years, and presidencies are numerically distinct—George Washington was the 1st, Abraham Lincoln was the 17th, Barak Obama is

the 44th. Nothing of the same sort can be said about Easter. The Great Easter Vigil does not *cause* the Resurrection to happen again, the effect on the newly baptized does not run out at the end of the Easter season, there is no numerical difference between one Easter and the next, Easters are not cumulative, and so on. In short, unlike the inauguration, Easter is *atemporal*, in a wholly nonmysterious sense.

How does Gadamer's distinction help with questions about the importance of morality, the existence of God, and the meaningfulness of human life? Gadamer thinks that there are two fundamental ways of experiencing time. "In the first way time is at our disposal and is there to be 'used'. In its temporal structure, such time is empty and needs to be filled. Boredom is an extreme example of this empty time. When bored we experience the featureless and repetitive flow of time as an agonizing presence" (Gadamer, 1977, 1986: 42). This is the boredom that Taylor anticipates, and he thereby identifies "eternity" with an indefinite amount of time. But if we invoke Gadamer's totally different experience of time (what he calls "autonomous" time), eternity can be conceived quite differently. Gadamer's example is this:

> [C]hildhood, youth, maturity, old age, and death are all forms of autonomous time. We do not calculate here, nor do we simply add up a gradual sequence of empty moments to arrive at a totality of time. The continuity of the uniform temporal flow that we can observe and measure by the clock tells us nothing about youth or age. The time that allows us to be young or old is not clock time at all.
>
> (Gadamer, 1977, 1986: 42)

The point is not simply that childhood and maturity have no proper or allotted time spans. A life is a life. Gadamer himself lived to the unusually old age of 102, but lives of only half this length are equally lives, not *half* lives. Clock time presents us with the question "What shall I do next?" Autonomous time presents us with a different question: How is my life-time to be shaped or punctuated? It is in response to this second question that we can find one explanation of how morality leads to religion.

10.8 Worship of the Sacred

Many of the things we value we are willing to trade off against each other. I value my leisure time, but I am willing to give some of it up to vote, say, because I also value the democratic process. I value my health, but I am willing to risk it in order to participate in exhilarating sports which I also value. Political societies value liberty, but they are usually willing to trade it off (at least in part) against increased security. The concept of the holy or the sacred aims to capture something of uniquely special value or significance in just this sense; it is nonnegotiable ("unyielding" is how Kant expresses it) and admits of no trade-offs. So conceived, the sacred cannot be part of ordinary human transactions in the way that the good, the useful, and the beautiful can. In cultures where the cow is sacred, for example, cows cannot be used for food or as beasts of burden, regardless of how well they might serve these purposes or however pressing these needs might be. So too sacred spaces (e.g., churches, temples, etc.) cannot be used as homes or businesses and sacred vestments (e.g., the Jewish ephod and the Christian chasuble) are not available for use in the ordinary function of clothing. All such sacred objects are set aside for exclusively religious use, often in a ceremony of "consecration" (a word deriving from the Latin meaning "set aside for sacred purposes"), and they become available for other uses only when they have been *deconsecrated*.

The acts of consecration and deconsecration alert us to an important fact. Objects of these kinds are not holy or sacred in and of themselves. They are *made* sacred, and they can be unmade. This making sacred is not a matter of changing their physical nature, but of removing them from the practices of ordinary life in which their value is negotiable and reserving them for actions and practices whose value is not negotiable. If the sacred is nonnegotiable in the fullest sense, then its value cannot be assessed, estimated, calculated, compared, or dealt with in any of the ways familiar to ordinary life (e.g., use, benefit or appearance). How, then, do sacred things have significance and enter human life at all? The answer is that the holiness they reflect is an occasion for *awe* and an object of *worship*—which is to say, veneration, adoration, and praise.

In some cultures, the sacred and its associated practices are everywhere. In others, they are extremely rare. That is why, in a highly secularized culture, people sometimes raise the plaintive question "Is *nothing* sacred?" and why some people (as we saw in Chapter 9) have turned to environmentalism as a new way in which a sense of the sacred might be restored to such a culture. The Promethean fear of nature to which Williams alludes and which might prompt in us the veneration of Gaia for which Lovelock hopes is strikingly like the *mysterium tremendum* (tendency to invoke fear and trembling) that Rudolph Otto, in his famous book *Das Heilige* (*The Idea of the Holy*), identifies as lying at the heart of religion.

For the purposes of this chapter however, we should return to Kant. In the concluding paragraphs of the section of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in which he argues that the existence of God is a necessary postulate of practical reason, Kant speaks of holiness.

> [T]hose who have placed the end of creation in the *glory* of God, provided this is not thought anthropomorphically as an inclination to be esteemed, have found the best term. For nothing glorifies God more than what is the most estimable thing in the world, namely, respect for His command, the observance of sacred duty which His law imposes on us, when there is added to this His glorious plan of crowning such an excellent order with corresponding happiness. If the latter, to speak in human terms, makes Him worthy of love, by the former He is an object of adoration. Human beings can win love by doing good, but by this alone they can never win respect; the greatest well-doing does them honor only by being exercised according to worthiness.
>
> It follows of itself that, in the order of ends, man (and every rational being) is an end-in-himself, i.e. he is never to be used as a means for someone (even for God) without at the same time being himself an end, and that thus the humanity in our person must itself be holy to us.
>
> (Kant, 1781, 1956: 136)

There is some evidence that Kant personally was reluctant to participate in religious rituals, but what he says in these paragraphs suggests a way in which we can conceive of the relation the moral life and religious practice. We began this chapter with a question about how (what Williams refers to as) the "special dignity and supremacy" that morality claims might be accommodated amongst the other values and purposes that go to make up ordinary life. An answer suggested by what Kant says is that morality has a special affinity with the sacred. If he is right, though the pursuit of happiness is subject to all the contingencies of life and the extent to which we make others happy is a fit object of human love, it is *worthiness to be happy* alone that has the same immutable and eternal character as truth, since it manifests the purest exercise of rational freedom. This is possible for human beings

only insofar as they regard the moral law as divine command, and thus find in themselves and in other human beings the very same holiness that makes God's glory worthy of worship. This profound perception of what it is to be human requires us to deny the impulses of more primitive religion and insist that we cannot be used as means *even for God*, while at the same time requiring us to acknowledge that we are wholly *dependent upon God* for the realization of this holiness. In short, it is only through the worship of God that our true humanity can be realized.

What form is this worship to take? Kant had reservations about liturgical practices whose purpose appeared to be to feed God's "inclination to be esteemed" with an endless diet of praise and adulation. For this reason, he saw ethical practices themselves as the only worship worthy of God. But we need not follow him in this. Gadamer's reflections on autonomous time as realized in festival and ritual open up alternative ways of thinking. Furthermore, these are ways in which, importantly, the nonmoral worlds of art, intellect, and family life can also be incorporated, and thereby assuage, at least in part, the fear expressed by Williams and others that the special dignity of morality comes at the cost of everything else in life.

This issue about the character and role of religious worship takes us beyond moral philosophy, and it must be left for another occasion. It is important to acknowledge, however, that, for some readers, even the explorations of this final chapter up to this point will already have gone too far. These are people for whom the ideas invoked by religion are so abstruse and perplexing that they cannot offer much illumination. It is worth underlining, though, that such readers are still confronted by Kant's sophisticated philosophical analysis and his contention that we can only take morality seriously if we presuppose the existence of God. How might they respond? One obvious possibility lies in the suggestion that something has gone wrong in the argument that led us to this place. If so, then we must go back to the start and examine the arguments all over again.

To arrive at the end of a book and reach this result may initially be dispiriting. Can the whole thing have been worthwhile? Yet this response is a perfectly fitting one, warranted both by the book and by the nature of philosophy. Though the oldest of intellectual disciplines, almost nothing has emerged from its investigations that could claim to be agreed and established "truth," such as that to which scientists and historians can lay claim. What philosophy offers is a means by which to deepen and enrich our understanding of some perennially important questions. So long as those who have been caught up in the arguments have seen clearly that there are issues here which warrant further exploration, and they feel better equipped to undertake it, the book has served its purpose. Though inevitably it is full of conclusions, like almost all philosophy books, it is properly described as an introduction.

Readings

Readings for Chapter 1

Ethics, Truth, and Reason

Treatise of Human Nature (excerpt)

David Hume

Book II, Part III, Section III

Of the Influencing Motives of the Will

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, it is said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, till it be entirely subdued, or at least brought to a conformity with that superior principle. On this method of thinking the greatest part of moral philosophy, ancient and modern, seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field, as well for metaphysical arguments, as popular declamations, than this supposed pre-eminence of reason above passion. The eternity, invariableness, and divine origin of the former have been displayed to the best advantage: The blindness, unconstancy, and deceitfulness of the latter have been as strongly insisted on. In order to show the fallacy of all this philosophy, I shall endeavour to prove first, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and secondly, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.

The understanding exerts itself after two different ways, as it judges from demonstration or probability; as it regards the abstract relations of our ideas, or those relations of objects, of which experience only gives us information. I believe it scarce will be asserted, that the first species of reasoning alone is ever the cause of any action. As its proper province is the world of ideas, and as the will always places us in that of realities, demonstration and volition seem, upon that account, to be totally removed, from each other. Mathematics, indeed, are useful in all mechanical operations, and arithmetic in almost every art and profession: But it is not of themselves they have any influence: Mechanics are the art of regulating the motions of bodies to some designed end or purpose; and the reason why we employ arithmetic in fixing the proportions of numbers, is only that we may discover the proportions of their influence and operation. A merchant is desirous of knowing the sum total of his accounts with any person: Why? but that he may learn what sum will have the same effects in paying his debt, and going to market, as all the particular articles taken together. Abstract or demonstrative reasoning, therefore, never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment concerning causes and effects; which leads us to the second operation of the understanding.

It is obvious, that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carryed to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. It is also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but making us cast our

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view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. But it is evident in this case that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. It is from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object: And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know, that such objects are causes, and such others effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connection can never give them any influence; and it is plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connection, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us.

Since reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition, I infer, that the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion. This consequence is necessary. It is impossible reason could have the latter effect of preventing volition, but by giving an impulse in a contrary direction to our passion; and that impulse, had it operated alone, would have been able to produce volition. Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse; and if this contrary impulse ever arises from reason, that latter faculty must have an original influence on the will, and must be able to cause, as well as hinder any act of volition. But if reason has no original influence, it is impossible it can withstand any principle, which has such an efficacy, or ever keep the mind in suspense a moment. Thus it appears, that the principle, which opposes our passion, cannot be the same with reason, and is only called so in an improper sense. We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. As this opinion may appear somewhat extraordinary, it may not be improper to confirm it by some other considerations.

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. It is impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects, which they represent.

What may at first occur on this head, is, that as nothing can be contrary to truth or reason, except what has a reference to it, and as the judgments of our understanding only have this reference, it must follow, that passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are accompanyed with some judgment or opinion. According to this principle, which is so obvious and natural, it is only in two senses, that any affection can be called unreasonable. First, when a passion, such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition or the existence of objects, which really do not exist. Secondly, When in exerting any passion in action, we chuse means insufficient for the designed end, and deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects. Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chuses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. It is not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. It is as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. A trivial good may, from certain circumstances, produce a desire superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable enjoyment; nor is there any thing more extraordinary in this, than in mechanics to see one pound weight raise up a hundred by the advantage of its situation. In short, a passion must be accompanyed with some false judgment, in order to its being unreasonable; and even then it is not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment.

The consequences are evident. Since a passion can never, in any sense, be called unreasonable, but when founded on a false supposition, or when it chuses means insufficient for the designed

end, it is impossible, that reason and passion can ever oppose each other, or dispute for the government of the will and actions. The moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means our passions yield to our reason without any opposition. I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases. I may will the performance of certain actions as means of obtaining any desired good; but as my willing of these actions is only secondary, and founded on the supposition, that they are causes of the proposed effect; as soon as I discover the falseood of that supposition, they must become indifferent to me.

It is natural for one, that does not examine objects with a strict philosophic eye, to imagine, that those actions of the mind are entirely the same, which produce not a different sensation, and are not immediately distinguishable to the feeling and perception. Reason, for instance, exerts itself without producing any sensible emotion; and except in the more sublime disquisitions of philosophy, or in the frivolous subtilies of the school, scarce ever conveys any pleasure or uneasiness. Hence it proceeds, that every action of the mind, which operates with the same calmness and tranquility, is confounded with reason by all those, who judge of things from the first view and appearance. Now it is certain, there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, though they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, considered merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are supposed to proceed from the same faculty, with that, which judges of truth and falsehood. Their nature and principles have been supposed the same, because their sensations are not evidently different.

Beside these calm passions, which often determine the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind, which have likewise a great influence on that faculty. When I receive any injury from another, I often feel a violent passion of resentment, which makes me desire his evil and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself. When I am immediately threatened with any grievous ill, my fears, apprehensions, and aversions rise to a great height, and produce a sensible emotion.

The common error of metaphysicians has lain in ascribing the direction of the will entirely to one of these principles, and supposing the other to have no influence. Men often act knowingly against their interest: For which reason the view of the greatest possible good does not always influence them. Men often counter-act a violent passion in prosecution of their interests and designs: It is not therefore the present uneasiness alone, which determines them. In general we may observe, that both these principles operate on the will; and where they are contrary, that either of them prevails, according to the general character or present disposition of the person. What we call strength of mind, implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent; though we may easily observe, there is no man so constantly possessed of this virtue, as never on any occasion to yield to the solicitations of passion and desire. From these variations of temper proceeds the great difficulty of deciding concerning the actions and resolutions of men, where there is any contrariety of motives and passions.

Book III, Part I, Section I

Moral Distinctions Not Derived from Reason

There is an inconvenience which attends all abstruse reasoning that it may silence, without convincing an antagonist, and requires the same intense study to make us sensible of its force, that was at first requisite for its invention. When we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life, its conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning; and it is difficult for us to retain even that conviction, which we had attained with difficulty.

This is still more conspicuous in a long chain of reasoning, where we must preserve to the end the evidence of the first propositions, and where we often lose sight of all the most received maxims, either of philosophy or common life. I am not, however, without hopes, that the present system of philosophy will acquire new force as it advances; and that our reasonings concerning morals will corroborate whatever has been said concerning the UNDERSTANDING and the PASSIONS. Morality is a subject that interests us above all others: We fancy the peace of society to be at stake in every decision concerning it; and it is evident, that this concern must make our speculations appear more real and solid, than where the subject is, in a great measure, indifferent to us. What affects us, we conclude can never be a chimera; and as our passion is engaged on the one side or the other, we naturally think that the question lies within human comprehension; which, in other cases of this nature, we are apt to entertain some doubt of. Without this advantage I never should have ventured upon a third volume of such abstruse philosophy, in an age, wherein the greatest part of men seem agreed to convert reading into an amusement, and to reject every thing that requires any considerable degree of attention to be comprehended.

It has been observed, that nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and that all the actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking, fall under this denomination. The mind can never exert itself in any action, which we may not comprehend under the term of perception; and consequently that term is no less applicable to those judgments, by which we distinguish moral good and evil, than to every other operation of the mind. To approve of one character, to condemn another, are only so many different perceptions.

Now as perceptions resolve themselves into two kinds, viz. impressions and ideas, this distinction gives rise to a question, with which we shall open up our present enquiry concerning morals. WHETHER IT IS BY MEANS OF OUR IDEAS OR IMPRESSIONS WE DISTINGUISH BETWIXT VICE AND VIRTUE, AND PRONOUNCE AN ACTION BLAMEABLE OR PRAISEWORTHY? This will immediately cut off all loose discourses and declamations, and reduce us to something precise and exact on the present subject.

Those who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason; that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them; that the immutable measures of right and wrong impose an obligation, not only on human creatures, but also on the Deity himself: All these systems concur in the opinion, that morality, like truth, is discerned merely by ideas, and by their juxta-position and comparison. In order, therefore, to judge of these systems, we need only consider, whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil, or whether there must concur some other principles to enable us to make that distinction,

If morality had naturally no influence on human passions and actions, it were in vain to take such pains to inculcate it; and nothing would be more fruitless than that multitude of rules and precepts, with which all moralists abound. Philosophy is commonly divided into speculative and practical; and as morality is always comprehended under the latter division, it is supposed to influence our passions and actions, and to go beyond the calm and indolent judgments of the understanding. And this is confirmed by common experience, which informs us, that men are often governed by their duties, and are deterred from some actions by the opinion of injustice, and impelled to others by that of obligation.

Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already proved, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.

No one, I believe, will deny the justness of this inference; nor is there any other means of evading it, than by denying that principle, on which it is founded. As long as it is allowed, that reason has no influence on our passions and action, it is in vain to pretend, that morality is discovered only by a deduction of reason. An active principle can never be founded on an inactive; and if reason

be inactive in itself, it must remain so in all its shapes and appearances, whether it exerts itself in natural or moral subjects, whether it considers the powers of external bodies, or the actions of rational beings.

It would be tedious to repeat all the arguments, by which I have proved [Book II. Part III. Sect 3.], that reason is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection, it will be easy to recollect what has been said upon that subject. I shall only recall on this occasion one of these arguments, which I shall endeavour to render still more conclusive, and more applicable to the present subject.

Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now it is evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, complete in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. It is impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason.

This argument is of double advantage to our present purpose. For it proves DIRECTLY, that actions do not derive their merit from a conformity to reason, nor their blame from a contrariety to it; and it proves the same truth more INDIRECTLY, by showing us, that as reason can never immediately prevent or produce any action by contradicting or approving of it, it cannot be the source of moral good and evil, which are found to have that influence. Actions may be laudable or blameable; but they cannot be reasonable: Laudable or blameable, therefore, are not the same with reasonable or unreasonable. The merit and demerit of actions frequently contradict, and sometimes control our natural propensities. But reason has no such influence. Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.

But perhaps it may be said, that though no will or action can be immediately contradictory to reason, yet we may find such a contradiction in some of the attendants of the action, that is, in its causes or effects. The action may cause a judgment, or may be obliquely caused by one, when the judgment concurs with a passion; and by an abusive way of speaking, which philosophy will scarce allow of, the same contrariety may, upon that account, be ascribed to the action. How far this truth or falsehood may be the source of morals, it will now be proper to consider.

It has been observed, that reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connection of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion. These are the only kinds of judgment, which can accompany our actions, or can be said to produce them in any manner; and it must be allowed, that these judgments may often be false and erroneous. A person may be affected with passion, by supposing a pain or pleasure to lie in an object, which has no tendency to produce either of these sensations, or which produces the contrary to what is imagined. A person may also take false measures for the attaining his end, and may retard, by his foolish conduct, instead of forwarding the execution of any project. These false judgments may be thought to affect the passions and actions, which are connected with them, and may be said to render them unreasonable, in a figurative and improper way of speaking. But though this be acknowledged, it is easy to observe, that these errors are so far from being the source of all immorality, that they are commonly very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the person who is so unfortunate as to fail into them. They extend not beyond a mistake of fact, which moralists have not generally supposed criminal, as being perfectly involuntary. I am more to be lamented than blamed, if I am mistaken with regard to the influence of objects in producing pain or pleasure, or if I know not the proper means of satisfying my desires. No one can ever regard such errors as a defect in my moral character. A fruit, for instance, that is really disagreeable, appears to me at a distance, and through mistake I fancy it to be pleasant and

delicious. Here is one error. I choose certain means of reaching this fruit, which are not proper for my end. Here is a second error; nor is there any third one, which can ever possibly enter into our reasonings concerning actions. I ask, therefore, if a man, in this situation, and guilty of these two errors, is to be regarded as vicious and criminal, however unavoidable they might have been? Or if it be possible to imagine, that such errors are the sources of all immorality?

And here it may be proper to observe, that if moral distinctions be derived from the truth or falsehood of those judgments, they must take place wherever we form the judgments; nor will there be any difference, whether the question be concerning an apple or a kingdom, or whether the error be avoidable or unavoidable. For as the very essence of morality is supposed to consist in an agreement or disagreement to reason, the other circumstances are entirely arbitrary, and can never either bestow on any action the character of virtuous or vicious, or deprive it of that character. To which we may add, that this agreement or disagreement, not admitting of degrees, all virtues and vices would of course be equal.

Should it be pretended, that though a mistake of fact be not criminal, yet a mistake of right often is; and that this may be the source of immorality: I would answer, that it is impossible such a mistake can ever be the original source of immorality, since it supposes a real right and wrong; that is, a real distinction in morals, independent of these judgments. A mistake, therefore, of right may become a species of immorality; but it is only a secondary one, and is founded on some other, antecedent to it.

As to those judgments which are the effects of our actions, and which, when false, give occasion to pronounce the actions contrary to truth and reason; we may observe, that our actions never cause any judgment, either true or false, in ourselves, and that it is only on others they have such an influence. It is certain, that an action, on many occasions, may give rise to false conclusions in others; and that a person, who through a window sees any lewd behaviour of mine with my neighbour's wife, may be so simple as to imagine she is certainly my own. In this respect my action resembles somewhat a lye or falsehood; only with this difference, which is material, that I perform not the action with any intention of giving rise to a false judgment in another, but merely to satisfy my lust and passion. It causes, however, a mistake and false judgment by accident; and the falsehood of its effects may be ascribed, by some odd figurative way of speaking, to the action itself. But still I can see no pretext of reason for asserting, that the tendency to cause such an error is the first spring or original source of all immorality.[1]

Thus upon the whole, it is impossible, that the distinction betwixt moral good and evil, can be made to reason; since that distinction has an influence upon our actions, of which reason alone is incapable. Reason and judgment may, indeed, be the mediate cause of an action, by prompting, or by directing a passion: But it is not pretended, that a judgment of this kind, either in its truth or falsehood, is attended with virtue or vice. And as to the judgments, which are caused by our judgments, they can still less bestow those moral qualities on the actions, which are their causes.

But to be more particular, and to show, that those eternal immutable fitnesses and unfitnesses of things cannot be defended by sound philosophy, we may weigh the following considerations.

If the thought and understanding were alone capable of fixing the boundaries of right and wrong, the character of virtuous and vicious either must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact, which is discovered by our reasoning. This consequence is evident. As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discovered by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations, nor is there any third operation of the understanding, which can discover it. There has been an opinion very industriously propagated by certain philosophers, that morality is susceptible of demonstration; and though no one has ever been able to advance a single step in those demonstrations; yet it is taken for granted, that this science may be brought to an equal certainty with geometry or algebra. Upon this supposition, vice and virtue must consist in some relations; since it is allowed on all hands, that no matter of fact is capable of being demonstrated. Let us, therefore, begin with examining this hypothesis, and endeavour, if possible, to fix those

moral qualities, which have been so long the objects of our fruitless researches. Point out distinctly the relations, which constitute morality or obligation, that we may know wherein they consist, and after what manner we must judge of them.

If you assert, that vice and virtue consist in relations susceptible of certainty and demonstration, you must confine yourself to those four relations, which alone admit of that degree of evidence; and in that case you run into absurdities, from which you will never be able to extricate yourself. For as you make the very essence of morality to lie in the relations, and as there is no one of these relations but what is applicable, not only to an irrational, but also to an inanimate object; it follows, that even such objects must be susceptible of merit or demerit. RESEMBLANCE, CONTRARIETY, DEGREES IN QUALITY, and PROPORTIONS IN QUANTITY AND NUMBER; all these relations belong as properly to matter, as to our actions, passions, and volitions. It is unquestionable, therefore, that morality lies not in any of these relations, nor the sense of it in their discovery.[2]

Should it be asserted, that the sense of morality consists in the discovery of some relation, distinct from these, and that our enumeration was not complete, when we comprehended all demonstrable relations under four general heads: To this I know not what to reply, till some one be so good as to point out to me this new relation. It is impossible to refute a system, which has never yet been explained. In such a manner of fighting in the dark, a man loses his blows in the air, and often places them where the enemy is not present.

I must, therefore, on this occasion, rest contented with requiring the two following conditions of any one that would undertake to clear up this system. First, As moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind, and are derived from our situation with regard to external objects, the relations, from which these moral distinctions arise, must lie only betwixt internal actions, and external objects, and must not be applicable either to internal actions, compared among themselves, or to external objects, when placed in opposition to other external objects. For as morality is supposed to attend certain relations, if these relations could belong to internal actions considered singly, it would follow, that we might be guilty of crimes in ourselves, and independent of our situation, with respect to the universe: And in like manner, if these moral relations could be applied to external objects, it would follow, that even inanimate beings would be susceptible of moral beauty and deformity. Now it seems difficult to imagine, that any relation can be discovered betwixt our passions, volitions and actions, compared to external objects, which relation might not belong either to these passions and volitions, or to these external objects, compared among themselves. But it will be still more difficult to fulfill the second condition, requisite to justify this system. According to the principles of those who maintain an abstract rational difference betwixt moral good and evil, and a natural fitness and unfitness of things, it is not only supposed, that these relations, being eternal and immutable, are the same, when considered by every rational creature, but their effects are also supposed to be necessarily the same; and it is concluded they have no less, or rather a greater, influence in directing the will of the deity, than in governing the rational and virtuous of our own species. These two particulars are evidently distinct. It is one thing to know virtue, and another to conform the will to it. In order, therefore, to prove, that the measures of right and wrong are eternal laws, obligatory on every rational mind, it is not sufficient to show the relations upon which they are founded: We must also point out the connection betwixt the relation and the will; and must prove that this connection is so necessary, that in every well-disposed mind, it must take place and have its influence; though the difference betwixt these minds be in other respects immense and infinite. Now besides what I have already proved, that even in human nature no relation can ever alone produce any action: besides this, I say, it has been shown, in treating of the understanding, that there is no connection of cause and effect, such as this is supposed to be, which is discoverable otherwise than by experience, and of which we can pretend to have any security by the simple consideration of the objects. All beings in the universe, considered in themselves, appear entirely loose and independent of each other. It is only by experience we learn their influence and connection; and this influence we ought never to extend beyond experience.

Thus it will be impossible to fulfill the first condition required to the system of eternal measures of right and wrong; because it is impossible to show those relations, upon which such a distinction may be founded: And it is as impossible to fulfill the second condition; because we cannot prove A PRIORI, that these relations, if they really existed and were perceived, would be universally forcible and obligatory.

But to make these general reflections more dear and convincing, we may illustrate them by some particular instances, wherein this character of moral good or evil is the most universally acknowledged. Of all crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural is ingratitude, especially when it is committed against parents, and appears in the more flagrant instances of wounds and death. This is acknowledged by all mankind, philosophers as well as the people; the question only arises among philosophers, whether the guilt or moral deformity of this action be discovered by demonstrative reasoning, or be felt by an internal sense, and by means of some sentiment, which the reflecting on such an action naturally occasions. This question will soon be decided against the former opinion, if we can show the same relations in other objects, without the notion of any guilt or iniquity attending them. Reason or science is nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations; and if the same relations have different characters, it must evidently follow, that those characters are not discovered merely by reason. To put the affair, therefore, to this trial, let us chuse any inanimate object, such as an oak or elm; and let us suppose, that by the dropping of its seed, it produces a sapling below it, which springing up by degrees, at last overtops and destroys the parent tree: I ask, if in this instance there be wanting any relation, which is discoverable in parricide or ingratitude? Is not the one tree the cause of the other's existence; and the latter the cause of the destruction of the former, in the same manner as when a child murders his parent? It is not sufficient to reply, that a choice or will is wanting. For in the case of parricide, a will does not give rise to any DIFFERENT relations, but is only the cause from which the action is derived; and consequently produces the same relations, that in the oak or elm arise from some other principles. It is a will or choice, that determines a man to kill his parent; and they are the laws of matter and motion, that determine a sapling to destroy the oak, from which it sprung. Here then the same relations have different causes; but still the relations are the same: And as their discovery is not in both cases attended with a notion of immorality, it follows, that that notion does not arise from such a discovery.

But to chuse an instance, still more resembling; I would fain ask any one, why incest in the human species is criminal, and why the very same action, and the same relations in animals have not the smallest moral turpitude and deformity? If it be answered, that this action is innocent in animals, because they have not reason sufficient to discover its turpitude; but that man, being endowed with that faculty which ought to restrain him to his duty, the same action instantly becomes criminal to him; should this be said, I would reply, that this is evidently arguing in a circle. For before reason can perceive this turpitude, the turpitude must exist; and consequently is independent of the decisions of our reason, and is their object more properly than their effect. According to this system, then, every animal, that has sense, and appetite, and will; that is, every animal must be susceptible of all the same virtues and vices, for which we ascribe praise and blame to human creatures. All the difference is, that our superior reason may serve to discover the vice or virtue, and by that means may augment the blame or praise: But still this discovery supposes a separate being in these moral distinctions, and a being, which depends only on the will and appetite, and which, both in thought and reality, may be distinguished from the reason. Animals are susceptible of the same relations, with respect to each other, as the human species, and therefore would also be susceptible of the same morality, if the essence of morality consisted in these relations. Their want of a sufficient degree of reason may hinder them from perceiving the duties and obligations of morality, but can never hinder these duties from existing; since they must antecedently exist, in order to their being perceived. Reason must find them, and can never produce them. This argument deserves to be weighed, as being, in my opinion, entirely decisive.

Nor does this reasoning only prove, that morality consists not in any relations, that are the objects of science; but if examined, will prove with equal certainty, that it consists not in any matter of fact, which can be discovered by the understanding. This is the second part of our argument; and if it can be made evident, we may conclude, that morality is not an object of reason. But can there be any difficulty in proving, that vice and virtue are not matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason? Take any action allowed to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but it is the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; though, like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.

I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.

Notes

1 One might think It were entirely superfluous to prove this, if a late author [William Wollaston, THE RELIGION OF NATURE DELINEATED (London 1722)], who has had the good fortune to obtain some reputation, had not seriously affirmed, that such a falsehood is the foundation of all guilt and moral deformity. That we may discover the fallacy of his hypothesis, we need only consider, that a false conclusion is drawn from an action, only by means of an obscurity of natural principles, which makes a cause be secretly interrupted In its operation, by contrary causes, and renders the connection betwixt two objects uncertain and variable. Now, as a like uncertainty and variety of causes take place, even in natural objects, and produce a like error in our judgment, if that tendency to produce error were the very essence of vice and immorality, it should follow, that even inanimate objects might be vicious and immoral. It is in vain to urge, that inanimate objects act without liberty and choice. For as liberty and choice are not necessary to make an action produce in us an erroneous conclusion, they can be, in no respect, essential to morality; and I do not readily perceive, upon this system, how they can ever come to be regarded by it. If the tendency to cause error be the origin of immorality, that tendency and immorality would in every case be inseparable.

   Add to this, that if I had used the precaution of shutting the windows, while I indulged myself in those liberties with my neighbour's wife, I should have been guilty of no immorality; and that because my action, being perfectly concealed, would have had no tendency to produce any false conclusion.

For the same reason, a thief, who steals In by a ladder at a window, and takes all imaginable care to cause no disturbance, is in no respect criminal. For either he will not be perceived, or if he be, it is impossible he can produce any error, nor will any one, from these circumstances, take him to be other than what he really is.

It is well known, that those who are squint-sighted, do very readily cause mistakes in others, and that we Imagine they salute or are talking to one person, while they address themselves to another. Are they therefore, upon that account, immoral?

Besides, we may easily observe, that in all those arguments there is an evident reasoning in a circle. A person who takes possession of another's goods, and uses them as his own, in a manner declares them to be his own; and this falsehood is the source of the immorality of injustice. But is property, or right, or obligation, intelligible, without an antecedent morality?

A man that is ungrateful to his benefactor, in a manner affirms, that he never received any favours from him. But in what manner? Is it because it is his duty to be grateful? But this supposes, that there is some antecedent rule of duty and morals. Is it because human nature is generally grateful, and makes us conclude, that a man who does any harm never received any favour from the person he harmed? But human nature is not so generally grateful, as to justify such a conclusion. Or if it were, is an exception to a general rule in every case criminal, for no other reason than because it is an exception?

But what may suffice entirely to destroy this whimsical system is, that it leaves us under the same difficulty to give a reason why truth is virtuous and falsehood vicious, as to account for the merit or turpitude of any other action. I shall allow, if you please, that all immorality is derived from this supposed falsehood in action, provided you can give me any plausible reason, why such a falsehood is immoral. If you consider rightly of the matter, you will find yourself in the same difficulty as at the beginning.

This last argument is very conclusive; because, if there be not an evident merit or turpitude annexed to this species of truth or falsehood, It can never have any influence upon our actions. For, who ever thought of forbearing any action, because others might possibly draw false conclusions from it? Or, who ever performed any, that he might give rise to true conclusions?]

2 As a proof, how confused our way of thinking on this subject commonly is, we may observe, that those who assert, that morality is demonstrable, do not say, that morality lies in the relations, and that the relations are distinguishable by reason. They only say, that reason can discover such an action, In such relations, to be virtuous, and such another vicious. It seems they thought it sufficient, if they could bring the word, Relation, into the proposition, without troubling themselves whether it was to the purpose or not. But here, I think, is plain argument. Demonstrative reason discovers only relations. But that reason, according to this hypothesis, discovers also vice and virtue. These moral qualities, therefore, must be relations. When we blame any action, in any situation, the whole complicated object, of action and situation, must form certain relations, wherein the essence of vice consists. This hypothesis is not otherwise intelligible. For what does reason discover, when it pronounces any action vicious? Does it discover a relation or a matter of fact? These questions are decisive, and must not be eluded.

Essays on the Active Powers of Man (excerpt)

Thomas Reid

Of Morals

Of the First Principles of Morals

Morals, like all other sciences, must have first principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded.

In every branch of knowledge where disputes have been raised, it is useful to distinguish the first principles from the superstructure. They are the foundation on which the whole fabric of the science leans; and whatever is not supported by this foundation can have no stability.

In all rational belief, the thing believed is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles. When men differ about deductions of reasoning, the appeal must be to the rules of reasoning, which have been very unanimously fixed from the days of ARISTOTLE. But when they differ about a first principle, the appeal is made to another tribunal; to that of common sense.

How the genuine decisions of common sense may be distinguished from the counterfeit, has been considered in essay sixth, on the Intellectual Powers of Man, chapter fourth, to which the reader is referred. What I would here observe is, That as first principles differ from deductions of reasoning in the nature of their evidence, and must be tried by a different standard when they are called in question, it is of importance to know to which of these two classes a truth which we would examine, belongs. When they are not distinguished, men are apt to demand proof for every thing they think fit to deny: And when we attempt to prove by direct argument, what is really self-evident, the reasoning will always be inconclusive; for it will either take for granted the thing to be proved, or something not more evident; and so, instead of giving strength to the conclusion, will rather tempt those to doubt of it, who never did so before.

I propose, therefore, in this chapter, to point out some of the first principles of morals, without pretending to a complete enumeration.

The principles I am to mention, relate either to virtue in general, or to the different particular branches of virtue, or to the comparison of virtues where they seem to interfere.

1. There are some things in human conduct, that merit approbation and praise, others that merit blame and punishment; and different degrees either of approbation or of blame, are due to different actions.

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2. What is in no degree voluntary, can neither deserve moral approbation nor blame.
3. What is done from unavoidable necessity may be agreeable or disagreeable, useful or hurtful, but cannot be the object either of blame or of moral approbation.
4. Men may be highly culpable in omitting what they ought to have done, as well as in doing what they ought not;
5. We ought to use the best means we can to be well informed of our duty, by serious attention to moral instruction; by observing what we approve, and what we disapprove, in other men, whether our acquaintance, or those whose actions are recorded in history; by reflecting often, in a calm and dispassionate hour, on our own past conduct, that we may discern what was wrong, what was right, and what might have been better; by deliberating coolly and impartially upon our future conduct, as far as we can foresee the opportunities we may have of doing good, or the temptations, to do wrong; and by having this principle deeply fixed in our minds, that as moral excellence is the true worth and glory of a man, so the knowledge of our duty is to every man, in every station of life, the most important of all knowledge.
6. It ought to be our most serious concern to do our duty as far as we know it, and to fortify our minds against every temptation to deviate from it; by maintaining a lively sense of the beauty of right conduct, and of its present and future reward, of the turpitude of vice, and of its bad consequences here and hereafter; by having always in our eye the noblest examples; by the habit of subjecting our passions to the government of reason; by firm purposes and resolutions with regard to our conduct; by avoiding occasions of temptation when we can; and by imploring the aid of him who made us, in every hour of temptation.

These principles concerning virtue and vice in general, must appear self-evident to every man who hath a conscience, and who hath taken pains to exercise this natural power of his mind. I proceed to others that are more particular.

1. We ought to prefer a greater good, though more distant, to a less; and a less evil to a greater.

A regard to our own good, though we had no conscience, dictates this principle; and we cannot help disapproving the man that acts contrary to it, as deserving to lose the good which he wantonly threw away, and to suffer the evil which he knowingly brought upon his own head.

We observed before, that the ancient moralists, and many among the modern, have deduced the whole of morals from this principle, and that when we make a right estimate of goods and evils according to their degree, their dignity, their duration, and according as they are more or less in our power, it leads to the practice of every virtue: More directly, indeed, to the virtues of self-government, to prudence, to temperance, and to fortitude; and, though more indirectly, even to justice, humanity, and all the social virtues, when their influence upon our happiness is well understood.

Though it be not the noblest principle of conduct, it has this peculiar advantage, that its force is felt by the most ignorant, and even by the most abandoned.

Let a man's moral judgment be ever so little improved by exercise, or ever so much corrupted by bad habits, he cannot be indifferent to his own happiness or misery. When he is become insensible to every nobler motive to right conduct, he cannot be insensible to this. And though to act from this motive solely may be called *prudence* rather than *virtue,* yet this prudence deserves some regard upon its own account, and much more as it is the friend and ally of virtue, and the enemy of all vice; and as it gives a favourable testimony of virtue to those who are deaf to every other recommendation.

If a man can be induced to do his duty even from a regard to his own happiness, he will soon find reason to love virtue for her own sake, and to act from motives less mercenary.

I cannot therefore approve of those moralists, who would banish all persuasives to virtue taken from the confederation of private good. In the present state of human nature these are not useless to the best, and they are the only means left of reclaiming the abandoned.

2. As far as the intention of nature appears in the constitution of man, we ought to comply with that intention, and to act agreeably to it.

The Author of our being hath given us not only the power of acting within a limited sphere, but various principles or springs of action, of different nature and dignity, to direct us in the exercise of our active power.

From the constitution of every species of the inferior animals, and especially from the active principles which nature has given them, we easily perceive the manner of life for which nature intended them; and they uniformly act the part to which they are led by their constitution, without any reflection upon it, or intention of obeying its dictates. Man only, of the inhabitants of this world, is made capable of observing his own constitution, what kind of life it is made for, and of acting according to that intention, or contrary to it. He only is capable of yielding an intentional obedience to the dictates of his nature, or of rebelling against them.

In treating of the principles of action in man, it has been shewn; that as his natural instincts and bodily appetites, are well adapted to the preservation of his natural life, and to the continuance of the species; so his natural desires, affections, and passions, when uncorrupted by vicious habits, and under the government of the leading principles of reason and conscience, are excellently fitted for the rational and social life. Every vicious action shews an excess, or defect, or wrong direction of some natural spring of action, and therefore may, very justly, be said to be unnatural. Every virtuous action agrees with the uncorrupted principles of human nature.

The Stoics defined virtue to be a life according to nature. Some of them more accurately, a life according to the nature of man, in so far as it is superior to that of brutes. The life of a brute is according to the nature of the brute; but it is neither virtuous nor vicious. The life of a moral agent cannot be according to his nature, unless it be virtuous. That conscience, which is in every man's breast, is the law of God written in his heart, which he cannot disobey without acting unnaturally, and being self-condemned.

The intention of nature, in the various active principles of man, in the desires of power, of knowledge, and of esteem, in the affection to children, to near relations, and to the communities to which we belong, in gratitude, in compassion, and even in resentment and emulation, is very obvious, and has been pointed out in treating of those principles. Nor is it less evident, that reason and conscience are given us to regulate the inferior principles, so that they may conspire, in a regular and consistent plan of life, in pursuit of some worthy end.

3. No man is born for himself only. Every man, therefore, ought to consider himself as a member of the common society of mankind, and of those subordinate societies to which he belongs, such as family, friends, neighbourhood, country, and to do as much good as he can, and as little hurt to the societies of which he is a part.

This axiom leads directly to the practice of every social virtue, and indirectly to the virtues of self-government, by which only we can be qualified for discharging the duty we owe to society.

4. In every case, we ought to act that part towards another, which we would judge to be right in him to act toward us, if we were in his circumstances and he in ours; or, more generally, what we approve in others, that we ought to practise in like circumstances, and what we condemn in others we ought not to do.

If there be any such thing as right and wrong in the conduct of moral agents, it must be the same to all in the same circumstances.

We stand all in the same relation to him who made us, and will call us to account for our conduct; for with him there is no respect of persons. We stand in the same relation to one another as members of the great community of mankind. The duties consequent upon the different ranks and offices and relations of men are the same to all in the same circumstances.

It is not want of judgment, but want of candour and impartiality, that hinders men from discerning what they owe to others. They are quicksighted enough in discerning what is due to themselves. When they are injured, or ill-treated, they see it, and feel resentment. It is the want of candour that makes men use one measure for the duty they owe to others, and another measure for the duty that others' owe to them in like circumstances. That men ought to judge with candour, as in all other cases, so especially in what concerns their moral conduct, is surely self-evident to every intelligent being. The man who takes offence when he is injured in his person, in his property, in his good name, pronounces judgment against himself if he act so toward his neighbour.

As the equity and obligation of this rule of conduct is self-evident to every man who hath a conscience; so it is, of all the rules of morality, the most comprehensive, and truly deserves the encomium given it by the highest authority, that *is the law and the prophets*.

It comprehends every rule of justice without exception. It comprehends all the relative duties, arising either from the more permanent relations of parent and child, of master and servant, of magistrate and subject, of husband and wife, or from the more transient relations of rich and poor, of buyer and seller, of debtor and creditor, of benefactor and beneficiary, of friend and enemy. It comprehends every duty of charity and humanity, and even of courtesy and good manners.

Nay, I think, that, without any force or straining, it extends even to the duties of self-government. For, as every man approves in others the virtues of prudence, temperance, self-command and fortitude, he must perceive, that what is right in others must be right in himself in like circumstances.

To sum up all, he who acts invariably by this rule will never deviate from the path of his duty, but from an error of judgment. And, as he feels the obligation that he and all men are under to use the best means in his power to have his judgment well-informed in matters of duty, his errors will only be such as are invincible.

It may be observed, that this axiom supposes a faculty in man by which he can distinguish right conduct from wrong. It supposes also, that, by this faculty, we easily perceive the right and the wrong in other men that are indifferent to us; but are very apt to be blinded by the partiality of selfish passions when the case concerns ourselves. Every claim we have against others is apt to be magnified by self-love, when viewed directly. A change of persons removes this prejudice, and brings the claim to appear in its just magnitude.

5. To every man who believes the existence, the perfections, and the providence of GOD, the veneration and submission we owe to him is self-evident. Right sentiments of the Deity and of his works, not only make the duty we owe to him obvious to every intelligent being, but likewise add the authority of a Divine law to every rule of right conduct.

There is another class of axioms in morals, by which, when there seems to be an opposition between the actions that different virtues lead to, we determine to which the preference is due.

Between the several virtues, as they are dispositions of mind, or determinations of will, to act according to a certain general rule, there can be no opposition. They dwell together most amicably, and give mutual aid and ornament, without the possibility of hostility or opposition, and, taken altogether, make one uniform and consistent rule of conduct. But, between particular external actions, which different virtues would lead to, there may be an opposition. Thus, the same man may be in his heart, generous, grateful and just. These dispositions strengthen, but never can weaken one another. Yet it may happen, that an external action which generosity or gratitude solicits, justice may forbid.

That in all such cases, unmerited generosity should yield to gratitude, and both to justice, is self-evident. Nor is it less so, that unmerited beneficence to those who are at ease should yield to

compassion to the miserable, and external acts of piety to works of mercy, because GOD loves mercy more than sacrifice.

At the same time, we perceive, that those acts of virtue which ought to yield in the case of a competition, have most intrinsic worth when there is no competition. Thus, it is evident that there is more worth in pure and unmerited benevolence than in compassion, more in compassion than in gratitude, and more in gratitude than in justice.

I call these *first principles,* because they appear to me to have in themselves an intuitive evidence which I cannot resist. I find I can express them in other words. I can illustrate them by examples and authorities, and perhaps can deduce one of them from another; but I am not able to deduce them from other principles that are more evident. And I find the best moral reasonings of authors I am acquainted with, ancient and modern, Heathen and Christian, to be grounded upon one or more of them.

The evidence of mathematical axioms is not discerned till men come to a certain degree of maturity of understanding. A boy must have formed the general conception of *quantity,* and of *more* and *less* and *equal,* of s*um* and *difference*; and he must have been accustomed to judge of these relations in matters of common life, before he can perceive the evidence of the mathematical axiom, that equal quantities, added to equal quantities, make equal sums.

In like manner, our moral judgment, or conscience, grows to maturity from an imperceptible feed, planted by our Creator. When we are capable of contemplating the actions of other men, or of reflecting upon our own calmly and dispassionately, we begin to perceive in them the qualities of honest and dishonest, of honourable and base, of right and wrong, and to feel the sentiments of moral approbation and disapprobation.

These sentiments are at first feeble, easily warped by passions and prejudices, and apt to yield to authority. By use and time, the judgment, in morals as in other matters, gathers strength, and feels more vigour. We begin to distinguish the dictates of passion from those of cool reason, and to perceive, that it is not always safe to rely upon the judgment of others. By an impulse of nature, we venture to judge for ourselves, as we venture to walk by ourselves.

There is a strong analogy between the progress of the body from infancy to maturity, and the progress of all the powers of the mind. This progression in both is the work of nature, and in both may be greatly aided or hurt by proper education. It is natural to a man to be able to walk or run or leap; but if his limbs had been kept in fetters from his birth, he would have none of those powers. It is no less natural to a man trained in society, and accustomed to judge of his own actions and those of other men, to perceive a right and a wrong, an honourable and a base, in human conduct; and to such a man, I think, the principles of morals I have above mentioned will appear self-evident. Yet there may be individuals of the human species so little accustomed to think or judge of any thing, but of gratifying their animal appetites, as to have hardly any conception of right or wrong in conduct, or any moral judgment; as there certainly are some who have not the conceptions and the judgment necessary to understand the axioms of geometry.

From the principles above mentioned, the whole system of moral conduct follows so easily, and with so little aid of reasoning, that every man of common understanding, who wishes to know his duty, may know it. The path of duty is a plain path, which the upright in heart can rarely mistake. Such it must be, since every man is bound to walk in it. There are some intricate cases in morals which admit of disputation; but these seldom occur in practice; and, when they do, the learned disputant has no great advantage: For the unlearned man, who uses the best means in his power to know his duty, and acts according to his knowledge, is inculpable in the fight of GOD and man. He may err, but he is not guilty of immorality.

Of Systems of Morals

If the knowledge of our duty be so level to the apprehension of all men, as has been represented in the last chapter, it may seem hardly to deserve the name of a science. It may seem that there is no need for instruction in morals.

From what cause then has it happened, that we have many large and learned systems of moral philosophy, and systems of natural jurisprudence, or the law of nature and nations; and that, in modern times, public professions have been instituted in most places of education for instructing youth in these branches of knowledge?

This event, I think, may be accounted for, and the utility of such systems and professions justified, without supposing any difficulty or intricacy in the knowledge of our duty.

I am far from thinking instruction in morals unnecessary. Men may, to the end of life, be ignorant of self-evident truths. They may, to the end of life, entertain gross absurdities. Experience shews that this happens often in matters that are indifferent. Much more may it happen in matters where interest, passion, prejudice and fashion, are so apt to pervert the judgment.

The most obvious truths are not perceived without some ripeness of judgment. For we see, that children may be made to believe any thing, though ever so absurd. Our judgment of things is ripened, not by time only, but chiefly by being exercised about things of the same or of a similar kind.

Judgment, even in things self-evident, requires a clear, distinct and steady conception of the things about which we judge. Our conceptions are at first obscure and wavering. The habit of attending to them is necessary to make them distinct and steady; and this habit requires an exertion of mind to which many of our animal principles are unfriendly. The love of truth calls for it; but its still voice is often drowned by the louder call of some passion, or we are hindered from listening to it by laziness and desultoriness. Thus men often remain through life ignorant of things which they needed but to open their eyes to see, and which they would have seen if their attention had been turned to them.

The most knowing derive the greatest part of their knowledge, even in things obvious, from instruction and information, and from being taught to exercise their natural faculties, which, without instruction, would lie dormant.

I am very apt to think, that, if a man could be reared from infancy, without any society of his fellow-creatures, he would hardly ever shew any sign, either of moral judgment, or of the power of reasoning. His own actions would be directed by his animal appetites and passions, without cool reflection, and he would have no access to improve, by observing the conduct of other beings like himself.

The power of vegetation in the feed of a plant, without heat and moisture, would for ever lie dormant. The rational and moral powers of man would perhaps lie dormant without instruction and example. Yet these powers are a part, and the noblest part, of his constitution; as the power of vegetation is of the seed.

Our first moral conceptions are probably got by attending coolly to the conduct of others, and observing what moves our approbation, what our indignation. These sentiments spring from our moral faculty as naturally as the sensations of sweet and bitter from the faculty of taste. They have their natural objects. But most human actions are of a mixed nature, and have various colours, according as they are viewed on different sides. Prejudice against, or in favour of the person, is apt to warp our opinion. It requires attention and candour to distinguish the good from the ill, and, without favour or prejudice, to form a clear and impartial judgment. In this we may be greatly aided by instruction.

He must be very ignorant of human nature, who does not perceive that the seed of virtue in the mind of man, like that of a tender plant in an unkindly soil, requires care and culture in the first period of life, as well as our own exertion when we come to maturity.

If the irregularities of passion and appetite be timely checked, and good habits planted; if we be excited by good examples, and bad examples be shown in their proper colour; if the attention be prudently directed to the precepts of wisdom and virtue, as the mind is capable of receiving them; a man thus trained will rarely be at a loss to distinguish good from ill in his own conduct, without the labour of reasoning.

The bulk of mankind have but little of this culture in the proper season; and what they have is often unskilfully applied; by which means bad habits gather strength, and false notions of pleasure,

of honour, and of interest, occupy the mind. They give little attention to what is right and honest. Conscience is seldom consulted, and so little exercised, that its decisions are weak and wavering. Although, therefore, to a ripe understanding, free from prejudice, and accustomed to judge of the morality of actions, most truths in morals will appear self-evident, it does not follow that moral instruction is unnecessary in the first part of life, or that it may not be very profitable in its more advanced period.

The history of past ages shews that nations, highly civilized and greatly enlightened in many arts and sciences, may, for ages, not only hold the grossest absurdities with regard to the Deity and his worship, but with regard to the duty we owe to our fellow-men, particularly to children, to servants, to strangers, to enemies, and to those who differ from us in religious opinions.

Such corruptions in religion, and in morals, had spread so wide among mankind, and were so confirmed by custom, as to require a light from heaven to correct them. Revelation was not intended to supersede, but to aid the use of our natural faculties; and I doubt not, but the attention given to moral truths, in such systems as we have mentioned, has contributed much to correct the errors and prejudices of former ages, and may continue to have the same good effect in time to come.

It needs not seem strange, that systems of morals may swell to great magnitude, if we consider that, although the general principles be few and simple, their application extends to every part of human conduct, in every condition, every relation, and every transaction of life. They are the rule of life to the magistrate and to the subject, to the master and to the servant, to the parent and to the child, to the fellow-citizen and to the alien, to the friend and to the enemy, to the buyer and to the seller, to the borrower and to the lender. Every human creature is subject to their authority in his actions and words, and even in his thoughts. They may, in this respect, be compared to the laws of motion in the natural world, which, though few and simple, serve to regulate an infinite variety of operations throughout the universe.

And as the beauty of the laws of motion is displayed in the most striking manner, when we trace them through all the variety of their effects; so the divine beauty and sanctity of the principles of morals, appear most august when we take a comprehensive view of their application to every condition and relation, and to every transaction of human society.

This is, or ought to be, the design of systems of morals. They may be made more or less extensive, having no limits fixed by nature, but the wide circle of human transactions. When the principles are applied to these in detail, the detail is pleasant and profitable. It requires no profound reasoning (excepting, perhaps, in a few disputable points). It admits of the most agreeable illustration from examples and authorities; it serves to exercise, and thereby to strengthen moral judgment. And one who has given much attention to the duty of man, in all the various relations and circumstances of life, will probably be more enlightened in his own duty, and more able to enlighten others.

The first writers in morals, we are acquainted with, delivered their moral instructions, not in systems, but in short unconnected sentences, or aphorisms. They saw no need for deductions of reasoning, because the truths they delivered could not but be admitted by the candid and attentive.

Subsequent writers, to improve the way of treating this subject, gave method and arrangement to moral truths, by reducing them under certain divisions and subdivisions, as parts of one whole. By these means the whole is more easily comprehended and remembered, and from this arrangement gets the name of a system and of a science.

A system of morals is not like a system of geometry, where the subsequent parts derive their evidence from the preceding, and one chain of reasoning is carried on from the beginning; so that, if the arrangement is changed, the chain is broken, and the evidence is lost. It resembles more a system of botany, or mineralogy, where the subsequent parts depend not for their evidence upon the preceding, and the arrangement is made to facilitate apprehension and memory, and not to give evidence.

Morals have been methodised in different ways. The ancients commonly arranged them under the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. Christian writers, I think

more properly, under the three heads of the duty we owe to God, to ourselves, and to our neighbour. One division may be more comprehensive, or more natural, than another; but the truths arranged are the same, and their evidence the same in all.

I shall only farther observe, with regard to systems of morals, that they have been made more voluminous, and more intricate, partly by mixing political questions with morals, which I think improper, because they belong to a different science, and are grounded on different principles; partly by making what is commonly, but I think improperly, called *the Theory of Morals*, a part of the system.

By the theory of morals is meant a just account of the structure of our moral powers; that is, of those powers of the mind by which we have our moral conceptions, and distinguish right from wrong in human actions. This, indeed, is an intricate subject, and there have been various theories and much controversy about it in ancient and in modern times. But it has little connection with the knowledge of our duty; and those who differ most in the theory of our moral powers, agree in the practical rules of morals which they dictate.

As a man may be a good judge of colours, and of the other visible qualities of objects, without any knowledge of the anatomy of the eye, and of the theory of vision; so a man may have a very clear and comprehensive knowledge of what is right and what is wrong in human conduct, who never studied the structure of our moral powers.

A good ear in music may be much improved by attention and practice in that art; but very little by studying the anatomy of the ear, and the theory of sound. In order to acquire a good eye or a good ear in the arts that require them, the theory of vision and the theory of sound, are by no means necessary, and indeed of very little use. Of as little necessity or use is what we call the theory of morals, in order to improve our moral judgment.

I mean not to depreciate this branch of knowledge. It is a very important part of the philosophy of the human mind, and ought to be considered as such, but not as any part of morals. By the name we give to it, and by the custom of making it a part of every system of morals, men may be led into this gross mistake, which I wish to obviate, That in order to understand his duty, a man must needs be a philosopher and a metaphysician.

Readings for Chapter 2

Contractualism: Moral Rules and Social Agreement

"The Second Treatise of Government" (excerpt)

John Locke

Chapter II

Of the State of Nature

4. To understand Political Power right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, a *State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man.

A *State* also *of Equality*, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another: there being nothing more evident, than that Creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without Subordination or Subjection, unless the Lord and Master of them all, should by any manifest Declaration of his Will set one above another, and confer on him by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted Right to Dominion and Sovereignty.

5. This *equality* of Men by Nature, the Judicious *Hooker* looks upon as so evident in it self, and beyond all question, that he makes it the Foundation of that Obligation to mutual Love amongst Men, on which he Builds the Duties they owe one another, and from whence he derives the great Maxims *of Justice* and *Charity*. His words are;

> *The like natural inducement, hath brought Men to know that it is no less their Duty, to Love others than themselves, for seeing those things which are equal, must needs all have one measure; If I cannot but wish to receive good, even as much at every Man's hands, as any Man can wish unto his own Soul, how should I look to have any part of my desire herein satisfied, unless my self be careful to satisfie the like desire, which is undoubtedly in other Men, being of one and the same nature? to have any thing offered them repugnant to this desire, must needs in all respects grieve them as much as me, so that if I do harm, I must look to suffer, there being no reason that others should shew greater measure of love to me, than they have by me, shewed unto them; my desire therefore to be lov'd of my equals in nature, as much as possible may be, imposeth upon me a natural Duty of bearing to themward, fully the like affection; From which relation of equality between our selves and them, that are as our selves, what several Rules and Canons, natural reason hath drawn for direction of Life, no Man is ignorant*. Eccl. Pol. Lib. 1.

Locke, J. (1690, 1960) *Two Treatises of Government* (a critical edition with introduction and notes by Peter Laslett), New York, Cambridge University Press, 269–278, 285–289, 330–333. Reprinted with permission.

6. But though this be a *State of Liberty*, yet it is *not a State of Licence*, though Man in that State have an uncontroleable Liberty, to dispose of his Person or Possessions, yet he has not Liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any Creature in his Possession, but where some nobler use, than its bare Preservation calls for it. The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions. For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one anothers Pleasure. And being furnished with like Faculties, sharing all in one Community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such *Subordination* among us, that may Authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one anothers uses, as the inferior ranks of Creatures are for ours. Every one as he is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his Station wilfully; so by the like reason when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of Mankind*, and may not unless it be to do Justice on an Offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the Preservation of the Life, the Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another.

7. And that all Men may be restrained from invading others Rights, and from doing hurt to one another, and the Law of Nature be observed, which willeth the Peace and *Preservation of all Mankind*, the *Execution* of the Law of Nature is in that State, put into every Mans hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that Law to such a Degree, as may hinder its Violation. For the *Law of Nature* would, as all other Laws that concern Men in this World, be in vain, if there were no body that in the State of Nature, had a *Power to Execute* that Law, and thereby preserve the innocent and restrain offenders, and if any one in the State of Nature may punish another, for any evil he has done, every one may do so. For in that *State of perfect Equality*, where naturally there is no superiority or jurisdiction of one, over another, what any may do in Prosecution of that Law, every one must needs have a Right to do.

8. And thus in the State of Nature, *one Man comes by a Power over another*; but yet no Absolute or Arbitrary Power, to use a Criminal when he has got him in his hands, according to the passionate heats, or boundless extravagancy of his own Will, but only to retribute to him, so far as calm reason and conscience dictates, what is proportionate to his Transgression, which is so much as may serve for *Reparation* and *Restraint*. For these two are the only reasons, why one Man may lawfully do harm to another, which is that we call *punishment*. In transgressing the Law of Nature, the Offender declares himself to live by another Rule, than that of *reason* and common Equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of Men, for their mutual security: and so he becomes dangerous to Mankind, the tye, which is to secure them from injury and violence, being slighted and broken by him. Which being a trespass against the whole Species, and the Peace and Safety of it, provided for by the Law of Nature, every man upon this score, by the Right he hath to preserve Mankind in general, may restrain, or where it is necessary, destroy things noxious to them, and so may bring such evil on any one, who hath transgressed that Law, as may make him repent the doing of it, and thereby deter him, and by his Example others, from doing the like mischief. And in this case, and upon this ground, *every Man hath a Right to punish the Offender, and be Executioner of the Law of Nature*.

9. I doubt not but this will seem a very strange Doctrine to some Men: but before they condemn it, I desire them to resolve me, by what Right any Prince or State can put to death, or *punish an Alien*, for any Crime he commits in their Country. 'Tis certain their Laws by vertue of any Sanction they receive from the promulgated Will of the Legislative, reach not a Stranger. They speak not to him, nor if they did, is he bound to hearken to them. The Legislative Authority, by which they are in Force over the Subjects of that Common-wealth, hath no Power over him. Those who have the Supream Power of making Laws in *England*, *France* or *Holland*, are to an *Indian*, but like the rest of the World, Men without Authority: And therefore if by the Law of Nature, every Man hath not

a Power to punish Offences against it, as he soberly judges the Case to require, I see not how the Magistrates of any Community, can *punish an Alien* of another Country, since in reference to him, they can have no more Power, than what every Man naturally may have over another.

10. Besides the Crime which consists in violating the Law, and varying from the right Rule of Reason, whereby a Man so far becomes degenerate, and declares himself to quit the Principles of Human Nature, and to be a noxious Creature, there is commonly *injury* done to some Person or other, and some other Man receives damage by his Transgression, in which Case he who hath received any damage, has besides the right of punishment common to him with other Men, a particular Right to seek *Reparation* from him that has done it. And any other Person who finds it just, may also joyn with him that is injur'd, and assist him in recovering from the Offender, so much as may make satisfaction for the harm he has suffer'd.

11. From these *two distinct Rights*, the one of *Punishing* the Crime *for restraint*, and preventing the like Offence, which right of punishing is in every body; the other of taking *reparation*, which belongs only to the injured party, comes it to pass that the Magistrate, who by being Magistrate, hath the common right of punishing put into his hands, can often, where the publick good demands not the execution of the Law, *remit* the punishment of Criminal Offences by his own Authority, but yet cannot *remit* the satisfaction due to any private Man, for the damage he has received. That, he who has suffered the damage has a Right to demand in his own name, and he alone can *remit*: The damnified Person has this Power of appropriating to himself, the Goods or Service of the Offender, by *Right of Self-preservation*, as every Man has a Power to punish the Crime, to prevent its being committed again, *by the Right he has of Preserving all Mankind*, and doing all reasonable things he can in order to that end: And thus it is, that every Man in the State of Nature, has a Power to kill a Murderer, both to deter others from doing the like Injury, which no Reparation can compensate, by the Example of the punishment that attends it from every body, and also *to secure* Men from the attempts of a Criminal, who having renounced Reason, the common Rule and Measure, God hath given to Mankind, hath by the unjust Violence and Slaughter he hath committed upon one, declared War against all Mankind, and therefore may be destroyed as a *Lyon* or a *Tyger*, one of those wild Savage Beasts, with whom Men can have no Society nor Security: And upon this is grounded the great Law of Nature, *Who so sheddeth Mans Blood*, *by Man shall his Blood be shed*. And *Cain* was so fully convinced, that every one had a Right to destroy such a Criminal, that after the Murther of his Brother, he cries out, *Every one that findeth me*, *shall slay me*; so plain was it writ in the Hearts of all Mankind.

12. By the same reason, may a Man in the State of Nature *punish the lesser breaches* of that Law. It will perhaps be demanded, with death? I answer, Each Transgression may be *punished* to that *degree*, and with so much *Severity* as will suffice to make it an ill bargain to the Offender, give him cause to repent, and terrifie others from doing the like. Every Offence that can be committed in the State of Nature, may in the State of Nature be also punished, equally, and as far forth as it may, in a Common-wealth; for though it would be besides my present purpose, to enter here into the particulars of the Law of Nature, or its *measures of punishment*; yet, it is certain there is such a Law, and that too, as intelligible and plain to a rational Creature, and a Studier of that Law, as the positive Laws of Common-wealths, nay possibly plainer; As much as Reason is easier to be understood, than the Phansies and intricate Contrivances of Men, following contrary and hidden interests put into Words; For so truly are a great part of the *Municipal Laws* of Countries, which are only so far right, as they are founded on the Law of Nature, by which they are to be regulated and interpreted.

13. To this strange Doctrine, *viz*. That *in the State of Nature*, *every one has the Executive Power* of the Law of Nature, I doubt not but it will be objected, That it is unreasonable for Men to be Judges in their own Cases, that Self-love will make Men partial to themselves and their Friends. And on the other side, that Ill Nature, Passion and Revenge will carry them too far in punishing others. And hence nothing but Confusion and Disorder will follow, and that therefore God hath certainly appointed Government to restrain the partiality and violence of Men. I easily grant, that

Civil Government is the proper Remedy for the Inconveniences of the State of Nature, which must certainly be Great, where Men may be Judges in their own Case, since 'tis easily to be imagined, that he who was so unjust as to do his Brother an Injury, will scarce be so just as to condemn himself for it: But I shall desire those who make this Objection, to remember that *Absolute Monarchs* are but Men, and if Government is to be the Remedy of those Evils, which necessarily follow from Mens being Judges in their own Cases, and the State of Nature is therefore not to be endured, I desire to know what kind of Government that is, and how much better it is than the State of Nature, where one Man commanding a multitude, has the Liberty to be Judge in his own Case, and may do to all his Subjects whatever he pleases, without the least liberty to any one to question or controle those who Execute his Pleasure? And in whatsoever he doth, whether led by Reason, Mistake or Passion, must be submitted to? Much better it is in the State of Nature wherein Men are not bound to submit to the unjust will of another: And if he that judges, judges amiss in his own, or any other Case, he is answerable for it to the rest of Mankind.

14. 'Tis often asked as a mighty Objection, *Where are*, or ever were, there any *Men in such a State of Nature*? To which it may suffice as an answer at present; That since all *Princes* and Rulers of *Independent* Governments all through the World, are in a State of Nature, 'tis plain the World never was, nor ever will be, without Numbers of Men in that State. I have named all Governors of *Independent* Communities, whether they are, or are not, in League with others: For 'tis not every Compact that puts an end to the State of Nature between Men, but only this one of agreeing together mutually to enter into one Community, and make one Body Politick; other Promises and Compacts, Men may make one with another, and yet still be in the State of Nature. The Promises and Bargains for Truck, *&c.* between the two Men in the Desert Island, mentioned by *Garcilasso De la vega*, in his History of *Peru*, or between a *Swiss* and an *Indian*, in the Woods of *America*, are binding to them, though they are perfectly in a State of Nature, in reference to one another. For Truth and keeping of Faith belongs to Men, as Men, and not as Members of Society.

15. To those that say, There were never any Men in the State of Nature; I will not only oppose the Authority of the Judicious *Hooker*, *Eccl. Pol. Lib. 1. Sect. 10.* where he says, *The Laws which have been hitherto mentioned*, i.e. the Laws of Nature, *do bind Men absolutely, even as they are Men, although they have never any settled fellowship*, *never any Solemn Agreement amongst themselves what to do or not to do*, *but for as much as we are not by our selves sufficient to furnish our selves with competent store of things, needful for such a Life*, *as our Nature doth desire*, *a Life*, *fit for the Dignity of Man*; *therefore to supply those Defects and Imperfections which are in us*, *as living singly and solely by our selves*, *we are naturally induced to seek Communion and Fellowship with others*, *this was the Cause of Mens uniting themselves*, *at first in Politick Societies*. But I moreover affirm, That all Men are naturally in that State, and remain so, till by their own Consents they make themselves Members of some Politick Society; And I doubt not in the Sequel of this Discourse, to make it very clear.

Chapter V

Of Property

25. Whether we consider natural *Reason*, which tells us, that Men, being once born, have a right to their Preservation, and consequently to Meat and Drink, and such other things, as Nature affords for their Subsistence: Or *Revelation*, which gives us an account of those Grants God made of the World to *Adam*, and to *Noah*, and his Sons, 'tis very clear, that God, as King *David* says, *Psal.* CXV. xvj. *has given the Earth to the Children of Men*, given it to Mankind in common. But this being supposed, it seems to some a very great difficulty, how any one should ever come to have a *Property* in any thing: I will not content my self to answer, That if it be difficult to make out *Property*, upon a supposition, that God gave the World to *Adam* and his Posterity in common; it

is impossible that any Man, but one universal Monarch, should have any *Property*, upon a supposition, that God gave the World to *Adam*, and his Heirs in Succession, exclusive of all the rest of his Posterity. But I shall endeavour to shew, how Men might come to have a *property* in several parts of that which God gave to Mankind in common, and that without any express Compact of all the Commoners.

26. God, who hath given the World to Men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of Life, and convenience. The Earth, and all that is therein, is given to Men for the Support and Comfort of their being. And though all the Fruits it naturally produces, and Beasts it feeds, belong to Mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of Nature; and no body has originally a private Dominion, exclusive of the rest of Mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of Men, there must of necessity be a means *to appropriate* them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular Man. The Fruit, or Venison, which nourishes the wild *Indian*, who knows no Inclosure, and is still a Tenant in common, must be his, and so his, *i.e.* a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his Life.

27. Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this *labour* something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men. For this *Labour* being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no Man but he can have a right to what that is once joyned to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.

28. He that is nourished by the Acorns he pickt up under an Oak, or the Apples he gathered from the Trees in the Wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. No Body can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then, When did they begin to be his? When he digested? Or when he eat? Or when he boiled? Or when he brought them home? Or when he pickt them up? And 'tis plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That *labour* put a distinction between them and common. That added something to them more than Nature, the common Mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right. And will any one say he had no right to those Acorns or Apples he thus appropriated, because he had not the consent of all Mankind to make them his? Was it a Robbery thus to assume to himself what belonged to all in Common? If such a consent as that was necessary, Man had starved, notwithstanding the Plenty God had given him. We see in *Commons*, which remain so by Compact, that 'tis the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state Nature leaves it in, which *begins the Property*; without which the Common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the Commoners. Thus the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg'd in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my *Property*, without the assignation or consent of any body. The *labour* that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath *fixed* my *Property* in them.

29. By making an explicit consent of every Commoner, necessary to any ones appropriating to himself any part of what is given in common, Children or Servants could not cut the Meat which their Father or Master had provided for them in common, without assigning to every one his peculiar part. Though the Water running in the Fountain be every ones, yet who can doubt, but that in the Pitcher is his only who drew it out? His *labour* hath taken it out of the hands of Nature, where it was common, and belong'd equally to all her Children, and *hath* thereby *appropriated* it to himself.

Chapter VIII

Of the Beginning of Political Societies

95. Men being, as has been said, by Nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate, and subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own *Consent*. The only way whereby any one devests himself of his Natural Liberty, and *puts on the bonds of Civil Society* is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it. This any number of Men may do, because it injures not the Freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the Liberty of the State of Nature. When any number of Men have so *consented to make one Community* or Government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make *one Body Politick*, wherein the *Majority* have a Right to act and conclude the rest.

96. For when any number of Men have, by the consent of every individual, made a *Community*, they have thereby made that *Community* one Body, with a Power to Act as one Body, which is only by the will and determination of the *majority*. For that which acts any Community, being only the consent of the individuals of it, and it being necessary to that which is one body to move one way; it is necessary the Body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the *consent of the majority*: or else it is impossible it should act or continue one Body, *one Community*, which the consent of every individual that united into it, agreed that it should; and so every one is bound by that consent to be concluded by the *majority*. And therefore we see that in Assemblies impowered to act by positive Laws where no number is set by that positive Law which impowers them, the *act of the Majority* passes for the act of the whole, and of course determines, as having by the Law of Nature and Reason, the power of the whole.

97. And thus every Man, by consenting with others to make one Body Politick under one Government, puts himself under an Obligation to every one of that Society, to submit to the determination of the *majority*, and to be concluded by it; or else this *original Compact*, whereby he with others incorporates into *one Society*, would signifie nothing, and be no Compact, if he be left free, and under no other ties, than he was in before in the State of Nature. For what appearance would there be of any Compact? What new Engagement if he were no farther tied by any Decrees of the Society, than he himself thought fit, and did actually consent to? This would be still as great a liberty, as he himself had before his Compact, or any one else in the State of Nature hath, who may submit himself and consent to any acts of it if he thinks fit.

98. For if *the consent of the majority* shall not in reason, be received, as *the act of the whole*, and conclude every individual; nothing but the consent of every individual can make any thing to be the act of the whole: But such a consent is next impossible ever to be had, if we consider the Infirmities of Health, and Avocations of Business, which in a number, though much less than that of a Common-wealth, will necessarily keep many away from the publick Assembly. To which if we add the variety of Opinions, and contrariety of Interests, which unavoidably happen in all Collections of Men, the coming into Society upon such terms, would be only like *Cato*'s coming into the Theatre, only to go out again. Such a Constitution as this would make the mighty *Leviathan* of a shorter duration, than the feeblest Creatures; and not let it outlast the day it was born in: which cannot be suppos'd, till we can think, that Rational Creatures should desire and constitute Societies only to be dissolved. For where the *majority* cannot conclude the rest, there they cannot act as one Body, and consequently will be immediately dissolved again.

99. Whosoever therefore out of a state of Nature unite into a *Community*, must be understood to give up all the power, necessary to the ends for which they unite into Society, to the *majority* of the Community, unless they expressly agreed in any number greater than the majority. And this is done by barely agreeing to *unite into one Political Society*, which is *all the Compact* that

is, or needs be, between the Individuals, that enter into, or make up a *Common-wealth*. And thus that, which begins and actually *constitutes any Political Society*, is nothing but the consent of any number of Freemen capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a Society. And this is that, and that only, which did, or could give *beginning* to any *lawful Government* in the World.

"Of the Original Contract"

David Hume

As no party, in the present age, can well support itself, without a philosophical or speculative system of principles, annexed to its political or practical one; we accordingly find, that each of the factions, into which this nation is divided, has reared up a fabric of the former kind, in order to protect and cover that scheme of actions, which it pursues. The people being commonly very rude builders, especially in this speculative way, and more especially still, when actuated by party-zeal; it is natural to imagine, that their workmanship must be a little unshapely, and discover evident marks of that violence and hurry, in which it was raised. The one party, by tracing up Government to the DEITY, endeavour to render it so sacred and inviolate, that it must be little less than sacrilege, however tyrannical it may become, to touch or invade it, in the smallest article. The other party, by founding government altogether on the consent of the PEOPLE, suppose that there is a kind of *original contract,* by which the subjects have tacitly reserved the power of resisting their sovereign, whenever they find themselves aggrieved by that authority, with which they have, for certain purposes, voluntarily entrusted him. These are the speculative principles of the two parties; and these too are the practical consequences deduced from them.

I shall venture to affirm, *That both these* systems *of speculative principles are just; though not in the sense, intended by the parties:* And, *That both the* schemes *of practical consequences are prudent; though not in the extremes, to which each party, in opposition to the other, has commonly endeavoured to carry them.*

That the DEITY is the ultimate author of all government, will never be denied by any, who admit a general providence, and allow, that all events in the universe are conducted by an uniform plan, and directed to wise purposes. As it is impossible for the human race to subsist, at least in any comfortable or secure state, without the protection of government; this institution must certainly have been intended by that beneficent Being, who means the good of all his creatures: And as it has universally, in fact, taken place, in all countries, and all ages; we may conclude, with still greater certainty, that it was intended by that omniscient Being, who can never be deceived by any event or operation. But since he gave rise to it, not by any particular or miraculous interposition, but by his concealed and universal efficacy; a sovereign cannot, properly speaking, be called his vicegerent, in any other sense than every power or force, being derived from him, may be said to act by his commission. Whatever actually happens is comprehended in the general plan or intention of providence; nor has the greatest and most lawful prince any more reason, upon that account, to plead a peculiar sacredness or inviolable authority, than an inferior magistrate, or even an usurper, or even a robber and a pyrate. The same divine superintendant, who, for wise purposes, invested a TITUS or a TRAJAN with authority, did also, for purposes, no doubt, equally wise, though unknown, bestow power on a BORGIA or an ANGRIA. The same causes, which gave rise to the

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sovereign power in every state, established likewise every petty jurisdiction in it, and every limited authority. A constable, therefore, no less than a king, acts by a divine commission, and possesses an indefeasible right.

When we consider how nearly equal all men are in their bodily force, and even in their mental powers and faculties, till cultivated by education; we must necessarily allow, that nothing but their own consent could, at first, associate them together, and subject them to any authority. The people, if we trace government to its first origin in the woods and desarts, are the source of all power and jurisdiction, and voluntarily, for the sake of peace and order, abandoned their native liberty, and received laws from their equal and companion. The conditions, upon which they were willing to submit, were either expressed, or were so clear and obvious, that it might well be esteemed superfluous to express them. If this, then, be meant by the *original contract,* it cannot be denied, that all government is, at first, founded on a contract, and that the most ancient rude combinations of mankind were formed chiefly by that principle. In vain, are we asked in what records this charter of our liberties is registered. It was not written on parchment, nor yet on leaves or barks of trees. It preceded the use of writing and all the other civilized arts of life. But we trace it plainly in the nature of man, and in the equality, or something approaching equality, which we find in all the individuals of that species. The force, which now prevails, and which is founded on fleets and armies, is plainly political, and derived from authority, the effect of established government. A man's natural force consists only in the vigour of his limbs, and the firmness of his courage; which could never subject multitudes to the command of one. Nothing but their own consent, and their sense of the advantages resulting from peace and order, could have had that influence.

Yet even this consent was long very imperfect, and could not be the basis of a regular administration. The chieftain, who had probably acquired his influence during the continuance of war, ruled more by persuasion than command; and till he could employ force to reduce the refractory and disobedient, the society could scarcely be said to have attained a state of civil government. No compact or agreement, it is evident, was expressly formed for general submission; an idea far beyond the comprehension of savages: Each exertion of authority in the chieftain must have been particular, and called forth by the present exigencies of the case: The sensible utility, resulting from his interposition, made these exertions become daily more frequent; and their frequency gradually produced an habitual, and, if you please to call it so, a voluntary, and therefore precarious, acquiescence in the people.

But philosophers, who have embraced a party (if that be not a contradiction in terms) are not contented with these concessions. They assert, not only that government in its earliest infancy arose from consent or rather the voluntary acquiescence of the people; but also, that, even at present, when it has attained its full maturity, it rests on no other foundation. They affirm, that all men are still born equal, and owe allegiance to no prince or government, unless bound by the obligation and sanction of a *promise.* And as no man, without some equivalent, would forego the advantages of his native liberty, and subject himself to the will of another; this promise is always understood to be conditional, and imposes on him no obligation, unless he meet with justice and protection from his sovereign. These advantages the sovereign promises him in return; and if he fail in the execution, he has broken, on his part, the articles of engagement, and has thereby freed his subject from all obligations to allegiance. Such, according to these philosophers, is the foundation of authority in every government; and such the right of resistance, possessed by every subject.

But would these reasoners look abroad into the world, they would meet with nothing that, in the least, corresponds to their ideas, or can warrant so refined and philosophical a system. On the contrary, we find, every where, princes, who claim their subjects as their property, and assert their independent right of sovereignty, from conquest or succession. We find also, every where, subjects, who acknowledge this right in their prince, and suppose themselves born under obligations of obedience to a certain sovereign, as much as under the ties of reverence and duty to certain parents. These connections are always conceived to be equally independent of our consent, in PERSIA and CHINA; in FRANCE and SPAIN; and even in HOLLAND and ENGLAND, wherever the doctrines

above-mentioned have not been carefully inculcated. Obedience or subjection becomes so familiar, that most men never make any enquiry about its origin or cause, more than about the principle of gravity, resistance, or the most universal laws of nature. Or if curiosity ever move them; as soon as they learn, that they themselves and their ancestors have, for several ages, or from time immemorial, been subject to such a form of government or such a family; they immediately acquiesce, and acknowledge their obligation to allegiance. Were you to preach, in most parts of the world, that political connections are founded altogether on voluntary consent or a mutual promise, the magistrate would soon imprison you, as seditious, for loosening the ties of obedience; if your friends did not before shut you up as delirious, for advancing such absurdities. It is strange, that an act of the mind, which every individual is supposed to have formed, and after he came to the use of reason too, otherwise it could have no authority; that this act, I say, should be so much unknown to all of them, that, over the face of the whole earth, there scarcely remain any traces or memory of it.

But the contract, on which government is founded, is said to be the *original contract*; and consequently may be supposed too old to fall under the knowledge of the present generation. If the agreement, by which savage men first associated and conjoined their force, be here meant, this is acknowledged to be real; but being so ancient, and being obliterated by a thousand changes of government and princes, it cannot now be supposed to retain any authority. If we would say any thing to the purpose, we must assert, that every particular government, which is lawful, and which imposes any duty of allegiance on the subject, was, at first, founded on consent and a voluntary compact. But besides that this supposes the consent of the fathers to bind the children, even to the most remote generations, (which republican writers will never allow) besides this, I say, it is not justified by history or experience, in any age or country of the world.

Almost all the governments, which exist at present, or of which there remains any record in story, have been founded originally, either on usurpation or conquest, or both, without any pretence of a fair consent, or voluntary subjection of the people. When an artful and bold man is placed at the head of an army or faction, it is often easy for him, by employing, sometimes violence, sometimes false pretences, to establish his dominion over a people a hundred times more numerous than his partizans. He allows no such open communication, that his enemies can know, with certainty, their number or force. He gives them no leisure to assemble together in a body to oppose him. Even all those, who are the instruments of his usurpation, may wish his fall; but their ignorance of each other's intention keeps them in awe, and is the sole cause of his security. By such arts as these, many governments have been established; and this is all the *original contract,* which they have to boast of.

The face of the earth is continually changing, by the encrease of small kingdoms into great empires, by the dissolution of great empires into smaller kingdoms, by the planting of colonies, by the migration of tribes. Is there any thing discoverable in all these events, but force and violence? Where is the mutual agreement or voluntary association so much talked of?

Even the smoothest way, by which a nation may receive a foreign master, by marriage or a will, is not extremely honourable for the people; but supposes them to be disposed of, like a dowry or a legacy, according to the pleasure or interest of their rulers.

But where no force interposes, and election takes place; what is this election so highly vaunted? It is either the combination of a few great men, who decide for the whole, and will allow of no opposition: Or it is the fury of a multitude, that follow a seditious ringleader, who is not known, perhaps, to a dozen among them, and who owes his advancement merely to his own impudence, or to the momentary caprice of his fellows.

Are these disorderly elections, which are rare too, of such mighty authority, as to be the only lawful foundation of all government and allegiance?

In reality, there is not a more terrible event, than a total dissolution of government, which gives liberty to the multitude, and makes the determination or choice of a new establishment depend upon a number, which nearly approaches to that of the body of the people: For it never comes entirely to the whole body of them. Every wise man, then, wishes to see, at the head of a powerful

and obedient army, a general, who may speedily seize the prize, and give to the people a master, which they are so unfit to chuse for themselves. So little correspondent is fact and reality to those philosophical notions.

Let not the establishment at the *Revolution* deceive us, or make us so much in love with a philosophical origin to government, as to imagine all others monstrous and irregular. Even that event was far from corresponding to these refined ideas. It was only the succession, and that only in the regal part of the government, which was then changed: And it was only the majority of seven hundred, who determined that change for near ten millions. I doubt not, indeed, but the bulk of those ten millions acquiesced willingly in the determination: But was the matter left, in the least, to their choice? Was it not justly supposed to be, from that moment, decided, and every man punished, who refused to submit to the new sovereign? How otherwise could the matter have ever been brought to any issue or conclusion?

The republic of ATHENS was, I believe, the most extensive democracy, that we read of in history: Yet if we make the requisite allowances for the women, the slaves, and the strangers, we shall find, that that establishment was not, at first, made, nor any law ever voted, by a tenth part of those who were bound to pay obedience to it: Not to mention the islands and foreign dominions, which the ATHENIANS claimed as theirs by right of conquest. And as it is well known, that popular assemblies in that city were always full of licence and disorder, notwithstanding the institutions and laws by which they were checked: How much more disorderly must they prove, where they form not the established constitution, but meet tumultuously on the dissolution of the ancient government, in order to give rise to a new one? How chimerical must it be to talk of a choice in such circumstances?

The ACHÆANS enjoyed the freest and most perfect democracy of all antiquity; yet they employed force to oblige some cities to enter into their league, as we learn from POLYBIUS.[1]

HARRY the IVth and HARRY the VIIth of ENGLAND, had really no title to the throne but a parliamentary election; yet they never would acknowledge it, lest they should thereby weaken their authority. Strange, if the only real foundation of all authority be consent and promise!

It is in vain to say, that all governments are or should be, at first, founded on popular consent, as much as the necessity of human affairs will admit. This favours entirely my pretension. I maintain, that human affairs will never admit of this consent; seldom of the appearance of it. But that conquest or usurpation, that is, in plain terms, force, by dissolving the ancient governments, is the origin of almost all the new ones, which were ever established in the world. And that in the few cases, where consent may seem to have taken place, it was commonly so irregular, so confined, or so much intermixed either with fraud or violence, that it cannot have any great authority.

My intention here is not to exclude the consent of the people from being one just foundation of government where it has place. It is surely the best and most sacred of any. I only pretend, that it has very seldom had place in any degree, and never almost in its full extent. And that therefore some other foundation of government must also be admitted.

Were all men possessed of so inflexible a regard to justice, that, of themselves, they would totally abstain from the properties of others; they had for ever remained in a state of absolute liberty, without subjection to any magistrate or political society: But this is a state of perfection, of which human nature is justly deemed incapable. Again; were all men possessed of so perfect an understanding, as always to know their own interests, no form of government had ever been submitted to, but what was established on consent, and was fully canvassed by every member of the society: But this state of perfection is likewise much superior to human nature. Reason, history, and experience shew us, that all political societies have had an origin much less accurate and regular; and were one to choose a period of time, when the people's consent was the least regarded in public transactions, it would be precisely on the establishment of a new government. In a settled constitution, their inclinations are often consulted; but during the fury of revolutions, conquests, and public convulsions, military force or political craft usually decides the controversy.

When a new government is established, by whatever means, the people are commonly dissatisfied with it, and pay obedience more from fear and necessity, than from any idea of allegiance or of moral obligation. The prince is watchful and jealous, and must carefully guard against every beginning or appearance of insurrection. Time, by degrees, removes all these difficulties, and accustoms the nation to regard, as their lawful or native princes, that family, which, at first, they considered as usurpers or foreign conquerors. In order to found this opinion, they have no recourse to any notion of voluntary consent or promise, which, they know, never was, in this case, either expected or demanded. The original establishment was formed by violence, and submitted to from necessity. The subsequent administration is also supported by power, and acquiesced in by the people, not as a matter of choice, but of obligation. They imagine not that their consent gives their prince a title: But they willingly consent, because they think, that, from long possession, he has acquired a title, independent of their choice or inclination.

Should it be said, that, by living under the dominion of a prince, which one might leave, every individual has given a *tacit* consent to his authority, and promised him obedience; it may be answered, that such an implied consent can only have place, where a man imagines, that the matter depends on his choice. But where he thinks (as all mankind do who are born under established governments) that by his birth he owes allegiance to a certain prince or certain form of government; it would be absurd to infer a consent or choice, which he expressly, in this case, renounces and disclaims.

Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artizan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires? We may as well assert, that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean, and perish, the moment he leaves her.

What if the prince forbid his subjects to quit his dominions; as in TIBERIUS's time, it was regarded as a crime in a ROMAN knight that he had attempted to fly to the PARTHIANS in order to escape the tyranny of that emperor?[2] Or as the ancient MUSCOVITES prohibited all travelling under pain of death? And did a prince observe, that many of his subjects were seized with the frenzy of migrating to foreign countries, he would doubtless, with great reason and justice, restrain them, in order to prevent the depopulation of his own kingdom. Would he forfeit the allegiance of all his subjects, by so wise and reasonable a law? Yet the freedom of their choice is surely, in that case, ravished from them.

A company of men, who should leave their native country, in order to people some uninhabited region, might dream of recovering their native freedom; but they would soon find, that their prince still laid claim to them, and called them his subjects, even in their new settlement. And in this he would but act conformably to the common ideas of mankind.

The truest *tacit* consent of this kind, that is ever observed, is when a foreigner settles in any country, and is beforehand acquainted with the prince, and government, and laws, to which he must submit: Yet is his allegiance, though more voluntary, much less expected or depended on, than that of a natural born subject. On the contrary, his native prince still asserts a claim to him. And if he punish not the renegade, when he seizes him in war with his new prince's commission; this clemency is not founded on the municipal law, which in all countries condemns the prisoner; but on the consent of princes, who have agreed to this indulgence, in order to prevent reprisals.

Did one generation of men go off the stage at once, and another succeed, as is the case with silk-worms and butterflies, the new race, if they had sense enough to choose their government, which surely is never the case with men, might voluntarily, and by general consent, establish their own form of civil polity, without any regard to the laws or precedents, which prevailed among their ancestors. But as human society is in perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it, it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution, and nearly follow the path which their fathers, treading in the footsteps of theirs, had marked out to them. Some innovations

must necessarily have place in every human institution, and it is happy where the enlightened genius of the age gives these a direction to the side of reason, liberty, and justice: but violent innovations no individual is entitled to make: they are even dangerous to be attempted by the legislature: more ill than good is ever to be expected from them: and if history affords examples to the contrary, they are not to be drawn into precedent, and are only to be regarded as proofs, that the science of politics affords few rules, which will not admit of some exception, and which may not sometimes be controuled by fortune and accident. The violent innovations in the reign of HENRY VIII proceeded from an imperious monarch, seconded by the appearance of legislative authority: Those in the reign of CHARLES I were derived from faction and fanaticism, and both of them have proved happy in the issue: But even the former were long the source of many disorders, and still more dangers; and if the measures of allegiance were to be taken from the latter, a total anarchy must have place in human society, and a final period at once be put to every government.

Suppose, that an usurper, after having banished his lawful prince and royal family, should establish his dominion for ten or a dozen years in any country, and should preserve so exact a discipline in his troops, and so regular a disposition in his garrisons, that no insurrection had ever been raised, or even murmur heard, against his administration: Can it be asserted, that the people, who in their hearts abhor his treason, have tacitly consented to his authority, and promised him allegiance, merely because, from necessity, they live under his dominion? Suppose again their native prince restored, by means of an army, which he levies in foreign countries: They receive him with joy and exultation, and shew plainly with what reluctance they had submitted to any other yoke. I may now ask, upon what foundation the prince's title stands? Not on popular consent surely: For though the people willingly acquiesce in his authority, they never imagine, that their consent made him sovereign. They consent; because they apprehend him to be already, by birth, their lawful sovereign. And as to that tacit consent, which may now be inferred from their living under his dominion, this is no more than what they formerly gave to the tyrant and usurper.

When we assert, that all lawful government arises from the consent of the people, we certainly do them a great deal more honour than they deserve, or even expect and desire from us. After the ROMAN dominions became too unwieldly for the republic to govern them, the people, over the whole known world, were extremely grateful to AUGUSTUS for that authority, which, by violence, he had established over them; and they showed an equal disposition to submit to the successor, whom he left them, by his last will and testament. It was afterwards their misfortune, that there never was, in one family, any long regular succession; but that their line of princes was continually broken, either by private assassinations or public rebellions. The *praetorian* bands, on the failure of every family, set up one emperor; the legions in the East a second; those in GERMANY, perhaps, a third: And the sword alone could decide the controversy. The condition of the people, in that mighty monarchy, was to be lamented, not because the choice of the emperor was never left to them; for that was impracticable: But because they never fell under any succession of masters, who might regularly follow each other. As to the violence and wars and bloodshed, occasioned by every new settlement; these were not blameable, because they were inevitable.

The house of LANCASTER ruled in this island about sixty years; yet the partizans of the white rose seemed daily to multiply in ENGLAND. The present establishment has taken place during a still longer period. Have all views of right in another family been utterly extinguished; even though scarce any man now alive had arrived at years of discretion, when it was expelled, or could have consented to its dominion, or have promised it allegiance? A sufficient indication surely of the general sentiment of mankind on this head. For we blame not the partizans of the abdicated family, merely on account of the long time, during which they have preserved their imaginary loyalty. We blame them for adhering to a family, which, we affirm, has been justly expelled, and which, from the moment the new settlement took place, had forfeited all title to authority.

But would we have a more regular, at least a more philosophical, refutation of this principle of an original contract or popular consent; perhaps, the following observations may suffice.

All *moral* duties may be divided into two kinds. The *first* are those, to which men are impelled by a natural instinct or immediate propensity, which operates on them, independent of all ideas of obligation, and of all views, either to public or private utility. Of this nature are, love of children, gratitude to benefactors, pity to the unfortunate. When we reflect on the advantage, which results to society from such humane instincts, we pay them the just tribute of moral approbation and esteem: But the person, actuated by them, feels their power and influence, antecedent to any such reflection.

The *second* kind of moral duties are such as are not supported by any original instinct of nature, but are performed entirely from a sense of obligation, when we consider the necessities of human society, and the impossibility of supporting it, if these duties were neglected. It is thus *justice* or a regard to the property of others, *fidelity* or the observance of promises, become obligatory, and acquire an authority over mankind. For as it is evident, that every man loves himself better than any other person, he is naturally impelled to extend his acquisitions as much as possible; and nothing can restrain him in this propensity, but reflection and experience, by which he learns the pernicious effects of that licence, and the total dissolution of society which must ensue from it. His original inclination, therefore, or instinct, is here checked and restrained by a subsequent judgment or observation.

The case is precisely the same with the political or civil duty of *allegiance,* as with the natural duties of justice and fidelity. Our primary instincts lead us, either to indulge ourselves in unlimited freedom, or to seek dominion over others: And it is reflection only, which engages us to sacrifice such strong passions to the interests of peace and public order. A small degree of experience and observation suffices to teach us, that society cannot possibly be maintained without the authority of magistrates, and that this authority must soon fall into contempt, where exact obedience is not paid to it. The observation of these general and obvious interests is the source of all allegiance, and of that moral obligation, which we attribute to it.

What necessity, therefore, is there to found the duty of *allegiance* or obedience to magistrates on that of *fidelity* or a regard to promises, and to suppose, that it is the consent of each individual, which subjects him to government; when it appears, that both allegiance and fidelity stand precisely on the same foundation, and are both submitted to by mankind, on account of the apparent interests and necessities of human society? We are bound to obey our sovereign, it is said; because we have given a tacit promise to that purpose. But why are we bound to observe our promise? It must here be asserted, that the commerce and intercourse of mankind, which are of such mighty advantage, can have no security where men pay no regard to their engagements. In like manner, may it be said, that men could not live at all in society, at least in a civilized society, without laws and magistrates and judges, to prevent the encroachments of the strong upon the weak, of the violent upon the just and equitable. The obligation to allegiance being of like force and authority with the obligation to fidelity, we gain nothing by resolving the one into the other. The general interests or necessities of society are sufficient to establish both.

If the reason be asked of that obedience, which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer, *because society could not otherwise subsist:* And this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind. Your answer is, *because we should keep our word.* But besides, that no body, till trained in a philosophical system, can either comprehend or relish this answer: Besides this, I say, you find yourself embarrassed, when it is asked, *why we are bound to keep our word?* Nor can you give any answer, but what would, immediately, without any circuit, have accounted for our obligation to allegiance.

But *to whom is allegiance due? And who is our lawful sovereign?* This question is often the most difficult of any, and liable to infinite discussions. When people are so happy, that they can answer, *Our present sovereign, who inherits, in a direct line, from ancestors, that have governed us for many ages;* this answer admits of no reply; even though historians, in tracing up to the remotest antiquity, the origin of that royal family, may find, as commonly happens, that its first authority was derived from usurpation and violence. It is confessed, that private justice, or the abstinence from the properties of others, is a most cardinal virtue: Yet reason tells us, that there is

no property in durable objects, such as lands or houses, when carefully examined in passing from hand to hand, but must, in some period, have been founded on fraud and injustice. The necessities of human society, neither in private nor public life, will allow of such an accurate enquiry: And there is no virtue or moral duty, but what may, with facility, be refined away, if we indulge a false philosophy, in sifting and scrutinizing it, by every captious rule of logic, in every light or position, in which it may be placed.

The questions with regard to private property have filled infinite volumes of law and philosophy, if in both we add the commentators to the original text; and in the end, we may safely pronounce, that many of the rules, there established, are uncertain, ambiguous, and arbitrary. The like opinion may be formed with regard to the succession and rights of princes and forms of government. Several cases, no doubt, occur, especially in the infancy of any constitution, which admit of no determination from the laws of justice and equity: And our historian RAPIN pretends, that the controversy between EDWARD the THIRD and PHILIP DE VALOIS was of this nature, and could be decided only by an appeal to heaven, that is, by war and violence.

Who shall tell me, whether GERMANICUS or DRUSUS ought to have succeeded to TIBERIUS, had he died, while they were both alive, without naming any of them for his successor? Ought the right of adoption to be received as equivalent to that of blood, in a nation, where it had the same effect in private families, and had already, in two instances, taken place in the public? Ought GERMANICUS to be esteemed the elder son because he was born before DRUSUS; or the younger, because he was adopted after the birth of his brother? Ought the right of the elder to be regarded in a nation, where he had no advantage in the succession of private families? Ought the ROMAN empire at that time to be deemed hereditary, because of two examples; or ought it, even so early, to be regarded as belonging to the stronger or to the present possessor, as being founded on so recent an usurpation?

COMMODUS mounted the throne after a pretty long succession of excellent emperors, who had acquired their title, not by birth, or public election, but by the fictitious rite of adoption. That bloody debauchee being murdered by a conspiracy suddenly formed between his wench and her gallant, who happened at that time to be *Prætorian Præfect*; these immediately deliberated about choosing a master to human kind, to speak in the style of those ages; and they cast their eyes on PERTINAX. Before the tyrant's death was known, the *Præfect* went secretly to that senator, who, on the appearance of the soldiers, imagined that his execution had been ordered by COMMODUS. He was immediately saluted emperor by the officer and his attendants; chearfully proclaimed by the populace; unwillingly submitted to by the guards; formally recognized by the senate; and passively received by the provinces and armies of the empire.

The discontent of the *Prætorian* bands broke out in a sudden sedition, which occasioned the murder of that excellent prince: And the world being now without a master and without government, the guards thought proper to set the empire formally to sale. JULIAN, the purchaser, was proclaimed by the soldiers, recognized by the senate, and submitted to by the people; and must also have been submitted to by the provinces, had not the envy of the legions begotten opposition and resistance. PESCENNIUS NIGER in SYRIA elected himself emperor, gained the tumultuary consent of his army, and was attended with the secret good-will of the senate and people of ROME. ALBINUS in BRITAIN found an equal right to set up his claim; but SEVERUS, who governed PANNONIA, prevailed in the end above both of them. That able politician and warrior, finding his own birth and dignity too much inferior to the imperial crown, professed, at first, an intention only of revenging the death of PERTINAX. He marched as general into ITALY; defeated JULIAN; and without our being able to fix any precise commencement even of the soldiers' consent, he was from necessity acknowledged emperor by the senate and people; and fully established in his violent authority by subduing NIGER and ALBINUS.[3]

Inter hœc Gordianus CÆSAR (says CAPITOLINUS, speaking of another period) *sublatus a militibus,* Imperator *est appellatus, quia non erat alius in præsenti,* It is to be remarked, that GORDIAN was a boy of fourteen years of age.

Frequent instances of a like nature occur in the history of the emperors; in that of ALEXANDER's successors; and of many other countries: Nor can anything be more unhappy than a despotic government of this kind; where the succession is disjoined and irregular, and must be determined, on every vacancy, by force or election. In a free government, the matter is often unavoidable, and is also much less dangerous. The interests of liberty may there frequently lead the people, in their own defence, to alter the succession of the crown. And the constitution, being compounded of parts, may still maintain a sufficient stability, by resting on the aristocratical or democratical members, though the monarchical be altered, from time to time, in order to accommodate it to the former.

In an absolute government, when there is no legal prince, who has a title to the throne, it may safely be determined to belong to the first occupant. Instances of this kind are but too frequent, especially in the eastern monarchies. When any race of princes expires, the will or destination of the last sovereign will be regarded as a title. Thus the edict of LEWIS the XIVth, who called the bastard princes to the succession in case of the failure of all the legitimate princes, would, in such an event, have some authority.[4] Thus the will of CHARLES the Second disposed of the whole SPANISH monarchy. The cession of the ancient proprietor, especially when joined to conquest, is likewise deemed a good title. The general obligation, which binds us to government, is the interest and necessities of society; and this obligation is very strong. The determination of it to this or that particular prince or form of government is frequently more uncertain and dubious. Present possession has considerable authority in these cases, and greater than in private property; because of the disorders which attend all revolutions and changes of government.[16]

We shall only observe, before we conclude, that, though an appeal to general opinion may justly, in the speculative sciences of metaphysics, natural philosophy, or astronomy, be deemed unfair and inconclusive, yet in all questions with regard to morals, as well as criticism, there is really no other standard, by which any controversy can ever be decided. And nothing is a clearer proof, that a theory of this kind is erroneous, than to find, that it leads to paradoxes, repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind, and to the practice and opinion of all nations and all ages. The doctrine, which founds all lawful government on an *original contract,* or consent of the people, is plainly of this kind; nor has the most noted of its partizans, in prosecution of it, scrupled to affirm, *that absolute monarchy is inconsistent with civil society, and so can be no form of civil government at all;*[5] and *that the supreme power in a state cannot take from any man, by taxes and impositions, any part of his property, without his own consent or that of his representatives.*[6] What authority any moral reasoning can have, which leads into opinions so wide of the general practice of mankind, in every place but this single kingdom, it is easy to determine.

The only passage I meet with in antiquity, where the obligation of obedience to government is ascribed to a promise, is in PLATO's *Crito:* where SOCRATES refuses to escape from prison, because he had tacitly promised to obey the laws. Thus he builds a *tory* consequence of passive obedience, on a *whig* foundation of the original contract.

New discoveries are not to be expected in these matters. If scarce any man, till very lately, ever imagined that government was founded on compact, it is certain that it cannot, in general, have any such foundation.

The crime of rebellion among the ancients was commonly expressed by the terms *νεωτερίζειν, novas res moliri.*

Notes

1 Lib. ii. cap. 38.

2 TACIT. Ann. vi. cap. 14.

3 HERODIAN, lib. ii.

4 It is remarkable, that, in the remonstrance of the duke of BOURBON and the legitimate princes, against this destination of LOUIS the XIVth, the doctrine of the *original contract* is insisted on, even in that absolute

government. The French nation, say they, chusing Hugh Capet and his posterity to rule over them and their posterity, where the former line fails, there is a tacit right reserved to choose the royal family; and this right is invaded by calling the bastard princes to the throne, without the consent of the nation. But the Comte de Boulainvilliers, who wrote in defence of the bastard princes, ridicules this notion of an original contract, especially when applied to Hugh Capet; who mounted the throne, says he, by the same arts, which have ever been employed by all conquerors and usurpers. He got his title, indeed, recognized by the states after he had put himself in possession. But is this a choice or a contract? The Comte de Boulainvilliers, we may observe, was a noted republican; but being a man of learning, and very conversant in history, he knew that the people were never almost consulted in these revolutions and new establishments, and that time alone bestowed right and authority on what was commonly at first founded on force and violence. See *Etat de la France*, Vol III.

5 See Locke on Government, chap. vii. § 90

6 Id. chap. xi. § 138, 139, 140.

"Justice as Fairness"[1]

John Rawls

1. It might seem at first sight that the concepts of justice and fairness are the same, and that there is no reason to distinguish them, or to say that one is more fundamental than the other. I think that this impression is mistaken. In this paper I wish to show that the fundamental idea in the concept of justice is fairness; and I wish to offer an analysis of the concept of justice from this point of view. To bring out the force of this claim, and the analysis based upon it, I shall then argue that it is this aspect of justice for which utilitarianism, in its classical form, is unable to account, but which is expressed, even if misleadingly, by the idea of the social contract.

To start with I shall develop a particular conception of justice by stating and commenting upon two principles which specify it, and by considering the circumstances and conditions under which they may be thought to arise. The principles defining this conception, and the conception itself, are, of course, familiar. It may be possible, however, by using the notion of fairness as a framework, to assemble and to look at them in a new way. Before stating this conception, however, the following preliminary matters should be kept in mind.

Throughout I consider justice only as a virtue of social institutions, or what I shall call practices.[2] The principles of justice are regarded as formulating restrictions as to how practices may define positions and offices, and assign thereto powers and liabilities, rights and duties. Justice as a virtue of particular actions or of persons I do not take up at all. It is important to distinguish these various subjects of justice, since the meaning of the concept varies according to whether it is applied to practices, particular actions, or persons. These meanings are, indeed, connected, but they are not identical. I shall confine my discussion to the sense of justice as applied to practices, since this sense is the basic one. Once it is understood, the other senses should go quite easily.

Justice is to be understood in its customary sense as representing but *one* of the many virtues of social institutions, for these may be antiquated, inefficient, degrading, or any number of other things, without being unjust. Justice is not to be confused with an all-inclusive vision of a good society; it is only one part of any such conception. It is important, for example, to distinguish that sense of equality which is an aspect of the concept of justice from that sense of equality which belongs to a more comprehensive social ideal. There may well be inequalities which one concedes are just, or at least not unjust, but which, nevertheless, one wishes, on other grounds, to do away with. I shall focus attention, then, on the usual sense of justice in which it is essentially the elimination of arbitrary distinctions and the establishment, within the structure of a practice, of a proper balance between competing claims.

Finally, there is no need to consider the principles discussed below as *the* principles of justice. For the moment it is sufficient that they are typical of a family of principles normally associated with the concept of justice. The way in which the principles of this family resemble one another,

Rawls, J. (1958) "Justice as Fairness," *Philosophical Review* 67, 164–194. Reprinted with permission.

as shown by the background against which they may be thought to arise, will be made clear by the whole of the subsequent argument.

2. The conception of justice which I want to develop may be stated in the form of two principles as follows: first, each person participating in a practice, or affected by it, has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all; and second, inequalities are arbitrary unless it is reasonable to expect that they will work out for everyone's advantage, and provided the positions and offices to which they attach, or from which they may be gained, are open to all. These principles express justice as a complex of three ideas: liberty, equality, and reward for services contributing to the common good.[3]

The term "person" is to be construed variously depending on the circumstances. On some occasions it will mean human individuals, but in others it may refer to nations, provinces, business firms, churches, teams, and so on. The principles of justice apply in all these instances, although there is a certain logical priority to the case of human individuals. As I shall use the term "person," it will be ambiguous in the manner indicated.

The first principle holds, of course, only if other things are equal: that is, while there must always be a justification for departing from the initial position of equal liberty (which is defined by the pattern of rights and duties, powers and liabilities, established by a practice), and the burden of proof is placed on him who would depart from it, nevertheless, there can be, and often there is, a justification for doing so. Now, that similar particular cases, as defined by a practice, should be treated similarly as they arise, is part of the very concept of a practice; it is involved in the notion of an activity in accordance with rules.[4] The first principle expresses an analogous conception, but as applied to the structure of practices themselves. It holds, for example, that there is a presumption against the distinctions and classifications made by legal systems and other practices to the extent that they infringe on the original and equal liberty of the persons participating in them. The second principle defines how this presumption may be rebutted.

It might be argued at this point that justice requires only an equal liberty. If, however, a greater liberty were possible for all without loss or conflict, then it would be irrational to settle on a lesser liberty. There is no reason for circumscribing rights unless their exercise would be incompatible, or would render the practice defining them less effective. Therefore no serious distortion of the concept of justice is likely to follow from including within it the concept of the greatest equal liberty.

The second principle defines what sorts of inequalities are permissible; it specifies how the presumption laid down by the first principle may be put aside. Now by inequalities it is best to understand not *any* differences between offices and positions, but differences in the benefits and burdens attached to them either directly or indirectly, such as prestige and wealth, or liability to taxation and compulsory services. Players in a game do not protest against there being different positions, such as batter, pitcher, catcher, and the like, nor to there being various privileges and powers as specified by the rules; nor do the citizens of a country object to there being the different offices of government such as president, senator, governor, judge, and so on, each with their special rights and duties. It is not differences of this kind that are normally thought of as inequalities, but differences in the resulting distribution established by a practice, or made possible by it, of the things men strive to attain or avoid. Thus they may complain about the pattern of honors and rewards set up by a practice (e.g., the privileges and salaries of government officials) or they may object to the distribution of power and wealth which results from the various ways in which men avail themselves of the opportunities allowed by it (e.g., the concentration of wealth which may develop in a free price system allowing large entrepreneurial or speculative gains).

It should be noted that the second principle holds that an inequality is allowed only if there is reason to believe that the practice with the inequality, or resulting in it, will work for the advantage of *every* party engaging in it. Here it is important to stress that *every* party must gain from the inequality. Since the principle applies to practices, it implies that the representative man in every office or position defined by a practice, when he views it as a going concern, must find it reasonable to prefer his condition and prospects with the inequality to what they would be under

the practice without it. The principle excludes, therefore, the justification of inequalities on the grounds that the disadvantages of those in one position are outweighed by the greater advantages of those in another position. This rather simple restriction is the main modification I wish to make in the utilitarian principle as usually understood. When coupled with the notion of a practice, it is a restriction of consequence,[5] and one which some utilitarians, e.g., Hume and Mill, have used in their discussions of justice without realizing apparently its significance, or at least without calling attention to it.[6] Why it is a significant modification of principle, changing one's conception of justice entirely, the whole of my argument will show.

Further, it is also necessary that the various offices to which special benefits or burdens attach are open to all. It may be, for example, to the common advantage, as just defined, to attach special benefits to certain offices. Perhaps by doing so the requisite talent can be attracted to them and encouraged to give its best efforts. But any offices having special benefits must be won in a fair competition in which contestants are judged on their merits. If some offices were not open, those excluded would normally be justified in feeling unjustly treated, even if they benefited from the greater efforts of those who were allowed to compete for them. Now if one can assume that offices are open, it is necessary only to consider the design of practices themselves and how they jointly, as a system, work together. It will be a mistake to focus attention on the varying relative positions of particular persons, who may be known to us by their proper names, and to require that each such change, as a once for all transaction viewed in isolation, must be in itself just. It is the system of practices which is to be judged, and judged from a general point of view: unless one is prepared to criticize it from the standpoint of a representative man holding some particular office, one has no complaint against it.

3. Given these principles one might try to derive them from a priori principles of reason, or claim that they were known by intuition. These are familiar enough steps and, at least in the case of the first principle, might be made with some success. Usually, however, such arguments, made at this point, are unconvincing. They are not likely to lead to an understanding of the basis of the principles of justice, not at least as principles of justice. I wish, therefore, to look at the principles in a different way.

Imagine a society of persons amongst whom a certain system of practices is *already* well established. Now suppose that by and large they are mutually self-interested; their allegiance to their established practices is normally founded on the prospect of self-advantage. One need not assume that, in all senses of the term "person," the persons in this society are mutually self-interested. If the characterization as mutually self-interested applies when the line of division is the family, it may still be true that members of families are bound by ties of sentiment and affection and willingly acknowledge duties in contradiction to self-interest. Mutual self-interestedness in the relations between families, nations, churches, and the like, is commonly associated with intense loyalty and devotion on the part of individual members. Therefore, one can form a more realistic conception of this society if one thinks of it as consisting of mutually self-interested families, or some other association. Further, it is not necessary to suppose that these persons are mutually self-interested under all circumstances, but only in the usual situations in which they participate in their common practices.

Now suppose also that these persons are rational: they know their own interests more or less accurately; they are capable of tracing out the likely consequences of adopting one practice rather than another; they are capable of adhering to a course of action once they have decided upon it; they can resist present temptations and the enticements of immediate gain; and the bare knowledge or perception of the difference between their condition and that of others is not, within certain limits and in itself, a source of great dissatisfaction. Only the last point adds anything to the usual definition of rationality. This definition should allow, I think, for the idea that a rational man would not be greatly downcast from knowing, or seeing, that others are in a better position than himself, unless he thought their being so was the result of injustice, or the consequence of letting chance work itself out for no useful common purpose, and so on. So if these persons strike us as unpleasantly egoistic, they are at least free in some degree from the fault of envy.[7]

Finally, assume that these persons have roughly similar needs and interests, or needs and interests in various ways complementary, so that fruitful cooperation amongst them is possible; and suppose that they are sufficiently equal in power and ability to guarantee that in normal circumstances none is able to dominate the others. This condition (as well as the others) may seem excessively vague; but in view of the conception of justice to which the argument leads, there seems no reason for making it more exact here.

Since these persons are conceived as engaging in their common practices, which are already established, there is no question of our supposing them to come together to deliberate as to how they will set these practices up for the first time. Yet we can imagine that from time to time they discuss with one another whether any of them has a legitimate complaint against their established institutions. Such discussions are perfectly natural in any normal society. Now suppose that they have settled on doing this in the following way. They first try to arrive at the principles by which complaints, and so practices themselves, are to be judged. Their procedure for this is to let each person propose the principles upon which he wishes his complaints to be tried with the understanding that, if acknowledged, the complaints of others will be similarly tried, and that no complaints will be heard at all until everyone is roughly of one mind as to how complaints are to be judged. They each understand further that the principles proposed and acknowledged on this occasion are binding on future occasions. Thus each will be wary of proposing a principle which would give him a peculiar advantage, in his present circumstances, supposing it to be accepted. Each person knows that he will be bound by it in future circumstances the peculiarities of which cannot be known, and which might well be such that the principle is then to his disadvantage. The idea is that everyone should be required to make *in advance* a firm commitment, which others also may reasonably be expected to make, and that no one be given the opportunity to tailor the canons of a legitimate complaint to fit his own special condition, and then to discard them when they no longer suit his purpose. Hence each person will propose principles of a general kind which will, to a large degree, gain their sense from the various applications to be made of them, the particular circumstances of which being as yet unknown. These principles will express the conditions in accordance with which each is the least unwilling to have his interests limited in the design of practices, given the competing interests of the others, on the supposition that the interests of others will be limited likewise. The restrictions which would so arise might be thought of as those a person would keep in mind if he were designing a practice in which his enemy were to assign him his place.

The two main parts of this conjectural account have a definite significance. The character and respective situations of the parties reflect the typical circumstances in which questions of justice arise. The procedure whereby principles are proposed and acknowledged represents constraints, analogous to those of having a morality, whereby rational and mutually self-interested persons are brought to act reasonably. Thus the first part reflects the fact that questions of justice arise when conflicting claims are made upon the design of a practice and where it is taken for granted that each person will insist, as far as possible, on what he considers his rights. It is typical of cases of justice to involve persons who are pressing on one another their claims, between which a fair balance or equilibrium must be found. On the other hand, as expressed by the second part, having a morality must at least imply the acknowledgment of principles as impartially applying to one's own conduct as well as to another's, and moreover principles which may constitute a constraint, or limitation, upon the pursuit of one's own interests. There are, of course, other aspects of having a morality: the acknowledgment of moral principles must show itself in accepting a reference to them as reasons for limiting one's claims, in acknowledging the burden of providing a special explanation, or excuse, when one acts contrary to them, or else in showing shame and remorse and a desire to make amends, and so on. It is sufficient to remark here that having a morality is analogous to having made a firm commitment in advance; for one must acknowledge the principles of morality even when to one's disadvantage.[8] A man whose moral judgments always coincided with his interests could be suspected of having no morality at all.

Thus the two parts of the foregoing account are intended to mirror the kinds of circumstances in which questions of justice arise and the constraints which having a morality would impose upon persons so situated. In this way one can see how the acceptance of the principles of justice might come about, for given all these conditions as described, it would be natural if the two principles of justice were to be acknowledged. Since there is no way for anyone to win special advantages for himself, each might consider it reasonable to acknowledge equality as an initial principle. There is, however, no reason why they should regard this position as final; for if there are inequalities which satisfy the second principle, the immediate gain which equality would allow can be considered as intelligently invested in view of its future return. If, as is quite likely, these inequalities work as incentives to draw out better efforts, the members of this society may look upon them as concessions to human nature: they, like us, may think that people ideally should want to serve one another. But as they are mutually self-interested, their acceptance of these inequalities is merely the acceptance of the relations in which they actually stand, and a recognition of the motives which lead them to engage in their common practices. *They* have no title to complain of one another. And so provided that the conditions of the principle are met, there is no reason why they should not allow such inequalities. Indeed, it would be short-sighted of them to do so, and could result, in most cases, only from their being dejected by the bare knowledge, or perception, that others are better situated. Each person will, however, insist on an advantage to himself, and so on a common advantage, for none is willing to sacrifice anything for the others.

These remarks are not offered as a proof that persons so conceived and circumstanced would settle on the two principles, but only to show that these principles could have such a background, and so can be viewed as those principles which mutually self-interested and rational persons, when similarly situated and required to make in advance a firm commitment, could acknowledge as restrictions governing the assignment of rights and duties in their common practices, and thereby accept as limiting their rights against one another. The principles of justice may, then, be regarded as those principles which arise when the constraints of having a morality are imposed upon parties in the typical circumstances of justice.

4. These ideas are, of course, connected with a familiar way of thinking about justice which goes back at least to the Greek Sophists, and which regards the acceptance of the principles of justice as a compromise between persons of roughly equal power who would enforce their will on each other if they could, but who, in view of the equality of forces amongst them and for the sake of their own peace and security, acknowledge certain forms of conduct insofar as prudence seems to require. Justice is thought of as a pact between rational egoists the stability of which is dependent on a balance of power and a similarity of circumstances.[9] While the previous account is connected with this tradition, and with its most recent variant, the theory of games,[10] it differs from it in several important respects which, to forestall misinterpretations, I will set out here.

First, I wish to use the previous conjectural account of the background of justice as a way of analyzing the concept. I do not want, therefore, to be interpreted as assuming a general theory of human motivation: when I suppose that the parties are mutually self-interested, and are not willing to have their (substantial) interests sacrificed to others, I am referring to their conduct and motives as they are taken for granted in cases where questions of justice ordinarily arise. Justice is the virtue of practices where there are assumed to be competing interests and conflicting claims, and where it is supposed that persons will press their rights on each other. That persons are mutually self-interested in certain situations and for certain purposes is what gives rise to the question of justice in practices covering those circumstances. Amongst an association of saints, if such a community could really exist, the disputes about justice could hardly occur; for they would all work selflessly together for one end, the glory of God as defined by their common religion, and reference to this end would settle every question of right. The justice of practices does not come up until there are several different parties (whether we think of these as individuals, associations, or nations and so on, is irrelevant) who do press their claims on one another, and who do regard themselves as representatives of interests which deserve to be considered. Thus the previous account involves

no general theory of human motivation. Its intent is simply to incorporate into the conception of justice the relations of men to one another which set the stage for questions of justice. It makes no difference how wide or general these relations are, as this matter does not bear on the analysis of the concept.

Again, in contrast to the various conceptions of the social contract, the several parties do not establish any particular society or practice; they do not covenant to obey a particular sovereign body or to accept a given constitution.[11] Nor do they, as in the theory of games (in certain respects a marvelously sophisticated development of this tradition), decide on individual strategies adjusted to their respective circumstances in the game. What the parties do is to *jointly* acknowledge certain *principles* of appraisal relating to their common *practices* either as already established or merely proposed. They accede to standards of judgment, not to a given practice; they do not make any specific agreement, or bargain, or adopt a particular strategy. The subject of their acknowledgment is, therefore, very general indeed; it is simply the acknowledgment of certain principles of judgment, fulfilling certain general conditions, to be used in criticizing the arrangement of their common affairs. The relations of mutual self-interest between the parties who are similarly circumstanced mirror the conditions under which questions of justice arise, and the procedure by which the principles of judgment are proposed and acknowledged reflects the constraints of having a morality. Each aspect, then, of the preceding hypothetical account serves the purpose of bringing out a feature of the notion of justice. One could, if one liked, view the principles of justice as the "solution" of this highest order "game" of adopting, subject to the procedure described, principles of argument for all coming particular "games" whose peculiarities one can in no way foresee. But this comparison, while no doubt helpful, must not obscure the fact that this highest order "game" is of a special sort.[12] Its significance is that its various pieces represent aspects of the concept of justice.

Finally, I do not, of course, conceive the several parties as necessarily coming together to establish their common practices for the first time. Some institutions may, indeed, be set up *de novo;* but I have framed the preceding account so that it will apply when the full complement of social institutions already exists and represents the result of a long period of development. Nor is the account in any way fictitious. In any society where people reflect on their institutions they will have an idea of what principles of justice would be acknowledged under the conditions described, and there will be occasions when questions of justice are actually discussed in this way. Therefore if their practices do not accord with these principles, this will affect the quality of their social relations. For in this case there will be some recognized situations wherein the parties are mutually aware that one of them is being forced to accept what the other would concede is unjust. The foregoing analysis may then be thought of as representing the actual quality of relations between persons as defined by practices accepted as just. In such practices the parties will acknowledge the principles on which it is constructed, and the general recognition of this fact shows itself in the absence of resentment and in the sense of being justly treated. Thus one common objection to the theory of the social contract, its apparently historical and fictitious character, is avoided.

5. That the principles of justice may be regarded as arising in the manner described illustrates an important fact about them. Not only does it bring out the idea that justice is a primitive moral notion in that it arises once the concept of morality is imposed on mutually self-interested agents similarly circumstanced, but it emphasizes that, fundamental to justice, is the concept of fairness which relates to right dealing between persons who are cooperating with or competing against one another, as when one speaks of fair games, fair competition, and fair bargains. The question of fairness arises when free persons, who have no authority over one another, are engaging in a joint activity and amongst themselves settling or acknowledging the rules which define it and which determine the respective shares in its benefits and burdens. A practice will strike the parties as fair if none feels that, by participating in it, they or any of the others are taken advantage of, or forced to give in to claims which they do not regard as legitimate. This implies that each has a conception of legitimate claims which he thinks it reasonable for others as well as himself to acknowledge. If

one thinks of the principles of justice as arising in the manner described, then they do define this sort of conception. A practice is just or fair, then, when it satisfies the principles which those who participate in it could propose to one another for mutual acceptance under the afore-mentioned circumstances. Persons engaged in a just, or fair, practice can face one another openly and support their respective positions, should they appear questionable, by reference to principles which it is reasonable to expect each to accept.

It is this notion of the possibility of mutual acknowledgment of principles by free persons who have no authority over one another which makes the concept of fairness fundamental to justice. Only if such acknowledgment is possible can there be true community between persons in their common practices; otherwise their relations will appear to them as founded to some extent on force. If, in ordinary speech, fairness applies more particularly to practices in which there is a choice whether to engage or not (e.g., in games, business competition), and justice to practices in which there is no choice (e.g., in slavery), the element of necessity does not render the conception of mutual acknowledgment inapplicable, although it may make it much more urgent to change unjust than unfair institutions. For one activity in which one can always engage is that of proposing and acknowledging principles to one another supposing each to be similarly circumstanced; and to judge practices by the principles so arrived at is to apply the standard of fairness to them.

Now if the participants in a practice accept its rules as fair, and so have no complaint to lodge against it, there arises a prima facie duty (and a corresponding prima facie right) of the parties to each other to act in accordance with the practice when it falls upon them to comply. When any number of persons engage in a practice, or conduct a joint undertaking according to rules, and thus restrict their liberty, those who have submitted to these restrictions when required have the right to a similar acquiescence on the part of those who have benefited by their submission. These conditions will obtain if a practice is correctly acknowledged to be fair, for in this case all who participate in it will benefit from it. The rights and duties so arising are special rights and duties in that they depend on previous actions voluntarily undertaken, in this case on the parties having engaged in a common practice and knowingly accepted its benefits.[13] It is not, however, an obligation which presupposes a deliberate performative act in the sense of a promise, or contract, and the like.[14] An unfortunate mistake of proponents of the idea of the social contract was to suppose that political obligation does require some such act, or at least to use language which suggests it. It is sufficient that one has knowingly participated in and accepted the benefits of a practice acknowledged to be fair. This prima facie obligation may, of course, be overridden: it may happen, when it comes one's turn to follow a rule, that other considerations will justify not doing so. But one cannot, in general, be released from this obligation by denying the justice of the practice only when it falls on one to obey. If a person rejects a practice, he should, so far as possible, declare his intention in advance, and avoid participating in it or enjoying its benefits.

This duty I have called that of fair play, but it should be admitted that to refer to it in this way is, perhaps, to extend the ordinary notion of fairness. Usually acting unfairly is not so much the breaking of any particular rule, even if the infraction is difficult to detect (cheating), but taking advantage of loop-holes or ambiguities in rules, availing oneself of unexpected or special circumstances which make it impossible to enforce them, insisting that rules be enforced to one's advantage when they should be suspended, and more generally, acting contrary to the intention of a practice. It is for this reason that one speaks of the sense of fair play: acting fairly requires more than simply being able to follow rules; what is fair must often be felt, or perceived, one wants to say. It is not, however, an unnatural extension of the duty of fair play to have it include the obligation which participants who have knowingly accepted the benefits of their common practice owe to each other to act in accordance with it when their performance falls due; for it is usually considered unfair if someone accepts the benefits of a practice but refuses to do his part in maintaining it. Thus one might say of the tax-dodger that he violates the duty of fair play: he accepts the benefits of government but will not do his part in releasing resources to it; and members of labor unions often say that fellow workers who refuse to join are being unfair: they refer to them

as "free riders," as persons who enjoy what are the supposed benefits of unionism, higher wages, shorter hours, job security, and the like, but who refuse to share in its burdens in the form of paying dues, and so on.

The duty of fair play stands beside other prima facie duties such as fidelity and gratitude as a basic moral notion; yet it is not to be confused with them.[15] These duties are all clearly distinct, as would be obvious from their definitions. As with any moral duty, that of fair play implies a constraint on self-interest in particular cases; on occasion it enjoins conduct which a rational egoist strictly defined would not decide upon. So while justice does not require of anyone that he sacrifice his interests in that *general position* and procedure whereby the principles of justice are proposed and acknowledged, it may happen that in particular situations, arising in the context of engaging in a practice, the duty of fair play will often cross his interests in the sense that he will be required to forego particular advantages which the peculiarities of his circumstances might permit him to take. There is, of course, nothing surprising in this. It is simply the consequence of the firm commitment which the parties may be supposed to have made, or which they would make, in the general position, together with the fact that they have participated in and accepted the benefits of a practice which they regard as fair.

Now the acknowledgment of this constraint in particular cases, which is manifested in acting fairly or wishing to make amends, feeling ashamed, and the like, when one has evaded it, is one of the forms of conduct by which participants in a common practice exhibit their recognition of each other as persons with similar interests and capacities. In the same way that, failing a special explanation, the criterion for the recognition of suffering is helping one who suffers, acknowledging the duty of fair play is a necessary part of the criterion for recognizing another as a person with similar interests and feelings as oneself.[16] A person who never under any circumstances showed a wish to help others in pain would show, at the same time, that he did not recognize that they were in pain; nor could he have any feelings of affection or friendship for anyone; for having these feelings implies, failing special circumstances, that he comes to their aid when they are suffering. Recognition that another is a person in pain shows itself in sympathetic action; this primitive natural response of compassion is one of those responses upon which the various forms of moral conduct are built.

Similarly, the acceptance of the duty of fair play by participants in a common practice is a reflection in each person of the recognition of the aspirations and interests of the others to be realized by their joint activity. Failing a special explanation, their acceptance of it is a necessary part of the criterion for their recognizing one another as persons with similar interests and capacities, as the conception of their relations in the general position supposes them to be. Otherwise they would show no recognition of one another as persons with similar capacities and interests, and indeed, in some cases perhaps hypothetical, they would not recognize one another as persons at all, but as complicated objects involved in a complicated activity. To recognize another as a person one must respond to him and act towards him in certain ways; and these ways are intimately connected with the various prima facie duties. Acknowledging these duties in *some* degree, and so having the elements of morality, is not a matter of choice, or of intuiting moral qualities, or a matter of the expression of feelings or attitudes (the three interpretations between which philosophical opinion frequently oscillates); it is simply the possession of one of the forms of conduct in which the recognition of others as persons is manifested.

These remarks are unhappily obscure. Their main purpose here, however, is to forestall, together with the remarks in Section 4, the misinterpretation that, on the view presented, the acceptance of justice and the acknowledgment of the duty of fair play depends in every day life solely on there being a *de facto* balance of forces between the parties. It would indeed be foolish to underestimate the importance of such a balance in securing justice; but it is not the only basis thereof. The recognition of one another as persons with similar interests and capacities engaged in a common practice must, failing a special explanation, show itself in the acceptance of the principles of justice and the acknowledgment of the duty of fair play.

The conception at which we have arrived, then, is that the principles of justice may be thought of as arising once the constraints of having a morality are imposed upon rational and mutually self-interested parties who are related and situated in a special way. A practice is just if it is in accordance with the principles which all who participate in it might reasonably be expected to propose or to acknowledge before one another when they are similarly circumstanced and required to make a firm commitment in advance without knowledge of what will be their peculiar condition, and thus when it meets standards which the parties could accept as fair should occasion arise for them to debate its merits. Regarding the participants themselves, once persons knowingly engage in a practice which they acknowledge to be fair and accept the benefits of doing so, they are bound by the duty of fair play to follow the rules when it comes their turn to do so, and this implies a limitation on their pursuit of self-interest in particular cases.

Now one consequence of this conception is that, where it applies, there is no moral value in the satisfaction of a claim incompatible with it. Such a claim violates the conditions of reciprocity and community amongst persons, and he who presses it, not being willing to acknowledge it when pressed by another, has no grounds for complaint when it is denied; whereas he against whom it is pressed can complain. As it cannot be mutually acknowledged it is a resort to coercion; granting the claim is possible only if one party can compel acceptance of what the other will not admit. But it makes no sense to concede claims the denial of which cannot be complained of in preference to claims the denial of which can be objected to. Thus in deciding on the justice of a practice it is not enough to ascertain that it answers to wants and interests in the fullest and most effective manner. For if any of these conflict with justice, they should not be counted, as their satisfaction is no reason at all for having a practice. It would be irrelevant to say, even if true, that it resulted in the greatest satisfaction of desire. In tallying up the merits of a practice one must toss out the satisfaction of interests the claims of which are incompatible with the principles of justice.

6. The discussion so far has been excessively abstract. While this is perhaps unavoidable, I should now like to bring out some of the features of the conception of justice as fairness by comparing it with the conception of justice in classical utilitarianism as represented by Bentham and Sidgwick, and its counterpart in welfare economics. This conception assimilates justice to benevolence and the latter in turn to the most efficient design of institutions to promote the general welfare. Justice is a kind of efficiency.[17]

Now it is said occasionally that this form of utilitarianism puts no restrictions on what might be a just assignment of rights and duties in that there might be circumstances which, on utilitarian grounds, would justify institutions highly offensive to our ordinary sense of justice. But the classical utilitarian conception is not totally unprepared for this objection. Beginning with the notion that the general happiness can be represented by a social utility function consisting of a sum of individual utility functions with identical weights (this being the meaning of the maxim that each counts for one and no more than one),[18] it is commonly assumed that the utility functions of individuals are similar in all essential respects. Differences between individuals are ascribed to accidents of education and upbringing, and they should not be taken into account. This assumption, coupled with that of diminishing marginal utility, results in a prima facie case for equality, e.g., of equality in the distribution of income during any given period of time, laying aside indirect effects on the future. But even if utilitarianism is interpreted as having such restrictions built into the utility function, and even if it is supposed that these restrictions have in practice much the same result as the application of the principles of justice (and appear, perhaps, to be ways of expressing these principles in the language of mathematics and psychology), the fundamental idea is very different from the conception of justice as fairness. For one thing, that the principles of justice should be accepted is interpreted as the contingent result of a higher order administrative decision. The form of this decision is regarded as being similar to that of an entrepreneur deciding how much to produce of this or that commodity in view of its marginal revenue, or to that of someone distributing goods to needy persons according to the relative urgency of their wants. The choice between practices is thought of as being made on the basis of the allocation of benefits and

burdens to individuals (these being measured by the present capitalized value of their utility over the full period of the practice's existence), which results from the distribution of rights and duties established by a practice.

Moreover, the individuals receiving these benefits are not conceived as being related in any way: they represent so many different directions in which limited resources may be allocated. The value of assigning resources to one direction rather than another depends solely on the preferences and interests of individuals as individuals. The satisfaction of desire has its value irrespective of the moral relations between persons, say as members of a joint undertaking, and of the claims which, in the name of these interests, they are prepared to make on one another;[19] and it is this value which is to be taken into account by the (ideal) legislator who is conceived as adjusting the rules of the system from the center so as to maximize the value of the social utility function.

It is thought that the principles of justice will not be violated by a legal system so conceived provided these executive decisions are correctly made. In this fact the principles of justice are said to have their derivation and explanation; they simply express the most important general features of social institutions in which the administrative problem is solved in the best way. These principles have, indeed, a special urgency because, given the facts of human nature, so much depends on them; and this explains the peculiar quality of the moral feelings associated with justice.[20] This assimilation of justice to a higher order executive decision, certainly a striking conception, is central to classical utilitarianism; and it also brings out its profound individualism, in one sense of this ambiguous word. It regards persons as so many *separate* directions in which benefits and burdens may be assigned; and the value of the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of desire is not thought to depend in any way on the moral relations in which individuals stand, or on the kinds of claims which they are willing, in the pursuit of their interests, to press on each other.

7. Many social decisions are, of course, of an administrative nature. Certainly this is so when it is a matter of social utility in what one may call its ordinary sense: that is, when it is a question of the efficient design of social institutions for the use of common means to achieve common ends. In this case either the benefits and burdens may be assumed to be impartially distributed, or the question of distribution is misplaced, as in the instance of maintaining public order and security or national defense. But as an interpretation of the basis of the principles of justice, classical utilitarianism is mistaken. It *permits* one to argue, for example, that slavery is unjust on the grounds that the advantages to the slaveholder as slaveholder do not counterbalance the disadvantages to the slave and to society at large burdened by a comparatively inefficient system of labor. Now the conception of justice as fairness, when applied to the practice of slavery with its offices of slaveholder and slave, would not allow one to consider the advantages of the slaveholder in the first place. As that office is not in accordance with principles which could be mutually acknowledged, the gains accruing to the slaveholder, assuming them to exist, cannot be counted as in *any* way mitigating the injustice of the practice. The question whether these gains outweigh the disadvantages to the slave and to society cannot arise, since in considering the justice of slavery these gains have no weight at all which requires that they be overridden. Where the conception of justice as fairness applies, slavery is *always* unjust.

I am not, of course, suggesting the absurdity that the classical utilitarians approved of slavery. I am only rejecting a type of argument which their view allows them to use in support of their disapproval of it. The conception of justice as derivative from efficiency implies that judging the justice of a practice is always, in principle at least, a matter of weighing up advantages and disadvantages, each having an intrinsic value or disvalue as the satisfaction of interests, irrespective of whether or not these interests necessarily involve acquiescence in principles which could not be mutually acknowledged. Utilitarianism cannot account for the fact that slavery is always unjust, nor for the fact that it would be recognized as irrelevant in defeating the accusation of injustice for one person to say to another, engaged with him in a common practice and debating its merits, that nevertheless it allowed of the greatest satisfaction of desire. The charge of injustice cannot be rebutted in this way. If justice were derivative from a higher order executive efficiency, this would not be so.

But now, even if it is taken as established that, so far as the ordinary conception of justice goes, slavery is always unjust (that is, slavery by definition violates commonly recognized principles of justice), the classical utilitarian would surely reply that these principles, as other moral principles subordinate to that of utility, are only generally correct. It is simply for the most part true that slavery is less efficient than other institutions; and while common sense may define the concept of justice so that slavery is unjust, nevertheless, where slavery would lead to the greatest satisfaction of desire, it is not wrong. Indeed, it is then right, and for the very same reason that justice, as ordinarily understood, is usually right. If, as ordinarily understood, slavery is always unjust, to this extent the utilitarian conception of justice might be admitted to differ from that of common moral opinion. Still the utilitarian would want to hold that, as a matter of moral principle, his view is correct in giving no special weight to considerations of justice beyond that allowed for by the general presumption of effectiveness. And this, he claims, is as it should be. The every day opinion is morally in error, although, indeed, it is a useful error, since it protects rules of generally high utility.

The question, then, relates not simply to the analysis of the concept of justice as common sense defines it, but the analysis of it in the wider sense as to how much weight considerations of justice, as defined, are to have when laid against other kinds of moral considerations. Here again I wish to argue that reasons of justice have a *special* weight for which only the conception of justice as fairness can account. Moreover, it belongs to the concept of justice that they do have this special weight. While Mill recognized that this was so, he thought that it could be accounted for by the special urgency of the moral feelings which naturally support principles of such high utility. But it is a mistake to resort to the urgency of feeling; as with the appeal to intuition, it manifests a failure to pursue the question far enough. The special weight of considerations of justice can be explained from the conception of justice as fairness. It is only necessary to elaborate a bit what has already been said as follows.

If one examines the circumstances in which a certain tolerance of slavery is justified, or perhaps better, excused, it turns out that these are of a rather special sort. Perhaps slavery exists as an inheritance from the past and it proves necessary to dismantle it piece by piece; at times slavery may conceivably be an advance on previous institutions. Now while there may be some excuse for slavery in special conditions, it is never an excuse for it that it is sufficiently advantageous to the slaveholder to outweigh the disadvantages to the slave and to society. A person who argues in this way is not perhaps making a wildly irrelevant remark; but he is guilty of a moral fallacy. There is disorder in his conception of the ranking of moral principles. For the slaveholder, by his own admission, has no moral title to the advantages which he receives as a slaveholder. He is no more prepared than the slave to acknowledge the principle upon which is founded the respective positions in which they both stand. Since slavery does not accord with principles which they could mutually acknowledge, they each may be supposed to agree that it is unjust: it grants claims which it ought not to grant and in doing so denies claims which it ought not to deny. Amongst persons in a general position who are debating the form of their common practices, it cannot, therefore, be offered as a reason for a practice that, in conceding these very claims that ought to be denied, it nevertheless meets existing interests more effectively. By their very nature the satisfaction of these claims is without weight and cannot enter into any tabulation of advantages and disadvantages.

Furthermore, it follows from the concept of morality that, to the extent that the slaveholder recognizes his position vis-a-vis the slave to be unjust, he would not choose to press his claims. His not wanting to receive his special advantages is one of the ways in which he shows that he thinks slavery is unjust. It would be fallacious for the legislator to suppose, then, that it is a ground for having a practice that it brings advantages greater than disadvantages, if those for whom the practice is designed, and to whom the advantages flow, acknowledge that they have no moral title to them and do not wish to receive them.

For these reasons the principles of justice have a special weight; and with respect to the principle of the greatest satisfaction of desire, as cited in the general position amongst those discussing the merits of their common practices, the principles of justice have an absolute weight. In this sense

they are not contingent; and this is why their force is greater than can be accounted for by the general presumption (assuming that there is one) of the effectiveness, in the utilitarian sense, of practices which in fact satisfy them.

If one wants to continue using the concepts of classical utilitarianism, one will have to say, to meet this criticism, that at least the individual or social utility functions must be so defined that no value is given to the satisfaction of interests the representative claims of which violate the principles of justice. In this way it is no doubt possible to include these principles within the form of the utilitarian conception; but to do so is, of course, to change its inspiration altogether as a moral conception. For it is to incorporate within it principles which cannot be understood on the basis of a higher order executive decision aiming at the greatest satisfaction of desire.

It is worth remarking, perhaps, that this criticism of utilitarianism does not depend on whether or not the two assumptions, that of individuals having similar utility functions and that of diminishing marginal utility, are interpreted as psychological propositions to be supported or refuted by experience, or as moral and political principles expressed in a somewhat technical language. There are, certainly, several advantages in taking them in the latter fashion.[21] For one thing, one might say that this is what Bentham and others really meant by them, as least as shown by how they were used in arguments for social reform. More importantly, one could hold that the best way to defend the classical utilitarian view is to interpret these assumptions as moral and political principles. It is doubtful whether, taken as psychological propositions, they are true of men in general as we know them under normal conditions. On the other hand, utilitarians would not have wanted to propose them merely as practical working principles of legislation, or as expedient maxims to guide reform, given the egalitarian sentiments of modern society.[22]

When pressed they might well have invoked the idea of a more or less equal capacity of men in relevant respects if given an equal chance in a just society. But if the argument above regarding slavery is correct, then granting these assumptions as moral and political principles makes no difference. To view individuals as equally fruitful lines for the allocation of benefits, even as a matter of moral principle, still leaves the mistaken notion that the satisfaction of desire has value in itself irrespective of the relations between persons as members of a common practice, and irrespective of the claims upon one another which the satisfaction of interests represents. To see the error of this idea one must give up the conception of justice as an executive decision altogether and refer to the notion of justice as fairness: that participants in a common practice be regarded as having an original and equal liberty and that their common practices be considered unjust unless they accord with principles which persons so circumstanced and related could freely acknowledge before one another, and so could accept as fair. Once the emphasis is put upon the concept of the mutual recognition of principles by participants in a common practice the rules of which are to define their several relations and give form to their claims on one another, then it is clear that the granting of a claim the principle of which could not be acknowledged by each in the general position (that is, in the position in which the parties propose and acknowledge principles before one another) is not a reason for adopting a practice. Viewed in this way, the background of the claim is seen to exclude it from consideration; that it can represent a value in itself arises from the conception of individuals as separate lines for the assignment of benefits, as isolated persons who stand as claimants on an administrative or benevolent largesse. Occasionally persons do so stand to one another; but this is not the general case, nor, more importantly, is it the case when it is a matter of the justice of practices themselves in which participants stand in various relations to be appraised in accordance with standards which they may be expected to acknowledge before one another. Thus however mistaken the notion of the social contract may be as history, and however far it may overreach itself as a general theory of social and political obligation, it does express, suitably interpreted, an essential part of the concept of justice.[23]

8. By way of conclusion I should like to make two remarks: first, the original modification of the utilitarian principle (that it require of practices that the offices and positions defined by them be equal unless it is reasonable to suppose that the representative man in *every* office would find

the inequality to his advantage), slight as it may appear at first sight, actually has a different conception of justice standing behind it. I have tried to show how this is so by developing the concept of justice as fairness and by indicating how this notion involves the mutual acceptance, from a general position, of the principles on which a practice is founded, and how this in turn requires the exclusion from consideration of claims violating the principles of justice. Thus the slight alteration of principle reveals another family of notions, another way of looking at the concept of justice.

Second, I should like to remark also that I have been dealing with the *concept* of justice. I have tried to set out the kinds of principles upon which judgments concerning the justice of practices may be said to stand. The analysis will be successful to the degree that it expresses the principles involved in these judgments when made by competent persons upon deliberation and reflection.[24] Now every people may be supposed to have the concept of justice, since in the life of every society there must be at least some relations in which the parties consider themselves to be circumstanced and related as the concept of justice as fairness requires. Societies will differ from one another not in having or in failing to have this notion but in the range of cases to which they apply it and in the emphasis which they give to it as compared with other moral concepts.

A firm grasp of the concept of justice itself is necessary if these variations, and the reasons for them, are to be understood. No study of the development of moral ideas and of the differences between them is more sound than the analysis of the fundamental moral concepts upon which it must depend. I have tried, therefore, to give an analysis of the concept of justice which should apply generally, however large a part the concept may have in a given morality, and which can be used in explaining the course of men's thoughts about justice and its relations to other moral concepts. How it is to be used for this purpose is a large topic which I cannot, of course, take up here. I mention it only to emphasize that I have been dealing with the concept of justice itself and to indicate what use I consider such an analysis to have.

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Notes

1 An abbreviated version of this paper (less than one-half the length) was presented in a symposium with the same title at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, December 28, 1957, and appeared in the *Journal of Philosophy,* LIV, 653–662.

2 I use the word "practice" throughout as a sort of technical term meaning any form of activity specified by a system of rules which defines offices, roles, moves, penalties, defenses, and so on, and which gives the activity its structure. As examples one may think of games and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property. I have attempted a partial analysis of the notion of a practice in a paper "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Review,* LXIV (1955), 3–32.

3 These principles are, of course, well-known in one form or another and appear in many analyses of justice even where the writers differ widely on other matters. Thus if the principle of equal liberty is commonly associated with Kant (see *The Philosophy of Law,* tr. by W. Hastie, Edinburgh, 1887, pp. 56 f.), it may be claimed that it can also be found in J. S. Mill's *On Liberty* and elsewhere, and in many other liberal writers. Recently H. L. A. Hart has argued for something like it in his paper "Are There Any Natural Rights?," P*hilosophical Review,* LXIV (1955), 175–191. The injustice of inequalities which are not won in return for a contribution to the common advantage is, of course, widespread in political writings of all sorts. The conception of justice here discussed is distinctive, if at all, only in selecting these two principles in this form; but for another similar analysis, see the discussion by W. D. Lamont, *The Principles of Moral Judgment* (Oxford, 1946), ch. v.

4 This point was made by Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics,* 6th ed. (London, 1901), Bk. III, ch. v, sec. 1. It has recently been emphasized by Sir Isaiah Berlin in a symposium, "Equality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* n.s. LVI (1955–56), 305 f.

5 In the paper referred to above, footnote 2, I have tried to show the importance of taking practices as the proper subject of the utilitarian principle. The criticisms of so-called "restricted utilitarianism" by J. J. C.

Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism," *Philosophical Quarterly,* VI (1956), 344–354, and by H. J. McCloskey, "An Examination of Restricted Utilitarianism," *Philosophical Review* LXVI (1957), 466–485, do not affect my argument. These papers are concerned with the very general proposition, which is attributed (with what justice I shall not consider) to S. E. Toulmin and P. H. Nowell-Smith (and in the case of the latter paper, also, apparently, to me); namely, the proposition that particular moral actions arc justified by appealing to moral rules, and moral rules in turn by reference to utility. But clearly I meant to defend no such view. My discussion of the concept of rules as maxims is an explicit rejection of it. What I did argue was that, in the *logically special* case of practices (although actually quite a common case) where the rules have special features and are not moral rules at all but legal rules or rules of games and the like (except, perhaps, in the case of promises), there is a peculiar force to the distinction between justifying particular actions and justifying the system of rules themselves. Even then I claimed only that restricting the utilitarian principle to practices as defined strengthened it. I did not argue for the position that this amendment alone is sufficient for a complete defense of utilitarianism as a general theory of morals. In this paper I take up the question as to how the utilitarian principle itself must be modified, but here, too, the subject of inquiry is not all of morality at once, but a limited topic, the concept of justice.

6 It might seem as if J. S. Mill, in paragraph 36 of Chapter v of *Utilitarianism,* expressed the utilitarian principle in this modified form, but in the remaining two paragraphs of the chapter, and elsewhere, he would appear not to grasp the significance of the change. Hume often emphasizes that *every* man must benefit. For example, in discussing the utility of general rules, he holds that they are requisite to the "well-being of every individual"; from a stable system of property "every individual person must find himself a gainer in balancing the account . . ." "Every member of society is sensible of this interest; everyone expresses this sense to his fellows along with the resolution he has taken of squaring his actions by it, on the conditions that others will do the same." *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Bk. III, Pt. II. Section II, paragraph 22.

7 It is not possible to discuss here this addition to the usual conception of rationality. If it seems peculiar, it may be worth remarking that it is analogous to the modification of the utilitarian principle which the argument as a whole is designed to explain and justify. In the same way that the satisfaction of interests, the representative claims of which violate the principles of justice, is not a reason for having a practice (see sec. 7), unfounded envy, within limits, need not to be taken into account.

8 The idea that accepting a principle as a moral principle implies that one generally acts on it, failing a special explanation, has been stressed by R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford, I952). His formulation of it needs to be modified, however, along the lines suggested by P. L. Gardiner, "On Assenting to a Moral Principle," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* n.s. LV (1995), 23–44. See also C. K. Grant, "Akrasia and the Criteria of Assent to Practical Principles," *Mind,* LXV (1956), 400–407, where the complexity of the criteria for assent is discussed.

9 Perhaps the best known statement of this conception is that given by Glaucon at the beginning of Book II of Plato's *Republic.* Presumably it was, in various forms, a common view among the Sophists; but that Plato gives a fair representation of it is doubtful. See K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies,* rev. ed. (Princeton, 1950), pp. 112–118. Certainly Plato usually attributes to it a quality of manic egoism which one feels must be an exaggeration; on the other hand, see the Melian Debate in Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* Book V, ch. vii, although it is impossible to say to what extent the views expressed there reveal any current philosophical opinion. Also in this tradition are the remarks of Epicurus on justice in *Principal Doctrines,* XXXI–XXXVIII. In modern times elements of the conception appear in a more sophisticated form in Hobbes *The Leviathan* and in Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Book III, Pt. II, as well as in the writings of the school of natural law such as Pufendorf's *De jure naturae et gentium.* Hobbes and Hume are especially instructive. For Hobbes's argument see Howard Warrender's *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford, 1957). W. J. Baumol's *Welfare Economics and the Theory of the State* (London, 1952), is valuable in showing the wide applicability of Hobbes's fundamental idea (interpreting his natural law as principles of prudence), although in this book it is traced back only to Hume's *Treatise.*

10 See J. von Neumann and O. Morgenstern, *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior,* 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1947). For a comprehensive and not too technical discussion of the developments since, see R. Duncan Luce and Howard Raiffa, *Games and Decisions: Introduction and Critical Survey* (New York, 1957). Chs. vi and xiv discuss the developments most obviously related to the analysis of justice.

11 For a general survey see J. W. Gough, *The Social Contract,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957), and Otto von Gierke, *The Development of Political Theory,* tr. by B. Freyd (London, 1939), Pt. II, ch. II.

12 The difficulty one gets into by a mechanical application of the theory of games to moral philosophy can be brought out by considering among several possible examples, R. B. Braithwaite's study, *Theory of Games as a Tool for the Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1955). On the analysis there given, it turns out that the fair division of playing time between Matthew and Luke depends on their preferences, and these in turn are connected with the instruments they wish to play. Since Matthew has a threat advantage over Luke, arising purely from the fact that Matthew, the trumpeter, prefers both of them playing at once to neither of them playing, whereas Luke, the pianist, prefers silence to cacophony, Matthew is alloted 26 evenings of play to Luke's 17. If the situation were reversed, the threat advantage would be with Luke. See pp. 36 f. But now we have only to suppose that Matthew is a jazz enthusiast who plays the drums, and Luke a violinist who plays sonatas, in which case it will be fair, on this analysis, for Matthew to play whenever and as often as he likes, assuming, of course, as it is plausible to assume, that he does not care whether Luke plays or not. Certainly something has gone wrong. To each according to his threat advantage is hardly the principle of fairness. What is lacking is the concept of morality, and it must be brought into the conjectural account in some way or other. In the text this is done by the form of the procedure whereby principles are proposed and acknowledged (Section 3). If one starts directly with the particular case as known, and if one accepts as given and definitive the preferences and relative positions of the parties, whatever they are, it is impossible to give an analysis of the moral concept of fairness. Braithwaite's use of the theory of games, insofar as it is intended to analyze the concept of fairness, is, I think, mistaken. This is not, of course, to criticize in any way the theory of games as a mathematical theory, to which Braithwaite's book certainly contributes, nor as an analysis of how rational (and amoral) egoists might behave (and so as an analysis of how people sometimes actually do behave). But it is to say that if the theory of games is to be used to analyze moral concepts, its formal structure must be interpreted in a special and general manner as indicated in the text. Once we do this, though, we are in touch again with a much older tradition.

13 For the definition of this prima facie duty, and the idea that it is a special duty, I am indebted to H. L. A. Hart. See his paper "Are There Any Natural Rights?," *Philosophical Review,* LXIV (1955), 185 f.

14 The sense of "performative" here is to be derived from J. L. Austin's paper in the symposium, "Other Minds," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* Supplementary Volume (I946), pp. 170–174.

15 This, however, commonly happens. Hobbes, for example, when invoking the notion of a "tacit covenant," appeals not to the natural law that promises should be kept but to his fourth law of nature, that of gratitude. On Hobbes's shift from fidelity to gratitude, see Warrender, *op. cit.,* pp. 51–52, 233–237. While it is not a serious criticism of Hobbes, it would have improved his argument had he appealed to the duty of fair play. On his premises he is perfectly entitled to do so. Similarly Sidgwick thought that a principle of justice, such as every man ought to receive adequate requital for his labor, is like gratitude universalized. See *Methods of Ethics,* Bk. III, ch. v, Sec. 5. There is a gap in the stock of moral concepts used by philosophers into which the concept of the duty of fair play fits quite naturally.

16 I am using the concept of criterion here in what I take to be Wittgenstein's sense. See *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1953); and Norman Malcolm's review, "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*," *Philosophical Review,* LXIII (1954), 543–547. That the response of compassion, under appropriate circumstances, is part of the criterion for whether or not a person understands what "pain" means, is, I think, in the *Philosophical Investigations.* The view in the text is simply an extension of this idea. I cannot, however, attempt to justify it here. Similar thoughts are to be found, I think, in Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy,* tr. by Peter Heath (New Haven, 1954). His way of writing is often so obscure that I cannot be certain.

17 While this assimilation is implicit in Bentham's and Sidgwick's moral theory, explicit statements of it as applied to justice are relatively rare. One clear instance in *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* occurs in ch. x, footnote 2 to section XL: ". . . justice, in the only sense in which it has a meaning, is an imaginary personage, feigned for the convenience of discourse, whose dictates are the dictates of utility, applied to certain particular cases. Justice, then, is nothing more than an imaginary instrument, employed to forward on certain occasions, and by certain means, the purposes of benevolence. The dictates of justice are nothing more than a part of the dictates of benevolence, which, on certain occasions, are applied to certain subjects. . . ." Likewise in *The Limits of Jurisprudence Defined,* ed. by C. W. Everett (New York, 1945), pp. 117 f., Bentham criticizes Grotius for denying that justice derives from utility; and in *The Theory of Legislation,* ed. by C. K. Ogden (London, 1931), p. 3, he says that he uses the words "just"

and "unjust" along with other words "simply as collective terms including the ideas of certain pains or pleasures." That Sidgwick's conception of justice is similar to Bentham's is admittedly not evident from his discussion of justice in Book III, ch. v of *Methods of Ethics*. But it follows, I think, from the moral theory he accepts. Hence C. D. Broad's criticisms of Sidgwick in the matter of distributive justice in *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London, 1930), pp. 249–253, do not rest on a misinterpretation.

18 This maxim is attributed to Bentham by J. S. Mill in *Utilitarianism,* ch. v, paragraph 36. I have not found it in Bentham's writings, nor seen such a reference. Similarly James Bonar, *Philosophy and Political Economy* (London, 1893), p. 234 n. But it accords perfectly with Bentham's ideas. See the hitherto unpublished manuscript in David Baumgardt, *Bentham and the Ethics of Today* (Princeton, 1952), Appendix IV. For example, "the total value of the stock of pleasure belonging to the whole community is to be obtained by multiplying the number expressing the value of it as respecting any one person, by the number expressing the multitude of such individuals" (p. 556).

19 An idea essential to the classical utilitarian conception of justice. Bentham is firm in his statement of it: "It is only upon that principle [the principle of asceticism], and not from the principle of utility, that the most abominable pleasure which the vilest of malefactors ever reaped from his crime would be reprobated, if it stood alone. The case is, that it never does stand alone; but is necessarily followed by such a quantity of pain (or, what comes to the same thing, such a chance for a certain quantity of pain) that the pleasure in comparison of it, is as nothing: and this is the true and sole, but perfectly sufficient, reason for making it a ground for punishment" (*The Principles of Morals and Legislation,* ch. II, sec. iv. See also ch. x, sec. x, footnote 1). The same point is made in *The Limits of Jurisprudence Defined,* pp. 115 f. Although much recent welfare economics, as found in such important works as I. M. D. Little, *A Critique of Welfare Economics,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957) and K. J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New York, 1951), dispenses with the idea of cardinal utility, and use instead the theory of ordinal utility as stated by J. R. Hicks, *Value and Capital,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1946), Pt. I, it assumes with utilitarianism that individual preferences have value as such, and so accepts the idea being criticized here. I hasten to add, however, that this is no objection to it as a means of analyzing economic policy, and for that purpose it may, indeed, be a necessary simplifying assumption. Nevertheless it is an assumption which cannot be made in so far as one is trying to analyze moral concepts, especially the concept of justice, as economists would, I think, agree. Justice is usually regarded as a separate and distinct part of any comprehensive criterion of economic policy. See, for example, Tibor Scitovsky, *Welfare and Competition* (London, 1952), pp. 59–69, and Little, *op. cit.,* ch. VII.

20 See J. S. Mill's argument in *Utilitarianism,* ch. v, pars. 16–25.

21 See D. G. Ritchie, *Natural Rights* (London, 1894), pp. 95 ff., 249 ff. Lionel Robbins has insisted on this point on several occasions. See *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science,* 2nd ed. (London, 1935), pp. 134–43, "Interpersonal Comparisons of Utility: A Comment," *Economic Journal,* XLVIII (1938), 635–41, and more recently, "Robertson on Utility and Scope," *Economica,* n.s. XX (1953), 108 f.

22 As Sir Henry Maine suggested Bentham may have regarded them. See *The Early History of Institutions* (London, 1875), pp. 398 ff.

23 Thus Kant was not far wrong when he interpreted the original contract merely as an "Idea of Reason"; yet he still thought of it as a *general* criterion of right and as providing a general theory of political obligation. See the second part of the essay, "On the Saying 'That may be right in theory but has no value in practice'" (1793), in *Kant's Principles of Politics,* tr. by W. Hastie (Edinburgh, 1891). I have drawn on the contractarian tradition not for a general theory of political obligation but to clarify the concept of justice.

24 For a further discussion of the idea expressed here, see my paper, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics," in the *Philosophical Review,* LX (1951), 177–197. For an analysis, similar in many respects but using the notion of the ideal observer instead of that of the considered judgment of a competent person, see Roderick Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* XII (1952), 317–345. While the similarities between these two discussions are more important than the differences, an analysis based on the notion of a considered judgment of a competent person, as it is based on a kind of judgment, may prove more helpful in understanding the features of moral judgment than an analysis based on the notion of an ideal observer, although this remains to be shown. A man who rejects the conditions imposed on a considered judgment of a competent person could no longer profess to *judge* at all. This seems more fundamental than his rejecting the conditions of observation, for these do not seem to apply, in an ordinary sense, to making a moral judgment.

Readings for Chapter 3

Egoism

The Republic (excerpt)

Plato

Book I (336b–354b)

Several times in the course of the discussion Thrasymachus had made an attempt to get the argument into his own hands, and had been put down by the rest of the company, who wanted to hear the end. But when Polemarchus and I had done speaking and there was a pause, he could no longer hold his peace; and, gathering himself up, he came at us like a wild beast, seeking to devour us. We were quite panic-stricken at the sight of him.

He roared out to the whole company: What folly, Socrates, has taken possession of you all? And why, sillybillies, do you knock under to one another? I say that if you want really to know what justice is, you should not only ask but answer, and you should not seek honour to yourself from the refutation of an opponent, but have your own answer; for there is many a one who can ask and cannot answer. And now I will not have you say that justice is duty or advantage or profit or gain or interest, for this sort of nonsense will not do for me; I must have clearness and accuracy.

I was panic-stricken at his words, and could not look at him without trembling. Indeed I believe that if I had not fixed my eye upon him, I should have been struck dumb: but when I saw his fury rising, I looked at him first, and was therefore able to reply to him.

Thrasymachus, I said, with a quiver, don't be hard upon us. Polemarchus and I may have been guilty of a little mistake in the argument, but I can assure you that the error was not intentional. If we were seeking for a piece of gold, you would not imagine that we were 'knocking under to one another,' and so losing our chance of finding it. And why, when we are seeking for justice, a thing more precious than many pieces of gold, do you say that we are weakly yielding to one another and not doing our utmost to get at the truth? Nay, my good friend, we are most willing and anxious to do so, but the fact is that we cannot. And if so, you people who know all things should pity us and not be angry with us.

How characteristic of Socrates! he replied, with a bitter laugh;—that's your ironical style! Did I not foresee—have I not already told you, that whatever he was asked he would refuse to answer, and try irony or any other shuffle, in order that he might avoid answering?

You are a philosopher, Thrasymachus, I replied, and well know that if you ask a person what numbers make up twelve, taking care to prohibit him whom you ask from answering twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three, 'for this sort of nonsense will not do for me,'—then obviously, if that is your way of putting the question, no one can answer you. But suppose that he were to retort, 'Thrasymachus, what do you mean? If one of these numbers which you interdict be the true answer to the question, am I falsely to say some other number which is not the right one?—is that your meaning?'—How would you answer him?

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Just as if the two cases were at all alike! he said.

Why should they not be? I replied; and even if they are not, but only appear to be so to the person who is asked, ought he not to say what he thinks, whether you and I forbid him or not?

I presume then that you are going to make one of the interdicted answers?

I dare say that I may, notwithstanding the danger, if upon reflection I approve of any of them.

But what if I give you an answer about justice other and better, he said, than any of these? What do you deserve to have done to you?

Done to me!—as becomes the ignorant, I must learn from the wise—that is what I deserve to have done to me.

What, and no payment! a pleasant notion!

I will pay when I have the money, I replied.

But you have, Socrates, said Glaucon: and you, Thrasymachus, need be under no anxiety about money, for we will all make a contribution for Socrates.

Yes, he replied, and then Socrates will do as he always does—refuse to answer himself, but take and pull to pieces the answer of some one else.

Why, my good friend, I said, how can any one answer who knows, and says that he knows, just nothing; and who, even if he has some faint notions of his own, is told by a man of authority not to utter them? The natural thing is, that the speaker should be some one like yourself who professes to know and can tell what he knows. Will you then kindly answer, for the edification of the company and of myself?

Glaucon and the rest of the company joined in my request, and Thrasymachus, as any one might see, was in reality eager to speak; for he thought that he had an excellent answer, and would distinguish himself. But at first he affected to insist on my answering; at length he consented to begin. Behold, he said, the wisdom of Socrates; he refuses to teach himself, and goes about learning of others, to whom he never even says Thank you.

That I learn of others, I replied, is quite true; but that I am ungrateful I wholly deny. Money I have none, and therefore I pay in praise, which is all I have; and how ready I am to praise any one who appears to me to speak well you will very soon find out when you answer; for I expect that you will answer well.

Listen, then, he said; I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger. And now why do you not praise me? But of course you won't.

Let me first understand you, I replied. Justice, as you say, is the interest of the stronger. What, Thrasymachus, is the meaning of this? You cannot mean to say that because Polydamas, the pancratiast, is stronger than we are, and finds the eating of beef conducive to his bodily strength, that to eat beef is therefore equally for our good who are weaker than he is, and right and just for us?

That's abominable of you, Socrates; you take the words in the sense which is most damaging to the argument.

Not at all, my good sir, I said; I am trying to understand them; and I wish that you would be a little clearer.

Well, he said, have you never heard that forms of government differ; there are tyrannies, and there are democracies, and there are aristocracies?

Yes, I know.

And the government is the ruling power in each state?

Certainly.

And the different forms of government make laws democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical, with a view to their several interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and him who transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law, and unjust. And that is what I mean when I say that in all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government; and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is, that everywhere there is one principle of justice, which is the interest of the stronger.

Now I understand you, I said; and whether you are right or not I will try to discover. But let me remark, that in defining justice you have yourself used the word 'interest' which you forbade me to use. It is true, however, that in your definition the words 'of the stronger' are added.

A small addition, you must allow, he said.

Great or small, never mind about that: we must first enquire whether what you are saying is the truth. Now we are both agreed that justice is interest of some sort, but you go on to say 'of the stronger'; about this addition I am not so sure, and must therefore consider further.

Proceed.

I will; and first tell me, do you admit that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?

I do.

But are the rulers of states absolutely infallible, or are they sometimes liable to err?

To be sure, he replied, they are liable to err.

Then in making their laws they may sometimes make them rightly, and sometimes not?

True.

When they make them rightly, they make them agreeably to their interest; when they are mistaken, contrary to their interest; you admit that?

Yes.

And the laws which they make must be obeyed by their subjects,—and that is what you call justice?

Doubtless.

Then justice, according to your argument, is not only obedience to the interest of the stronger but the reverse?

What is that you are saying? he asked.

I am only repeating what you are saying, I believe. But let us consider: Have we not admitted that the rulers may be mistaken about their own interest in what they command, and also that to obey them is justice? Has not that been admitted?

Yes.

Then you must also have acknowledged justice not to be for the interest of the stronger, when the rulers unintentionally command things to be done which are to their own injury. For if, as you say, justice is the obedience which the subject renders to their commands, in that case, O wisest of men, is there any escape from the conclusion that the weaker are commanded to do, not what is for the interest, but what is for the injury of the stronger?

Nothing can be clearer, Socrates, said Polemarchus.

Yes, said Cleitophon, interposing, if you are allowed to be his witness.

But there is no need of any witness, said Polemarchus, for Thrasymachus himself acknowledges that rulers may sometimes command what is not for their own interest, and that for subjects to obey them is justice.

Yes, Polemarchus,—Thrasymachus said that for subjects to do what was commanded by their rulers is just.

Yes, Cleitophon, but he also said that justice is the interest of the stronger, and, while admitting both these propositions, he further acknowledged that the stronger may command the weaker who are his subjects to do what is not for his own interest; whence follows that justice is the injury quite as much as the interest of the stronger.

But, said Cleitophon, he meant by the interest of the stronger what the stronger thought to be his interest,—this was what the weaker had to do; and this was affirmed by him to be justice.

Those were not his words, rejoined Polemarchus.

Never mind, I replied, if he now says that they are, let us accept his statement. Tell me, Thrasymachus, I said, did you mean by justice what the stronger thought to be his interest, whether really so or not?

Certainly not, he said. Do you suppose that I call him who is mistaken the stronger at the time when he is mistaken?

Yes, I said, my impression was that you did so, when you admitted that the ruler was not infallible but might be sometimes mistaken.

You argue like an informer, Socrates. Do you mean, for example, that he who is mistaken about the sick is a physician in that he is mistaken? Or that he who errs in arithmetic or grammar is an arithmetician or grammarian at the time when he is making the mistake, in respect of the mistake? True, we say that the physician or arithmetician or grammarian has made a mistake, but this is only a way of speaking; for the fact is that neither the grammarian nor any other person of skill ever makes a mistake in so far as he is what his name implies; they none of them err unless their skill fails them, and then they cease to be skilled artists. No artist or sage or ruler errs at the time when he is what his name implies; though he is commonly said to err, and I adopted the common mode of speaking. But to be perfectly accurate, since you are such a lover of accuracy, we should say that the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, is unerring, and, being unerring, always commands that which is for his own interest; and the subject is required to execute his commands; and therefore, as I said at first and now repeat, justice is the interest of the stronger.

Indeed, Thrasymachus, and do I really appear to you to argue like an informer?

Certainly, he replied.

And do you suppose that I ask these questions with any design of injuring you in the argument?

Nay, he replied, 'suppose' is not the word—I know it; but you will be found out, and by sheer force of argument you will never prevail.

I shall not make the attempt, my dear man; but to avoid any misunderstanding occurring between us in future, let me ask, in what sense do you speak of a ruler or stronger whose interest, as you were saying, he being the superior, it is just that the inferior should execute—is he a ruler in the popular or in the strict sense of the term?

In the strictest of all senses, he said. And now cheat and play the informer if you can; I ask no quarter at your hands. But you never will be able, never.

And do you imagine, I said, that I am such a madman as to try and cheat, Thrasymachus? I might as well shave a lion.

Why, he said, you made the attempt a minute ago, and you failed.

Enough, I said, of these civilities. It will be better that I should ask you a question: Is the physician, taken in that strict sense of which you are speaking, a healer of the sick or a maker of money? And remember that I am now speaking of the true physician.

A healer of the sick, he replied.

And the pilot—that is to say, the true pilot—is he a captain of sailors or a mere sailor?

A captain of sailors.

The circumstance that he sails in the ship is not to be taken into account; neither is he to be called a sailor; the name pilot by which he is distinguished has nothing to do with sailing, but is significant of his skill and of his authority over the sailors.

Very true, he said.

Now, I said, every art has an interest?

Certainly.

For which the art has to consider and provide?

Yes, that is the aim of art.

And the interest of any art is the perfection of it—this and nothing else?

What do you mean?

I mean what I may illustrate negatively by the example of the body. Suppose you were to ask me whether the body is self-sufficing or has wants, I should reply: Certainly the body has wants; for the body may be ill and require to be cured, and has therefore interests to which the art of medicine ministers; and this is the origin and intention of medicine, as you will acknowledge. Am I not right?

Quite right, he replied.

But is the art of medicine or any other art faulty or deficient in any quality in the same way that the eye may be deficient in sight or the ear fail of hearing, and therefore requires another art to provide for the interests of seeing and hearing—has art in itself, I say, any similar liability to fault or defect, and does every art require another supplementary art to provide for its interests, and that another and another without end? Or have the arts to look only after their own interests? Or have they no need either of themselves or of another?—having no faults or defects, they have no need to correct them, either by the exercise of their own art or of any other; they have only to consider the interest of their subject-matter. For every art remains pure and faultless while remaining true—that is to say, while perfect and unimpaired. Take the words in your precise sense, and tell me whether I am not right.

Yes, clearly.

Then medicine does not consider the interest of medicine, but the interest of the body?

True, he said.

Nor does the art of horsemanship consider the interests of the art of horsemanship, but the interests of the horse; neither do any other arts care for themselves, for they have no needs; they care only for that which is the subject of their art?

True, he said.

But surely, Thrasymachus, the arts are the superiors and rulers of their own subjects?

To this he assented with a good deal of reluctance.

Then, I said, no science or art considers or enjoins the interest of the stronger or superior, but only the interest of the subject and weaker?

He made an attempt to contest this proposition also, but finally acquiesced.

Then, I continued, no physician, in so far as he is a physician, considers his own good in what he prescribes, but the good of his patient; for the true physician is also a ruler having the human body as a subject, and is not a mere money-maker; that has been admitted?

Yes.

And the pilot likewise, in the strict sense of the term, is a ruler of sailors and not a mere sailor?

That has been admitted.

And such a pilot and ruler will provide and prescribe for the interest of the sailor who is under him, and not for his own or the ruler's interest?

He gave a reluctant 'Yes.'

Then, I said, Thrasymachus, there is no one in any rule who, in so far as he is a ruler, considers or enjoins what is for his own interest, but always what is for the interest of his subject or suitable to his art; to that he looks, and that alone he considers in everything which he says and does.

When we had got to this point in the argument, and every one saw that the definition of justice had been completely upset, Thrasymachus, instead of replying to me, said: Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nurse?

Why do you ask such a question, I said, when you ought rather to be answering?

Because she leaves you to snivel, and never wipes your nose: she has not even taught you to know the shepherd from the sheep.

What makes you say that? I replied.

Because you fancy that the shepherd or meatherd fattens or tends the sheep or oxen with a view to their own good and not to the good of himself or his master; and you further imagine that the rulers of states, if they are true rulers, never think of their subjects as sheep, and that they are not studying their own advantage day and night. Oh, no; and so entirely astray are you in your ideas about the just and unjust as not even to know that justice and the just are in reality another's good; that is to say, the interest of the ruler and stronger, and the loss of the subject and servant; and injustice the opposite; for the unjust is lord over the truly simple and just: he is the stronger, and his subjects do what is for his interest, and minister to his happiness, which is very far from being their own. Consider further, most foolish Socrates, that the just is always a loser in comparison with the unjust. First of all, in private contracts: wherever the unjust is the partner of the just you will find

that, when the partnership is dissolved, the unjust man has always more and the just less. Secondly, in their dealings with the State: when there is an income-tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same amount of income; and when there is anything to be received the one gains nothing and the other much. Observe also what happens when they take an office; there is the just man neglecting his affairs and perhaps suffering other losses, and getting nothing out of the public, because he is just; moreover he is hated by his friends and acquaintance for refusing to serve them in unlawful ways. But all this is reversed in the case of the unjust man. I am speaking, as before, of injustice on a large scale in which the advantage of the unjust is most apparent; and my meaning will be most clearly seen if we turn to that highest form of injustice in which the criminal is the happiest of men, and the sufferers or those who refuse to do injustice are the most miserable—that is to say tyranny, which by fraud and force takes away the property of others, not little by little but wholesale; comprehending in one, things sacred as well as profane, private and public; for which acts of wrong, if he were detected perpetrating any one of them singly, he would be punished and incur great disgrace—they who do such wrong in particular cases are called robbers of temples, and man-stealers and burglars and swindlers and thieves. But when a man besides taking away the money of the citizens has made slaves of them, then, instead of these names of reproach, he is termed happy and blessed, not only by the citizens but by all who hear of his having achieved the consummation of injustice. For mankind censure injustice, fearing that they may be the victims of it and not because they shrink from committing it. And thus, as I have shown, Socrates, injustice, when on a sufficient scale, has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice; and, as I said at first, justice is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest.

Thrasymachus, when he had thus spoken, having, like a bath-man, deluged our ears with his words, had a mind to go away. But the company would not let him; they insisted that he should remain and defend his position; and I myself added my own humble request that he would not leave us. Thrasymachus, I said to him, excellent man, how suggestive are your remarks! And are you going to run away before you have fairly taught or learned whether they are true or not? Is the attempt to determine the way of man's life so small a matter in your eyes—to determine how life may be passed by each one of us to the greatest advantage?

And do I differ from you, he said, as to the importance of the enquiry?

You appear rather, I replied, to have no care or thought about us, Thrasymachus—whether we live better or worse from not knowing what you say you know, is to you a matter of indifference. Prithee, friend, do not keep your knowledge to yourself; we are a large party; and any benefit which you confer upon us will be amply rewarded. For my own part I openly declare that I am not convinced, and that I do not believe injustice to be more gainful than justice, even if uncontrolled and allowed to have free play. For, granting that there may be an unjust man who is able to commit injustice either by fraud or force, still this does not convince me of the superior advantage of injustice, and there may be others who are in the same predicament with myself. Perhaps we may be wrong; if so, you in your wisdom should convince us that we are mistaken in preferring justice to injustice.

And how am I to convince you, he said, if you are not already convinced by what I have just said; what more can I do for you? Would you have me put the proof bodily into your souls?

Heaven forbid! I said; I would only ask you to be consistent; or, if you change, change openly and let there be no deception. For I must remark, Thrasymachus, if you will recall what was previously said, that although you began by defining the true physician in an exact sense, you did not observe a like exactness when speaking of the shepherd; you thought that the shepherd as a shepherd tends the sheep not with a view to their own good, but like a mere diner or banqueter with a view to the pleasures of the table; or, again, as a trader for sale in the market, and not as a shepherd. Yet surely the art of the shepherd is concerned only with the good of his subjects; he has only to provide the best for them, since the perfection of the art is already ensured whenever all the requirements of it are satisfied. And that was what I was saying just now about the ruler. I conceived that the art of the ruler, considered as ruler, whether in a state or in private life, could

only regard the good of his flock or subjects; whereas you seem to think that the rulers in states, that is to say, the true rulers, like being in authority.

Think! Nay, I am sure of it.

Then why in the case of lesser offices do men never take them willingly without payment, unless under the idea that they govern for the advantage not of themselves but of others? Let me ask you a question: Are not the several arts different, by reason of their each having a separate function? And, my dear illustrious friend, do say what you think, that we may make a little progress.

Yes, that is the difference, he replied.

And each art gives us a particular good and not merely a general one—medicine, for example, gives us health; navigation, safety at sea, and so on?

Yes, he said.

And the art of payment has the special function of giving pay: but we do not confuse this with other arts, any more than the art of the pilot is to be confused with the art of medicine, because the health of the pilot may be improved by a sea voyage. You would not be inclined to say, would you, that navigation is the art of medicine, at least if we are to adopt your exact use of language?

Certainly not.

Or because a man is in good health when he receives pay you would not say that the art of payment is medicine?

I should not.

Nor would you say that medicine is the art of receiving pay because a man takes fees when he is engaged in healing?

Certainly not.

And we have admitted, I said, that the good of each art is specially confined to the art?

Yes.

Then, if there be any good which all artists have in common, that is to be attributed to something of which they all have the common use?

True, he replied.

And when the artist is benefited by receiving pay the advantage is gained by an additional use of the art of pay, which is not the art professed by him?

He gave a reluctant assent to this.

Then the pay is not derived by the several artists from their respective arts. But the truth is, that while the art of medicine gives health, and the art of the builder builds a house, another art attends them which is the art of pay. The various arts may be doing their own business and benefiting that over which they preside, but would the artist receive any benefit from his art unless he were paid as well?

I suppose not.

But does he therefore confer no benefit when he works for nothing?

Certainly, he confers a benefit.

Then now, Thrasymachus, there is no longer any doubt that neither arts nor governments provide for their own interests; but, as we were before saying, they rule and provide for the interests of their subjects who are the weaker and not the stronger—to their good they attend and not to the good of the superior. And this is the reason, my dear Thrasymachus, why, as I was just now saying, no one is willing to govern; because no one likes to take in hand the reformation of evils which are not his concern without remuneration. For, in the execution of his work, and in giving his orders to another, the true artist does not regard his own interest, but always that of his subjects; and therefore in order that rulers may be willing to rule, they must be paid in one of three modes of payment, money, or honor, or a penalty for refusing.

What do you mean, Socrates? said Glaucon. The first two modes of payment are intelligible enough, but what the penalty is I do not understand, or how a penalty can be a payment.

You mean that you do not understand the nature of this payment which to the best men is the great inducement to rule? Of course you know that ambition and avarice are held to be, as indeed they are, a disgrace?

Very true.

And for this reason, I said, money and honor have no attraction for them; good men do not wish to be openly demanding payment for governing and so to get the name of hirelings, nor by secretly helping themselves out of the public revenues to get the name of thieves. And not being ambitious they do not care about honor. Wherefore necessity must be laid upon them, and they must be induced to serve from the fear of punishment. And this, as I imagine, is the reason why the forwardness to take office, instead of waiting to be compelled, has been deemed dishonorable. Now the worst part of the punishment is that he who refuses to rule is liable to be ruled by one who is worse than himself. And the fear of this, as I conceive, induces the good to take office, not because they would, but because they cannot help—not under the idea that they are going to have any benefit or enjoyment themselves, but as a necessity, and because they are not able to commit the task of ruling to any one who is better than themselves, or indeed as good. For there is reason to think that if a city were composed entirely of good men, then to avoid office would be as much an object of contention as to obtain office is at present; then we should have plain proof that the true ruler is not meant by nature to regard his own interest, but that of his subjects; and every one who knew this would choose rather to receive a benefit from another than to have the trouble of conferring one. So far am I from agreeing with Thrasymachus that justice is the interest of the stronger. This latter question need not be further discussed at present; but when Thrasymachus says that the life of the unjust is more advantageous than that of the just, his new statement appears to me to be of a far more serious character. Which of us has spoken truly? And which sort of life, Glaucon, do you prefer?

I, for my part deem the life of the just to be the more advantageous, he answered.

Did you hear all the advantages of the unjust which Thrasymachus was rehearsing?

Yes, I heard him, he replied, but he has not convinced me.

Then shall we try to find some way of convincing him, if we can, that he is saying what is not true?

Most certainly, he replied.

If, I said, he makes a set speech and we make another recounting all the advantages of being just, and he answers and we rejoin, there must be a numbering and measuring of the goods which are claimed on either side, and in the end we shall want judges to decide; but if we proceed in our enquiry as we lately did, by making admissions to one another, we shall unite the offices of judge and advocate in our own persons.

Very good, he said.

And which method do I understand you to prefer? I said.

That which you propose.

Well, then, Thrasymachus, I said, suppose you begin at the beginning and answer me. You say that perfect injustice is more gainful than perfect justice?

Yes, that is what I say, and I have given you my reasons.

And what is your view about them? Would you call one of them virtue and the other vice?

Certainly.

I suppose that you would call justice virtue and injustice vice?

What a charming notion! So likely too, seeing that I affirm injustice to be profitable and justice not.

What else then would you say?

The opposite, he replied.

And would you call justice vice?

No, I would rather say sublime simplicity.

Then would you call injustice malignity?

No; I would rather say discretion.

And do the unjust appear to you to be wise and good?

Yes, he said; at any rate those of them who are able to be perfectly unjust, and who have the

power of subduing states and nations; but perhaps you imagine me to be talking of cutpurses. Even this profession if undetected has advantages, though they are not to be compared with those of which I was just now speaking.

I do not think that I misapprehend your meaning, Thrasymachus, I replied; but still I cannot hear without amazement that you class injustice with wisdom and virtue, and justice with the opposite.

Certainly I do so class them.

Now, I said, you are on more substantial and almost unanswerable ground; for if the injustice which you were maintaining to be profitable had been admitted by you as by others to be vice and deformity, an answer might have been given to you on received principles; but now I perceive that you will call injustice honorable and strong, and to the unjust you will attribute all the qualities which were attributed by us before to the just, seeing that you do not hesitate to rank injustice with wisdom and virtue.

You have guessed most infallibly, he replied.

Then I certainly ought not to shrink from going through with the argument so long as I have reason to think that you, Thrasymachus, are speaking your real mind; for I do believe that you are now in earnest and are not amusing yourself at our expense.

I may be in earnest or not, but what is that to you?—to refute the argument is your business.

Very true, I said; that is what I have to do: But will you be so good as answer yet one more question? Does the just man try to gain any advantage over the just?

Far otherwise; if he did he would not be the simple amusing creature which he is.

And would he try to go beyond just action?

He would not.

And how would he regard the attempt to gain an advantage over the unjust; would that be considered by him as just or unjust?

He would think it just, and would try to gain the advantage; but he would not be able.

Whether he would or would not be able, I said, is not to the point. My question is only whether the just man, while refusing to have more than another just man, would wish and claim to have more than the unjust?

Yes, he would.

And what of the unjust—does he claim to have more than the just man and to do more than is just?

Of course, he said, for he claims to have more than all men.

And the unjust man will strive and struggle to obtain more than the unjust man or action, in order that he may have more than all?

True.

We may put the matter thus, I said—the just does not desire more than his like but more than his unlike, whereas the unjust desires more than both his like and his unlike?

Nothing, he said, can be better than that statement.

And the unjust is good and wise, and the just is neither?

Good again, he said.

And is not the unjust like the wise and good and the just unlike them?

Of course, he said, he who is of a certain nature, is like those who are of a certain nature; he who is not, not.

Each of them, I said, is such as his like is?

Certainly, he replied.

Very good, Thrasymachus, I said; and now to take the case of the arts: you would admit that one man is a musician and another not a musician?

Yes.

And which is wise and which is foolish?

Clearly the musician is wise, and he who is not a musician is foolish.

And he is good in as far as he is wise, and bad in as far as he is foolish?

Yes.

And you would say the same sort of thing of the physician?

Yes.

And do you think, my excellent friend, that a musician when he adjusts the lyre would desire or claim to exceed or go beyond a musician in the tightening and loosening the strings?

I do not think that he would.

But he would claim to exceed the non-musician?

Of course.

And what would you say of the physician? In prescribing meats and drinks would he wish to go beyond another physician or beyond the practice of medicine?

He would not.

But he would wish to go beyond the non-physician?

Yes.

And about knowledge and ignorance in general; see whether you think that any man who has knowledge ever would wish to have the choice of saying or doing more than another man who has knowledge. Would he not rather say or do the same as his like in the same case?

That, I suppose, can hardly be denied.

And what of the ignorant? Would he not desire to have more than either the knowing or the ignorant?

I dare say.

And the knowing is wise?

Yes.

And the wise is good?

True.

Then the wise and good will not desire to gain more than his like, but more than his unlike and opposite?

I suppose so.

Where as the bad and ignorant will desire to gain more than both?

Yes.

But did we not say, Thrasymachus, that the unjust goes beyond both his like and unlike? Were not these your words?

They were.

And you also said that the just will not go beyond his like but his unlike?

Yes.

Then the just is like the wise and good, and the unjust like the evil and ignorant?

That is the inference.

And each of them is such as his like is?

That was admitted.

Then the just has turned out to be wise and good and the unjust evil and ignorant.

Thrasymachus made all these admissions, not fluently, as I repeat them, but with extreme reluctance; it was a hot summer's day, and the perspiration poured from him in torrents; and then I saw what I had never seen before, Thrasymachus blushing. As we were now agreed that justice was virtue and wisdom, and injustice vice and ignorance, I proceeded to another point:

Well, I said, Thrasymachus, that matter is now settled; but were we not also saying that injustice had strength; do you remember?

Yes, I remember, he said, but do not suppose that I approve of what you are saying or have no answer; if however I were to answer, you would be quite certain to accuse me of haranguing; therefore either permit me to have my say out, or if you would rather ask, do so, and I will answer 'Very good,' as they say to story-telling old women, and will nod 'Yes' and 'No.'

Certainly not, I said, if contrary to your real opinion.

Yes, he said, I will, to please you, since you will not let me speak. What else would you have?

Nothing in the world, I said; and if you are so disposed I will ask and you shall answer.

Proceed.

Then I will repeat the question which I asked before, in order that our examination of the relative nature of justice and injustice may be carried on regularly. A statement was made that injustice is stronger and more powerful than justice, but now justice, having been identified with wisdom and virtue, is easily shown to be stronger than injustice, if injustice is ignorance; this can no longer be questioned by any one. But I want to view the matter, Thrasymachus, in a different way: You would not deny that a state may be unjust and may be unjustly attempting to enslave other states, or may have already enslaved them, and may be holding many of them in subjection?

True, he replied; and I will add that the best and most perfectly unjust state will be most likely to do so.

I know, I said, that such was your position; but what I would further consider is, whether this power which is possessed by the superior state can exist or be exercised without justice or only with justice.

If you are right in your view, and justice is wisdom, then only with justice; but if I am right, then without justice.

I am delighted, Thrasymachus, to see you not only nodding assent and dissent, but making answers which are quite excellent.

That is out of civility to you, he replied.

You are very kind, I said; and would you have the goodness also to inform me, whether you think that a state, or an army, or a band of robbers and thieves, or any other gang of evil-doers could act at all if they injured one another?

No indeed, he said, they could not.

But if they abstained from injuring one another, then they might act together better?

Yes.

And this is because injustice creates divisions and hatreds and fighting, and justice imparts harmony and friendship; is not that true, Thrasymachus?

I agree, he said, because I do not wish to quarrel with you.

How good of you, I said; but I should like to know also whether injustice, having this tendency to arouse hatred, wherever existing, among slaves or among freemen, will not make them hate one another and set them at variance and render them incapable of common action?

Certainly.

And even if injustice be found in two only, will they not quarrel and fight, and become enemies to one another and to the just?

They will.

And suppose injustice abiding in a single person, would your wisdom say that she loses or that she retains her natural power?

Let us assume that she retains her power.

Yet is not the power which injustice exercises of such a nature that wherever she takes up her abode, whether in a city, in an army, in a family, or in any other body, that body is, to begin with, rendered incapable of united action by reason of sedition and distraction; and does it not become its own enemy and at variance with all that opposes it, and with the just? Is not this the case?

Yes, certainly.

And is not injustice equally fatal when existing in a single person; in the first place rendering him incapable of action because he is not at unity with himself, and in the second place making him an enemy to himself and the just? Is not that true, Thrasymachus?

Yes.

And O my friend, I said, surely the gods are just?

Granted that they are.

But if so, the unjust will be the enemy of the gods, and the just will be their friend?

Feast away in triumph, and take your fill of the argument; I will not oppose you, lest I should displease the company.

Well then, proceed with your answers, and let me have the remainder of my repast. For we have already shown that the just are clearly wiser and better and abler than the unjust, and that the unjust are incapable of common action; nay more, that to speak as we did of men who are evil acting at any time vigorously together, is not strictly true, for if they had been perfectly evil, they would have laid hands upon one another; but it is evident that there must have been some remnant of justice in them, which enabled them to combine; if there had not been they would have injured one another as well as their victims; they were but half-villains in their enterprises; for had they been whole villains, and utterly unjust, they would have been utterly incapable of action. That, as I believe, is the truth of the matter, and not what you said at first. But whether the just have a better and happier life than the unjust is a further question which we also proposed to consider. I think that they have, and for the reasons which I have given; but still I should like to examine further, for no light matter is at stake, nothing less than the rule of human life.

Proceed.

I will proceed by asking a question: Would you not say that a horse has some end?

I should.

And the end or use of a horse or of anything would be that which could not be accomplished, or not so well accomplished, by any other thing?

I do not understand, he said.

Let me explain: Can you see, except with the eye?

Certainly not.

Or hear, except with the ear?

No.

These then may be truly said to be the ends of these organs?

They may.

But you can cut off a vine-branch with a dagger or with a chisel, and in many other ways?

Of course.

And yet not so well as with a pruning-hook made for the purpose?

True.

May we not say that this is the end of a pruning-hook?

We may.

Then now I think you will have no difficulty in understanding my meaning when I asked the question whether the end of anything would be that which could not be accomplished, or not so well accomplished, by any other thing?

I understand your meaning, he said, and assented.

And that to which an end is appointed has also an excellence? Need I ask again whether the eye has an end?

It has.

And has not the eye an excellence?

Yes.

And the ear has an end and an excellence also?

True.

And the same is true of all other things; they have each of them an end and a special excellence?

That is so.

Well, and can the eyes fulfill their end if they are wanting in their own proper excellence and have a defect instead?

How can they, he said, if they are blind and cannot see?

You mean to say, if they have lost their proper excellence, which is sight; but I have not arrived at that point yet. I would rather ask the question more generally, and only enquire whether the

things which fulfill their ends fulfill them by their own proper excellence, and fail of fulfilling them by their own defect?

Certainly, he replied.

I might say the same of the ears; when deprived of their own proper excellence they cannot fulfill their end?

True.

And the same observation will apply to all other things?

I agree.

Well; and has not the soul an end which nothing else can fulfil? for example, to superintend and command and deliberate and the like. Are not these functions proper to the soul, and can they rightly be assigned to any other?

To no other.

And is not life to be reckoned among the ends of the soul?

Assuredly, he said.

And has not the soul an excellence also?

Yes.

And can she or can she not fulfill her own ends when deprived of that excellence?

She cannot.

Then an evil soul must necessarily be an evil ruler and superintendent, and the good soul a good ruler?

Yes, necessarily.

And we have admitted that justice is the excellence of the soul, and injustice the defect of the soul?

That has been admitted.

Then the just soul and the just man will live well, and the unjust man will live ill?

That is what your argument proves.

And he who lives well is blessed and happy, and he who lives ill the reverse of happy?

Certainly.

Then the just is happy, and the unjust miserable?

So be it.

But happiness and not misery is profitable.

Of course.

Then, my blessed Thrasymachus, injustice can never be more profitable than justice.

Let this, Socrates, he said, be your entertainment at the Bendidea.

For which I am indebted to you, I said, now that you have grown gentle towards me and have left off scolding. Nevertheless, I have not been well entertained; but that was my own fault and not yours. As an epicure snatches a taste of every dish which is successively brought to table, he not having allowed himself time to enjoy the one before, so have I gone from one subject to another without having discovered what I sought at first, the nature of justice. I left that enquiry and turned away to consider whether justice is virtue and wisdom or evil and folly; and when there arose a further question about the comparative advantages of justice and injustice, I could not refrain from passing on to that. And the result of the whole discussion has been that I know nothing at all. For I know not what justice is, and therefore I am not likely to know whether it is or is not a virtue, nor can I say whether the just man is happy or unhappy.

Twilight of the Idols (excerpt)

Friedrich Nietzsche

Morality as Anti-Nature

I

There is a time with all passions when they are merely fatalities, when they drag their victim down with the weight of their folly—and a later, very much later time when they are wedded with the spirit, when they are 'spiritualized'. Formerly one made war on passion itself on account of the folly inherent in it: one conspired for its extermination—all the old moral monsters are unanimous that '*il faut tuer les passions*'.[1] The most famous formula for doing this is contained in the New Testament, in the Sermon on the Mount, where, by the way, things are not at all regarded from a *lofty* standpoint. There, for example, it is said, with reference to sexuality, 'if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out': fortunately no Christian follows this prescription. To *exterminate* the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences—this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly. We no longer admire dentists who *pull out* the teeth to stop them hurting. . . . On the other hand, it is only fair to admit that on the soil out of which Christianity grew the concept '*spiritualization* of passion' could not possibly be conceived. For the primitive Church, as is well known, fought *against* the 'intelligent' in favour of the 'poor in spirit': how could one expect from it an intelligent war against passion?—The Church combats the passions with excision in every sense of the word: its practice, its 'cure' is *castration*. It never asks: 'How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?'—it has at all times laid the emphasis of its discipline on extirpation (of sensuality, of pride, of lust for power, of avarice, of revengefulness).—But to attack the passions at their roots means to attack life at its roots: the practice of the Church is *hostile to life* . . .

The same expedient—castration, extirpation—is instinctively selected in a struggle against a desire by those who are too weak-willed, too degenerate to impose moderation upon it: by those natures which need La Trappe,[2] to speak metaphorically (and not metaphorically—), some sort of definitive declaration of hostility, a *chasm* between themselves and a passion. It is only the degenerate who cannot do without radical expedients; weakness of will, more precisely the inability *not* to react to a stimulus, is itself merely another form of degeneration. Radical hostility, mortal hostility towards sensuality is always a thought-provoking symptom: it justifies making certain conjectures as to the general condition of one who is excessive in this respect.—That hostility, that hatred reaches its height, moreover, only when such natures are no longer sufficiently sound even for the radical cure, for the renunciation of their 'devil'. Survey the entire history of priests and philosophers, and that of artists as well: the most virulent utterances against the senses have *not* come from the impotent, *nor* from ascetics, but from those who found it impossible to be ascetics, from those who stood in need of being ascetics . . .

Nietzsche, F. (1895, 1889, 1968) *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* (translated by R.J. Hollingdale), London, Penguin Classics, 52–70. Reprinted with permission.

3

The spiritualization of sensuality is called *love*: it is a great triumph over Christianity. A further triumph is our spiritualization of *enmity*. It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies: in brief, in acting and thinking in the reverse of the way in which one formerly acted and thought. The Church has at all times desired the destruction of its enemies: we, we immoralists and anti-Christians, see that it is to our advantage that the Church exist. . . . In politics, too, enmity has become much more spiritual—much more prudent, much more thoughtful, much more *forbearing*. Almost every party grasps that it is in the interest of its own self-preservation that the opposing party should not decay in strength; the same is true of grand politics. A new creation in particular, the new *Reich* for instance, has more need of enemies than friends: only in opposition does it feel itself necessary, only in opposition does it *become* necessary. . . . We adopt the same attitude towards the 'enemy within': there too we have spiritualized enmity, there too we have grasped its *value*. One is *fruitful* only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains *young* only on condition the soul does not relax, does not long for peace. . . . Nothing has grown more alien to us than that desideratum of former times 'peace of soul', the *Christian* desideratum; nothing arouses less envy in us than the moral cow and the fat contentment of the good conscience. . . . One has renounced *grand* life when one renounces war. . . . In many cases, to be sure, 'peace of soul' is merely a misunderstanding—something *else* that simply does not know how to give itself a more honest name. Here, briefly and without prejudice, are a few of them. 'Peace of soul' can, for example, be the gentle radiation of a rich animality into the moral (or religious) domain. Or the beginning of weariness, the first of the shadows which evening, every sort of evening, casts. Or a sign that the air is damp, that south winds are on the way. Or unconscious gratitude for a good digestion (sometimes called 'philanthropy'). Or the quiescence of the convalescent for whom all things have a new taste and who waits. . . . Or the condition which succeeds a vigorous gratification of our ruling passion, the pleasant feeling of a rare satiety. Or the decrepitude of our will, our desires, our vices. Or laziness persuaded by vanity to deck itself out as morality. Or the appearance of a certainty, even a dreadful certainty, after the protracted tension and torture of uncertainty. Or the expression of ripeness and mastery in the midst of action, creation, endeavour, volition, a quiet breathing, 'freedom of will' *attained*. . . . *Twilight of the Idols:* who knows? perhaps that too is only a kind of 'peace of soul' . . .

4

—I formulate a principle. All naturalism in morality, that is all *healthy* morality, is dominated by an instinct of life—some commandment of life is fulfilled through a certain canon of 'shall' and 'shall not', some hindrance and hostile element on life's road is thereby removed. *Anti-natural* morality, that is virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, reverenced and preached, turns on the contrary precisely *against* the instincts of life—it is a now secret, now loud and impudent *condemnation* of these instincts. By saying 'God sees into the heart' it denies the deepest and the highest desires of life and takes God for the *enemy of life*. . . . The saint in whom God takes pleasure is the ideal castrate. . . . Life is at an end where the 'kingdom of God' *begins* . . .

5

If one has grasped the blasphemousness of such a rebellion against life as has, in Christian morality, become virtually sacrosanct, one has fortunately therewith grasped something else as well: the uselessness, illusoriness, absurdity, *falsity* of such a rebellion. For a condemnation of life by the living is after all no more than the symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether the condemnation is just or unjust has not been raised at all. One would have to be situated *outside* life, and on the other hand to know it as thoroughly as any, as many, as all who have experienced it, to be permitted to touch on the problem of the *value* of life at all: sufficient reason for

understanding that this problem is for us an inaccessible problem. When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values. . . . From this it follows that even that *anti-nature of a morality* which conceives God as the contrary concept to and condemnation of life is only a value judgement on the part of life—of *what* life? of *what* kind of life?—But I have already given the answer: of declining, debilitated, weary, condemned life. Morality as it has been understood hitherto—as it was ultimately formulated by Schopenhauer as 'denial of the will to life'—is the *instinct of décadence* itself, which makes out of itself an imperative: it says: 'Perish!'—it is the judgement of the judged . . .

6

Let us consider finally what naïvety it is to say 'man *ought* to be thus and thus!' Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the luxuriance of a prodigal play and change of forms: and does some pitiful journeyman moralist say at the sight of it: 'No! man ought to be *different*'? . . . He even knows *how* man ought to be, this bigoted wretch; he paints himself on the wall and says '*ecce homo*'![3] . . . But even when the moralist merely turns to the individual and says to him: '*You* ought to be thus and thus' he does not cease to make himself ridiculous. The individual is, in his future and in his past, a piece of fate, one law more, one necessity more for everything that is and everything that will be. To say to him 'change yourself' means to demand that everything should change, even in the past. . . . And there have indeed been consistent moralists who wanted man to be different, namely virtuous, who wanted him in their own likeness, namely that of a bigot: to that end they *denied* the world! No mean madness! No modest presumption! . . . In so far as morality *condemns* as morality and *not* with regard to the aims and objects of life, it is a specific error with which one should show no sympathy, an *idiosyncrasy of the degenerate* which has caused an unspeakable amount of harm! . . . We others, we immoralists, have on the contrary opened wide our hearts to every kind of understanding, comprehension, *approval*. We do not readily deny, we seek our honour in *affirming*. We have come more and more to appreciate that economy which needs and knows how to use all that which the holy lunacy of the priest, the *diseased* reason of the priest rejects; that economy in the law of life which derives advantage even from the repellent species of the bigot, the priest, the virtuous man—*what* advantage? But we ourselves, we immoralists, are the answer to that . . .

The Four Great Errors

1

The error of confusing cause and consequence.—There is no more dangerous error than that of *mistaking the consequence for the cause:* I call it reason's intrinsic form of corruption. None the less, this error is among the most ancient and most recent habits of mankind: it is even sanctified among us, it bears the names 'religion' and 'morality'. *Every* proposition formulated by religion and morality contains it; priests and moral legislators are the authors of this corruption of reason.—I adduce an example. Everyone knows the book of the celebrated Cornaro in which he recommends his meagre diet as a recipe for a long and happy life—a virtuous one, too. Few books have been so widely read; even now many thousands of copies are printed in England every year. I do not doubt that hardly any book (the Bible rightly excepted) has done so much harm, has shortened so many lives, as this curiosity, which was so well meant. The reason: mistaking the consequence for the cause. The worthy Italian saw in his diet the *cause* of his long life: while the prerequisite of long life, an extraordinarily slow metabolism, a small consumption, was the cause of his meagre diet. He was not free to eat much *or* little as he chose, his frugality was *not* an act of 'free will': he became ill when he ate more. But if one is not a bony fellow of this sort one does not merely do well, one positively needs to eat *properly*. A scholar of *our* day, with his rapid consumption of nervous energy, would kill himself with Cornaro's regimen. *Credo experto.*—

2

The most general formula at the basis of every religion and morality is: 'Do this and this, refrain from this and this—and you will be happy! Otherwise. . . .' Every morality, every religion *is* this imperative—I call it the great original sin of reason, *immortal unreason*. In my mouth this formula is converted into its reverse—*first* example of my 'revaluation of all values': a well-constituted human being, a 'happy one', *must* perform certain actions and instinctively shrinks from other actions, he transports the order of which he is the physiological representative into his relations with other human beings and with things. In a formula: his virtue is the *consequence* of his happiness. . . . Long life, a plentiful posterity is *not* the reward of virtue, virtue itself is rather just that slowing down of the metabolism which also has among other things, a long life, a plentiful posterity, in short *Cornarism*, as its outcome.—The Church and morality say: 'A race, a people perishes through vice and luxury'. My *restored* reason says: when a people is perishing, degenerating physiologically, vice and luxury (that is to say the necessity for stronger and stronger and more and more frequent stimulants, such as every exhausted nature is acquainted with) *follow* therefrom. A young man grows prematurely pale and faded. His friends say: this and that illness is to blame. I say: *that* he became ill, *that* he failed to resist the illness, was already the consequence of an impoverished life, an hereditary exhaustion. The newspaper reader says: this party will ruin itself if it makes errors like this. My *higher* politics says: a party which makes errors like this is already finished—it is no longer secure in its instincts. Every error, of whatever kind, is a consequence of degeneration of instinct, disintegration of will: one has thereby virtually defined the *bad*. Everything *good* is instinct—and consequently easy, necessary, free. Effort is an objection, the *god* is typically distinguished from the hero (in my language: *light* feet are the first attribute of divinity).

3

The error of a false causality.—We have always believed we know what a cause is: but whence did we derive our knowledge, more precisely our belief we possessed this knowledge? From the realm of the celebrated 'inner facts', none of which has up till now been shown to be factual. We believed ourselves to be causal agents in the act of willing; we at least thought we were there *catching causality in the act*. It was likewise never doubted that all the *antecedentia* of an action, its causes, were to be sought in the consciousness and could be discovered there if one sought them—as 'motives': for otherwise one would not have been *free* to perform it, *responsible* for it. Finally, who would have disputed that a thought is caused? that the ego causes the thought? . . . Of these three 'inner facts' through which causality seemed to be guaranteed the first and most convincing was that of *will as cause*; the conception of a consciousness ('mind') as cause and later still that of the ego (the 'subject') as cause are merely after-products after causality had, on the basis of will, been firmly established as a given fact, as *empiricism*. . . . Meanwhile, we have thought better. Today we do not believe a word of it. The 'inner world' is full of phantoms and false lights: the will is one of them. The will no longer moves anything, consequently no longer explains anything—it merely accompanies events, it can also be absent. The so-called 'motive': another error. Merely a surface phenomenon of consciousness, an accompaniment to an act, which conceals rather than exposes the *antecedentia* of the act. And as for the ego! It has become a fable, a fiction, a play on words: it has totally ceased to think, to feel and to will! . . .What follows from this? There are no spiritual causes at all! The whole of the alleged empiricism which affirmed them has gone to the devil! *That* is what follows! And we had made a nice misuse of that 'empiricism', we had *created* the world on the basis of it as a world of causes, as a world of will, as a world of spirit. The oldest and longest-lived psychology was at work here—indeed it has done nothing else: every event was to it an action, every action the effect of a will, the world became for it a multiplicity of agents, an agent ('subject') foisted itself upon every event. Man projected his three 'inner facts', that in which he believed more firmly than in anything else, will, spirit, ego, outside himself—he derived the concepts 'being' only from the concept 'ego', he posited 'things' as possessing being according to his own image, according to

his concept of the ego as cause. No wonder he later always discovered in things only *that which he had put into them!*—The thing itself, to say it again, the concept 'thing' is merely a reflection of the belief in the ego as cause. . . . And even your atom, *messieurs* mechanists and physicists, how much error, how much rudimentary psychology, still remains in your atom!—To say nothing of the 'thing in itself',[4] that *horrendum pudendum*[5] of the metaphysicians! The error of spirit as cause mistaken for reality! And made the measure of reality! And called *God*!—

4

The error of imaginary causes.—To start from the dream: on to a certain sensation, the result for example of a distant cannon-shot, a cause is subsequently foisted (often a whole little novel in which precisely the dreamer is the chief character). The sensation, meanwhile, continues to persist, as a kind of resonance: it waits, as it were, until the cause-creating drive permits it to step into the foreground—now no longer as a chance occurrence but as 'meaning'. The cannon-shot enter in a *causal* way, in an apparent inversion of time. That which comes later, the motivation, is experienced first, often with a hundred details which pass like lightning, the shot *follows*. . . .What has happened? The ideas *engendered* by a certain condition have been misunderstood as the cause of that condition.—We do just the same thing, in fact, when we are awake. Most of our general feelings—every sort of restraint, pleasure, tension, explosion in the play and counter-play of our general feelings—every sort of restraint, pressure, tension, explosion in the play and counter-play of our organs, likewise and especially the condition of the *nervus sympathicus*—excite our cause-creating drive: we want to have a *reason* for feeling *as we do*—for feeling well or for feeling ill. It never suffices us simply to establish the mere fact *that* we feel as we do: we acknowledge this fact—become *conscious* of it—only *when* we have furnished it with a motivation of some kind.—The memory, which in such a case becomes active without our being aware of it, calls up earlier states of a similar kind and the causal interpretations which have grown out of them—*not* their causality. To be sure, the belief that these ideas, the accompanying occurrences in the consciousness, were causes is also brought up by the memory. Thus there arises an *habituation* to a certain causal interpretation which in truth obstructs and even prohibits an *investigation* of the cause.

5

Psychological explanation.—To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown—the first instinct is to *eliminate* these distressing states. First principle: any explanation is better than none. Because it is at bottom only a question of wanting to get rid of oppressive ideas, one is not exactly particular about what means one uses to get rid of them: the first idea which explains that the unknown is in fact the known does so much good that one 'holds it for true'. Proof by *pleasure* ('by potency') as criterion of truth.—The cause-creating drive is thus conditioned and excited by the feeling of fear. The question 'why?' should furnish, if at all possible, not so much the cause for its own sake as a *certain kind of cause*—a soothing, liberating, alleviating cause. That something already *known*, experienced, inscribed in the memory is posited as cause is the first consequence of this need. The new, the unexperienced, the strange is excluded from being cause.—Thus there is sought not only some kind of explanation as cause, but a *selected* and *preferred* kind of explanation, the kind by means of which the feeling of the strange, new, unexperienced is most speedily and most frequently abolished—the *most common* explanations.—Consequence: a particular kind of cause-ascription comes to preponderate more and more, becomes concentrated into a system and finally comes to *dominate* over the rest, that is to say simply to exclude *other* causes and explanations.—The banker thinks at once of 'business', the Christian of 'sin', the girl of her love.

6

The entire realm of morality and religion falls under this concept of imaginary causes.—'Explanation' of *unpleasant* general feelings. They arise from beings hostile to us (evil spirits: most celebrated case—hysterics misunderstood as witches). They arise from actions we cannot approve of (the feeling of 'sin', of 'culpability' foisted upon a physiological discomfort—one always finds reasons for being discontented with oneself). They arise as punishments, as payment for something we should not have done, should not have *been* (generalized in an impudent form by Schopenhauer into a proposition in which morality appears for what it is, the actual poisoner and calumniator of life; 'Every great pain, whether physical or mental, declares what it is we deserve; for it could not have come upon us if we had not deserved it.' *World as Will and Idea* II 666). They arise as the consequences of rash actions which have turned our badly (—the emotions, the senses assigned as 'cause', as 'to blame'; physiological states of distress construed, with the aid of *other* states of distress, as 'deserved').—'Explanation' of *pleasant* general feelings. They arise from trust in God. They arise from the consciousness of good actions (the so-called 'good conscience', a physiological condition sometimes to like a sound digestion as to be mistaken for it). They arise from the successful outcome of undertakings (—naïve fallacy: the successful outcome of an undertaking certainly does not produce any pleasant general feelings in a hypochondriac or a Pascal). They arise from faith, hope and charity—the Christian virtues.—In reality all these supposed explanations are *consequential* states and as it were translations of pleasurable and unpleasurable feelings into a false dialect: one is in a state in which one can experience hope *because* the physiological basic feeling is once more strong and ample; one trusts in God *because* the feeling of plentitude and strength makes one calm.—Morality and religion fall entirely under the *psychology of error*: in every single case cause is mistaken for the truth; or a state of consciousness is mistaken for the causation of this state.

7

The error of free will.—We no longer have any sympathy today with the concept of 'free will': we know only too well what it is—the most infamous of all the arts of the theologian for making mankind 'accountable' in his sense of the word, that is to say for *making mankind dependent on him*. . . . I give here only the psychology of making men accountable.—Everywhere accountability is sought, it is usually the instinct for *punishing and judging* which seeks it. One has deprived becoming of its innocence if being in this or that state is traced back to will, to intentions, to accountability acts: the doctrine of will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is of *finding guilty*. The whole of the old-style psychology, the psychology of will, has as its precondition the desire of its authors, the priests at the head of the ancient communities, to create for themselves a *right* to ordain punishments—or their desire to create for God a right to do so. . . . Men were thought of as 'free' so that they could become *guilty*: consequently, every action *had* to be thought of as willed, the origin of every action as lying in the consciousness (—whereby the most *fundamental* falsification *in psychologicis* was made into the very principle of psychology). . . . Today, when we have started to move in the *reverse* direction, when we immoralists especially are trying with all our might to remove the concept of guilt and the concepts of punishment from the world and to purge psychology, history, nature, the social institutions and sanctions of them, there is in our eyes no more radical opposition than that of the theologians, who continue to infect the innocence of becoming with 'punishment' and 'guilt' by means of the concept of the 'moral world-order'. Christianity is a hangman's metaphysics . . .

8

What alone can *our* teaching be?—That no one *gives* a human being his qualities: not God, not society, not his parents or ancestors, not *he himself* (—the nonsensical ideal here last rejected was propounded, as 'intelligible freedom', by Kant, and perhaps also by Plato before him). *No one* is

accountable for existing at all, or for being constituted as he is, or for living in the circumstances and surroundings in which he lives. The fatality of his nature cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that which has been and will be. He is *not* the result of a special design, a will, a purpose; he is *not* the subject of an attempt to attain to an 'ideal of man' or an 'ideal of happiness' or an 'ideal of morality'—it is absurd to want to *hand over* his nature to some purpose or other. *We* invented the concept 'purpose': in reality purpose is *lacking*. . . . One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole—there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, condemn our being, for that would be to judge, measure, compare, condemn the whole. . . . *But nothing exists apart from the whole!*—That no one is any longer made accountable, that the kind of being manifested cannot be traced back to a *causa prima*,[6] that the world is a unity neither as sensorium nor as 'spirit', *this alone is the great liberation*—thus alone is the *innocence* of becoming restored. . . . The concept 'God' has hitherto been the greatest *objection* to existence. . . . We deny God; in denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing *that* do we redeem the world.—

The 'Improvers' of Mankind

1

One knows my demand of philosophers that they place themselves *beyond* good and evil—that they have the illusion of moral judgment *beneath* them. This demand follows from an insight first formulated by me: *that there are no moral facts whatever*. Moral judgment has this in common with religious judgement that it believes in realities which do not exist. Morality is only an interpretation of certain phenomena, more precisely a *mis*interpretation. Moral judgement belongs, as does religious judgement, to a level of ignorance at which even the concept of the real, the distinction between the real and the imaginary, is lacking: so that at such a level 'truth' denotes nothing but things which we today call 'imaginings'. To this extent moral judgement is never to be taken literally: as such it never contains anything but nonsense. But as *semeiotics* it remains of incalculable value: it reveals, to the informed man at least, the most precious realities of cultures and inner worlds which did not *know* enough to 'understand' themselves. Morality is merely sign-language, merely symptomatology: one must already know *what* it is about to derive profit from it.

2

A first example, merely as an introduction. In all ages one has wanted to 'improve' men: this above all is what morality has meant. But one word can conceal the most divergent tendencies. Both the *taming* of the beast man and the *breeding* of a certain species of man has been called 'improvement': only these zoological *termini* express realities—realities, to be sure, of which the typical 'improver', the priest, knows nothing—*wants* to know nothing. . . . To call the taming of an animal its 'improvement' is in our ears almost a joke. Whoever knows what goes on in menageries is doubtful whether the beasts in them are 'improved'. They are weakened, they are made less harmful, they become *sickly* beasts through the depressive emotion of fear, through pain, through injuries, through hunger.—It is no different with the tamed human being whom the priest has 'improved'. In the early Middle Ages, when the Church was in fact above all a menagerie, one everywhere hunted down the fairest specimens of the 'blond beast'[7]—one 'improved', for example, the noble Teutons. But what did such a Teuton afterwards look like when he had been 'improved' and led into a monastery? Like a caricature of a human being, like an abortion: he had become a 'sinner', he was in a cage, one had imprisoned him behind nothing but sheer terrifying concepts. . . . There he lay now, sick, miserable, filled with ill-will towards himself; full of hatred for the impulses towards life, full of suspicion of all that was still strong and happy. In short, a 'Christian'. . . . In physiological terms: in the struggle with the beast, making it sick *can* be the only means of making it weak. This the Church understood: it *corrupted* the human being, it weakened him—but it claimed to have 'improved' him . . .

3

Let us take the other aspect of so-called morality, the *breeding* of a definite race and species. The most grandiose example of this is provided by Indian morality, sanctioned, as the 'Law of Manu', into religion. Here the proposed task is to breed no fewer than four races simultaneously: a priestly, a warrior, and a trading and farming race, and finally a menial race, the Sudras. Here we are manifestly no longer among animal-tamers: a species of human being a hundred times more gentle and rational is presupposed even to conceive the plan of such a breeding. One draws a breath of relief when coming out of the Christian sick-house and dungeon atmosphere into this healthier, higher, *wider* world. How paltry the 'New Testament' is compared with Manu, how ill it smells!—But this organization too needed to be *dreadful*—this time in struggle not with the beast but with *its* antithesis, with the non-bred human being, the hotchpotch human being, the Chandala.[8] And again it had no means of making him *sick*—it was the struggle with the 'great majority'. Perhaps there is nothing which outrages our feelings more than *these* protective measures of Indian morality. The third edict, for example (*Avadana-Shastra* I), that 'concerning unclean vegetables', ordains that the only nourishment permitted the Chandala shall be garlic and onions, in view of the fact that holy scripture forbids one to give them corn or seed-bearing fruits or *water* or fire. The same edict lays it down that the water they need must not be taken from rivers or springs or pools, but only from the entrances to swamps and holes made by the feet of animals. They are likewise forbidden to wash their clothes or to *wash themselves*, since the water allowed them as an act of charity must be used only for quenching the thirst. Finally, the Sudra women are forbidden to assist the Chandala women in childbirth, and the latter are likewise forbidden to *assist one another*. . . .—The harvest of such hygienic regulations did not fail to appear: murderous epidemics, hideous venereal diseases and, as a consequence, 'the law of the knife' once more, ordaining circumcision for the male and removal of the *labia minora* for the female children.—Manu himself says: 'The Chandala are the fruit of adultery, incest and crime' (—this being the *necessary* consequence of the concept 'breeding'). 'They shall have for clothing only rags from corpses, for utensils broken pots, for ornaments old iron, for worship only evil spirits; they shall wander from place to place without rest. They are forbidden to write from left to right and to use the right hand for writing: the employment of the right hand and of the left-to-right motion is reserved for the *virtuous*, for people of *race*.'—

4

These regulations are instructive enough: in them we find for once *Aryan* humanity, quite pure, quite primordial—we learn that the concept 'pure blood' is the opposite of a harmless concept. It becomes clear, on the other hand, in *which* people the hatred, the Chandala hatred for this 'humanity' has been immortalized, where it has become religion, where it has become *genius*. . . . From this point of view, the Gospels are documents of the first rank; the Book of Enoch even more so.—Christianity, growing from Jewish roots and comprehensible only as a product of this soil, represents the *reaction* against that morality of breeding, of race, of privilege—it is the *anti-Aryan* religion *par excellence*: Christianity the revaluation of all Aryan values, the victory of Chandala values, the evangel preached to the poor and lowly, the collective rebellion of everything downtrodden, wretched, ill-constituted, under-privileged against the 'race'—undying Chandala revenge as the *religion of love* . . .

5

The morality of *breeding* and the morality of *taming* are, in the means they employ to attain their ends, entirely worthy of one another: we may set down as our chief proposition that to *make* morality one must have the unconditional will to the contrary. This is the great, the *uncanny* problem which I have pursued furthest: the psychology of the 'improvers' of mankind. A small and really rather modest fact, that of so-called *pia fraus*,[9] gave me my first access to this problem: *pia*

fraus, the heritage of all philosophers and priests who have 'improved' mankind. Neither Manu nor Plato, neither Confucius nor the Jewish and Christian teachers, ever doubted their *right* to tell lies. Nor did they doubt their possession of *other rights*. . . . Expressed in a formula one might say: *every* means hitherto employed with the intention of making mankind moral has been thoroughly *immoral*.—

Notes

1 The passions must be killed.
2 The abbey at Soligny from which the Trappist order—characterized by the severity of its discipline—takes its name.
3 Behold the man!
4 In Kant's philosophy the causes of sensations are called 'things in themselves'. The thing in itself is unknowable: the sensations we actually experience are produced by the operation of our subjective mental apparatus.
5 Ugly shameful part.
6 First cause.
7 Nietzsche introduced this term in *Towards a Genealogy of Morals I* II it means man considered as an animal, and the first use of the term is immediately followed by a reference to 'the Roman, Arab, Teutonic, Japanese nobility, the Homeric heroes, the Scandinavian Vikings' and to the Athenians of the age of Pericles as examples of men 'the animal' in whom 'has to get out again, has to go back to the wilderness.'
8 The 'untouchables' excluded from the caste system.
9 Pious fraud.

Readings for Chapter 4

Hedonism

"The Epicurean"

David Hume

The Epicurean[1]

It is a great mortification to the vanity of man, that his utmost art and industry can never equal the meanest of Nature's productions, either for beauty or value. Art is only the under-workman, and is employed to give a few strokes of embellishment to those pieces which come from the hand of the master. Some of the drapery may be of his drawing, but he is not allowed to touch the principal figure. Art may make a suit of clothes, but nature must produce a man.

Even in those productions commonly denominated works of art, we find that the noblest of the kind are beholden for their chief beauty to the force and happy influence of nature. To the native enthusiasm of the poets, we owe whatever is admirable in their productions. The greatest genius, where nature at any time fails him, (for she is not equal) throws aside the lyre, and hopes not, from the rules of art, to reach that divine harmony, which must proceed from her inspiration alone. How poor are those songs, where a happy flow of fancy has not furnished materials for art to embellish and refine!

But of all the fruitless attempts of art, no one is so ridiculous, as that which the severe philosophers have undertaken, the producing of an *artificial happiness,* and making us be pleased by rules of reason, and by reflection. Why did none of them claim the reward, which Xerxes promised to him, who should invent a new pleasure? Unless, perhaps, they invented so many pleasures for their own use, that they despised riches, and stood in no need of any enjoyments, which the rewards of that monarch could procure them. I am apt, indeed, to think, that they were not willing to furnish the Persian court with a new pleasure, by presenting it with so new and unusual an object of ridicule. Their speculations, when confined to theory, and gravely delivered in the schools of Greece, might excite admiration in their ignorant pupils; but the attempting to reduce such principles to practice would soon have betrayed their absurdity.

You pretend to make me happy by reason, and by rules of art. You must then create me anew by rules of art, for on my original frame and structure does my happiness depend. But you want power to effect this, and skill too, I am afraid; nor can I entertain a less opinion of nature's wisdom than of yours; and let her conduct the machine which she has so wisely framed, I find that I should only spoil it by tampering.

To what purpose should I pretend to regulate, refine, or invigorate any of those springs or principles which nature has implanted in me? Is this the road by which I must reach happiness? But happiness implies ease, contentment, repose, and pleasure; not watchfulness, care and fatigue. The health of my body consists in the facility with which all its operations are performed. The stomach digests the aliments; the heart circulates the blood; the brain separates and refines the spirits; and all this without my concerning myself in the matter. When by my will alone I can stop

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the blood, as it runs with impetuosity along its canals, then may I hope to change the course of my sentiments and passions. In vain should I strain my faculties, and endeavour to receive pleasure from an object, which is not fitted by nature to affect my organs with delight. I may give myself pain by my fruitless endeavours, but shall never reach any pleasure.

Away then with all those vain pretences of making ourselves happy within ourselves, of feasting on our own thoughts, of being satisfied with the consciousness of well-doing, and of despising all assistance and all supplies from external objects. This is the voice of pride, not of nature. And it were well if even this pride could support itself, and communicate a real *inward* pleasure, however melancholy or severe. But this impotent pride can do no more than regulate the *outside,* and with infinite pains and attention compose the language and countenance to a philosophical dignity, in order to deceive the ignorant vulgar. The heart, meanwhile, is empty of all enjoyment, and the mind, unsupported by its proper objects, sinks into the deepest sorrow and dejection. Miserable, but vain mortal! Thy mind be happy within itself! With what resources is it endowed to fill so immense a void, and supply the place of all thy bodily senses and faculties? Can thy head subsist without thy other members? In such a situation,

What foolish figure must it make?
Do nothing else but sleep and ake.

Into such a lethargy, or such a melancholy, must thy mind be plunged, when deprived of foreign occupations and enjoyments.

Keep me, therefore, no longer in this violent constraint. Confine me not within myself, but point out to me those objects and pleasures which afford the chief enjoyment. But why do I apply to you, proud and ignorant sages, to shew me the road to happiness? Let me consult my own passions and inclinations. In them must I read the dictates of nature, not in your frivolous discourses.

But see, propitious to my wishes, the divine, the amiable PLEASURE,[2] the supreme love of GODS and men, advances towards me. At her approach, my heart beats with genial heat, and every sense and every faculty is dissolved in joy; while she pours around me all the embellishments of the spring, and all the treasures of the autumn. The melody of her voice charms my ears with the softest music, as she invites me to partake of those delicious fruits, which, with a smile that diffuses a glory on the heavens and the earth, she presents to me. The sportive cupids who attend her, or fan me with their odoriferous wings, or pour on my head the most fragrant oils, or offer me their sparkling nectar in golden goblets: O! for ever let me spread my limbs on this bed of roses, and thus, thus feel the delicious moments, with soft and downy steps, glide along. But cruel chance! Whither do you fly so fast? Why do my ardent wishes, and that load of pleasures under which you labour, rather hasten than retard your unrelenting pace. Suffer me to enjoy this soft repose, after all my fatigues in search of happiness. Suffer me to satiate myself with these delicacies, after the pains of so long and so foolish an abstinence.

But it will not do. The roses have lost their hue, the fruit its flavour, and that delicious wine, whose fumes so late intoxicated all my senses with such delight, now solicits in vain the sated palate. *Pleasure* smiles at my languor. She beckons her sister, *Virtue,* to come to her assistance. The gay, the frolic *Virtue,* observes the call, and brings along the whole troop of my jovial friends. Welcome, thrice welcome, my ever dear companions, to these shady bowers, and to this luxurious repast. Your presence has restored to the rose its hue, and to the fruit its flavour. The vapours of this sprightly nectar now again ply around my heart; while you partake of my delights, and discover, in your cheerful looks, the pleasure which you receive from my happiness and satisfaction. The like do I receive from yours; and, encouraged by your joyous presence, shall again renew the feast, with which, from too much enjoyment, my senses are well nigh sated, while the mind kept not pace with the body, nor afforded relief to her overburdened partner.

In our cheerful discourses, better than in the formal reasoning of the schools, is true wisdom to be found. In our friendly endearments, better than in the hollow debates of statesmen and

pretended patriots, does true virtue display itself. Forgetful of the past, secure of the future, let us here enjoy the present; and while we yet possess a being, let us fix some good, beyond the power of fate or fortune. To-morrow will bring its own pleasures along with it: Or, should it disappoint our fond wishes, we shall at least enjoy the pleasure of reflecting on the pleasures of to-day.

Fear not, my friends, that the barbarous dissonance of Bacchus, and of his revellers, should break in upon this entertainment, and confound us with their turbulent and clamorous pleasures. The sprightly muses wait around; and with their charming symphony, sufficient to soften the wolves and tygers of the savage desert, inspire a soft joy into every bosom. Peace, harmony, and concord, reign in this retreat; nor is the silence ever broken but by the music of our songs, or the cheerful accents of our friendly voices.

But hark! the favourite of the muses, the gentle Damon strikes the lyre; and while he accompanies its harmonious notes with his more harmonious song, he inspires us with the same happy debauch of fancy, by which he is himself transported. "Ye happy youths," he sings, "Ye favoured of Heaven,[3] while the wanton spring pours upon you all her blooming honours, let not *glory* seduce you, with her delusive blaze, to pass in perils and dangers this delicious season, this prime of life. Wisdom points out to you the road to pleasure: Nature too beckons you to follow her in that smooth and flowery path. Will you shut your ears to their commanding voice? Will you harden your heart to their soft allurements? Oh, deluded mortals! thus to lose your youth, thus to throw away so invaluable a present, to trifle with so perishing a blessing. Contemplate well your recompence. Consider that glory, which so allures your proud hearts, and seduces you with your own praises. It is an echo, a dream, nay the shadow of a dream, dissipated by every wind, and lost by every contrary breath of the ignorant and ill-judging multitude. You fear not that even death itself shall ravish it from you. But behold! while you are yet alive, calumny bereaves you of it; ignorance neglects it; nature enjoys it not; fancy alone, renouncing every pleasure, receives this airy recompence, empty and unstable as herself."

Thus the hours pass unperceived along, and lead in their wanton train all the pleasures of sense, and all the joys of harmony and friendship. Smiling *innocence* closes the procession; and, while she presents herself to our ravished eyes, she embellishes the whole scene, and renders the view of these pleasures as transporting, after they have past us, as when, with laughing countenances, they were yet advancing towards us.

But the sun has sunk below the horizon; and darkness, stealing silently upon us, has now buried all nature in an universal shade. "Rejoice, my friends, continue your repast, or change it for soft repose. Though absent, your joy or your tranquillity shall still be mine." *But whither do you go? Or what new pleasures call you from our society? Is there aught agreeable without your friends? And can aught please in which we partake not?* "Yes, my friends; the joy which I now seek, admits not of your participation. Here alone I wish your absence: And here alone can I find a sufficient compensation for the loss of your society."

But I have not advanced far through the shades of the thick wood, which spreads a double night around me, ere, methinks, I perceive through the gloom the charming Cælia, the mistress of my wishes, who wanders impatient through the grove, and, preventing the appointed hour, silently chides my tardy steps. But the joy, which she receives from my presence, best pleads my excuse; and dissipating every anxious and every angry thought, leaves room for nought but mutual joy and rapture. With what words, my fair one, shall I express my tenderness, or describe the emotions which now warm my transported bosom! Words are too faint to describe my love; and if, alas! you feel not the same flame within, in vain shall I endeavour to convey to you a just conception of it. But your every word and every motion suffice to remove this doubt; and while they express your passion, serve also to inflame mine. How amiable this solitude, this silence, this darkness! No objects now importune the ravished soul. The thought, the sense, all full of nothing but our mutual happiness, wholly possess the mind, and convey a pleasure, which deluded mortals vainly seek for in every other enjoyment.——

But why does your bosom heave with these sighs, while tears bathe your glowing cheeks? Why distract your heart with such vain anxieties? Why so often ask me, *How long my love shall yet*

endure? Alas! my Cælia, can I resolve this question? *Do I know how long my life shall yet endure?* But does this also disturb your tender breast? And is the image of our frail mortality for ever present with you, to throw a damp on your gayest hours, and poison even those joys which love inspires? Consider rather, that if life be frail, if youth be transitory, we should well employ the present moment, and lose no part of so perishable an existence. Yet a little moment, and *these* shall be no more. We shall be, as if we had never been. Not a memory of us be left upon earth; and even the fabulous shades below will not afford us a habitation. Our fruitless anxieties, our vain projects, our uncertain speculations, shall all be swallowed up and lost. Our present doubts, concerning the original cause of all things, must never, alas! be resolved. This alone we may be certain of, that if any governing mind preside, he must be pleased to see us fulfil the ends of our being, and enjoy that pleasure for which alone we were created. Let this reflection give ease to your anxious thoughts; but render not your joys too serious, by dwelling for ever upon it. It is sufficient, once to be acquainted with this philosophy, in order to give an unbounded loose to love and jollity, and remove all the scruples of a vain superstition: But while youth and passion, my fair one, prompt our eager desires, we must find gayer subjects of discourse, to intermix with these amorous caresses.

Notes

1 Or, *The man of elegance and pleasure*. The intention of this and the following Essays is not so much to explain accurately the sentiments of the ancient sects of philosophy, as to deliver the sentiments of sects that naturally form themselves in the world, and entertain different ideas of human life and happiness. I have given each of them the name of the philosophical sect to which it bears the greatest affinity.

2 Dia Voluptas. LUCRET.

3 An imitation of the Syrens song in Tasso:

"O Giovinetti, mentre Aprile et Maggio
"V' ammantan di fiorité et verde spoglie," &c.
Giuresalemme liberate, Canto 14.

Nicomachean Ethics (excerpt)

Aristotle

Book X

After these subjects, presumably the next thing to discuss is pleasure. For pleasure, more than anything, seems an ineradicable aspect of our humanity. This is why those who educate the young try to steer them by means of pleasure and pain; and it also seems that taking pleasure in the things one should, and hating the things one should, are most important in relation to excellence of character: their effect extends through every part of life, constituting a powerful influence in regard to excellence and the happy life, for it is pleasant things that people choose, and painful ones they avoid. Discussion of such things would seem to be least dispensable, especially since they are the subject of much dispute: some people say that pleasure is the good, while others on the contrary say that it is just plain bad, some presumably because they are actually convinced that this is so, others because they think it better in relation to our lives to represent pleasure as a bad thing, even if it isn't, since (so they say) most people incline towards it, and are slaves to pleasures, so that one has to draw them in the contrary direction; that way they will arrive at the intermediate. But this may perhaps not be a good thing to say. For what people say about matters in the sphere of affections and actions carries less conviction than what they actually do, so that whenever their pronouncements disagree with what one can see before one's eyes, they earn contempt and put paid to what is true into the bargain; for if ever the person who censures pleasure is observed seeking it, his falling away is taken to indicate that all of it is worth having, since making distinctions is not a characteristic of most people. It seems, then, that true statements are the most useful ones in relation not only to knowledge but to life; for since they are in agreement with what is seen to happen, they carry conviction, and so encourage those who comprehend them to live accordingly. Enough, then, of matters of this sort; let us go on to the things that have been said about pleasure.

Now Eudoxus used to think that pleasure was the good because he saw every sort of creature seeking it, whether rational or non-rational; and since he thought that what was desirable in all cases was what was good, and that what was most so exercised the greatest attraction, he concluded that every creature's being drawn towards the same thing showed this as being best for all of them (since each finds what is good for itself, just as it finds its own food), and that what was good for every creature, and what every creature sought, was the good. Eudoxus' pronouncements carried conviction more because of the excellence of his character than in themselves; for he was thought to be a person of exceptional moderation, and so it was not thought that he made them as a lover of pleasure, but that things were truly as he said. He held that it was no less evident from the contrary, since pain is in itself, for all creatures, something to be avoided, so that the contrary must similarly be desirable for all; and that what is most desirable is what we do not choose because of

Aristotle (2002) *Nicomachean Ethics* (translation, introduction and commentary by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 241–258. Reprinted with permission.

something else, or for the sake of something else—but that pleasure is by general agreement a thing of this sort, since nobody asks a person "What are you enjoying yourself for?", which implies that pleasure is desirable in itself. Again, he argued that when added to any good whatever, e.g. just actions, or moderate behaviour, pleasure makes it more desirable, and that the good is increased by itself. This argument, then, at any rate, appears to show it to be *a* good, and no more so than any other; for every good is more desirable when combined with another one than it is in isolation. Why, it is by this sort of argument that Plato in fact tries to do away with the view that pleasure is the good; for he says that the pleasant life is more desirable in combination with than apart from wisdom, and if the result of the combination is better, then pleasure is not the good, since there is nothing which when added to the good makes *it* more desirable. And clearly nothing else will be the good, either, if it becomes more desirable when combined with something else good in itself. What, then, is there of this nature, which we have a share in too? For it is something of that nature that we are trying to discover. Those, on the other hand, who contend that what all creatures seek is not good may well be talking nonsense. For what seems to all to be the case, that we assert to be the case; and the person who does away with this conviction will hardly have anything more convincing to say. For if it is unintelligent creatures that desire the things in question, the claim would make sense; but if it is intelligent ones too, how could it make sense? And perhaps even in inferior creatures there is some natural element of goodness that transcends what they are in themselves, and has as its object their own proper good. But the point about the contrary does not seem to be well made either. For they deny that, if pain is something bad, it follows that pleasure must be a good, since bad is opposed to bad, too, and both bad and good to what is neither; and in saying this, so far as it goes, they are not wrong, but at the same time they are missing the truth in the case of the things under discussion. For if both were bad, both would also have had to be things to be avoided too, and something that is neither good nor bad is neither to be avoided nor to be sought, or both equally; but as things are people patently avoid pain as something bad and choose pleasure as something good; this, then, is the way they are opposed.

But neither does it follow, if pleasure is not a quality, that it is not a good either; for neither are the activities of excellence qualities, nor is happiness. Again, they say that the good is determinate, whereas pleasure is indeterminate, because it admits of more and less. Now if they reach this judgement by considering being pleased, the same will hold of justice and the other excellences—qualities of which these thinkers openly say that the persons qualified by them are more so or less so, and act more in accordance with the excellences, or less: people can be just to a greater degree, or courageous, and they can also perform just acts or behave moderately to a greater or lesser degree. But if the judgement in question refers to the pleasures, they are perhaps failing to give the explanation; that is, if some pleasures are unmixed while others are mixed. And why should pleasure not be in the same case as health, which while being determinate nevertheless admits of more and less? For the same kind of balance does not exist in everyone, nor is there always some single balance in the same person, but even while it is giving way it continues to be present up to a certain point, so differing in terms of more and less. The case of pleasure too, then, may be of this sort. Again, they suppose the good to be something complete, movements and comings to be incomplete, and try to show pleasure to be movement and coming to be. But they do not seem to be right even in saying that it is a movement; for it seems to be characteristic of every movement to be quick or slow, and if not in itself, as e.g. the movement of the cosmos, then in relation to something else; but pleasure is neither quick nor slow. For it is possible to become pleased quickly, as it is to become angered quickly, but not to *be* pleased quickly, even in relation to something else, in the way that one can walk quickly, or grow, and all that sort of thing. It is possible, then, to change quickly or slowly to being pleased, but it is not possible actually to *be* in that condition quickly—I mean the condition of being pleased. Again, how could it be a coming to be? For it seems that not just anything comes to be from just anything, but that a thing is dissolved into that from which it comes to be; and pain is a destruction of that of which pleasure is a coming to be. But they also say that pain is lack of what is in accordance with nature, and

pleasure replenishment of it. And these affections are bodily. If, then, pleasure is a replenishment of what is in accordance with nature, it would follow that the subject of the replenishment is what is being pleased; so it is the body; but it seems not to be; nor, then, is the replenishment pleasure, but rather someone will undergo pleasure while replenishment is in process, and pain during emptying. This view of pleasure seems to have its origins in the pains and pleasures connected with nourishment: the claim is that lack comes first, and so pain, then the pleasure of replenishment. But this does not happen with all pleasures; for there are no pains involved with the pleasures of coming to understand, or, if it is a matter of sensory pleasures, those that arise through the sense of smell; and sounds and sights, too, are often painless, as is remembering and looking to the future. So of what will they be comings to be? For there has occurred no lack of anything for there to be a replenishment of. To those who cite the pleasures that bring reproach, one can reply that these things are not pleasant: that they are pleasant for those in a bad condition does not mean that we should think them to *be* pleasant, except for this sort of person, any more than we should think things healthy or sweet or bitter that are so to people who are ill, or again think things to be white that appear so to those suffering from eye-disease; or else one can reply that pleasures really are desirable, only not pleasures deriving from these sources, just as it is desirable to have wealth, but not to have it as a result of betraying one's country, and to be healthy, but not at the cost of eating anything whatever; or that pleasures differ in kind, for those deriving from fine things are distinct from those deriving from shameful ones, and one cannot come to feel the pleasure of the just person without being just, or that of the musical expert without being musical, and similarly in other cases. The distinction between friend and flatterer also seems to be evidence either that pleasure is not a good thing, or that pleasures are different in kind, since the one seems to offer his company with the good in view, the other with a view to pleasure, and whereas the latter is an object of reproach, the former receives praise, on the basis that he offers his company for quite different purposes. Again, no one would choose to live the whole of life with the thoughts of a small child, enjoying to the utmost the pleasures of small children; or to delight in doing something of the most shameful sort, even without the prospect of ever having to suffer pain for it. Again, there are many things we would regard as important to us even if they brought no pleasure, e.g. seeing, remembering, knowing, possessing the excellences; and if these things are necessarily accompanied by pleasures, it makes no difference, since we would choose them even if no pleasure did come from them. It seems clear, then, both that pleasure is not the good, and that not all pleasure is desirable; also that some pleasures are desirable in themselves, differing from others either in kind or in terms of their sources.

So we have said enough about the things people say on the subject of pleasure and pain; as for what pleasure is, or what kind of thing, this will become plainer if we start again from the beginning. The activity of seeing seems to be complete over any given span of time: it is not lacking in anything which by coming to be at a later time will complete its specific form; and pleasure too seems to be like this. For it is a kind of whole, and there is no length of time such that if a pleasure someone takes during it goes on for a time that's longer, the form of the pleasure will be completed. Hence it is not a movement either. For every movement involves time, and relates to some goal, as does e.g. the movement that is building, and it is complete when it finally does what it aims at. So that will be either in the whole time, or in this. But if it is divided up into temporal parts, the resulting movements are all incomplete, and distinct in form both from the whole and from each other; for the putting together of the stone blocks is distinct from the fluting of the column, and both of these from the making of the temple—and the making of the temple is a complete movement, since it is not lacking anything required for the task in hand, whereas that of the base, and of the triglyph, is incomplete, since each of these is a making of a part. So they are different in form, and it is not possible in any of the portions of the time to find a movement that is complete in terms of its form; if such a movement *is* to be found, it is to be found in the whole time. And similarly with walking, and the other cases. For if locomotion is movement from one place to another, there are different forms of this too, i.e. flying, walking, leaping, and so on; but

there are not only these divisions, but divisions in walking itself, since the where from/where to is not the same thing for a race-track and for a part of it, or for one part and for another; nor is crossing this line the same as crossing that one; for one is not only traversing a line, but a line that also has a location, and this line has a different location from that one. Well, a precise account of movement has been given elsewhere; however, it seems that movement is not complete in every portion of time, but rather that most movements are incomplete and differ in form, given that the where from/where to determines the form. But the form of pleasure is complete in any and every portion of time. So it is clear that pleasure and movement will be distinct from one another, and that pleasure is something whole and complete. And this would also seem to follow from the fact that it is not possible to move, while it is possible to be pleased, without taking time; for what occurs in the now is a whole of some kind. From these points it is also clear that it is not correct to say, as people do, that there is a movement or coming to be *of* pleasure. For one does not talk of a movement or coming to be of everything, but of things that are divisible into parts, and are not wholes; for there is no coming to be of seeing either, or of a point, or of a mathematical unit, nor is there movement of these things at all, or coming to be; nor, then, is there movement or coming to be of pleasure either, because it is a kind of whole.

But since every sense is active in relation to the sense-object, and completely active when the sense is in good condition and its object is the finest in the domain of that sense (for something like this, more than anything else, is what complete activity of a sense seems to be; let it be a matter of indifference whether we say the sense itself, or what it is in, is active)—this being so, well, in the case of each of the senses the activity that is best is the one whose subject is in the best condition in relation to the object that is most worth while in the domain of that sense. But this activity will be most complete and most pleasant. For all the kinds of sensory activity give rise to pleasure, and so too do thought and reflection; but the most complete is the most pleasant, and most complete is that whose subject is in good condition, in relation to the most worth while of the objects in the domain of the sense; and pleasure is what completes the activity. But pleasure does not complete it in the same way that the sense-object and the sense do so, when they are good of their kind, any more than health and a doctor are causes in the same way of being healthy. That pleasure does arise with each sense is clear (for we say that sights and sounds are pleasant), and it is clear too that it arises most when the sense is at its best and is active in relation to an object of which the same is true; and when both sense-object and what is doing the sensing are like this, there will always be pleasure, at any rate so long as there is something to produce the sense-perception and something to receive it. Pleasure completes the activity not in the way the disposition present in the subject completes it, but as a sort of supervenient end, like the bloom of manhood on those in their prime. For so long, then, as the object of thought or sense-perception is as it should be, and so is what discriminates or reflects, there will be pleasure in the activity; for when receptor and producer are similar, and in the same relation to each other, the same result naturally occurs. How then is it that no one enjoys pleasure continuously? Or is it because one gets tired? Continuous activity, after all, is impossible for any human capacity. So pleasure does not occur continuously either, since it accompanies the activity in each case. That some things delight when new but later on not so much has the same explanation; for at first thought is called forth, and is intensely engaged with them, like someone focussing on something in the case of sight, but afterwards the activity is no longer like this but rather is allowed to lapse, so that the pleasure too is dimmed. That everyone desires pleasure one might put down to the fact that everyone also seeks to be alive, and living is a sort of activity, each person being active in relation to those objects, and with those faculties, to which he also feels the greatest attachment: the musical person, e.g., with hearing in relation to melodies, the lover of understanding with thought in relation to the objects of reflection, and so on in the case of every other type too; and pleasure completes the activities, and so the life, that they desire. It makes sense, then, that they seek pleasure; for it adds completeness to living, which is something desirable, for each. As for whether we choose living because we want pleasure or pleasure because we want to be alive, this is something that may be set aside for the present; for the two things appear

to be yoked together, and not to allow themselves to be separated: without activity pleasure does not occur, and every activity is completed by pleasure.

This is also, it seems, why pleasures differ in kind. For we think that where things differ in kind, what completes them is different (this is evidently the case with both natural and artificial objects: animals and trees, a picture, a statue, a house, a piece of furniture); and similarly with activities too: if they differ in kind, we think of what completes them as differing in kind. But the activities of thought differ in kind from those involving the senses, and they themselves from each other; so then do the pleasures that complete them. This will be apparent also from the closeness with which each of the pleasures is bound up with the activity it completes. For the activity's own pleasure contributes to increasing the activity. It is those who are active and take pleasure in it that are more discriminating and precise in relation to a given subject, e.g. those who delight in geometry are the ones that become expert in geometry, and are always more able to see things, and similarly the lover of music, or of building, or whatever it may be—each gets better at his own task through taking pleasure in it; and the pleasures contribute to the increase; but what contributes to increasing something belongs to it as its own, and where things are different in kind, what belongs to each is different in kind. But this will be still more evident from the way activities are impeded by the pleasures from different ones. Lovers of pipe-music are incapable of paying attention to a discussion if they happen to hear someone playing the pipes, because they take more pleasure in the pipe-playing than in their present activity. So the pleasure in pipe-playing than in their present activity. So the pleasure in pipe-playing destroys the activity of discussion. This happens in a similar way in other cases too, when someone is simultaneously involved in two activities; for the more pleasant one pushes the other out of the way, and the more so if the difference in pleasure is large, to the point where the other activity ceases altogether. Hence the fact that when we are deriving intense enjoyment from whatever it may be we are hardly inclined to do something else, and that if we do turn to other things, it is when we are only mildly engaged, as e.g. those who eat tidbits in the theatre do it most when the actors are no good. And since its own pleasure gives an activity a sharper edge, and makes it longer-lasting and better, while other activities' pleasures spoil it, clearly pleasures are widely distinct in nature. For a pleasure that belongs to another activity has much the same effect as an activity's own pain; for activities are destroyed by the pains belonging to them, as e.g. if writing, or doing calculations, is unpleasant for someone, and even causes them pain, in the first case there is no writing and in the second no calculating, because the activity is painful. The pleasures and pains that belong, then, have contrary effects on activities, the ones that belong being the ones that supervene on the activity itself. Pleasures that belong to other activities, as we have said, have an effect not dissimilar to that caused by pain: they destroy the activity, only not in the same way. But since activities differ in goodness and worthlessness, and some are desirable while others are to be avoided, and others neither, so it is with pleasures too, since for each activity there is its own pleasure. So the pleasure belonging to a worthwhile activity is good, while that related to a worthless one is bad; for appetites, too, are praiseworthy when they are for fine things, and worthy of censure when they are for shameful things. But the pleasures that are in activities belong to them more closely than the desires for them. For the latter are divided off from the activities both by the time that intervenes and by their nature as desires, whereas the former are close together with them and are so indistinguishable that there is room for dispute whether activity isn't the same thing as pleasure. It certainly does not seem likely that pleasures *is* thinking, or perceiving (for that is a strange idea); but because of their not being separated they appear to some people to be the same thing. Just as activities are distinct, then, so too are their pleasures. But sight differs from touch in purity, as do hearing and smell from taste. So the pleasure, too, differ in a similar way: the pleasures of thinking from these pleasures of sense, and each of the two kinds among themselves. But each kind or creature seems to have its own kind of pleasure, just as it has its own function; for the pleasure corresponding to its activity will be its own. But this will also be evident in each case, if one goes through them: a horse's pleasure, a dog's, and a man's are different, and as Heraclitus says, donkeys will choose sweepings to gold; something to eat is

more pleasant than gold, for donkeys. If creatures are distinct in kind, then their pleasures will be different in kind; and if they are of the same kind, one might reasonably expect their pleasures not to differ. But they diverge to no small degree at least in the case of human beings, since the same things delight some while giving pain to others, and are painful and objects of loathing for the one group while being pleasant and things to love for the other. This happens with sweet things too; the same things don't seem sweet to the person with a fever and the one in good health, nor warm to those who are frail and those who are physically fit. This happens with other things too in the same way. However, in all such cases it is thought to be what appears so to the good person that *is* so. And if this is the right thing to say, as it seems to be, and it is excellence and the good person, in so far as he is such, that is the measure for each sort of thing, then so too with pleasures: the ones that appear so to *him* will be pleasures, and the things *he* delights in will be pleasant. If the things that disgust him appear pleasant to a given person, there is nothing surprising in that, since there are many forms of corruption and damage to which human beings are subject; pleasant the things in question are not, though they are for these types, and for people in this condition. It is clear, then, that the ones by common consent shameful should be declared not to be pleasures, except for people whose nature is corrupted; but among those thought to be good, what sort of pleasure, or which pleasure, should we declare to belong to a human being? Or is the answer clear, from looking at the different types of activity? For pleasures go in tandem with these. Whether, then, the activities of the complete and blessed man are one or more than one, it is the pleasures that complete these that will be said to be human pleasures in the primary sense; and the rest will be so called in a sense that is secondary or many times remove, just as the activities will be.

Now that we have discussed the subjects relating to the different kinds of excellence, of friendship, and of pleasure, it remains to treat, in outline, of happiness, since we suppose it to be the end of things human. Now our account will be more concise if we begin by picking up again what was said earlier. What we said, then, was that happiness is not a disposition; for if it were, even a person asleep his whole life might have it, living a plant's life, or someone who was suffering the greatest misfortunes. If, then, these are not satisfying notions, and happiness is rather to be put down as a kind of activity, as has been said in our earlier discussions, and if some activities are necessary, i.e. desirable because of other things, while others desirable in themselves, it is clear that happiness is to be put down as one of those desirable in themselves, not as one of those desirable because of something else; for happiness is not lacking in anything, but self-sufficient. But the ones desirable in themselves are those from which nothing is sought over and above the activity. Actions in accordance with excellence are thought to be of this kind, on the basis that doing what is fine and worth while is one of the things desirable because of themselves. Also thought to be of this kind are the pleasant forms of amusement, since people do not choose them because of other things; after all, they get harm rather than benefit from them, by not taking care of their bodies and their property. But such diversions are the refuge of most of those called 'happy', which is why people who have the supple wit for such diversions are in good standing with tyrants; they make themselves pleasant in ways that fit what the tyrant seeks, and he needs people like that. It is thought, then, that these things make for happiness because those with political power spend their leisure-time on them, but presumably people like that are no indication of anything, since excellence does not lie in wielding power, and neither does intelligence, from which the worthwhile activities flow; nor if these people who have had no taste of refined and civilized pleasure resort to bodily ones should one think because of this that the latter are more desirable, since children too think best what is most honoured among their own group. It is to be expected, then, that just as different things appear honourable to children and grown men, so too with bad characters and good ones. So as has often been said, both what is honourable and what is pleasant is what is so for the good person; but for each type, the most desirable activity is the one that accords with his own proper disposition; for the good person as well, therefore, the most desirable is the one that accords with excellence. In that case, happiness does not lie in amusement; for it is indeed a strange thought that the end should be amusement, and that the busy-ness and suffering throughout one's life should be for the sake of

amusing oneself. For we value almost everything, except happiness, for the sake of amusing oneself. For we value almost everything, except happiness, for the sake of something else; for happiness is an end. To apply oneself to serious things, and to labour, for the sake of amusement appears silly and excessively childish. 'Play to be serious', as Anacharsis has it, seems the correct way; for amusement is like relaxation, and it is because people are incapable of labouring continuously that they need to relax. Relaxation, then, is not an end; for it occurs for the sake of activity. The happy life seems to be in accordance with excellence; and this life is one accompanied by seriousness, not one that depends on amusement. Again, we say that serious things are better than those that occasion laughter and involve amusement, and that the activity of what is better, whether part of a human being or the whole of one, is more serious; but the activity of what is better is superior, which already implies that it is more productive of happiness. Again, just anyone can enjoy bodily pleasure, and a slave no less than the best kind of person; but no one thinks of a slave as having a share in happiness, unless he also has a share in life. For happiness does not lie in diversions of this sort, but in the kinds of activity that accord with excellence, as has been said before.

But if happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest kind; and this will be the excellence of what is best. Whether, then, this is intelligence or something else, this element that is thought naturally to rule and guide, and to possess awareness of fine things and divine ones—whether being, itself too, something divine, or the divinest of the things in us, it is the activity of this, in accordance with its own proper excellence, that will be complete happiness. That it is *reflective* activity has been said; and this would seem to be in agreement both with what was said before and with the truth. For this is the highest kind of activity, since intelligence too is highest of the things in us, and the objects of intelligence are the highest knowables; further, it is the most continuous, since we can engage in reflection continuously more than we can in getting things done, whatever they may be. Again, we think that pleasure must be an ingredient in happiness, and of activities in accordance with excellence it is the one in accordance with intellectual accomplishment that is agreed to be pleasantest; at any rate the love of it [*philosophia*] is thought to bring with it pleasures amazing in purity and stability, and it is reasonable that those who have attained knowledge should pass their time more pleasantly than those who are looking for it. Again, the talked-about self-sufficiency will be a feature of the reflective life most of all; for both the intellectually accomplished and the just person, and everyone else, will require the things necessary for living, but given that they are adequately supplied with such things, the just person will need people to be objects of, and partners in, his just actions, and similarly with the moderate, the courageous and each of the other types, whereas the intellectually accomplished will be able to engage in reflection even when by himself, and the more so, the more accomplished he is—he will do it better, presumably, if he has others to work with him, but all the same he will be most self-sufficient. Again, reflective activity would seem to be the only kind loved because of itself; for nothing accrues from it besides the act of reflecting, whereas from practical projects we get something, whether more or less, besides the doing of them. Again, happiness is thought to reside in leisure from business; for we busy ourselves in order to have leisure, and go to war in order to live at peace. Now the context of the practical activity of the excellences is either the city or war, but actions in these spheres seem to lack the element of leisure, and warlike ones, in fact, lack it utterly (for no one chooses to make war for the sake of making war, or deliberately contrives it: if someone made his friends into enemies in order to create battles and killings, he would seem an utterly bloodthirsty type). But the politician's activity, too, lacks the element of leisure, and aims beyond the business of politics itself—at getting power, or honours, or indeed happiness for himself and his fellow citizens, this being distinct from the exercise of political expertise, and something we clearly do seek as something distinct. If, then, among actions in accordance with the excellences the political and war-like stand out in fineness and greatness, and these actions are lacking in leisure and aim at some end rather than being desirable because of themselves, while the activity of intelligence seems both to possess a greater seriousness, being reflective, and to aim at no end beside itself, and to have its own proper pleasure

(and this contributes to increasing the activity); and if, finally, the elements of self-sufficiency, and of leisure, and of freedom from weariness, in so far as these are possible for human beings, and all the other attributes assigned to the blessed, are patently characteristics of this kind of activity: then *this* activity will be the complete happiness of man, if it is given a complete length of life, since nothing about happiness is incomplete. But such a life will be higher than the human plane; for it is not in so far as he is human that he will live like this, but in so far as there is something divine in him, and to the degree that this is superior to the compound, to that degree will its activity too be superior to that in accordance with the rest of excellence. If, then, intelligence is something divine as compared to a human being, so too a life lived in accordance with this will be divine as compared to a human life. One should not follow the advice of those who say 'Human you are, think human thoughts', and 'Mortals you are, think mortal' ones, but instead, so far as is possible, assimilate to the immortals and do everything with the aim of living in accordance with what is highest of the things in us; for even if it is small in bulk, the degree to which it surpasses everything in power and dignity is far greater. And each of us would seem actually to *be* this, given that each is his authoritative and better element; it would be a strange thing, then, if one chose, not one's own life, but that of something else. Again, what was said before will fit with the present case too: what belongs to each kind of creature by nature is best and most pleasant for each; for man, then, the life in accordance with intelligence is so too, given that man is this most of all. This life, then, will also be happiest.

But second happiest is the life in accordance with the rest of excellence; for activities in accordance with this are human. For just things, and courageous things, and the other kinds of things we do that accord with the excellences, we do in relation to one another, keeping what befits each person in view, in transactions and dealings and all the various types of actions, and in our affective states; and all of these things appear to be human. Some of them seem also to be consequential on the body, and in many respects excellence of character seems to be bound up closely with the affective states; and wisdom too is yoked together with excellence of character, and this with wisdom, given that the starting points of wisdom are in accordance with the character-excellences, and the correctness of the character-excellences is in accordance with wisdom. Connected as these are with the affective states too, they will have to do with the compound. But the excellences of the compound are human ones; so too, then, is the life in accordance with these, and the happiness. The excellence belonging to intelligence, by contrast, is separate; let that much be said about it (for to go into precise detail is a larger task than the one before us). But it would also seem to have little need for external resources or less need than excellence of character does. For let the requirement both types have for the necessary things be taken as actually equal, even if the political type exerts himself more in relation to the body and everything of that sort, since the difference might be a small one; but with regard to the respective activities there will be a large difference. For the open-handed type will need money to do open-handed things, and the just type, too, in order to make returns for benefits received (for wishes are invisible, and even those who are *not* just pretend to wish to do the just thing); and the courageous type will need not to be powerless, if he is to achieve anything in accordance with his excellence, while the moderate type will need the opportunity of indulging himself—how else will it be clear that this type, or any of the others, is the type he is? Again, there is dispute about whether excellence is primarily a matter of decision or of doings, on the assumption that it depends on both: well, in the complete case it clearly will involve both, and one needs many things in order to carry an action through, and more of them, the greater and finer the action is. The person engaged in reflection needs none of these sorts of thing, at least for his activity; instead, one might almost say that they are even impediments to him, at least in relation to reflecting; but in so far as he is a human being, and shares his life with others, he chooses to do the deeps that accord with excellence, and so he will need such things for the purposes of living a human life.

But that complete happiness is a reflective kind of activity will be evident from the following too. Our belief is that the gods are blessed and happy to the highest degree; but what sorts of

practical doings ought we to assign to them? Just ones? Won't they appear comic, carrying on transactions, returning deposits, and everything like that? Courageous ones? Should we think of them as standing up to frightening things, and facing danger because it is a fine thing to do? Open-handed ones? But to whom will they give? A strange notion, too, that they'll have currency or anything like that. And their moderate actions—what would they be? Or would praising them in that way be vulgar rubbish, since they don't have bad appetites? Everything about practical doings, if one looks through all the kinds, will obviously turn out to be petty and unworthy of gods. And yet everyone supposes them to be alive, and if alive, then in activity; for they surely do not think of them as sleeping like Endymion. If, then, living has practical doing taken away from it, and (still more) producing, what is left except reflection? So then the activity of a god, superior as it is in blessedness, will be one of reflection; and so too the human activity that has the greatest affinity to this one will be most productive of happiness. Another indication of this is that the other animals do not share in happiness, being completely deprived of this sort of activity. For the life of gods is blessedly happy throughout, while that of human beings is so to the extent that there belongs to it some kind of semblance of this sort of activity; but of the other animals none is happy, since there is no respect in which they share in reflection. So happiness too extends as far as reflection does, and to those who have more of reflection more happiness belongs too, not incidentally, but in virtue of the reflection; for this is in itself to be honoured. So then happiness will be a kind of reflection.

But the one who is happy will also need external prosperity, in so far as he is human; for human nature is not self-sufficient for the purposes of reflection, but needs bodily health too, and the availability of nourishment and other kinds of servicing. And yet, if it is not possible to be blessedly happy without external things, still it should not be thought that the happy person will need many of them, and on a large scale, in order to be so; for self-sufficiency does not depend on excess, and neither does action, and even someone who does not rule over land and sea is capable of doing fine things; for it will be possible to act in accordance with excellence even on the basis of moderate resources (and this one can observe plainly enough, since private individuals seem to perform decent actions no less, or even more, than those with political power), and it is enough to have external things to this amount, since a person's life will be happy if he is active in accordance with excellence. And Solon, too, gave what is perhaps a good depiction of the happy when he said they had been moderately well equipped with external things, had done the finest things, as he saw it, and had lived a sensible life; for it is possible to do what one should if one has moderate possessions. Anaxagoras too seems to have taken the happy man not to be a rich one, or a politically powerful one, when he said he wouldn't be surprised if the happy were to appear to most people a strange sort—because they judge by external things, having eyes only for these. The views of the wise, then, seem to be in agreement with the arguments.

These sorts of considerations too, then, do carry a certain conviction; but in the practical sphere the truth is determined on the basis of the way life is actually lived; for this is decisive. So when one looks at everything that has been said up to this point, one should be bringing it to bear on one's life as actually lived, and if it is in harmony with what one actually does, it should be accepted, while if there is discord, it should be supposed mere words.

And the person whose intelligence is active, and who devotes himself to intelligence, and is in the best condition, seems also to be most loved by the gods. For if the gods have any sort of care for things human, as they are thought to do, it would also be reasonable to suppose both that they delight in what is best and has the greatest affinity to themselves (and this would be intelligence) and that those who cherish this most, and honour it, are the ones they benefit in return, for taking care of what they themselves love, and acting correctly and finely. And quite clearly, all these attributes belong most of all to the intellectually accomplished person. He, therefore, is most loved by the gods. But it is reasonable that the same person should also be happiest; so that in this way too it is the intellectually accomplished person who will be happy to the highest degree.

Well then, if we have accorded adequate discussion, in outline, both to these subjects and to the excellences, and again to friendship and pleasure, should we suppose our programme completely carried out? Or as one says, when it is a question of practical projects is the goal not to reflect on each set of things and to know about them, but rather to get on and do them—so that in the case of excellence too, it is not sufficient to *know* about it, but rather one must try actually to have and to use it, or whatever way it is that we become good? Now if words were sufficient in themselves for making people decent, "Many and fat the fees they'd earn" (to quote Theognis), and justly, and words would be what had to be provided; but as it is they appear to have the power to turn and motivate those of the young who are civilized, and to be capable of bringing about possession by excellence in a character that is noble and truly loves the fine, but to lack the power to turn the majority of people towards refinement of excellence. For most people are not of the sort to be guided by a sense of shame but by fear, and not to refrain from bad things on the grounds of their shamefulness but because of the punishments; living by emotion as they do, they pursue their own kinds of pleasures and the means to these, and shun the opposing pains, while not even having a conception of the fine and the truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it. What kind of talking, then, would change the rhythm of their life? For it is not possible, or not easy, for words to dislodge what has long since been absorbed into one's character-traits. But perhaps we should be satisfied if, with all the factors in place through which it is thought that we become decent people, we were to acquire a portion of excellence. Now some people think we become good by nature, while others think it is by habituation, and others again by teaching. Well, the natural element clearly does not depend on us, but belongs by divine causes of some kind to the truly fortunate; while talk and teaching may well not have force under all circumstances, and the soul of the hearer has to have been prepared beforehand through its habits in order to delight in and loathe the right things, just as one has to prepare soil if it is going to nourish the seed. For the person who lives according to emotion will not listen to talk that tries to turn him away from it, nor again will be comprehend such talk; how will it be possible to persuade someone like this to change? And in general it is not talk that makes emotion yield but force. Before he acquires excellence, then, a person must in a way already possess a character akin to it, one that is attracted by the fine and repulsed by the shameful. But it is hard for someone to get the correct guidance towards excellence, from childhood on, if he has not been brought up under laws that aim at that effect; for a moderate and resistant way of life is not pleasant for most people, especially when they are young. So their upbringing and patterns of behaviour must be ordered by the laws; for these ways will not be painful to them if they have become used to them. But presumably it is not enough that people should be brought up and supervised correctly when they are young; on the contrary: since they must observe those patterns of behaviour, and be habituated to them, when they are grown men too, there will need to be laws covering these aspects too, and indeed covering the whole of life; for most people are more governed by compulsion than talk, and by penalties than by what is fine. This is why some think that lawgivers, in the course of laying down laws, should exhort and try to turn people towards excellence for the sake of what is fine, on the assumption that those whose habits have been decently developed will listen; but that they should impose forcible constraints in the form of punishments of those that fail to obey, and are rather poor material; and finally that they should cast out the incurable for good; the view is that the decent character; his life being directed as it is towards the fine, will allow words to govern him, whereas the inferior character whose desire is for pleasure needs forcible constraint by pain like a yoked animal. This is why they also say that the pains meted out should be of the sort most opposed to the attracting pleasures.

However this may be: if, as has been said, a person needs to be brought up and habituated in the right way in order to be good, and then live accordingly under a regime of decent behaviour, neither counter-voluntarily nor voluntarily doing what is bad; and if this will come about when people live in accordance with a kind of intelligence or correct principle of order, with the force to make itself felt: well, a father's prescriptions do not have the requisite force, or the element of compulsion; nor indeed do the orders of any single man, unless he is a king or similar person; but

law does have the power to compel, being a form of words deriving from a kind of wisdom and intelligence. And people hate any human beings that oppose their impulses, even if the opposition is correct; whereas the law is not felt as burdensome when it orders decent behaviour. But only in Sparta, or in a few places, does the lawgiver seem to have sufficiently careful attention to upbringing and patterns of behaviour; in most cities there is neglect of such matters, and each man lives as he wishes, "wielding his law over children and wife" like a Cyclops. The best thing, then, is that there should be communal supervision, of the correct sort; but if things are neglected on the communal level, then it would seem appropriate for each to contribute towards his own children's and friends' acquisition of excellence, and for him to have the capacity to do so, or at any rate to decide to do it. But from what has been said he would seem to be likely to have a greater capacity for doing it if he first acquired the expertise of the lawgiver. For clearly, where supervision is on a communal basis, it is achieved through laws, and where it is of a decent kind, through good laws; whether these are written or unwritten, or whether they are to govern the education of one person or many, it would appear to make no difference, any more than it does in the case of music, or athletic training, or other kinds of discipline. For the things a father says, and the habits he imposes, have the same force in a household as legal provisions and customs in a city; or even more force, because of the bonds of kinship and beneficence; for offspring are naturally predisposed to feel affection for and to be obedient to fathers. Furthermore: education on an individual basis is in fact also superior to its communal counterpart, just as individual medical treatment is superior: rest and fasting are generally advantageous for patients with a fever, while for a given one perhaps not, any more than the boxing trainer will prescribe the same style of fighting for all his pupils. The particular case, then, would seem to be more exactly worked out once there is private supervision, since each person gets to a greater extent what applies to him. But the best supervision in each individual case will be provided by the doctor, or athletic trainer (or whoever it may be), when he has universal knowledge, knowing what applies to all cases or to cases of such-and-such a type (since the different kinds of expert knowledge are said to be, and actually are, of common features). Granted that there is no reason, despite this, why a given individual should not be well supervised even by someone who, although no expert, on the basis of experience has made precise observations of how things turn out in each situation—just as in fact some people seem to be their own best doctors, even though they would be of no assistance to someone else; still, this presumably does not mean that at any rate if someone does wish to acquire technical knowledge, and the capacity to think reflectively about a subject, he should not proceed to the level of the universal, and familiarize himself with that so far as is possible, for as we have said, this is the sphere of expert knowledge. And perhaps if someone wishes to make people better—whether in large numbers or in small—by exercising supervision over them, he too should attempt to become and expert in legislation, if it's through laws that we'd become good. For the production of a good disposition in any given person, whoever he may be, is not a task for just anybody, but if anyone *can* do it, it is the person with knowledge, as in the case of medicine or any sphere where there is room for wise supervision.

So should we next inquire from what source, or how, one might become an expert in legislation? Or is it (if we follow the model of other kinds of expertise) from the experts in politics? After all, legislation seems, as we saw, to be a part of political expertise. Or is it evidently not the same for political as it is for other kinds of expertise or capacity? For in the others, those who pass on the relevant capacities and those who practise them are plainly the same individuals, as with doctors or painters; but when it comes to things political it's the sophists who profess to teach, but no sophist is a practitioner—rather, the practitioners are rather the politicians, who would seem to do what they do by means of some sort of natural ability and experience, rather than by means of thought, since they are not well known for writing or lecturing on this sort of thing (though it would presumably have been a finer thing than making speeches for the lawcourts or the assembly), or again for having made political experts or their own sons or others close to them. But it would have been reasonable for them to have done so, if they were capable of it; for not only is

there no better legacy they could have left to their cities, but there is nothing they would rather choose than this ability to have for themselves, and so for those dearest to them. And yet experience seems to make no small contribution, since otherwise people would not in fact have turned into political experts through familiarity with the political sphere; hence those who aim for expert knowledge in the sphere of politics seem to need experience as well. But the sophists who profess such knowledge appear to be nowhere near teaching it. For they don't have any knowledge at all even of what sort of thing it is or what sorts of thing it is about; if they did, they wouldn't put it down as the same as, or inferior to, rhetorical expertise, nor would they think legislating an easy thing for anyone who has collected together those laws that are well thought of, on the basis that one can then pick out the best—as if the selection were not itself a matter for acumen, and correct discrimination not the greatest task, as in questions of music. For it is those experienced in each sphere that discriminate between the relevant products correctly, and understand by what means and in what way they are brought to completion, and what sorts of things harmonize with what; whereas for the inexperienced it is an achievement if they simply avoid failing to observe that the product has been well or badly produced, as in the case of painting. But laws are like the products of political expertise; how then could someone become a legislative expert, or discern which are the best of them, *from* them? For it doesn't appear that people become medical experts, either, from written texts. It is certainly true that these texts *try* to say not only what the forms of treatment are, but even how patients might be cured, and how one should treat each type of patient, distinguishing the various conditions; and these texts are thought to be beneficial to those with experience, but useless to those without expert knowledge. Perhaps, then, collections of laws and constitutions too might be put to good use by those able to reflect on and to discern what is well done or the contrary, and what sorts of things fit what; but in those who go through such things without any skill there won't be good discrimination, unless of course by accident—and they might perhaps then get to understand more about these things. Well then, since previous thinkers left the subject of legislation unexamined, it is better, perhaps, if we ourselves start a further investigation of it, and of the constitutions in general, so that as far as possible that part of philosophy that deals with things human may be brought to completion.

First, then, if there is anything that has been well said on any particular point by our predecessors, let us attempt to discuss that, and then, on the basis of our collected constitutions, try to observe what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities, and what sorts have these effects on each type of constitution, and what the causes are whereby some cities are finely governed and others the opposite. For when we have made these observations, perhaps we shall have a better view, too, on what sort of constitution is best, and how each type is arranged, and what laws and customs it will have. Let us then make a start on the discussion.

"Letter to Menoeceus"

Epicurus

To Menœceus, Greeting

Let no one delay to study philosophy while he is young, and when he is old let him not become weary of the study; for no man can ever find the time unsuitable or too late to study the health of his soul. And he who asserts either that it is not yet time to philosophize, or that the hour is passed, is like a man who should say that the time is not yet come to be happy, or that it is too late. So that both young and old should study philosophy, the one in order that, when he is old, he may be young in good things through the pleasing recollection of the past, and the other in order that he may be at the same time both young and old, in consequence of his absence of fear for the future.

It is right then for a man to consider the things which produce happiness, since, if happiness is present, we have everything, and when it is absent, we do everything with a view to possess it. Now, what I have constantly recommended to you, these things I would have you do and practise, considering them to be the elements of living well. First of all, believe that God is a being incorruptible and happy, as the common opinion of the world about God dictates; and attach to your idea of him nothing which is inconsistent with incorruptibility or with happiness; and think that he is invested with everything which is able to preserve to him this happiness, in conjunction with incorruptibility. For there are Gods; for our knowledge of them is indistinct. But they are not of the character which people in general attribute to them; for they do not pay a respect to them which accords with the ideas that they entertain of them. And that man is not impious who discards the Gods believed in by the many, but he who applies to the Gods the opinions entertained of them by the many. For the assertions of the many about the Gods are not anticipations, but false opinions. And in consequence of these, the greatest evils which befall wicked men, and the benefits which are conferred on the good, are all attributed to the Gods; for they connect all their ideas of them with a comparison of human virtues, and everything which is different from human qualities, they regard as incompatible with the divine nature.

Accustom yourself also to think death a matter with which we are not at all concerned, since all good and all evil is in sensation, and since death is only the privation of sensation. On which account, the correct knowledge of the fact that death is no concern of ours, makes the mortality of life pleasant to us, inasmuch as it sets forth no illimitable time, but relieves us for the longing for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in living to a man who rightly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in ceasing to live; so that he was a silly man who said that he feared death, not because it would grieve him when it was present, but because it did grieve him while it was future. For it is very absurd that that which does not distress a man when it is present, should afflict him

Extracted from *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius (translated by C.D. Yonge). Public domain.

when only expected. Therefore, the most formidable of all evils, death, is nothing to us, since, when we exist, death is not present to us; and when death is present, then we have no existence. It is no concern then either of the living or of the dead; since to the one it has no existence, and the other class has no existence itself. But people in general, at times flee from death as the greatest of evils, and at times wish for it as a rest from the evils in life. Nor is the not living a thing feared, since living is not connected with it: nor does the wise man think not living an evil; but, just as he chooses food, not preferring that which is most abundant, but that which is nicest; so too, he enjoys time, not measuring it as to whether it is of the greatest length, but as to whether it is most agreeable. And he who enjoins a young man to live well, and an old man to die well, is a simpleton, not only because of the constantly delightful nature of life, but also because the care to live well is identical with the care to die well. And lie was still more wrong who said:—

"'Tis well to taste of life, and then when born
To pass with quickness to the shades below". (quotation from Theognis)

For if this really was his opinion why did he not quit life? For it was easily in his power to do so, if it really was his belief. But if he was joking, then he was talking foolishly in a case where it ought not to be allowed; and, we must recollect, that the future is not our own, nor, on the other hand, is it wholly not our own, I mean so that we can never altogether await it with a feeling of certainty that it will be, nor altogether despair of it as what will never be. And we must consider that some of the passions are natural, and some empty; and of the natural ones some are necessary, and some merely natural. And of the necessary one's some are necessary to happiness, and others, with regard to the exemption of the body, from trouble; and others with respect to living itself; for a correct theory, with regard to these things, can refer all choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom from disquietude of the soul. Since this is the end of living happily; for it is for the sake of this that we do everything, wishing to avoid grief and fear; and when once this is the case, with respect to us, then the storm of the soul is, as I may say, put an end to; since the animal is unable to go as if to something deficient, and to seek something different from that by which the good of the soul and body will be perfected.

For then we have need of pleasure when we grieve, because pleasure is not present; but when we do not grieve, then we have no need of pleasure; and on this account, we affirm, that pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily; for we have recognized this as the first good, being connate with us; and with reference to it, it is that we begin every choice and avoidance; and to this we come as if we judged of all good by passion as the standard; and, since this is the first good and connate with us, on this account we do not choose every pleasure, but at times we pass over many pleasures when any difficulty is likely to ensue from them; and we think many pains better than pleasures, when a greater pleasure follows them, if we endure the pain for a time.

Every pleasure is therefore a good on account of its own nature, but it does not follow that every pleasure is worthy of being chosen; just as every pain is an evil, and yet every pain must not be avoided. But it is right to estimate all these things by the measurement and view of what is suitable and unsuitable; for at times we may feel the good as an evil, and at times, on the contrary, we may feel the evil as good. And, we think, contentment a great good, not in order that we may never have but a little, but in order that, if we have not much, we may make use of a little, being genuinely persuaded that those men enjoy luxury most completely who are the best able to do without it; and that everything which is natural is easily provided, and what is useless is not easily procured. And simple flavours give as much pleasure as costly fare, when everything that can give pain, and every feeling of want, is removed; and corn and water give the most extreme pleasure when any one in need eats them. To accustom one's self, therefore, to simple and inexpensive habits is a great ingredient in the perfecting of health, and makes a man free from hesitation with respect to the necessary uses of life. And when we, on certain occasions, fall in with more sumptuous fare, it makes us in a better disposition towards it, and renders us fearless with respect to

fortune. When, therefore, we say that pleasure is a chief good, we are not speaking of the pleasures of the debauched man, or those which lie in sensual enjoyment, as some think who are ignorant, and who do not entertain our opinions, or else interpret them perversely; but we mean the freedom of the body from pain, and of the soul from confusion. For it is not continued drinking and revels, or the enjoyment of female society, or feasts of fish and other such things, as a costly table supplies, that make life pleasant, but sober contemplation, which examines into the reasons for all choice and avoidance, and which puts to flight the vain opinions from which the greater part of the confusion arises which troubles the soul.

Now, the beginning and the greatest good of all these things is prudence, on which account prudence is something more valuable than even philosophy, inasmuch as all the other virtues spring from it, teaching us that it is not possible to live pleasantly unless one also lives prudently, and honourably, and justly; and that one cannot live prudently, and honestly, and justly, without living pleasantly; for the virtues are connate with living agreeably, and living agreeably is inseparable from the virtues. Since, who can you think better than that man who has holy opinions respecting the Gods, and who is utterly fearless with respect to death, and who has properly contemplated the end of nature, and who comprehends that the chief good is easily perfected and easily provided; and the greatest evil lasts but a short period, and causes but brief pain. And who has no belief in necessity, which is set up by some as the mistress of all things, but lie refers some things to fortune, some to ourselves, because necessity is an irresponsible power, and because he sees that fortune is unstable, while our own will is free; and this freedom constitutes, in our case, a responsibility which makes us encounter blame and praise. Since it would be better to follow the fables about the Gods than to be a slave to the fate of the natural philosopher; for the fables which are told give us a sketch, as if we could avert the wrath of God by paying him honour; but the other presents us with necessity who is inexorable.

And he, not thinking fortune a goddess, as the generality esteem her (for nothing is done at random by a God), nor a cause which no man can rely on, for he thinks that good or evil is not given by her to men so as to make them live happily, but that the principles of great goods or great evils are supplied by her; thinking it better to be unfortunate in accordance with reason, than to be fortunate irrationally; for that those actions which are judged to be the best, are rightly done in consequence of reason.

Do you then study these precepts, and those which are akin to them, by all means day and night, pondering on them by yourself, and discussing them with any one like yourself, and then you will never be disturbed by either sleeping or waking fancies, but you will live like a God among men; for a man living amid immortal Gods, is in no respect like a mortal being."

A summary of his philosophy by Diogenes Laertius

XXVIII Now, he differs with the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit that to be pleasure which exists as a condition, but place it wholly in motion. He, however, admits both kinds to be pleasure, namely, that of the soul, and that of the body, as he says in his treatise on Choice and Avoidance; and also in his work on the Chief Good; and in the first book of his treatise on Lives, and in his Letter against the Mitylenian Philosophers. And in the same spirit, Diogenes, in the seventeenth book of his Select Discourses, and Metrodorus, in his Timocrates, speak thus. "But when pleasure is understood, I mean both that which exists in motion, and that which is a state. . . ." And Epicurus, in his treatise on Choice, speaks thus: "Now, freedom from disquietude, and freedom from pain, are states of pleasure; but joy and cheerfulness are beheld in motion and energy.

XXIX For they make out the pains of the body to be worse than those of the mind; accordingly, those who do wrong, are punished in the body. But he considers the pains of the soul the worst; for that the flesh is only sensible to present affliction, but the soul feels the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, in the same manner, he contends that the pleasures of the soul are greater than those of the body: and he uses as a proof that pleasure is the chief good, the fact that all animals

from the moment of their birth are delighted with pleasure, and are offended with pain by their natural instinct, and without the employment of reason. Therefore, too, we, of our own inclination, flee from pain; so that Hercules, when devoured by his poisoned tunic, cries out:—

> Shouting and groaning, and the rocks around Re-echoed his sad wails, the mountain heights
> Of Locrian lands, and sad Eubæa's hills. (Trachinæ of Sophocles, 1784)

XXX And we choose the virtues for the sake of pleasure, and not on their own account; just as we seek the skill of the physician for the sake of health, as Diogenes says, in the twentieth book of his Select Discourses, where lie also calls virtue a way of passing one's life. But Epicurus says, that virtue alone is inseparable from pleasure, but that everything else may be separated from it as mortal.

XXXI, Let us, however, now add the finishing stroke, as one may say, to this whole treatise, and to the life of the philosopher; giving some of his fundamental maxims, and closing the whole work with them, taking that for our end "which is the beginning of happiness.

1. "That which is happy and imperishable, neither has trouble itself, nor does it cause it to anything; so that it is not subject to the feelings of either anger or gratitude; for these feelings only exist in what is weak.

(In other passages he says that the Gods are speculated on by reason, some existing according to number, and others according to some similarity of form, arising from the continual flowing on of similar images, perfected for this very purpose in human form.)

2. "Death is nothing to us; for that which is dissolved is devoid of sensation, and that which is devoid of sensation is nothing to us.

3. "The limit of the greatness of the pleasures is the removal of everything which can give pain. And where pleasure is, as long as it lasts, that which gives pain, or that which feels pain, or both of them, are absent.

4. "Pain does not abide continuously in the flesh, but in its extremity it is present only a very short time. That pain which only just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh, does not last many days. But long diseases have in them more that is pleasant than painful to the flesh.

5. "It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, and honourably, and justly; nor to live prudently, and honourably, and justly, without living pleasantly. But he to whom it does not happen to live prudently, honourably, and justly, cannot possibly live pleasantly.

6. "For the sake of feeling confidence and security with regard to men, and not with reference to the nature of government and kingly power being a good, some men have wished to be eminent and powerful, in order that others might attain this feeling by their means; thinking that so they would secure safety as far as men are concerned. So that, if the life of such men is safe, they have attained to the nature of good; but if it is not safe, then they have failed in obtaining that for the sake of which they originally desired power according to the order of nature.

7. "No pleasure is intrinsically bad: but the efficient causes of some pleasures bring with them a great many perturbations of pleasure.

8. "If every pleasure were condensed, if one may so say, and if each lasted long, and affected the whole body, or the essential parts of it, then there would be no difference between one pleasure and another.

9. "If those things which make the pleasures of debauched men, put an end to the fears of the mind, and to those which arise about the heavenly bodies, and death, and pain; and if they taught us what ought to be the limit of our desires, we should have no pretence for blaming those who wholly devote themselves to pleasure, and who never feel any pain or grief (which is the chief evil) from any quarter.

10. "If apprehensions relating to the heavenly bodies did not disturb us, and if the terrors of death have no concern with us, and if we had the courage to contemplate the boundaries of pain and of the desires, we should have no need of physiological studies.

11. "It would not be possible for a person to banish all fear about those things which are called most essential, unless he knew what is the nature of the universe, or if he had any idea that the fables told about it could be true; and therefore, it is, that a person cannot enjoy unmixed pleasure without physiological knowledge.

12. "It would be no good for a man to secure himself safety as far as men are concerned, while in a state of apprehension as to all the heavenly bodies, and those under the earth, and in short, all those in the infinite.

13. Irresistible power and great wealth may, up to a certain point, give us security as far as men are concerned; but the security of men in general depends upon the tranquillity of their souls, and their freedom from ambition.

14. "The riches of nature are defined and easily procurable; but vain desires are insatiable.

15. "The wise man is but little favoured by fortune; but his reason procures him the greatest and most valuable goods, and these he does enjoy, and will enjoy the whole of his life.

16. "The just man is the freest of all men from disquietude; but the unjust man is a perpetual prey to it.

17. "Pleasure in the flesh is not increased, when once the pain arising from want is removed; it is only diversified.

18. "The most perfect happiness of the soul depends on these reflections, and on opinions of a similar character on all those questions which cause the greatest alarm to the mind.

19. "Infinite and finite time both have equal pleasure, if any one measures its limits by reason.

20. "If the flesh could experience boundless pleasure, it would want to dispose of eternity.

21. "But reason, enabling us to conceive the end and dissolution of the body, and liberating us from the fears relative to eternity, procures for us all the happiness of which life is capable, so completely that we have no further occasion to include eternity in our desires. In this disposition of mind, man is happy even when his troubles engage him to quit life; and to die thus, is for him only to interrupt a life of happiness.

22. "He who is acquainted with the limits of life knows, that that which removes the pain which arises from want, and which makes the whole of life perfect, is easily procurable; so that he has no need of those things which can only be attained with trouble.

23. "But as to the subsisting end, we ought to consider it with all the clearness and evidence which we refer to whatever we think and believe; otherwise, all things will be full of confusion and uncertainty of judgment.

24. "If you resist all the senses, you will not even have anything left to which you can refer, or by which you may be able to judge of the falsehood of the senses which you condemn.

25. "If you simply discard one sense, and do not distinguish between the different elements of the judgment, so as to know on the one hand, the induction which goes beyond the actual sensation, or, on the other, the actual and immediate notion; the affections, and all the conceptions of the mind which lean directly on the sensible representation, you will be imputing trouble into the other sense, and destroying in that quarter every species of criterion.

26. "If you allow equal authority to the ideas, which, being only inductive, require to be verified, and to those which bear about them an immediate certainty, you will not escape error; for you will be confounding doubtful opinions with those which are not doubtful, and true judgments with those of a different character.

27. "If, on every occasion, we do not refer every one of our actions to the chief end of nature, if we turn aside from that to seek or avoid some other object, there will be a want of agreement between our words and our actions.

28. "Of all the things which wisdom provides for the happiness of the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship.

29. "The same opinion encourages man to trust that no evil will be everlasting, or even of long duration; as it sees that, in the space of life allotted to us, the protection of friendship is most sure and trustworthy.

30. "Of the desires, some are natural and necessary, some natural, but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary, but owe their existence to vain opinions, (Epicurus thinks that those are natural and necessary which put an end to pains, as drink when one is thirsty; and that those are natural but not necessary which only diversify pleasure, but do not remove pain, such as expensive food; and that these are neither natural nor necessarily which are such as crowns, or the erection of statues.)

31. "Those desires which do not lead to pain, if they are not satisfied, are not necessary. It is easy to impose silence on them when they appear difficult to gratify, or likely to produce injury.

32. "When the natural desires, the failing to satisfy which is, nevertheless, not painful, are violent and obstinate, it is a proof that there is an admixture of vain opinion in them; for then energy does not arise from their own nature, but from the vain opinions of men.

33. "Natural justice is a covenant of what is suitable, leading men to avoid injuring one another, and being injured.

34. "Those animals which are unable to enter into an argument of this nature, or to guard against doing or sustaining mutual injury, have no such thing as justice or injustice. And the case is the same with those nations, the members of which are either unwilling or unable to enter into a covenant to respect their mutual interests.

35. "Justice has no independent existence; it results from mutual contracts, and establishes itself wherever there is a mutual engagement to guard against doing or sustaining mutual injury.

36. "Injustice is not intrinsically bad; it has this character only because there is joined with it a fear of not escaping those who are appointed to punish actions marked with that character.

37. "It is not possible for a man who secretly does anything in contravention of the agreement which men have made with one another, to guard against doing, or sustaining mutual injury, to believe that he shall always escape notice, even if he have escaped notice already ten thousand times; for, till his death, it is uncertain whether he will not be detected.

38. "In a general point of view, justice is the same thing to every one; for there is something advantageous in mutual society. Nevertheless, the difference of place, and divers other circumstances, make justice vary.

39. "From the moment that a thing declared just by the law is generally recognized as useful for the mutual relations of men, it becomes really just, whether it is universally regarded as such or not.

40. "But if, on the contrary, a thing established by law is not really useful for the social relations, then it is not just; and if that which was just, inasmuch as it was useful, loses this character, after having been for some time considered so, it is not less true that, during that time, it was really just, at least for those who do not perplex themselves about vain words, but who prefer, in every case, examining and judging for themselves.

41. "When, without any fresh circumstances arising, a thing which has been declared just in practice does not agree with the impressions of reason, that is a proof that the thing was not really just. In the same way, when in consequence of new circumstances, a thing which has been pronounced just does not any longer appear to agree with utility, the thing which was just, inasmuch as it was useful to the social relations and intercourse of mankind, ceases to be just the moment when it ceases to be useful.

42. "He who desires to live tranquilly without having any thing to fear from other men, ought to make himself friends; those whom he cannot make friends of, he should, at least, avoid rendering enemies; and if that is not in his power, he should, as far as possible, avoid all intercourse with them, and keep them aloof, as far as it is for his interest to do so.

43. "The happiest men are they who have arrived at the point of having nothing to fear from those who surround them. Such men live with one another most agreeably, having the firmest grounds of confidence in one another, enjoying the advantages of friendship in all their fullness, and not lamenting, as a pitiable circumstance, the premature death of their friends."

Readings for Chapter 5

Naturalism and Virtue

Nicomachean Ethics (excerpt)

Aristotle

Book I

Every sort of expert knowledge and every inquiry, and similarly every action and undertaking, seems to seek some good. Because of that, people are right to affirm that the good is "that which all things seek". But there appears to be a certain difference among ends: some are activities, while others are products of some kind, over and above the activities themselves. Where there are ends over and above the activities, in these cases the products are by their nature better than the activities. Since there are many sorts of action, and of expertise and knowledge, their ends turn out to be many too; thus health is the end of medicine, a ship of shipbuilding, victory of generalship, wealth of household management. But in every case where such activities fall under some single capacity, just as bridle-making falls under horsemanship, along with all the others that produce the equipment for horsemanship, and horsemanship along with every action that has to do with expertise in warfare falls under generalship—so in the same way others fall under a separate one; and in all activities the ends of the controlling ones are more desirable than the ends under them, because it is for the sake of the former that the latter too are pursued. It makes no difference—as in the case of the sorts of knowledge mentioned—whether the ends of the actions are the activities themselves, or some other thing over and above these.

If then there is some end in our practical projects that we wish for because of itself, while wishing for the other things we wish for because of it, and we do not choose everything because of something else (for if *that* is the case, the sequence will go on to infinity, making our desire empty and vain), it is clear that this will be the good, i.e. the chief good. So in relation to life, too, will knowing it have great weight, and like archers with a target would we be more successful in hitting the point we need to hit if we had this knowledge? If so, then one must try to grasp it at least in outline, that is, what it might be, and to which sort of expertise or productive capacity it belongs. It would seem to belong to the most sovereign, i.e. the most "architectonic". Political expertise appears to be like this, for it is this expertise that sets out which of the expertises there needs to be in cities, and what sorts of expertise each group of people should learn, and up to what point; and we see even the most prestigious of the productive capacities falling under it, for example generalship, household management, rhetoric; and since it makes use of the practical expertises that remain, and furthermore legislates about what one must do and what things one must abstain from doing, the end of this expertise will contain those of the rest; so that this end will be the human good. For even if the good is the same for a single person and for a city, the good of the city is a greater and more complete thing both to achieve and to preserve; for while to do so for one person on his own is satisfactory enough, to do it for a nation or for cities is finer and more godlike. So our inquiry seeks these things, being a political inquiry in a way.

Aristotle (2002) *Nicomachean Ethics* (translation, introduction and commentary by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 95–122. Reprinted with permission.

But our account would be adequate, if we achieved a degree of precision appropriate to the underlying material; for precision must not be sought to the same degree in all accounts of things, any more than it is by craftsmen in the things they are producing. Fine things and just things, which are what political expertise inquires about, involve great variation and irregularity, so that they come to seem fine and just by convention alone, and not by nature. Something like this lack of regularity is found also in good things, because of the fact that they turn out to be a source of damage to many people: some in fact have perished because of wealth, others because of courage. We must be content, then, when talking about things of this sort and starting from them, to show what is true about them roughly and in outline, and when talking about things that are for the most part, and starting from these, to reach conclusions too of the same sort. It is in this same way, then, that one must also receive each sort of account; for it is a mark of an educated person to look for precision in each kind of inquiry just to the extent that the nature of the subject allows it; it looks like the same kind of mistake to accept a merely persuasive account from a mathematician and to demand demonstrations from an expert in oratory. Each person judges well what he knows, and is a good judge of these things (so the person who is educated in a given thing is a good judge of that, and the person who is educated in everything is a good judge without qualification). This is why the young are not an appropriate audience for the political expert; for they are inexperienced in the actions that constitute life, and what is said will start from these and will be about these. What is more, because they have a tendency to be led by the emotions, it will be without point or use for them to listen, since the end is not knowing things but doing them. Nor does it make any difference whether a person is young in years or immature in character, for the deficiency is not a matter of time, but the result of living by emotion and going after things in that way. For having knowledge turns out to be without benefit to such people, as it is to those who lack self-control; whereas for those who arrange their desires, and act, in accordance with reason, it will be of great use to know about these things. Let this stand as our preamble: about audience, about how the present inquiry is to be received, and about what we are proposing.

Let us then resume the argument: since every sort of knowledge, and every undertaking, seeks after some good, let us say what it is that we say political expertise seeks, and what the topmost of all achievable goods is. Pretty well most people are agreed about what to call it: both ordinary people and people of quality say "happiness", and suppose that living well and doing well are the same thing as being happy. But they are in dispute about what happiness actually is, and ordinary people do not give the same answer as intellectuals. The first group identifies it with one of the obvious things that anyone would recognize, like pleasure or wealth or honour, while some pick some other thing and others another (often, too, the same person picks a different thing: when he falls ill, it's health, and if he is poor, it's wealth); but out of consciousness of their own ignorance they are in awe of those who say something impressive and over their heads. Some people used to think that besides these many goods there is another one, existing by itself, which is cause for all of these too of their being good. Now it is presumably rather otiose to examine all these opinions, and enough to examine those that are most widely held, or seem to have some justification. However we must keep in mind that there is a difference between arguments that begin from first principles and arguments that work to first principles. Plato too used to raise difficulties here, and rightly: he would inquire whether the movement of the discussion was from first principles or to them, just as in the stadium the runners might be moving away from the race stewards towards the turn or in the reverse direction. For one must begin from what is knowable, but there are two senses of "knowable": there is what is knowable *in relation to us,* and what is knowable *without qualification.* Presumably, then, in our case, we must start from what is knowable to us. Consequently, in order to listen appropriately to discussion about what is fine and just, i.e. about the objects of political expertise in general, one must have been well brought up. For the starting point is *that* it is so, and if this were sufficiently clear to us—well, in that case there will be no need to know in addition *why*. But such a person either has the relevant first principles, or might easily grasp them. As for anyone who has neither of the things in question, he should listen to what Hesiod says:

> Best out of everyone he who himself sees all that concerns him;
> Excellent too is that man who listens to others' good counsel.
> But the one who neither sees for himself, nor, hearing another,
> Takes the words to his heart—now that is a useless man.

But let us return to the point from which we digressed. On the good and happiness: to judge from their lives, most people, i.e. the most vulgar, seem—not unreasonably—to suppose it to be pleasure; that is just why they favour the life of consumption. The kinds of lives that stand out here are especially three: the one just mentioned; the political life; and the life of reflection. Now most of the utterly slavish sort of people obviously decide in favour of a life that belongs to grazing cattle, and not without reason, given that many of those in high places behave like Sardanapallus. People of quality, for their part, those who tend towards a life of action, go for honour; for pretty much this is the end of the political life. But it appears more superficial than what we are looking for, as it seems to be located in those doing the honouring rather than in the person receiving it, and our hunch is that the good is something that belongs to a person and is difficult to take away from him. Again, people seem to pursue honour in order to be convinced that they themselves are good: at any rate they seek to be honoured by people of discernment, and among those who know them, and to be honoured for excellence. So it is clear, at any rate according to them, that excellence is of greater value. In fact, perhaps one might suppose that this is even more the end of the political life than honour is. But excellence too appears somewhat incomplete: for it seems to be possible actually to be asleep while having one's excellence, or to spend one's life in inactivity, and furthermore to suffer, and to meet with the greatest misfortunes; and no one would call the person who lived this kind of life happy, unless to defend a debating position. That will suffice on these questions, since they have also been adequately discussed in the books that have circulated. Third of the three lives in question, then, is the life of reflection, about which we shall make our investigation in what follows. The life of the money maker is of a sort that is chosen under compulsion of need, and wealth is clearly not the good we are looking for, since it is useful, and for the sake of something else. Hence one might be more inclined to take as ends the things mentioned before, because they are valued for themselves. But it appears that they are not what we are looking for either; and yet there are many established arguments that focus on them.

Let these things, then, be set aside; but perhaps we had better discuss the universal good, and raise difficulties about how "good" is predicated—although such an investigation goes against the grain because it was friends of ours who introduced the forms. But it would seem perhaps better, even imperative, certainly when it is a matter of saving the truth, to destroy even what is one's own, especially if one is a philosopher; for while both friends and the truth are dear, the right thing is to honour the truth first. Well then, those who introduced this view used not to set up forms for things to which they applied the notions of prior and posterior, which is why they also did not construct a form of numbers; but "good" is said in the categories of "what it is", quality, and relative to something: and what is in its own right, i.e. substance, is by nature prior to what is relative to something (for the latter resembles an offshoot or accident of what is); it follows that there will not be some common form over these. Again, since "good" is said in as many ways as "being" (since it is said in the category of "what", e.g. god and intelligence, in that of quality, e.g. the excellences, in that of quantity, e.g. the moderate amount, in that of relative to something, e.g. the useful, in that of time, e.g. the right moment, in that of place, e.g. habitat, and other things like this), it is clear that there will not be some common and unitary universal in this case; for otherwise good would not be said in all the categories, but only in one. Again, since in relation to the things corresponding to a single form there is also a single kind of knowledge, there would also be some single knowledge of all goods; but as it is there are many even of goods falling under a single category, as for example there are many kinds of knowledge of the right moment, since in war there is generalship, and medicine in the case of disease, while for the moderate amount there is medicine in diet and

athletic training in physical exertion. One might raise difficulties, too, about what it might be that they *mean* by talking about the (whatever it may be in each case) "itself", if in fact there is one and the same definition both in the case of "man-itself" and in that of man, namely the definition of man. For in so far as both are man, they will not differ at all; and if that is so, neither will there be a difference in the other case, in so far as both "good-itself" and good are good. Nor will "good-itself" be more good by virtue of being eternal, unless it is also true that what is white and long-lasting is whiter than what is white and short-lived. The Pythagoreans seem to have something more persuasive to say about the matter, when they place the One in the column of goods; and apparently Speusippus followed their lead. But let us leave these people for another occasion. As for those others we referred to, we may detect something of a dilemma arising for them, from their not having said the same things about every good: rather, those that are pursued and valued for themselves are called good by reference to a single form, while those that tend to bring these about or somehow preserve them or prevent their opposites are called good because of them, and in another way. It is clear, then, that goods will be called good in two ways, i.e. some will be good in themselves, while the other sort will be good because of them. Well then, let us separate off those good in themselves from those that are useful, and consider whether they are called good by reference to a single form. These goods in themselves—what sort of goods would one suppose these to be? Or are they those that are pursued even on their own, like understanding, or seeing, or certain pleasures or honours? For even if we do pursue these because of something else, still one might suppose them to belong among things good in themselves. Or is there nothing that is good in itself at all apart from the form? In which case, the form will have no point. If on the other hand the things mentioned also belong among things good in themselves, the same definition of the good will need to show up in all of them, just as the definition of whiteness shows up in snow and white lead. But in fact the definitions of honour, understanding, and pleasure are distinct and different according to the way in which they are goods. In that case the good is not something in common and relating to a single form. But then on what principle *is* it predicated? For it does not look like a case of mere chance homonymy. Or is it on the principle that other goods derive from a single one, or that they all converge on it; or is it rather a matter of analogy: as sight is in the case of body, intelligence is in the case of soul, and so on with other goods, other contexts? But perhaps for now we should leave these questions aside; for to get precision on them would belong to a different sort of inquiry. Similarly in relation to the form; for even if the good that is predicated in common of things is some one thing something separate "itself by itself", it is clear that it will not be anything doable or capable of being acquired by a human being, whereas, as things stand, it is something like this that we are looking for. But perhaps someone might think it better to get to know it with a view to getting those goods that *are* capable of being acquired and doable; they might think that by having this as a kind of model we shall also be better able to identify those things that are good for us, and in that case to attain them. Well, the idea has a certain plausibility, but seems not to be in accord with what we find with the various sorts of expert knowledge; for all of them seek some particular good, and though they look for whatever is lacking, they leave out knowledge of the form of the good. And yet it is hardly likely that all the experts should be unaware of so great a resource, and should fail even to go looking for it. But it is also difficult to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be helped in relation to his craft by knowing this good "itself"; or how someone who has seen the form itself will be a better doctor or a better general. For the doctor appears not even to look into health in this way; what he looks into is human health or perhaps rather the health of this individual, for he deals with his patients one by one.

So much for these subjects: let us go back to the good we are looking for—what might it be? For it appears to be one thing in one activity or sphere of expertise, another in another: it is different in medicine and in generalship, and likewise in the rest. What then is the good that belongs to each? Or is it that for which everything else is done? In medicine this is health, in generalship victory, in

housebuilding a house, in some other sphere some other thing, but in every activity and undertaking it is the end; for it is for the sake of this that they all do the rest. The consequence is that if there is some one end of all practical undertakings, this will be the practicable good, and if there are more than one, it will be these. Thus as the argument turns in its course, it has arrived at the same point: but we must try even more to achieve precision in this matter. Since, then, the ends are evidently more than one, and of these we choose some because of something else, as we do wealth, flutes, and instruments in general, it is clear that not all are complete; and the best is evidently something complete. So that if there is some one thing alone that is complete, this will be what we are looking for, and if there are more such things than one, the most complete of these. Now we say that what is worth pursuing for itself is more complete than what is worth pursuing because of something else, and what is never desirable because of something else is more complete than those things that are desirable both for themselves and because of it; while what is complete *without qualification* is what is always desirable in itself and never because of something else. Happiness seems most of all to be like this; for this we do always choose because of itself and never because of something else, while as for honour, and pleasure, and intelligence, and every excellence, we do choose them because of themselves (since if nothing resulted from them, we would still choose each of them), but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, supposing that we shall be happy through them. But happiness no one chooses for the sake of these things, nor in general because of something else. The same appears also to follow from considerations of self-sufficiency; for the complete good seems to be self-sufficient. By "self-sufficient", we do not mean sufficient for oneself alone, for the person living a life of isolation, but also for one's parents, children, wife, and generally those one loves, and one's fellow citizens, since man is by nature a civic being. But there must be some limit found here: if the point is extended to ancestors and descendants and loved ones' loved ones, an infinite series will result. But this we must look at on another occasion: the "self-sufficient" we posit as being what in isolation makes life desirable and lacking in nothing, and we think happiness is like this—and moreover most desirable of all things, it not being counted with other goods: clearly, if it *were* so counted in with the least of other goods, we would think it more desirable, for what is added becomes an extra quantity of goods, and the larger total amount of goods is always more desirable. So happiness is clearly something complete and self-sufficient, being the end of our practical undertakings.

But perhaps it appears somewhat uncontroversial to say that *happiness* is the chief good, and a more distinct statement of what it is still required. Well, perhaps this would come about if one established the *function* of human beings. For just as for a flute-player, or a sculptor, or any expert, and generally for all those who have some characteristic function or activity, the good—their doing well—seems to reside in their function, so too it would seem to be for the human being, if indeed there is some function that belongs to him. So does a carpenter or a shoemaker have certain functions and activities, while a human being has none, and is by nature a do-nothing? Or just as an eye, a hand, a foot, and generally each and every part of the body appears as having some function, in the same way would one posit a characteristic function for a human being too, alongside all of these? What, then, should we suppose this to be? For being alive is obviously shared by plants too, and we are looking for what is peculiar to human beings. In that case we must divide off the kind of life that consists in taking in nutriment and growing. Next to consider would be some sort of life of perception, but this too is evidently shared, by horses, oxen, and every other animal. There remains a practical sort of life of what possesses reason; and of this, one element "possesses reason" in so far as it is obedient to reason, while the other possesses it in so far as it actually has it, and itself thinks. Since this life, too, is spoken of in two ways, we must posit the *active* life; for this seems to be called a practical life in the more proper sense. If the function of a human being is activity of soul in accordance with reason, or not apart from reason, and the function, we say, of a given sort of practitioner and a good practitioner of that sort is generically the same, as for example in the case of a cithara-player and a good cithara-player, and this is so without qualification in all cases, when a difference in respect of excellence is added to the function (for

what belongs to the citharist is to play the cithara, to the good citharist to play it well)—if all this is so, and a human being's function we posit as being a kind of life, and this life as being activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason, and it belongs to a good man to perform these well and finely, and each thing is completed well when it possesses its proper excellence: if all this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with excellence (and if there are more excellences than one, in accordance with the best and the most complete). But furthermore it will be this in a complete life. For a single swallow does not make spring, nor does a single day; in the same way, neither does a single day, or a short time, make a man blessed and happy.

Let the good, then, be sketched in this way; for perhaps we need to give an outline first, and fill in the detail later. To develop and articulate those elements in the sketch that are as they should be would seem to be something anyone can do, and time seems to be good at discovering such things, or helping us to discover them; this is also the source of advances in the productive skills—it is for anyone to add what is lacking. But one must also bear in mind what was said before, and not look for precision in the same way in everything, but in accordance with the underlying material in each sphere, and to the extent that is appropriate to the inquiry. For a carpenter and a geometer look for the right angle in different ways: the one looks for it to the extent to which it is useful towards his product, while the other looks for what it is, or what sort of thing it is; for his gaze is on the truth. We should proceed in just the same way in other areas too, so that the side issues do not overwhelm the main ones. One should not demand to know the reason *why,* either, in the same way in all matters: in some cases, it will suffice if *that* something is so has been well shown, as indeed is true of starting points; and that something is so is primary and a starting point. Of starting points, some are grasped by induction, some by perception, some by a sort of habituation, and others in other ways: one must try to get hold of each sort in the appropriate way, and take care that they are well marked out, since they have great importance in relation to what comes later. For the start of something seems to be more than half of the whole, and through it many of the things being looked for seem to become evident.

But we must inquire into it not only on the basis of our conclusion and the premisses of our argument, but also on the basis of the things people say about it: for a true view will have all the available evidence in harmony with it, while a false one quickly finds itself in discord with what is true. Well then, given the division of goods into three, with some said to be external, and others said to relate to soul and body respectively, we commonly say that those relating to soul are goods in the most proper sense and good to the highest degree, and we count actions, and soul-related activities, as "relating to soul". So what we have said will be right at any rate according to this view, which is an old one, and has the agreement of those who reflect philosophically. Our account will be right too in so far as certain actions and activities are being identified as the end; for in this way the end turns out to belong among goods of the soul and not among external goods. In harmony with our account, too, is the idea that the happy man both lives well and does well; for happiness has virtually been defined as a sort of living well and doing well. Also all the things that are looked for in relation to happiness appear to belong to what we have said it is. For some people think it is excellence, others that it is wisdom, others a kind of intellectual accomplishment; others think that it is these, or one of these, together with pleasure or not without pleasure, while others include external prosperity as well. Some of these views have been held by many people from ancient times, while some belong to a few people of high reputation; and it is not reasonable to suppose that either set of people are wholly wrong, but rather that they are getting it right at least in some one respect, or else in most respects. Well, our account is in harmony with those who say that happiness is excellence, or some form of excellence; for "activity in accordance with excellence" belongs to excellence. But perhaps it makes no little difference whether we suppose the chief good to be located in the possession of excellence, or in its use, i.e. in a disposition or in a form of activity. For it is possible for the disposition to be present and yet to produce nothing good, as for example in the case of the person who is asleep, or in some other way rendered inactive, but the same will not hold of the activity: the person will necessarily be doing something, and

will do (it) well. Just as at the Olympic Games it is not the finest and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for the winners come from among these), so too in life it is the doers that become achievers of fine and good things—and rightly so. Their life, too, is in itself pleasant. For enjoying pleasure is something that belongs to the soul, and to each person that thing is pleasant in relation to which he is called "lover of" that sort of thing, as for example a horse is to the horse-lover, a spectacle to the theatre-lover; and in the same way what is just is also pleasant to the lover of justice, and generally the things in accordance with excellence to the lover of excellence. Now for most people the things that are pleasant are in conflict, because they are not such by nature, whereas to lovers of the fine what is pleasant is what is pleasant by nature; and actions in accordance with excellence are like this, so that they are pleasant both to these people and in themselves. So their life has no need of pleasure in addition, like a piece of jewellery fastened on, but contains pleasure within itself. For to add to what we have said, the sort of person who does not delight in fine actions does not even qualify as a person of excellence: no one would call a person just if he failed to delight in acting justly, nor open-handed if he failed to delight in open-handed actions; and similarly in other cases. If that is so, actions in accordance with excellence will be pleasant in themselves. But they will be *good,* too, and fine, and will be each of these to the highest degree, if the person of excellence is a good judge here—which he is, and he judges in the way we have said. So happiness is what is best, and finest, and pleasantest, and these qualities are not divided as the inscription at Delos says:

> What's finest—perfect justice; what's best—not that, but health.
> What's most pleasant—none of those, but getting the thing one adores.

All these accolades in fact belong to the best kinds of activity; and it is these, or the one of them that is best, that we say happiness is. Nevertheless it clearly also requires external goods in addition, as we have said; for it is impossible, or not easy, to perform fine actions if one is without resources. For in the first place many things are done by means of friends, or wealth, or political power, as if by means of tools; and then again, there are some things the lack of which is like a stain on happiness, things like good birth, being blessed in one's children, beauty: for the person who is extremely ugly, or of low birth, or on his own without children is someone we would be not altogether inclined to call happy, and even less inclined, presumably, if someone had totally depraved children or friends, or ones who were good but dead. As we have said, then, one seems to need this sort of well-being too; and this is the reason why some people identify good fortune with happiness, others excellence.

This is the reason too why people debate whether happiness is something learned, or the product of habituation, or the product of training in some other way, or whether it comes by some sort of divine dispensation, or even through chance. Well, if anything is a gift of the gods to mankind, it is reasonable to suppose that *happiness* is god-given—more than any other human possession, by the same degree that it is best. But, while this subject will perhaps belong more to a different investigation, it appears nevertheless that, even if happiness is not sent by gods but comes through excellence and some process of learning or training, it is one of the most godlike things; for the prize and fulfilment of excellence appears to be to the highest degree good, and to be something godlike and blessed. It will also be something available to many; for it will be possible for it to belong, through some kind of learning or practice, to anyone not handicapped in relation to excellence. And if it is better like this than that we should be happy through chance, it is reasonable to suppose that it is like this, if in fact things in the natural world are as fine as it is possible for them to be, and similarly things in the realm of artifice, or causation generally, and most of all in relation to the best cause. To hand over the greatest and finest of things to chance would be too much out of tune. But the answer we are looking for is evident from our account too: for we have said that happiness is a certain sort of activity in accordance with excellence; and of the remaining goods, some are necessary to happiness, while others contribute to it by being useful tools. This will

agree, too, with our opening remarks; for we were there positing that the end of political expertise is best, and this expertise is dedicated above all to making the citizens be of a certain quality, i.e. good, and doers of fine things. So it makes sense that we do not call either an ox, or a horse, or any other animal "happy", because none of them is capable of sharing in this sort of activity. For this reason a child is not "happy", either; for he is not yet a doer of the sorts of things in question, because of his age; those children that *are* said to be happy are being called blessed because of their prospects. This is because, as we have said, happiness requires both complete excellence and a complete life. For many changes occur in life, and all sorts of things happen: it is possible for a person who flourishes to the highest degree to encounter great disasters in old age, as happened to Priam in the story of events at Troy; and no one who has had a fate like that, and died miserably, is counted happy by anyone.

Is it the case, then, that we should not count anyone else happy, either, so long as he is alive? Must we agree with Solon, and look to a man's end? And if we *should* posit that view, is it then that one is really happy—when one is dead? Or is that a completely strange notion, especially in our case, when we are saying that happiness is a kind of activity? But if we do not call the dead happy, and if this is not what Solon means, either—only that that is the time when it will be safe to call a human being blessed, on the grounds that he is now beyond the reach of evils and misfortunes: even this one might dispute, for someone who is dead seems in a way to be affected by both good and bad, as much as someone who is alive but not perceiving what is happening to him; so for example the dead seem to be affected when their children are honoured or disgraced, and generally by whether their descendants do well or encounter misfortune. But this too raises a difficulty. Take someone who has lived a blessed life up until old age, and died in a manner that accords with that: the way his descendants turn out is something that will be liable to great variation, and some of them may be good and enjoy the life they deserve, while for others the opposite happens; and it is clearly possible for them to be separated by all sorts of different intervals from their dead ancestors. It would then be a strange result if the dead person were to change along with his descendants, and were to be happy at one time and miserable at another; and it would be odd too if the fortunes of descendants did not touch their ancestors to any degree, or over any period of time. But we should go back to the first problem, for perhaps from that we shall also be able to observe the answer to the question we are now considering. If, then, one must look to a man's end, and call a man blessed at that point, not on the grounds, that he is then blessed, but because he was so before, is it not plainly strange if, when he is happy, what actually belongs to him will not be truly predicated of him, as a result of our not wanting to call the living happy because of the changes that can occur, and because of our assumption that happiness is something firm-rooted and not in any way easily subject to change, while often the same people find their fortunes circling back on themselves? For clearly if we were to track a person's fortunes, we shall find ourselves often calling the same person happy, and then miserable, thus revealing the happy man as a kind of "chameleon, and infirmly based". Or is it completely wrong to track a person's fortunes like this? For *they* are not where living well or badly is located, but rather human life needs them in addition, as we have said, and it is activities in accordance with excellence that are responsible for our happiness, and the opposite sort of activities for the opposite state. The present difficulty itself bears witness to our account. For in no aspect of what human beings do is there such stability as there is in activities in accordance with excellence: they seem to be more firm-rooted even than the various kinds of knowledge we possess; and of these very kinds of knowledge the most honourable are more firm-rooted because of the fact that those who are blessed spend their lives in them more than in anything, and most continuously, for this is likely to be why forgetfulness does not occur in relation to them. What we are looking for, then, will belong to the happy man, and throughout life he will be such as we say; for he will always, or most of all people, do and reflect on what is in accordance with excellence, and as for what fortune brings, "the man who is truly good and four-square beyond reproach" will bear it in the finest way, without any note of discord of any kind. Given that many things happen by chance, things that differ in magnitude and smallness,

small instances of good fortune, and similarly of the opposite, clearly do not alter the balance of a man's life, whereas turns of fortune that are great and repeated will if good make one's life more blessed (since they are themselves such as to add lustre to life, and the use of them is fine and worth while), and if they turn out in the opposite way, they crush and maim one's blessedness; for they bring on pains, and obstruct many sorts of activities. Nevertheless, even in these circumstances the quality of fineness shines through, when someone bears repeated and great misfortunes calmly, not because he is insensitive to them but because he is a person of nobility and greatness of soul. If one's activities are what determines the quality of one's life, as we have said, no one who is blessed will become miserable; for he will never do what is hateful and vile. For we consider that the truly good and sensible person bears what fortune brings him with good grace, and acts on each occasion in the finest way possible given the resources at the time, just as we think that a good general uses the army he has to the best strategic advantage, and a shoemaker makes a shoe as finely as it can be made out of the hides he has been given; and similarly with all the other sorts of craftsmen. If so, then the happy man will never become miserable, though neither will he be blessed if he meets with fortunes like Priam's. Nor indeed will he take on many colours, or be subject to easy change; for on the one hand he will not be readily dislodged from his happy state, and not by any misfortune that happens along, but only by great and repeated ones, and on the other hand he will not recover his happiness from such misfortunes in a short time, but if at all in some extended and complete passage of life in which he achieves great and fine things. What then stops us from calling happy the one who is active in accordance with complete excellence, sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some random period of time but over a complete life? Or must we add that he will also continue to live like that, and die accordingly, since his future is not apparent to us, and we posit happiness as an end, and complete in every way and every respect? If so, we shall call blessed those living people who have and will have the things we have mentioned, but blessed as human beings.

On these issues, let us draw the line at this point: as for the question we left behind, the idea that the fortunes of one's descendants and all one's loved ones should make not the slightest contribution to one's state seems too devoid of fellow feeling, and contrary to what people think; however since the things that come about are many and exhibit all sorts of variety, and some penetrate to us more and some less, to make distinctions in each and every case appears a long, even endless task, and it will perhaps be enough if we deal with the matter in general terms and in outline. If, then, there is a similarity between the misfortunes that affect oneself and those affecting all one's loved ones, with some possessing weight and influencing the quality of life, and others looking like lighter occurrences, and if, for any given incident, whether it involves the living or the dead makes much more difference than whether in tragedies lawless, terrible deeds have happened beforehand or are presently being enacted, we must then take this difference too into account in our argument, or rather perhaps we must bring in the difficulty, in relation to the dead, whether they share in any good or in the things opposite to that. For it seems likely from these considerations that even if anything at all does penetrate through to them, whether good or the opposite, it is something feeble and small, either small generally or small to them, or if not, at any rate of such a size and such a sort as not to make happy those who are not already, nor to take blessedness away from those who are. Thus the dead do seem to be somehow affected when their loved ones do well, and similarly when they do badly, but in such a way and to such an extent as neither to render the happy unhappy nor do anything else of the sort.

With this clarified, let us consider whether happiness comes under the heading of what is to be praised or rather of what is to be honoured; for obviously it is not found among the potentialities. Everything praised appears to be praised for being of a certain quality and being disposed in a certain way towards something; for we praise the just man, the courageous man, and in general the good man, and excellence, because of his actions, i.e. what he does, and we praise the strong

man, too, and the one who is good at running, and so on in other cases, because they are of a certain quality and disposed in a certain way towards something good and worth doing. This is also clear if we consider praises offered to the gods; for they appear laughable if they are offered by reference to our case, and this actually occurs, because of the fact that we have mentioned, that praise is always with reference to something. But if praise is of things like this, it is clear that it is not praise that is appropriate to things that are good to the highest possible degree, but something greater and better, as in fact accords with our practice, for we call both gods and the most godlike men "blessed" and "happy". Similarly in the case of good things: for no one praises happiness as one does justice, but ranks it blessed, as being something more godlike and superior. It seems, in fact, that Eudoxus put well the claims of pleasure to first place in the competition of goods: he thought that the fact that it is not praised, even though it is a good, indicated that it was superior to the things that *are* praised, as he thought god and *the* good are superior, because it is to these that the other things are referred. For praise is appropriate to excellence, since excellence is what makes people disposed to fine actions; whereas encomia belong to things done, whether in the sphere of the body or in that of the soul. However to achieve precision in these things perhaps belongs more to those who have worked on the subject of encomia; for our purposes it is clear, from what we have said, that happiness is one of the things that are honourable and complete. This also seems to be so because of the fact that it is a principle; for it is for the sake of happiness that we all do everything else we do, and we lay it down that the principle and cause of goods is something honourable and godlike.

Since happiness is some activity of soul in accordance with complete excellence, we should discuss the subject of excellence; for perhaps in this way we shall get a better view of happiness too. In fact it seems that the true political expert will have worked at excellence more than anything; for what he wants is to make the members of the citizen-body good, and obedient to the laws. A model in this case is provided by the lawgivers of the Cretans and the Spartans, and any others there have been like them. If the present inquiry belongs to the sphere of political expertise, the investigation into excellence will be in accordance with our original purpose. But clearly it is human excellence we should inquire about, because it was the human good that we were looking for, and human happiness. By "human excellence" we mean excellence of soul, not of body; happiness, too, we say, is activity of soul. If all this is so, clearly the political expert should know, in a way, about soul, just as the person who is going to treat people's eyes should know about the entire body, too; and more so, by the same degree that political expertise is more honourable than and superior to the doctor's; and the better sort of doctor is in fact much occupied with knowing about the body. It is for the political expert too, then, to reflect about the soul, but he should do so for the sake of the things in question, and to the extent that will suffice in relation to what is being looked for; to go into greater detail is perhaps a task too laborious for our present enterprise. There are some things said on the subject of soul in our published works too that are quite adequate, and we should make use of them: for example, that one aspect of soul is non-rational, while another possesses reason. It makes no difference for present purposes whether these are delimited like the parts of the body, and like everything that is divisible into parts, or whether they are two things by definition but by nature inseparable, like the convex and the concave in the case of a curved surface. Of the non-rational, one grade looks likely to be shared, and to have to do with growth—by which I mean what is responsible for the taking in of food and for increase in size; for this sort of capacity of soul one would posit as being in all things that take in food, and in embryos, and this same one too as being in them when they are full-grown, for it is more reasonable to suppose the presence of this one than of any other. Excellence in the exercise of this capacity, then, appears to be something shared and not distinctively human: this part, and this capacity, seem to be most active when things are asleep, and it is most difficult to tell the good and the bad man apart when they are asleep (which is why people say that there is no difference at all between the happy and the miserable for half of their lives—but this is a perfectly reasonable consequence, because sleep is inactivity of soul in that respect in which it is said to be excellent or

worthless), unless to some small degree some movements really do penetrate us in sleep, and in this way the dream-appearances of reasonable people are better than what appears to any random person. But on these subjects that will suffice, and we should leave the nutritive aspect of soul to one side, since it appears by nature devoid of any share in human excellence. But another kind of soul also seems to be non-rational, although participating in a way in reason. Take those with and without self-control: we praise their reason, and the aspect of their soul that possesses reason; it gives the right encouragement, in the direction of what is best, but there appears to be something else besides reason that is naturally in them, which fights against reason and resists it. For exactly as with paralysed limbs, which when their owners decide to move them to the right take off in the wrong direction, moving to the left, so it is in the case of the soul: the impulses of the person lacking self-control are contrary to each other. The difference is that in the case of the body we actually see the part that is moving wrongly, which we do not in the case of the soul. But perhaps we should not be any less inclined to think that in the soul too there is something besides reason, opposing and going against it. How it is different is of no importance. But this part too seems to participate in reason, as we have said: at any rate, in the self-controlled person it is obedient to reason—and in the moderate and courageous person it is presumably still readier to listen; for in him it always chimes with reason. The non-rational, then, too, appears to be double in nature. For the plant-like aspect of soul does not share in reason in any way, while the appetitive and generally desiring part does participate in it in a way, i.e. in so far as it is capable of listening to it and obeying it: it is the way one is reasonable when one *takes* account of advice from one's father or loved ones, not when one *has* an account of things, as for example in mathematics. That the non-rational is in a way persuaded by reason is indicated by our practice of admonishing people, and all the different forms in which we reprimand and encourage them. If one should call this too "possessing reason", then the aspect of soul that possesses reason will also be double in nature: one element of it will have it in the proper sense and in itself, another as something capable of listening as if to one's father. Excellence too is divided according to this difference; for we call some of them intellectual excellences, others excellences of character—intellectual accomplishment, good sense, wisdom on the one hand counting on the side of the intellectual excellences, open-handedness and moderation counting among those of character. For when we talk about character, we do not say that someone is accomplished in a subject, or has a good sense of things, but rather that he is mild or moderate; but we do also praise someone accomplished in something for his disposition, and the dispositions we praise are the ones we call "excellences".

Book II

Excellence being of two sorts, then, the one intellectual and the other of character, the intellectual sort mostly both comes into existence and increases as a result of teaching (which is why it requires experience and time), whereas excellence of character results from habituation—which is in fact the source of the name it has acquired [*ēthikē*], the word for "character-trait" [*ēthos*] being a slight variation of that for "habituation" [*ĕthos*]. This makes it quite clear that none of the excellences of character comes about in us by nature; for no natural way of being is changed through habituation, as for example the stone which by nature moves downwards will not be habituated into moving upwards, even if someone tries to make it so by throwing it upwards ten thousand times, nor will fire move downwards, nor will anything else that is by nature one way be habituated into behaving in another. In that case the excellences develop in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but because we are naturally able to receive them and are brought to completion by means of habituation. Again, in the case of those things that accrue to us by nature, we possess the capacities for them first, and display them in actuality later (something that is evident in the case of the senses: we did not acquire our senses as a result of repeated acts of seeing, or repeated acts of hearing, but rather the other way round—we used them because we had them, rather than acquired them because we used them); whereas we acquire the excellences through having first engaged in the activities, as is

also the case with the various sorts of expert knowledge—for the way we learn the things we should do, knowing how to do them, is by doing them. For example people become builders by building, and cithara-players by playing the cithara; so too, then, we become just by doing just things, moderate by doing moderate things, and courageous by doing courageous things. What happens in cities testifies to this: lawgivers make the citizens good through habituation, and this is what every lawgiver *aims* at, but those who do it badly miss their mark; and this is what makes one constitution different from another, a good one from a bad one. Again, it is from the same things and through the same things that every excellence is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every expertise; for it is from playing the cithara that both the good and the bad cithara-players come about. So too both with builders and the rest: good building will result in good builders, bad building in bad ones. If it were not like this, there would be no need at all of anyone to teach them, and instead everyone would just become a good builder or a bad one. This, then, is how it is with the excellences too; for it is through acting as we do in our dealings with human beings that some of us become just and others unjust, and through acting as we do in frightening situations, and through becoming habituated to fearing or being confident, that some of us become courageous and some of us cowardly. A similar thing holds, too, with situations relating to the appetites, and with those relating to temper: some people become moderate and mild-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, the one group as a result of behaving one way in such circumstances, the other as a result of behaving another way. We may sum up by saying just that dispositions come about from activities of a similar sort. This is why it is necessary to ensure that the activities be of a certain quality; for the varieties of these are reflected in the dispositions. So it does not make a small difference whether people are habituated to behave in one way or in another way from childhood on, but a very great one; or rather, it makes all the difference in the world.

Since, then, the present undertaking is not for the sake of theory, as our others are (for we are not inquiring into what excellence is for the sake of knowing it, but for the sake of becoming good, since otherwise there would be no benefit in it at all), we need to inquire into the subjects relating to actions, i.e. to how one should act; for as we have said, our actions are also responsible for our coming to have dispositions of a certain sort. Now, that one should act in accordance with the correct prescription is a shared view—let it stand as a basic assumption; there will be a discussion about it later, both about what "the correct prescription" is, and about how it is related to the other kinds of excellence. But before that let it be agreed that everything one says about practical undertakings has to be said, not with precision, but in rough outline; just as we also said at the beginning that the sorts of account we demand must be determined by the subject matter: things in the sphere of action and things that bring advantage have nothing stable about them, any more than things that bring health. But if what one says universally is like this, what one says about particulars is even more lacking in precision; for it does not fall either under any expertise or under any set of rules—the agents themselves have to consider the circumstances relating to the occasion, just as happens in the case of medicine, too, and of navigation.

But even though the present discussion is like this, we must try to give some help. First of all, then, one must keep in view that the sorts of things we are talking about are naturally such as to be destroyed by deficiency and excess, just as we observe—since we have to use what is obvious to testify on behalf of what is not so—in the case of strength and health; for both excessive training and too little training will destroy our strength, and similarly if we drink or eat too much, that will destroy our health, whereas drinking and eating proportionate amounts creates, increases, and preserves it. So too it is, then, with moderation, courage, and the other excellences. For someone who runs away from everything, out of fear, and withstands nothing, becomes cowardly, and correspondingly someone who is frightened of nothing at all and advances in the face of just anything becomes rash; and similarly, too, someone who takes advantage of every pleasure offered and holds back from none becomes self-indulgent, while someone who runs away from every pleasure, as boors do, is insensate, as it were. Moderation, then, and courage are destroyed by excess and deficiency, and preserved by what is intermediate between them. But not only are the excellences

brought about, increased, and destroyed as a result of the same things, and by the same things, but it is in the same things that we shall find them activated too. This in fact holds in the other, more obvious cases, as for example with bodily strength; for strength comes about from taking plenty of nourishment and withstanding repeated exertion, and the strong person would be most capable of doing these things. So it is with the excellences as well: from holding back from pleasures we become moderate, and also when we have become moderate we are most capable of holding back from them; and similarly, too, with courage—from being habituated to scorn frightening things and withstand them we become courageous people, and having become courageous we shall be best able to withstand frightening things.

The pleasure or pain that supervenes on what people do should be treated as a sign of their dispositions; for someone who holds back from bodily pleasure and does so cheerfully is a moderate person, while someone who is upset at doing so is self-indulgent, and someone who withstands frightening things and does so cheerfully, or anyway without distress, is a courageous person, while someone who is distressed at them is cowardly. For excellence of character has to do with pleasures and pains: it is because of pleasure that we do bad things, and because of pain that we hold back from doing fine things. This is why we must have been brought up in a certain way from childhood onwards, as Plato says, so as to delight in and be distressed by the things we should; this is what the correct education is. Again, if the excellences have to do with actions and affections, and every affection and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, this will be another reason for thinking that excellence has to do with pleasures and pains. A further proof is afforded by the practice of forcible correction, which takes place through pleasures and pains; for it is a kind of medical treatment, and it is in the nature of medical treatments to be effected through opposites. Further, as in fact we said just now, every disposition of the soul by nature relates to and has to do with the sorts of things that make the soul worse and better; and it is through pleasures and pains that people become bad, i.e. by pursuing them and running away from them, either the ones they shouldn't, or when they shouldn't, or in a way they shouldn't, or however many other distinctions are made in one's prescriptions. This is also why people define the excellences as kinds of impassivity and immobility; but they go wrong because they say what they say without specifying—they don't add "as one should", "as one shouldn't", "when one should", and all the other specifications. It is, then, a basic assumption that this kind of excellence is a disposition to act in the best ways in relation to pleasures and pains, while badness is the opposite. That excellence and badness have to do with the same things will also become clear to us from the following considerations. The things pertinent to choice being three, and those pertinent to avoidance also three, i.e. what is fine, what is advantageous, and what is pleasant, and their opposites, the excellent person tends to get things right in relation to all of them, while the bad person tends to get things wrong, and especially in relation to pleasure; for pleasure both is something shared with the animals, and accompanies all the things falling under the heading of choice (since in fact what is fine and advantageous seems pleasant). Again, pleasure is something we have all grown up with since infancy; the result is that it is hard to rub us clean of this impulse, dyed as it is into our lives. And we measure our actions too, some of us more, some less, by pleasure and pain. Because of this, then, our whole concern is necessarily with these; for it makes no small difference with regard to action whether someone feels pleasure and pain in a good way or a bad way. Again, it is harder to fight against pleasure than to "fight temper" (as Heraclitus says), and it is always in relation to what is harder that we find both technical expertise and excellence; for it is also a better thing to do something well if it is difficult. So that for this reason too the whole concern both for excellence and for political expertise is with pleasures and pains; for someone who behaves well in relation to pleasure and pain will be a person of excellence, while someone who behaves badly in relation to them will be bad. So much, then, for these subjects—that excellence has to do with pleasures and pains, that the things from which it comes about are also the ones by which it is both increased and—if they come about in a different way—destroyed, and that the things from which it has come about are also the things in relation to which it is activated.

But someone may raise a problem about how we can say that, to become just, people need to do what is just, and to do what is moderate in order to become moderate; for if they are doing what is just and moderate, they are already just and moderate, in the same way in which, if people are behaving literately and musically, they are already expert at reading and writing and in music. Or does this fail to hold, in fact, even for skills? One can do something literate both by chance and at someone else's prompting. One will only count as literate, then, if one both does something literate and does it in the way a literate person does it; and this is a matter of doing it in accordance with one's own expert knowledge of letters. Again, neither do the case of the skills and that of the excellences resemble each other: the things that come about through the agency of skills contain in themselves the mark of their being done well, so that it is enough if they turn out in a certain way, whereas the things that come about in accordance with the excellences count as done justly or moderately not merely because they themselves are of a certain kind, but also because of facts about the agent doing them—first, if he does them knowingly, secondly if he decides to do them, and decides to do them for themselves, and thirdly if he does them from a firm and unchanging disposition. When it is a matter of having skills, these conditions are not relevant, except for knowledge itself; but when it comes to having the excellences, knowledge makes no difference, or a small one, whereas the force of the other conditions is not small but counts for everything, and it is these that result from the repeated performance of just and moderate actions. So things done are called just and moderate whenever they are such that the just person or the moderate person would do them; whereas a person is not just and moderate because he does these things, but also because he does them in the way in which just and moderate people do them. So it is appropriate to say that the just person comes about from doing what is just, and the moderate person from doing what is moderate; whereas from not doing these things no one will have excellence in the future either. But most people fail to do these things, and by taking refuge in talk they think that they are philosophizing, and that they will become excellent this way, so behaving rather like sick people, when they listen carefully to their doctors but then fail to do anything of what is prescribed for them. Well, just as the latter, for their part, won't be in good bodily condition if they look after themselves like that, neither will the former have their souls in good condition if they philosophize like that.

After these questions, we must consider what excellence is. Now since the things that occur in the soul fall into three kinds, i.e. affections, capacities, and dispositions, excellence will be one of these. By affections I mean appetite, anger, fear, boldness, grudging ill will, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, envy, pity—generally, feelings attended by pleasure or pain; while capacities are what people are referring to when they say we are susceptible to the affections, as for example with those capacities in terms of which we are said to be capable of becoming angry, or distressed, or of feeling pity; as for dispositions, it is in terms of these that we are well or badly disposed in relation to the affections, as for example in relation to becoming angry, if we are violently or sluggishly disposed, we are badly disposed, and if in an intermediate way, we are well disposed—and similarly too in relation to the other things in question. Well then, neither the excellences nor the corresponding bad states are affections, because we are not called excellent or bad people on account of affections, whereas we are so called on account of excellences and bad states; and because we are neither praised nor censured on account of affections (for the frightened person isn't praised, nor is the angry person, nor is the person who is simply angry censured, but the person who is angry in a certain way), whereas we are praised or censured on account of excellences and bad states. Again, we are angry and afraid without decision, whereas the excellences are kinds of decision, or anyway involve decision. In addition to these considerations, when it comes to the affections we are said to be moved, whereas with the excellences and the bad states we are said, not to be moved, but to be in a certain condition. For these reasons they are not capacities either; for neither are we called excellent by virtue of being capable of being affected, simply, nor are we called bad, nor are we praised, nor censured. Again, we are by nature capable of being affected, whereas we do not become excellent or bad by nature—but we talked about this earlier. If, then, the excellences are

neither affections nor capacities, the only thing left for them to be is dispositions. We have said, then, what the genus of excellence is.

But we must not restrict ourselves to saying that it is a disposition; we must also say what sort of disposition it is. Well, one should say that every excellence, whatever it is an excellence of, both gives that thing the finish of a good condition and makes it perform its function well, as for example the eye's excellence makes both it and its functioning excellent; for it is through the excellence of the eye that we see well. Similarly the excellence of a horse both makes it an excellent horse and good at running, carrying its rider and facing the enemy. If, then, this is so in all cases, the excellence of a human being too will be the disposition whereby he becomes a good human being and from which he will perform his own function well. In what way this will be, we have already said, but it will also be clear in this way, too, i.e. if we consider what sort of nature excellence has. Now with everything continuous and divisible it is possible to take a greater and a lesser and an equal amount, and these either with reference to the object itself or relative to us. The "equal" is a kind of intermediate between what exceeds and what falls short; by intermediate "with reference to the object" I mean what is equidistant from each of its two extremes, which is one and the same for all, whereas by intermediate "relative to us" I mean the sort of thing that neither goes to excess nor is deficient—and this is not one thing, nor is it the same for all. So for example if ten count as many and two as few, six is what people take as intermediate, with reference to the object, since it exceeds and is exceeded by the same amount; and this is intermediate in terms of arithmetical proportion. But the intermediate relative to us should not be taken in this way; for if ten minae in weight is a large amount for a particular person to eat and two a small amount, the trainer will not prescribe six minae, because perhaps this too is large for the person who will be taking it, or small—small for Milo, large for the person just beginning his training. Similarly with running and wrestling. It is in this way, then, that every expert tries to avoid excess and deficiency, and looks instead for the intermediate, and chooses this; the intermediate, that is, not in the object, but relative to us. If, then, it is in this way that every kind of expert knowledge completes its function well, by looking to the intermediate and guiding what it produces by reference to this (which is why people are used to saying about products of good quality that nothing can either be taken away from them or added to them, because they suppose that excess and deficiency destroy good quality, while intermediacy preserves it—and skilled experts, as we say, work by looking to this), and if excellence is more precise and better than any expertise, just as nature is, it will be effective at hitting upon what is intermediate. I mean excellence of character; for this has to do with affections and actions, and it is in these that there is excess and deficiency, and the intermediate. So for example it is possible on occasion to be affected by fear, boldness, appetite, anger, pity, and pleasure and distress in general both too much and too little, and neither is good; but to be affected when one should, at the things one should, in relation to the people one should, for the reasons one should, and in the way one should, is both intermediate and best, which is what belongs to excellence. In the same way with actions, too, there is excess, deficiency, and the intermediate. Excellence has to do with affections and actions, things in which excess, and deficiency, go astray, while what is intermediate is praised and gets it right—features, both, of excellence. Excellence, then, is a kind of intermediacy, in so far as it is effective at hitting upon what is intermediate. Again, there are many ways of going astray (for the bad belongs to what is unlimited—as the Pythagoreans used to say by analogy—the good to what is limited), whereas there is only one way of getting it right (which is exactly why the one is easy and the other difficult—missing the mark is easy, but hitting it is difficult); for these reasons too, then, excess and deficiency belong to badness, whereas intermediacy belongs to excellence—

> for single and straight is the road of the good; the bad go bad every which way.

Excellence, then, is a disposition issuing in decisions, depending on intermediacy of the kind relative to us, this being determined by rational prescription and in the way in which the wise person would determine it. And it is intermediacy between two bad states, one involving excess, the other

involving deficiency; and also because one set of bad states is deficient, the other excessive in relation to what is required both in affections and in actions, whereas excellence both finds and chooses the intermediate. Hence excellence, in terms of its essence, and the definition that states what it is for excellence to be, is intermediacy, but in terms of what is best, and good practice, it is extremity. But not every action admits of intermediacy, nor does every affection; for in some cases they have been named in such a way that they are combined with badness from the start, as e.g. with malice, shamelessness, grudging ill will, and in the case of actions, fornication, theft, murder; for all these, and others like them, owe their names to the fact that they themselves—not excessive versions of them, or deficient ones—are bad. It is not possible, then, ever to get it right with affections and actions like these, but only to go astray; nor does good practice or the lack of it in relation to such things consist in (e.g.) fornicating with the woman one should, when one should, and how—rather, simply doing any one of these things is going astray. So it is like expecting there to be intermediacy and excess and deficiency also in relation to unjust, cowardly, and self-indulgent behaviour; for that way there will be intermediate excess and deficiency, excessive excess, and deficient deficiency. But just as in moderation and courage there is no excess and deficiency, because the intermediate is in a way an extreme, so neither can there be intermediacy in those other cases, or excess and deficiency—one goes astray however one does them; for, in short, neither is there intermediacy in excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency in intermediacy.

But we should not simply state this in general terms; we should also show how it fits the particular cases. For with discussions that relate to actions, those of a general sort have a wider application, but those that deal with the subject bit by bit are closer to the truth; for actions have to do with particulars, and the requirement is that we should be in accord on these. So we should take these cases, from the chart. Thus with regard to feelings of fear and boldness, courage is the intermediate state; while of those people who go to excess, the one who is excessively fearless has no name (many cases are nameless), the one who is excessively bold is rash, and the one who is excessively fearful and deficiently bold is cowardly. With regard to pleasures and pains—not all of them, and still less with regard to all pains—the intermediate state is moderation, the excessive state self-indulgence. As for people deficient with regard to pleasures, they hardly occur; which is why people like this, too, have even failed to acquire a name. But let us put them down as "insensate". With regard to the giving and receiving of money the intermediate state is open-handedness, while the excessive and deficient states are wastefulness and avariciousness. But in these states excess and deficiency work in opposite ways: the wasteful person is excessive in handing money out and deficient in taking it, while the avaricious person is excessive in taking it and deficient when it comes to giving it out. (For the moment we are talking in outline, and giving the main points, contenting ourselves with just that; later we shall give more precise descriptions.) With regard to money there are also other states: an intermediate state, munificence (for the munificent person differs from the open-handed one: the former deals in large amounts, the latter with small), while the excessive disposition is tastelessness and vulgarity, the deficient one shabbiness; these differ from the excessive and deficient states relating to open-handedness but what the differences are we shall say later. With regard to honour and dishonour the intermediate state is greatness of soul, while the excessive state is called a kind of conceitedness, the deficient one littleness of soul. And just as we said open-handedness was related to munificence, differing from it in having to do with small amounts, so there is a state with the same kind of relationship to greatness of soul, that being concerned with honour on the large scale while this other is concerned with it on a small scale; for it is possible to desire honour both more than one should and less than one should. The person who is excessive in his desires in this case is said to be honour-loving, while the one who is correspondingly deficient is said to be indifferent to honour; and the intermediate person lacks a name. (The states themselves, too, are nameless, except that the name given to that of the honour-lover is love of honour.) Consequently those at the extremes lay claim to the ground between them; and even we ourselves sometimes call the intermediate person "honour-loving", sometimes "indifferent to honour", sometimes using the first as a term of praise, sometimes the second. We shall

talk about the reason for our doing this in what follows; for now, let us talk about the remaining states, on the pattern we have adopted with the previous ones. With regard to anger, too, there are excessive, deficient, and intermediate states, but since they are practically nameless, let us—since we say that the intermediate person is mild-tempered—call the intermediate state "mildness"; and of those at the extremes, let the one who goes to excess be "irascible", and the corresponding state "irascibility", with the deficient one being in a way "spiritless", and the deficiency "spiritlessness". There are also three other intermediate states, ones which have a certain similarity to one other, but which at the same time differ from one another; for while all have to do with the sharing by people in conversation and in actions, they differ in so far as one of them has to do with truth in these contexts, whereas the others have to do with what is pleasant; and of this, part is found in play, part in all aspects of life. So we must talk about these states too, in order to gain a broader perspective on the fact that in everything intermediacy is an object for praise, whereas the extremes are neither to be praised, nor correct, but to be censured. Well, more of these too lack a name than have one, but we must try—just as we did in the other cases—to create names for them ourselves, to make things clear and easy to follow. With regard to truth in social contexts, let the intermediate individual be said to be in a sense "truthful", and the intermediate state "truthfulness", while the sort of pretending about oneself that tends to overstatement will be "imposture", the person having the state being an "impostor", and the sort that tends to understatement will be "self-deprecation", the corresponding person being "self-deprecating". With regard to the part of the pleasant that lies in play, let the intermediate person be "witty" and the state "wittiness"; the excessive state, for its part, will be "buffoonery" and the person having it a "buffoon", the deficient person perhaps a "boor" and the disposition "boorishness". With regard to the remaining part of the pleasant, i.e. the part to be found in any part of life, if someone is pleasant in the way one should be, let us call him "friendly", and the intermediate state correspondingly; if without ulterior motive, someone with the excessive state will be "obsequious", but if it is for his own benefit, he will be "ingratiating"; while someone with the deficient state, someone who is always unpleasant, will be a "contentious" and "morose" sort of person. There are also intermediates in the affective feelings and in relation to things that happen to people; for (e.g.) a sense of shame is not an excellence, but people are praised for having a sense of shame too. For in fact in these contexts one person is said to be intermediate, while another is said to be excessive, as with the nervous sort who feels shame at everything; the person who is deficient in shame or does not feel it at all is called shameless, and the intermediate person is said to have a sense of shame. Righteous indignation is intermediate between grudging ill will and malice, all of these having to do with pain and pleasure at things that happen to one's neighbours: the person who tends towards righteous indignation is distressed at those who do well undeservedly, while the grudging person exceeds him, being distressed at anyone's doing well, and the malicious person is so deficient when it comes to being distressed that he is even pleased. But there will be an opportunity to discuss these questions later; and as for justice, since the term is not used merely in one sense, we shall (after these other subjects) make a division and talk about how justice in each of the two senses is an intermediate. And likewise with the excellences of reason too.

There being, then, three kinds of dispositions, two of them bad states, i.e. the one relating to excess and the one relating to deficiency, and one excellence, the intermediate state, all three are in one way or another opposed to all; for the states at the extremes are contrary both to the intermediate state and to each other, and the intermediate to the ones at the extremes; for just as what is equal is larger when compared with the smaller and smaller when compared with the larger, so the intermediate dispositions are excessive when compared with the deficient ones and deficient when compared with the excessive ones, in the spheres both of affections and of actions. For the courageous appear rash in comparison with cowards, but cowardly in comparison with the rash; similarly the moderate, too, appear self-indulgent in comparison with the "insensate", but "insensate" in comparison with the self-indulgent, and the open-handed appear wasteful in comparison with the avaricious, but avaricious in comparison with the wasteful. This is why those at either extreme

try to distance themselves from the one between them, associating him with the other extreme: the courageous person is called rash by the coward, cowardly by the rash person, and analogously in the other cases. This being the way these things are opposed to each other, there is most contrariety between those at the extremes—more than between them and the intermediate; for they stand further away from each other than they do from the intermediate, just as the large stands further away from the small and the small from the large than either of them from the equal. Again, in some cases what is at the extremes has a certain similarity to the intermediate, as rashness has to courage and wastefulness to open-handedness; whereas there is most dissimilarity between the extremes in relation to each other, and things that are furthest away from each other are defined as contraries, so that things that are further apart will also be more contrary to each other. What is more opposed to the intermediate is in some cases the deficient state, in others the excessive, as in the case of courage it is not rashness, an excessive state, but a deficient one, cowardliness, whereas with moderation it is not "insensateness", a state involving lack, but self-indulgence, an excessive state. This comes about for two reasons, the first being the one deriving from the thing itself; for by virtue of the fact that one of the extremes is closer to and more like the intermediate, we do not oppose that to the mean so much as its opposite. So for example because rashness seems to be something more like and closer to courage, and cowardliness more unlike it, it is the latter that we oppose more to courage—because things that are further removed from the intermediate seem to be more contrary to it. This, then, is one reason, deriving from the thing itself; but the second derives from our own selves, namely that the things towards which we ourselves have a certain natural inclination appear more contrary to the intermediate—as for example we are ourselves naturally more inclined towards pleasures, which is why we are more easily drawn in the direction of self-indulgence than of orderliness. So it is these things, the things to which we are more prone, that we call more contrary; and for this reason it is self-indulgence, the excessive state, that is more opposed to moderation.

This, then, will suffice on the themes we have been treating: that excellence of character is an intermediate state; in what way it is intermediate; that it is intermediate between two bad states, one relating to excess and the other to deficiency; and that it is such because it is effective at hitting upon the intermediate in affections and in actions. This is why being excellent is also something difficult to achieve. For in any context getting hold of the intermediate is difficult—as for example finding the centre of a circle is not a task for anyone, but for the skilled person; so too, whereas getting angry, or giving money away, or spending it are things anyone can do, and easy, doing them to the person one should, to the extent one should, when one should, for the reason one should, and in the manner one should—this is no longer for anyone, nor is it something easy, which explains why getting things right is a rare thing, a proper object of praise, and something fine. Hence the person who is aiming at the intermediate should first move away from the more opposed extreme, following Calypso's advice:

> That spray and surging breaker there—keep your ship well clear of that.

For to arrive at one of the two extremes is more erroneous, to arrive at the other less; so, since it is hard to hit upon the intermediate with extreme accuracy, one should take to the oars and sail that way, as they say, grasping what is least bad of what is available, and this will be most easily done in the way we say. And we should consider the things that we ourselves, too, are more readily drawn towards, for different people have different natural inclinations; and this is something we shall be able to recognize from the pleasure and the pain that things bring about in us. We should drag ourselves away in the contrary direction; for by pulling far away from error we shall arrive at the intermediate point, in the way people do when they are straightening out warped pieces of wood. In everything we must guard most against the pleasant, and pleasure itself, because we are not impartial judges in its case. We ourselves should feel towards pleasure as the elders of the people felt towards Helen, and repeat on every occasion what they uttered; by proposing to send pleasure

packing like this we shall get things less wrong. In short, by doing these things we shall be best able to hit upon the intermediate. But to do this is difficult, perhaps, and most of all in particular cases; for it is not easy to determine not only how, but with whom, in what sorts of circumstances, and for how long one should be angry, since we ourselves sometimes praise those deficient in anger and call them "mild", while at other times we praise those who get angry and call them "manly". But it is not the person who deviates a little from the right path who is censured, whether he does so in the direction of excess or of deficiency; rather it is the person who deviates significantly, for there is no missing *him*. But as to how far and to what extent one has to deviate to be worthy of censure, it is not easy to fix it in words, any more than anything else that belongs to the sphere of perception; for such things depend on the particular circumstances, and the judgement of them lies in our perception. This much, then, shows that the intermediate disposition is to be praised in all circumstances, but that one should sometimes incline towards excess, sometimes towards deficiency; for in this way we shall most easily hit upon what is intermediate, and good practice.

Readings for Chapter 6

Existentialism

Existentialism and Humanism (excerpt)

Jean-Paul Sartre

The word "subjectivism" has two possible interpretations, and our opponents play with both of them, at our expense. Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject to choose what he will be, and, on the other, man's inability to transcend human subjectivity. The fundamental meaning of existentialism resides in the latter. When we say that man chooses himself, not only do we mean that each of us must choose himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men. In fact, in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be. Choosing to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for any of us unless it is good for all. If, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for our whole era. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we might have supposed, because it concerns all mankind. If I am a worker and I choose to join a Christian trade union rather than to become a Communist, and if, by that membership, I choose to signify that resignation is, after all, the most suitable solution for man, and that the kingdom of man is not on this earth, I am not committing myself alone—I am choosing to be resigned on behalf of all—consequently my action commits all mankind. Or, to use a more personal example, if I decide to marry and have children—granted such a marriage proceeds solely from my own circumstances, my passion, or my desire—I am nonetheless committing not only myself, but all of humanity, to the practice of monogamy. I am therefore responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man.

This allows us to understand the meaning behind some rather lofty-sounding words such as "anguish," "abandonment," and "despair." As you are about to see, it is all quite simple. First, what do we mean by anguish? Existentialists like to say that man is in anguish. This is what they mean: a man who commits himself, and who realizes that he is not only the individual that he chooses to be, but also a legislator choosing at the same time what humanity as a whole should be, cannot help but be aware of his own full and profound responsibility. True, many people do not appear especially anguished, but we maintain that they are merely hiding their anguish or trying not to face it. Certainly, many believe that their actions involve no one but themselves, and were we to ask them, "But what if everyone acted that way?" they would shrug their shoulders and reply, "But everyone does *not* act that way." In truth, however, one should always ask oneself, "What would happen if everyone did what I am doing?" The only way to evade that disturbing thought is through some kind of bad faith. Someone who lies to himself and excuses himself by

Sartre, J.-P. (1946, 2007) *Existentialism and Humanism* (translated by Carol Macomber), New Haven, Yale University Press, 23–48. Reprinted with permission.

saying "Everyone does not act that way" is struggling with a bad conscience, for the act of lying implies attributing a universal value to lies.

Anguish can be seen even when concealed. This is the anguish Kierkegaard called the anguish of Abraham. You know the story: an angel orders Abraham to sacrifice his son. This would be okay provided it is really an angel who appears to him and says, "Thou, Abraham, shalt sacrifice thy son." But any sane person may wonder first whether it is truly an angel, and second, whether I am really Abraham. What proof do I have? There was once a mad woman suffering from hallucinations who claimed that people were phoning her and giving her orders. The doctor asked her, "But who exactly speaks to you?" She replied, "He says it is God." How did she actually know for certain that it was God? If an angel appears to me, what proof do I have that it is an angel? Or if I hear voices, what proof is there that they come from heaven and not from hell, or from my own subconscious, or some pathological condition? What proof is there that they are intended for me? What proof is there that I am the proper person to impose my conception of man on humanity? I will never find any proof at all, nor any convincing sign of it. If a voice speaks to me, it is always I who must decide whether or not this is the voice of an angel; if I regard a certain course of action as good, it is I who will choose to say that it is good, rather than bad. There is nothing to show that I am Abraham, and yet I am constantly compelled to perform exemplary deeds. Everything happens to every man as if the entire human race were staring at him and measuring itself by what he does. So every man ought to be asking himself, "Am I really a man who is entitled to act in such a way that the entire human race should be measuring itself by my actions?" And if he does not ask himself that, he masks his anguish.

The anguish we are concerned with is not the kind that could lead to quietism or inaction. It is anguish pure and simple, of the kind experienced by all who have borne responsibilities. For example, when a military leader takes it upon himself to launch an attack and sends a number of men to their deaths, he chooses to do so, and, ultimately, makes that choice alone. Some orders may come from his superiors, but their scope is so broad that he is obliged to interpret them, and it is on his interpretation that the lives of ten, fourteen, or twenty men depend. In making such a decision, he is bound to feel some anguish. All leaders have experienced that anguish, but it does not prevent them from acting. To the contrary, it is the very condition of their action, for they first contemplate several options, and, in choosing one of them, realize that its only value lies in the fact that it was chosen. It is this kind of anguish that existentialism describes, and as we shall see it can be made explicit through a sense of direct responsibility toward the other men who will be affected by it. It is not a screen that separates us from action, but a condition of action itself.

And when we speak of "abandonment"—one of Heidegger's favorite expressions—we merely mean to say that God does not exist, and that we must bear the full consequences of that assertion. Existentialists are strongly opposed to a certain type of secular morality that seeks to eliminate God as painlessly as possible. Around 1880, when some French professors attempted to formulate a secular morality, they expressed it more or less in these words: God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have a morality, a civil society, and a law-abiding world, it is essential that certain values be taken seriously; they must have an *a priori* existence ascribed to them. It must be considered mandatory *a priori* for people to be honest, not to lie, not to beat their wives, to raise children, and so forth. We therefore will need to do a little more thinking on this subject in order to show that such values exist all the same, and that they are inscribed in an intelligible heaven, even though God does not exist. In other words—and I think this is the gist of everything that we in France call "radicalism"—nothing will have changed if God does not exist; we will encounter the same standards of honesty, progress, and humanism, and we will have turned God into an obsolete hypothesis that will die out quietly on its own.

Existentialists, on the other hand, find it extremely disturbing that God no longer exists, for along with his disappearance goes the possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There could no longer be any *a priori* good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it. Nowhere is it written that good exists, that we must be honest or must not lie, since

we are on a plane shared only by men. Dostoyevsky once wrote: "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." This is the starting point of existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and man is consequently abandoned, for he cannot find anything to rely on—neither within nor without. First, he finds there are no excuses. For if it is true that existence precedes essence, we can never explain our actions by reference to a given and immutable human nature, In other words, there is no determinism—man is free, man is freedom. If, however, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. Existentialists do not believe in the power of passion. They will never regard a great passion as a devastating torrent that inevitably compels man to commit certain acts and which, therefore, is an excuse. They think that man is responsible for his own passion. Neither do existentialists believe that man can find refuge in some given sign that will guide him on earth; they think that man interprets the sign as he pleases and that man is therefore without any support or help, condemned at all times to invent man. In an excellent article, Francis Ponge once wrote: "Man is the future of man." This is absolutely true. However, if we were to interpret this to mean that such a future is inscribed in heaven, and that God knows what it is, that would be false, for then it would no longer even be a future. If, on the other hand, it means that whatever man may appear to be, there is a future waiting to be created—a virgin future—then the saying is true. But for now, we are abandoned.

To give you an example that will help you to better understand what we mean by abandonment, I will mention the case of one of my students, who sought me out under the following circumstances: his father had broken off with his mother and, moreover, was inclined to be a "collaborator." His older brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940, and this young man, with primitive but noble feelings, wanted to avenge him. His mother, living alone with him and deeply hurt by the partial betrayal of his father and the death of her oldest son, found her only comfort in him. At the time, the young man had the choice of going to England to join the Free French Forces—which would mean abandoning his mother—or remaining by her side to help her go on with her life. He realized that his mother lived only for him and that his absence—perhaps his death—would plunge her into utter despair. He also realized that, ultimately, any action he might take on her behalf would provide the concrete benefit of helping her to live, while any action he might take to leave and fight would be of uncertain outcome and could disappear pointlessly like water in sand. For instance, in trying to reach England, he might pass through Spain and be detained there indefinitely in a camp; or after arriving in England or Algiers, he might be assigned to an office to do paperwork. He was therefore confronted by two totally different modes of action: one concrete and immediate, but directed toward only one individual; the other involving an infinitely vaster group—a national corps—yet more ambiguous for that very reason and which could be interrupted before being carried out. And, at the same time, he was vacillating between two kinds of morality: a morality motivated by sympathy and individual devotion, and another morality with a broader scope, but less likely to be fruitful. He had to choose between the two.

What could help him make that choice? The Christian doctrine? No. The Christian doctrine tells us we must be charitable, love our neighbor, sacrifice ourselves for others, choose the "narrow way," et cetera. But what is the narrow way? Whom should we love like a brother—the soldier or the mother? Which is the more useful aim—the vague one of fighting as part of a group, or the more concrete one of helping one particular person keep on living? Who can decide that *a priori*? No one. No code of ethics on record answers that question. Kantian morality instructs us to never treat another as a means, but always as an end. Very well; therefore, if I stay with my mother, I will treat her as an end, not as a means. But by the same token, I will be treating those who are fighting on my behalf as a means. Conversely, if I join those who are fighting, I will treat them as an end, and, in so doing, risk treating my mother as a means.

If values are vague and if they are always too broad in scope to apply to the specific and concrete case under consideration, we have no choice but to rely on our instincts. That is what this young man tried to do, and when I last saw him, he was saying: "All things considered, it is feelings that matter; I should choose what truly compels me to follow a certain path. If I feel that I love my mother enough to sacrifice everything else for her—my desire for vengeance, my desire for action, my desire for adventure—then I should stay by her side. If, to the contrary, I feel that my love for my mother is not strong enough, I should go." But how can we measure the strength of a feeling? What gave any value to the young man's feelings for his mother? Precisely the fact that he chose to stay with her. I may say that I love a friend well enough to sacrifice a certain sum of money for his sake, but I can claim that only if I have done so. I can say that I love my mother enough to stay by her side only if I actually stayed with her. The only way I can measure the strength of this affection is precisely by performing an action that confirms and defines it. However, since I am depending on this affection to justify my action, I find myself caught in a vicious circle.

Moreover, as Gide once pointed out, it is almost impossible to distinguish between playacting and true feelings. To decide that I love my mother and will stay with her, or to stay with her by putting on a charade, amount to the same thing. In other words, feelings are developed through the actions we take; therefore I cannot use them as guidelines for action. This means that I shouldn't seek within myself some authentic state that will compel me to act, any more than I can expect any morality to provide the concepts that will enable me to act. You may say, "Well, he went to see a professor for advice." But if you consult a priest, for instance, it's you who has chosen to consult him, and you already know in your heart, more or less, what advice he is likely to give. In other words, to choose one's adviser is only another way to commit oneself. This is demonstrated by the fact that, if you are Christian, you will say "consult a priest." But there are collaborating priests, temporizing priests, and priests connected to the Resistance: which do you choose? Had this young man chosen to consult a priest connected to the Resistance, or a collaborating priest, he would have decided beforehand what kind of advice he was to receive. Therefore, in seeking me out, he knew what my answer would be, and there was only one answer I could give him: "You are free, so choose; in other words, invent. No general code of ethics can tell you what you ought to do; there are no signs in this world."

Catholics will reply: "But there *are* signs!" Be that as it may, it is I who chooses what those signs mean. When I was in a German prison camp, I met a rather remarkable man, who happened to be a Jesuit. This is how he came to join the order: he had experienced several frustrating setbacks in his life. His father died while he was still a child, leaving him in poverty, but he was awarded a scholarship to a religious institution where he was constantly reminded that he had been accepted only out of charity. He was subsequently denied a number of distinctions and honors that would have pleased any child. Then, when he was about eighteen years old, he had an unfortunate love affair that broke his heart. Finally, at the age of twenty-two, what should have been a trifle was actually the last straw: he flunked out of military training school. This young man had every right to believe he was a total failure. It was a sign—but a sign of what? He could have sought refuge in bitterness or despair. Instead—and it was very clever of him—he chose to take it as a sign that he was not destined for secular success, and that his achievements would be attained only in the realms of religion, sanctity, and faith. He saw in all of this a message from God, and so he joined the order. Who can doubt that the meaning of the sign was determined by him, and by him alone? We might have concluded something quite different from this set of reversals—for example, that he might have been better off training to be a carpenter or a revolutionary. He therefore bears the full responsibility for his interpretation of the sign. This is what "abandonment" implies: it is we, ourselves, who decide who we are to be. Such abandonment entails anguish.

As for "despair," it has a very simple meaning. It means that we must limit ourselves to reckoning only with those things that depend on our will, or on the set of probabilities that enable action. Whenever we desire something, there are always elements of probability. If I am counting on a visit from a friend who is traveling by train or trolley, then I assume that the train will arrive on time, or

that the trolley will not derail. I operate within a realm of possibilities. But we credit such possibilities only to the strict extent that our action encompasses them. From the moment that the possibilities I am considering cease to be rigorously engaged by my action, I must no longer take interest in them, for no God or greater design can bend the world and its possibilities to my will. In the final analysis, when Descartes said "Conquer yourself rather than the world," he actually meant the same thing: we should act without hope. Marxists, with whom I have discussed this, reply: "Obviously, your action will be limited by your death; but you can rely on the help of others. You can count both on what others are doing elsewhere, in China, in Russia, to help you, and on what they will do later, that is, after your death, to carry on your work and bring it to fruition, which will be the revolution. What is more, you must rely on it; not to do so would be immoral."

My initial response to this is that I will always depend on my comrades-in-arms in the struggle, inasmuch as they are committed, as I am, to a definite common cause, in the solidarity of a party or a group that I can more or less control—that is to say, that I joined the group as a militant and so its every move is familiar to me. In that context, counting on the solidarity and will of this party is exactly like counting on the fact that the train will arrive on time, or that the trolley will not derail. But I cannot count on men whom I do not know based on faith in the goodness of humanity or in man's interest in society's welfare, given that man is free and there is no human nature in which I can place my trust. I do not know where the Russian Revolution might lead. I can admire it and hold it up as an example to the extent that it is clear, to date, that the proletariat plays a part in Russia that it has attained in no other nation. But I cannot assert that this Revolution will necessarily lead to the triumph of the proletariat; I must confine myself to what I can see. Nor can I be certain that comrades-in-arms will carry on my work after my death and bring it to completion, seeing that those men are free and will freely choose, tomorrow, what man is to become. Tomorrow, after my death, men may choose to impose fascism, while others may be cowardly or distraught enough to let them get away with it. Fascism will then become humanity's truth, and so much the worse for us. In reality, things will be what men have chosen them to be. Does that mean that I must resort to quietism? No. First, I must commit myself, and then act according to the old adage: "No hope is necessary to undertake anything." This does not mean that I cannot belong to a party, just that I should have no illusions and do whatever I can. For instance, if I were to ask myself: "Will collectivization ever be a reality?" I have no idea. All I know is that I will do everything in my power to make it happen. Beyond that, I cannot count on anything.

Quietism is the attitude of people who say: "Others can do what I cannot do." The doctrine that I am presenting to you is precisely the opposite of quietism, since it declares that reality exists only in action. It ventures even further than that, since it adds: "Man is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, nothing more than his life." In view of this, we can clearly understand why our doctrine horrifies many people. For they often have no other way of putting up with their misery than to think: "Circumstances have been against me, I deserve a much better life than the one I have. Admittedly, I have never experienced a great love or extraordinary friendship, but that is because I never met a man or woman worthy of it; if I have written no great books, it is because I never had the leisure to do so; if I have had no children to whom I could devote myself, it is because I did not find a man with whom I could share my life. So I have within me a host of untried but perfectly viable abilities, inclinations, and possibilities that endow me with worthiness not evident from any examination of my past actions." In reality, however, for existentialists there is no love other than the deeds of love; no potential for love other than that which is manifested in loving. There is no genius other than that which is expressed in works of art; the genius of Proust resides in the totality of his works; the genius of Racine is found in the series of his tragedies, outside of which there is nothing. Why should we attribute to Racine the ability to write yet another tragedy when that is precisely what he did not do? In life, a man commits himself and draws his own portrait, outside of which there is nothing. No doubt this thought may seem harsh to someone who has not made a success of his life. But on the other hand, it helps people to understand that reality alone

counts, and that dreams, expectations, and hopes only serve to define a man as a broken dream, aborted hopes, and futile expectations; in other words, they define him negatively, not positively. Nonetheless, saying "You are nothing but your life" does not imply that the artist will be judged solely by his works of art, for a thousand other things also help to define him. What we mean to say is that a man is nothing but a series of enterprises, and that he is the sum, organization, and aggregate of the relations that constitute such enterprises.

In light of all this, what people reproach us for is not essentially our pessimism, but the sternness of our optimism. If people criticize our works of fiction, in which we describe characters who are spineless, weak, cowardly, and sometimes even frankly evil, it is not just because these characters are spineless, weak, cowardly, or evil. For if, like Zola, we were to blame their behavior on their heredity, or environmental influences, their society, or factors of an organic or psychological nature, people would be reassured and would say, "That is the way we are. No one can do anything about it." But when an existentialist describes a coward, he says that the coward is responsible for his own cowardice. He is not the way he is because he has a cowardly heart, lung, or brain. He is not like that as the result of his physiological makeup; he is like that because he has made himself a coward through his actions. There is no such thing as a cowardly temperament; there are nervous temperaments, or "poor blood," as ordinary folks call it, or "rich temperaments," but just because a man has poor blood does not make him a coward, for what produces cowardice is the act of giving up, or giving in. A temperament is not an action; a coward is defined by the action he has taken. What people are obscurely feeling, and what horrifies them, is that the coward, as we present him, is guilty of his cowardice. People would prefer to be born a coward or be born a hero. One of the most frequent criticisms of *Roads to Freedom* may be expressed as follows: "Frankly, how can you make heroes out of people as spineless as this?" This objection is really quite comical, for it implies that people are born heroes. Essentially, that is what people would like to think. If you are born a coward, you need not let it concern you, for you will be a coward your whole life, regardless of what you do, through no fault of your own. If you are born a hero, you need not let it concern you either, for you will be a hero your whole life, and eat and drink like one. What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic; there is always the possibility that one day the coward may no longer be cowardly and the hero may cease to be a hero. What matters is the total commitment, but there is no one particular situation or action that fully commits you, one way or the other.

We have now, I think, dispensed with a number of charges brought against existentialism. You have seen that it cannot be considered a philosophy of quietism, since it defines man by his actions, nor can it be called a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, since it declares that man's destiny lies within himself. Nor is existentialism an attempt to discourage man from taking action, since it tells him that the only hope resides in his actions and that the only thing that allows him to live is action. Consequently we are dealing with a morality of action and commitment. Nevertheless, on the basis of a few wrongheaded notions, we are also charged with imprisoning man within his individual subjectivity. In this regard, too, we are exceedingly misunderstood. For strictly philosophical reasons, our point of departure is, indeed, the subjectivity of the individual—not because we are bourgeois, but because we seek to base our doctrine on truth, not on comforting theories full of hope but without any real foundation. As our point of departure there can be no other truth than this: *I think therefore I am.* This is the absolute truth of consciousness confronting itself. Any theory that considers man outside of this moment of self-awareness is, at the outset, a theory that suppresses the truth, for outside of this Cartesian *cogito*, all objects are merely probable, and a doctrine of probabilities not rooted in any truth crumbles into nothing. In order to define the probable, one must possess what is true. Therefore, in order for any truth to exist, there must first be an absolute truth. The latter is simple, easy to attain, and within everyone's reach: one need only seize it directly.

In the second place, this is the only theory that endows man with any dignity, and the only one that does not turn him into an object. The effect of any form of materialism is to treat all

men—including oneself—as objects, which is to say as a set of predetermined reactions indistinguishable from the properties and phenomena that constitute, say, a table, a chair, or a stone. Our aim is exactly to establish the human kingdom as a set of values distinct from the material world. But the subjectivity that we thereby attain as a standard of truth is not strictly individual in nature, for we have demonstrated that it is not only oneself that one discovers in the *cogito*, but also the existence of others. Contrary to the philosophy of Descartes, or of Kant, when we say "I think," we each attain ourselves in the presence of the other, and we are just as certain of the other as we are of ourselves. Therefore, the man who becomes aware of himself directly in the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he does so as the condition of his own existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which we say someone is spiritual, or cruel, or jealous) unless others acknowledge him as such. I cannot discover any truth whatsoever about myself except through the mediation of another. The other is essential to my existence, as well as to the knowledge I have of myself. Under these conditions, my intimate discovery of myself is at the same time a revelation of the other as a freedom that confronts my own and that cannot think or will without doing so for or against me. We are thus immediately thrust into a world that we may call "intersubjectivity." It is in this world that man decides what he is and what others are.

Furthermore, although it is impossible to find in every man a universal essence that could be said to comprise human nature, there is nonetheless a universal human *condition*. It is no accident that today's thinkers are more likely to speak of the condition of man rather than of his nature. By "condition" they refer, more or less clearly, to all limitations that *a priori* define man's fundamental situation in the universe. Historical situations vary: a man may be born a slave in a pagan society or a feudal lord or a member of the proletariat. What never varies is the necessity for him to be in the world, to work in it, to live out his life in it among others, and, eventually, to die in it. These limitations are neither subjective nor objective; rather they have an objective as well as a subjective dimension: objective, because they affect everyone and are evident everywhere; subjective because they are *experienced* and are meaningless if man does not experience them—that is to say, if man does not freely determine himself and his existence in relation to them. And, as diverse as man's projects may be, at least none of them seem wholly foreign to me since each presents itself as an attempt to surpass such limitations, to postpone, deny, or to come to terms with them. Consequently, every project, however individual, has a universal value. Every project—even one belonging to a Chinese, an Indian, or an African—can be understood by a European. To say it can be understood means that the European of 1945, though his situation is different, must deal with his own limitations in the same way, and so can reinvent within himself the project undertaken by the Chinese, Indian, or black African. There is universality in every project, inasmuch as any man is capable of understanding any human project. This should not be taken to mean that a certain project defines man forever, but that it can be reinvented again and again. Given sufficient information, one can always find a way to understand an idiot, a child, a person from a so-called primitive culture, or a foreigner.

In this sense, we can claim that human universality exists, but it is not a given; it is in perpetual construction. In choosing myself, I construct universality; I construct it by understanding every other man's project, regardless of the era in which he lives. This absolute freedom of choice does not alter the relativity of each era. The fundamental aim of existentialism is to reveal the link between the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity—a commitment that is always understandable, by anyone in any era—and the relativity of the cultural ensemble that may result from such a choice. We must also note the relativity of Cartesianism and the absolute nature of the Cartesian commitment. In this sense, we can say, if you prefer, that every one of us creates the absolute by the act of breathing, eating, sleeping, or by behaving in any fashion at all. There is no difference between free being—being as a project, being as existence choosing its essence—and absolute being. Nor is there any difference between being as an absolute temporarily localized—that is, localized in history—and universally intelligible being.

This does not entirely refute the charge of subjectivism; in fact, that criticism is still being made in several ways. The most common instance is when people tell us, "So you can do whatever you like." This is expressed in various ways. First, they tax us with anarchy; then they say, "You cannot judge others, for there is no reason to prefer one project to another." Finally, they say, "Since all of your choices are arbitrary, you receive into one hand what you grant with the other." These three objections should not be taken too seriously. The first objection, that you can choose whatever you like, is simply incorrect. In one sense, choice is possible; what is impossible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I must also realize that, if I decide not to choose, that still constitutes a choice. This may seem a purely technical difference, but it is very important since it limits whim and caprice. Although it is true that in confronting any real situation, for example that I am capable of having sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex and of having children, I am obliged to choose an attitude toward the situation, and in any case I bear the responsibility of a choice that, in committing myself, also commits humanity as a whole. Even if no *a priori* value can influence my choice, the latter has nothing to do with caprice; and, if anyone thinks this is just another example of Gide's theory of the gratuitous act, he has failed to grasp the vast difference between our theory and Gide's. Gide does not know what a situation is; he acts merely by caprice. Our view, on the other hand, is that man finds himself in a complex social situation in which he himself is committed, and by his choices commits all mankind, and he cannot avoid choosing. He will choose to abstain from sex, or marry without having children, or marry and have children. Whatever he does, he cannot avoid bearing full responsibility for his situation. He must choose without reference to any pre-established values, but it would be unfair to tax him with capriciousness. Rather, let us say that moral choice is like constructing a work of art.

At this point, we need to digress a moment to make it clear that we are not espousing an aesthetic morality, for our adversaries have shown such bad faith that they even reproach us for that. I invoke the example of artistic endeavor solely as a means of comparison. Having said that, has anyone ever blamed an artist for not following rules of painting established *a priori*? Has anyone ever told an artist what sort of picture he should paint? It is obvious that there is no predefined picture to be made, and that the artist commits himself in painting his own picture, and that the picture that ought to be painted is precisely the one that he will have painted. As we all know, there are no aesthetic values *a priori*, but there are values that will subsequently be reflected in the coherence of the painting, in the relationship between the will to create and the finished work. No one can say what tomorrow's painting will look like; we cannot judge a painting until it is finished. What does that have to do with morality? We are in the same creative situation. We never speak of the gratuitousness of a work of art. When we discuss one of Picasso's paintings, we never say that it is gratuitous; we know full well that his composition became what it is while he was painting it, and that the body of his work is part and parcel of his life.

The same applies to the moral plane. What art and morality have in common is creation and invention. We cannot decide *a priori* what ought to be done. I believe I made that clear enough when discussing the case of the student who came to see me: regardless of whatever ethical system he might attempt to follow, whether Kantian or any other, none would offer any guidance. He was obliged to invent his own laws. Certainly we cannot claim that this young man—who chose to remain with his mother, taking as his guiding moral principles his feelings, individual action, and concrete charity (or who could have chosen sacrifice by going to England)—made a gratuitous choice. Man makes himself; he does not come into the world fully made, he makes himself by choosing his own morality, and his circumstances are such that he has no option other than to choose a morality. We can define man only in relation to his commitments. It is therefore ludicrous to blame us for the gratuitousness of our choices. In the second place, people tell us: "You cannot judge others." In one sense this is true, in another not. It is true in the sense that whenever man chooses his commitment and his project in a totally sincere and lucid way, it is impossible for him to prefer another. It is also true in the sense that we do not believe in the idea of progress. Progress implies improvement, but man is always the same, confronting a situation that is forever

changing, while choice always remains a choice in any situation. The moral dilemma has not changed from the days of the American Civil War, when many were forced to choose between taking sides for or against slavery, to our own time, when one is faced with the choice between the Popular Republican Movement [a Christian democratic party founded in 1944] and the Communists.

Nevertheless we can pass judgment, for as I said, we choose in the presence of others, and we choose ourselves in the presence of others. First, we may judge (and this may be a logical rather than a value judgment) that certain choices are based on error and others on truth. We may also judge a man when we assert that he is acting in bad faith. If we define man's situation as one of free choice, in which he has no recourse to excuses or outside aid, then any man who takes refuge behind his passions, any man who fabricates some deterministic theory, is operating in bad faith. One might object by saying: "But why shouldn't he choose bad faith?" My answer is that I do not pass moral judgment against him, but I call his bad faith an error. Here, we cannot avoid making a judgment of truth. Bad faith is obviously a lie because it is a dissimulation of man's full freedom of commitment. On the same grounds, I would say that I am also acting in bad faith if I declare that I am bound to uphold certain values, because it is a contradiction to embrace these values while at the same time affirming that I am bound by them. If someone were to ask me: "What if I want to be in bad faith?" I would reply, "There is no reason why you should not be, but I declare that you are, and that a strictly consistent attitude alone demonstrates good faith." What is more, I am able to bring a moral judgment to bear. When I affirm that freedom, under any concrete circumstance, can have no other aim than itself, and once a man realizes, in his state of abandonment, that it is he who imposes values, he can will but one thing: freedom as the foundation of all values.

Readings for Chapter 7
Kantianism

Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals (excerpt)

Immanuel Kant

Preface

Ancient Greek philosophy was divided into three sciences: physics, ethics, and logic. This division conforms perfectly to the nature of the subject, and one need improve on it perhaps only by supplying its principle in order both to insure its exhaustiveness and to define correctly the necessary subdivisions.

All rational knowledge is either material, and concerns some object, or formal, and is occupied only with the form of understanding and reason itself and with the universal rules of thinking, without regard to distinctions among objects. Formal philosophy is called logic. Material philosophy, however, which has to do with definite objects and the laws to which they are subject, is divided into two parts. This is because these laws are either laws of nature or laws of freedom. The science of the former is called physics, and that of the latter ethics. The former is also called theory of nature and the latter theory of morals.

Logic can have no empirical part—a part in which universal and necessary laws of thinking would rest upon grounds taken from experience. For in that case it would not be logic (i.e., a canon for understanding or reason which is valid for all thinking and which must be demonstrated). Natural and moral philosophy, on the other hand, can each have its empirical part. The former must do so, for it must determine the laws of nature as an object of experience, and the latter must do so because it must determine the human will so far as it is affected by nature. The laws of the former are laws according to which everything happens; those of the latter are laws according to which everything ought to happen, but allow for conditions under which what ought to happen often does not.

All philosophy, so far as it is based on experience, may be called empirical; but, so far as it presents its doctrines solely on the basis of a priori principles, it may be called pure philosophy. Pure philosophy, when formal only, is logic; when limited to definite objects of the understanding, it is metaphysics.

In this way there arises the idea of a two-fold metaphysics—a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of morals. Physics, therefore, will have an empirical part and also a rational part, and ethics likewise. In ethics, however, the empirical part may be called more specifically practical anthropology; the rational part, morals proper.

All crafts, handiworks, and arts have gained by the division of labor, for when one person does not do everything but each limits himself to a particular job which is distinguished from all the

Kant, I. (1785, 1989) *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (translated, with an introduction, by Lewis White Beck), New York, Prentice Hall, 3–63. Reprinted with permission.

others by the treatment it requires, he can do it with greater perfection and more facility. Where work is not thus differentiated and divided, where everyone is a jack-of-all-trades, the crafts remain at a primitive level. It might be worth considering whether pure philosophy in each of its parts does not require a man particularly devoted to it, and whether it would not be better for the learned profession as a whole to warn those who are in the habit of catering to the taste of the public by mixing up the empirical with the rational in all sorts of proportions which they themselves do not know—a warning to those who call themselves independent thinkers and who give the name of speculator to those who apply themselves exclusively to the rational part of philosophy. This warning would be that they should not, at one and the same time, carry on two employments which differ widely in the treatment they require, and for each of which perhaps a special talent is required, since the combination of these talents in one person produces only bunglers. I only ask whether the nature of the science does not require that a careful separation of the empirical from the rational part be made, with a metaphysics of nature put before real (empirical) physics and a metaphysics of morals before practical anthropology. Each branch of metaphysics must be carefully purified of everything empirical so that we can know how much pure reason can accomplish in each case and from what sources it creates its a priori teaching, whether the latter inquiry be conducted by all moralists (whose name is legion) or only by some who feel a calling to it.

Since my purpose here is directed to moral philosophy, I narrow my proposed question to this: Is it not of the utmost necessity to construct a pure moral philosophy which is completely freed from everything which may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology? That there must be such a philosophy is self-evident from the common idea of duty and moral laws. Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to hold morally (i.e., as a ground of obligation), must imply absolute necessity; he must admit that the command: Thou shalt not lie, does not apply to men only as if other rational beings had no need to observe it. The same is true for all other moral laws properly so called. He must concede that the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of man or in the circumstances in which he is placed but a priori solely in the concepts of pure reason, and that every precept which rests on principles of mere experience, even a precept which is in certain respects universal, so far as it leans in the least on empirical grounds (perhaps only in regard to the motive involved) may be called a practical rule but never a moral law.

Thus not only are moral laws together with their principles essentially different from all practical knowledge in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests solely on its pure part. Applied to man, it borrows nothing from knowledge of him (anthropology) but gives man, as a rational being, a priori laws. No doubt these laws require a power of judgment sharpened by experience partly in order to decide in which cases they apply and partly to procure for them access to man's will and to provide an impetus to their practice. For man is affected by so many inclinations that, though he is capable of the Idea of a practical pure reason, he is not so easily able to make it concretely effective in the conduct of his life.

A metaphysics of morals is therefore indispensable, not merely because of motives to speculation on the source of the a priori practical principles which lie in our reason, but also because morals themselves remain subject to all kinds of corruption so long as the guide and supreme norm for their correct estimation is lacking. For it is not sufficient to that which should be morally good that it conform to the law; it must be done for the sake of the law. Otherwise its conformity is merely contingent and spurious because, though the unmoral ground may indeed now and then produce lawful actions, more often it brings forth unlawful ones. But the moral law can be found in its purity and genuineness (which is the central concern in the practical) nowhere else than in a pure philosophy; therefore metaphysics must lead the way, and without it there can be no moral philosophy. Philosophy which mixes pure principles with empirical ones does not deserve the name, for what distinguishes philosophy from common sense knowledge is its treatment in separate sciences of what is confusedly apprehended in such knowledge. Much less does it deserve the name of moral philosophy, since by this confusion it spoils the purity of morals themselves, and works contrary to its own end.

It should not be thought that what is here required is already present in the celebrated Wolff's propaedeutic to his moral philosophy (i.e., in what he calls *Universal Practical Philosophy*) and that it is not an entirely new field which is to be opened. Precisely because his work was to be universal practical philosophy, it contained no will of any particular kind, such as one determined without any empirical motives by a priori principles; in a word, it had nothing which could be called a pure will, since it considered only volition in general with all the actions and conditions which pertain to it in this general sense. Thus his propaedeutic differs from a metaphysic of morals in the same way that general logic is distinguished from transcendental philosophy, the former expounding the actions and rules of thinking in general, and the latter presenting the actions and rules of pure thinking (thinking by which objects are known completely a priori). For the metaphysics of morals is meant to investigate the Idea and principles of a possible pure will and not the actions and conditions of human volition as such, which for the most part are drawn from psychology.

That universal practical philosophy discussed (though improperly) laws and duty is no objection to my assertion. For the authors of this science remain even here true to their idea of it. They do not distinguish the motives which are presented completely a priori by reason alone and which are thus moral in the proper sense of the world, from empirical motives which the understanding raises to universal concepts by comparing experiences. Rather, they consider motives without regard to the difference in their source but only with reference to their larger or smaller number (as they are considered to be all of the same kind); they thus formulate their concept of obligation, which is anything but moral, but which is all that can be desired in a philosophy which does not decide whether the origin of all possible practical concepts is a priori or a posteriori.

As a preliminary to a *Metaphysics of Morals* which I intend to publish someday, I issue these *Foundations*. There is, to be sure, no other foundation for such a metaphysics than a critical examination of pure practical reason, just as there is no other foundation for metaphysics than the already published critical examination of pure speculative reason. But, in the first place, a critical examination of pure practical reason is not of such extreme importance as that of the speculative reason, because human reason, even in the commonest mind, can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and completeness in moral matters while, on the other hand, in its theoretical but pure use it is wholly dialectical. In the second place, I require of a critical examination of pure practical reason, if it is to be complete, that its unity with the speculative be subject to presentation under a common principle, because in the final analysis there can be but one and the same reason which must be different only in application. But I could not bring this to such a completeness without bringing in observations of an altogether different kind and without thereby confusing the reader. For these reasons I have employed the title, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, instead of *Critique of Pure Practical Reason.*

Because, in the third place, a *Metaphysics of Morals*, in spite of its forbidding title, is capable of a high degree of popular adaptation to common understanding, I find it useful to separate this preliminary work of laying the foundation, in order not to have to introduce unavoidable subtleties into the latter, more comprehensible work.

The present foundations, however, are nothing more than the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality. This constitutes a task altogether complete in design and one which should be kept separate from all other moral inquiry. My conclusions concerning this important question, which has not yet been discussed nearly enough, would, of course, be clarified by application of the principle to the whole system of morality, and it would receive much confirmation by the adequacy which it would everywhere show. But I must forego this advantage which would be, in the final analysis, more personally gratifying than commonly useful, because ease of use and apparent adequacy of a principle are not any sure proof of correctness, but rather awaken a certain partiality which prevents a rigorous investigation and evaluation of it for itself without regard to consequences.

I have adopted in this writing the method which is, I think, most suitable if one wishes to proceed analytically from common knowledge to the determination of its supreme principle,

and then synthetically from the examination of this principle and its sources back to common knowledge where it finds its application. The division is therefore as follows:

1 First Section. Transition from Common Sense Knowledge of Morals to the Philosophical
2. Second Section. Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysics of Morals
3. Third Section. Final Step from the Metaphysics of Morals to the Critical Examination of Pure Practical Reason

First Section
Transition from Common Sense Knowledge of Morals to the Philosophical

Nothing in the world—indeed nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a *GOOD WILL*. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and other talents of the mind however they may be named, or courage, resoluteness, and perseverence as qualities of temperament, are doubtless in many respects good and desirable; but they can become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. It is the same with gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honor, even health, general well-being and the contentment with one's condition which is called happiness make for pride and even arrogance if there is not a good will to correct their influence on the mind and on its principle of action, so as to make it generally fitting to its entire end. It need hardly be mentioned that the sight of a being adorned with no feature of a pure and good will yet enjoying lasting good fortune can never give pleasure to an impartial rational observer. Thus the good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy.

Some qualities seem to be conducive to this good will and can facilitate its action, but in spite of that they have no intrinsic unconditional worth. They rather presuppose a good will, which limits the high esteem which one otherwise rightly has for them and prevents their being held to be absolutely good. Moderation in emotions and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation not only are good in many respects but seem even to constitute part of the inner worth of the person. But however unconditionally they were esteemed by the ancients, they are far from being good without qualification, for without the principles of a good will they can become extremely bad, and the coolness of a villain makes him not only far more dangerous but also more directly abominable in our eyes than he would have seemed without it.

The good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its competence to achieve some intended end; it is good only because of its willing (i.e., it is good in itself). And, regarded for itself, it is to be esteemed as incomparably higher than anything which could be brought about by it in favor of any inclination or even of the sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen that, by a particularly unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should be wholly lacking in power to accomplish its purpose, and if even the greatest effort should not avail it to achieve anything of its end, and if there remained only the good will—not as a mere wish, but as the summoning of all the means in our power—it would sparkle like a jewel all by itself, as something that had its full worth in itself. Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither diminish nor augment this worth. Its usefulness would be only its setting, as it were, so as to enable us to handle it more conveniently in commerce or to attract the attention of those who are not yet connoisseurs, but not to recommend it to those who are experts or to determine its worth.

But there is something so strange in this idea of the absolute worth of the will alone, in which no account is taken of any use, that, notwithstanding the agreement even of common sense, the suspicion must arise that perhaps only high-flown fancy is its hidden basis, and that we may have misunderstood the purpose of nature in appointing reason as the ruler of our will. We shall there-

fore examine this idea from this point of view.

In the natural constitution of an organized being (i.e., one suitably adapted to life), we assume as an axiom that no organ will be found for any purpose which is not the fittest and best adapted to that purpose. Now if its preservation, its welfare, in a word its happiness, were the real end of nature in a being having reason and will, then nature would have hit upon a very poor arrangement in appointing the reason of the creature to be the executor of this purpose. For all the actions which the creature has to perform with this intention of nature, and the entire rule of his conduct, would be dictated much more exactly by instinct, and the end would be far more certainly attained by instinct than it ever could be by reason. And if, over and above this, reason should have been granted to the favored creature, it would have served only to let him contemplate the happy constitution of his nature, to admire it, to rejoice in it, and to be grateful for it to its beneficent cause. But reason would not have been given in order that the being should subject his faculty of desire to that weak and delusive guidance and to meddle with the purpose of nature. In a word, nature would have taken care that reason did not break forth into practical use nor have the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself the plan of happiness and the means of attaining it. Nature would have taken over the choice not only of ends but also of the means, and with wise foresight she would have entrusted both to instinct alone.

And, in fact, we find that the more a cultivated reason deliberately devotes itself to the enjoyment of life and happiness, the more the man falls short of true contentment. From this fact there arises in many persons, if only they are candid enough to admit it, a certain degree of misology, hatred of reason. This is particularly the case with those who are most experienced in its use. After counting all the advantages which they draw—I will not say from the invention of the arts of common luxury—from the sciences (which in the end seem to them to be also a luxury of the understanding), they nevertheless find that they have actually brought more trouble on their shoulders instead of gaining in happiness; they finally envy, rather than despise, the common run of men who are better guided by merely natural instinct and who do not permit their reason much influence on their conduct. And we must at least admit that a morose attitude or ingratitude to the goodness with which the world is governed is by no means found always among those who temper or refute the boasting eulogies which are given of the advantages of happiness and contentment with which reason is supposed to supply us. Rather, their judgment is based on the Idea of another and far more worthy purpose of their existence for which, instead of happiness, their reason is properly intended; this purpose, therefore, being the supreme condition to which the private purposes of men must, for the most part, defer.

Since reason is not competent to guide the will safely with regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs (which it in part multiplies), to this end an innate instinct would have led with far more certainty. But reason is given to us as a practical faculty (i.e., one which is meant to have an influence on the will). As nature has elsewhere distributed capacities suitable to the functions they are to perform, reason's proper function must be to produce a will good in itself and not one good merely as a means, since for the former, reason is absolutely essential. This will need not be the sole and complete good, yet it must be the condition of all others, even of the desire for happiness. In this case it is entirely compatible with the wisdom of nature that the cultivation of reason, which is required for the former unconditional purpose, at least in this life restricts in many ways—indeed, can reduce to nothing—the achievement of the latter unconditional purpose, happiness. For one perceives that nature here does not proceed unsuitably to its purpose, because reason, which recognizes its highest practical vocation in the establishment of a good will, is capable of a contentment of its own kind (i.e., one that springs from the attainment of a purpose determined by reason), even though this injures the ends of inclination.

We have, then, to develop the concept of a will which is to be esteemed as good in itself without regard to anything else. It dwells already in the natural and sound understanding and does not need so much to be taught as only to be brought to light. In the estimation of the total worth of our actions it always takes first place and is the condition of everything else. In order to show this, we

shall take the concept of duty. It contains the concept of a good will, though with certain subjective restrictions and hindrances, but these are far from concealing it and making it unrecognizable, for they rather bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth all the more brightly.

I here omit all actions which are recognized as opposed to duty, even though they may be useful in one respect or another, for with these the question does not arise as to whether they may be done *from* duty, since they conflict with it. I also pass over actions which are really in accord with duty and to which one has no direct inclination, rather doing them because impelled to do so by another inclination. For it is easily decided whether an action in accord with duty is done from duty or for some selfish purpose. It is far more difficult to note this difference when the action is in accord with duty and, in addition, the subject has a direct inclination to do it. For example, it is in accord with duty that a dealer should not overcharge an inexperienced customer, and wherever there is much trade the prudent merchant does not do so, but has a fixed price for everyone so that a child may buy from him as cheaply as any other. Thus the customer is honestly served, but this is far from sufficient to warrant the belief that the merchant has behaved in this way from duty and principles of honesty. His own advantage required this behavior, but it cannot be assumed that over and above that he had a direct inclination to his customers and that, out of love, as it were, he gave none an advantage in price over another. The action was done neither from duty nor from direct inclination but only for a selfish purpose.

On the other hand, it is a duty to preserve one's life, and moreover everyone has a direct inclination to do so. But for that reason, the often anxious care which most men take of it has no intrinsic worth, and the maxim of doing so has no moral import. They preserve their lives according to duty, but not from duty. But if adversities and hopeless sorrow completely take away the relish for life; if an unfortunate man, strong in soul, is indignant rather than despondent or dejected over his fate and wishes for death, and yet preserves his life without loving it and from neither inclination nor fear but from duty—then his maxim has moral merit.

To be kind where one can is a duty, and there are, moreover, many persons so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy and rejoice in the contentment of others which they have made possible. But I say that, however dutiful and however amiable it may be, that kind of action has no true moral worth. It is on a level with [actions done from] other inclinations, such as the inclination to honor, which, if fortunately directed to what in fact accords with duty and is generally useful and thus honorable, deserve praise and encouragement, but no esteem. For the maxim lacks the moral import of an action done not from inclination but from duty. But assume that the mind of that friend to mankind was clouded by a sorrow of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the lot of others, and though he still had the power to benefit others in distress their need left him untouched because he was preoccupied with his own. Now suppose him to tear himself, unsolicited by inclination, out of his dead insensibility and to do this action only from duty and without any inclination—then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth. Furthermore, if nature has put little sympathy into the heart of a man, and if he, though an honest man, is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others perhaps because he is provided with special gifts of patience and fortitude and expects and even requires that others should have them too—and such a man would certainly not be the meanest product of nature—would not he find in himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than he could have got by having a good-natured temperament? This is unquestionably true even though nature did not make him philanthropic, for it is just here that the worth of character is brought out, which is morally the incomparably highest of all: he is beneficent not from inclination, but from duty.

To secure one's own happiness is at least indirectly a duty, for discontent with one's condition under pressure from many cares and amid unsatisfied wants could easily become a great temptation to transgress against duties. But, without any view to duty, all men have the strongest and deepest inclination to happiness, because in this Idea all inclinations are summed up. But the precept of happiness is often so formulated that it definitely thwarts some inclinations, and men

can make no definite and certain concept of the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations, which goes under the name of happiness. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that a single inclination, definite as to what it promises and as to the time at which it can be satisfied, can outweigh a fluctuating idea and that, for example, a man with the gout can choose to enjoy what he likes and to suffer what he may, because according to his calculations at least on this occasion he has not sacrificed the enjoyment of the present moment to a perhaps groundless expectation of a happiness supposed to lie in health. But even in this case if the universal inclination to happiness did not determine his will, and if health were not at least for him a necessary factor in these calculations, there would still remain, as in all other cases, a law that he ought to promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty. Only from this law could his conduct have true moral worth.

It is in this way, undoubtedly, that we should understand those passages of Scripture which command us to love our neighbor and even our enemy, for love as an inclination cannot be commanded. But beneficence from duty, even when no inclination impels it and even when it is opposed by a natural and unconquerable aversion, is practical love, not pathological love; it resides in the will and not in the propensities of feeling, in principles of action and not in tender sympathy; and it alone can be commanded.

[Thus the first proposition of morality is that to have genuine moral worth, an action must be done from duty.] The second proposition is: An action done from duty does not have its moral worth in the purpose which is to be achieved through it but in the maxim whereby it is determined. Its moral value, therefore, does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action but merely on the principle of the volition by which the action is done irrespective of the objects of the faculty of desire. From the preceding discussion it is clear that the purposes we may have for our actions and their effects as ends and incentives of the will cannot give the actions any unconditional and moral worth. Wherein, then, can this worth lie, if it is not in the will in its relation to its hoped-for effect? It can lie nowhere else than in the principle of the will irrespective of the ends which can be realized by such action. For the will stands, as it were, at the crossroads halfway between its a priori principle which is formal and its posteriori incentive which is material. Since it must be determined by something, if it is done from duty it must be determined by the formal principle of volition as such, since every material principle has been withdrawn from it.

The third principle, as a consequence of the two preceding, I would express as follows: Duty is the necessity to do an action from respect for law. I can certainly have an inclination to an object as an effect of the proposed action, but I can never have respect for it precisely because it is a mere effect and not an activity of a will. Similarly, I can have no respect for any inclination whatsoever, whether my own or that of another; in the former case I can at most approve of it and in the latter I can even love it (i.e., see it as favorable to my own advantage). But that which is connected with my will merely as ground and not as consequence, that which does not serve my inclination but overpowers it or at least excludes it from being considered in making a choice—in a word, law itself—can be an object of respect and thus a command. Now as an act from duty wholly excludes the influence of inclination and therewith every object of the will, nothing remains which can determine the will objectively except law and subjectively except pure respect for this practical law. This subjective element is the maxim[1] that I should follow such a law even if it thwarts all my inclinations.

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect which is expected from it or in any principle of action which has to borrow its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects (agreeableness of my own condition, indeed even the promotion of the happiness of others) could be brought about through other causes and would not require the will of a rational being, while the highest and unconditional good can be found only in such a will. Therefore the preeminent good can consist only in the conception of law in itself (which can be present only in a rational being) so far as this conception and not the hoped-for effect is the determining ground of the will. This preeminent good, which we call moral, is already present in the person who acts according to this conception, and we do not have to look for it first in the result.[2]

But what kind of law can that be, the conception of which must determine the will without

reference to the expected result? Under this condition alone can the will be called absolutely good without qualification. Since I have robbed the will of all impulses which could come to it from obedience to any law, nothing remains to serve as a principle of the will except universal conformity to law as such. That is, I ought never to act in such a way that I could not also will that my maxim should be a universal law. Strict conformity to law as such (without assuming any particular law applicable to certain actions) serves as the principle of the will, and it must serve as such a principle if duty is not to be a vain delusion and chimerical concept. The common sense of mankind (*gemeine Menschenvernunft*) in its practical judgments is in perfect agreement with this and has this principle constantly in view.

Let the question, for example, be: May I, when in distress, make a promise with the intention not to keep it? I easily distinguish the two meanings which the question can have, viz., whether it is prudent to make a false promise, or whether it conforms to duty. The former can undoubtedly be often the case, though I do see clearly that it is not sufficient merely to escape from the present difficulty by this expedient, but that I must consider whether inconveniences much greater than the present one may not later spring from this lie. Even with all my supposed cunning, the consequences cannot be so easily foreseen. Loss of credit might be far more disadvantageous than the misfortune I am now seeking to avoid, and it is hard to tell whether it might not be more prudent to act according to a universal maxim and to make it a habit not to promise anything without intending to fulfill it. But it is soon clear to me that such a maxim is based only on an apprehensive concern with consequences.

To be truthful from duty, however, is an entirely different thing from being truthful out of fear of untoward consequences, for in the former case the concept of the action itself contains a law for me, while in the latter I must first look about to see what results for me may be connected with it. To deviate from the principle of duty is certainly bad, but to be unfaithful to my maxim of prudence can sometimes be very advantageous to me, though it is certainly safer to abide by it. The shortest but most infallible way to find the answer to the question as to whether a deceitful promise is consistent with duty is to ask myself: Would I be content that my maxim of extricating myself from difficulty by a false promise should hold as a universal law for myself as well as for others? And could I say to myself that everyone may make a false promise when he is in a difficulty from which he otherwise cannot escape? Immediately I see that I could will the lie but not a universal law to lie. For with such a law there would be no promises at all, inasmuch as it would be futile to make a pretense of my intention in regard to future actions to those who would not believe this pretense or—if they overhastily did so—would pay me back in my own coin. Thus my maxim would necessarily destroy itself as soon as it was made a universal law.

I do not, therefore, need any penetrating acuteness to discern what I have to do in order that my volition may be morally good. Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for all its contingencies, I only ask myself: Can I will that my maxim become a universal law? If not, it must be rejected, not because of any disadvantage accruing to myself or even to others, but because it cannot enter as a principle into a possible enactment of universal law, and reason extorts from me an immediate respect for such legislation. I do not as yet discern on what it is grounded (this is a question the philosopher may investigate), but I at least understand that it is an estimation of a worth which far outweighs all the worth of whatever is recommended by the inclinations, and that the necessity that I act from pure respect for the practical law constitutes my duty. To duty every other motive must give place, because duty is the condition of a will good in itself, whose worth transcends everything.

Thus within the moral knowledge of ordinary human reason (*gemeine Menschenvernunft*) we have attained its principle. To be sure, ordinary human reason does not think this principle abstractly in such a universal form, but it always has the principle in view and uses it as the standard for its judgments. It would be easy to show how ordinary human reason, with this compass, knows well how to distinguish what is good, what is bad, and what is consistent or inconsistent with duty. Without in the least teaching common reason anything new, we need only to draw its attention to its own principle (in the manner of Socrates), thus showing that neither science

nor philosophy is needed in order to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous. We might have conjectured beforehand that the knowledge of what everyone is obliged to do and thus also to know would be within the reach of everyone, even of the most ordinary man. Here we cannot but admire the great advantages which the practical faculty of judgment has over the theoretical in ordinary human understanding. In the theoretical, if ordinary reason ventures to go beyond the laws of experience and perceptions of the senses, it falls into sheer inconceivabilities and self-contradictions, or at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability. In the practical, on the other hand, the power of judgment first shows itself to advantage when common understanding excludes all sensuous incentives from practical laws. It then even becomes subtle, quibbling with its own conscience or with other claims to what should be called right, or wishing to determine accurately, for its own instruction, the worth of certain actions. But the most remarkable thing about ordinary human understanding in its practical concern is that it may have as much hope as any philosopher of hitting the mark. In fact, it is almost more certain to do so that the philosopher, for while he has no principle which common understanding lacks, his judgment is easily confused by a mass of irrelevant considerations so that it easily turns aside from the correct way. Would it not, therefore, be wiser in moral matters to acquiesce in ordinary reasonable judgment and at most to call in philosophy in order to make the system of morals more complete and comprehensible and its rules more convenient for use (especially in disputation), than to steer the ordinary understanding from its happy simplicity in practical matters and to lead it through philosophy into a new path of inquiry and instruction?

Innocence is indeed a glorious thing, but it is very sad that it cannot well maintain itself, being easily led astray. For this reason, even wisdom—which consists more in acting than in knowing—needs science, not so as to learn from it but to secure admission and permanence to its precepts. Man feels in himself a powerful counterpoise against all commands of duty which reason presents to him as so deserving of respect. This counterpoise is his needs and inclinations, the complete satisfaction of which he sums up under the name of happiness. Now reason issues inexorable commands without promising anything to the inclinations. It disregards, as it were, and holds in contempt those claims which are so impetuous and yet so plausible, and which refuse to be suppressed by any command. From this a natural dialectic arises, i.e., a propensity to argue against the stern laws of duty and their validity, or at least to place their purity and strictness in doubt and, where possible, to make them more accordant with our wishes and inclinations. This is equivalent to corrupting them in their very foundations and destroying their dignity—a thing which even ordinary practical reason cannot finally call good.

In this way ordinary human reason is impelled to go outside its sphere and to take a step into the field of practical philosophy. But it is forced to do so not by any speculative need, which never occurs to it so long as it is satisfied to remain merely healthy reason; rather, it is impelled on practical grounds to obtain information and clear instruction respecting the source of its principle and the correct definition of this principle in its opposition to the maxims based on need and inclination. It seeks this information in order to escape from the perplexity of opposing claims and to avoid the danger of losing all genuine moral principles through the equivocation in which it is easily involved. Thus when ordinary practical reason cultivates itself, a dialectic surreptitiously ensues which forces it to seek aid in philosophy, just as the same thing happens in the theoretical use of reason. Ordinary practical reason, like theoretical reason, will find rest only in a complete critical examination of our reason.

Second Section
Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysics of Morals

Although we have derived our earlier concept of duty from the ordinary use of our practical reason, it is by no means to be inferred that we have treated it as an empirical concept. On the contrary, if we attend to our experience of the way men act, we meet frequent and, as we must confess, justi-

fied complaints that we cannot cite a single sure example of the disposition to act from pure duty. There are also justified complaints that, though much may be done that accords with what duty commands, it is nevertheless always doubtful whether it is done from duty and thus whether it has moral worth. There have always been philosophers who for this reason have absolutely denied the reality of this disposition in human actions, attributing everything to more or less refined self-love. They have done so without questioning the correctness of the concept of morality. Rather they spoke with sincere regret of the frailty and corruption of human nature, which is noble enough to take as its precept an Idea so worthy of respect but which at the same time is too weak to follow it, employing reason, which should give laws for human nature, only to provide for the interest of the inclinations either singly or, at best, in their greatest possible harmony with one another.

It is, in fact, absolutely impossible by experience to discern with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action, however much it might conform to duty, rested solely on moral grounds and on the conception of one's duty. It sometimes happens that in the most searching self-examination we can find nothing except the moral ground of duty which could have been powerful enough to move us to this or that good action and to such great sacrifice. But from this we cannot by any means conclude with certainty that a secret impulse of self-love, falsely appearing as the Idea of duty, was not actually the true determining cause of the will. For we like to flatter ourselves with a pretended nobler motive, while in fact even the strictest examination can never lead us entirely behind the secret incentives, for when moral worth is in question it is not a matter of actions which one sees but of their inner principles which one does not see.

Moreover, one cannot better serve the wishes of those who ridicule all morality as a mere phantom of human imagination overreaching itself through self-conceit than by conceding that the concepts of duty must be derived only from experience (for they are ready, from indolence, to believe that this is true of all other concepts too). For, by this concession, a sure triumph is prepared for them. Out of love for humanity I am willing to admit that most of our actions are in accord with duty; but if we look more closely at our thoughts and aspirations, we come everywhere upon the dear self, which is always turning up, and it is this instead of the stern command of duty (which would often require self-denial) which supports our plans. One need not be an enemy of virtue, but only a cool observer who does not confuse even the liveliest aspiration for the good with its actuality, to be sometimes doubtful whether true virtue can really be found anywhere in the world. This is especially true as one's years increase and the power of judgment is made wiser by experience and more acute in observation. This being so, nothing can secure us against the complete abandonment of our ideas of duty and preserve in us a well-founded respect for its law except the conviction that, even if there never were actions springing from such pure sources, our concern is not whether this or that was done, but that reason of itself and independently of all appearances commanded what ought to be done. Our concern is with actions of which perhaps the world has never had an example, with actions whose feasibility might be seriously doubted by those who base everything on experience, and yet with actions inexorably commanded by reason. For example, pure sincerity in friendship can be demanded of every man, and this demand is not in the least diminished if a sincere friend has never existed, because this duty, as duty in general, prior to all experience lies in the Idea of reason which determines the will on a priori grounds.

No experience, it is clear, can give occasion for inferring the possibility of such apodictic laws. This is especially clear when we add that, unless we wish to deny all truth to the concept of morality and renounce its application to any possible object, we cannot refuse to admit that the law is of such broad significance that it holds not merely for men but for all rational beings as such; we must grant that it must be valid with absolute necessity, and not merely under contingent conditions and with exceptions. For with what right could we bring into unlimited respect something that might be valid only under contingent human conditions? And how could laws of the determination of our will be held to be laws of the determination of the will of any rational being whatever and of ourselves in so far as we are rational beings, if they were merely empirical and did not have their

origin completely a priori in pure, but practical, reason?

Nor could one given poorer counsel to morality than to attempt to derive it from examples. For each example of morality which is exhibited must itself have been previously judged according to principles of morality to see whether it was worthy to serve as an original example or model. By no means could it authoritatively furnish the concept of morality. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before He is recognized as such; even He says of Himself, "Why call ye Me (Whom you see) good? None is good (the archetype of the good) except God only (Whom you do not see)." But whence do we have the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the Idea of moral perfection which reason formulates a priori and which it inseparably connects with the concept of a free will. Imitation has no place in moral matters, and examples serve only for encouragement. That is, they put beyond question the possibility of performing what the law commands, and they make visible that which the practical rule expresses more generally. But they can never justify our guiding ourselves by examples and our setting aside their true original, which lies in reason.

If there is thus no genuine supreme principle of morality which does not rest on pure reason alone independent of all possible experience, I do not believe it is necessary even to ask whether it is well to exhibit these concepts generally (*in abstracto*), which, together with the principles belonging to them, are established a priori. At any rate, the question need not be asked if knowledge of them is to be distinguished from ordinary knowledge and called philosophical. But in our times this question may be necessary. For if we collected votes as to whether pure rational knowledge separated from all experience (i.e., a metaphysics of morals) or popular practical philosophy is to be preferred, it is easily guessed on which side the majority would stand.

This condescension to popular notions is certainly very commendable once the ascent to the principles of pure reason has been satisfactorily accomplished. That would mean the prior establishment of the doctrine of morals on metaphysics and then, when it is established, procuring a hearing for it through popularization. But it is extremely absurd to want to achieve popular appeal in the first investigation, where everything depends on the correctness of the fundamental principles. Not only can this procedure never make claim to that rarest merit of true philosophical popularity, since there is really no art in being generally comprehensible if one thereby renounces all basic insight; but it produces a disgusting jumble of patched-up observations and half-reasoned principles. Shallow pates enjoy this, for it is very useful in everyday chitchat, while the more sensible feel confused and dissatisfied and avert their eyes without being able to help themselves. But philosophers, who see through this delusion, get little hearing when they call people away from this would-be popularity so that they may have genuine popular appeal once they have gained a definite understanding.

One need only look at the essays on morality favored by popular taste. One will sometimes meet with the particular vocation of human nature (but occasionally with the Idea of a rational nature in general), sometimes perfection and sometimes happiness, here moral feeling, there fear of God, a little of this and a little of that in a marvelous mixture. It never occurs to the authors, however, to ask whether the principles of morality are, after all, to be sought anywhere in knowledge of human nature (which we can derive only from experience). And if this is not the case, if the principles are a priori, free from everything empirical, and found exclusively in pure rational concepts and not at all in any other place, they never ask whether they should undertake this investigation as a separate inquiry (i.e., as pure practical philosophy) or (if one may use a name so decried) a metaphysics[3] of morals. They never think of dealing with it alone and bringing it by itself to completeness and of requiring the public, which desires popularization, to await the outcome of this undertaking.

But a completely isolated metaphysics of morals, mixed with no anthropology, no theology, no physics or hyperphysics, and even less with occult qualities (which might be called hypophysical), is not only an indispensable substrate of all theoretically sound and definite knowledge of duties; it is also a desideratum of the highest importance to the actual fulfillment of its precepts. For the

thought of duty and of the moral law generally, with no admixture of empirical inducements, has an influence on the human heart so much more powerful than all other incentives[4] which may be derived from the empirical field that reason, in the consciousness of its dignity, despises them and gradually becomes master over them. It has this influence only through reason alone, which thereby first realizes that it can of itself be practical. A mixed theory of morals which is put together from incentives of feelings and inclinations and from rational concepts must, on the other hand, make the mind vacillate between motives which cannot be brought together under any principle and which can lead only accidentally to the good, and frequently lead to the bad.

From what has been said it is clear that all moral concepts have their seat and origin entirely a priori in reason. This is just as much the case in the most ordinary reason as in the reason which is speculative to the highest degree. It is obvious that they can be abstracted from no empirical and hence merely contingent cognitions. In the purity of origin lies their worthiness to serve us as supreme practical principles, and to the extent that something empirical is added to them, just this much is subtracted from their genuine influence and from the unqualified worth of actions. Furthermore, it is evident that it is not only of the greatest necessity from a theoretical point of view when it is a question of speculation but also of the utmost practical importance to derive the concepts and laws of morals from pure reason and to present them pure and unmixed, and to determine the scope of this entire practical but pure rational knowledge (the entire faculty of pure practical reason) without making the principles depend upon the particular nature of human reason, as speculative philosophy may permit and even find necessary. But since moral laws should hold for every rational being as such, the principles must be derived from the universal concept of a rational being in general. In this manner all morals, which need anthropology for their application to men, must be completely developed first as pure philosophy (i.e., metaphysics), independently of anthropology (a thing feasibly done in such distinct fields of knowledge). For we know well that if we are not in possession of such a metaphysics, it is not merely futile [to try to] define accurately for the purposes of speculative judgment the moral element of duty in all actions which accord with duty, but impossible to base morals on legitimate principles for even ordinary practical use, especially in moral instruction; and it is only in this manner that pure moral dispositions can be produced and engrafted on men's minds for the purpose of the highest good in the world.

In this study we do not advance merely from the common moral judgment (which here is very worthy of respect) to the philosophical, as this has already been done; but we advance by natural stages from popular philosophy (which goes no farther than it can grope by means of examples) to metaphysics (which is not held back by anything empirical and which, as it must measure out the entire scope of rational knowledge of this kind, reaches even Ideas, where examples fail us). In order to make this advance, we must follow and clearly present the practical faculty of reason from its universal rules of determination to the point where the concept of duty arises from it.

Everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the *conception* of laws (i.e., according to principles). This capacity is the will. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, will is nothing less than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions which such a being recognizes as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary. That is, the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary (i.e., as good). But if reason of itself does not sufficiently determine the will, and if the will is subjugated to subjective conditions (certain incentives) which do not always agree with the objective conditions—in a word, if the will is not of itself in complete accord with reason (which is the actual case with men), then the actions which are recognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will according to objective laws is a constraint. That is, the relation of objective laws to a will which is not completely good is conceived as the determination of the will of a rational being by principles of reason to which this will is not by its nature necessarily obedient.

The conception of an objective principle, so far as it constrains a will, is a command (of reason), and the formula of this command is called an *imperative*.

All imperatives are expressed by an "ought" and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which is not in its subjective constitution necessarily determined by this law. This relation is that of constraint. Imperatives say that it would be good to do or to refrain from doing something, but they say it to a will which does not always do something simply because the thing is presented to it as good to do. Practical good is what determines the will by means of the conception of reason and hence not by subjective causes but objectively, on grounds which are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the pleasant, as that which has an influence on the will only by means of a sensation from purely subjective causes, which hold for the senses only of this or that person and not as a principle of reason which holds for everyone.[5]

A perfectly good will, therefore, would be equally subject to objective laws of the good, but it could not be conceived as constrained by them to accord with them, because it can be determined to act by its own subjective constitution only through the conception of the good. Thus no imperatives hold for the divine will or, more generally, for a holy will. The "ought" here is out of place, for the volition of itself is necessarily in unison with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulas expressing the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, the human will.

All imperatives command either *hypothetically* or *categorically*. The former present the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else which one desires (or which one may possibly desire). The categorical imperative would be one which presented an action as of itself objectively necessary, without regard to any other end.

Since every practical law presents a possible action as good and thus as necessary for a subject practically determinable by reason, all imperatives are formulas of the determination of action which is necessary by the principle of a will which is in any way good. If the action is good only as a means to something else, the imperative is hypothetical; but if it is thought of as good in itself, and hence as necessary in a will which of itself conforms to reason as the principle of this will, the imperative is categorical.

The imperative thus says what action possible for me would be good, and it presents the practical rule in relation to a will which does not forthwith perform an action simply because it is good, in part because the subject does not always know that the action is good, and in part (when he does know it) because his maxims can still be opposed to the objective principles of a practical reason.

The hypothetical imperative, therefore, says only that the action is good to some purpose, possible or actual. In the former case, it is a problematical, in the latter an assertorical, practical principle. The categorical imperative, which declares the action to be of itself objectively necessary without making any reference to any end in view (i.e., without having any other purpose), holds as an apodictical practical principle.

We can think of what is possible only through the powers of some rational being as a possible end in view of any will. As a consequence, the principles of action thought of as necessary to attain a possible end in view which can be achieved by them, are in reality infinitely numerous. All sciences have some practical part consisting of problems which presuppose some purpose as well as imperatives directing how it can be reached. These imperatives can therefore be called, generally, imperatives of skill. Whether the purpose is reasonable and good is not in question at all, for the question concerns only what must be done in order to attain it. The precepts to be followed by a physician in order to cure his patient and by a poisoner to bring about certain death are of equal value in so far as each does that which will perfectly accomplish his purpose. Since in early youth we do not know what purposes we may have in the course of our life, parents seek to let their children learn a great many things and provide for skill in the use of means to all sorts of ends which they might choose, among which they cannot determine whether any one of them will become their child's actual purpose, though it may be that someday he may have it as his actual purpose.

And this anxiety is so great that they commonly neglect to form and correct their children's judgment on the worth of the things which they may make their ends.

There is one end, however, which we may presuppose as actual in all rational beings so far as imperatives apply to them, that is, so far as they are dependent beings. There is one purpose which they not only *can* have but which we can presuppose that they all *do* have by a necessity of nature. This purpose is happiness. The hypothetical imperative which represents the practical necessity of an action as means to the promotion of happiness is an assertorical imperative. We may not expound it as necessary to a merely uncertain and merely possible purpose, but as necessary to a purpose which we can a priori and with assurance assume for everyone because it belongs to his essence. Skill in the choice of means to one's own highest well-being can be called prudence[6] in the narrowest sense. Thus the imperative which refers to the choice of means to one's own happiness (i.e., the precept of prudence) is still only hypothetical, and the action is not commanded absolutely but commanded only as a means to another end in view.

Finally, there is one imperative which directly commands certain conduct without making its condition some purpose to be reached by it. This imperative is categorical. It concerns not the material of the action and its intended result, but the form and principle from which it originates. What is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, the result being what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality.

Volition according to these three principles is plainly distinguished by the dissimilarity in the constraints by which they subject the will. In order to clarify this dissimilarity, I believe that they are most suitably named if one says that they are either rules of skill, counsels of prudence, or commands (laws) of morality, respectively. For law alone implies the concept of an unconditional and objective and hence universally valid necessity, and commands are laws which must be obeyed even against inclination. Counsels do indeed involve necessity, but a necessity that can hold only under a subjectively contingent condition (i.e., whether this or that man counts this or that as part of his happiness). The categorical imperative, on the other hand, is restricted by no condition. As absolutely, though practically, necessary it can be called a command in the strict sense. We could also call the first imperatives *technical* (belonging to art), the second *pragmatic*[7] (belonging to well-being), and the third *moral* (belonging to free conduct as such, i.e., to morals).

The question now arises: How are all these imperatives possible? This question does not require an answer as to how the action which the imperative commands can be performed, but only an answer as to how the constraint of the will, which the imperative expresses in setting the problem, can be conceived. How an imperative of skill is possible requires no particular discussion. Whoever wills the end, so far as reason has decisive influence on his action, wills also the indispensably necessary steps to it that he can take. This proposition, in what concerns the will, is analytical; for, in the willing of an object as an effect, my causality, as an acting cause of this effect shown in my use of the means to it, is already thought, and the imperative derives the concept of actions necessary to this purpose from the concept of willing this purpose. Synthetical propositions undoubtedly are necessary for determining the means to a proposed end, but they do not concern the ground, the act of the will, but only the way to achieve the object. Mathematics teaches, by synthetical propositions only, that in order to bisect a line according to an infallible principle, I must make two intersecting arcs from each of its extremities; but if I know the proposed result can be obtained only by such an action, then it is an analytical proposition that, if I fully will the effect, I must also will the action necessary to produce it. For it is one and the same thing to conceive of something as an effect which is in a certain way possible through me, and to conceive of myself as acting in this way.

If it were only easy to give a definite concept of happiness, the imperatives of prudence would perfectly correspond to those of skill and would likewise be analytical. For it could then be said in this case as well as in the former that whoever wills the end wills also (necessarily according to reason) the only means to it which are in his power. But it is a misfortune that the concept of happiness is so indefinite that, although each person wishes to attain it, he can never definitely

and self-consistently state what it is that he really wishes and wills. The reason for this is that all elements which belong to the concept of happiness are empirical (i.e., they must be taken from experience), while for the Idea of happiness an absolute whole, a maximum, of well-being is needed in my present and in every future condition. Now it is impossible for even a most clear-sighted and most capable but finite being to form here a definite concept of that which he really wills. If he wills riches, how much anxiety, envy, and intrigues might he not thereby draw upon his shoulders! If he wills much knowledge and vision, perhaps it might become only an eye that much sharper to show him as more dreadful the evils which are now hidden from him and which are yet unavoidable; or it might be to burden his desires—which already sufficiently engage him—with even more needs! If he wills long life, who guarantees that it will not be long misery! If he wills at least health, how often has not the discomfort of his body restrained him from excesses into which perfect health would have led him? In short, he is not capable, on any principle and with complete certainty, of ascertaining what would make him truly happy; omniscience would be needed for this. He cannot, therefore, act according to definite principles so as to be happy, but only according to empirical counsels (e.g., those of diet, economy, courtesy, restraint, etc.) which are shown by experience best to promote well-being on the average. Hence the imperatives of prudence cannot, in the strict sense, command (i.e., present actions objectively as practically necessary); thus they are to be taken as counsels (*consilia*) rather than as commands (*praecepta*) of reason, and the task of determining infallibly and universally what action will promote the happiness of a rational being is completely unsolvable. There can be no imperative which would, in the strict sense, command us to do what makes for happiness, because happiness is an ideal not of reason but of imagination, depending only on empirical grounds which one would expect in vain to determine an action through which the totality of consequences—which in fact is infinite—could be achieved. Assuming that the means to happiness could be infallibly stated, this imperative of prudence would be an analytically practical proposition for it differs from the imperative of skill only in that its purpose is given, while in the imperative of skill it is merely a possible purpose. Since both, however, command the means to that which one presupposes as a willed purpose, the imperative which commands the willing of the means to him who wills the end is in both cases analytical. There is, consequently, no difficulty in seeing the possibility of such an imperative.

To see how the imperative of morality is possible, then, is without doubt the only question needing an answer. It is not hypothetical, and thus the objectively conceived necessity cannot be supported by any presupposed purpose, as was the case with the hypothetical imperatives. But it must not be overlooked that it cannot be shown by any example (i.e., it cannot be empirically shown) that there is such an imperative. Rather, it is to be suspected that all imperatives which appear to be categorical are tacitly hypothetical. For instance, when it is said, "Thou shall not make a false promise," we assume that the necessity of this prohibition is not a mere counsel for the sake of escaping some other evil, so that it would read: "Thou shalt not make a false promise, lest, if it comes to light, thou ruinest thy credit." [In so doing] we assume that an action of this kind must be regarded as in itself bad and that the imperative prohibiting it is categorical, but we cannot show with certainty by any example that the will is here determined by the law alone without any other incentives, although it appears to be so. For it is always possible that secretly fear of disgrace, and perhaps also obscure apprehension of other dangers, may have had an influence on the will. Who can prove by experience the nonexistence of a cause when experience shows us only that we do not perceive the cause? In such a case the so-called moral imperative, which as such appears to be categorical and unconditional, would be actually only a pragmatic precept which makes us attentive to our own advantage and teaches us to consider it.

Thus we shall have to investigate purely a priori the possibility of a categorical imperative, for we do not have the advantage that experience would show us the reality of this imperative so that the [demonstration of its] possibility would be necessary only for its explanation, and not for its establishment. In the meantime, this much at least may be seen: the categorical imperative alone can be taken as a practical *law*, while all other imperatives may be called principles of the will

but not laws. This is because what is necessary merely for the attainment of some chosen end can be regarded as itself contingent and we get rid of the precept once we give up the end in view, whereas the unconditional command leaves the will no freedom to choose the opposite. Thus it alone implies the necessity which we require of a law.

Secondly, in the case of the categorical imperative or law of morality, the cause of the difficulty in discerning its possibility is very weighty. This imperative is an a priori synthetical practical proposition[8] and since to discern the possibility of propositions of this sort is so difficult in theoretical knowledge it may well be gathered that it will be no less difficult in practical knowledge.

In attacking this problem, we will first inquire whether the mere concept of a categorical imperative does not also furnish the formula containing the proposition which alone can be a categorical imperative. For even when we know the formula of the imperative, to learn how such an absolute command is possible will require difficult and special labors which we shall postpone to the last Section.

If I think of a hypothetical imperative as such, I do not know what it will contain until the condition is stated [under which it is an imperative]. But if I think of a categorical imperative. I know immediately what it will contain. For since the imperative contains, besides the law, only the necessity of the maxim[9] of acting in accordance with the law, while the law contains no condition to which it is restricted, nothing remains except the universality of law as such to which the maxim of the action should conform; and this conformity alone is what is represented as necessary by the imperative.

There is, therefore, only one categorical imperative. It is: Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Now if all imperatives of duty can be derived from this one imperative as a principle, we can at least show what we understand by the concept of duty and what it means, even though it remain undecided whether that which is called duty is an empty concept or not.

The universality of law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form) (i.e., the existence of things so far as it is determined by universal laws). [By analogy], then, the universal imperative of duty can be expressed as follows: Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.

We shall now enumerate some duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and to others and into perfect and imperfect duties.[10]

1. A man who is reduced to despair by a series of evils feels a weariness with life but is still in possession of his reason sufficiently to ask whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he asks whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim, however is: For love of myself, I make it my principle to shorten my life when by a longer duration it threatens more evil than satisfaction. But it is questionable whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. One immediately sees a contradiction in a system of nature whose law would be to destroy life by the feeling whose special office is to impel the improvement of life. In this case it would not exist as nature; hence that maxim cannot obtain as a law of nature, and thus it wholly contradicts the supreme principle of all duty.

2. Another man finds himself forced by need to borrow money. He well knows that he will not be able to repay it, but he also sees that nothing will be lent him if he does not firmly promise to repay it at a certain time. He desires to make such a promise, but he has enough conscience to ask himself whether it is not improper and opposed to duty to relieve his distress in such a way. Now, assuming he does decide to do so, the maxim of his action would be as follows: When I believe myself to be in need of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know I shall never be able to do so. Now this principle of self-love or of his own benefit may very well be compatible with his whole future welfare, but the question is whether it is right. He changes the pretension of self-love into a universal law and then puts the question: How would it be if my maxim became a universal law? He immediately sees that it could never hold as a universal law of

nature and be consistent with itself; rather it must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law which says that anyone who believes himself to be in need could promise what he pleased with the intention of not fulfilling it would make the promise itself and the end to be accomplished by it impossible; no one would believe what was promised to him but would only laugh at any such assertion as vain pretense.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which could, by means of some cultivation, make him in many respects a useful man. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers indulgence in pleasure to troubling himself with broadening and improving his fortunate natural gifts. Now, however, let him ask whether his maxim of neglecting his gifts, besides agreeing with his propensity to idle amusement, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees that a system of nature could indeed exist in accordance with such a law, even though man (like the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands) should let his talents rust and resolve to devote his life merely to idleness, indulgence, and propagation—in a word, to pleasure. But he cannot possibly will that this should become a universal law of nature or that it should be implanted in us by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that all his faculties should be developed, inasmuch as they are given him and serve him for all sorts of purposes.

4. A fourth man, for whom things are going well, sees that others (whom he could help) have to struggle with great hardships, and he asks, "What concern of mine is it? Let each one be as happy as heaven wills, or as he can make himself; I will not take anything from him or even envy him; but to his welfare or to his assistance in time of need I have no desire to contribute." If such a way of thinking were a universal law of nature, certainly the human race could exist, and without doubt even better than in a state where everyone talks of sympathy and good will or even exerts himself occasionally to practice them while, on the other hand, he cheats when he can and betrays or otherwise violates the right of man. Now although it is possible that a universal law of nature according to that maxim could exist, it is nevertheless impossible to will that such a principle should hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would conflict with itself, since instances can often arise in which he would need the love and sympathy of others, and in which he would have robbed himself, by such a law of nature springing from his own will, of all hope of the aid he desires.

The foregoing are a few of the many actual duties, or at least of duties we hold to be actual, whose derivation from the one stated principle is clear. We must be able to will that a maxim of our action become a universal law; this is the canon of the moral estimation of our action generally. Some actions are of such a nature that their maxim cannot even be *thought* as a universal law of nature without contradiction, far from it being possible that one could will that it should be such. In others this internal impossibility is not found, though it is still impossible to *will* that that maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself. We easily see that a maxim of the first kind conflicts with stricter or narrower (imprescriptable) duty, that of the latter with broader (meritorious) duty. Thus all duties, so far as the kind of obligation (not the object of their action) is concerned, have been completely exhibited by these examples in their dependence upon the same principle.

When we observe ourselves in any transgression of a duty, we find that we do not actually will that our maxim should become a universal law. That is impossible for us; rather, the contrary of this maxim should remain as a law generally, and we only take the liberty of making an exception to it for ourselves or for the sake of our inclination, and for this one occasion. Consequently, if we weighed everything from one and the same standpoint, namely, reason, we would come upon a contradiction in our own will, viz., that a certain principle is objectively necessary as a universal law and yet subjectively does not hold universally but rather admits exceptions. However, since we regard our action at one time from the point of view of a will wholly conformable to reason and then from that of a will affected by inclinations, there is actually no contradiction, but rather an opposition of inclination to the precept of reason (*antagonismus*). In this the universality of the principle (*universalitas*) is changed into mere generality (*generalitas*), whereby the practical

principle of reason meets the maxim halfway. Although this cannot be justified in our own impartial judgment, it does show that we actually acknowledge the validity of the categorical imperative and allow ourselves (with all respect to it) only a few exceptions which seem to us to be unimportant and forced upon us.

We have thus at least established that if duty is a concept which is to have significance and actual law-giving authority for our actions, it can be expressed only in categorical imperatives and not at all in hypothetical ones. For every application of it we have also clearly exhibited the content of the categorical imperative which must contain the principle of all duty (if there is such). This is itself very much. But we are not yet advanced far enough to prove a priori that that kind of imperative really exists, that there is a practical law which of itself commands absolutely and without any incentives, and that obedience to this law is duty.

With a view to attaining this, it is extremely important to remember that we must not let ourselves think that the reality of this principle can be derived from the particular constitution of human nature. For duty is practical unconditional necessity of action; it must, therefore, hold for all rational beings (to which alone an imperative can apply), and only for that reason can it be a law for all human wills. Whatever is derived from the particular natural situation of man as such, or from certain feelings and propensities, or even from a particular tendency of the human reason which might not hold necessarily for the will of every rational being (if such a tendency is possible), can give a maxim valid for us but not a law; that is, it can give a subjective principle by which we might act if only we have the propensity and inclination, but not an objective principle by which we would be directed to act even if all our propensity, inclination, and natural tendency were opposed to it. This is so far the case that the sublimity and intrinsic worth of the command is the better shown in a duty the fewer subjective causes there are for it and the more they are against it; the latter do not weaken the constraint of the law or diminish its validity.

Here we see philosophy brought to what is, in fact, a precarious position, which should be made fast even though it is supported by nothing in either heaven or earth. Here philosophy must show its purity, as the absolute sustainer of its laws, and not as the herald of laws which an implanted sense or who knows what tutelary nature whispers to it. Those may be better than nothing at all, but they can never afford fundamental principles, which reason alone dictates. These fundamental principles must originate entirely a priori and thereby obtain their commanding authority; they can expect nothing from the inclination of men but everything from the supremacy of the law and due respect for it. Otherwise they condemn man to self-contempt and inner abhorrence.

Thus everything empirical is not only wholly unworthy to be an ingredient in the principle of morality but is even highly prejudicial to the purity of moral practices themselves. For, in morals, the proper and inestimable worth of an absolutely good will consists precisely in the freedom of the principle of action from all influences from contingent grounds which only experience can furnish. We cannot too much or too often warn against the lax or even base manner of thought which seeks its principles among empirical motives and laws, for human reason in its weariness is glad to rest on this pillow. In a dream of sweet illusions (in which it embraces not Juno but a cloud), it substitutes for morality a bastard patched up from limbs of very different parentage, which looks like anything one wishes to see in it, but not like virtue to anyone who has ever beheld her in her true form.[11]

The question then is: Is it a necessary law for all rational beings that they should always judge their actions by such maxims as they themselves could will to serve as universal laws? If there is such a law, it must be connected wholly a priori with the concept of the will of a rational being as such. But in order to discover this connection, we must, however reluctantly, take a step into metaphysics, although in a region of it different from speculative philosophy, namely into the metaphysics of morals. In a practical philosophy it is not a question of assuming grounds for what happens but of assuming laws of what ought to happen even though it may never happen (that is to say, we assume objective practical laws). Hence in practical philosophy we need not inquire into the reasons why something pleases or displeases, how the pleasure of mere feeling differs from

taste, and whether this is distinct from a general satisfaction of reason. Nor need we ask on what the feeling of pleasure or displeasure rests, how desires and inclinations arise, and how, finally, maxims arise from desires and inclination under the co-operation of reason. For all these matters belong to empirical psychology, which would be the second part of physics if we consider it as philosophy of nature so far as it rests on empirical laws. But here it is a question of objectively practical laws and thus of the relation of a will to itself so far as it determines itself only by reason, for everything which has a relation to the empirical automatically falls away, because if reason of itself alone determines conduct, it must necessarily do so a priori. The possibility of reason's thus determining conduct must now be investigated.

The will is thought of as a faculty of determining itself to action in accordance with the conception of certain laws. Such a faculty can be found only in rational beings. That which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is a purpose, and if it is given by reason alone it must hold alike for all rational beings. On the other hand, that which contains the ground of the possibility of the action, whose result is an end, is called the means. The subjective ground of desire is the incentive (*Triebfeder*) while the objective ground of volition is the motive (*Bewegungsgrund*). Thus arises the distinction between subjective purposes, which rest on incentives, and objective purposes, which depend on motives valid for every rational being. Practical principles are formal when they disregard all subjective purposes; they are material when they have subjective purposes and thus certain incentives as their basis. The purposes that a rational being holds before himself by choice as consequences of his action are material purposes and are without exception only relative, for only their relation to a particularly constituted faculty of desire in the subject gives them their worth. And this worth cannot afford any universal principles for all rational beings or any principles valid and necessary for every volition. That is, they cannot give rise to any practical laws. All these relative purposes, therefore, are grounds for hypothetical imperatives only.

But suppose that there were something the existence of which in itself had absolute worth, something which, as an end in itself, could be a ground of definite laws. In it and only in it could lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative (i.e., of a practical law).

Now, I say, man and, in general, every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. In all his actions, whether they are directed toward himself or toward other rational beings, he must always be regarded at the same time as an end. All objects of inclination have only conditional worth, for if the inclinations and needs founded on them did not exist, their object would be worthless. The inclinations themselves as the sources of needs, however, are so lacking in absolute worth that the universal wish of every rational being must be indeed to free himself completely from them. Therefore, the worth of any objects to be obtained by our actions is at times conditional. Beings whose existence does not depend on our will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only relative worth as means, and are therefore called "things"; rational beings, on the other hand, are designated "persons" because their nature indicates that they are ends in themselves (i.e., things which may not be used merely as means). Such a being is thus an object of respect, and as such restricts all [arbitrary] choice. Such beings are not merely subjective ends whose existence as a result of our action has a worth for us, but are objective ends (i.e., beings whose existence is an end in itself). Such an end is one in the place of which no other end, to which these beings should serve merely as means, can be put. Without them, nothing of absolute worth could be found, and if all worth is conditional and thus contingent, no supreme practical principle for reason could be found anywhere.

Thus if there is to be a supreme practical principle and a categorical imperative for the human will, it must be one that forms an objective principle of the will from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself. Hence this objective principle can serve as a universal law. The ground of this principle is: rational nature exists as an end in itself. Man necessarily thinks of his own existence in this way, and thus far it is a subjective principle of human actions. Also every other rational being thinks of his existence on the same rational ground

which holds also for myself;[12] thus it is at the same time an objective principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will. The practical imperative, therefore, is the following: Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only. Let us now see whether this can be achieved. To return to our previous examples:

First, according to the concept of necessary duty to oneself, he who contemplates suicide will ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself. If in order to escape from burdensome circumstances he destroys himself, he uses a person merely as a means to maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life. Man, however, is not a thing, and thus not something to be used merely as a means; he must always be regarded in all his actions as an end in himself. Therefore I cannot dispose of man in my own person so as to mutilate, corrupt, or kill him. (It belongs to ethics proper to define more accurately this basic principle so as to avoid all misunderstanding, e.g., as to amputating limbs in order to preserve myself, or to exposing my life to danger in order to save it; I must therefore omit them here.)

Second, as concerns necessary or obligatory duties to others, he who intends a deceitful promise to others sees immediately that he intends to use another man merely as a means, without the latter at the same time containing the end in himself. For he whom I want to use for my own purposes by means of such a promise cannot possibly assent to my mode of acting against him and thus share in the purpose of this action. This conflict with the principle of other men is even clearer if we cite examples of attacks on their freedom and property, for then it is clear that he who violates the rights of men intends to make use of the person of others merely as means, without considering that, as rational beings, they must always be esteemed at the same time as ends (i.e., only as beings who must be able to embody in themselves the purpose of the very same action).[13]

Thirdly, with regard to contingent (meritorious) duty to oneself, it is not sufficient that the action not conflict with humanity in our person as an end in itself; it must also harmonize with it. In humanity there are capacities for greater perfection which belong to the purpose of nature with respect to humanity in our own person, and to neglect these might perhaps be consistent with the preservation of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the furtherance of that end.

Fourthly, with regard to meritorious duty to others, the natural purpose that all men have is their own happiness. Humanity might indeed exist if no one contributed to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally detract from it, but this harmony with humanity as an end in itself is only negative, not positive, if everyone does not also endeavor, as far as he can, to further the purposes of others. For the ends of any person, who is an end in himself, must as far as possible be also my ends, if that conception of an end in itself is to have its full effect on me.

This principle of humanity, and in general of every rational creature an end in itself, is the supreme limiting condition on the freedom of action of each man. It is not borrowed from experience, first, because of its universality, since it applies to all rational beings generally, and experience does not suffice to determine anything about them; and secondly, because in experience humanity is not thought of (subjectively) as the purpose of men (i.e., as an object which we of ourselves really make our purpose). Rather it is thought of as the objective end which ought to constitute the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends whatever they may be. Thus this principle must arise from pure reason. Objectively the ground of all practical legislation lies (according to the first principle) in the rule and form of universality, which makes it capable of being a law (at least a natural law); subjectively it lies in the end. But the subject of all ends is every rational being as an end in itself (by the second principle); from this there follows the third practical principle of the will as the supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, viz, the Idea of the will of every rational being as making universal law.

By this principle all maxims are rejected which are not consistent with the will's giving universal law. The will is not only subject to the law, but subject in such a way that it must be conceived also as itself prescribing the law, of which reason can hold itself to be the author; it is on this ground alone that the will is regarded as subject to the law.

By the very fact that the imperatives are thought of as categorical, either way of conceiving them—as imperatives demanding the lawfulness of actions, resembling the lawfulness of the natural order; or as imperatives of the universal prerogative of the purposes of rational beings as such—excludes from their sovereign authority all admixture of any interest as an incentive to obedience. But we have been *assuming* the imperatives to be categorical, for that was necessary if we wished to explain the concept of duty; that there are practical propositions which command categorically could not of itself be proved independently, just as little as it can be proved anywhere in this section. One thing, however could have been done: to indicate in the imperative itself, by some determination inherent in it, that in willing from duty the renunciation of all interest is the specific mark of the categorical imperative, distinguishing it from the hypothetical. And this is now done in the third formulation of the principle, viz., in the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law. A will which is subject to laws can be bound to them by an interest, but a will giving the supreme law cannot possibly depend upon any interest, for such a dependent will would itself need still another law which would restrict the interest of its self-love to the condition that its [maxim] should be valid as a universal law.

Thus the principle of every human will as a will giving universal law in all its maxims[14] is very well adapted to being a categorical imperative, provided it is otherwise correct. Because of the Idea of giving universal law, it is based on no interest; and thus of all possible imperatives, it alone can be unconditional. Or, better, converting the proposition: if there is a categorical imperative (a law for the will of every rational being), it can command only that everything be done from the maxim of its will as one which could have as its object only itself considered as giving universal law. For only in this case are the practical principle and the imperative which the will obeys unconditional, because the will can have no interest as its foundation.

If now we look back upon all previous attempts which have ever been undertaken to discover the principle of morality, it is not to be wondered at that they all had to fail. Man was seen to be bound to laws by his duty, but it was not seen that he is subject to his own, but still universal, legislation, and that he is bound to act only in accordance with his own will, which is, however, designed by nature to be a will giving universal law. For if one thought of him as only subject to a law (whatever it may be), this necessarily implied some interest as a stimulus or compulsion to obedience because the law did not arise from his will. Rather, his will had to be constrained by something else to act in a certain way. By this strictly necessary consequence, however, all the labor of finding a supreme ground for duty was irrevocably lost, and one never arrived at duty but only at the necessity of acting from a certain interest. This might be his own interest or that of another, but in either case the imperative always had to be conditional, and could not at all serve as a moral command. The moral principle I will call the principle of *autonomy* of the will in contrast to all other principles which I accordingly count under *heteronomy*.

The concept of any rational being as a being that must regard itself as giving universal law through all the maxims of its will, so that it may judge itself and its actions from this standpoint, leads to a very fruitful concept, namely that of a *realm of ends*.

By *realm* I understand the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws. Because laws determine which ends have universal validity, if we abstract from personal differences of rational beings, and thus from all content of their private purposes, we can think of a whole of all ends in systematic connection, a whole of rational beings as ends in themselves as well as a whole of particular purposes which each may set for himself. This is a realm of ends, which is possible on the principles stated above. For all rational beings stand under the law that each of them should treat himself and all others never merely as means, but in every case at the same time as an end in himself. Thus there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws. This is a realm which may be called a realm of ends (certainly only an ideal) because what these laws have in view is just the relation of these beings to each other as ends and means.

A rational being belongs to the realm of ends as a member when he gives universal laws in it while also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as sovereign when, as legislating, he is

subject to the will of no other. The rational being must regard himself always as legislative in a realm of ends possible through the freedom of the will whether he belongs to it as member or as sovereign. He cannot maintain his position as sovereign merely through the maxims of his will, but only when he is a completely independent being without need and with unlimited power adequate to his will.

Morality, therefore, consists in the relation of every action to the legislation through which alone a realm of ends is possible. This legislation must be found in every rational being. It must be able to arise from his will, whose principle then is to do no action according to any maxim which would be inconsistent with its being a universal law, and thus to act only so that the will through its maxims could regard itself at the same time as giving universal law. If the maxims do not by their nature already necessarily conform to this objective principle of rational beings as giving universal law, the necessity of acting according to that principle is called practical constraint, which is to say: duty. Duty pertains not to the sovereign of the realm of ends, but rather to each member and to each in the same degree.

The practical necessity of acting according to this principle (duty) does not rest at all on feelings, impulses, and inclinations; it rests solely on the relation of rational beings to one another, in which the will of a rational being must always be regarded as legislative, for otherwise it could not be thought of as an end in itself. Reason, therefore, relates every maxim of the will as giving universal laws to every other will and also to every action towards itself; it does not do so for the sake of any other practical motive or future advantage but rather from the Idea of the dignity of a rational being who obeys no law except one which he himself also gives.

In the realm of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent, has dignity.

That which is related to general human inclinations and needs has a *market price*. That which, without presupposing any need, accords with a certain taste (i.e., with pleasure in the purposeless play of our faculties) has a *fancy price*. But that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself does not have mere relative worth (price) but an intrinsic worth (*dignity*).

Morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in himself, because only through it is it possible to be a lawgiving member in the realm of ends. Thus morality, and humanity so far as it is capable of morality, alone have dignity. Skill and diligence in work have a market value; wit, lively imagination, and humor have a fancy price; but fidelity in promises and benevolence on principle (not benevolence from instinct) have intrinsic worth. Nature and likewise art contain nothing which could make up for their lack, for their worth consists not in the effects which flow from them nor in any advantage and utility which they procure; it consists only in mental dispositions, maxims of the will, which are ready to reveal themselves in this manner through actions even though success does not favor them. These actions need no recommendation from my subjective disposition or taste in order that they may be looked upon with immediate favor and satisfaction, nor do they have need of any direct propensity or feeling directed to them. They exhibit the will which performs them as the object of an immediate respect, since nothing but reason is required in order to impose them upon the will. The will is not to be cajoled into them, for this, in the case of duties, would be a contradiction. This esteem lets the worth of such a turn of mind be recognized as dignity and puts it infinitely beyond any price; with things of price it cannot in the least be brought into any competition or comparison without, as it were, violating its holiness.

And what is it that justifies the morally good disposition or virtue in making such lofty claims? It is nothing less that the participation it affords the rational being in giving universal laws. He is thus fitted to be a member in a possible realm of ends, to which his own nature already destined him. For, as an end in himself, he is destined to be a lawgiver in the realm of ends, free from all laws of nature and obedient only to those laws which he himself gives. Accordingly, his maxims

can belong to a universal legislation to which he is at the same time subject. A thing has no worth other than that determined for it by the law. The lawgiving which determines all worth must therefore have a dignity (i.e., an unconditional and incomparable worth). For the esteem which a rational being must have for it, only the word "respect"[15] is suitable. Autonomy is thus the basis of the dignity of both human nature and every rational nature.

The three aforementioned ways of presenting the principle of morality are fundamentally only so many formulas of the very same law, and each of them unites the others in itself. There is, nevertheless, a difference between them, but the difference is more subjectively than objectively practical, for the difference is intended to bring an Idea of reason closer to intuition (by means of a certain analogy) and thus nearer to feeling. All maxims have:

1. A form, which consists in universality, and in this respect the formula of the moral imperative requires that maxims be chosen as though they should hold as universal laws of nature.
2. A material (i.e., an end), and in this respect the formula says that the rational being, as by its nature an end and thus as an end in itself, must serve in every maxim as the condition restricting all merely relative and arbitrary ends.
3. A complete determination of all maxims by the formula that all maxims which stem from autonomous legislation ought to harmonize with a possible realm of ends as with a realm of nature.[16]

There is a progression here like that through the categories of the unity of the form of the will (its universality), the plurality of material (the objects, ends), to the all-comprehensiveness or totality of the system of ends. But it is better in moral valuation to follow the rigorous method and to make the universal formula of the categorical imperative the basis: Act according to the maxim which can at the same time make itself a universal law. But if one wishes to gain a hearing for the moral law, it is very useful to bring one and the same action under the three stated principles and thus, so far as possible, bring it nearer to intuition.

We can now end where we started, with the concept of an unconditionally good will. That will is absolutely good which cannot be bad, and thus it is a will whose maxim, when made universal law, can never conflict with itself. Thus this principle is also its supreme law: Always act according to that maxim whose universality as law you can at the same time will. This is the only condition under which a will can never come into conflict with itself, and such an imperative is categorical. Because the validity of the will as a universal law for possible actions has an analogy with the universal connection of the existence of things under universal laws, which is the formal element of nature in general, the categorical imperative can be expressed also as follows: Act on those maxims which can at the same time have themselves as universal laws of nature as their object. Such, then, is the formula of an absolutely good will.

Rational nature is distinguished from others in that it proposes an end to itself. This end would be the material of every good will. Since, however, in the Idea of an absolutely good will without the limiting condition that this or that end be achieved, we must abstract from every end to be actually effected (as any particular end would make each will only relatively good), we must conceive the end here not as one to be brought about, but as a self-existent end, and thus merely negatively, as that which must never be acted against and which consequently must never be valued merely as a means but in every volition also as an end. Now this end can never be other than the subject of all possible ends themselves, because this is at the same time the subject of a possible will which is absolutely good, for the latter cannot without contradiction be made secondary to any other object. The principle: Act with reference to every rational being (whether yourself or another) so that in your maxim it is an end in itself, is thus basically identical with the principle: Act by a maxim which involves its own universal validity for every rational being.

That in the use of means to any end I should restrict my maxim to the condition of its universal validity as a law for every subject is tantamount to saying that the subject of ends (i.e., the rational

being itself) must be made the basis of all maxims of actions and thus be treated never as a mere means but as the supreme limiting condition in the use of all means (i.e., as at the same time an end).

It follows incontestably that every rational being must be able to regard himself as an end in himself with reference to all laws to which he may be subject whatever they may be, and thus see himself as giving universal laws. For it is just the fitness of his maxims to universal legislation that indicates that he is an end in himself. It also follows that his dignity (his prerogative) over all merely natural beings entails that he must take his maxims from the point of view that regards himself, and hence also every other rational being, as legislative. Rational beings are, on this account, called persons. In this way, a world of rational beings (*mundus intelligibilis)* is possible as a realm of ends, because of the legislation belonging to all persons as members. Consequently every rational being must act as if by his maxims he were at all times a legislative member of the universal realm of ends. The formal principle of these maxims is: So act as if your maxims should serve at the same time as universal law (for all rational beings).

A realm of ends is thus possible only by analogy with a realm of nature. The former is possible only by maxims (i.e., self-imposed rules), while the latter is possible by laws of efficient causes of things externally necessitated. Regardless of this difference, by analogy we call the natural whole a realm of nature so far as it is related to rational beings as its end, we do so even though the natural whole is looked upon as a machine. Such a realm of ends would actually be realized through maxims whose rule is prescribed to all rational beings by the categorical imperative, if they were universally obeyed. But a rational being, though he scrupulously follow this maxim, cannot for that reason expect every other rational being to be true to it, nor can he expect the realm of nature and its orderly design to harmonize with him as a fitting member of a realm of ends which is possible through himself. That is, he cannot count on its favoring his expectation of happiness. Still the law: Act according to the maxim of a member of a merely potential realm of ends who gives universal law, remains in full force because it commands categorically. And just in this lies the paradox that simply the dignity of humanity as rational nature without any end or advantage to be gained by it, and thus respect for a mere Idea, should serve as the inflexible precept of the will. [There is the further paradox that] the sublimity of the maxims and the worthiness of every rational subject to be a law-giving member in the realm of ends consist precisely in the independence of his maxims from all such incentives. Otherwise he would have to be viewed as subject to only the natural law of his needs. Although the realm of nature as well as that of ends would be thought of as united under a sovereign, so that the latter would no longer remain a mere Idea but would receive true reality, the realm of ends would undoubtedly gain a strong urge in its favor though its intrinsic worth would not be augmented. Regardless of this, even the one and only absolute legislator would still have to be conceived as judging the worth of rational beings only by the disinterested conduct which they prescribe to themselves merely from the Idea. The essence of things is not changed by their external relations, and without reference to these relations a man must be judged only by what constitutes his absolute worth, and this is true whoever his judge may be, even if it be the Supreme Being. Morality is thus the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will (i.e., to the possible giving of universal law by the maxims of the will). The action which can be compatible with the autonomy of the will is permitted; that which does not agree with it is prohibited. The will whose maxims are necessarily in harmony with the laws of autonomy is a holy will or an absolutely good will. The dependence of a will not absolutely good on the principle of autonomy (moral constraint) is *obligation*. Hence obligation cannot be predicated of a holy will. The objective necessity of an action from obligation is called *duty*.

From what has just been said, it can easily be explained how it happens that, although in the concept of duty we think of subjection to law, we do nevertheless at the same time ascribe a certain sublimity and dignity to the person who fulfills all his duties. For though there is no sublimity in him in so far as he is subject to the moral law, yet he is sublime in so far as he is the giver of the law and subject to it for this reason only. We have also shown above how neither fear of nor

inclination to the law is the incentive which can give moral worth to action; only respect for it can do so. Our own will, so far as it would act only under the condition of a universal legislation rendered possible by its maxims—this will ideally possible for us—is the proper object of respect, and the dignity of humanity consists just in its capacity to give universal laws under the condition that it is itself subject to this same legislation.

The Autonomy of the Will as the Supreme Principle of Morality

Autonomy of the will is that property of it by which it is a law to itself independent of any property of the objects of its volition. Hence the principle of autonomy is: Never choose except in such a way that the maxims of the choice are comprehended as universal law in the same volition. That this practical rule is an imperative, that is, that the will of every rational being is necessarily bound to it as a condition, cannot be proved by a mere analysis of the concepts occurring in it, because it is a synthetical proposition. To prove it, we would have to go beyond the knowledge of objects to a critical examination of the subject (i.e., to a critique of pure practical reason), for this synthetical proposition which commands apodictically must be susceptible of being known a priori. This matter, however, does not belong in the present section. But that the principle of autonomy, which is now in question, is the sole principle of morals can be readily shown by mere analysis of the concepts of morality; for by this analysis we find that its principle must be a categorical imperative and that the imperative commands neither more nor less than this very autonomy.

The Heteronomy of the Will as the Source of All Spurious Principles of Morality

If the will seeks the law which is to determine it elsewhere than in the fitness of its maxims to be given as universal law, and if thus it goes outside and seeks the law in the property of any of its objects, heteronomy always results. For then the will does not give itself the law, but the object through its relation to the will gives the law to it. This relation, whether it rests on inclination or on conceptions of reason, admits of only hypothetical imperatives: I should do something for the reason that I will something else. The moral (categorical) imperative, on the other hand, says that I should act in this or that way even though I have not willed anything else. For example, the former says that I should not lie if I wish to keep my good name. The latter says that I should not lie even though it would not cause me the least injury. The latter, therefore, must disregard every object to such an extent that it has absolutely no influence on the will; it must so disregard it that practical reason (will) may not just minister to any interest not its own but rather show its commanding authority as the supreme legislation. Thus, for instance, I should seek to further the happiness of others, not as though its realization were of consequence to me (because of a direct inclination or some satisfaction related to it indirectly through reason); I should do so solely because the maxim which excludes it from my duty cannot be comprehended as a universal law in one and the same volition.

Classification of All Possible Principles of Morality Following from the Assumed Principle of Heteronomy

Here as everywhere in the pure use of reason so long as a critical examination of it is lacking, human reason tries all possible wrong ways before it succeeds in finding the one true way.

All principles which can be taken from this point of view are either empirical or rational. The former, drawn from the principles of happiness, are based on physical or moral feeling; the latter, drawn from the principle of perfection, are based either on the rational concept of perfection as a possible result or on the concept of an independent perfection (the will of God) as the determining ground of the will.

Empirical principles are not at all suited to serve as the basis of moral laws. For if the basis of the universality by which they should be valid for all rational beings without distinction (the

unconditional practical necessity which is thereby imposed upon them) is derived from a particular tendency of human nature or the accidental circumstance in which it is found, that universality is lost. But the principle of one's own happiness is the most objectionable of the empirical principles. This is not merely because it is false and because experience contradicts the supposition that well-being is always proportional to good conduct, nor yet because this principle contributes nothing to the establishment of morality inasmuch as it is a very different thing to make a man happy from making him good, and to make him prudent and far-sighted for his own advantage is far from making him virtuous. Rather, it is because this principle supports morality with incentives which undermine it and destroy all its sublimity, for it puts the motives to virtue and those to vice in the same class, teaching us only to make a better calculation while obliterating the specific difference between them. On the other hand, there is the alleged special sense,[17] the moral feeling. The appeal to it is superficial, since those who cannot think expect help from feeling, even with respect to that which concerns universal laws; they do so even though feelings naturally differ so infinitely in degree that they are incapable of furnishing a uniform standard of the good and bad, and also in spite of the fact that one cannot validly judge for others by means of one's own feeling. Nevertheless, the moral feeling is nearer to morality and its dignity, inasmuch as it pays virtue the honor of ascribing the satisfaction and esteem for her directly to morality, and does not, as it were, say to her face that it is not her beauty but only our advantage which attaches us to her.

Among the rational principles of morality, there is the onto-logical concept of perfection. It is empty, indefinite, and consequently useless for finding in the immeasurable field of possible reality the greatest possible sum which is suitable to us; and, in specifically distinguishing the reality which is here in question from all other reality, it inevitably tends to move in a circle and cannot avoid tacitly presupposing the morality which it ought to explain. Nevertheless, it is better than the theological concept, which derives morality from a most perfect divine will. It is better not merely because we cannot intuit the perfection of the divine will, having rather to derive it only from our own concepts of which morality itself is foremost, but also because if we do not so derive it (and to do so would involve a most flagrant circle in explanation), the only remaining concept of the divine will is made up of the attributes of desire for glory and dominion combined with the awful conceptions of might and vengeance, and any system of ethics based on them would be directly opposed to morality.

But if I had to choose between the concept of the moral sense and that of perfection in general (neither of which at any rate weakens morality, though neither is capable of serving as its foundation), I would decide for the latter, because it preserves the indefinite Idea of a will good in itself free from corruption until it can be more narrowly defined. It at least withdraws the decision on the question from the realm of sensibility and brings it to the court of pure reason, although it does not even there decide the question.

For the rest, I think I may be excused from a lengthy refutation of all these doctrines. It is so easy, and presumably so well understood even by those whose office requires them to decide for one of these theories (since their students would not tolerate suspension of judgment), that such a refutation would be superfluous. What interests us more, however, is to know that all these principles set up nothing other than heteronomy of the will as the first ground of morality, and thus they necessarily miss their goal.

In every case in which the object of the will must be assumed as prescribing the rule which is to determine the will, the rule is nothing else than heteronomy. The imperative in this case is conditional, stating that if or because one wills such and such an object, one ought to act thus or so. Therefore the imperative can never command morally, that is, categorically. The object may determine the will by means of inclination, as in the principle of one's own happiness, or by means of reason directed to objects of our possible volition in general, as in the principle of perfection; but the will in these cases never determines itself directly by the conception of the action itself but only by the incentive which the foreseen result of the action incites in the will—that is: I ought to do something because I will something else. And here still another law must be assumed in me as

the basis for this imperative; it would be a law by which I would necessarily will that other thing; but this law would in its turn require an imperative to restrict this maxim. Since the conception of a result to be obtained by one's own powers incites in the will an impulse which depends upon the natural characteristic of the subject, either of his sensibility (inclination and taste) or understanding and reason; and since these faculties according to the particular constitution of their nature find satisfaction in exercising themselves on the result of the voluntary action, it follows that it would really be nature which would give the law [to the action]. This law, as a law of nature, would have to be known and proved by experience, and as in itself contingent it would be unfit to be an apodictical practical rule such as the moral rule must be. Such a law always represents heteronomy of the will: the will does not give itself the law, but an external impulse gives the law to the will according to nature of the subject which is susceptible to receive it.

The absolutely good will, the principle of which must be a categorical imperative, is thus undetermined with reference to any object. It contains only the form of volition in general, and this form is autonomy. That is, the capability of the maxims of every good will to make themselves universal laws is itself the sole law which the will of every rational being imposes on himself, and it does not need to support this by any incentive or interest.

How such a synthetical practical a priori proposition is possible and why it is necessary is a problem whose solution does not lie within the boundaries of the metaphysics of morals. Moreover, we have not here affirmed its truth, and even less professed to command a proof of it. We showed only through the development of the generally received concept of morals that autonomy of the will is unavoidably connected with it, or rather that it is its foundation. Whoever, therefore, holds morality to be something real and not a chimerical idea without truth must also concede its principle which has been derived here. Consequently, this section, like the first, was merely analytical. To prove that morality is not a mere phantom of the mind—and if the categorical imperative, and with it the autonomy of the will, is true and absolutely necessary as an a priori proposition, it follows that it is no phantom—requires that a synthetical use of pure practical reason be possible. But we must not venture on this use without first making a critical examination of this faculty of reason. In the last section we shall give the principal features of such an examination that will be sufficient for our purpose.

Notes

1 A maxim is the subjective principle of volition. The objective principle (i.e., that which would serve all rational beings also subjectively as a practical principle if reason had full power over the faculty of desire) is the practical law.

2 It might be objected that I seek to take refuge in an obscure feeling behind the word "respect," instead of clearly resolving the question with a concept of reason. But though respect is a feeling, it is not one received through any [outer] influence but is self-wrought by a rational concept; thus it differs specifically from all feelings of the former kind which may be referred to inclination or fear. What I recognize directly as a law for myself I recognize with respect, which means merely the consciousness of the submission of my will to a law without the intervention of other influences on my mind. The direct determination of the will by law and the consciousness of this determination is respect; thus respect can be regarded as the effect of the law on the subject and not as the cause of the law. Respect is properly the conception of a worth which thwarts my self-love. Thus it is regarded as an object neither of inclination nor of fear, though it has something analogous to both. The only object of respect is law, and indeed only the law which we impose on ourselves and yet recognize as necessary in itself. As a law we are subject to it without consulting self-love; as imposed on us by ourselves, it is a consequence of our will. In the former respect it is analogous to fear and in the latter to inclination. All respect for a person is only respect for the law (of righteousness, etc.) of which the person provides an example. Because we see the improvement of our talents as a duty, we think of a person of talent as the example of a law, as it were (the law that we should by practice become like him in his talents), and that constitutes our respect. All so-called moral interest consists solely in respect for the law.

3 If one wishes, the pure philosophy (metaphysics) of morals can be distinguished from the applied (i.e., applied to human nature), just as pure mathematics and pure logic are distinguished from applied mathematics and applied logic. By this designation one is immediately reminded that moral principles are not founded on the peculiarities of human nature but must stand of themselves a priori, and that from such principles practical rules for every rational nature, and accordingly for man, must be derivable.

4 I have a letter from the late excellent Sulzer in which he asks me why the theories of virtue accomplish so little even though they contain so much that is convincing to reason. My answer was delayed in order that I might make it complete. The answer is only that the teachers themselves have not completely clarified their concepts, and when they wish to make up for this by hunting in every quarter for motives to the morally good so as to make their physic right strong, they spoil it. For the commonest observation shows that if we imagine an act of honesty performed with a steadfast soul and sundered from all view to any advantage in this or another world and even under the greatest temptations of need or allurement, it far surpasses and eclipses any similar action which was affected in the least by any foreign incentive; it elevates the soul and arouses the wish to be able to act in this way. Even moderately young children feel this impression, and one should never represent duties to them in any other way.

5 The dependence of the faculty of desire on sensations is called inclination, and inclination always indicates a need. The dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason, however, is called interest. An interest is present only in a dependent will which is not of itself always in accord with reason; in the divine will we cannot conceive of an interest. But even the human will can take an interest in something without thereby acting from interest. The former means the practical interest in the action; the latter, the pathological interest in the object of the action. The former indicates only the dependence of the will on principles of reason in themselves, while the latter indicates dependence on the principles of reason for the purpose of inclination, since reason gives only the practical rule by which the needs of inclination are to be aided. In the former case the action interests me, and in the latter the object of the action (so far as it is pleasant for me) interests me. In the First Section we have seen that, in the case of an action done from duty, no regard must be given to the interest in the object, but merely to the action itself and its principle in reason (i.e., the law).

6 The word "prudence" may be taken in two senses, and it may bear the names of prudence with reference to things of the world and private prudence. The former sense means the skill of a man in having an influence on others so as to use them for his own purposes. The latter is the ability to unite all these purposes to his own lasting advantage. The worth of the first is finally reduced to the latter, and of one who is prudent in the former sense but not in the latter we might better say that he is clever and cunning yet, on the whole, imprudent.

7 It seems to me that the proper meaning of the word "pragmatic" could be most accurately defined in this way. For sanctions which properly flow not from the law of states as necessary statutes but from provision for the general welfare are called pragmatic. A history is pragmatically composed when it teaches prudence (i.e., instructs the world how it could provide for its interest better than, or at least as well as, has been done in the past).

8 I connect a priori, and hence necessarily, the action with the will without supposing as a condition that there is any inclination [to the action] (though I do so only objectively, i.e., under the Idea of a reason which would have complete power over all subjective motives). This is, therefore, a practical proposition which does not analytically derive the willing of an action from some other volition already presupposed (for we do not have such a perfect will); it rather connects it directly with the concept of the will of a rational being as something which is not contained within it.

9 A maxim is the subjective principle of acting and must be distinguished from the objective principle (i.e., the practical law). The former contains the practical rule which reason determines according to the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or inclinations) and is thus the principle according to which the subject acts. The law, on the other hand, is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle by which it ought to act, i.e., an imperative.

10 It must be noted here that I reserve the division of duties for a future *Metaphysics of Morals* and that the division here stands as only an arbitrary one (chosen in order to arrange my examples). For the rest, by a perfect duty I here understand a duty which permits no exception in the interest of inclination; thus I have not merely outer but also inner perfect duties. This runs contrary to the usage adopted in the schools, but I am not disposed to defend it here because it is all one to my purpose whether this is conceded or not.

11 To behold virtue in her proper form is nothing else than to exhibit morality stripped of all admixture

of sensuous things and of every spurious adornment of reward or self-love. How much she then eclipses everything which appears charming to the senses can easily be seen by everyone with the least effort of his reason, if it be not spoiled for all abstraction.

12 Here I present this proposition as a postulate, but in the last Section grounds for it will be found.

13 Let it not be thought that the banal "what you do not wish to be done to you . . ." could here serve as guide or principle, for it is only derived from the principle and is restricted by various limitations. It cannot be a universal law, because it contains the ground neither of duties to one's self nor of the benevolent duties to others (for many a man would gladly consent that others should not benefit him, provided only that he might be excused from showing benevolence to them). Nor does it contain the ground of obligatory duties to another, for the criminal would argue on this ground against the judge who sentences him. And so on.

14 I may be excused from citing examples to elucidate this principle, for those that have already illustrated the categorical imperative and its formula can here serve the same purpose.

15 H.J. Paton, in his translation of this text, prefers to translate the German word *Achtung* as *reverence*. There are religious overtones of awe before the sublimity of the moral law which speak in favor of Paton's choice.

16 Teleology considers nature as a realm of ends; morals regards a possible realm of ends as a realm of nature. In the former the realm of ends is a theoretical Idea for the explanation of what actually is. In the latter it is a practical Idea for bringing about that which does not exist but which can become actual through our conduct and for making it conform with this Idea.

17 I count the principle of moral feeling under that of happiness, because every empirical interest promises to contribute to our well-being by the agreeableness that a thing affords, either directly and without a view to future advantage or with a view to it. We must likewise, with Hutcheson, count the principle of sympathy with the happiness of others under the moral sense which he assumed.

Readings for Chapter 8

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism (excerpt)

John Stuart Mill

Chapter I General remarks

There are few circumstances, among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge, more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state in which speculation on the most important subjects still lingers, than the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong. From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the *summum bonum,* or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought, has occupied the most gifted intellects, and divided them into sects and schools, carrying on a vigorous warfare against one another. And after more than two thousand years the same discussions continue, philosophers are still ranged under the same contending banners, and neither thinkers nor mankind at large seem nearer to being unanimous on the subject than when the youth Socrates listened to the old Protagoras, and asserted (if Plato's dialogue be grounded on real conversation) the theory of utilitarianism against the popular morality of the so-called sophist.

It is true that similar confusion and uncertainty, and in some cases similar discordance, exist respecting the first principles of all the sciences, not excepting that which is deemed the most certain of them, mathematics; without much impairing—generally, indeed, without impairing at all—the trustworthiness of the conclusions of those sciences. An apparent anomaly, the explanation of which is that the detailed doctrines of a science are not usually deduced from, nor depend for their evidence upon, what are called its first principles. Were it not so, there would be no science more precarious, or whose conclusions were more insufficiently made out, than algebra; which derives none of its certainty from what are commonly taught to learners as its elements, since these, as laid down by some of its most eminent teachers, are as full of fictions as English law, and of mysteries as theology. The truths which are ultimately accepted as the first principles of a science are really the last results of metaphysical analysis, practiced on the elementary notions with which the science is conversant; and their relation to the science is not that of foundations to an edifice, but of roots to a tree, which may perform their office equally well, though they be never dug down to and exposed to light. But though in science the particular truths precede the general theory, the contrary might be expected to be the case with a practical art, such as morals or legislation. All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and color from the end to which they are subservient. When we engage in a pursuit, a clear and precise conception of what we are pursuing would seem to be the first thing we need, instead of the last we are to look forward to. A test of right and wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a consequence of having already ascertained it.

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The difficulty is not avoided by having recourse to the popular theory of a natural faculty, a sense or instinct, informing us of right and wrong. For—besides that the existence of such a moral instinct is itself one of the matters in dispute—-those believers in it who have any pretensions to philosophy have been obliged to abandon the idea that it discerns what is right or wrong in the particular case in hand, as our other senses discern the sight or sound actually present. Our moral faculty, according to all those of its interpreters who are entitled to the name of thinkers, supplies us only with the general principles of moral judgments; it is a branch of our reason, not of our sensitive faculty; and must be looked to for the abstract doctrines of morality, not for perception of it in the concrete. The intuitive, no less than what may be termed the inductive, school of ethics insists on the necessity of general laws. They both agree that the morality of an individual action is not a question of direct perception, but of the application of a law to an individual case. They recognize also, to a great extent, the same moral laws; but differ as to their evidence, and the source from which they derive their authority. According to the one opinion, the principles of morals are evident *a priori,* requiring nothing to command assent, except that the meaning of the terms be understood. According to the other doctrine, right and wrong, as well as truth and falsehood, are questions of observation and experience. But both hold equally that morality must be deduced from principles; and intuitive school affirms as strongly as the inductive that there is a science of morals. Yet they seldom attempt to make out a list of the *a priori* principles which are to serve as the premises of the science; still more rarely do they make any effort to reduce those various principles to one first principle, or common ground of obligation. They either assume the ordinary precepts of morals as of *a priori* authority, or they lay down as the common groundwork of those maxims some generality much less obviously authoritative than the maxims themselves, and which has never succeeded in gaining popular acceptance. Yet to support their pretensions there ought either to be some one fundamental principle or law, at the root of all morality, or, if there be several, there should be a determinate order of precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles when they conflict, ought to be self-evident.

To inquire how far the bad effects of this deficiency have been mitigated in practice, or to what extent the moral beliefs of mankind have been vitiated or made uncertain by the absence of any distinct recognition of an ultimate standard, would imply a complete survey and criticism of past and present ethical doctrine. It would, however, be easy to show that whatever steadiness or consistency these moral beliefs have attained has been mainly due to the tacit influence of a standard not recognized. Although the non-existence of an acknowledged first principle has made ethics not so much a guide as a consecration of men's actual sentiments, still, as men's sentiments, both of favor and of aversion, are greatly influenced by what they supposed to be the effects of thing's upon their happiness, the principle of utility, or as Bentham latterly called it, the greatest-happiness principle, has had a large share in forming the moral doctrines even of those who most scornfully reject its authority. Nor is there any school of thought which refuses to admit that the influence of actions on happiness is a most material, and even predominant, consideration in many of the details of morals, however unwilling to acknowledge it as the fundamental principle of morality and the source of moral obligation. I might go much farther, and say that to all those *a priori* moralists who deem it necessary to argue at all, utilitarian arguments are indispensable. It is not my present purpose to criticise these thinkers; but I cannot help referring, for illustration, to a systematic treatise by one of the most illustrious of them, the *Metaphysics of Ethics* by Kant. This remarkable man, whose system of thought will long remain one of the landmarks in the history of philosophical speculation, does, in the treatise in question, lay down a universal first principle as the origin and ground of moral obligation; it is this: "So act that the rule on which thou actest would admit of being adopted as a law by all rational beings." But when he begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows is that the c*onsequences* of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur.

On the present occasion I shall, without further discussion of the other theories, attempt to contribute something toward the understanding and appreciation of the Utilitarian or Happiness theory, and toward such proof as it is susceptible of. It is evident that this cannot be proof in the ordinary and popular meaning of the term. Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof. Whatever can be proved to be good must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to good without proof. The medical art is proved to be good by its conducing to health; but how is it possible to prove that health is good? The art of music is good for the reason, among others, that it produces pleasure; but what proof is it possible to give that pleasure is good? If, then, it is asserted that there is a comprehensive formula, including all things which are in themselves good, and that whatever else is good is not so as an end, but as a mean, the formula may be accepted or rejected, but is not a subject of what is commonly understood by proof. We are not, however, to infer that its acceptance or rejection must depend on blind impulse or arbitrary choice. There is a larger meaning of the word "proof," in which this question is as amenable to it as any other of the disputed questions of philosophy. The subject is within the cognizance of the rational faculty; and neither does that faculty deal with it solely in the way of intuition. Considerations may be presented capable of determining the intellect either to give or withhold its assent to the doctrine; and this is equivalent to proof.

We shall examine presently of what nature are these considerations; in what manner they apply to the case, and what rational grounds, therefore, can be given for accepting or rejecting the utilitarian formula. But it is a preliminary condition of rational acceptance or rejection that the formula should be correctly understood. I believe that the very imperfect notion ordinarily formed of its meaning is the chief obstacle which impedes its reception; and that, could it be cleared, even from only the grosser misconceptions, the question would be greatly simplified and a large proportion of its difficulties removed. Before, therefore, I attempt to enter into the philosophical grounds which can be given for assenting to the utilitarian standard, I shall offer some illustrations of the doctrine itself; with the view of showing more clearly what it is, distinguishing it from what it is not, and disposing of such of the practical objections to it as either originate in, or are closely connected with, mistaken interpretations of its meaning. Having thus prepared the ground, I shall afterward endeavor to throw such light as I can upon the question, considered as one of philosophical theory.

Chapter II What Utilitarianism is

A passing remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for utility as the test of right and wrong use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure. An apology is due to the philosophical opponents of utilitarianism for even the momentary appearance of confounding them with anyone capable of so absurd a misconception; which is the more extraordinary, inasmuch as the contrary accusation of referring everything to pleasure, and that too in its grossest form, is another of the common charges against utilitarianism; and, as has been pointedly remarked by an able writer, the same sort of persons, and often the very same persons, denounce the theory "as impracticably dry when the word 'utility' precedes the word 'pleasure,' and as too practicably voluptuous when the word 'pleasure' precedes the word 'utility.' Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain; and, instead of opposing the useful to the agreeable or the ornamental, have always declared that the useful means these, among other things. Yet the common herd, including the herd of writers, not only in newspapers and periodicals, but in books of weight and pretensions, are perpetually falling into this shallow mistake. Having caught up the word "utilitarian," while knowing nothing whatever about it but its sound, they habitually express by it the rejection, or the neglect, of pleasure in some of its forms; of beauty, of ornament, or of amusement. Nor is

the term thus ignorantly misapplied solely in disparagement, but occasionally in compliment; as though it implied superiority to frivolity and the mere pleasures of the moment. And this perverted use is the only one in which the word is popularly known, and the one from which the new generation are acquiring their sole notion of its meaning. Those who introduced the word, but who had for many years discontinued it as a distinctive appellation, may well feel themselves called upon to resume it, if by doing so they can hope to contribute anything toward rescuing it from this utter degradation.[1]

The creed which accepts, as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest-Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

Now, such a theory of life excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and groveling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants.

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation: for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other.

The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and, when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic, as well as Christian, elements require to be included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc., of the former — that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other and, as it may be called, higher ground with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact that some *kinds* of pleasure are desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

If I am asked what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted

with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

Now, it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable of more acute suffering, and is certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but, in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable; we may refer it to the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which do really enter into and contribute to it; but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them. Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness—that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior—confounds the two very different ideas of happiness and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

It may be objected that many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good. It may be further objected that many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble, as they advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do not believe that those who undergo this very common change voluntarily choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher. I believe that, before they devote themselves exclusively to the one, they have already become incapable of the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping

that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying. It may be questioned whether anyone who has remained equally susceptible to both classes of pleasures ever knowingly and calmly preferred the lower; though many, in all ages, have broken down in an ineffectual attempt to combine both.

From this verdict of the only competent judges I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from it consequences, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final. And there needs be the less hesitation to accept this judgment respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgment of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgment declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable in *kind,* apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.

I have dwelt on this point, as being a necessary part of a perfectly just conception of Utility or Happiness, considered as the directive rule of human conduct. But it is by no means an indispensable condition to the acceptance of the utilitarian standard; for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness, altogether; and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it. Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness of others, and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit. But the bare enunciation of such an absurdity as this last renders refutation superfluous.

According to the Greatest-Happiness Principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt, as far as possible, from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who, in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison. This, being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined, the rules and precepts for human conduct by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation.

Against this doctrine, however, rises another class of objectors, who say that happiness, in any form, cannot be the rational purpose of human life and action; because, in the first place, it is unattainable; and they contemptuously ask, "What right hast thou to be happy?" a question which Mr. Carlyle clinches by the addition, "What right, a short time ago, hadst thou even *to be?*" Next, they say that men can do *without* happiness; that all noble human beings have felt this, and could not have become noble but by learning the lesson of *Entsagen,* or renunciation; which lesson, thoroughly learned and submitted to, they affirm to be the beginning and necessary condition of all virtue.

The first of these objections would go to the root of the matter, were it well founded; for if no happiness is to be had at all by human beings, the attainment of it cannot be the end of morality or of any rational conduct. Though, even in that case, something might still be said for the utilitarian theory, since utility includes not solely the pursuit of happiness, but the prevention or mitigation of unhappiness; and if the former aim be chimerical, there will be all the greater scope and more imperative need for the latter, so long, at least, as mankind think fit to live and do not take refuge in the simultaneous act of suicide recommended under certain conditions by Novalis. When, however, it is thus positively asserted to be impossible that human life should be happy, the assertion, if not something like a verbal quibble, is at least an exaggeration. If by happiness be meant a continuity of highly pleasurable excitement, it is evident enough that this is impossible. A state of exalted pleasures lasts only moments, or in some cases, and with some intermissions, hours or days, and is the occasional brilliant flash of enjoyment, not its permanent and steady flame. Of this the philosophers who have taught that happiness is the end of life were as fully aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate enough to obtain it, has always appeared worthy of the name of happiness. And such an existence is even now the lot of many during some considerable portion of their lives. The present wretched education and wretched social arrangements are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by almost all.

The objectors perhaps may doubt whether human beings, if taught to consider happiness as the end of life, would be satisfied with such a moderate share of it. But great numbers of mankind have been satisfied with much less. The main constituents of a satisfied life appear to be two, either of which by itself is often found sufficient for the purpose: tranquility and excitement. With much tranquility, many find that they can be content with very little pleasure; with much excitement, many can reconcile themselves to a considerable quantity of pain. There is assuredly no inherent impossibility in enabling even the mass of mankind to unite both; since the two are so far from being incompatible that they are in natural alliance, the prolongation of either being a preparation for, and exciting a wish for, the other. It is only those in whom indolence amounts to a vice that do not desire excitement after an interval of repose; it is only those in whom the need of excitement is a disease that feel the tranquility which follows excitement dull and insipid, instead of pleasurable in direct proportion to the excitement which preceded it. When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is caring for nobody but themselves. To those who have neither public nor private affections the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death; while those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow-feeling with the collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigor of youth and health. Next to selfishness the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation. A cultivated mind—I do not mean that of a philosopher, but any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught, in any tolerable degree, to exercise its faculties—finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it: in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind past and present, and their prospects in the future. It is possible, indeed, to become indifferent to all this, and that too without having exhausted a thousandth part of it; but only when one has had from the beginning no moral or human interest in these things and has sought in them only the gratification of curiosity.

Now, there is absolutely no reason in the nature of things why an amount of mental culture sufficient to give an intelligent interest in these objects of contemplation should not be the inheritance of everyone born in a civilized country. As little is there an inherent necessity that any human being

should be a selfish egotist, devoid of every feeling or care but those which center in his own miserable individuality. Something far superior to this is sufficiently common even now to give ample earnest of what the human species may be made. Genuine private affections and a sincere interest in the public good are possible, though in unequal degrees, to every rightly brought up human being. In a world in which there is so much to interest, so much to enjoy, and so much also to correct and improve, everyone who has this moderate amount of moral and intellectual requisites is capable of an existence which may be called enviable; and unless such a person, through bad laws or subjection to the will of others, is denied the liberty to use the sources of happiness within his reach, he will not fail to find this enviable existence, if he escape the positive evils of life, the great sources of physical and mental suffering — such as indigence, disease, and the unkindness, worthlessness, or premature loss of objects of affection. The main stress of the problem lies, therefore, in the contest with these calamities, from which it is a rare good fortune entirely to escape; which, as things now are, cannot be obviated, and often cannot be in any material degree mitigated. Yet no one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most intractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education, and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still more, which deprive us of those in whom our happiness is wrapped up. As for vicissitudes of fortune and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions. All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made— yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and unconspicuous, in the endeavor, will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without.

And this leads to the true estimation of what is said by the objectors concerning the possibility, and the obligation, of learning to do without happiness. Unquestionably it is possible to do without happiness; it is done involuntarily by nineteen-twentieths of mankind, even in those parts of our present world which are least deep in barbarism; and it often has to be done voluntarily by the hero or the martyr, for the sake of something which he prizes more than his individual happiness. But this something, what is it, unless the happiness of others, or some of the requisites of happiness? It is noble to be capable of resigning entirely one's own portion of happiness, or chances of it; but, after all, this self-sacrifice must be for some end; it is not its own end; and if we are told that its end is not happiness, but virtue, which is better than happiness, I ask, Would the sacrifice be made if the hero or martyr did not believe that it would earn for others immunity from similar sacrifices? Would it be made if he thought that his renunciation of happiness for himself would produce no fruit for any of his fellow-creatures, but to make their lot like his, and place them also in the condition of persons who have renounced happiness? All honor to those who can abnegate for themselves the personal enjoyment of life, when by such renunciation they contribute worthily to increase the amount of happiness in the world; but he who does it, or professes to do it, for any other purpose is no more deserving of admiration than the ascetic mounted on his pillar. He may be an inspiriting proof of what men *can do,* but assuredly not an example of what they *should.*

Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world's arrangements that anyone can best serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in

that imperfect state, I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue which can be found in man. I will add that, in this condition of the world, paradoxical as the assertion may be, the conscious ability to do without happiness gives the best prospect of realizing such happiness as is attainable. For nothing except that consciousness can raise a person above the chances of life, by making him feel that, let fate and fortune do their worst, they have not power to subdue him; which, once felt, frees him from excess of anxiety concerning the evils of life, and enables him, like many a Stoic in the worst times of the Roman Empire, to cultivate in tranquility the sources of satisfaction accessible to him, without concerning himself about the uncertainty of their duration, any more than about their inevitable end.

Meanwhile, let utilitarians never cease to claim the morality of self-devotion as a possession which belongs by as good a right to them as either to the Stoic or to the Transcendentalist. The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness it considers as wasted. The only self-renunciation which it applauds is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind.

I must again repeat, what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as one would be done by, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole and, secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole; especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being's sentient existence. If the impugners of the utilitarian morality represented it to their own minds in this its true character, I know not what recommendation possessed by any other morality they could possibly affirm to be wanting to it; what more beautiful or more exalted developments of human nature any other ethical system can be supposed to foster, or what springs of action, not accessible to the utilitarian, such systems rely on for giving effect to their mandates.

The objectors to utilitarianism cannot always be charged with representing it in a discreditable light. On the contrary, those among them who entertain anything like a just idea of its disinterested character sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of morals, and to confound the rule of action with the motive of it. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them; but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty does not condemn them. It is the more unjust to utilitarianism that this particular misapprehension should be made a ground of objection to it, inasmuch as utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with

the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow-creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the friend that trusts is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligations.[1] But to speak only of actions done from the motive of duty, and in direct obedience to principle: it is a misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought to conceive it as implying that people should fix their minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are intended, not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which, the good of the world is made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not on these occasions travel beyond the particular persons concerned, except so far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is not violating the rights—that is, the legitimate and authorized expectations—of anyone else. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue; the occasions on which any person (except one in a thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other words, to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional; and on these occasions alone is he called on to consider public utility; in every other case, private utility, the interest or happiness of some few persons, is all he has to attend to. Those alone the influence of whose actions extends to society in general need concern themselves habitually about so large an object. In the case of abstinences, indeed—of things which people forbear to do, from moral considerations, though the consequences in the particular case might be beneficial—it would be unworthy of an intelligent agent not to be consciously aware that the action is of a class which, if practiced generally, would be generally injurious, and that this is the ground of the obligation to abstain from it. The amount of regard for the public interest implied in this recognition is no greater than is demanded by every system of morals; for they all enjoin to abstain from whatever is manifestly pernicious to society.

The same considerations dispose of another reproach against the doctrine of utility, founded on a still grosser misconception of the purpose of a standard of morality, and of the very meaning of the words "right" and "wrong." It is often affirmed that utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathizing; that it chills their moral feelings toward individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of the consequences of actions, not taking into their moral estimate the qualities from which those actions emanate. If the assertion means that they do not allow their judgment respecting the rightness or wrongness of an action to be influenced by their opinion of the qualities of the person who does it, this is a complaint, not against utilitarianism, but against having any standard of morality at all; for certainly no known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or a bad man; still less because done by an amiable, a brave, or a benevolent man, or the contrary. These considerations are relevant, not to the estimation of actions, but of persons; and there is nothing in the utilitarian theory inconsistent with the fact that there are other things which interest us in persons besides the rightness and wrongness of their actions. The Stoics, indeed, with the paradoxical misuse of language which was part of their system, and by which they strove to raise themselves above all concern about anything but virtue, were fond of saying that he who has that has everything; that he, and only he, is rich, is beautiful, is a king. But no claim of this description is made for the virtuous man by the utilitarian doctrine. Utilitarians are quite aware there are other desirable possessions and qualities besides virtue, and are perfectly willing to allow to all of them their full worth. They are also aware that a right action does not necessarily indicate a virtuous character, and that actions which are blamable often proceed from qualities entitled to praise. When this is apparent in any particular case, it modifies their estimation, not certainly of the act, but of the agent. I grant that they are, notwithstanding, of opinion that in the long run the best proof of a good character is good actions; and resolutely refuse to consider any mental disposition as good of which the predominant tendency is to produce bad conduct. This makes them unpopular with many people; but it is an unpopularity which they must share with everyone who regards the distinction between right and wrong in a serious light; and the reproach is not one which a conscientious utilitarian need be anxious to repel.

If no more be meant by the objection than that many utilitarians look on the morality of actions, as measured by the utilitarian standard, with too exclusive a regard, and do not lay sufficient stress upon the other beauties of character which go toward making a human being lovable or admirable, this may be admitted. Utilitarians who have cultivated their moral feelings, but not their sympathies nor their artistic perceptions, do fall into this mistake; and so do all other moralists under the same conditions. What can be said in excuse for other moralists is equally available for them, namely, that if there is to be any error, it is better that it should be on that side. As a matter of fact, we may affirm that among utilitarians, as among adherents of other systems, there is every imaginable degree of rigidity and of laxity in the application of their standard: some are even puritanically rigorous, while others are as indulgent as can possibly be desired by sinner or by sentimentalist. But, on the whole, a doctrine which brings prominently forward the interest that mankind have in the repression and prevention of conduct which violates the moral law is likely to be inferior to no other in turning the sanctions of opinion against such violations. It is true, the question, What does violate the moral law? is one on which those who recognize different standards of morality are likely now and then to differ. But difference of opinion on moral questions was not first introduced into the world by utilitarianism, while that doctrine does supply, if not always an easy, at all events a tangible and intelligible, mode of deciding such differences.

It may not be superfluous to notice a few more of the common misapprehensions of utilitarian ethics, even those which are so obvious and gross that it might appear impossible for any person of candor and intelligence to fall into them; since persons, even of considerable mental endowments, often give themselves so little trouble to understand the bearings of any opinion against which they entertain a prejudice, and men are in general so little conscious of this voluntary ignorance as a defect, that the vulgarest misunderstandings of ethical doctrines are continually met with in the deliberate writings of persons of the greatest pretensions both to high principle and to philosophy. We not uncommonly hear the doctrine of utility inveighed against as a *godless* doctrine. If it be necessary to say anything at all against so mere an assumption, we may say that the question depends upon what idea we have formed of the moral character of the Deity. If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more profoundly religious than any other. If it be meant that utilitarianism does not recognize the revealed will of God as the supreme law of morals, I answer that a utilitarian who believes in the perfect goodness and wisdom of God necessarily believes that whatever God has thought fit to reveal on the subject of morals must fulfil the requirements of utility in a supreme degree. But others besides utilitarians have been of opinion that the Christian revelation was intended, and is fitted, to inform the hearts and minds of mankind with a spirit which should enable them to find for themselves what is right, and incline them to do it when found, rather than to tell them, except in a very general way, what it is; and that we need a doctrine of ethics, carefully followed out, to *interpret* to us the will of God. Whether this opinion is correct or not it is superfluous here to discuss; since whatever aid religion, either natural or revealed, can afford to ethical investigation is as open to the utilitarian moralist as to any other. He can use it as the testimony of God to the usefulness or hurtfulness of any given course of action, by as good a right as others can use it for the indication of a transcendental law, having no connection with usefulness or with happiness.

Again, Utility is often summarily stigmatized as an immoral doctrine by giving it the name of Expediency, and taking advantage of the popular use of that term to contrast it with Principle. But the Expedient, in the sense in which it is opposed to the Right, generally means that which is expedient for the particular interest of the agent himself; as when a minister sacrifices the interest of his country to keep himself in place. When it means anything better than this, it means that which is expedient for some immediate object, some temporary purpose, but which violates a rule whose observance is expedient in a much higher degree. The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a branch of the hurtful. Thus, it would often be expedient, for the purpose of getting over some momentary embarrassment, or attaining some object immediately useful to

ourselves or to others, to tell a lie. But inasmuch as the cultivation in ourselves of a sensitive feeling on the subject of veracity is one of the most useful, and the enfeeblement of that feeling one of the most hurtful, things to which our conduct can be instrumental; and inasmuch as any, even unintentional, deviation from truth does that much toward weakening the trustworthiness of human assertion which is not only the principal support of all present social well-being, but the insufficiency of which does more than any one thing that can be named to keep back civilization, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends; we feel that the violation, for a present advantage, of a rule of such transcendent expediency is not expedient, and that he who, for the sake of a convenience to himself or to some other individual, does what depends on him to deprive mankind of the good, and inflict upon them the evil, involved in the greater or less reliance which they can place in each other's word, acts the part of one of their worst enemies. Yet that even this rule, sacred as it is, admits of possible exceptions is acknowledged by all moralists; the chief of which is when the withholding of some fact (as of information from a malefactor, or of bad news from a person dangerously ill) would preserve someone (especially a person other than oneself) from great and unmerited evil, and when the withholding can only be effected by denial. But in order that the exception may not extend itself beyond the need, and may have the least possible effect in weakening reliance on veracity, it ought to be recognized, and, if possible, its limits defined; and if the principle of utility is good for anything, it must be good for weighing these conflicting utilities against one another, and marking out the region within which one or the other preponderates.

Again, defenders of utility often find themselves called upon to reply to such objections as this, that there is not time, previous to action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the general happiness. This is exactly as if anyone were to say that it is impossible to guide our conduct by Christianity, because there is not time, on every occasion on which anything has to be done, to read through the Old and New Testaments. The answer to the objection is that there has been ample time, namely, the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time mankind have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality, of life is dependent. People talk as if the commencement of this course of experience had hitherto been put off, and as if, at the moment when some man feels tempted to meddle with the property or life of another, he had to begin considering for the first time whether murder and theft are injurious to human happiness. Even then I do not think he would find the question very puzzling; but, at all events, the matter is now done to his hand. It is truly a whimsical supposition that, if mankind were agreed in considering utility to be the test of morality, they would remain without any agreement as to what *is* useful, and would take no measures for having their notions on the subject taught to the young, and enforced by law and opinion. There is no difficulty in proving any ethical standard whatever to work ill, if we suppose universal idiocy to be conjoined with it; but on any hypothesis short of that, mankind must by this time have acquired positive beliefs as to the effects of some actions on their happiness, and the beliefs which have thus come down are the rules of morality for the multitude, and for the philosopher until he has succeeded in finding better. That philosophers might easily do this, even now, on many subjects; that the received code of ethics is by no means of divine right; and that mankind have still much to learn as to the effects of actions on the general happiness, I admit or, rather, earnestly maintain. The corollaries from the principle of utility, like the precepts of every practical art, admit of indefinite improvement, and, in a progressive state of the human mind, their improvement is perpetually going on. But to consider the rules of morality as improvable is one thing; to pass over the intermediate generalizations entirely, and endeavor to test each individual action directly by the first principle, is another. It is a strange notion that the acknowledgment of a first principle is inconsistent with the admission of secondary ones. To inform a traveler respecting the place of his ultimate destination is not to forbid the use of landmarks and direction-posts on the way. The proposition that happiness is the end and aim of morality does not mean that no road ought to be laid down to that goal, or that persons going thither should not be advised to take one direction

rather than another. Men really ought to leave off talking a kind of nonsense on this subject which they would neither talk nor listen to on other matters of practical concernment. Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy, because sailors cannot wait to calculate the nautical almanac. Being rational creatures, they go to sea with it ready calculated; and all rational creatures go out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and foolish. And this, as long as foresight is a human quality, it is to be presumed they will continue to do. Whatever we adopt as the fundamental principle of morality, we require subordinate principles to apply it by; the impossibility of doing without them, being common to all systems, can afford no argument against any one in particular; but gravely to argue as if no such secondary principles could be had, and as if mankind had remained till now, and always must remain, without drawing any general conclusions from the experience of human life, is as high a pitch, I think, as absurdity has ever reached in philosophical controversy.

The remainder of the stock arguments against utilitarianism mostly consist in laying to its charge the common infirmities of human nature, and the general difficulties, which embarrass conscientious persons in shaping their course through life. We are told that a utilitarian will be apt to make his own particular case an exception to moral rules, and, when under temptation, will see a utility in the breach of a rule, greater than he will see in its observance. But is utility the only creed which is able to furnish us with excuses for evil-doing, and means of cheating our own conscience? They are afforded in abundance by all doctrines which recognize as a fact in morals the existence of conflicting considerations; which all doctrines do that have been believed by sane persons. It is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions, and that hardly any kind of action can safely be laid down as either always obligatory or always condemnable. There is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws by giving a certain latitude, under the moral responsibility of the agent, for accommodation to peculiarities of circumstances; and under every creed, at the opening thus made, self-deception and dishonest casuistry get in. There exists no moral system under which there do not arise unequivocal cases of conflicting obligation. These are the real difficulties, the knotty points, both in the theory of ethics and in the conscientious guidance of personal conduct. They are overcome practically with greater or with less success according to the intellect and virtue of the individual; but it can hardly be pretended that anyone will be the less qualified for dealing with them from possessing an ultimate standard to which conflicting rights and duties can be referred. If utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible. Though the application of the standard may be difficult, it is better than none at all; while in other systems, the moral laws all claiming independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them; their claims to precedence one over another rest on little better than sophistry, and unless determined, as they generally are, by the unacknowledged influence of considerations of utility, afford a free scope for the action of personal desires and partialities. We must remember that only in these cases of conflict between secondary principles is it requisite that the first principles should be appealed to. There is no case of moral obligation in which some secondary principle is not involved; and if only one, there can seldom be any real doubt which one it is, in the mind of any person by whom the principle itself is recognized.

Notes

1 'The author of this essay has reason for believing himself to be the first person who brought the word "utilitarian" into use. He did not invent it, but adopted it from a passing expression in Mr. Galt's *Annals of the Parish*. After using it as a designation for several years, he and others abandoned it from a growing dislike to anything resembling a badge or watchword of sectarian distinction. But as a name for one single opinion, not a set of opinions—to denote the recognition of "utility" as a standard, not any particular way

of applying it — the term supplies a want in the language, and offers, in many cases, a convenient mode of avoiding tiresome circumlocution.

2 An opponent, whose intellectual and moral fairness it is a pleasure to acknowledge (Rev. J. Llewelyn Davies), has objected to this passage, saying: "Surely the rightness or wrongness of saving a man from drowning does depend very much upon the motive with which it is done. Suppose that a tyrant, when his enemy jumped into the sea to escape from him, saved him from drowning simply in order that he might inflict upon him more exquisite tortures, would it tend to clearness to speak of that rescue as 'a morally right action'? Or suppose again, according to one of the stock illustrations of ethical inquiries, that a man betrayed a trust received from a friend, because the discharge of it would fatally injure that friend himself or someone belonging to him, would utilitarianism compel one to call the betrayal 'a crime' as much as if it had been done from the meanest motive?"

I submit that he who saves another from drowning in order to kill him by torture afterward does not differ only in motive from him who does the same thing from duty or benevolence; the act itself is different. The rescue of the man is, in the case supposed, only the necessary first step of an act far more atrocious than leaving him to drown would have been. Had Mr. Davies said, "The rightness or wrongness of saving a man from drowning does depend very much"— not upon the motive, but— "upon the *intention,*" no utilitarian would have differed from him. Mr. Davies, by an oversight too common not to be quite venal, has in this case confounded the very different ideas of Motive and Intention. There is no point which utilitarian thinkers (and Bentham pre-eminently) have taken more pains to illustrate than this. The morality of the action depends entirely upon the intention—that is, upon what the agent *wills to do*. But the motive, that is, the feeling which makes him will so to do, when it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality; though it makes a great difference in our moral estimation of the agent, especially if it indicates a good or bad habitual *disposition*—a bent of character from which useful, or from which hurtful, actions are likely to arise.

Readings for Chapter 9
Ethics and Environment

"The Land Ethic"

Aldo Leopold

When god-like Odysseus returned from the wars in Troy, he hanged all on one rope a dozen slave-girls of his household whom he suspected of misbehavior during his absence.

This hanging involved no question of propriety. The girls were property. The disposal of property was then, as now, a matter of expediency, not of right and wrong.

Concepts of right and wrong were not lacking from Odysseus' Greece: witness the fidelity of his wife through the long years before at last his black-prowed galleys clove the wine-dark seas for home. The ethical structure of that day covered wives, but had not yet been extended to human chattels. During the three thousand years which have since elapsed, ethical criteria have been extended to many fields of conduct, with corresponding shrinkages in those judged by expediency only.

The Ethical Sequence

This extension of ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process in ecological evolution. Its sequences may be described in ecological as well as in philosophical terms. An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct. These are two definitions of one thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation. The ecologist calls these symbioses. Politics and economics are advanced symbioses in which the original free-for-all competition has been replaced, in part, by co-operative mechanisms with an ethical content.

The complexity of co-operative mechanisms has increased with population density, and with the efficiency of tools. It was simpler, for example, to define the anti-social uses of sticks and stones in the days of the mastodons than of bullets and billboards in the age of motors.

The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals; the Mosaic Decalogue is an example. Later accretions dealt with the relation between the individual and society. The Golden Rule tries to integrate the individual to society; democracy to integrate social organization to the individual.

There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.

The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is the third step in a sequence. The first two have already been taken. Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has

Leopold, A. (1946, 1969) *A Sand County Almanac: With Other Essays on Conservation from Round River*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 219–241. Reprinted with permission.

not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation.

An ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual in meeting such situations. Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making.

The Community Concept

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land.

This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.

In human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows, *ex cathedra,* just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves.

In the biotic community, a parallel situation exists. Abraham knew exactly what the land was for: it was to drip milk and honey into Abraham's mouth. At the present moment, the assurance with which we regard this assumption is inverse to the degree of our education.

The ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure that he does not. He knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood.

That man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land. The characteristics of the land determined the facts quite as potently as the characteristics of the men who lived on it.

Consider, for example, the settlement of the Mississippi valley. In the years following the Revolution, three groups were contending for its control: the native Indian, the French and English traders, and the American settlers. Historians wonder what would have happened if the English at Detroit had thrown a little more weight into the Indian side of those tipsy scales which decided the outcome of the colonial migration into the cane-lands of Kentucky. It is time now to ponder the fact that the cane-lands, when subjected to the particular mixture of forces represented by the cow, plow, fire, and axe of the pioneer, became bluegrass. What if the plant succession inherent in this dark and bloody ground had, under the impact of these forces, given us some worthless sedge, shrub, or weed? Would Boone and Kenton have held out? Would there have been any overflow into

Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri? Any Louisiana Purchase? Any transcontinental union of new states? Any Civil War?

Kentucky was one sentence in the drama of history. We are commonly told what the human actors in this drama tried to do, but we are seldom told that their success, or the lack of it, hung in large degree on the reaction of particular soils to the impact of the particular forces exerted by their occupancy. In the case of Kentucky, we do not even know where the bluegrass came from—whether it is a native species, or a stowaway from Europe.

Contrast the cane-lands with what hindsight tells us about the Southwest, where the pioneers were equally brave, resourceful, and persevering. The impact of occupancy here brought no bluegrass, or other plant fitted to withstand the bumps and buffetings of hard use. This region, when grazed by livestock, reverted through a series of more and more worthless grasses, shrubs, and weeds to a condition of unstable equilibrium. Each recession of plant types bred erosion; each increment to erosion bred a further recession of plants. The result today is a progressive and mutual deterioration, not only of plants and soils, but of the animal community subsisting thereon. The early settlers did not expect this: on the ciénegas of New Mexico some even cut ditches to hasten it. So subtle has been its progress that few residents of the region are aware of it. It is quite invisible to the tourist who finds this wrecked landscape colorful and charming (as indeed it is, but it bears scant resemblance to what it was in 1848).

This same landscape was 'developed' once before, but with quite different results. The Pueblo Indians settled the Southwest in pre-Columbian times, but they happened *not* to be equipped with range livestock. Their civilization expired, but not because their land expired.

In India, regions devoid of any sod-forming grass have been settled, apparently without wrecking the land, by the simple expedient of carrying the grass to the cow, rather than vice versa. (Was this the result of some deep wisdom, or was it just good luck? I do not know.)

In short, the plant succession steered the course of history; the pioneer simply demonstrated, for good or ill, what successions inhered in the land. Is history taught in this spirit? It will be, once the concept of land as a community really penetrates our intellectual life.

The Ecological Conscience

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and convention oratory. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forward stride.

The usual answer to this dilemma is 'more conservation education.' No one will debate this, but is it certain that only the *volume* of education needs stepping up? Is something lacking in the *content* as well?

It is difficult to give a fair summary of its content in brief form, but, as I understand it, the content is substantially this: obey the law, vote right, join some organizations, and practice what conservation is profitable on your own land; the government will do the rest.

Is not this formula too easy to accomplish anything worthwhile? It defines no right or wrong, assigns no obligation, calls for no sacrifice, implies no change in the current philosophy of values. In respect to land-use, it urges only enlightened self-interest. Just how far will such education take us? An example will perhaps yield a partial answer.

By 1930 it had become clear to all except the ecologically blind that southwestern Wisconsin's topsoil was slipping seaward. In 1933 the farmers were told that if they would adopt certain remedial practices for five years, the public would donate CCC labor to install them, plus the necessary machinery and materials. The offer was widely accepted, but the practices were widely forgotten when the five-year contract period was up. The farmers continued only those practices that yielded an immediate and visible economic gain for themselves.

This led to the idea that maybe farmers would learn more quickly if they themselves wrote the rules. Accordingly the Wisconsin Legislature in 1937 passed the Soil Conservation District Law.

This said to farmers, in effect: *We, the public, will furnish you free technical service and loan you specialized machinery, if you will write your own rules for land-use. Each county may write its own rules, and these will have the force of law.* Nearly all the counties promptly organized to accept the proffered help, but after a decade of operation, *no county has yet written a single rule.* There has been visible progress in such practices as strip-cropping, pasture renovation, and soil liming, but none in fencing woodlots against grazing, and none in excluding plow and cow from steep slopes, The farmers, in short, have selected those remedial practices which were profitable anyhow, and ignored those which were profitable to the community, but not clearly profitable to themselves.

When one asks why no rules have been written, one is told that the community is not yet ready to support them; education must precede rules. But the education actually in progress makes no mention of obligations to land over and above those dictated by self-interest. The net result is that we have more education but less soil, fewer healthy woods, and as many floods as in 1937.

The puzzling aspect of such situations is that the existence of obligations over and above self-interest is taken for granted in such rural community enterprises as the betterment of roads, schools, churches, and baseball teams. Their existence is not taken for granted, nor as yet seriously discussed, in bettering the behavior of the water that falls on the land, or in the preserving of the beauty or diversity of the farm landscape, Land-use ethics are still governed wholly by economic self-interest, just as social ethics were a century ago.

To sum up: we asked the farmer to do what he conveniently could to save his soil, and he has done just that, and only that. The farmer who clears the woods off a 75 per cent slope, turns his cows into the clearing, and dumps its rainfall, rocks, and soil into the community creek, is still (if otherwise decent) a respected member of society. If he puts lime on his fields and plants his crops on contour, he is still entitled to all the privileges and emoluments of his Soil Conservation District. The District is a beautiful piece of social machinery, but it is coughing along on two cylinders because we have been too timid, and too anxious for quick success, to tell the farmer the true magnitude of his obligations. Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land.

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.

Substitutes for a Land Ethic

When the logic of history hungers for bread and we hand out a stone, we are at pains to explain how much the stone resembles bread. I now describe some of the stones which serve in lieu of a land ethic.

One basic weakness in a conservation system based wholly on economic motives is that most members of the land community have no economic value. Wildflowers and songbirds are examples. Of the 22,000 higher plants and animals native to Wisconsin, it is doubtful whether more than 5 per cent can be sold, fed, eaten, or otherwise put to economic use. Yet these creatures are members of the biotic community, and if (as I believe) its stability depends on its integrity, they are entitled to continuance.

When one of these non-economic categories is threatened, and if we happen to love it, we invent subterfuges to give it economic importance. At the beginning of the century songbirds were supposed to be disappearing. Ornithologists jumped to the rescue with some distinctly shaky evidence to the effect that insects would eat us up if birds failed to control them. The evidence had to be economic in order to be valid.

It is painful to read these circumlocutions today. We have no land ethic yet, but we have at least drawn nearer the point of admitting that birds should continue as a matter of biotic right, regardless of the presence or absence of economic advantage to us.

A parallel situation exists in respect of predatory mammals, raptorial birds, and fish-eating birds. Time was when biologists somewhat overworked the evidence that these creatures preserve the health of game by killing weaklings, or that they control rodents for the farmer, or that they prey only on 'worthless' species. Here again, the evidence had to be economic in order to be valid. It is only in recent years that we hear the more honest argument that predators are members of the community, and that no special interest has the right to exterminate them for the sake of a benefit, real or fancied, to itself. Unfortunately this enlightened view is still in the talk stage. In the field the extermination of predators goes merrily on: witness the impending erasure of the timber wolf by fiat of Congress, the Conservation Bureaus, and many state legislatures.

Some species of trees have been 'read out of the party' by economics-minded foresters because they grow too slowly, or have too low a sale value to pay as timber crops: white cedar, tamarack, cypress, beech, and hemlock are examples. In Europe, where forestry is ecologically more advanced, the non-commercial tree species are recognized as members of the native forest community, to be preserved as such, within reason. Moreover, some (like beech) have been found to have a valuable function in building up soil fertility. The interdependence of the forest and its constituent tree species, ground flora, and fauna is taken for granted.

Lack of economic value is sometimes a character not only of species or groups, but of entire biotic communities: marshes, bogs, dunes, and 'deserts' are examples. Our formula in such cases is to relegate their conservation to government as refuges, monuments, or parks. The difficulty is that these communities are usually interspersed with more valuable private lands; the government cannot possibly own or control such scattered parcels. The net effect is that we have relegated some of them to ultimate extinction over large areas. If the private owner were ecologically minded, he would be proud to be the custodian of a reasonable proportion of such areas, which add diversity and beauty to his farm and to his community.

In some instances, the assumed lack of profit in these 'waste' areas has proved to be wrong, but only after most of them had been done away with. The present scramble to reflood muskrat marshes is a case in point.

There is a clear tendency in American conservation to relegate to government all necessary jobs that private landowners fail to perform. Government ownership, operation, subsidy, or regulation is now widely prevalent in forestry, range management, soil and watershed management, park and wilderness conservation, fisheries management, and migratory bird management, with more to come. Most of this growth in governmental conservation is proper and logical, some of it is inevitable. That I imply no disapproval of it is implicit in the fact that I have spent most of my life working for it. Nevertheless the question arises: What is the ultimate magnitude of the enterprise? Will the tax base carry its eventual ramifications? At what point will governmental conservation, like the mastodon, become handicapped by its own dimensions? The answer, if there is any, seems to be in a land ethic, or some other force which assigns more obligation to the private landowner.

Industrial landowners and users, especially lumbermen and stockmen, are inclined to wail long and loudly about the extension of government ownership and regulation to land, but (with notable exceptions) they show little disposition to develop the only visible alternative: the voluntary practice of conservation on their own lands.

When the private landowner is asked to perform some unprofitable act for the good of the community, he today assents only with outstretched palm. If the act costs him cash this is fair and proper, but when it costs only forethought, open-mindedness, or time, the issue is at least debatable. The overwhelming growth of land-use subsidies in recent years must be ascribed, in large part, to the government's own agencies for conservation education: the land bureaus, the agricultural colleges, and the extension services. As far as I can detect, no ethical obligation toward land is taught in these institutions.

To sum up: a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning, It assumes,

falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts. It tends to relegate to government many functions eventually too large, too complex, or too widely dispersed to be performed by government.

An ethical obligation on the part of the private owner is the only visible remedy for these situations.

The Land Pyramid

An ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism. We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.

The image commonly employed in conservation education is 'the balance of nature.' For reasons too lengthy to detail here, this figure of speech fails to describe accurately what little we know about the land mechanism. A much truer image is the one employed in ecology: the biotic pyramid. I shall first sketch the pyramid as a symbol of land, and later develop some of its implications in terms of land-use.

Plants absorb energy from the sun. This energy flows through a circuit called the biota, which may be represented by a pyramid consisting of layers. The bottom layer is the soil. A plant layer rests on the soil, an insect layer on the plants, a bird and rodent layer on the insects, and so on up through various animal groups to the apex layer, which consists of the larger carnivores.

The species of a layer are alike not in where they came from, or in what they look like, but rather in what they eat. Each successive layer depends on those below it for food and often for other services, and each in turn furnishes food and services to those above. Proceeding upward, each successive layer decreases in numerical abundance. Thus, for every carnivore there are hundreds of his prey, thousands of their prey, millions of insects, uncountable plants. The pyramidal form of the system reflects this numerical progression from apex to base. Man shares an intermediate layer with the bears, raccoons, and squirrels which eat both meat and vegetables.

The lines of dependency for food and other services are called food chains. Thus soil-oak-deer-Indian is a chain that has now been largely converted to soil-corn-cow-farmer. Each species, including ourselves, is a link in many chains. The deer eats a hundred plants other than oak, and the cow a hundred plants other than corn. Both, then, are links in a hundred chains. The pyramid is a tangle of chains so complex as to seem disorderly, yet the stability of the system proves it to be a highly organized structure. Its functioning depends on the co-operation and competition of its diverse parts.

In the beginning, the pyramid of life was low and squat, the food chains short and simple. Evolution has added layer after layer, link after link. Man is one of thousands of accretions to the height and complexity of the pyramid. Science has given us many doubts, but it has given us at least one certainty: the trend of evolution is to elaborate and diversify the biota.

Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil. The circuit is not closed; some energy is dissipated in decay, some is added by absorption from the air, some is stored in soils, peats, and long-lived forests; but it is a sustained circuit, like a slowly augmented revolving fund of life. There is always a net loss by downhill wash, but this is normally small and offset by the decay of rocks. It is deposited in the ocean and, in the course of geological time, raised to form new lands and new pyramids.

The velocity and character of the upward flow of energy depend on the complex structure of the plant and animal community, much as the upward flow of sap in a tree depends on its complex cellular organization. Without this complexity, normal circulation would presumably not occur. Structure means the characteristic numbers, as well as the characteristic kinds and functions, of the component species. This interdependence between the complex structure of the land and its smooth functioning as an energy unit is one of its basic attributes.

When a change occurs in one part of the circuit, many other parts must adjust themselves to it. Change does not necessarily obstruct or divert the flow of energy; evolution is a long series of self-induced changes, the net result of which has been to elaborate the flow mechanism and to lengthen the circuit. Evolutionary changes, however, are usually slow and local. Man's invention of tools has enabled him to make changes of unprecedented violence, rapidity, and scope.

One change is in the composition of floras and faunas. The larger predators are lopped off the apex of the pyramid; food chains, for the first time in history, become shorter rather than longer. Domesticated species from other lands are substituted for wild ones, and wild ones are moved to new habitats. In this world-wide pooling of faunas and floras, some species get out of bounds as pests and diseases; others are extinguished. Such effects are seldom intended or foreseen; they represent unpredicted and often untraceable readjustments in the structure. Agricultural science is largely a race between the emergence of new pests and the emergence of new techniques for their control.

Another change touches the flow of energy through plants and animals and its return to the soil. Fertility is the ability of soil to receive, store, and release energy. Agriculture, by overdrafts on the soil, or by too radical a substitution of domestic for native species in the superstructure, may derange the channels of flow or deplete storage. Soils depleted of their storage, or of the organic matter which anchors it, wash away faster than they form. This is erosion.

Waters, like soil, are part of the energy circuit. Industry, by polluting waters or obstructing them with dams, may exclude the plants and animals necessary to keep energy in circulation.

Transportation brings about another basic change: the plants or animals grown in one region are now consumed and returned to the soil in another. Transportation taps the energy stored in rocks, and in the air, and uses it elsewhere; thus we fertilize the garden with nitrogen gleaned by the guano birds from the fishes of seas on the other side of the Equator. Thus the formerly localized and self-contained circuits are pooled on a world-wide scale.

The process of altering the pyramid for human occupation releases stored energy, and this often gives rise, during the pioneering period, to a deceptive exuberance of plant and animal life, both wild and tame. These releases of biotic capital tend to becloud or postpone the penalties of violence.

* * *

This thumbnail sketch of land as an energy circuit conveys three basic ideas:

(1) That land is not merely soil.
(2) That the native plants and animals kept the energy circuit open; others may or may not.
(3) That man-made changes are of a different order than evolutionary changes, and have effects more comprehensive than is intended or foreseen.

These ideas, collectively, raise two basic issues: Can the land adjust itself to the new order? Can the desired alterations be accomplished with less violence?

Biotas seem to differ in their capacity to sustain violent conversion. Western Europe, for example, carries a far different pyramid than Caesar found there. Some large animals are lost; swampy forests have become meadows or plowland; many new plants and animals are introduced, some of which escape as pests; the remaining natives are greatly changed in distribution and abundance. Yet the soil is still there and, with the help of imported nutrients, still fertile; the waters flow normally; the new structure seems to function and to persist. There is no visible stoppage or derangement of the circuit.

Western Europe, then, has a resistant biota. Its inner processes are tough, elastic, resistant to strain. No matter how violent the alterations, the pyramid, so far, has developed some new *modus vivendi* which preserves its habitability for man, and for most of the other natives.

Japan seems to present another instance of radical conversion without disorganization.

Most other civilized regions, and some as yet barely touched by civilization, display various stages of disorganization, varying from initial symptoms to advanced wastage. In Asia Minor and North

Africa diagnosis is confused by climatic changes, which may have been either the cause or the effect of advanced wastage. In the United States the degree of disorganization varies locally; it is worst in the Southwest, the Ozarks, and parts of the South, and least in New England and the Northwest. Better land-uses may still arrest it in the less advanced regions. In parts of Mexico, South America, South Africa, and Australia a violent and accelerating wastage is in progress, but I cannot assess the prospects.

This almost world-wide display of disorganization in the land seems to be similar to disease in an animal, except that it never culminates in complete disorganization or death. The land recovers, but at some reduced level of complexity, and with a reduced carrying capacity for people, plants, and animals. Many biotas currently regarded as 'lands of opportunity' are in fact already subsisting on exploitative agriculture, i.e. they have already exceeded their sustained carrying capacity. Most of South America is overpopulated in this sense.

In arid regions we attempt to offset the process of wastage by reclamation, but it is only too evident that the prospective longevity of reclamation projects is often short. In our own West, the best of them may not last a century.

The combined evidence of history and ecology seem to support one general deduction: the less violent the man-made changes, the greater the probability of successful readjustment in the pyramid. Violence, in turn, varies with human population density; a dense population requires a more violent conversion. In this respect, North America has a better chance for permanence than Europe, if she can contrive to limit her density.

This deduction runs counter to our current philosophy, which assumes that because a small increase in density enriched human life, an indefinite increase will enrich it indefinitely. Ecology knows of no density relationship that holds for indefinitely wide limits. All gains from density are subject to a law of diminishing returns.

Whatever may be the equation for men and land, it is improbable that we as yet know all its terms. Recent discoveries in mineral and vitamin nutrition reveal unsuspected dependencies in the up-circuit: incredibly minute quantities of certain substances determine the value of soils to plants, of plants to animals. What of the down-circuit? What of the vanishing species, the preservation of which we now regard as an esthetic luxury? They helped build the soil; in what unsuspected ways may they be essential to its maintenance? Professor Weaver proposes that we use prairie flowers to re-flocculate the wasting soils of the dust bowl; who knows for what purpose cranes and condors, otters and grizzlies may some day be used?

Land Health and the A-B Cleavage

A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.

Conservationists are notorious for their dissensions. Superficially these seem to add up to mere confusion, but a more careful scrutiny reveals a single plane of cleavage common to many specialized fields. In each field one group (A) regards the land as soil, and its function as commodity-production; another group (B) regards the land as a biota, and its function as something broader. How much broader is admittedly in a state of doubt and confusion.

In my own field, forestry, group A is quite content to grow trees like cabbages, with cellulose as the basic forest commodity. It feels no inhibition against violence; its ideology is agronomic. Group B, on the other hand, sees forestry as fundamentally different from agronomy because it employs natural species, and manages a natural environment rather than creating an artificial one. Group B prefers natural reproduction on principle. It worries on biotic as well as economic grounds about the loss of species like chestnut, and the threatened loss of the white pines. It worries about a whole series of secondary forest functions: wildlife, recreation, watersheds, wilderness areas. To my mind, Group B feels the stirrings of an ecological conscience.

In the wildlife field, a parallel cleavage exists. For Group A the basic commodities are sport and meat; the yardsticks of production are ciphers of take in pheasants and trout. Artificial propagation is acceptable as a permanent as well as a temporary recourse—if its unit costs permit. Group B, on the other hand, worries about a whole series of biotic side-issues. What is the cost in predators of producing a game crop? Should we have further recourse to exotics? How can management restore the shrinking species, like prairie grouse, already hopeless as shootable game? How can management restore the threatened rarities, like trumpeter swan and whooping crane? Can management principles be extended to wildflowers? Here again it is clear to me that we have the same A-B cleavage as in forestry.

In the larger field of agriculture I am less competent to speak, but there seem to be somewhat parallel cleavages. Scientific agriculture was actively developing before ecology was born; hence a slower penetration of ecological concepts might be expected. Moreover the farmer, by the very nature of his techniques, must modify the biota more radically than the forester or the wildlife manager. Nevertheless, there are many discontents in agriculture which seem to add up to a new vision of 'biotic farming.'

Perhaps the most important of these is the new evidence that poundage or tonnage is no measure of the food-value of farm crops; the products of fertile soil may be qualitatively as well as quantitatively superior. We can bolster poundage from depleted soils by pouring on imported fertility, but we are not necessarily bolstering food-value. The possible ultimate ramifications of this idea are so immense that I must leave their exposition to abler pens.

The discontent that labels itself 'organic farming,' while bearing some of the earmarks of a cult, is nevertheless biotic in its direction, particularly in its insistence on the importance of soil flora and fauna.

The ecological fundamentals of agriculture are just as poorly known to the public as in other fields of land-use. For example, few educated people realize that the marvelous advances in technique made during recent decades are improvements in the pump, rather than the well. Acre for acre, they have barely sufficed to offset the sinking level of fertility.

In all of these cleavages, we see repeated the same basic paradoxes: man the conqueror *versus* man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword *versus* science the searchlight on his universe; land the slave and servant *versus* land the collective organism. Robinson's injunction to Tristram may well be applied, at this juncture, to *Homo sapiens* as a species in geological time:

> Whether you will or not
> You are a King, Tristram, for you are one
> Of the time-tested few that leave the world,
> When they are gone, not the same place it was.
> Mark what you leave.

The Outlook

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.

Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow. Turn him loose for a day on the land, and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or a 'scenic' area, he is bored stiff. If crops could be raised by hydroponics instead of farming, it would suit him very well. Synthetic substitutes for wood, leather, wool, and other natural land products suit him better than the originals. In short, land is something he has 'outgrown.'

Almost equally serious as an obstacle to a land ethic is the attitude of the farmer for whom the land is still an adversary, or a taskmaster that keeps him in slavery. Theoretically, the mechanization of farming ought to cut the farmer's chains, but whether it really does is debatable.

One of the requisites for an ecological comprehension of land is an understanding of ecology, and this is by no means co-extensive with 'education'; in fact, much higher education seems deliberately to avoid ecological concepts. An understanding of ecology does not necessarily originate in courses bearing ecological labels; it is quite as likely to be labeled geography, botany, agronomy, history, or economics. This is as it should be, but whatever the label, ecological training is scarce.

The case for a land ethic would appear hopeless but for the minority which is in obvious revolt against these 'modern' trends.

The 'key-log' which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

It of course goes without saying that economic feasibility limits the tether of what can or cannot be done for land. It always has and it always will. The fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines *all* land-use. This is simply not true. An innumerable host of actions and attitudes, comprising perhaps the bulk of all land relations, is determined by the land-users' tastes and predilections, rather than by his purse. The bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill, and faith rather than on investments of cash. As a land-user thinketh, so is he.

I have purposely presented the land ethic as a product of social evolution because nothing so important as an ethic is ever 'written.' Only the most superficial student of history supposes that Moses 'wrote' the Decalogue; it evolved in the minds of a thinking community, and Moses wrote a tentative summary of it for a 'seminar.' I say tentative because evolution never stops.

The evolution of a land ethic is an intellectual as well as emotional process. Conservation is paved with good intentions which prove to be futile, or even dangerous, because they are devoid of critical understanding either of the land, or of economic land-use. I think it is a truism that as the ethical frontier advances from the individual to the community, its intellectual content increases.

The mechanism of operation is the same for any ethic: social approbation for right actions; social disapproval for wrong actions.

By and large, our present problem is one of attitudes and implements. We are remodeling the Alhambra with a steam-shovel, and we are proud of our yardage. We shall hardly relinquish the shovel, which after all has many good points, but we are in need of gentler and more objective criteria for its successful use.

"A Personal View of Environmentalism"

James Lovelock

The concept of Gaia, a living planet, is for me the essential basis of a coherent and practical environmentalism; it counters the persistent belief that the Earth is a property, an estate, there to be exploited for the benefit of humankind. This false belief that we own the Earth, or are its stewards, allows us to pay lip service to environmental policies and programmes but to continue with business as usual. A glance at any financial newspaper confirms that our aim is still growth and development. We cheer at any new discovery of gas or oil deposits and regard the current rise in petroleum prices as a potential disaster, not a welcome curb on pollution. Few, even among climate scientists and ecologists, seem yet to realize fully the potential severity, or the imminence, of catastrophic global disaster; understanding is still in the conscious mind alone and not yet the visceral reaction of fear. We lack an intuitive sense, an instinct, that tells us when Gaia is in danger.

So how do we acquire, or reacquire, an instinct that recognizes not only the presence of the great Earth system but also its state of health? We do not have much to go on because the concepts of intuition and instinct tended to be ignored, or at best regarded as flaky and dubious, during the last two centuries of triumphant reductionism. In the twenty-first century we are somewhat freer to wonder about ideas like instinct and intuition, and it seems probable that long ago in our evolutionary history, when our ancestors were simple aquatic animals, we had already evolved an ability instantly to distinguish anything alive within the mainly inorganic ocean. This primeval instinct would have been supremely important for survival, since living things can be either edible, lovable or lethal. It is likely to be part of our genetic coding and hard wired into our brains so that we still have it in full strength. We do not need a doctorate in biology to distinguish a beetle from a stone, or a plum from a pebble. But, because of the circumscribed nature of its origins, the instinctive recognition of life is limited by the range of our senses and does not work for things smaller or larger than we can see. We recognize a paramecium as alive, but only when we can see it through a microscope. Even biologists, when they think of the biosphere, too often ignore all things smaller than can be seen with the naked eye. My friend and collaborator Lynn Margulis more than anyone has stressed the primary importance of micro organisms in Gaia, and she summarizes her thoughts in the book she wrote in 1986 with Dorian Sagan, *Microcosmos*. The Earth was never seen as a whole until astronauts viewed it for us from outside, and then we saw something very different from our expectation of a mere planet-sized ball of rock existing within a thin layer of air and water. Some astronauts, especially those who travelled as far as the moon, were deeply moved and

Lovelock, J. (2006) *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*, New York, Basic Books, 135–145. Reprinted with permission.

saw the Earth itself as their home. Somehow we have to think like them and expand our instinctive recognition of life to include the Earth.

The ability instantly to recognize life, and other instincts, like the fear of heights and snakes, are part of our long evolutionary history, but there is another kind of instinct that is not innate but grows from childhood conditioning. The Jesuits discovered that a child's mind could be moulded to accept their faith, and that once done the child retained faith as an instinct throughout life; similar but different moulds fix lifelong tribal and national loyalty. The mind of a child is even plastic enough to be shaped to follow faithfully something as trivial as a football team or as potentially sinister as a political ideology. Abundant experience of this kind suggests that we could, if we chose, make Gaia an instinctive belief by exposing our children to the natural world, telling them how and why it is Gaia in action, and showing that they belong to it.

The founders of the great religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism lived at times when we were far less numerous and lived in a way that was no burden to the Earth. Those holy men would have had no inkling of the troubled state of the planet a thousand or more years later, and their concern, rightly, would have been for human affairs. Rules and guidance were needed for individual, family and tribal good behaviour; we were the human family growing up in the natural world of Gaia and, like children, we took our home for granted and never questioned its existence. The success of these religious backgrounds is measured by their persistence as faiths and guides over more than a thousand years of further population expansion. When I was a child I was marinated in Christian belief, and still it unconsciously guides my thinking and behaviour. Now we face the consequences of fouling our planetary home, and new hazards loom that are much more difficult to understand or cope with than the tribal and personal conflicts of the past. Our religions have not yet given us the rules and guidance for our relationship with Gaia. The humanist concept of sustainable development and the Christian concept of stewardship are flawed by unconscious hubris. We have neither the knowledge nor the capacity to achieve them. We are no more qualified to be the stewards or developers of the Earth than are goats to be gardeners.

Perhaps Christians need a new Sermon on the Mount that sets out the human constraints needed for living decently with the Earth, and which spells out the rules for its achievement. I have long wished that the religions and the secular humanists might turn to the concept of Gaia and recognize that human rights and needs are not enough; those with faith could accept the Earth as part of God's creation and be troubled by its desecration. There are signs that church leaders are moving towards a theology of creation that could include Gaia. Rupert Shortt, in his book *God's Advocates*, reported an interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams:

INTERVIEWER: The next question is that talk of miracles flies in the face of science. There is a lack of evidence for miracles as well as an intrinsic implausibility about them.

ARCHBISHOP: It is a very big issue, the question of divine action. Again, I think it has to be taken in connection with a doctrine of God rather than a very specific examination of any claim to start with.

Let us put it this way. For a theological believer, the relation of God to creation is neither that of the old image of someone who winds up the watch and leaves it, nor is it that of a director in a theatre, or worse a puppet master who's constantly adjusting what's going on.

It's the relation of an external activity which – moment by moment – energizes, makes real, makes active what there is. And I sometimes feel that a lot of our theology has lost that extraordinarily vivid or exhilarating sense of the world penetrated by divine energy in classical theological terms.

As I read on through these thoughtful and impressive responses I was taken back to the 1970s when Richard Dawkins and other strong-minded scientists fiercely contested the concept of Gaia using arguments similar to those they now use as atheists to challenge the concepts of God and creation. That argument with them about Gaia has I think been settled with an acceptance that Gaia is real to the extent that we have a self-regulating Earth but with a growing recognition that many natural phenomena are unknowable and can never be explained in classical reductionist

terms – phenomena such as consciousness, life, the emergence of self-regulation and a growing list of happenings in the world of quantum physics. It is time, I think, that theologians shared with scientists their wonderful word, 'ineffable'; a word that expresses the thought that God is immanent but unknowable.

Important concepts like God or Gaia are not comprehensible in the limited space of our conscious minds, but they do have meaning in that inner part of our minds that is the seat of intuition. Our deep unconscious thoughts are not rationally constructed; they emerge fully formed as our conscience and an instinctive ability to distinguish good from evil. Perhaps this is why the early Quakers knew that the still, small voice within does not come from conscious reckoning. Our conscious rational minds are no more capable of deep thought than is the tiny screen of a contemporary mobile telephone able to present in its full glory a Vermeer painting. The extraordinary power of our unconscious minds is expressed in what we see as mundane things like walking, riding a bicycle or catching a ball. We would fail utterly to do any of these things by conscious thought; their automatic and instinctive achievement requires long and often tedious training. The same is true of inventors who, after long apprenticeship to their craft, become inspired to imagine and then construct devices that reveal emergence when they are switched on; physicists in a similar way exploit the incredible mysteries of quantum phenomena despite having no conscious understanding.

The history of science shows that we need to keep what is good in past interpretation of the world and merge in new knowledge as it appears, Newton's understanding enlightened physics for three hundred years. Einstein's relativity did not cast out Newtonian physics, it extended it. In a similar way, Darwin's great vision of evolution has raised biology from a cataloguing activity into a science, but now we are beginning to see Darwinism is incomplete. Evolution is not just a property of organisms – what evolves is the whole Earth system with its living and non-living parts existing as a tight coupled entity. It is foolish to think that we can explain science as it evolves, rationally and consciously. We have to use the crude tool of metaphor to translate conscious ideas into unconscious understanding. Just as the metaphor, a living Earth, used to explain Gaia, was wrongly rejected by reductionist scientists, so it may be wrong of them also to reject the metaphors and fables of the sacred texts. Crude they may be, but they serve to ignite an intuitive understanding of God and creation that cannot be falsified by rational argument.

As a scientist I know that Gaia theory is provisional and likely to be displaced by a larger and more complete view of the Earth. But for now I see it as the seed from which an instinctive environmentalism can grow; one that would instantly reveal planetary health or disease and help sustain a healthy world.

Green thoughts and ideas are as diverse and competitive as the plants of a forest ecosystem and, unlike the plants, they do not even share the spectral purity of the colour of chlorophyll. Green thoughts range from shades of red to shades of blue. The totalitarian greens, sometimes called eco-fascists, would like to see most other humans eliminated in genocide and so leave a perfect Earth for them alone. At the other end of the spectrum are those who would like to see universal human welfare and rights, and somehow hope that luck, Gaia or sustainable development will allow this dream to come true. Greens could be defined as those who have sensed the deterioration of the natural world and would like to do something about it. They share a common environmentalism but differ greatly in the means for its achievement. Perhaps the most humane green arguments are in Jonathon Porritt's two books *Seeing Green* and *Playing Safe: Science and the Environment*. He has done more than anyone I know to persuade the power bases of Europe to think and act in what he believes is an environmentally sound way, and he has selflessly devoted much of his life to this cause.

Since I met him at Dartington in 1982 I have thought of Jonathon as a friend, and therefore I deeply regret that in the past two years our paths have diverged; it is important that, deep though our differences are over the merits of nuclear and wind energy, we still share a great deal in common. In Chapters 5 and 6 I presented detailed criticisms of green thoughts and actions, but it

was from within the environmental community, not from without, as in the recent book by Dick Taverne, *The March of Unreason*, which expresses the viewpoint of an enlightenment liberal who rightly criticizes greens for their impractical romanticism. My feelings about modern environmentalism are more parallel with those that might pass through the mind of the headmistress of an inner-city school or the colonel of a newly formed regiment of licentious and naturally disobedient young men: how the hell can these unruly charges be disciplined and made effective?

The root of our problems with the environment comes from a lack of constraint on the growth of population. There is no single right number of people that we can have as a goal: the number varies with our way of life on the planet and the state of its health. It has varied naturally from a few million when we were hunters and gatherers to a fraction of a billion as simple farmers; but now it has grown to over six billion, which is wholly unsustainable in the present state of Gaia, even if we had the will and the ability to cut back.

If we could go back to, for example, 1840 and start again we might be able to reach a stable population of six billion if we were guided from the beginning by a proper understanding of the Earth. We would know that fossil-fuel combustion needed limiting and that cattle and sheep farming use far too much land and cannot be sustained, and that arable farming, with pigs and chickens as food animals consuming mainly vegetable waste, would be a better way to go. It might even be possible to sustain ten billion or more living in well-planned, dense cities and eating synthesized food.

If we can overcome the self-generated threat of deadly climate change, caused by our massive destruction of ecosystems and global pollution, our next task will be to ensure that our numbers are always commensurate with our and Gaia's capacity to nourish them. Personally I think we would be wise to aim at a stabilized population of about half to one billion, and then we would be free to live in many different ways without harming Gaia. At first this may seem a difficult, unpalatable, even hopeless task, but events during the last century suggest that it might be easier than we think. Thus in prosperous societies, when women are given a fair chance to develop their potential they choose voluntarily to be less fecund. It is only a small step towards a better way of living with Gaia, and it has brought with it problems of a distorted age structure in society and dysfunctional family life, but it is a seed of optimism from which other voluntary controls could grow and surely far better than the cold concept of eugenics that withered in its own amorality. In the end, as always, Gaia will do the culling and eliminate those that break her rules. We have the choice to accept this fate or plan our own destiny within Gaia. Whatever we choose to do we have always to ask, what are the consequences?

The regulation of fecundity is part of population control, but the regulation of the death rate is also important. Here, too, people in affluent societies are choosing voluntarily seemly ways to die. Traditionally, hospitals have for the elderly been places for dying in comparative comfort and painlessness; the hospice movement has served to set standards and make this otherwise unmentionable role of the health systems acceptable. According to Hodkinson, in his book *An Outline of Geriatrics,* about 25 per cent of the elderly entering hospitals die within two months. Now that the Earth is in imminent danger of a transition to a hot and inhospitable state, it seems amoral to strive ostentatiously to extend our personal lifespan beyond its normal biological limit of about one hundred years. When I was a young postdoctoral fellow at Harvard Medical School in Boston an eminent paediatrician complained of the huge, more than tenfold, disparity between funds given for cancer research and those given for childhood disease; I suspect that it still exists.

We have severed nearly all the natural physical constraints on the growth of our species: we can live anywhere from the Arctic to the tropics and, while they last, our water supplies are piped to us; our only significant predator now is the occasional micro organism that briefly mounts a pandemic. If we are to continue as a civilization that successfully avoids natural catastrophes, we have to make our own constraints on growth and make them strong and make them now.

Over half the Earth's people live in cities, and they hardly ever see, feel or hear the natural world. Therefore our first duty if we are green should be to convince them that the real world is the

living Earth and that they and their city lives are a part of it and wholly dependent on it for their existence. Our role is to teach and to set an example by our lives. In purely human affairs, Gandhi showed how to do it; his modern equivalents might come from the Deep Ecology movement, founded by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. I am moved by the ideas of deep ecology and touch on them again in the next chapter. In certain ways my long-time friend Edward Goldsmith is one of the few who have tried to live and think as a deep ecologist. His erudite and thought-provoking book *The Way* is essential reading for anyone who wants to know more about green philosophy; he founded *The Ecologist,* a magazine concerned with green thoughts and politics. It is now managed in much the same way by his nephew, Zac Goldsmith. The difference between us lies in our origins. I, not surprisingly, since my first experience in science was twenty-three years of medical research, think like a physician or even a surgeon. This is why I would like to see us use our technical skills to cure the ills of the Earth as well as those of humans. Teddy Goldsmith and the deep ecologists, from their humanist origins, scorn modern technology and would prefer alternative technology and medicine and would let Nature take its course. I acknowledge that they may be right and that iatrogenic illness, the disease that treatment causes, is all too common, but I cannot stand aside while civilization drinks itself to death on fossil fuels. And this is why I regard nuclear energy, however much it is feared, as a needed remedy.

The green community should have been reluctant to found lobbies and political parties; both are concerned with people and their problems, and, like megaphones, they amplify the demagogic voices of their leaders. Our task as individuals is to think of Gaia first. In no way does this make us inhuman or uncaring; our survival as a species is wholly dependent on Gaia and on our acceptance of her discipline.

I am often asked, 'What is our place in Gaia?' To answer we need to look back a long time ago in human history to when we were an animal, a primate, living within Gaia and different from other species only in unimportant ways. Our role then was like theirs, to recycle carbon and other elements. We lived on an omnivorous diet and returned to the air as carbon dioxide the carbon collected in their lifetimes by our food animals and plants. We had our niche in the evolutionary system, and our numbers were probably not more than a million.

As intelligent predators, we were equipped with useful brains and hands and could alter the boundaries of our niche in ways that were unavailable to other animals. We could throw stones, use simple stone and wood tools, and do it better than other primates.

Many animals, even insects like bees and ants, can communicate. They use alarms and mating calls and pass on detailed information about the size, direction and distance of food sources. We humans were fortunate to acquire through a mutation the ability to modulate our voices sufficiently for a primitive spoken language. This change was as profound for us as primitive people as the invention of the computer or mobile phone has been for modern humans. The members of the tribe could share experiences; they could plan ahead against drought and famine and guard against predators. We were by then the emerging Homo sapiens and may have been the first animals consciously to modify the environment for their own benefit. Most remarkably, we used natural fires started by lightning for cooking, clearing land and hunting.

The innocent among the urban intelligentsia think and talk of early humans as living in harmony with the natural world. Some of them go further and gather funds to preserve what they see as natural communities living in remote regions, such as the tropical forests. They see the modern world as clever but bad and these simple lifestyles as natural and good. They are wrong. We should not think of early humans as better or worse than we are; indeed, they were probably very little different.

Others consider us superior because of our cultured ways and intellectual tendencies; our technology lets us drive cars, use word processors and travel great distances by air. Some of us live in air-conditioned houses and we are entertained by the media. We think that we are more intelligent than stone-agers, yet how many modern humans could live successfully in caves, or would know how to light wood fires for cooking, or make clothes and shoes from animal skins or bows and

arrows good enough to keep their families fed? I am indebted to Jerry Glynn and Theodore Gray for making this point in their guidebook for users of the computer program *Mathematica*, a mathematics processor. Using as an example the fact that modern children can hardly add a column of numbers without a calculator, they observe that this is no bad thing, since each stage of human development brings with it a full measure of skills exchanged for others no longer needed; stone-agers were probably as fully occupied with living as we are.

One group of these early humans migrated to Australia at a time when the sea levels were much lower than now and the journey by boat or raft was probably neither long nor difficult. From this group are descended the modern Australian aboriginals, often claimed to be an example of natural humans at peace with the Earth. Yet their method of clearing forests by fire may have destroyed the natural forests of the Australian continent as surely as do modern men with chainsaws. Peace on you Aboriginals; you individually are no worse and no better than we are, it is just that we are power-assisted and more numerous.

Through Gaia I see science and technology as traits possessed by humans that have the potential for great good and great harm. Because we are part of, and not separate from Gaia, our intelligence is a new capacity and strength for her as well as a new danger. Evolution is iterative, mistakes are made, blunders committed; but in time that great eraser and corrector, natural selection, usually keeps a neat and tidy world. Perhaps our and Gaia's greatest error was the conscious abuse of fire. Cooking meat over a wood fire may have been acceptable, but the deliberate destruction of whole ecosystems by fire merely to drive out the animals within was surely our first great sin against the living Earth. It has haunted us ever since and combustion could now be our *auto de fé,* and the cause of our extinction.

Readings for Chapter 10

Ethics, Religion, and the Meaning of Life

Euthyphro

Plato

In 399 BC a meeting takes place before the court of the King Archon. Two litigants discuss their respective cases.

EUTHYPHRO: What's come over you, Socrates, that you've deserted your usual pastimes in the Lyceum, and are now lurking here by the King's Porch? It surely can't be that you too have a suit before the King as I have?

SOCRATES: No indeed, the Athenians don't call it 'suit', Euthyphro, but 'prosecution'.

EUTHYPHRO: What? Somebody's prosecuting you, I gather; I'll hardly accuse you of prosecuting somebody else.

SOCRATES: No indeed.

EUTHYPHRO: Somebody's doing it to you?

SOCRATES: Quite.

EUTHYPHRO: Who is he?

SOCRATES: I don't even know the man at all well myself, Euthyphro; he's obviously some young unknown; but they call him Meletus, I believe. He's from the deme of Pitthus—you might recall a Meletus from Pitthus with straight hair and not much of a beard, but a rather hooked nose.

EUTHYPHRO: I can't recall him, Socrates; but what's the prosecution he's brought against you?

SOCRATES: What is it? No trivial one, in my view. To have discovered, as a young man, a matter of such magnitude is no mean thing. For he knows, as he claims, how the young men are being corrupted and who it is that's corrupting them. The chances are that he's a clever sort of fellow, who has noticed how—in my ignorance—I'm corrupting his contemporaries, and goes to the city, as if to his mother, to tell on me. He seems to me to be the only one in politics to approach the subject correctly, because it's quite right to make young men and their future excellence your first concern—just as a good farmer is likely to concern himself first with the young plants, and only then with the others. And so Meletus too, perhaps, is first weeding out people like me who corrupt the young shoots of youth, as he puts it; then he'll evidently move on to looking after older persons and be responsible for countless great benefits to the city—the logical outcome for one who has made so promising a start.

EUTHYPHRO: I should like to think so, Socrates, but I'm very fearful of the opposite outcome. In my view he is beginning by striking at the very heart of the city in trying to harm you. So tell me, what is it he says you are doing to corrupt the youth?

SOCRATES: Heavens! Strange things, my man—if we take him literally at least. He claims I'm a manufacturer of gods, and he says this is why he's prosecuted me, that I create new gods and don't recognize the old ones.

Plato (1954) *Euthyphro*, in *The Last Days of Socrates* (translated with an introduction by Hugh Tredennick), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

EUTHYPHRO: I see, Socrates; it's because you claim that the divine sign keeps visiting you. He's launched this prosecution on the grounds that you improvise on the subject of the gods, and so he's off to the lawcourts to present you in a bad light, knowing that such things are easily misrepresented before the general public. They ridicule me too, whenever I say something in the Assembly about matters divine and predict the future for them, saying that I'm crazy! Yet in all my predictions I've spoken the truth; they just have a grudge against all of us who are inclined that way. One shouldn't be bothered about them—just meet them head on.

SOCRATES: You may be right, Euthyphro, that it's no matter to be ridiculed; you see, I don't think the Athenians are particularly concerned if they believe somebody to be clever, as long as he's not inclined to teach these skills of his. But if they think anybody makes others as well just as clever, they get angry with him, perhaps because of a grudge, as you say, perhaps for some other reason.

EUTHYPHRO: I've no appetite for testing how they feel about me in this matter.

SOCRATES: Perhaps it's because you appear to make yourself scarce, and refuse to teach your skills; but I fear that I, because of my generosity, appear to them to communicate whatever I've got indiscriminately to anybody—not just without a fee, for I'd even be glad to tip anybody willing to listen to me. So, as I said just now, if they were just going to ridicule me as you say they do you, it would be pleasant enough to pass the time in court jesting and laughing. Whereas now, if they are going to take things seriously, where it will all end is clear to no one but you soothsayers.

EUTHYPHRO: Oh well, perhaps it won't be such an ordeal, Socrates, and you'll contest your suit according to plan, as I think I'll contest mine.

SOCRATES: And what is your suit then, Euthyphro? Are you prosecuting or defending?

EUTHYPHRO: Prosecuting.

SOCRATES: Whom?

EUTHYPHRO: Once again, it's somebody I'm supposed to be crazy to be prosecuting.

SOCRATES: What? Are you after a wild goose in flight?

EUTHYPHRO: He's very far from flying—in fact he's really quite elderly.

SOCRATES: Who is this person?

EUTHYPHRO: My father.

SOCRATES: Your own father, Euthyphro?

EUTHYPHRO: Exactly.

SOCRATES: What's the charge? What's the suit for?

EUTHYPHRO: For homicide, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Heavens above! It's certainly beyond the masses to know the right course, Euthyphro. I mean, I really don't think it's an action to be taken by the man in the street, but only by somebody already far advanced along the path of wisdom.

EUTHYPHRO: Far advanced for sure, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then is the man who died at the hands of your father one of your household? I suppose it's obvious; you wouldn't have prosecuted him merely for the sake of an outsider—not for murder.

EUTHYPHRO: It's laughable, Socrates, that you think it makes some difference whether the dead man was an outsider or a relative, and not realize that it's this alone which one must watch, whether or not the killer killed with justification. If so, let him be; otherwise proceed against him—even if the killer shares your hearth and table. Your pollution is as great as his if you live with such a person in the knowledge of what he has done, and fail to purge both yourself and him by taking legal proceedings against him. As a matter of fact, the deceased was a hired hand of mine, and, when we were farming on Naxos, he was labouring there for us. Well, he got drunk, became angry with one of our servants, and slit his throat. So my father bound him hand and foot, threw him into a ditch, and sent a fellow here to find out from the Interpreter what he should do. But in the meantime he took no interest in the prisoner, and neglected him in the

belief that he was a murderer and that it was no concern of his if he died—which is exactly what happened. What with starvation, exposure and confinement, he died before the messenger got back from the Interpreter. So both my father and my other relatives are all the more annoyed at this, because I am prosecuting my father for homicide on a murderer's behalf. They claim that he didn't kill him, or, even if he'd killed him outright, I still shouldn't be concerned about that type of person, because they think it's unholy for a son to prosecute his father for homicide—badly mistaking the position of divine law on what's holy and what's unholy.

Euthyphro is induced by ironic flattery to reveal to Socrates what he believes holiness really is. He offers his own (and similar) conduct as an example of holiness, supporting his statement with references to popular myths. Socrates expresses bewilderment at this kind of religious story, and repeats that he requires a general standard against which he may assess the holiness or otherwise of any given action.

SOCRATES: My word, Euthyphro, does that mean that you think you understand religion so exactly, matters holy and unholy that is, that you have no misgivings about the circumstances you describe? Aren't you afraid in taking your father to court that you too might turn out to be doing an unholy deed?

EUTHYPHRO: No, I would be of no use, Socrates, nor would Euthyphro differ at all from the common herd of men, if I didn't understand the details of all things of this sort.

SOCRATES: Remarkable, Euthyphro! In that case it would be best for me to become your pupil; before I defend this prosecution against Meletus I could challenge him on this very point—I'd say that for my part I'd always, even in the past, considered it of great importance to know about religious matters, and that now, since he claims that I'm at fault in improvising and innovating on questions of religion, I have naturally become a pupil of *yours*—'And presuming, Meletus,' I could say, 'that you admit that Euthyphro is an authority in such matters, you must accept that my beliefs are true too, and not bring me to court; if you don't admit it, then bring a suit against that teacher of mine before you tackle me—for being the ruin of his elders, me by what he teaches me and his own father by the criticism and punishment that he metes out to him.' And if he doesn't do as I say, and either drop the suit or indict you instead of me, I'd better deliver this same challenge to him in the lawcourt.

EUTHYPHRO: Goodness yes, Socrates, if he should try a prosecution on me, I'd discover where his weak spot is, and he'd be on the defensive in court long before I was!

SOCRATES: I realize that as well as you do, dear friend; that's why I am anxious to become a pupil of yours. I know that Meletus here among others does not seem to notice you, whereas he observes me with such ease and such acuity that he's indicted me for impiety. So for heaven's sake tell me now what you were just then affirming you knew: what do you say piety and impiety are, be it in homicide or in other matters? Or isn't holiness the same in every sphere of activity, and unholiness too—the opposite of everything holy and the same as itself, so that everything to be called unholy has one standard which determines its unholiness?

EUTHYPHRO: Completely so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Tell me then, what do you say holiness is, and what is unholiness?

EUTHYPHRO: Well, I say that holiness is what I am doing now, prosecuting a criminal either for murder or for sacrilegious theft or for some other such thing, regardless of whether that person happens to be one's father or one's mother or anyone else at all, whereas not to prosecute is unholy. Take a look, Socrates, and I'll show you clear evidence of divine law—the law that one must not let off the perpetrator of impiety whoever he should happen to be. I've already used it to show others that this would be the right way to proceed. You see, people themselves do in fact acknowledge that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, and they admit that he imprisoned his own father because he had unjustly swallowed his sons; and the latter too had castrated *his* father for similar reasons. But in my case they are annoyed with me for prosecuting my father for his crime, and so they make contradictory assertions about the gods' conduct and about mine.

SOCRATES: Could this be why I'm defending a prosecution, Euthyphro, that whenever somebody talks like this about the gods, I find it very difficult to accept? That would be a natural reason for somebody to claim I'm in error. So now, if their view is shared even by you who understand such things, then evidently the rest of us are going to have to agree. What more could we say, when we admit for ourselves that we know nothing about them? But be a good fellow and tell me, do you really believe that these things happened like this?

EUTHYPHRO: These and still more wonderful things, Socrates, which ordinary people do not know.

SOCRATES: Then do you think that there is really civil war among the gods, and fearful hostility and battles, and so on—the kind of thing described by the poets and depicted by fine artists upon sacred artefacts, not least upon the Robe at the Great Panathenaea which is brought up to the Acropolis, covered in decorations of that kind? Are we to say that it's all true, Euthyphro?

EUTHYPHRO: Not merely that, Socrates, but (as I said just now) I'll tell you much more about divine beings, if you like; I know you'll be stunned by it.

SOCRATES: I shouldn't be surprised. But you shall tell me that another time when we have leisure. For the time being, try to answer more clearly what I asked you just now. You see, when I asked you before what holiness is, you didn't adequately explain it, but you said that what you are doing now, prosecuting your father for impiety, does happen to be holy.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, I was telling you the truth, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Possibly. But look, Euthyphro, you do say that there are many other things too which are holy?

EUTHYPHRO: And so there are.

SOCRATES: Do you remember, then, that this wasn't what I was asking you to give me—one or two examples from a multitude of holy things? I asked you for that special feature through which all holy things are holy. For you were in agreement, surely, that it was by virtue of a single standard that all unholy things are unholy and all holy things holy. Or don't you remember?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: So explain to me what this standard itself is, so that when I observe it and use it as a means of comparison, I may affirm that whatever actions are like it—yours or anybody else's—are holy, while those not of that kind are not.

EUTHYPHRO: Well, if that's what you want, Socrates, that's what I'll give you.

SOCRATES: Indeed, it is what I want.

Euthyphro offers a universal definition of holiness, satisfying Socrates in form but not in content. To define holiness in terms of what the gods regard with favour seems difficult for those who accept traditional tales of disputes among the gods, for the same action will please one god and annoy another. Euthyphro retreats to a position that 'the holy' is that which all the gods approve of, only to be confronted with the problem that, since what is 'divinely approved' is determined by what the gods approve, while what the gods approve is determined by what is holy, what is 'divinely approved' cannot be identical in meaning with what is holy. (Where A *determines* B, *and* B *determines* C, A ≠ C.) *This argument has been much analysed, and is a powerful weapon against those who believe morality can be explained purely in terms of God's will.*

EUTHYPHRO: Right then: what is agreeable to the gods is holy, and what is not agreeable is unholy.

SOCRATES: Simply splendid, Euthyphro, you've now answered in just the way I asked you to. Admittedly I don't yet know whether you're *correct* or not, but obviously you'll go on to demonstrate the truth of what you say.

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Come then, let's examine our thesis: for any action, or person, if it is 'divinely approved' it is holy, and if it's 'divinely disapproved' it is unholy; and they're not the same, but exact opposites, the holy and the unholy. Is that it?

EUTHYPHRO: That's quite right.

SOCRATES: And does it seem well stated?

EUTHYPHRO: I think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Haven't we also said that the gods have quarrels, Euthyphro, and disputes with one another, and that there is enmity among them, one with another?

EUTHYPHRO: We have.

SOCRATES: And what is the subject, please, of those disputes which cause enmity and anger? Let's look at it like this. If you and I were in dispute about which of two numbers is greater, would our dispute about this turn us into enemies, and make us angry with each other? Or should we quickly settle our differences by resorting to arithmetic?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly we should.

SOCRATES: And surely, if we were in dispute about the relative size of two things, we could quickly bring an end to our dispute by resorting to measurement?

EUTHYPHRO: That is so.

SOCRATES: And weighing, I imagine, would be the way for us to get a case of relative weight decided?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then over what might we dispute and fail to find some solution? What could we become enemies over and get angry about? Perhaps you have no ready answer, but I'll make a suggestion—consider whether it's over what's just and unjust, or fine and despicable, or good and bad. Aren't these the things over which we quarrel and can't come to an adequate means of resolution, leading us at times to make enemies of each other—you, me and everybody else?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, it's that sort of dispute, Socrates; those are the issues.

SOCRATES: What of the gods, Euthyphro? If they disagree at all, wouldn't they disagree for just these reasons?

EUTHYPHRO: Inevitably.

SOCRATES: Then among the gods too, my fine fellow, your account suggests that different parties think different things just—or fine or despicable or good or bad—because they would not, apparently, be quarrelling with one another unless they were in dispute about this. Right?

EUTHYPHRO: That's correct.

SOCRATES: Surely those things which each party regards as just and good it also approves of, and they disapprove of the opposite kind.

EUTHYPHRO: Quite.

SOCRATES: But then again, according to your claim, the same things are considered just by some, unjust by others—those matters of dispute about which they quarrel and make war on one another. Is that right?

EUTHYPHRO: Right.

SOCRATES: Then the same things, it's likely, are both disapproved of and approved of by the gods, and the same things would be 'divinely approved' and 'divinely disapproved'.

EUTHYPHRO: Likely enough.

SOCRATES: Then the same things would be both holy and unholy according to this account.

EUTHYPHRO: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: Then you've not answered my question, Euthyphro. I wasn't asking what turns out to be equally holy and unholy—whatever is divinely approved is also divinely disapproved, apparently. Consequently, my dear Euthyphro, it would be no surprise if, in trying to punish your father as you do now, you did something approved by Zeus and offensive to Kronos and Uranus, or approved by Hephaestus and offensive to Hera; and so on for any one of the gods who disagrees with any other on the subject.

EUTHYPHRO: Well it's my belief, Socrates, that not one of the gods disputes with another on *this*; that whoever kills someone unjustly should pay the penalty.

SOCRATES: What about men? Have you ever yet heard any human disputing the claim that a person who killed unjustly—or did anything else unjustly—should pay the penalty?

EUTHYPHRO: There's no way they ever stop disputing these things, particularly in the courts; though they've committed a host of crimes there's nothing they won't do or say in their efforts to escape the penalty.

SOCRATES: And do they also admit they've done wrong, Euthyphro, and in spite of their admission still claim that they should not pay the penalty?

EUTHYPHRO: There's no way they do that!

SOCRATES: Then they don't do or say *everything;* for I don't think they have the nerve to argue that they should not pay the penalty even supposing they've done wrong. I think they deny they've done wrong. Is it so?

EUTHYPHRO: That's true.

SOCRATES: So at least they're not disputing whether the wrongdoer must pay the penalty; but perhaps what they dispute is who the wrongdoer is, or what he did, or when.

EUTHYPHRO: True.

SOCRATES: Then don't the gods go through the same experience, if they really do quarrel about what's just and unjust as you say, and some of them say others are in the wrong, while those others deny it? But even so, my friend, surely no one, neither god nor man, has the nerve to say that the actual wrongdoer should not pay the penalty.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, what you're saying is true, Socrates, in principle at least.

SOCRATES: But in each case, Euthyphro, I think the disputants—both men and gods, if gods really dispute things—are disputing what has been done; they quarrel about some deed, and one party says it's been done justly, the other unjustly. Right?

EUTHYPHRO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Come now, Euthyphro, my friend, teach me too—make me wiser. What proof have you got that *all* gods regard as unjust the death of that man who, as a hired hand, was responsible for somebody's death; was bound by the master of the man who was killed; and died from the conditions of his imprisonment before his imprisoner heard what he should do from the Interpreter? What proof have you that it is correct for a son to bring a prosecution on behalf of *this* kind of person, and to denounce his own father for homicide? Come, try and show me some clear proof that this action, beyond a doubt, is thought by all gods to be correct. And if you show me to my satisfaction, I shall never stop acclaiming your wisdom.

EUTHYPHRO: Well, it's no small task probably, Socrates: though I *could* show you perfectly clearly.

SOCRATES: I understand: you think I'm a slower learner than the jurymen, because you'll obviously give *them* a demonstration that it was unjust and that all the gods disapprove of such things.

EUTHYPHRO: With absolute clarity, Socrates, as long as they listen to what I say.

SOCRATES: They'll listen, as long as they think you're making sense. But here's a question which I thought of while you were speaking. I ask myself: 'However well Euthyphro were to teach me that all the gods in unison think that such a killing is unjust, what more have I learnt from him about what the holy and the unholy are?' All right, so *this* action would apparently be 'divinely disapproved', but you see, it appeared just now that what was holy and what was not were *not* distinguished in this way—for what was 'divinely disapproved' also appeared to be 'divinely approved'. So I'll let you off this, Euthyphro: if you like, let all the gods think it unjust and let them all disapprove of it. But what about this correction that we are making to our account—to the effect that what *all* the gods disapprove of is unholy, what all approve of is holy, and what some approve of and others disapprove of is neither or both—is this how you would like our definition to run concerning the holy and the unholy?

EUTHYPHRO: What is there to prevent it, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Nothing to prevent me, Euthyphro, but you look at your own position, and ask yourself whether, on the basis of this assumption, you will most easily teach me what you promised.

EUTHYPHRO: Well, I should certainly say that what's holy is whatever all the gods approve of, and that its opposite, what all the gods disapprove of, is unholy.

SOCRATES: Are we to investigate further, Euthyphro, and see if it's well stated, or are we to let it be and to accept something from ourselves or from another, agreeing that it is so if somebody merely states that this is the position? Or should we examine what the speaker means?

EUTHYPHRO: Examine it. But I myself think that this has now been excellently stated.

SOCRATES: We'll soon be in a better position to judge, my good chap. Consider the following point: is the holy approved by the gods because it's holy, or is it holy because it's approved?

EUTHYPHRO: I don't know what you mean, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, I'll try to put it more clearly. We speak of a thing 'being carried' or 'carrying', 'being led' or 'leading', 'being seen' or 'seeing'—and you understand that all such pairs are different from each other, and how they are different.

EUTHYPHRO: I certainly *think* I understand.

SOCRATES: Is there not also something which is 'approved', while that which is 'approving' is different from it?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then tell me, is what's carried *being carried* because it *gets carried*, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO: No, for this reason.

SOCRATES: And what's being led is *being led* because it *gets led,* and what's being seen is *being seen* because it *gets seen*?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then it is *not* the case that because it's 'being seen' it 'gets seen', but the opposite—because it 'gets seen' it's 'being seen'; nor that because a thing's 'being led' it 'gets led', but because it 'gets led' it's 'being led'; nor that because a thing's 'being carried' it 'gets carried', but because it 'gets carried' it's 'being carried'. Isn't it obvious what I mean, Euthyphro? I mean that if something is coming to be so or is being affected, then it's not the case that it *gets to be so* because it's *coming to be so,* but that it's *coming to be so* because it *gets to be so*; nor that it *gets affected* because it's *being affected,* but that it's *being affected* because it *gets affected?* Or don't you go along with this?

EUTHYPHRO: I certainly do.

SOCRATES: Then isn't *being approved* an example either of coming to be so or of being affected by something?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then this too is comparable with the previous cases: something does not *get approved* because it's *being approved* by those who approve of it, but it's *being approved* because it *gets approved*?

EUTHYPHRO: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Well then, what is it that we're saying about the holy, Euthyphro? Surely that it gets approved by all the gods, on your account.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Is that because it's holy, or for some other reason?

EUTHYPHRO: No, that's the reason.

SOCRATES: Then it *gets approved* because it's holy: it's not holy by reason of *getting approved*?

EUTHYPHRO: Presumably.

SOCRATES: Whereas it's precisely because it *gets approved* that it is approved by the gods and 'divinely approved'.

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then the 'divinely approved' is not holy, Euthyphro, nor is the holy 'divinely approved', as you say, but it's different from this.

EUTHYPHRO: How so, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Because we've admitted that the holy *gets approved* for the reason that it's holy, but it's not because it *gets approved* that it's holy. Right?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: But then again the 'divinely approved', because it *gets approved* by the gods, is *divinely approved* by this very act of approval: it is *not* the case that it *gets approved* because it's *divinely approved*.

EUTHYPHRO: That is true.

SOCRATES: But if the 'divinely approved' and the holy were really the same thing, Euthyphro my friend, then: (i) if the holy were *getting approved* because of its being holy, then the 'divinely approved' too would be *getting approved* because of its being 'divinely approved'; whereas (ii) if the 'divinely approved' were 'divinely approved' on account of its *getting approved* by the gods, then the holy would be holy too on account of its *getting approved*. But as things are you can see that the two are oppositely placed, as being altogether different from each other; for the one is 'such as to get approved' because it *gets approved*, while the other *gets approved* precisely because it's 'such as to get approved'. And perhaps, Euthyphro, when asked what the holy is, you don't want to point out the essence for me, but to tell me of some attribute which attaches to it, saying that holiness has the attribute of being approved by all the gods; what it *is*, you've not yet said.

Interlude: wandering arguments.

So if you don't mind, don't keep me in the dark, but tell me again from the beginning what on earth the holy is, whether it gets approved by the gods or whatever happens to it (as it's not over this that we disagree). Don't hesitate: tell me what the holy and the unholy are.

EUTHYPHRO: But Socrates, I have no way of telling you what I mean; whatever explanation we set down, it always seems to go round in circles somehow, and not to be willing to stay where we positioned it.

SOCRATES: It's as if your explanations, Euthyphro, were the work of my predecessor Daedalus. And if it had been me who was putting forward these ideas and suggestions, you might perhaps be having a joke at my expense—you'd say that I too had inherited from him the tendency for my verbal creations to run off and refuse to stay wherever I'd tried to position them. But as things are, the fundamentals of the explanation are yours—that means a different joke is needed, for it's you they won't stay put for, as you yourself appreciate.

EUTHYPHRO: What I appreciate is that what we've been saying demands more or less the same jibe—because its property of going round in circles and never staying put was not conferred on it by me. Rather it is you who are the Daedalus; if it were up to me it would stay as it is.

SOCRATES: Perhaps, Euthyphro, I've turned out cleverer than him in my craft, in so far as he only made his own products mobile, while I apparently make other people's mobile as well as my own. And surely this is the most ingenious feature of my art, that I don't want to be so clever. I should prefer our explanations to stay put and be securely founded rather than have the wealth of Tantalus to complement my Daedalan cleverness.

Socrates helps Euthyphro along by suggesting in effect that holiness is a species of justice. Euthyphro agrees, but is then required to say which species of justice.

But enough of this! Seeing that you seem to me to be taking things easy, I'll try to help you find a way of explaining holiness to me. And don't you withdraw exhausted before the finish! See whether it doesn't seem necessary to you that everything holy is just.

EUTHYPHRO: It seems so to me.

SOCRATES: Then is all that is just holy? Or is it the case that all that's holy is just, whereas not all that's just is holy—part of it's holy and part of it's different?

EUTHYPHRO: I don't follow your question, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But surely you're younger than me no less than you're wiser! As I say, you're taking it easy, basking in the wealth of your wisdom. Make a bit of an effort, Euthyphro; it's actually not hard to grasp what I mean. I am really claiming the opposite of what was said by the poet who composed the lines:

> But to speak of Zeus, the agent who nurtured all this,
> You don't dare; for where is found fear, there is also found shame.

I disagree with this poet. Shall I tell you how?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: I don't think it's true that 'where is found fear, there is also found shame', as it seems to me that many people, in fear of disease and poverty and other such things, *are* fearful but *aren't* at all shameful of these things which they fear. Don't you think so?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: But where there is shame, at least, there is also fear; for does anybody, feeling shameful at, or ashamed of, some deed, fail to take fright and feel apprehensive of an unsavoury reputation?

EUTHYPHRO: He's apprehensive, certainly.

SOCRATES: Then it's not right to say 'where is found fear, there is also found shame', but where is found shame, fear also is found, though shame is not found everywhere where fear is. For I imagine fear has a wider distribution than shame, because shame is a division of fear like odd is of number, so that it's not true that where there is number, there is also found odd, but where there is odd there is also found number. You follow me now, surely?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then this was also the kind of thing I meant in the case of my earlier question. Is it 'where is a just thing, there is also a holy one', or 'where is a holy thing, there is also a just one, but not a holy one everywhere there's a just one', the holy being a division of the just? Shall we put it that way, or do you take a different view?

EUTHYPHRO: No, that's it; your explanation seems correct to me.

SOCRATES: See what comes next, then. If what's holy is a division of the just, it seems that we must then discover the precise kind of division of the just that is holy. If you had asked me a question about what came up just now, for instance what kind of division of number even is—what this type of number actually is—I should have said that it's number that can be represented as two equal limbs rather than as unequal ones. Don't you think so?

EUTHYPHRO: I do indeed.

SOCRATES: Now it's your turn—try to give me the same type of explanation of the kind of division of justice what's holy is; then I can tell Meletus too that he should no longer be unjust to me and prosecute me for impiety, because I've already learnt well enough from you what is pious and holy and what is not.

Euthyphro says that holiness is that part of justice which looks after the gods. Socrates worries that this might imply that the gods are improved by holiness. Euthyphro explains 'looking after' in terms of serving them. Socrates worries about the purpose to which such a service contributes.

EUTHYPHRO: Well, I believe that *this* is the part of the just which is pious and holy, the one concerned with looking after the gods, whereas that concerned with looking after men is the remaining part of the just.

SOCRATES: Yes, I think that's a good answer, Euthyphro; but I still need one little thing to be cleared up—I don't understand what it is you mean by 'looking after'. You wouldn't be

meaning that we also look after the gods in the same way as we look after other things. We do speak that way, I suppose; for instance, we say that not everybody knows how to look after horses, only the groom, right?

EUTHYPHRO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Because the groom's art is looking after horses.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes,

SOCRATES: Nor indeed does everybody know how to look after dogs; only the kennel-master,

EUTHYPHRO: That's so.

SOCRATES: Because the kennel-master's art is looking after dogs.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Whereas the cattle-farmer's is looking after cattle?

EUTHYPHRO: Quite.

SOCRATES: But holiness and piety is looking after the gods, Euthyphro? Is that what you claim?

EUTHYPHRO: I certainly do.

SOCRATES: Surely any case of 'looking after' has the same effect. I'll put it like this: it's for the improvement and benefit of the thing looked after, just as you can see that horses are benefited and improved by grooming. Or don't you think so?

EUTHYPHRO: I do indeed.

SOCRATES: And dogs presumably are benefited by the kennel-master's art, cows by the cattle-farmer's, and so on in all other cases. Or do you think that things are looked after to their detriment?

EUTHYPHRO: No indeed, I don't.

SOCRATES: For their advantage then?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Well then, is holiness too, *qua* 'looking after' the gods, of benefit to the gods? Does it make them better? And would *you* agree to this, that whenever you do something holy you're improving one of the gods?

EUTHYPHRO: No indeed, I wouldn't.

SOCRATES: No, nor do I think you mean that, Euthyphro, far from it; it was for this very reason that I asked you what you meant by 'looking after' the gods—because I didn't believe you meant anything like that.

EUTHYPHRO: And you were quite right, Socrates; I don't mean anything like that.

SOCRATES: Let's get to the point: what kind of 'looking after' the gods could holiness be?

EUTHYPHRO: It's like slaves looking after their masters, Socrates.

SOCRATES: I get it—it would be a kind of service to the gods, perhaps?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Could you then tell me, what goal does 'service to doctors' help to achieve? Don't you think it's health?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: What about service to shipbuilders? What goal's achievement does it serve?

EUTHYPHRO: Obviously a boat's, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And service to builders, one supposes, helps to achieve a house?

EUTHYPHRO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Tell me then, please, to what goal's achievement would service to the gods be contributing? It's obvious that you know, seeing that you claim that no one knows more than you about religion.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes, and I'm telling the truth, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Tell me then, in heaven's name, what ever is that marvellous work which the gods accomplish using us as their servants?

EUTHYPHRO: A multitude of good things, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And so do generals, my friend, but all the same you could easily state their principal aim by saying that they achieve victory in war. No?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course they do.

SOCRATES: Then again, farmers also achieve a multitude of good things. But still their principal achievement is food from the earth.

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: What about the multitude of fine things that the gods achieve? What's the principal aim of their endeavour?

Euthyphro becomes impatient, and explains holiness as knowing how to pray and sacrifice in a way that will please the gods. Socrates reduces this to a knowledge of how to trade *with the gods, and continues to press for an explanation of how the gods will benefit.*

EUTHYPHRO: Only a while ago I told you, Socrates, that it was too great a task to learn with accuracy what all these things are. However, let me tell you this without further ado: if one knows how to say and do things gratifying to the gods in prayer and in sacrifice, this is what's holy, and such conduct is the salvation not only of private households but also of the public well-being of cities. And the opposite of what is gratifying is impious, and turns everything upside down, and wrecks it.

SOCRATES: You could have told me the principal thing I asked for in far fewer words, Euthyphro. The trouble is, you're not really trying to teach me—it's obvious. Even now you turned aside when you were on the point of giving the answer, by which I could have learnt well enough from you what holiness is. So now, because a lover can't help following where his beloved's whim leads, what is it again that you are calling 'holy' and 'holiness'? A kind of science of sacrifice and prayer, isn't it?

EUTHYPHRO: That's my view.

SOCRATES: Surely sacrifice is making a donation to the gods, while prayer is requesting something from them.

EUTHYPHRO: Yes indeed, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then holiness, on this account, would be the science of requests and donations to the gods.

EUTHYPHRO: You've understood well what I meant, Socrates.

SOCRATES: That's because I'm a zealot, Euthyphro, zealous for your wisdom, and I'm keeping a close eye upon it, so that what you say does not fall unfettered to the ground. So tell me, what is this service to the gods? You claim that it's asking from them and giving to them?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: Then wouldn't the correct kind of asking be to ask them for those things that we need?

EUTHYPHRO: Of course.

SOCRATES: And again, the correct kind of giving would be to bestow upon them in return what they happen to need from us? It wouldn't be a case of skilled giving, I assume, to give somebody things of which that person has no need.

EUTHYPHRO: Quite true, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then holiness would be a kind of skill in trading between gods and men.

EUTHYPHRO: A trading-skill, if it makes you happier to put it like that.

SOCRATES: Well, I'm no happier unless it turns out to be true. Show me what benefit for the gods eventuates from the donations which they receive from us. It's clear to anybody what they contribute, because nothing is good for us except what comes from them; but how are they benefited by what they receive from us? Or do we come off so much better than them in this trade, that we get all good things from them, while they get none from us?

Euthyphro affirms that the gods receive no benefit from our service, only gratification. Socrates recognizes that explaining holiness in terms of the gratification of the gods is similar to explaining

it in terms of their approval. The argument has now gone round in a circle. Socrates demands a fresh start, but Euthyphro has had enough,

EUTHYPHRO: Do you really suppose, Socrates, that the gods are benefited as a result of what they get from us?

SOCRATES: Well, whatever could these gifts of ours to the gods be, Euthyphro?

EUTHYPHRO: What else, do you think, but honour and tokens of esteem, and, as I said just now, *gratification.*

SOCRATES: So it is something the gods have found gratifying, Euthyphro—the holy—but not what's beneficial or approved by the gods.

EUTHYPHRO: In my view it's the most approved of all things.

SOCRATES: Then the holy is again, it seems, what's approved by the gods.

EUTHYPHRO: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Then will you wonder, when you say this, that your stated views are shown to be shifting rather than staying put, and will you accuse me of being the Daedalus who makes them shift, when you yourself are far more skilled than Daedalus and are making them go round in circles? Or don't you see that our account has been going round and has arrived back at the same place? Surely you remember that earlier in the discussion the holy and the 'divinely approved' did not appear the same to us; they were different from one another. Or don't you remember?

EUTHYPHRO: I do.

SOCRATES: Well, don't you realize that you're now saying that the holy is what's approved by the gods? Surely that's what's 'divinely approved', isn't it?

EUTHYPHRO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well, either our conclusion then was wrong, or, if it was right, our present position is not correct.

EUTHYPHRO: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Then we must inquire again from the beginning about what the holy is, as I'll not be willing to play the coward before I learn. Don't make light of me, but apply your mind in every way and do your best to tell me the truth. For if any man knows, you do, and, like Proteus, you're not to be let go until you speak. For if you didn't know clearly what holiness and unholiness are there's no way that you would have taken it upon yourself to prosecute your father, an elderly man, for a labourer's murder; but you would have both been worried about the gods and ashamed before men if you took such a risk, in case you should be wrong in doing it. As it is, I know well enough that you think you have true knowledge of what's holy and what's not. Tell me then, most worthy Euthyphro, and don't conceal what you think it is.

EUTHYPHRO: Another time, Socrates; right now I have an urgent engagement somewhere, and it's time for me to go.

SOCRATES: Look what you're doing, my friend! You're going off and dashing me from that great hope which I entertained; that I could learn from you what was holy and what not and quickly have done with Meletus's prosecution by demonstrating to him that I have now become wise in religion thanks to Euthyphro, and no longer improvise and innovate in ignorance of it—and moreover that I could live a better life for the rest of my days.

Critique of Practical Reason (excerpt)

Immanuel Kant

Book II

DIALECTIC OF PURE PRACTICAL REASON

Chapter II

ON THE DIALECTIC OF PURE REASON IN DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF THE HIGHEST GOOD

IV. The Immortality of the Soul as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason

The achievement of the highest good in the world is the necessary object of a will determinable by moral law. In such a will, however, the complete fitness of dispositions to the moral law is the supreme condition of the highest good. This fitness, therefore, must be just as possible as its object, because it is contained in the command that requires us to promote the latter. But the perfect fit of the will to moral law is holiness, which is a perfection of which no rational being in the world of sense is at any time capable. But since it is required as practically necessary, it can be found only in an endless progress to that perfect fitness; on principles of pure practical reason, it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will.

This infinite progress is possible, however, only under the presupposition of an infinitely enduring existence and personality of the same rational being; this is called the immortality of the soul. Thus the highest good is practically possible only on the supposition of the immortality of the soul, and the latter, as inseparably bound to the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason. By a postulate of pure practical reason, I understand a theoretical proposition which is not as such demonstrable, but which is an inseparable corollary of an a priori unconditionally valid practical law.

The thesis of the moral destiny of our nature, that it is only in an infinite progress that it can attain perfect fitness to moral law, is of the greatest use, not merely for the present purpose of supplementing the impotence of speculative reason, but also with respect to religion. Without it, either the moral law is completely degraded from its holiness, by being made out as lenient (indulgent) and thus compliant to our convenience, or its call and its demands are strained to an unattainable destination, i.e., a hoped-for complete attainment of holiness of will, and are lost in fanatical theosophical dreams which completely contradict our knowledge of ourselves. In either case, we are hindered in the unceasing striving toward exact and steadfast obedience to a command of reason which is stern, unindulgent, truly commanding, really and not just ideally possible.

Kant, I. (1781, 1989) *Critique of Practical Reason* (translated, with an introduction, by Lewis White Beck), New York, Prentice Hall, 3–63. Reprinted with permission.

Only endless progress from lower to higher stages of moral perfection is possible to a rational but finite being. The Infinite Being, to whom the temporal condition is nothing, sees in this series, which is for us without end, a whole comformable to moral law; holiness, which His law inexorably commands in order to be true to His justice in the share He assigns to each in the highest good, is to be found in a single intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings. All that can be granted to a creature with respect to hope for this share is consciousness of his tried character. And on the basis of his previous progress from the worse to the morally better, and of the immutability of disposition which thus becomes known to him, he may hope for a further uninterrupted continuance of this progress, however long his existence may last, even beyond this life.[1] But he cannot hope here or at any foreseeable point of his future existence to be fully adequate to God's will, without indulgence or remission which would not harmonize with justice. This he can do only in the infinity of his duration which God alone can survey.

V. The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason

The moral law led, in the foregoing analysis, to a practical task which is assigned solely by pure reason and without any concurrence of sensuous drives. It is the task of perfecting the first and principal part of the highest good, viz., morality; since this task can be executed only in eternity, it led to the postulate of immortality. The same law must also lead us to affirm the possibility of the second element of the highest good, i.e., happiness proportional to that morality; it must do so just as disinterestedly as heretofore, by a purely impartial reason. This it can do on the supposition of the existence of a cause adequate to this effect. It must postulate the existence of God as necessarily belonging to the possibility of the highest good (the object of our will which is necessarily connected with the moral legislation of pure reason). We proceed to exhibit this connection in a convincing manner.

Happiness is the condition of a rational being in the world, in whose whole existence everything goes according to wish and will. It thus rests on the harmony of nature with his whole end and with the essential determining ground of his will. But the moral law as a law of freedom commands through motives wholly independent of nature and of its harmony with our faculty of desire (as drives). Still, the acting rational being in the world is not at the same time the cause of the world and of nature itself. Hence there is not the slightest ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and proportionate happiness of a being who belongs to the world as one of its parts and is thus dependent on it. Not being nature's cause, his will cannot by its own strength bring nature, as it touches on his happiness, into perfect harmony with his practical principles. Nevertheless, in the practical task of pure reason, i.e., in the necessary endeavor after the highest good, such a connection is postulated as necessary: we *ought to* seek to further the highest good (which therefore must be at least possible). Therefore also the existence is postulated of a cause of the whole of nature, itself distinct from nature, which contains the ground of the exact coincidence of happiness with morality. This supreme cause, however, must contain the ground of the agreement of nature not merely with a law of the will of rational beings but with the representation of this law so far as they make it the supreme motive of the will. Thus it contains the ground of the agreement of nature not merely with actions moral in their form but also with their morality as the motives to such actions, i.e., with their moral disposition. Therefore, the highest good is possible in the world only on the supposition of a supreme cause of nature which has a causality corresponding to the moral disposition. Now a being capable of actions by the representation of laws is an intelligence (a rational being), and the causality of such a being according to this representation of laws is his will. Therefore, the supreme cause of nature, in so far as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being which is the cause (and consequently the author) of nature through understanding and will, i.e., God. As a consequence, the postulate of the possibility of a highest derivative good (the best world) is at the same time the postulate of the reality of a highest original good, namely, the postulate of the existence of God. Now it was our duty to promote the highest good; and it is

not merely our privilege but a necessity connected with duty as a requisite to presuppose the possibility of this highest good. This presupposition is made only under the condition of the existence of God, and this condition inseparably connects this supposition with duty. Therefore, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.

It is well to notice here that this moral necessity is subjective, i.e., a need, and not objective, i.e., duty itself. For there cannot be any duty to assume the existence of a thing, because such a supposition concerns only the theoretical use of reason. It is also not to be understood that the assumption of the existence of God is necessary as a ground of all obligation in general (for this rests, as has been fully shown, solely on the autonomy of reason itself). All that here belongs to duty is the endeavor to produce and to further the highest good in the world, the possibility of which may thus be postulated though our reason cannot conceive it except by presupposing a Highest Intelligence. To assume its existence is thus connected with the consciousness of our duty, though this assumption itself belongs to the realm of theoretical reason. Considered only in reference to the latter, it is an hypothesis, i.e., a ground of explanation. But in reference to the comprehensibility of an object (the highest good) placed before us by the moral law, and thus as a practical need, it can be called *faith* and even pure *rational faith,* because pure reason alone (by its theoretical as well as practical employment) is the source from which it springs.

From this deduction it now becomes clear why the Greek schools could never succeed in solving their problem of the practical possibility of the highest good. It was because they made the rule of the use which the human will makes of its freedom the sole and self-sufficient ground of its possibility, thinking that they had no need of the existence of God for this purpose. They were certainly correct in establishing the principle of morals by itself, independently of this postulate and merely from the relation of reason to the will, thus making the principle of morality the *supreme* practical condition of the highest good; but this principle was not the *entire* condition of its possibility. The Epicureans had indeed raised a wholly false principle of morality, i.e., that of happiness, into the supreme one, and for law had substituted a maxim of free choice of each according to his inclination. But they proceeded consistently enough, in that they degraded their highest good in proportion to the baseness of their principle and expected no greater happiness than that which could be attained through human prudence (wherein both temperance and the moderation of inclinations belong), though everyone knows prudence to be scarce enough and to produce diverse results according to circumstances, not to mention the exceptions which their maxims continually had to admit and which made them worthless as laws. The Stoics, on the other hand, had chosen their supreme practical principle, virtue, quite correctly as the condition of the highest good. But as they imagined the degree of virtue which is required for its pure law as completely attainable in this life, they not only exaggerated the moral capacity of man, under the name of "sage," beyond all the limits of his nature, making it into something which is contradicted by all our knowledge of men; they also refused to accept the second component of the highest good, i.e., happiness, as a special object of human desire. Rather, they made their sage, like a god in the consciousness of the excellence of his person, wholly independent of nature (as regards his own contentment), exposing him to the evils of life but not subjecting him to them. (They also represented him as free from everything morally evil.) Thus they really left out of the highest good the second element (personal happiness), since they placed the highest good only in acting and in contentment with one's own personal worth, including it in the consciousness of moral character. But the voice of their own nature could have sufficiently refuted this.

The doctrine of Christianity[2] even when not regarded as a religious doctrine, gives at this point a concept of the highest good (the Kingdom of God) which is alone sufficient to the strictest demand of practical reason. The moral law is holy (unyielding) and demands holiness of morals, although all moral perfection to which man can attain is only virtue, i.e., a law-abiding disposition resulting from respect for the law and thus implying consciousness of a continuous propensity to transgress it or at least to a defilement, i.e., to an admixture of many spurious (not moral) motives to obedience to the law; consequently, man can achieve only self-esteem combined with humility. And

thus with respect to the holiness required by the Christian law, nothing remains to the creature but endless progress, though for the same reason hope for endless duration is justified. The worth of a character completely accordant with the moral law is infinite, because all possible happiness in the judgment of a wise and omnipotent dispenser of happiness has no other limitation than the lack of fitness of rational beings to their duty. But the moral law does not of itself promise happiness, for happiness is not, according to concepts of any order of nature, necessarily connected with obedience to the law. Christian ethics supplies this defect of the second indispensable component of the highest good by presenting a world wherein reasonable beings single-mindedly devote themselves to the moral law; this is the Kingdom of God, in which nature and morality come into a harmony, which is foreign to each as such, through a holy Author of the world, who makes possible the derived highest good. The holiness of morals is prescribed to them even in this life as a guide to conduct, but well-being proportionate to this, which is bliss, is thought of as attainable only in eternity. This is due to the fact that the former must always be the archetype of their conduct in every state, and progressing toward it is even in this life possible and necessary, whereas the latter, under the name of happiness, cannot (as far as our own capacity is concerned) be reached in this life and therefore is made only an object of hope. Nevertheless, the Christian principle of morality is not theological and thus heteronomous, being rather the autonomy of pure practical reason itself, because it does not make the knowledge of God and His will the basis of these laws but makes such knowledge the basis only of succeeding to the highest good on condition of obedience to these laws; it places the real incentive for obedience to the law not in the desired consequences of obedience but in the conception of duty alone, in true observance of which the worthiness to attain the latter alone consists.

In this manner, through the concept of the highest good as the object and final end of pure practical reason, the moral law leads to religion. Religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions, i.e., arbitrary and contingent ordinances of a foreign will, but as essential laws of any free will as such. Even as such, they must be regarded as commands of the Supreme Being because we can hope for the highest good (to strive for which is our duty under the moral law) only from a morally perfect (holy and beneficent) and omnipotent will; and, therefore, we can hope to attain it only through harmony with this will. But here again everything remains disinterested and based only on duty, without being based on fear or hope as drives, which, if they became principles, would destroy the entire moral worth of the actions. The moral law commands us to make the highest possible good in a world the final object of all our conduct. This I cannot hope to effect except through the agreement of my will with that of a holy and beneficent Author of the world. And although my own happiness is included in the concept of the highest good as a whole wherein the greatest happiness is thought of as connected in exact proportion to the greatest degree of moral perfection possible to creatures, still it is not happiness but the moral law (which, in fact, sternly places restricting conditions upon my boundless longing for happiness) which is proved to be the ground determining the will to further the highest good.

Therefore, morals is not really the doctrine of how to make ourselves happy but of how we are to be *worthy* of happiness. Only if religion is added to it can the hope arise of someday participating in happiness in proportion as we endeavored not to be unworthy of it.

One is worthy of possessing a thing or a state when his possession is harmonious with the highest good. We can easily see now that all worthiness is a matter of moral conduct, because this constitutes the condition of everything else (which belongs to one's state) in the concept of the highest good, i.e., participation in happiness. From this it follows that one must never consider morals itself as a doctrine of happiness, i.e., as an instruction in how to acquire happiness. For morals has to do only with the rational condition (*conditio sine qua non)* of happiness and not with means of achieving it. But when morals (which imposes only duties instead of providing rules for selfish wishes) is completely expounded, and a moral wish has been awakened to promote the highest good (to bring the Kingdom of God to us), which is a wish based on law and one to which no selfish mind could have aspired, and when for the sake of this wish the step to religion has been

taken—then only can ethics be called a doctrine of happiness, because the *hope* for it first arises with religion.

From this it can also be seen that, if we inquire into God's final end in creating the world, we must name not the happiness of rational beings in the world but the highest good, which adds a further condition to the wish of rational beings to be happy, viz., the condition of being worthy of happiness, which is the morality of these beings, for this alone contains the standard by which they can hope to participate in happiness at the hand of a wise creator. For since wisdom, theoretically regarded, means the knowledge of the highest good and, practically, the conformability of the will to the highest good, one cannot ascribe to a supreme independent wisdom an end based merely on benevolence. For we cannot conceive the action of this benevolence (with respect to the happiness of rational beings) except as conformable to the restrictive conditions of harmony with the holiness[3] of His will as the highest original good. Then perhaps those who have placed the end of creation in the glory of God, provided this is not thought of anthropomorphically as an inclination to be esteemed, have found the best term. For nothing glorifies God more than what is the most estimable thing in the world, namely, reverence for His command, the observance of sacred duty which His law imposes on us, when there is added to this His glorious plan of crowning such an excellent order with corresponding happiness. If the latter, to speak in human terms, makes Him worthy of love, by the former He is an object of adoration. Human beings can win love by doing good, but by this alone even they never win respect; the greatest well-doing does them honor only by being exercised according to [their] worthiness.

It follows of itself that, in the order of ends, man (and every rational being) is an end in himself, i.e., he is never to be used merely as a means for someone (even for God) without at the same time being himself an end, and that humanity in our person must itself be holy to us, because man is subject to the moral law and therefore subject to that which is of itself holy, and it is only on account of this and in agreement with this that anything can be called holy. For this moral law is founded on the autonomy of his will as a free will, which by its universal laws must necessarily be able to agree with that to which he ought to subject himself.

Notes

1 The conviction of the immutability of character in progress toward the good may appear to be impossible for a creature. For this reason, Christian doctrine lets it derive from the same Spirit which works sanctification, i.e., this firm disposition and therewith the consciousness of steadfastness in moral progress. But naturally one who is conscious of having persisted, from legitimate moral motives, to the end of a long life in a progress to the better may very well have the comforting hope, though not the certainty, that he will be steadfast in these principles in an existence continuing beyond this life. Though he can never be justified in his own eyes either here or in the hoped-for increase of natural perfection together with an increase of his duties, nevertheless in this progress toward a goal infinitely remote (a progress which in God's sight is regarded as equivalent to possession) he can have prospect of a blessed future. For "blessed" is the word which reason uses to designate perfect well-being independent of all contingent causes in the world. Like holiness, it is an Idea which can be contained only in an infinite progress and its totality and thus is never fully reached by any creature.

2 The view is commonly held that the Christian precept of morals has no advantage over the moral concept of the Stoics in respect to its purity; but the difference between them is nevertheless obvious. The Stoic system makes the consciousness of strength of mind the pivot around which all moral dispositions should turn; and, if the followers of this system spoke of duties and even defined them accurately, they nevertheless placed the drives and the real motive of the will in an elevation of character above the base drives of the senses which have their power only through weakness of the mind. Virtue was, therefore, for them a certain heroism of the sage who, raising himself above the animal nature of man, was sufficient to himself, subject to no temptation to transgress the moral law, and elevated above duties though he propounded duties to others. But all this they could not have done had they conceived this law in the same purity and rigor as does the precept of the Gospel. If I understand by Idea a perfection to which the senses can give nothing adequate, moral Ideas are not transcendent, i.e., of such a kind that we cannot even sufficiently define the

concept or of which we are uncertain whether there is a corresponding object (as are the Ideas of speculative reason); rather, they serve as models of practical perfection, as an indispensable rule of moral conduct, and as standard for comparison. If I now regard Christian morals from their philosophical side, it appears in comparison with the ideas of the Greek schools as follows: the ideas of the Cynics, Epicureans, Stoics, and Christians are, respectively, the simplicity of nature, prudence, wisdom, and holiness. In respect to the way they achieve them, the Greek schools differ in that the Cynics found common sense sufficient, while the others found it in the path of science, and thus all held it to lie in the use of man's natural powers. Christian ethics, because it formulated its precept as pure and uncompromising (as befits a moral precept), destroyed man's confidence of being wholly adequate to it, at least in this life; but it re-established it by enabling us to hope that, if we act as well as lies in our power, what is not in our power will come to our aid from another source, whether we know in what way or not. Aristotle and Plato differed only as to the origin of our moral concepts.

3 Incidentally, and in order to make the peculiarity of this concept clear, I make the following remark. Although we ascribe various attributes to God, whose quality we find suitable also to creatures (e.g., power, knowledge, presence, goodness, etc.), which in God are present in a higher degree under such names as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and perfect goodness, etc., there are three which exclusively and without qualification of magnitude are ascribed to God, and they are all moral. He is the only holy, the only blessed, and the only wise being, because these concepts of themselves imply unlimitedness. By the arrangement of these He is thus the holy lawgiver (and creator), the beneficent ruler (and sustainer), and the just judge. These three attributes contain everything whereby God is the object of religion, and in conformity to them the metaphysical perfections of themselves arise in reason.

The Myth of Sisyphus (excerpt)

Albert Camus

The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.

If one believes Homer, Sisyphus was the wisest and most prudent of mortals. According to another tradition, however, he was disposed to practice the profession of highwayman. I see no contradiction in this. Opinions differ as to the reasons why he became the futile laborer of the underworld. To begin with, he is accused of a certain levity in regard to the gods. He stole their secrets. Ægina, the daughter of Æsopus, was carried off by Jupiter. The father was shocked by that disappearance and complained to Sisyphus. He, who knew of the abduction, offered to tell about it on condition that Æsopus would give water to the citadel of Corinth. To the celestial thunderbolts he preferred the benediction of water. He was punished for this in the underworld. Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put Death in chains. Pluto could not endure the sight of his deserted, silent empire. He dispatched the god of war, who liberated Death from the hands of her conqueror.

It is said also that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him.

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He *is,* as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. Nothing is told us about Sisyphus in the underworld. Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them. As for this myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.

Camus, A. (1942, 1991) *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* (translated by Justin O'Brien) New York, Vintage, 119–123, 47–60. Reprinted with permission.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

* * *

If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy. This word is not too much. Again I fancy Sisyphus returning toward his rock, and the sorrow was in the beginning. When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man's heart: this is the rock's victory, this is the rock itself. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane. But crushing truths perish from being acknowledged. Thus, Œdipus at the outset obeys fate without knowing it. But from the moment he knows, his tragedy begins. Yet at the same moment, blind and desperate, he realizes that the only bond linking him to the world is the cool hand of a girl. Then a tremendous remark rings out: "Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well," Sophocles' Œdipus, like Dostoevsky's Kirilov, thus gives the recipe for the absurd victory. Ancient wisdom confirms modern heroism.

One does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual of happiness. "What! by such narrow ways—?" There is but one world, however. Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable. It would be a mistake to say that happiness necessarily springs from the absurd discovery. It happens as well that the feeling of the absurd springs from happiness. "I conclude that all is well," says Œdipus, and that remark is sacred. It echoes in the wild and limited universe of man. It teaches that all is not, has not been, exhausted. It drives out of this world a god who had come into it with dissatisfaction and a preference for futile sufferings. It makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men.

All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to its silence, the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up. Unconscious, secret calls, invitations from all the faces, they are the necessary reverse and price of victory. There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all

is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

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