Fundamentals of
PHILOSOPHY

EIGHTH EDITION

DAVID STEWART

H. GENE BLOCKER

JAMES PETRIK

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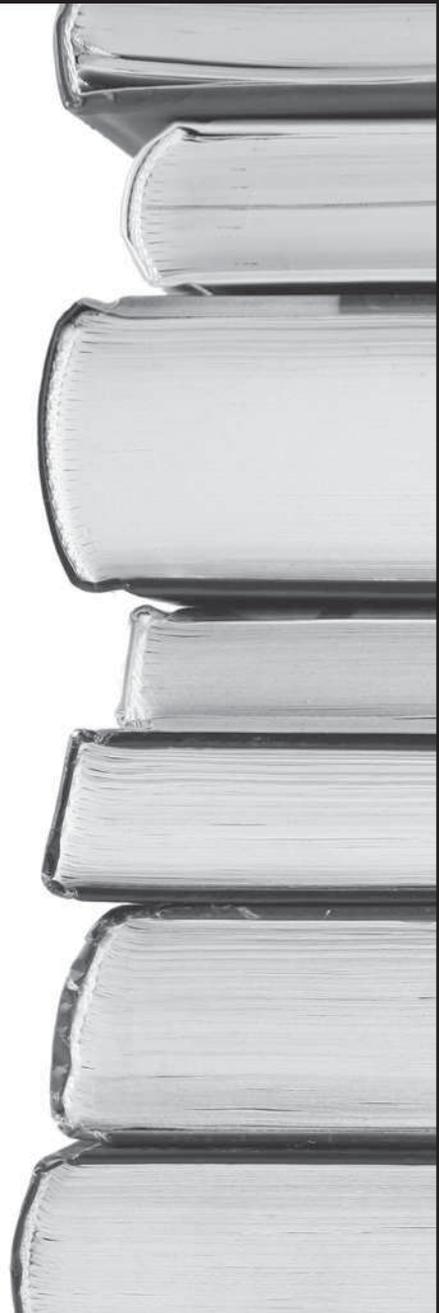
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FUNDAMENTALS OF PHILOSOPHY

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PREFACE

From our years of experience in teaching introductory philosophy, we have concluded that such a course should do two things: (1) introduce students to the major themes and thinkers in the philosophic tradition and (2) show how the issues students encounter in the great thinkers sections apply to concerns they encounter in their life experiences. A beginning philosophy course can attempt to do too much and as a consequence, accomplish too little. However, we think that an introductory philosophy course should contribute to students' general education by helping them develop a conceptual framework and vocabulary for discussing important intellectual and social issues.

Philosophy has something to say when people become upset over a controversial art exhibit or groups complain about art works that critics say degrade a religious or ethnic group. It also has something to say when people are misled by specious arguments and faulty reasoning. It can assist us in understanding that claims to absolute knowledge are not to be taken at face value, and it can guide us through the perplexing issues raised in public policy debates, such as the ongoing tugs of war about the protection of minority groups or life styles. Students probably first begin to think philosophically about matters of ethics and religion, though they may not be fully aware that they are doing philosophy when they encounter such problems in their own thinking. And with the increased awareness of other countries and cultures, students today need to have an understanding of non-Western thought systems.

At the same time, we do not intend this book to be just about philosophy, that is, a second-hand recounting of philosophical positions. We believe that students need to encounter the great thinkers directly. Therefore, we offer here the best features of the reader and the expository text. The readings themselves have been selected to represent a wide range of philosophical styles and temperaments—from Kant, Berkeley, Hume, and Descartes to Tolstoy, Mencius, Wittgenstein, and Kenneth Clark. The readings are no mere snippets but are solid chunks of material from relatively self-contained units, ranging from five to ten pages in length.

This book is divided into forty-two chapters (arranged under nine topics), and within each part users may select some readings and omit others without loss of pedagogical effectiveness. Since this book contains more material than can be covered in a single academic term, instructors may pick and choose those chapters that best suit their own philosophical dispositions. It also offers a wide array of selections from classic as well as contemporary philosophers so that students can understand philosophy as a living discipline that draws from its past in order to deal with current issues.

Our focus in making changes for this eighth edition was to further emphasize the text's ongoing commitment to providing accessible discussions of some of the traditional issues that constitute the core of philosophy's history. In keeping with this, our attention was devoted primarily to expanding our coverage of traditional issues in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

In Part 1, "What Is Philosophy?," the chapter on "Philosophy and Pop Culture" has been eliminated. Though we still view pop culture as a highly effective tool for illustrating

perennial philosophical issues, our discussion of philosophy and pop culture for this edition will be confined to connections made to specific issues within the various chapters.

In Part 3, "What Is Real? (Metaphysics)," the discussion of Plato's metaphysics in Chapter 9 has been expanded to include a discussion of Plato's account of human nature and, in support of this discussion, a selection on the immateriality of the soul from Plato's *Phaedo*.

Part 4, "How Do We Know? (Epistemology)," saw significant modifications to three of its chapters. First, Chapter 15, "René Descartes: The Quest for Certainty," now includes an extended discussion of the theistic foundations to Descartes' epistemology. In addition to commentary that explains the role played by Descartes' proofs for God's existence and veracity in his epistemology, the chapter now includes a substantial selection from the Third Meditation. Chapter 16, "David Hume: Trust Your Senses," was also significantly expanded so that it now includes an explanation of Hume's classification of perceptions and his *copy principle* along with a selection from section II of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in which Hume develops and defends this crucial portion of his epistemology. Finally, the discussion of Kant's epistemology in Chapter 17, "Immanuel Kant: A Compromise," now includes an expanded treatment of Kant's classification of judgments and his Copernican Revolution in epistemology. In addition, the selection from the Introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* has been expanded to include passages in which Kant discusses the place of synthetic *a priori* judgments in mathematics, the natural sciences, and traditional metaphysics.

In Part 5, "What Ought We Do? (Ethics)," the section on why one should be moral was cut from Chapter 19, "Introduction to Ethical Reasoning." Some of this material, including the discussion of Nietzsche, was moved to a new chapter on moral skepticism. This chapter (Chapter 20, "Moral Skepticism") considers both philosophers—like Friedrich Nietzsche—who are skeptical of the core of traditional morality and others—like J. L. Mackie—who are skeptical of the very existence of objective moral facts. It includes a selection from J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, and a reconstruction and evaluation of Mackie's argument from relativity. Continuing the discussion of metaethics begun in Chapter 20, Chapter 21, "Morality and Metaphysics," is another brand new addition to the text. In this chapter, we analyze our ordinary commitment to the existence of objective moral facts, considering along the way non-naturalism, intuitionism, and divine command theory. The centerpiece of this chapter is an article by Matthew Jordan on whether morality is dependent on there being a God.

One series of additions to the text for which we cannot take any credit are the MySearchLab links and their associated study questions found in each chapter. These links, which connect students to various media (print, audio, and video) that help bring to life the philosophical issues discussed in the text, are entirely the product of the ingenuity and hard work of Pearson's editorial and production teams.

We would like to thank all those who reviewed the previous edition and whose comments greatly aided us in this revision. We are indebted to the entire editorial and production staff of Pearson Education listed in the front matter of this text, and wish to express our special thanks to Maggie Barbieri, Carly Czech, Ashley Dodge, Courtney Elezovic, Kate Fernandes, Saraswathi Muralidhar, and Joe Scordato for their valuable contributions to this text.

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CHAPTER **1**

The Activity of Philosophy

I t is difficult to define philosophy with precision, and the attempt to do so forms an interesting and important part of philosophy itself. Even though we should not expect a pat definition, one way to define philosophy is to see what it is that philosophers do.

Sometimes people use the word *philosophy* to refer in a very general way to a person's overall theory or outlook. For example, you might refer to someone's attitude toward doing business as a "business philosophy" or an individual's general outlook as that person's "philosophy of life." "My philosophy is: honesty is the best policy," a recent advertisement said. Used in this way, the term *philosophy* is a kind of synonym for outlook, or general viewpoint. You will sometimes find philosophers using the term in this general sense, but more is implied by the word than that.

((•●)) **Listen** to the **interview:** *Kenneth Knisely* on **MySearchLab.com**

In the minds of others, being philosophical means having a passive attitude, taking life as it comes. For these people, to be philosophical would be to accept things without worrying about them. The ancient Stoics, believing that all things are ultimately rational and orderly, argued for a somewhat similar view, but not all philosophers have adopted a passive attitude that calls for a calm acceptance of the troubles of life.

If you look in the dictionary you will discover that the term *philosophy* is derived from two Greek words that mean "the love of wisdom." Philosophy, then, has something to do with wisdom, but *wisdom* is also a term that a lot of people use without knowing exactly what they mean by it. When the ancient Greek thinkers referred to wisdom, they usually meant the knowledge of fundamental principles and laws, an awareness of that which was basic and unchanging, as opposed to those things that are transitory and changing. Ever since then, the term *philosophy* has taken on something of this meaning and refers to attempts on the part of serious thinkers to get at the basis of things. Not the superficial, trivial details, but the underlying fundamentals. Not how many chemical elements there are, but what matter is in general; not what differentiates Baroque from Romantic music, but what art is in general. Unlike the social scientist who specializes in one small area, such as the initiation rites of a South American tribe, philosophy traditionally looks for principles underlying the whole of art, morality, religion, or reality. Putting these meanings together results in a more satisfactory definition of philosophy—the attempt to provide for oneself an outlook on life based on the discovery of broad, fundamental principles.

RATIONAL REFLECTION: THINKING HARD

First of all, then, philosophy is defined by its attempt to discover the most general and fundamental, underlying principles. But philosophy is also different in its method, a method that can be described as rational reflection. As one contemporary philosopher put it, philosophy is not much different from simply the act of thinking hard about something. Unlike the sciences, philosophy does not discover new empirical facts, but instead reflects on the facts we are already familiar with, or those given to us by the empirical sciences, to see what they lead to and how they all hang together. You can see the connection with the first point about philosophy—that philosophy tries to discover the most fundamental, underlying principles.

From our knowledge of science and our everyday experience, all of us have a great many ideas and opinions before we begin the study of philosophy, for example, about what the world is like and how we come to know it. We also have some opinions, before our first college course in philosophy, about how we ought to live. But by rationally reflecting on this prereflective understanding of things, in philosophy we try to deepen that understanding to see what it implies, what it all adds up to, in short, to see it all in a larger perspective.

Through rational reflection, philosophy offers a means of coming to an understanding of humankind, the world, and our responsibilities in the world. Some of the earliest philosophers inquired into the nature of reality, or the philosophy of nature. Many of their investigations formed the basis of the natural sciences, but there was always a residue of concern that could not be delved into by the natural sciences. For example, what is reality, ultimately? Is it merely matter in continuous motion? Or is reality ultimately more akin to mind and mental processes? Is nature merely a blind and purposeless scheme, or does it exhibit purpose? These and similar questions form the basis of an inquiry known as *metaphysics.*

Metaphysical questions directly lead into questions concerning knowledge. How do we have knowledge? Is it through the five senses alone? Or must the senses be corrected by reasoning and judgment? Which is more reliable, the senses or reason? These concerns are among those of the *theory of knowledge* or *epistemology.* Closely allied with epistemology is the study of correct thinking, known as *logic.* Logic deals with the difference between a valid and an invalid argument, how to spot fallacious reasoning, and how to proceed in reasoning so that the conclusion of an argument is justified by the premises.

Another ongoing concern of philosophy is *ethics,* or the analysis of principles of conduct. What makes an action right or wrong? What is my duty to myself and others? And what principles of action are consistent with my understanding of the nature of human beings? These and other concerns must be looked into before one is in a position to decide about the problems of ethics raised by advances in medicine, where we are faced with difficult decisions on abortion, euthanasia, and the morality of organ transplants and genetic manipulation. When the questions of ethics are broadened to include an entire society, one is concerned with *social and political philosophy* and the problems generated by a desire to live in a well-ordered society.

In general, the philosopher is trained to rationally reflect on how the fundamental questions relate to all human activities. Later we will see how these same philosophical methods can be applied to such specific activities as art, history, education, science, and religion.

THE NORMATIVE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

So far we have mentioned philosophy's use of the method of rational reflection in its attempt to discover the most general principles underlying everything. Now we add a second characterization. Philosophy is defined by a much deeper concern with normative issues than is found in other subjects. For this reason, philosophy can be viewed as a normative discipline. By *normative* we mean that philosophy often tries to distinguish, in very broad ways, what is from what ought to be. To establish norms, philosophy often appeals to the nature or essence of things. For instance, when a philosopher says that humans

(((•⎯ **Listen** to the **podcast:** *John Armstrong* on **MySearchLab.com**

are essentially rational, this is not a description of the way people are (because they often act irrationally) but how they ought to be. The philosopher is saying that it is only the rational part of a person that deserves to be called human, because that rational part makes human beings different from animals. And, of course, this normative definition implies normative modes of behavior. That is, some kinds of activities should be encouraged, given this conception of what it means to be human, and other kinds of activities should be discouraged.

The normative function of philosophy also overlaps philosophers' overriding concern with getting to the heart of things, to uncover the general, underlying principles. When we ask in the broadest sense what something is in general, we are asking for something like a definition, and definitions are usually normative. If we ask "What is education?" or "What is love?" we are asking for a definition of things as they ideally ought to be, and it is in terms of this ideal concept that we judge the way things actually are. If we define education, for example, as learning to use one's mind in the most creative way, then we can use that concept to criticize "educational" institutions as they actually exist, say our schools, for emphasizing rote memory and repetitive conformity. "Why, this is not education at all," we will say, "but only a parody of it." Similarly, if we define love as a kind of mutual concern and caring between people, then we will criticize those activities that some people call love but do not meet that definition, and we will praise those that do.

Here again, philosophy differs sharply from the natural and social sciences, which deliberately avoid any kind of value judgments. Unlike the psychologist or sociologist, who describes what people claim to know, the epistemologist (as the philosopher interested in the theory of knowledge is called) tries to find some general basis for distinguishing genuine from bogus knowledge claims. And rather than describe, as a psychologist might, how people do in fact reason, logicians try to find rules for distinguishing correct from incorrect reasoning. And so in ethics: unlike psychologists, who describe moral attitudes and beliefs as they actually exist, the moral philosopher tries to distinguish correct from incorrect moral thinking and behaving.

In general, then, we can characterize the normative function of philosophy as a concern for establishing, in every major area of philosophy, standards or criteria for correct and incorrect ways of thinking and acting: standards for correct decisions about reality, knowledge, morality, beauty, justice, and so on. The search for these normative criteria is no less important a task for philosophy than is its search for general principles. And in accomplishing both tasks, philosophy is guided by reason and logic. The following illustration summarizes the twin functions of philosophy discussed so far.

Philosophy ⎯⎯ Rational reflection ⎯⎯┌ General principles philosophy
                                      └ Normative criteria
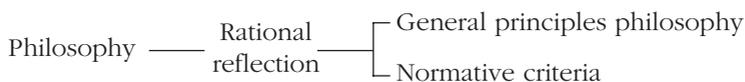
To learn what philosophy is, one must begin looking at the actual work of philosophers as they examine particular issues, and this is what we will do in the following chapters. But in this introductory section we offer some general guidelines to direct your progress through the rest of the book.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF PHILOSOPHY

We have defined philosophy as the use of a rational, reflective method for attempting to get at the most basic underlying principles and to discover normative criteria. But what is the subject matter of philosophy? In principle, any area of human concern can become the subject of philosophical interest. Unlike, say, accounting, philosophy does not have a narrowly restricted subject matter.

Originally philosophers were interested in everything, and much of what the ancient Greek philosophers concerned themselves with would now be classified as physics, zoology, psychology, anthropology, political science, literary criticism, and mathematics. In addition, the ancient philosophers were interested in discovering the principles of reasoning, the nature of beauty in art, the principles that regulate human conduct, the standards for distinguishing just from unjust societies, and even the nature of reality itself.

Philosophy, then, can include a number of things. Which of these is the most important depends on whom you happen to ask. If you ask a philosopher who is concerned with the principles that should govern human actions, you might be told that ethics is the heart of philosophy. On the other hand, a philosopher who is fascinated by the nature and function of language might tell you that the most important task of philosophy is linguistic analysis that dispels the ambiguity and confusion that lurk in our ordinary use of words. A political philosopher might insist that the really important task of philosophy is to discover the principles of social justice. We shall come back later to this question of why different philosophers emphasize different aspects of philosophy.

Notice, however, that the state of affairs in philosophy is not so different from what you might find in physics. Physicists investigate many different areas. Some are concerned with understanding atomic and subatomic reality. Others direct their attention outward to the exploration of space, and they would insist that astrophysics is the real subject matter of physics. Still another area of physics is physical chemistry, which in turn is quite different from the activity that interests physicists who explore the various theories of the origin of the universe—a concern known as cosmology and an activity that used to occupy a good deal of philosophical attention in the past.

Suppose that you ask a physicist which of these varied concerns is really physics. The answer probably would be that they all are the concerns of physics and that each has its place in the overall activity that we call physics. At different times a particular area of physics might be more popular than the others. There are fads in physics, and the same is true of philosophy.

To put this last point more positively, each generation of thinkers raises its own questions, and these may be in part brought to the surface by other events. An upheaval in political affairs may prompt discussion of basic issues in social and political philosophy. Major triumphs of science will give rise to a serious reexamination of knowledge and reality.

In our own time, for example, advances in medical technology have forced philosophers to deal with a wide range of bioethical issues.

The agora, or marketplace, was the setting for the communal life of Athens, including such events as the trial of Socrates. The temple of Hephaestus still overlooks the agora, now a popular archaeological site for visitors to Athens. Photo by David Stewart.

Of the many matters with which philosophers concern themselves, it would be difficult to say that any one is the real task of philosophy or that any one of the various questions dealt with by philosophers today is the most important. What may be most important to you may not seem to be as important to someone else. What one age considers to be of serious philosophical importance may seem to the next generation to be completely trivial. This, in part, explains why it is so difficult to come up with a single definition of philosophy that all philosophers would accept as completely adequate.

CONSTRUCTIVE OR ANALYTICAL?

As philosophy goes about its task of discovering general principles and normative criteria, always using rational reflection as its method, it seems to be faced with what appear, at first, to be two quite different ways of proceeding. The first we will refer to as the *constructive* and the second as the *analytical.*

On the whole it does seem that even though philosophy is not primarily a body of doctrine or a set of beliefs, most philosophy does attempt to find the answers to the basic and important issues in life. We will refer to this as the constructive task of philosophy. Philosophers in general have believed that philosophy is a systematic, rational way (as opposed to a religiously inspired way) of discovering the ultimate, underlying reality of which the ordinary space-time, physical world is only a manifestation. In its constructive role philosophy directs itself to developing a total worldview. For philosophers emphasizing this type of activity,

philosophy becomes a kind of superscience. It attempts to answer the most basic, fundamental, important questions of all: What is a person? What is the nature of the world? Why are we here? Some philosophers have even rebelled against the strictly rational and logical way philosophy has traditionally tried to answer these questions and have chosen a more personal and emotional approach. Since we are creatures of emotions and will, any philosophy must include those aspects of the human situation as well as concern for the use of reason.

The view of philosophy as analysis provides a still different approach to the activity of philosophy—one that is not opposed to the constructive role of philosophy but can be seen to serve a supporting function. Take the important question, "What is a human being?" The concept, or idea, of a human being seems to be pretty straightforward, and on one level this question may seem merely silly. Everybody knows what a human being is; so if all that philosophy does is to define a term everyone already knows, then what is the point? It is true that most people can pick out human beings from vegetables and pieces of furniture. But what about a four-month-old fetus in the mother's womb? While the fetus is human in the obvious sense of being of the human genus (as opposed, say, to a bovine or other animal genus), should the fetus be considered a human person? What is at stake here, among other questions, is whether aborting the fetus should be considered an act of murder.

How do we decide such a question? Certainly not by looking at biological facts, because both the pro-life and the pro-choice advocates agree on the facts—that the fetus develops progressively from a fertilized egg to a human infant, that it will die if removed from the mother's womb, and that it will probably live if left there. Agreeing on all these facts, we are still left with the question of how to describe an abortion—as an act of murder or simply as removing an unwanted organism from a female body?

We can see how the analysis of one concept quickly leads to the analysis of another: that of "murder." Although there is a publicly accepted meaning for murder, it is not a precise meaning; the center of the concept may be fixed, but its boundaries are vaguely drawn and hence open to debate. If we take the definition of murder to be "the deliberate act of killing another human person," what do we say about the soldier who deliberately kills another soldier in battle? Or the executioner who carries out an execution? The deliberate bombing of civilian noncombatants? The taking of a life in an act of self-defense? Assisting a terminally ill patient to die with self-chosen dignity? As we analyze each of these concepts we are doing philosophy, although at times we may not be clear about the difference between murder and assisted suicide. It is along these fuzzy borders of ordinary concepts that philosophers battle. If, as you followed the preceding discussion, you said to yourself, "of course abortion is murder, but killing in wartime isn't because the two are totally different," then, as a philosopher, you must say how they are different and why the concept "murder" can apply to the former but not the latter.

Philosophy is therefore probably best characterized as a rational examination or critique of the most basic elements of our everyday experience and beliefs. This helps us see how philosophy as analysis and philosophy as constructive are mutually interwoven. Because the world as we are aware of it is at least partly conceptual in nature (a world that includes murder, abortion, violence), the analysis of our concepts of "murder," "abortion," and "violence" entails analysis of our world. And if philosophy seeks in its constructive mode to develop a world view, then the analysis of concepts is essential for that task.

Given its emphasis on rationally examining the most basic elements of our experience and beliefs, it follows that nothing escapes the light of philosophical criticism, not even the assumptions of philosophers themselves. For this reason there are no absolute starting points in philosophy, and philosophy is continually examining the views of other philosophers and of its own past. This is why any understanding of the nature of philosophy must also include some knowledge of philosophy's history, and that is the topic of the next chapter in this section.

Questions for Discussion

1. In your own words, can you state what philosophy is? What aspects of philosophy do you still find puzzling?
2. Some philosophers have claimed that everybody does philosophy or has a philosophy. Do you think this is true?
3. To clarify in your own mind the normative function of philosophy, give examples of the difference between a descriptive and a normative treatment of a topic such as "honesty" or "fidelity" (or one of your own choosing).
4. What is implied in the definition of philosophy as the "love of wisdom?"
5. Do you think some of the activities of philosophy are more important than others? Explain.

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1. How do you think Kenneth Knisely would define the word *philosophy*?

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2. According to Bertrand Russell, what is the value of philosophy?

   Listen to the **audiobook:** *Bertrand Russell* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. What are a few things that John Armstrong thinks you can do with philosophy? Explain.

   Listen to the **podcast:** *John Armstrong,* on **MySearchLab.com**

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Philosophy's History

Because it is the nature of philosophy to take nothing for granted, philosophers look at philosophy's history as important for understanding both the successes and failures of their predecessors. Although every generation asks its own questions, there is a set of perennial issues that seems to recur: What ought we to do? (ethics); What is reality? (metaphysics); How do we know anything? (epistemology); What is the nature of correct reasoning? (logic); What is art? (esthetics). Some of the answers to these questions given by past philosophers have led to dead ends. Other answers seem only partial and incomplete. Some of the issues even elude the best efforts of past as well as present philosophers to answer fully.

One way to study philosophy is to take a problem and see how it was handled by past philosophers and how it is treated by contemporary ones. This could be called the problems approach to philosophy. Another way to study philosophy is to see how each era defined the important issues and responded to them. This is the historical approach. The former is probably the best way for beginning philosophy students to get a grasp of the nature of philosophical reasoning. Accordingly, in the following chapters we will move about rather freely among different problems and examine responses to them from various historical periods and geographical areas. Nonetheless, it is important to have a general overview of how philosophy and its problems developed, beginning in ancient Greece. We should also make clear that the following summary is that of Western philosophy. In the last Part of this book we will look at Eastern modes of thought and discuss the philosophically difficult and important question of whether the term *philosophy* should be applied to them or whether that title is better reserved for the Western and European history of certain ideas. For the moment, however, we will bracket this question and look at the initial stirrings of that search which, Aristotle said, begins in wonder.

EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Western philosophy appeared in Greece in the sixth century B.C.E. as the first attempt to provide a thoroughly secular and rational explanation of the natural world. People have always tried to explain the world, of course, but they had previously framed their theories in religious, mythological, and magical terms, leaning mainly on mystical and magical grounds for support. The first group of philosophers, known as the pre-Socratic

Milesians, limited their explanation of the world to natural elements, such as air, water, heat, and condensation, and their mode of justification to analytical reason and logic.

The question that dominated this early period was: What is the basic reality underlying the world, the changeless stuff of which all things are made? This question arises from a pessimistic view of change, in which everything is transient, and nothing seems permanent. The early philosophers felt there must be some "ageless, deathless" reality underlying the world as we know it—something eternal and unchanging from which everything else is derived. Thales (624–550 B.C.E.) said it was water. Anaximander (611–547 B.C.E.) objected that if everything had to come from one basic stuff, this primary substance would have to be "boundless" or indeterminate in character. Anaximenes (588–524 B.C.E.) responded that everything could be produced from one definite element, which he thought was air, that could be differentiated into various forms by opposing principles, which he designated as the rarification and condensation of air. Already two important themes of Western philosophy had been struck: the concern with reality as an underlying substratum and the problem of the "one and the many"—how to account for the many different objects in the world of ordinary experience on the basis of one unchanging substance.

The implications of this quest gradually became clear. The basic reality had to be eternal, unchanging, and undifferentiated. This definition of reality has dominated philosophy ever since and early in its history led to two quite different schools of thought, remnants of which continue up to the present day: the Eleatics, Parmenides (c. 495 B.C.E.) and Zeno (c. 490–430 B.C.E.); and the Atomists, Democritus (460–370 B.C.E.) and Leucippus (c. 440 B.C.E.).

The Eleatics (named after Parmenides' native town, Elea) argued that the one unchanging, eternal reality could not be identified with any of the elements known to ordinary experience, but had to be defined simply as the proper object of logical thought (whatever that turned out to be). That is, the only thing that really answers the criterion for reality is, ironically, what we think. Everyday things like tables and trees are not unchanging and so are not real. What is real is a special kind of object defined in terms of rational thought. When you think logically, you must be thinking about something, and that something is real, though it is not the kind of thing you can see, touch, or locate in space and time.

What was gradually emerging, though it did not become clear until much later, was that area of philosophy known as idealism (nothing exists but what is thought; "to be is to be perceived") or as rationalism ("whatever is real is rational and whatever is rational is real"). In analyzing the Milesian requirements for the primary substance, Parmenides found that its main element was noncontradiction (that it must not contradict itself). Since noncontradiction is a logical requirement of thought, reality was thus defined as whatever can be consistently thought. If this is not something in the physical world, then there must be some other kind of object specially suited to reason which we think about when we think logically. This is an instance of what might be called the objectification of reason as a principle of reality.

Supporting this early trend toward idealism and rationalism were the Pythagoreans (Pythagoras, 572–497 B.C.E.) who maintained that the basic substance of the world consisted of mathematical entities—numbers, relations, geometrical figures, and so on. This sounds odd, but it is not hard to understand in terms of the objectification of reason. Many of our explanations of things are framed in terms of mathematics. This was especially true

of the Pythagoreans, who were the first to develop mathematics as we understand it today as a set of propositions derived logically from primitive axioms in a hypothetical, deductive system. The Pythagoreans also saw that although mathematics dealt with pure abstract entities (numbers, triangles, and so on), it could be used to explain the ordinary world of sense experience. This suggested to them that the underlying reality of the world was mathematical and ideal, a view still popular among scientists and philosophers of science.

The Pythagoreans, for example, discovered that the musical triad (tonic chord) was based on the relation 3:4:6. This applied to all such musical sounds and therefore seemed to be the one underlying principle behind them all. Whether you fill bottles with water or cut bamboo gongs, as long as the ratio is 3:4:6, the sound produced will be that of the triadic chord. The underlying reality of the chord seems to be the mathematical relation. If the explanation is relational, then the reality must be relational as well. We make a similar assumption today when we speak of the scientist discovering the "laws" of nature, as though there were a rational system of relationships in the world corresponding to the mathematical formula which scientists use in their explanation. Thus, one major development arising out of the Milesian investigation into the one underlying substance of the world was the view that the underlying reality consisted of abstract ideal objects of thought. From the very beginning, the philosopher's concern with the world was rational and conceptual.

The atomists, on the other hand, argued that there were many unchanging, eternal, self-consistent entities of a physical nature which they called "atoms." There is nothing in reality, they said, but these atoms and empty space, everything else is to be explained as different arrangements of atoms. By emphasizing the material elements over their arrangement, the atomists established themselves as the forerunners of modern materialism. Pythagoras, of course, would argue that the immaterial arrangement of the atoms was more important for explaining why things are as they are, and this was the beginning of a long debate between the Idealists and the Materialists.

The next major philosophical development was that of Plato (427–347 B.C.E.) and his prize student, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), who together established a powerful synthesis of pre-Socratic thought, setting it forth in a clear and compelling way which survived almost unchanged for 2,000 years. Plato was inspired by the life and doctrines of Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.), one of the most interesting figures in Western civilization. Socrates never wrote anything but spent most of his time dialectically challenging the smug, self-satisfied establishment, actions for which he was tried and sentenced to death. Socrates was interested primarily in moral problems of justice, piety, and so on, and this made a powerful impression on Plato.

Plato combined the Pythagorean and Eleatic conception of reality with the Socratic concern with morality, and explained the multiplicity of the ordinary physical world on the basis of eternal, unchanging, ideal entities. Justice, Plato argued, is an ideal entity, along with the mathematical entities of the Pythagoreans, and these ideal entities are the only genuinely real things in the world. Like the Eleatics and Pythagoreans, Plato noted the discrepancy between our ideas and those things in the world to which those ideas refer. We talk about justice, equality, goodness, and beauty, for example, but it is hard to find anything in the world exactly corresponding to these ideas. No single instance of beauty, for example, can be identified with beauty itself because it is only one of many beautiful things and because it is not perfectly beautiful. Therefore, Plato reasoned, when we talk about beauty, we must be talking about something else, some ideal beauty of which ordinary instances of beauty in the day-to-day world of sense experience are but dim reflections. Since Plato found such

physical objects involved in the same sort of contradictions charged by the Eleatics, he made the bold claim that the ideal entities (which he called the Forms) were more real than their ordinary counterparts that we actually encounter in daily life.

But unlike the Pythagoreans or Eleatics, Plato went on to try to explain the ordinary world of sense particulars on the basis of the universal Forms. The Eleatics held that only the one underlying substratum was real. But what about all the other things in the ordinary physical world? The Eleatics never seriously tried to explain these; they just said that if you apply your logical principle of reality (that a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time), you will see that these things are not real. But this is very unsatisfying. If they are not real, then what are they? Plato said we must somehow account for these appearances.

Watch the **video:** *Aristotle, from Great Ideas of Philosophy,* on **MySearchLab.com**

Plato's solution was to blend Eleaticism with materialism. He concluded that there is a basic material "stuff." It is not completely real, but it is not exactly nothing either. By shaping this stuff, like a potter, into different forms resembling the ideal Forms that make up reality, God creates the ordinary physical world of tables, chairs, trees, animals, and people. These things "participate," or share in reality, and more or less resemble it, but they are not identical with it. This is Plato's way of expressing the point made earlier that the world and our experience of it is concept-laden, except that Plato is also objectifying the concepts into the Forms. When we inquire into justice, we are not asking about a particular law, state, or person; we are trying to define the essential characteristic of the real Form, Justice, which all the other things we call "just" more or less resemble. Plato, then, represents a compromise that favors the idealist aspects of pre-Socratic thought.

Aristotle, who is sometimes called the philosopher of common sense, objected to some of Plato's reasoning. He argued that although it is true that reality is conceptual, ideal, one, unchanging, and so on, it is not true that these ideal entities can exist by themselves. The Forms can exist only in particular physical things, and these ordinary objects composed of matter and form are what make up the real world. Still, Aristotle did admit that what is most real about these particular things is their form and that the more form a thing has the more real it is, so his position did not really differ too much from Plato's.

PHILOSOPHY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

One important philosophical accomplishment of the Middle Ages was to wed philosophy to the requirements of the expanding Christian religion. The theological synthesis was achieved by defining God as the most real being (that is, pure Form) in the Platonic–Aristotelian sense and by treating the Greek Forms as ideas in the mind of God. Otherwise, Greek philosophy survived the transition intact, and the debate over the reality of the Forms continued. Realists such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and Duns Scotus (1270–1308) argued with Aristotelians that Forms were real, but only in particular things. Nominalists such as William of Ockham (1300–1350) argued with the early atomists that Forms are only names to which no abstract entity corresponds in reality. The basic realities, Ockham argued, are particular things, but in order to talk about specific things, we must introduce general terms and relations into our language. Just because there is a word for something (such as justice), it does not follow that there is a real object corresponding to it (Justice).

With the rise of the New Science toward the end of the Renaissance (late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries), philosophy took a new turn and the period known as Modern Philosophy began (the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries). If the previous, or

Classical era, philosophy is characterized by an overriding concern with the nature of reality (see Chapter 1, "The Activity of Philosophy"), Modern Philosophy was dominated by a concern with knowledge. This was an exciting period in which Europeans felt themselves on the verge of a dramatic new breakthrough in accurate scientific understanding of the world, and they wanted to get off to a good start. The primary goal, therefore, was to discover the most secure foundation possible for our knowledge of the external world.

MODERN PHILOSOPHY

René Descartes (1596–1650) was the first major figure of the modern period. Knowledge must be erected on a solid foundation of certainty, he argued; nothing less than complete certainty will do. But although the purpose was to secure our scientific knowledge of the physical world, the logical implications of this initial starting point led ironically toward subjective idealism. It was held that what we are most sure of is our own thoughts, just as it had been held much earlier that what answered the criterion of reality was what can be thought. A person could say, "I may not know how things really stand, but at least I know what I think about them." The gaze outward toward the physical world therefore turned inward toward the self, and Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" became the foundation for all subsequent developments in Modern Philosophy until the early twentieth century.

This idealist trend took two forms: the *Continental Rationalists* (including Descartes, Spinoza [1632–1677], and Leibniz [1646–1716]), who stressed the importance of reason in the acquisition of knowledge; and the *British Empiricists* (Hobbes [1588–1679], Locke [1632–1704], Berkeley [1685–1753], and Hume [1711–1776]), who stressed the role of sensation and observation. The rationalists looked primarily to Plato as their source of inspiration, while the empiricists called upon the authority of Aristotle and the atomists. Both groups were in essential agreement that our knowledge of the external world had to be constructed out of subjective certainties, regardless of whether they were derived from our reasoning faculty or our faculty of sensation. The empiricists began, with Hobbes and Locke, on the materialist note that our sensations are caused by the interaction of our bodies with the physical world. But as it gradually became clear to Berkeley and Hume that this was only a supposition of which we could by no means be certain, empiricism moved progressively toward a kind of idealism known as phenomenalism.

Much of the debate between the rationalists and the empiricists centered on the possibility of *a priori* knowledge. Did all knowledge come from sensation, as the empiricists claimed, or did all or some of it come innately from within by pure reason, as the rationalists insisted? The rationalists naturally stressed logical and mathematical knowledge as the basis of knowledge, emphasizing the uncertainties of opinions about the physical world, while the empiricists stressed perceptual knowledge, explaining logical and mathematical certainty nominalistically, as being true simply by definition.

Just as Plato worked out a lasting compromise between competing views of his predecessors, so the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) came up with an ingenious resolution of rationalism and empiricism that held together for several centuries and is still important today. Borrowing Plato's distinction of matter and form, Kant held that the materials of our knowledge come from sensation (conceding to the empiricists), while the form of our knowledge comes from reason and the other cognitive faculties (which he interpreted the rationalists to mean). Kant was one of the first to see how concept-laden our everyday experience of the world is. We cannot perceive,

much less think, raw sense impressions; we can only as-
similate information that has been "programmed" through
our own forms of perception and reason. Just as Aristotle had said that neither matter nor
form could exist alone, but that things could exist only as a mixture of form in matter, so
Kant argued that the objects of our experience can be neither pure sensation (matter) nor
pure thought (form), but must always be a combination of the two.

The roots of the old controversy went too deep, however, and during the nineteenth
century the old battle lines were gradually redrawn along the English Channel, between
the neo-Kantian "absolute idealists," Hegel, Fichte, and Shelling, on the one side, and liber-
als like John Stuart Mill, on the other, and emerging in a somewhat different form in the
twentieth century as the split between contemporary Anglo-American "analytic" philoso-
phers and European "phenomenologists" (not to be confused with the phenomenalists).

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

The twentieth century was characterized by a revolution against the past. The dominant
mood among philosophers of that century was to denounce all previous philosophy
as a colossal mistake and to begin reexamining the nature of philosophy itself and the
reconstruction of its foundations. The more positive character of this revolution could
be described as a break with the metaphysical dream of discovering the real nature of
the world and a new conception of the role of philosophy as the analysis of meaning
(though not so new as many of those philosophers thought). For the Analysts, who
consisted of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Gilbert Ryle (1900–1976), John L. Austin
(1911–1960), and P. F. Strawson (1919–2006), among others, this meant the analysis of
words and concepts. For the phenomenologists, such as Edmund Husserl (1859–1938),
Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Maurice Merlearu-Ponty (1908–1961), it was the analysis
and meaning of the most general structures of our experience.

In retrospect, the differences between these approaches to philosophy seem less radi-
cal, though there has yet to be a reconciliation between the two. Nonetheless, some con-
temporary philosophers, such as Paul Ricoeur, Richard Rorty, Thomas Nagel, and Robert
Brandom, seem comfortable drawing from both traditions. Much of the distinction between
these two important philosophical movements resulted from differences in historical back-
ground and style rather than in substance. Analytic philosophers prided themselves on
their tough-minded rigor. They thrived on logic and avoided discussions of such things as
sex, death, and anxiety. The phenomenologists tended to revel in more tender, emotional,
relevant issues, which they dealt with in a sometimes literary style. The phenomenologists
complained that the analysts were too mechanical, aloof, trivial, and irrelevant. The ana-
lysts responded that the phenomenologists were vague, wishy-washy, and too poetical.

THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

What about the future? Perhaps there will yet be reconciliation between philosophy's
past and present, British and Continental, analytic and phenomenological. What is clear
is that, as our world shrinks before our eyes, philosophers are beginning to absorb cur-
rents of thought outside their own Western tradition from Africa, the Middle East, and
especially the Far East. What precise direction this will take depends on the work of phi-
losophers from your own generation.

This book will give you an introduction to philosophy and, we hope, whet your appetite for more. The following chapters offer a more detailed sampling of some of the major issues of lasting philosophical concern, and as we go along, you will no doubt raise considerations of your own. It will be up to you to test your positions rationally against the philosophers you are reading. In refining your views, you will at the same time be strengthening your own reflective habits of mind. Remember, in the end, as Socrates tells us, everyone has to be his or her own philosopher. And as we will see in the selection in Chapter 3, for Socrates, philosophy was both a habit of thinking and a way of life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you think of reasons why philosophy's history is more important to philosophers than, say, the history of physics is to physicists?

2. Which of the issues raised by the ancient Greek philosophers strikes you as the most "modern"? Why?

3. How does the emphasis apparent in Modern Philosophy reflect the new scientific discoveries of its age?

4. Show how the differences between analytic and phenomenological philosophers reflect the distinction discussed in Chapter 1 between philosophy's constructive and analytical roles.

5. Do you think philosophers should ignore their history and start afresh each generation? Why or why not?

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Here are a few questions and activities to help you understand this chapter:

1. What might be the reason, according to Angie Hobbs, that Socrates never wrote down his philosophy?

   ((•⟮ **Listen** to the **interview:** *Socrates* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. Summarize Aristotle's contributions to the study of philosophy.

   ⊙⟮ **Watch** the **video:** *Aristotle, from Great Ideas of Philosophy,* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. What impact did Kant's reaction to the topic of metaphysics have on the philosophical world?

   ⊙⟮ **Watch** the **video:** *Great Ideas of Philosophy II—Modern Philosophy* on **MySearchLab.com**

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Philosophy and the Examined Life

I n Chapter 1, we referred to both the analytical and the constructive functions of philosophy. In this chapter, we see the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates describing his own philosophical activity. Although Socrates represents both tasks of philosophy, the following reading shows him giving more attention to philosophy's analytical task. Indeed, Socrates reports that it was actually this function of philosophy that stirred up so much controversy.

Socrates was the first philosopher to use the analytical method of philosophy, and no one since has used it with quite the same persistence as did Socrates in what has come to be called the "Socratic method." Socrates spent most of his life talking philosophy with people on the streets. He would seek out someone in the city of Athens known to be an expert on some subject to learn what he could from this supposed authority. But in the course of Socrates' probing questioning it always turned out that the person did not really know what he was talking about, and under examination his views turned out to be full of contradictions and inconsistencies. This approach did not make Socrates very popular, as we shall see.

But Socrates' purpose was really constructive. How is one going to learn the truth? In another Socratic conversation reported by Plato, Socrates relates how as a young man he had high hopes of discovering a fail-safe philosophical method, one which would produce the absolute truth on every subject with complete certainty and conviction. Later, Socrates reports, he became skeptical of this approach. There were simply too many authorities claiming such absolute knowledge, each with different and even contradictory messages! Therefore, Socrates concluded, he must choose a more realistic compromise: consider all existing contenders for truth, subject each to rigorous scrutiny, and tentatively embrace, for the moment at least, whichever turned out to be the strongest.

Let us look again at this function of philosophy. This side of philosophy's task might better be referred to as the development of a nonsense detector. Philosophy is the search for the significant in contrast to the silly. It is concerned with discovering when people are talking nonsense and helping us to keep from wasting our time with meaningless drivel. When we look back at some of the great philosophers of the past, we discover that they spent considerable time pointing out the

errors of others. This activity does not especially endear philosophers to their associates, and it also gives rise to the view that philosophy is purely negative. While this function of philosophy might appear to be negative, it does offer a positive service, for if you discover errors that have been made by others, you can perhaps avoid them yourself.

For Socrates, philosophy was a total way of life, and something each person must do individually. "If you are sick," Socrates once said, "you must hire a physician, just as when you are in trouble with the law, you must hire a qualified lawyer, but each person must be his or her own philosopher." This is a point worth stressing. Despite its often seemingly technical nature, philosophy is really the most natural human activity, and there is a sense in which everyone engages in it. That is, we have all decided (whether or not we are consciously aware of it) what our standards of conduct will be, what principles we base our reasoning on, and what importance we attach to our humanness. But not everyone critically examines these views. It is this critical examination that studying philosophy provides. As Socrates, the father of Western philosophy, put it, "The unexamined life is not worth living." As you will see from the following reading, Socrates meant what he said.

THE APOLOGY OF SOCRATES

The word *apology* comes from the Greek word for "defense," and in the selection that follows, Socrates is literally defending himself in a court of law. The official charges against him were that he taught that people should not believe in the gods and that he was responsible for corrupting the young men of Athens by making them critical of authority.

Socrates was born about 469 B.C.E. and died in 399 B.C.E. Although he is one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy, he wrote nothing and established no school. His whole life was spent in questioning his associates and seeking to discover the truth. Why would this apparently harmless activity produce such a reaction, a reaction against Socrates that was so strong that he was on trial for his life? This question has been the subject of much historical conjecture. One theory is that Socrates was too closely identified with the old political regime that had just been deposed. Another theory is that Socrates was simply viewed as a troublemaker and that his accusers did not want to kill him but just wanted to force him to quit stirring everybody up. Probably there is truth in both views. In the reading that follows, it is obvious that Socrates realizes that were he to promise to halt his philosophical pursuits, the charges against him would be dropped. Such a surrender of his principles, however, was impossible for him: "So long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating the truth for everyone that I meet."

Whatever the real reason for Socrates' trial, the verdict was that Socrates was guilty of crimes against the state, and he was condemned to death. The death scene is reported by Plato in another dialogue, *Phaedo*, which describes the last hours of Socrates with his friends and the administration of hemlock, the poison drunk by Socrates as the method of execution prescribed by law.

Socrates: In Defense of Philosophy

Perhaps some of you may reply: "But, Socrates, what is the trouble with you? What has given rise to these prejudices against you? You must have been doing something out of the ordinary. All these rumors and reports of you would never have arisen if you had not been doing something different from other men. So tell us what it is, that we may not give our verdict arbitrarily." I think that is a fair question, and I will try to explain to you what it is that has raised these prejudices against me and given me this reputation. Listen, then. Some of you, perhaps, will think that I am joking, but I assure you that I will tell you the whole truth. I have gained this reputation, Athenians, simply by reason of a certain wisdom. But by what kind of wisdom? It is by just that wisdom which is perhaps human wisdom. In that, it may be, I am really wise. But the men of whom I was speaking just now must be wise in a wisdom which is greater than human wis-

Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.) Greek philosopher condemned to death by his fellow Athenians for philosophic activity. Socrates wrote nothing, but we know of his life and work through the writings of his student, Plato. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

dom, or else I cannot describe it, for certainly I know nothing of it myself, and if any man says that I do, he lies and speaks to arouse prejudice against me. Do not interrupt me with shouts, Athenians, even if you think that I am boasting. What I am going to say is not my own statement. I will tell you who says it, and he is worthy of your respect. I will bring the god of Delphi to the witness of my wisdom, if it is wisdom at all, and of its nature. You remember Chaerephon. From youth upwards he was my comrade, and also a partisan of your democracy, sharing your recent exile[1] and returning with you. You remember, too, Chaerephon's character—how impulsive he was in carrying through whatever he took in hand. Once he went to Delphi and ventured to put this question to the oracle—I entreat you again, my friends, not to interrupt me with your shouts—he asked if there was anyone who was wiser than I. The priestess answered that there was no one. Chaerephon himself is dead, but his brother here will witness to what I say.

Church, F. J., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito,* 1st Edition, © 1956. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.

[1]During the totalitarian regime of The Thirty, which remained in power for eight months (404 B.C.E.), five years before the trial—Ed.

Now see why I tell you this. I am going to explain to you how the prejudice against me has arisen. When I heard of the oracle, I began to reflect: What can the god mean by this riddle? I know very well that I am not wise, even in the smallest degree. Then what can he mean by saying that I am the wisest of men? It cannot be that he is speaking falsely, for he is a god and cannot lie. For a long time I was at a loss to understand his meaning. Then, very reluctantly, I turned to investigate it in this manner: I went to a man who was reputed to be wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I should prove the answer wrong, and meaning to point out to the oracle its mistake, and to say, "You said that I was the wisest of men, but this man is wiser than I am." So I examined the man—I need not tell you his name, he was a politician—but this was the result, Athenians. When I conversed with him, I came to see that, though a great many persons, and most of all he himself, thought that he was wise, yet he was not wise. Then I tried to prove to him that he was not wise, though he fancied that he was. By so doing, I made him indignant, and many of the bystanders. So when I went away, I thought to myself, I am wiser than this man: neither of us knows anything that is really worth knowing, but he thinks that he has knowledge when he has not, while I, having no knowledge, do not think that I have. I seem, at any rate, to be a little wiser than he is on this point: "I do not think that I know what I do not know." Next I went to another man who was reputed to be still wiser than the last, with exactly the same result. And there again I made him, and many other men, indignant.

Then I went on to one man after another, realizing that I was arousing indignation every day, which caused me much pain and anxiety. Still I thought that I must set the god's command above everything. So I had to go to every man who seemed to possess any knowledge, and investigate the meaning of the oracle. Athenians, I must tell you the truth; I swear, this was the result of the investigation which I made at the god's command: I found that the men whose reputation for wisdom stood highest were nearly the most lacking in it, while others who were looked down on as common people were much more intelligent. Now I must describe to you the wanderings which I undertook, like Herculean labors, to prove the oracle irrefutable. After the politicians, I went to the poets, tragic, dithyrambic, and others, thinking that there I should find myself manifestly more ignorant than they. So I took up the poems on which I thought that they had spent most pains, and asked them what they meant, hoping at the same time to learn something from them. I am ashamed to tell you the truth, my friends, but I must say it. Almost any one of the bystanders could have talked about the works of these poets better than the poets themselves. So I soon found that it is not by wisdom that the poets create their works, but by a certain instinctive inspiration, like soothsayers and prophets, who say many fine things, but understand nothing of what they say. The poets seemed to me to be in a similar situation. And at the same time I perceived that, because of their poetry they thought that they were the wisest of men in other matters too, which they were not. So I went away again, thinking that I had the same advantage over the poets that I had over the politicians.

Finally, I went to the artisans, for I knew very well that I possessed no knowledge at all worth speaking of, and I was sure that I should find that they knew many

fine things. And in that I was not mistaken. They knew what I did not know, and so far they were wiser than I. But, Athenians, it seemed to me that the skilled artisans had the same failing as the poets. Each of them believed himself to be extremely wise in matters of the greatest importance because he was skillful in his own art, and this presumption of theirs obscured their real wisdom. So I asked myself, on behalf of the oracle, whether I would choose to remain as I was, without either their wisdom or their ignorance, or to possess both, as they did. And I answered to myself and to the oracle that it was better for me to remain as I was.

From this examination, Athenians, has arisen much fierce and bitter indignation, and as a result, a great many prejudices about me. People say that I am "a wise man." For the bystanders always think that I am wise myself in any matter wherein I refute another. But, gentlemen, I believe that the god is really wise, and that by this oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. I do not think that he meant that Socrates was wise. He only made use of my name and took me as an example, as though he would say to men, "He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is really worth nothing at all." Therefore, I still go about testing and examining every man whom I think wise, whether he be a citizen or a stranger, as the god has commanded me. Whenever I find that he is not wise, I point out to him, on the god's behalf, that he is not wise. I am so busy in this pursuit that I have never had leisure to take any part worth mentioning in public matters or to look after my private affairs. I am in great poverty as the result of my service to the god.

Besides this, the young men who follow me about, who are the sons of wealthy persons and have the most leisure, take pleasure in hearing men cross-examined. They often imitate me among themselves, then they try their hands at cross-examining other people. And, I imagine, they find plenty of men who think that they know a great deal when in fact they know little or nothing. Then the persons who are cross-examined get angry with me instead of with themselves, and say that Socrates is an abomination and corrupts the young. When they are asked, "Why, what does he do? What does he teach?" they do not know what to say. Not to seem at a loss, they repeat the stock charges against all philosophers, and allege that he investigates things in the air and under the earth, and that he teaches people to disbelieve in the gods, and to make the worse argument appear the stronger. For, I suppose, they would not like to confess the truth, which is that they are shown up as ignorant pretenders to knowledge that they do not possess. So they have been filling your ears with their bitter prejudices for a long time, for they are ambitious, energetic, and numerous, and they speak vigorously and persuasively against me. Relying on this, Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon have attacked me. Meletus is indignant with me on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the artisans and politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators. And so, as I said at the beginning, I shall be surprised if I am able, in the short time allowed me for my defense, to remove from your minds this prejudice which has grown so strong. What I have told you, Athenians, is the truth: I neither conceal nor do I suppress anything, trivial or important. Yet I know that it is just this outspokenness which rouses indignation. But that is only a proof that my words are true, and that the prejudice against me, and the causes of it, are what I have said.

Here at Delphi, Socrates was pronounced by the oracle as the wisest man on earth. At the entrance of the sanctuary were the words "know thyself," which embody Socrates' personal quest for truth. Courtesy of David Stewart.

And whether you investigate them now or hereafter, you will find that they are so. For this, Athenians, I believe to be the truth. Wherever a man's station is, whether he has chosen it of his own will, or whether he has been placed at it by his commander, there it is his duty to remain and face the danger without thinking of death or of any other things except disgrace.

When the generals whom you chose to command me, Athenians, assigned me to my station during the battles of Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, I remained where they stationed me and ran the risk of death, like other men. It would be very strange conduct on my part if I were to desert my station now from fear of death or of any other thing when the god has commanded me—as I am persuaded that he has done—to spend my life in searching for wisdom, and in examining myself and others. That would indeed be a very strange thing. Then certainly I might with justice be brought to trial for not believing in the gods, for I should be disobeying the oracle, and fearing death and thinking myself wise when I was not wise. For to fear death, my friends, is only to think ourselves wise without really being wise, for it is to think that we know what we do not know. For no one knows whether death may not be the greatest good that can happen to man. But men fear it as if they knew quite well that it was the greatest of evils. And what is this but that shameful ignorance of thinking that we know what we do not know? In this matter, too, my friends, perhaps I am different from the multitude. And if I were to claim to be at all wiser than others, it would be because, not knowing very much about the other world, I do not think I know. But I do know very well that it is evil and disgraceful

to do an unjust act, and to disobey my superior, whether man or god. I will never do what I know to be evil, and shrink in fear from what I do not know to be good or evil. Even if you acquit me now, and do not listen to Anytus' argument that, if I am to be acquitted, I ought never to have been brought to trial at all, and that, as it is, you are bound to put me to death because, as he said, if I escape, all your sons will be utterly corrupted by practicing what Socrates teaches. If you were therefore to say to me, "Socrates, this time we will not listen to Anytus. We will let you go, but on the condition that you give up this investigation of yours, and philosophy. If you are found following these pursuits again, you shall die." I say, if you offered to let me go on these terms, I should reply: "Athenians, I hold you in the highest regard and affection, but I will be persuaded by the god rather than you. As long as I have breath and strength I will not give up philosophy and exhorting you and declaring the truth to every one of you whom I meet, saying, as I am accustomed, 'My good friend, you are a citizen of Athens, a city which is very great and very famous for its wisdom and power—are you not ashamed of caring so much for the making of money and for fame and prestige, when you neither think nor care about wisdom and truth and the improvement of your soul?' " If he disputes my words and says that he does care about these things, I shall not at once release him and go away: I shall question him and cross-examine him and test him. If I think that he has not attained excellence, though he says that he has, I shall reproach him for undervaluing the most valuable things, and overvaluing those that are less valuable. This I shall do to everyone whom I meet, young or old, citizen or stranger, but especially to citizens, since they are more closely related to me. This, you must recognize, the god has commanded me to do. And I think that no greater good has ever befallen you in the state than my service to the god. For I spend my whole life in going about and persuading you all to give your first and greatest care to the improvement of your souls, and not till you have done that to think of your bodies or your wealth. And I tell you that wealth does not bring excellence, but that wealth, and every other good thing which men have, whether in public or in private, comes from excellence. If then I corrupt the youth by this teaching, these things must be harmful. But if any man says that I teach anything else, there is nothing in what he says. And therefore, Athenians, I say whether you are persuaded by Anytus or not, whether you acquit me or not, I shall not change my way of life; no, not if I have to die for it many times.

Do not interrupt me, Athenians, with your shouts. Remember the request which I made to you and do not interrupt my words. I think that it will profit you to hear them. I am going to say something more to you, at which you may be inclined to protest, but do not do that. Be sure that if you put me to death, I who am what I have told you that I am, you will do yourselves more harm than me. Meletus and Anytus can do me no harm: that is impossible, for I am sure it is not allowed that a good man be injured by a worse. He may indeed kill me, or drive me into exile, or deprive me of my civil rights. Perhaps, Meletus and others think those things great evil. But I do not think so. I think it is a much greater evil to do what he is doing now and to try to put a man to death unjustly. And now, Athenians, I am not arguing in my own defense at all, as you might expect me to do, but rather in yours in order you may not make a mistake about the gift of the god to you by condemning

me. For if you put me to death, you will not easily find another who, if I may use a ludicrous comparison, clings to the state as a sort of gadfly to a horse that is large and well-bred but rather sluggish because of its size, so that it needs to be aroused. It seems to me that the god has attached me like that to the state, for I am constantly alighting upon you at every point to arouse, persuade, and reproach each of you all day long. You will not easily find anything else my friends, to fill my place, and if you are persuaded by me, you will spare my life. You are indignant, as drowsy persons are when they are awakened, and, of course, if you are persuaded by Anytus you could easily kill me with a single blow, and then sleep on undisturbed for the rest of your lives, unless the god in his care for you sends another to arouse you. . . .

Questions for Discussion

1. Which parts of the selection from the *Apology* show Socrates' concern with the constructive function of philosophy? The analytical?

2. Socrates claimed that discovering your own ignorance is an important step on the road to knowledge. Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. Can you think of any recent examples of philosophers arousing public hostility? What does this tell you about the current status of philosophy?

4. Do you agree with Socrates when he said, "To be afraid of death is only another form of thinking that one is wise when one is not." What are your reasons?

5. If we accept Socrates' claim that society needs philosophers, what sorts of issues should philosophers be raising today if they are to benefit society?

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PHILOSOPHY

If one were to ask a European philosopher to describe the nature of philosophy in North America today, the response would be that it is characterized by enormous variety. Countries that have more or less centralized educational systems can develop a national style in philosophy. For example, one can speak of French philosophy, British philosophy, or German philosophy. Nothing of the sort is possible with respect to the practice of philosophy in North America.

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There was a time when American philosophy might have been represented by the pragmatists such as William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewey, and the philosopher–sociologist George Herbert Mead, but those days are over. Today philosophy as practiced in the United States and Canada is overwhelmingly diverse. Adding to this diversity is the emergence of interest in various non-Western philosophies, such as African, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian, along with the related question of what sense it makes to call these non-Western thought systems "philosophy." Might they better be called something else, reserving the term *philosophy* for distinctly Western modes of thinking?

Within that diversity, however, it is possible to speak of different styles or methods of doing philosophy. In general terms those distinctions mirror the same sort of divergence that has occurred in the social sciences. Social scientists are divided between those who use statistical and mathematical techniques of analysis and those who prefer a more discursive, even narrative, style. The academic study of history, which long has been characterized as a humanities

discipline, has its advocates of statistical analysis and quantitative research. Known as *cliometrics*, this kind of historical research differs from traditional, narrative-style historical work as much as mathematics differs from poetry.

In philosophy a similar, though not identical, division exists between those whose use of analytical techniques derives from formal logic and those whose analysis is less formalized and more akin to the traditional writings of philosophers. Loosely these two approaches are referred to as the analytical and continental styles of philosophy. Like all such labels, these distinctions can be pushed too far. Some analytic philosophers practice a kind of analysis that has ample room for the more traditional discursive style of philosophy, whereas some continental philosophers use formalized techniques in their approaches to traditional philosophical questions. As was discussed in Chapter 1, "The Activity of Philosophy," these two approaches to philosophy are not opposed, though sometimes philosophers within the same academic department may act as if they are. However, a look at the philosophical literature currently appearing in journals and scholarly monographs shows philosophers drawing on the work of both styles of philosophy.

Other recent developments in philosophy go beyond questions of method. One increasingly important theme is feminist philosophy, which asks whether some of the traditional questions in philosophy, as well as traditional answers, have been skewed by male biases and interests. Particularly in ethics, feminist philosophers have argued that some of the ways ethical questions are posed is influenced more by gender than by reason. As an alternative to the rule-governed analysis of morality, feminist thinkers have put forward an ethics of care, which they see as an important corrective to the over emphasis on logic in the analysis of ethical issues.

Another area to which philosophers are giving considerable attention is philosophy of science and attendant issues, such as artificial intelligence and the logic of discovery. In some ways this is not new at all, since from its beginnings philosophers have shown an interest in including in their purview questions about the nature of things, which was the title of one of Aristotle's books.

Another significant fact about philosophy today is that philosophers are mainly teachers of philosophy. Unlike previous eras when philosophers might be church officials (Anselm, George Berkeley, William Paley), monks (Thomas Aquinas, Peter Abelard), a librarian (David Hume), a craftsman (Spinoza), novelists (Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky), today, with few exceptions, philosophers are professors and are found at work in colleges and universities. This situation has resulted in the professionalization of philosophy, with most practitioners belonging to the American Philosophical Association (APA), whose annual meetings, located in various parts of the United States, provide an opportunity for philosophers from all over North America to meet with each other and discuss issues of common intellectual interest. One side effect of the dominance of the APA is that the current status of philosophical questions tends to be defined by how they are treated in the papers and proceedings of the Association.

Within many college and university departments of philosophy, the study of philosophy serves as a cornerstone of the general education requirements of the institution. Therefore, philosophers give attention to communicating to the new generation of students the perennial issues of philosophy. This is done through the study of the history of philosophy and the topics that have occupied thinkers from ancient to contemporary times. Since philosophy has generally not found its way into the curriculum of high schools, some philosophers have turned their attention to the development of introductory materials for students there and even for students in the lower grades. These materials feature critical thinking skills and the development of moral reasoning capabilities. However, much of this effort faces tough going as public schools, pressed by budget concerns and the "back to basics" movement, find they have few resources and little time for such innovative courses.

Many college and university philosophy departments have broadened their offerings to include various applied areas in philosophy, such as applied ethics (business ethics, medical ethics, environmental ethics, journalism ethics, computer ethics), courses in critical thinking and writing, and courses that apply philosophical analysis to nontraditional areas such as philosophy of sport, philosophy of sex and love, and philosophy of ecology. In all such areas of inquiry, philosophers identify the important

issues and help students develop tools to evaluate possible answers to questions raised by activity in those areas under study.

Similar to the broadening of courses in applied philosophy in college curricula are other attempts to find an audience for philosophy other than undergraduate college students. One such effort is a series of books dealing with philosophical issues raised by current films and television series. Not all philosophers applaud the series. Some accuse it of dumbing down philosophy. Others point out that it is not that much different from what Socrates did when he discussed philosophical issues with ordinary people in the marketplace in Athens.[1]

Another arena for the practice of philosophy is the newly created activity called philosophical counseling. Still in its beginning stages, and suffering from the growing pains associated with any new endeavor, it offers an alternative to traditional psychological counseling. In the words of a *New York Times* reporter, "philosophical counseling takes the premise that many of our problems stem from uncertainties about the meaning of life and from faulty logic."[2] Allied with this is the appearance of a host of books showing that philosophy can offer a life-changing experience. *How Philosophy Can Change Your Life* is the subtitle of one of the books by Lou Marinoff, a practitioner of philosophical counseling. A bestseller from the United Kingdom is Alain de Botton's *The Consolations of Philosophy.* There is even a talk show patterned on National Public Radio's "Car Talk" entitled "Philosophy Talk."[3] And *The Philosopher's Magazine,* published in the United Kingdom but distributed in North America, offers articles written for a generally educated audience on a variety of philosophers and philosophical themes.[4] Another British import, *Philosophy Now,* describes itself as "a news-stand magazine for everyone interested in ideas."

((•— Listen to the Podcast: Alain DeBotton on Philosophy Within and Outside the Academy on MySearchLab.com

The arrival of the internet provides still another forum for the dissemination of philosophical ideas and discussion of philosophical themes. Using any of the available search engines, the term *philosophy* will offer links to thousands of web sites. Here the best advice is: user beware. Some of the sites are transitory and others are little more than forums for the promulgation of the author's own ideas. The Philosophy Documentation Center (www.pdcnet.org) is a good place to start.

The world of philosophy is constantly changing, yet at its core remains the essential questions that have dominated the quest for wisdom from its earliest times. No better summary of the current scope of philosophy can be found than in the statement of Socrates that "the unexamined life is not worth living," making self-examination a central role of philosophy. Even with all of its methodological debates and unresolved questions, the current role of philosophy is to do precisely that.

Endnotes

1. The series is published by Open Court Publishing Company. The series editor is William Irwin of King's College, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.
2. Daniel Duane, "The Socratic Shrink," *The New York Times Magazine,* March 21, 2004.
3. Reported in the previous article by Daniel Duane. The station airing the program is in San Francisco.
4. Available from The Philosophy Documentation Center, P.O. Box 7171, Charlottesville, VA 22906.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Blackburn, Simon. *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Discusses the "big" questions of philosophy: knowledge, consciousness, fate; God, truth, goodness, justice.

de Botton, Alain. *The Consolations of Philosophy.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2000. A bestseller in Britain, de Botton's book was made into a six-part miniseries showing how philosophy can help one cope with everything from not having enough money to a broken heart.

Phillips, Christopher. *Socrates Café*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001. A philosopher tries to re-create the Socratic teaching situation by engaging persons in dialogue in cafés and other public settings.

Solomon, Robert C. *The Joy of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Treats the perennial questions of philosophy and shows how philosophy helps us understand who we are.

Yancy, George, ed. *The Philosophical I: Personal Reflections on Life in Philosophy*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. A collection of essays by philosophers detailing what attracted them to philosophy and why they find it interesting.

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   ((•– **Listen** to the **Podcast:** *Edward Craig on What Is Philosophy* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Why did the academic philosophers largely reject DeBotton's work?

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CHAPTER **4**

The Life of Reason

Now that we have taken a brief look at what philosophers do, in general, you may be wondering *how* they do it. How do philosophers arrive at their conclusions, and more important, how do they defend or justify those conclusions? Notice that although every discipline must have some means of defending its claims and deciding between conflicting claims, there are different means for different disciplines. An acceptable criterion in one area may not be acceptable in another, and the question can arise, what in general is the best all-around procedure?

In Western culture, an important shift occurred in what was considered acceptable criteria for truth and falsity around the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E., largely due to the birth of Western philosophy, which began to move away from mythological criteria and toward an appeal to reason. This shift of emphasis has dominated Western culture ever since, not only in the rise of philosophy but also in science, law, theology, and history. From Socrates on, the dominant mood has been an appeal to reason to settle questions of truth and falsity.

THE APPEAL TO REASON

What do we mean by an *appeal to reason?* First of all, we can say what it is not an appeal to. It is not an appeal to any authority over and above the individual. It is not an appeal to any type of authority, whether it be the authority of the oldest, the most divinely inspired, the most respected, the most powerful person in the community, or the authority of the past. The rational appeal, then, is first of all an appeal to the individual who is considering an issue. If you are wondering whether to accept some doctrine, or how to decide between two competing assertions, you cannot, if the appeal is to reason, turn the matter over to some other more knowledgeable person, that is, to an authority. The appeal is to *your* reason.

At the same time, however, the appeal to reason is not an appeal to whatever you happen to think at any given moment in whatever mood you happen to be. It is also not an appeal to your passions or emotions. It is an appeal to that part of you that can set aside an issue from the heat of the moment and quietly and calmly reflect on a situation before deciding. This gives reason a kind of universality.

The odd thing about the appeal to reason is that although it is an appeal to *your* reason, it is at the same time an appeal to what *any* person would think in a calm and

reflective moment. It is an appeal to you *as* a rational person. By abstracting from the particular emotions and self-interests of the individual, the appeal to reason is *universal,* claiming to be correct for everyone who considers the question in this reasonable way. If I ask a group of people how they feel about the current political scene, I would expect widely different answers from the different individuals, but if I ask someone if he or she agrees that $5 + 7 = 12$, I would expect anyone of average intelligence who took the time to reflect on this to agree. Not that everyone actually does agree on principles of reason, but this is what the appeal is to, this is the expectation.

What is a reasonable decision, or a reasonable person? What, in short, is reason? Making an important decision in the heat of the moment is often a big mistake. Why? For one thing, you tend to confuse distinct issues, accepting one thing because you really believe another quite different thing. If a man is accused of brutally murdering a small child in your community, you may at first think that he should be killed immediately, with or without a trial. But later, in a calmer moment and given the time to reflect on the situation, you will probably come to realize that your decision is based on confusing two or more quite distinct issues: that the death of the child is unfortunate, that murder

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is a heinous crime, whether or not the accused is the murderer, whether accused murderers, including this one, deserve a fair trial, and whether convicted murderers should be sentenced to death. An affirmative answer to one question is not necessarily an affirmative answer to the others. Upon reflection, you will probably decide that although you think murder in general, and more so in the case of a small child, is reprehensible, you also believe that the accused has the right to a fair trial. You also do not *know* whether the accused is guilty or not and are not sure *how* you feel about capital punishment in general.

Another general inadequacy of emotional or snap judgments is that, in making them, people fail to consider all the relevant issues when deciding on a particular question. For members of the jury in the trial of the accused murderer in the earlier example, a great many issues must be considered, such as the reports of witnesses, the reliability of the witnesses, motives, the law, the past record of the defendant, and so on.

The use of reasoning to make decisions, then, can be characterized as an appeal to considerations that each person must address within his or her own mind, as a reflective person, with concentration on distinguishing the different issues and considering all the relevant points, including the consequences. The most important feature of reasoning, however, is one we have not yet considered: seeing the *connections* and *relations* among all the relevant issues. How do some considerations contradict certain others? How do some of the facts of the case strengthen one conclusion and weaken another? Given a certain set of beliefs or facts, what can be inferred from them? By focusing attention on all the considerations relevant to a particular decision, we become conscious of *why* we are doing something, and this is a crucial part of what it means to be reasonable. A reasonable person is one who asks why, who looks for good reasons for doing or believing something, and who is willing, when asked, to supply reasons why. One thing is true *because* other things are true; some things become reasons why we should believe other things. I do not just think the accused is guilty, for example, but I have reasons *why* I think so, reasons that connect my understanding of all the relevant issues into a single compelling conclusion.

REASON AND PHILOSOPHY

The study of such connections is the study of *logic,* and logic in conjunction with *reflection* is the primary research tool of philosophy. Science is also based on an appeal to reason, but the scientist, unlike the philosopher, can also appeal to empirical facts. A

scientific hypothesis is based on reasoning; if the hypothesis is true, then we will empirically observe a certain result if we carry out a certain experiment based on it. But having offered this argument or piece of reasoning, the scientist must then enter the laboratory, conduct the experiment, and observe the results, and this part of the task involves technical skill and an empirical, factual component not common to philosophy.

The philosopher's reasoning must also be related to the facts of our experience, but in a different way, which we referred to briefly in Chapter 1 as reflection. The philosopher tries to articulate and sharpen our ordinary beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about the world, and then tries to see, through the use of reason, what those beliefs presuppose, how they are logically tied together, and what they logically lead to. The philosopher is therefore more concerned with finding a theory that fits the facts and shows their interrelations than with discovering new facts. Since the facts appealed to are all well known, philosophy is not an empirical science, as are physics, botany, geology, or chemistry.

Thus, the philosopher's *primary* tool is reason. Reason is also, as we have indicated, an important part of everyday life, especially in the tradition of Western culture. In the remainder of this chapter, we will look first at the use of reason in everyday life, and then examine the use of reasoning in philosophical investigation.

Since the time of Socrates, we have been encouraged to live our lives according to reason, to be reasonable, or rational. Any passing familiarity with history will reveal that Western civilization has *not,* on the whole, been particularly reasonable, certainly no more than other cultures. Nonetheless, we are urged to adopt the rational life, at least as an ideal. In saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living," Socrates was asserting that a life not in accord with reason is worthless. Why? What exactly is this ideal rational life and what are its advantages?

First of all, let us distinguish the ideal of a rational life from other views with which it is often confused. One position often confused with the ideal of a rational life is the view that since reason is presumably common to all people, reason is therefore the essence of human nature and the most important part of human existence. But this is not the same as the ideal of rational life, which asserts that living by the dictates of reason is the best way to live. It might well be the case that our capacity for human love or sympathy is the most distinctive and ennobling aspect of human nature, and yet it might also be true that a life based on reason is better than one based on emotion.

Another view frequently confused with the rational ideal is the position that the world is inherently rational or that people in particular are basically reasonable. But the rational ideal says nothing about the way things actually are in the world or the way people actually behave. It simply asserts that the best practical guide to belief and action is the principle of reason. Often the appeal to reason is based on the fact that people are *not* fundamentally or usually reasonable, but more frequently are given to irrational outbursts of passion and madness. Certainly, in the light of studies by Darwin, Marx, and Freud, who placed great emphasis on nonrational forces governing human nature, we

cannot ignore the importance of nonrational factors in human existence, but it is quite another matter to advocate living one's life and basing decisions upon unconscious and irrational fears.

THE ADVANTAGES OF REASON

Now that we have limited the appeal to reason to the view that the rational course is the best way to decide on important issues, what are the advantages of such a view and why should we adopt it? First of all, the rational ideal helps to resolve and coordinate important nonrational feelings and intuitions. Why not make decisions simply on the basis of our strongest feelings and intuition? Why not do what seems best at the moment? In principle, nothing is intrinsically wrong with this approach. In fact, what we call feeling or intuition is often simply the end product of a rational deliberation of which we are no longer aware.

The decision to terminate a relationship, for example, might seem a sudden spur-of-the-moment thing, but it is in fact the end product of many sober reflections on several different and interrelated considerations over a long period of time—concerning dissimilar interests, conflicting tastes, opposed life goals, and so on. It is not the role of reason to replace this natural decision mechanism. Indeed, for most of our lives, this is the approach we must use. We simply don't have time to consciously deliberate on each and every decision affecting our lives. Think how confusing, chaotic, and generally unworkable it would be if we had to reason out whether to stop at the red light, open the mail now, start dinner, and so on. It is essential that most of our decisions be made quickly and automatically.

The problem with this method of decision making is simply that it will not work *all* the time. The job of reason is not to replace it, but to complement it, especially when important, long-range decisions have to be made and when our intuitions conflict with one another. Intuition works fine until a conflict arises. You want to go to the concert tonight, but you also want to finish your English assignment on time. Since your feelings are in conflict, it will not help to decide by consulting your feelings. It is their conflict that is causing the problem. What is now required is a more conscious, deliberate, methodical way to calculate all the pros and cons, weighing them carefully and making a decision on that basis. In short, it is a job for reason.

Notice that in resolving conflicts among intuitions and feelings, we are not trying to replace them, but simply to coordinate them—to find a way in which our many wants, desires, and goals can all fit harmoniously together. The more important the decision (involving career, lifestyle, marriage, having children, and so on), the greater the scope of coordination required. This is part of what is meant by the examined life, assigning priorities, and working out relationships among goals and objectives.

A second advantage in adopting the rational ideal is that it is a more humane way of dealing with conflicts of opinion among different people. If everyone in the same society holds the same opinions on everything, the search for reasons would probably be unnecessary. In such a world, our beliefs would simply be instincts shared by all and therefore in no need of justification, but this is not the world we actually live in. In the real world, people hold different opinions, and this can lead to conflict and tension. The question we face is how best to *handle* conflicting opinions, and this is a deep and

serious issue of human social existence. On the one hand, each of us is a distinct and unique individual with different beliefs, attitudes, likes, and dislikes. On the other hand, we are forced to live in a common social world, and this is impossible if conflicts arising out of differences cannot be resolved. Every society must, therefore, have some way of reconciling differences of opinion on matters that affect more than one person.

Consider some alternatives. One approach is the old standby that "might makes right." Those in positions of authority simply decide what is right and wrong for everyone else (perhaps in terms of what they see as in their own interests as the power elite), and any disputes are settled by conforming to this institutionalized position. This would result in the enforced dogmatism of the ruling elite of the society. In such a society one would have no right to come to one's own conclusions, much less to express them publicly.

A more palatable approach might, therefore, be to reject *dogmatism* in favor of a kind of total *relativism* of opinion. That is, we could agree to "live and let live," and "to each his own," or "different strokes for different folks." We could adopt the approach that since each person has a right to his or her own view, there should not be any way of arbitrating disagreements. We would avoid conflict by ignoring it. "You go your way; I'll go mine."

The problem with such an approach is that certain conflicts cannot be avoided, such as territorial disputes or, in general, whenever two people want the same thing. What is wrong here is that this approach automatically closes all lines of communication between people. One would think, "I can communicate only with people I happen to agree with; the others are forever outside the realm of communication." Thus, it would be impossible, even as an ideal, for everyone in the society to live in a common, shared world.

Finally, there is the approach that appeals to reason. The appeal to reason fosters communication between people and supports the idea that, despite our differences, we do live in a common world in which it is possible to come to some agreement. When two people argue about their differences, they may seem to be alienating themselves from one another, but in fact they are at least trying to find some common ground on which to reconcile their differences. A genuine dispute presupposes that both parties believe that they live in a common world, that they hold different opinions about a common reality, and that their differences can be resolved by patient appeal to reason. In an argument between two individuals, one person offers reasons for holding a view (rather than dogmatically insisting on it), and the reasons that he or she thinks will lead the other person to look at the matter in a different light. But the other person has an equal right to state his or her reasons and attempt to persuade the first. Their objective is not to *retain* their differences but to find some common ground.

This approach has a twofold advantage: first, it facilitates communication and, second, it supports the autonomy and dignity of the individual. By avoiding the extremes of dogmatism and of total relativism, the appeal to reason fosters the possibility of attaining a difficult-to-reach common world of communication among different individuals without sacrificing the right of the individual to be different. In a reasoned argument, each side has a right to his or her opinion. To be reasonable in this sense means that I must listen to you, try to understand why you think as you do, and try to explain myself to you. This position is based on a realistic assessment of the problem of distinct

individuals with different perspectives trying to come to a common view without either falsifying the world or denying the rights of other individuals.

As Plato pointed out in *The Republic,* another advantage to grounding your opinions on reason is that these opinions are more stable than those not supported by reason. Opinions unsupported by reasons, Plato says, are like the statues of the ancient sculptor Daedalus, which were said to be so lifelike they would simply walk away in the night. Beliefs that have not been critically examined are more likely to give way to the arguments of others, whereas those that have been thought out in terms of rational arguments can better withstand attacks and not walk away from us in the night.

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In addition, the rational ideal of the life of reason is the most likely means of attaining accurate, reliable knowledge about the world. Given our common human condition, with its limitations on our ability to know, as well as our individual biases and prejudices that color all our perceptions, we are more likely to arrive at the truth by letting everyone have his or her say, examining all points of view, and weighing each of these opinions in terms of all the available evidence. That way, we know that we have made our decisions in the light of the best sources of evidence available to us in a frame of mind most conducive to finding the truth, rather than on the basis of prejudice and limited experience. This does not mean that we will always be right, of course, but it does mean that given our limited human understanding and the complexity of the world, we have done the very best we could.

In planning a career, for example, the rational approach would be to weigh carefully all the relevant information about what you really want out of life, what your chances of success are in various fields, what the job prospects in those fields are likely to be in the next five to ten years, and so on. Having made that decision, however, it is always possible that things will turn out differently—that you won't enjoy your chosen career as much as you had thought, that it costs more to attain than you had estimated, or that despite all the economic indicators when you made your decision, no jobs will be available when you graduate and are ready to begin your career. But that is due to the precariousness of even the best knowledge of the future, not to the weakness in your method. It is not a question of selecting a criterion of knowledge that will always and necessarily be right, which is impossible, but in choosing one that has the best overall track record. In the long run, the argument is that if you let every opinion be heard, however crazy it may sound at the time, and if you look at all the evidence as carefully as possible, then you will be more often right than wrong, and you will treat people in a more humane fashion.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do we need decision procedures in any branch of learning?
2. What advantage does the appeal to reason offer as a decision procedure? Can you think of others? Can you think of any disadvantages?
3. What does it mean to "be reasonable"?
4. Do you think reason is in conflict with feeling?
5. "Love is all you need." Comment.

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Here are a few questions and activities to help you understand this chapter:

1. What does Socrates mean, according to M.M. McCabe, when he says that the unexamined life is not worth living?

   ((•─ **Listen** to the **podcast:** *M. M. McCabe on Socratic Method* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. How does logic make equals of us all?

   ((•─ **Listen** to the **podcast:** *Finding Equality Through Logic* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. What is Plato's main concern in The Republic?

   ((•─ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Plato—The Republic* on **MySearchLab.com**

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Argument Forms

Almost any human activity can be improved by working at it. If you do not play tennis as well as you would like to, you can take lessons from a tennis pro and learn how to improve your game. The same is true of golf, swimming, or almost any other sport. There is nothing strange about this state of affairs; we naturally assume that working with someone who has made a study of a particular activity will improve our performance of this activity.

Some activities are so natural, however, that it might strike a novice as unnecessary to seek expert advice to improve his or her ability in an activity. Take running, for example. What could be more natural than running? Yet if you want to excel at this activity, make the Olympic team, and perhaps win the gold, you will have to be coached by someone who has studied the fine points of this form of physical activity. And you might be surprised to learn that improving your running demands that you familiarize yourself with matters of physiology, nutrition, and a host of other subjects that you might never associate with running.

THINKING ABOUT THINKING

All this is leading up to a consideration of *thinking.* What could be more natural than thinking? We all do it. Thinking does not even seem to require any special training. Or does it? We all know people who do not seem to be able to respond to logical analysis and arguments. "Listen to reason," we say. By an appeal like this, we are asking someone to accept logical arguments offered to support a point of view that we are recommending. And it is probably evident to you that some people are better at problem solving than others and seem to be naturally more logical in their thinking. Because reasoning is so important in philosophy, we need to give some special attention to the methods and techniques for distinguishing correct from incorrect reasoning. Even though reasoning and argumentation are activities we all engage in every day, because of its special importance in philosophy, philosophers have over the years refined the principles of correct reasoning into the discipline known as *logic.* By reflecting on our ordinary, intuitive sense of what are good and bad arguments and trying to state *why* they are good or bad, philosophers have sharpened and made more explicit the principles underlying sound reasoning.

Perhaps it will clarify the goal of logic as a philosophical activity if we can see the difference between the ways psychology and philosophy deal with thinking. Psychology

is concerned with describing how the human mind actually functions and the various factors that seem to enter into the process of decision making. We could say then that psychology's interest in thinking is *descriptive*. Philosophy, in contrast, seeks to distinguish

between correct and incorrect ways of thinking. Its concern is *prescriptive,* a function of philosophy we discussed in Part 1, "What Is Philosophy?" as the search for *normative* criteria. In Part 2, we will look at some of the important distinctions made in logic and will examine a few of the major argument forms found in philosophical literature.

SOME BASIC TERMS

The first term you need to familiarize yourself with is *argument*. An argument, in the philosophical sense, has little to do with agreements or disagreements among people. An argument results when a group of statements, called *premises,* is said to lead to another statement, referred to as the *conclusion*. The relationship between premises and a conclusion can be described in various ways, but in general we can say that the premises support the truth of the conclusion, ideally (in deductive arguments) *entailing* or *necessitating* the conclusion, but at least (in inductive arguments) showing the conclusion *most likely* to be true.

One aim of philosophical logic is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of arguments by examining the correctness of their logical form. Why this is a valuable approach will become clearer as we examine some of the more usual argument forms. Arguments can take many forms and a detailed study of logic enables one to analyze the major forms of arguments. However, since this chapter is only an introduction to logic, and not even a short course on the topic, we will mention only a few argument forms in order to illustrate the kind of philosophical distinctions that one must master in order to tell the difference between correct and incorrect reasoning.

Consider an example taken from everyday life. What if I argue that whenever it rains, the streets get wet, and that since the streets are in fact wet, then it must have rained. How good is my argument? Does it necessarily follow that it rained last night just because the streets are wet and are always wet after a rain? Not necessarily. It might have snowed during the night and then melted because of the salt on the road. Or the street sweepers may have been out during the night sprinkling down the roads. Or a water main may have broken, and so on. Obviously, the reasons do not support the conclusion. They are not reasons that ought to persuade us to accept the conclusion. If we concentrate on *why* this argument is a poor one, we may be able to extract a useful principle or rule. Our argument looks like this:

> *If it rains, then the streets get wet.*
> *The streets got wet.*
> *Therefore, it must have rained.*

Can you see the pattern in this argument? Only two basic statements are used here; let's call them *P* and *Q,* arranged in the following way:

> *If P, then Q.*
> *Q.*
> *Therefore, P.*

The problem with this argument is that the first statement (If *P*, then *Q*.) does not claim that *P* is the *only* way to get *Q*; it just says that it is *one* way. That is why the fact that *Q* occurs doesn't necessarily mean that *P* occurs. But now we see why *any* argument of this form is a bad one, and this can now be used as a principle of logic. Whenever we find an argument of this form, we know that it is not a good argument.

Notice what we have done. By reflecting on our commonsense understanding of good reasoning, we have extracted an explicit principle of logic. By continuing this process, philosophers have, since Aristotle in the fourth century B.C.E., developed an elaborate system of logic. Since it is closely related to our ordinary sense of reasoning in everyday life, logic can be used, not only by philosophers, but by all of us to improve our rational thinking ability.

TRUTH AND VALIDITY

One of the first things philosophers discovered about arguments when they began to examine the processes of logical thought is that arguments can go wrong and lead us to errors in two different ways. The first way is when the statements in the argument are false. The second way is when the relationship between the premises and conclusion is such that the conclusion is not entailed by the premises. When the conclusion does not follow from the premises, we say that the argument is *invalid*. When we can show that the premises do lead to the conclusion, we say that the argument is *valid*. As logicians use the term, only *arguments* can be valid or invalid. The *statements* in an argument are either true or false, but are never valid or invalid. To illustrate this distinction, let's look at some more examples.

Suppose you are walking across the college green to your class and someone hands you a pamphlet that contains an argument designed to persuade you that abortion is wrong because it is murder. Consider the following argument:

> *Abortion is the destruction of a human fetus and the destruction of a fetus is the taking of a human life. So if the taking of a human life is murder, then so is abortion.*

You read the argument over, but for some reason you don't want to accept the conclusion that abortion is murder. Yet the reasoning seems to make sense. How can you respond to the argument?

Or suppose you are sitting in your room quietly studying on a Saturday afternoon when a man selling religious literature knocks on the door. You get into a discussion about the existence of God and your guest tries to persuade you that God exists. You ask the person why you should believe that God exists and he responds that God exists because the Bible says so, and the Bible is true because it is the word of God. You agree with his conclusion, yet something seems to be wrong with his reasoning. Something just doesn't seem to follow.

In the first argument mentioned, the author has presented a *valid* argument. Simply stated, this means that he has employed good reasoning. Yet this does not mean that the conclusion is necessarily true. It may be the case that although the author of the argument is using good reasoning, the conclusion is false. How can this be the case? *An argument can be valid, yet contain false propositions, as in the following example:*

> *All spiders have six legs.*
> *All six-legged creatures have wings.*
> *Therefore, all spiders have wings.*

Clearly, all spiders do not have wings. The argument is valid, however, because *if* the premises were true, the conclusion *would* follow. So, we can add to our definition of validity the following condition. *A valid argument is one in which, if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.*

So, let us reconsider the argument concerning abortion. The argument is valid in that *if* the premises are true, the conclusion is true. *If* it is really true that taking a human life is murder, and that the destruction of a human fetus *is* the taking of a human life, and that abortion *is* the destruction of a human fetus, then the conclusion is inescapable that abortion is murder. If these premises are true, then the conclusion could not possibly be false. The conclusion cannot be false if the premises are true because the conclusion is already implicitly contained in the premises. To accept the premises in a valid argument but deny the conclusion is self-contradictory. So, if you argue that the conclusion *is* false, that abortion is *not* murder, you would not want to say that the author used bad reasoning. You would instead demonstrate that one of the premises is false, probably the premise that asserts that the destruction of a fetus is the taking of a human life. If this premise can be shown to be false, then we are not forced to accept the conclusion.

What about the second argument concerning the existence of God? Here you most likely sense some fault in the reasoning employed. This is an example of an invalid argument. Although the conclusion may in fact be true, the reasoning used to support the argument is faulty. It is an example of what is sometimes called a *circular argument*. It assumes the truth of what it attempts to prove. In fact, all the propositions in the argument *may* be true; God exists, the Bible is true, and so on, yet these statements have not been arranged to form a valid argument.

Let us summarize. If the conclusion of an argument is justified by the premises (that is, if the conclusion follows from the premises), the argument is *valid*. If the premises do not justify the conclusion, the argument is *invalid*. Validity or invalidity is attributed only to arguments, never to the statements in an argument.

Now let us turn to the matter of truth and falsity. The statements in an argument can be either true or false. How to determine whether they are true or false is another matter, one that is not the concern of logic. The reason for this surprising attitude of logicians toward truth and falsity is that logicians are concerned solely with the form of an argument, not with its content. And the reason logicians can ignore the question of the truth or falsity of the statements in an argument is that *an argument can be valid even though one or more of its premises is false.* Conversely, an argument can be *invalid* even though all its statements are true. Nor is it silly to argue about things that are false, since this is the best way to work out the consequences of untried possibilities. What would happen if I jumped from the fifth floor window? I would get hurt. I haven't really jumped and I haven't gotten hurt, and this is because my reasoning was correct that I *would* get hurt if I *were* to jump. Or, to consider another example, if I were a lawyer, I would be wealthy. In fact, I am neither, but this kind of reasoning might persuade me to *become* a lawyer.

Discovering the distinction between truth and validity was a major step forward in the study of human thought. As far as we know, Aristotle was the first Western thinker to make the distinction explicit, and it may well have been his most important contribution to the development of logic. It is surprising, though, how many people two thousand years after Aristotle's time still have trouble with the distinction.

Maybe the following chart will help. Since we can talk about an argument in terms of the truth or falsity of its premises and the validity or invalidity of its inferences, any argument has four possibilities:

Premises	Argument	
False	Invalid	
True	Invalid	
False	Valid	
True	Valid	Argument is *sound.*

What we want, of course, are arguments that are valid and whose premises are true. Logicians refer to such arguments as *sound*. Unsound arguments may be either invalid or valid arguments that contain false premises.

ARGUMENT FORMS

It is not always easy to tell whether an argument is valid or invalid. This is especially the case when we are attempting to analyze arguments written in a natural language such as English. To help in analyzing the structure of an argument, logicians have found a powerful tool in the use of algebraic notation for logical analysis, a method that has gained widespread support among logicians since it was introduced into logic in the early years of the twentieth century. To see why the use of symbolism is such an aid to logical analysis, notice how difficult it would be to add the following numbers: four thousand six hundred and sixty-seven plus two thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine. Try to work the problem without using numerical notation. Then notice how easy the problem becomes when you use numerical symbols:

$$4,667$$
$$+\underline{2,829}$$

We introduced the notion of an argument form in our discussion of the distinction between truth and validity earlier in this section. Now let us take a closer look at some of the more common argument forms, using to a limited degree the algebraic notation that has become such an important tool in logical analysis. Since this is only an introduction to logical analysis, we will simplify this notation. For illustrative purposes, we will consider the following argument, which has two premises that are claimed to provide support for a conclusion:

Premises $\begin{cases} \text{If I owned a hotel in Hawaii, I would be wealthy.} \\ \text{I own a hotel in Hawaii.} \end{cases}$

Conclusion $\{$ Therefore, I am wealthy.

Of course, most of the arguments we are puzzled about are not this simple, but it is better to take a simple example first in order to be sure that we understand the distinctions that must be made before going on to more complicated arguments. To see better the logical form of this argument, we can use symbolic notation by letting *P* represent the statement that refers to hotel ownership in Hawaii and *Q* stand for the quality of being wealthy. (For the sake of logical analysis you can suppress all the tenses and moods of

the statements.) The arrow → indicates that the relationship between *P* and *Q* is an "if-then" type of relationship. *P* → *Q* symbolizes the first statement in the argument. The symbol ∴ means "therefore."

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{P }$$
$$\therefore Q$$

But is this a *valid* form of argument? Remember what the term *validity* means. It means that if the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true (and cannot possibly be false). This indicates how we can determine whether this argument form is valid or not. Is it possible in an argument of that form for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false? If it is really true that whoever owns a Hawaiian hotel is wealthy and that I actually own one, is there anything that could prevent me from being wealthy? No, given these premises, I would have to be wealthy. This is therefore a valid argument form.

FOUR STANDARD ARGUMENT FORMS

The key to assessing the validity of deductive arguments is the fact that their validity depends entirely on their form, not on the truth of the statements in the argument. The form of the argument just given is very simple, yet the same form is found in many different arguments, some of which are much more complicated. Because they recur frequently in arguments, the more common argument forms have been given standardized names (some of which go back to the Middle Ages). The argument form just cited is known as *modus ponens* (the affirming mode). Let's examine it a little more closely.

MODUS PONENS

We can discover the *modus ponens* (hereafter referred to as MP) form in many different arguments. Having identified it as a *valid* argument form, we have a quick and easy way of testing other arguments for their validity. The test is simple. If the argument displays that pattern (or has that form), it is valid. Since this is not the *only* valid form, however, the fact that an argument does *not* display the MP form does not prove that it is invalid, since it might display some other valid argument form. So, if we find the following argument in our reading, we see that it has the same form of MP, and so is valid:

> *Whenever the leading business indicators show a decline for two successive months, we are in a recession. Since they have declined during the past two months, we can conclude that we are now in a recession.*

Argument forms will not always be as easy to spot as this, however, and the reader must often rephrase and restructure the sentences (preserving their original meaning, of course) to see if they fit this pattern. So, for example, an earlier example of MP might have read:

> *I wouldn't take the car out today, not with those worn, slick tires of yours on those wet streets. Didn't you hear the weatherman last night?*

Here the first premise (If it rains, the streets will be wet.) is merely assumed and left unstated. It is so well known and obviously true that it does not *need* to be stated. Also, the conclusion is stated first, not last, and other material that is not relevant to the argument (about the weatherman) is present. Nonetheless, the passage does display the MP form, though in a disguised and submerged fashion. Another argument displaying MP in a disguised way might be the following:

> *I think he slipped off the road. It had been raining that night.*
>
> *Look, I told you not to come if it rained. You know how impossible those roads become when it rains.*

Sometimes people think they are reasoning by MP when they really are not. MP could be described as *affirming the antecedent* (in $P \rightarrow Q$, P is the antecedent, Q the consequent). If one *affirms the consequent,* however, a faulty form of argument results. Look again at the argument we considered earlier:

> *If it rains the streets will be wet, and the streets are wet.*
>
> *So, it must have rained.*

What is the argument form here?

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{Q \qquad}$$
$$\therefore\ P$$

The argument differs from MP in that the second premise is Q, not P, and the conclusion is P, not Q. But now ask yourself whether the conclusion *has got* to be true, assuming that the premises are true. Suppose it is true that whenever it rains, the streets get wet. And assume further that the streets are in fact wet. Does that *prove* that it rained? Of course not. As noted before, the street cleaner may have washed down the streets, or a water main may have burst, and so on, without it having rained at all.

If it is possible for the conclusion to be false when the premises are true, however, then (by definition of validity) the argument is invalid. This indicates an important way of showing an argument to be invalid by constructing an *obviously* invalid *counterexample* of the same form (one in which the premises are obviously true and the conclusion is obviously false). If an argument form is valid, then it will be impossible to find *any* arguments of that same form with true premises and a false conclusion. So, when you find such an argument, you know that that argument form is invalid. In this case, we can easily find such counterinstances.

> *If I took a trip to Europe, I would be broke. I am broke. Therefore, I took a trip to Europe.*

From what we have said about argument forms, if *this* argument is invalid, then so is every other one that has this same pattern. Whenever you find an argument of this form (overt or disguised),

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{Q \qquad}$$
$$\therefore\ P$$

you know it is invalid, because it commits the mistake of *affirming the consequent.*

MODUS TOLLENS

Another common valid argument form is *modus tollens* (MT), which is an inference resulting from *denying the consequent*. Let us go back to the same argument terms just mentioned:

> *If it rains, then the streets get wet.*
> *The streets didn't get wet.*
> *Therefore, it hasn't rained.*

Can you see the pattern in this argument? Using *P* and *Q* for the two terms of the argument, and a dash before a letter to mean negation, we can see that it has the following form:

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{-Q}$$
$$\therefore -P$$

The contrast between the valid forms of MT and MP and their invalid forms will be apparent in the following diagram.

Valid Form (MP)	Invalid Form (Affirming the Consequent)
$P \rightarrow Q$	$P \rightarrow Q$
$\underline{P}$	$\underline{Q}$
$\therefore\ Q$	$\therefore\ P$
If I owned a hotel, I would be rich.	If I owned a hotel, I would be rich.
I own a hotel.	I am rich.
Therefore, I am rich.	Therefore, I own a hotel.

Valid Form (MT)	Invalid Form (Denying the Antecedent)
$P \rightarrow Q$	$P \rightarrow Q$
$\underline{-Q}$	$\underline{-P}$
$\therefore\ -P$	$\therefore\ -Q$
If I owned a hotel, I would be rich.	If I owned a hotel, I would be rich.
I am not rich.	I don't own a hotel.
Therefore, I don't own a hotel.	Therefore, I am not rich.

It may not at first be obvious why the invalid forms given earlier are fallacious, but think of it this way. Suppose that you do not own a hotel but are rich for other reasons (you own a gold mine). All the premises in the invalid forms would be true, yet the conclusion would be false. Remember that in a valid deductive argument *if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true also.* Since the premises in the interpretation suggested would be true but the conclusion false, the argument is shown to be invalid.

A useful way of spotting invalid arguments, which we used before in our example of taking a trip to Europe, is to think up a counterexample *having the same form* but

whose premises are true and whose conclusion is false. An example of an argument that is invalid because it denies the antecedent is the following:

If this is a psychology textbook, it will be used in college classrooms.
This is not a psychology textbook.
So, it won't be used in college classrooms.

Even though this is a *philosophy* textbook, it will nevertheless be used in college classrooms.

HYPOTHETICAL SYLLOGISM

Another often-used argument form consists of a string of if-then statements. Look at the following argument, for example.

If I get an A on the midterm, I will ace the course. Furthermore, if I ace the course, I will graduate with a 4.0 grade point average. So, it seems that if I get an A on the midterm, I will graduate with a 4.0.

Does the argument seem valid? It can be symbolized as follows:

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$Q \rightarrow R$$
$$\therefore\ P \rightarrow R$$

This valid argument form is called the *hypothetical syllogism* (HS). It is an argument form commonly used in tracing a causal chain of consequences (like the domino theory). A *syllogism* is a deductive argument with two premises and a conclusion. The earlier example contains hypothetical (sometimes called *conditional*) statements and is therefore referred to as a *hypothetical syllogism*.

DISJUNCTIVE SYLLOGISM

Another common argument form involves the use of statements involving an either/or choice, symbolized by v as in *P* v *Q,* which means "either *P* or *Q,* or both." (The sense of "or" here is inclusive, meaning either or both.) Consider the following argument:

Either Macbeth or his wife is mad. Since Lady Macbeth obviously is not mad, Macbeth must be mad.

We can symbolize the argument form as follows:

$$P \text{ v } Q$$
$$-Q$$
$$\therefore\ P$$

Statements of the either-or kind are called *disjunctive statements,* and this argument form is called the *disjunctive syllogism* (DS). Denying either term of a disjunction (that is,

denying either *P* or *Q*) allows one to affirm the other disjunct, but an invalid form of this argument exists as well.

> *Either Macbeth or his wife is mad. Lady Macbeth is obviously mad, so Macbeth is not mad.*

$$P \text{ v } Q$$
$$\underline{Q}$$
$$\therefore -P$$

SUMMARY OF VALID ARGUMENT FORMS

We have examined four valid argument forms. These are not the only valid argument forms but are ones used a great deal in philosophical arguments. Using symbolic notation, we can state them as follows:

1. MP:	$P \rightarrow Q$	2. MT:	$P \rightarrow Q$		
	$\underline{P}$		$\underline{-Q}$		
	$\therefore Q$		$\therefore -P$		
3. HS:	$P \rightarrow Q$	4. DS:	$P \text{ v } Q$	or	$P \text{ v } Q$
	$\underline{Q \rightarrow R}$		$\underline{-P}$		$\underline{-Q}$
	$\therefore P \rightarrow R$		$\therefore Q$		$\therefore P$

What one often finds in philosophical and other kinds of argumentation is a combination of several of these basic valid argument forms. Consider the following argument, for example:

> *Every society is governed by its own set of norms of behavior (N). But if so (that is, if N), then behavior in accord with those norms will be consistently rewarded while deviant behavior will be persistently punished (B). It follows from this (that is, from B) that a sharp class division will be created in every society composed of those preferred individuals more willing and able to follow the norms and those rejected and despised individuals who are unwilling or incapable of adhering to the norms of that society (C). Therefore, class divisions are a necessary and unavoidable part of every society.*

The structure of the argument is immediately apparent if we symbolize it in the manner introduced in the preceding section:

$$1.\ N$$
$$2.\ N \rightarrow B$$
$$\underline{3.\ B \rightarrow C}$$
$$\therefore C$$

Here we find several argument forms combined into a single complex argument. Steps 2 and 3 lead to the conclusion $N \rightarrow C$ by HS, and this conclusion, along with step 1, leads to C, the conclusion of the argument, by MP. So we really have two arguments in one:

$$N \rightarrow B$$
$$\underline{B \rightarrow C} \quad \text{HS}$$
$$\therefore N \rightarrow C$$

and

$$N \rightarrow C$$
$$\underline{N \quad\quad} \quad \text{MP}$$
$$\therefore C$$

Alternatively, we could analyze the argument as a combination of several MPs, with steps 1 and 2 leading to *B*, and *B*, along with step 3, leading to *C*. According to this restructuring of the argument the two component arguments are

$$N \rightarrow B$$
$$\underline{N \quad\quad} \quad \text{MP}$$
$$\therefore B$$

and

$$B \rightarrow C$$
$$\underline{B \quad\quad} \quad \text{MP}$$
$$\therefore C$$

Now, imagine a counterargument to the one earlier:

Yes, if every society is governed by its own set of norms, then of course behavior will be rewarded and punished accordingly. And if that is true, then it will indeed follow that two distinct classes will emerge. But if we look at the facts we see that this (C) does not occur. Therefore, it is not the case that every society is governed by its own set of norms.

Here our argument is composed either of an HS and of an MT in one interpretation or in another interpretation of two MTs. The counterargument, which can be symbolized as follows:

$$N \rightarrow B$$
$$B \rightarrow C$$
$$\underline{-C \quad\quad}$$
$$\therefore -N$$

can be symbolized as either

$$N \rightarrow B$$
$$\underline{B \rightarrow C} \quad \text{HS}$$
$$\therefore N \rightarrow C$$

and

$$N \rightarrow C$$
$$\underline{-C \quad\quad} \quad \text{MT}$$
$$\therefore -N$$

or

$$B \rightarrow C$$
$$\underline{-C} \qquad \text{MT}$$
$$\therefore -B$$

and

$$N \rightarrow B$$
$$\underline{-B} \qquad \text{MT}$$
$$\therefore -N$$

Other combinations include mixtures of MT, HS, and MP with DS. Almost any grouping of these basic argument forms can be found in both philosophical literature and other writings. You might enjoy trying your hand at analyzing one of these other possibilities.

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$Q \rightarrow R$$
$$P \text{ v } S$$
$$\underline{-S}$$
$$\therefore R$$

Questions for Discussion

1. What is an argument?

2. What is the difference between something being true, valid, and sound?

3. Determine the validity or invalidity of the following examples by identifying the underlying basic argument form.[1]

   (a) "Since tests proved that it took at least 2.3 seconds to operate the bolt on Oswald's rifle, Oswald obviously could not have fired three times—hitting Kennedy twice and Connally once—in 5.6 seconds or less." (*Time Magazine*)

   (b) "Barry Goldwater to the contrary notwithstanding, extremism in defense of liberty, or virtue, or whatever is *always* a vice because extremism is but another name for fanaticism which is a vice by definition." (Irving Kristol, "The Environmental Crusade" in *The Wall Street Journal*)

   (c) "I have already said that he must have gone to King's Pyland or to Capleton. He is not at King's Pyland; therefore, he is at Capleton." (A. Conan Doyle, *Silver Blaze*)

   (d) "If then, it is agreed that things are either the result of coincidence or for an end, and these cannot be the result of coincidence or spontaneity, it follows that they must be for an end." (Aristotle, *Physics*)

   (e) "Either wealth is an evil or wealth is a good, but wealth is not an evil; therefore, wealth is a good." (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*)

   (f) "Since then to fight against neighbors is an evil, and to fight against the Thebans is to fight against neighbors, it is clear that to fight against the Thebans is an evil." (Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*)

   (g) "Also, what is simple cannot be separated from itself. The soul is simple; therefore, it cannot be separated from itself." (Duns Scotus, *Oxford Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*)

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[1]Many of the examples used in this chapter are taken from Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*.

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CHAPTER 6

Induction and the Philosophy of Science

A rguments vary greatly in their relative strengths. Some arguments are so strong that the conclusion could not possibly be false if the premises themselves are all true. These are known as *deductive* arguments, and they *prove* the conclusion conclusively. A valid deductive argument is one in which, if the premises are true, the conclusion *must* be true.

Deductive arguments, however, have a major drawback. You probably have already spotted it: You cannot get any more out of the conclusion than is present in the premises, and when we want to enlarge our knowledge of the world, especially when we engage in empirical investigation, as natural scientists do, deductive arguments are not sufficient because we want to go beyond the premises we begin with. In the vast majority of arguments in the natural sciences and in such social sciences as psychology, geography, history, linguistics, and anthropology, one finds that the reasons lend weight to the conclusion without demonstrating conclusively the truth of these conclusions. These arguments are called *inductive* arguments, a type of reasoning that has been a source of great perplexity to philosophers. An inductive argument is one in which the premises, if true, make the conclusion *probable,* or *likely* to be true, and therefore make it reasonable to accept the conclusion.

Inductive arguments are, however, neither valid nor invalid, since they do not prove or fail to prove their conclusion absolutely. In assessing the merits of an argument, we must be sure first of all what kind of argument it is, and not, like the man who entered his cat in a dog show, judge inductive arguments by deductive standards. A good inductive argument is one whose premises, if true, establish the conclusion as being more likely to be true than its competitors, and, for the moment at least, the most reasonable one to accept.

Inductive arguments vary among themselves according to *how* strong the reasons offered are, that is, according to how probable the conclusion has been shown to be. In a murder trial, for example, the mere fact that the suspect owns a gun of the same caliber as that which killed the victim adds very little weight to the conclusion that the suspect is the murderer. The prosecutor's case would be greatly strengthened if it could be shown that the bullet that killed the victim was fired from the suspect's own gun. This too would hardly be convincing without additional evidence, such as that the suspect had a motive for killing the deceased, had threatened the victim, was seen by eyewitnesses in the vicinity of the murder immediately before and after the fatal shots were fired, and so forth. In spite of the accumulation of evidence, the argument against the suspect still is not

conclusive, since it is possible for all this to be true, even though the victim was shot by someone who was trying to frame the suspect.

To summarize, it is the nature of induction that the conclusion of an inductive argument is never *absolutely* proved; we accept it with some degree of probability. We cannot speak of inductive arguments as being either valid or invalid, only better or worse. We also do not have the precise tests for determining the soundness of an inductive argument that we have for deductive arguments. The following chart gives a summary of some of the differences between the two types of reasoning.

Inductive and Deductive Arguments

Deductive	**Inductive**
Every mammal has a heart. All horses are mammals.	Every horse that has ever been observed has had a heart.
∴ Every horse has a heart.	∴ Every horse has a heart.
1. If all the premises are true in a valid argument the conclusion must be true.	1. If all the premises are true in a good inductive argument, the conclusion is probably true.
2. All of the information or factual content in the conclusion was already contained, at least implicitly, in the premises.	2. The conclusion contains information not present, even implicitly, in the premises.
3. Deductive arguments are either valid or invalid.	3. Inductive arguments are either better or worse.
4. Premises, taken together with negation of the conclusion, imply a contradiction.	4. Premises, taken together with the negation of the conclusion, do not imply a contradiction.

INDUCTION AND SCIENTIFIC REASONING

At some point in school, we may have been told that scientific theories are generated by a process of *inductive* generalizations from particular instances. "This swan is white, that one is white, and so on; therefore, all swans are white." Without some specific problem to be solved or question to be answered, however, inductive generalizations are aimless. Many observable similarities among objects in the world could stimulate generalizations, but most of them are not of great importance. Stones, for example, generally lie on the ground, while peaches are found higher up in trees, with insects somewhere in between, but so what? Only some special concern would make such generalizations worth noting. Theorizing must be directed, and it is the question or problem that provides this direction.

Inductive generalization alone, assuming we use it, would be hopelessly weak as a form of reasoning. Suppose I notice that all the animals on my farm are white (a white dog, a white horse, several white sheep, and so on). Would I be justified in concluding that all animals are white? Of course not. Even the generalization that all swans are white has been disproved by the discovery of a group of black swans in Australia. The weakness of this form of reasoning is that it always argues from the fact that some *A* is *B* to the conclusion that all *A* is *B,* which is obviously invalid (that is, it is always possible for

the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false). The inductive method is useful only when it is supplemented by a great deal more implied information. If we already know, for example, that the color of birds' eggs is specific to a particular species of bird, then from the fact that some mallard eggs are green, we can infer that all mallard eggs are green. Because we already accept the theory about birds' eggs in general, we do not need more green mallard eggs to support our argument.

The appeal to empirical facts is important in the formulation of scientific theories, of course. The question is, *how* is it important? Empirical facts are not simply collected like birds' eggs; they are used to test hypotheses that have been formulated to solve a particular question, and this process involves a certain amount of deductive reasoning. Suppose we notice that two widely separated groups of people, *A* and *C,* speak a similar language. This is puzzling; we would expect that the more remote the groups are in space and time, the greater the language differences between them. How can we explain this problematic phenomenon? We begin with a problem, some fact that needs explaining. We must then formulate one or more possible solutions or hypotheses. Since there is always more than one possible explanation for anything, this requires a certain amount of imagination. We certainly cannot hope to answer our question by just staring at all the facts. Investigations, whether scientific or not, require a creative effort. Perhaps *A* and *C* were originally one people driven apart in some remote period of history by an invasion of an alien group, *B,* which now separates them. In formulating this hypothesis, we treat our problematic fact as the *conclusion* of a deductive argument for which we construct a *hypothetical premise*. We are asking what is essentially a hypothetical question: "What must have happened to account for the facts as we know them? What supposition can we come up with that would logically imply that *A* and *C* speak a similar language?"

Sometimes the scientist constructs higher-order hypotheses to account not for specific events, as in our present example, but for other *hypotheses*. Here the scientist's approach resembles even more closely the philosophical task of the dialectic outlined by Plato in *The Republic*. The value of these higher order hypotheses and the test of their credibility lie in their ability to account for (that is, to logically imply) other hypotheses, bringing many separate hypotheses under one large umbrella. Part of Newton's success was his ability to infer from his general laws almost all the important hypotheses of his predecessors, Kepler and Galileo. The acceptance of Einstein's general theory of relativity was due in large part to Einstein's success in embracing in his theory not only the work of Newton, which it then replaced as a higher order theory, but also the widely divergent theories of his contemporaries concerning electromagnetism, radiation, and subatomic particles.

Usually, however, the hypothesis is formulated to account for (or imply) some more specific event that needs to be explained, such as a supposition, that, if true, would explain the fact, in our example, that *A* and *C* speak similar languages. Our hypothetical reasoning, then, is

> *If A and C were driven apart by B,*
> *Then A and C would speak a similar language today (which they do).*

But we do not know that *B* drove them apart. This is merely assumed as a possible solution. How can we determine if this is indeed the correct answer? What right have we to assume that this provides a better answer than some other possibility? It is at this point that empirical testing becomes important. We must now try to infer from our hypothesis

some new, empirically observable phenomenon, which we can then proceed to test. We stake the truth of our hypothesis, in other words, on a prediction that can be empirically decided one way or the other. In the earlier stages of our reasoning, in formulating our hypothesis, we argued dialectically "upward" from conclusion to premise (from the fact that *A* and *C* are apart due to the hypothetical cause, *B*). To test our hypothesis, we reason "downward" from premise to conclusion, that is, from our hypothesis to some new empirically observable event. We reason, for example, that if *A* and *C* had been separated by the warlike activities of *B* (that is, if our hypothesis is true), then *A* and *C* would still be telling similar stories about the cruel *B* people, and *B* would still be telling a different story about the brave exploits of their ancestors scattering their enemies when *B* first came to the land. Having staked our claim to observable facts, we can proceed to test our hypothesis. We record the stories of *A, B,* and *C,* and if they are not as predicted, we have falsified our hypothesis and have to start all over again. But if things turn out as we predicted, we have confirmed and supported our hypothesis though we have not yet proved it. Our test procedure is based on the reasoning that

> *If P, then Q.*
> *Q.*
> *Therefore, P.*

Setting up our argument in this form, we have:

> *If A and C were originally one people, then they will have similar mythologies.*
> *They do have similar mythologies.*
> *Therefore, they were originally one people.*

However, upon close scrutiny, we find that this is not a valid argument. It is, in fact, a form of the fallacy discussed earlier of *affirming the consequent,* a bogus form of *modus ponens* (MP). Ironically, we can support and strengthen scientific hypotheses, but we can never conclusively *prove* them to be true. Thus, we find it is easier to falsify a theory than to prove it, because a valid argument can, however, be formulated to prove the falsity of a theory.

> *If P, then Q.*
> *Not Q.*
> *Therefore, not P.*

This is the kind of valid argument form we identified earlier as *modus tollens* (MT).

INFORMAL REASONING

There is nothing mysterious about this form of reasoning. It is precisely what we do every day in solving problems that crop up in the normal course of events. Suppose that toward the end of the semester you decide to pay a visit to a college friend and find that he is not in. Where could he be? You hypothesize: Perhaps his exams are over and he has gone home for the semester break. But how can you be sure? Well, if he has gone home his car will be gone, which you can check. If the car is not in the garage, you can be reasonably sure he has gone away for the week. If you find the car in the garage, however, you must begin thinking of an alternative hypothesis. Maybe he is at Mary's, which you can test by going there to see for yourself.

Your form of reasoning is precisely that of the scientist. You began with a puzzling fact (John is not in). You constructed an hypothesis (he has gone home for the break), which if true would account for the unexplained fact. From this hypothesis you inferred a new testable consequence (that his garage would be empty), which you went on to check. From all this you concluded that he has probably gone home for the break.

OTHER INDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS

Correctly predicting something previously unknown is very persuasive, though it is not a complete proof. Instead of looking at induction as "going from the particular to the general," it is probably better to think of induction as all those forms of argument whose premises support but do not necessarily prove the conclusions. You might think that since inductive arguments are not valid, they are mistaken or *fallacious.* In many instances, however, they lend support or weight to a conclusion and are a legitimate source of evidence. The only mistake would be in pretending that inductive arguments are deductive.

Does it follow, for example, that because most drivers under twenty-five are insurance risks, that *you* are an insurance risk simply because you are under twenty-five? The conclusion does not logically or necessarily follow from the premises, but the insurance company is correct in supposing that its statistical information about drivers lends some weight to the claim that, other things being equal, you are probably not as safe a driver as your mother. If you dispute this claim, you can do so only by another argument of the same form. You may say, "But look, I have never had an accident, have no police record, and do not take drugs or alcohol in excess." This might carry some weight. You are assuming that since most people who have had no accidents, who do not have a police record, and so on are less accident-prone, that you are a safe driver. But this no more follows from the premises than the original argument by your would-be insurance company. (Don't worry; your argument is better because it includes a more complete profile of yourself.)

Another kind of inductive argument frequently used by philosophers is the *argument from analogy.* This argument, as the name implies, is based on an analogy drawn between the relation of *A* and *B* to that of *C* and *X*, where *A, B,* and *C* are known quantities and *X* is unknown. This type of reasoning rests on the claim that if two things resemble each other in one respect, they are likely to resemble each other in some other respect, which the argument seeks to establish. One argument for the existence of God, for example, goes like this. The world is as well organized as a clock; since a clock could have been made only by a skilled craftsman, the world must have been created by a Divine Craftsman. The argument exploits the analogy that the world is to the Divine Craftsman what the clock is to the clock maker. We are using our knowledge of three of the terms (clocks, clock makers, and the natural world) to infer something about the fourth (God), which is in question. The argument rests on the similarity of the "products" (the clock and the world) and is only as strong as the degree of similarity between the clock and the world. Is the world like a clock? How similar are they? Not very, according to some philosophers. In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, argued that the world was as much like a plant (which is not "manufactured") as like a clock, from which he concluded that the grounds for supposing that the world was created by an intelligent agent were no greater than the grounds for supposing it just grew like a weed.

Inductive generalization, we said earlier, is useful only when it is supplemented by a great deal more implied background information. If we already know that the color of birds' eggs is the same for all members of a species, then we can infer from the fact that these ten mallard eggs are pale green that all mallard eggs are pale green without looking at them all. Still, even with all this additional information the argument is far from conclusive. How do we know that there is a uniform kind of egg for each species of bird? This is itself based on the empirical generalization that the members of a species share many properties in common. Of course, members of a species don't share all properties in common (some dogs are black, and others are white, yet they all belong to the same species), so how do we know which properties are shared and which may not be shared? All our argument about mallard eggs shows is that it is likely that other mallard eggs will also be pale green.

The form of the argument in our example is *hypothetical*. *If* it is true that animals belong to a species, and *if* it is true that members of a species share common properties, and *if* it is true that one of these common properties is the color of their eggs (when they have eggs), and *if* it is true that some mallard eggs are pale green, *then* it is probably true that all mallard eggs will be pale green. But *is* all this true? For the moment, it seems to be empirically supported, but new information some time in the future may overturn these empirical observations.

This type of reasoning is also *analogical.* We are reasoning that because mallards share many other common features, they will therefore share *this* common feature. That is, because all mallard ducklings look alike, and all adult females look alike and all males look alike, and all have the same feeding and migratory habits, they will therefore all have the same colored eggs.

Behind this argument lie the more general analogical assumptions mentioned earlier, that because the animals within a species share certain common features of coloration, mating habits, and color of eggs, the members of *this* species (mallard) will also all have the same colored eggs.

Much of our everyday reasoning about things is analogical in this sense.

I infer that a new movie featuring my favorite star will be good because other movies featuring this person were good. I believe that my new automobile will be reliable because this brand of automobile has proved reliable in the past. In other words, I am arguing that because this new film is like other films in *some* respects (starring Matt Damon, for example) that it will be like the others in this *new* respect (in being good). The deeper assumption underlying this argument is of the same form, except more general. Because actors are generally consistent in their capacity to produce good films (and auto manufacturers are generally consistent in the way they make cars), new films by the same actor can be expected to share many properties with old ones (and new cars by this company will share many properties of the old models). Without this more general background information, analogical reasoning can obviously go astray.

Inductive generalizations are not, then, the major function of scientific reasoning, and even where they do occur, they are not based on the simplistic rule that because some things have a certain property, all of them do. In assessing this type of reasoning, we must take into account how broad the sample is and in how many respects the items being compared resemble one another. If we have seen only one film featuring a favorite actor, we have little basis on which to make a prediction about the actor's new film, and our prediction will be strengthened if the new film also shares with the other films the same costars, director, and so on. The other important criterion is the *relevance* of

the factors being compared, and this can be assessed only in terms of the general background information presupposed in all such reasoning. Is it really true that, generally speaking, film stars and auto manufacturers are consistent? If not, then it is irrelevant to argue that this new automobile will be reliable because the older models were.

CAUSAL ARGUMENTS

A great deal of inductive, scientific reasoning concerns causality. Often we want to know what causes what. Here is a disease: What causes it? Obviously, if we knew the cause, we could more easily work on a cure by blocking or stopping the cause. Before 1920, many people living in the tropics died of malaria. What caused it? Since people from North America and Europe did not get malaria until they began living in the tropics, and since they almost all got malaria once they moved to the tropics, the cause seemed to have something to do with living in a hot, moist climate. At first, malaria was thought to be caused by hot, damp, stagnant air in low-lying areas, and the cure was to move to a higher, more breezy, drier location.

The first question is whether there is any connection between incidences of malaria and living in a region of warm, moist, stagnant air. Suppose we looked at early European missionaries living in West Africa, comparing those who settled along the low-lying, forested coast with those who lived at higher elevations further inland. Is there any significant difference in the incidence of malaria? Perhaps some people with malaria did improve once they moved to a higher elevation, but maybe they would have survived in any case without moving to the mountains. Only by carefully examining empirical, statistical data can we tell what real difference a higher and drier climate makes.

In the late nineteenth century, a serious epidemic of anthrax broke out among cattle in France. Pasteur had heard about a French veterinarian who had cured hundreds of cows by employing an unusual treatment he had developed on his own in which he raised the sick cow's body temperature by vigorous rubbing and then making cuts in the skin into which was poured turpentine and hot vinegar. Of course, the poor cow bellowed in pain, but in many cases the cows fully recovered. The question for Pasteur, however, was whether the rate of recovery was any better for the cows receiving this painful and unusual treatment than for cows who received no treatment. As with many diseases, not all cows afflicted with anthrax died. Some of the infected animals died and some lived. Pasteur carried out an experiment in which half of a certain number of cows infected with anthrax were given the veterinarian's treatment, and half were left untreated. The results of the experiment turned out to be the same for both groups! Half of each group lived and half died. The conclusion was obvious: The cows who recovered after receiving the treatment were not cured by it but would have gotten better in any case. The treatment did nothing to benefit the cows.

Naturally, Pasteur's discovery was a great shock. Many intelligent people had reasoned wrongly and badly, engaging in what is known as the fallacy of "false cause." Just because one thing precedes another does not prove the first is the cause of the second. Bertrand Russell tells the story of the rooster who got up each morning before sunrise, hopped up on a fence post, and began crowing until the sun came up. This went on day after day until the rooster came to feel his crowing *caused* the sun to rise. The sad end of the story comes with the farmer's wife wringing the rooster's neck, cooking him for Sunday supper, and the sun continuing to rise as before.

In the case of malaria, on the other hand, it turns out that it did make a difference whether one lived in a low, wet area versus an area that was higher and drier. The incidence

of malaria tended to be much greater in the lower, wetter locations. So, unlike the case of the phony cure for the sick cows, there was a statistical correlation, but it is still not obvious that this explains what *causes* malaria. Despite this correlation, it is not clear that malaria is caused by moist, stagnant air. Although it helped to move to the mountains, people still got and died from malaria in the higher and drier elevations. So, despite the correlation, the cause of malaria had not been discovered. But what exactly are we looking for? What exactly do we mean by causality? It is not at all clear what is meant by causality. Is it supposed to be a necessary condition or a sufficient condition, or both a necessary and a sufficient condition? Or is causality perhaps something far weaker, that is, just one of many contributing conditions?

The scientist Eijkman fed chickens white, polished rice, and they all developed polyneuritis and died. He then fed another group of chickens unpolished rice, and none of them contracted the disease. Finally, he fed a third group of infected chickens the discarded outer husks of rice from polished rice, and these chickens all quickly recovered. Here the evidence is overwhelming that the lack of the outer rice covering causes polyneuritis. Without it, the chickens all get the disease and die. With it, they do not get the disease, and indeed sick chickens recover from it if given the outer rice parts. Clearly, then, the lack of the brown outer part of the rice is both a necessary and sufficient condition for polyneuritis, and this is causality in the strongest, most obvious sense. But not all cases of causal linkage are so clear.

Suppose, in the earlier example, we found, as it was discovered before 1920, that people who lived in swampy, tropical areas contracted malaria more frequently than those living in higher, drier tropical locations. Does this prove that breathing moist, warm air causes or even contributes to malaria? No, we now know that malaria is caused by a microbe that enters the bloodstream through the bite of a mosquito. So, what is the connection between warm, moist stagnant air and malaria? Only the indirect connection that mosquitoes thrive in such conditions. If we could get rid of the mosquitoes or prevent them from biting us, there would be no danger of malaria, even in warm, moist areas of stagnant, slow-moving air. So, the fact that there are statistical correlations does not, by itself, prove causal connections.

PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Because of the intimate connection between empirical evidence (from our five senses), inductive arguments, and science, induction has become an important branch of philosophy known as "philosophy of science." As pointed out in Part 1, "What Is Philosophy?" philosophy can be understood as a "second order" reflection on other "first order" investigations, such as philosophy of art, philosophy of history, philosophy of law. Similarly, the philosophy of science is a philosophical reflection on the nature of science and scientific thinking, including the important question of the scientific use of empirical, inductive arguments.

Traditionally there have been two roles assigned to induction, one "before the theory" and the other "after the theory." The first is the idea that scientists use inductive generalizations to create scientific theories; the second is the idea that scientists use summaries of inductive probabilities to support and confirm theories already in existence. Although supported in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill, induction is very weak as a method of discovery, as we've already seen, and has therefore fallen out of favor in recent years. But induction as a method of justification has continued to be of interest among philosophers of science. The most popular version of induction as a method

of justification is Karl Popper's "hypothetico-deductive model" (*The Logic of Scientific Discovery*), according to which we deduce empirically observable predictions from a scientific theory. This is the type of theory we used in our earlier example from anthropology. If we fail to observe what the theory predicts, the theory is falsified (a form of MT, a valid deductive argument, as pointed out earlier); but observing what the theory predicts doesn't verify the theory, according to Popper (since this amounts to the deductive fallacy of "affirming the consequent"), but merely "corroborates" it (that is, we merely retain the theory until it has been falsified).

More recently, Wesley Salmon (*Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World*) has argued that empirical verification is just as important as falsification in inductive justification of scientific theories. By rejecting all inductive verification, Salmon argues, Popper has no way of explaining how we select which unfalsified ("corroborated") theories to rely on in the future or why we regard some corroborated but unfalsified theories as better than others.

Another early philosopher of science, Rudolf Carnap (*The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*), also supported the idea that scientific theories must be empirically testable—otherwise, he said, they don't really explain anything and have no value as science. Carnap was particularly worried about purposeful biological theories in the 1930s. If we claim there is something in the root cells of plants that "drives" or "induces" them to always grow downward, what does this tell us beyond the fact which we already know, that roots grow downward? Does this really "explain" anything?

We naturally look to science to explain things, but how do scientific theories explain; what do we mean in this context by an "explanation"? Carl Hempel (*The Philosophy of Natural Science*) has argued that there really are at least two different kinds of scientific explanations—some theories explain empirical facts, while others "explain" (that is, account for, organize, or unify) other scientific theories. In this second kind of explanation, Newton's work was thought important because it could "explain" the earlier work of Johannes Kepler and others. And Einstein's theories of relativity have been thought to explain, in that sense, Newton's mechanistic theories.

The empiricist orientation of science led, in the early twentieth century, to what is known as "positivist" theories of meaning (A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*). If a statement cannot be empirically verified or falsified, according to this positivist understanding, it doesn't really explain anything and, indeed, doesn't really *mean* anything. Such extreme positivist views are now largely abandoned, but the empiricist orientation of science also led to positivist theories of what really exists in the world. According to Grover Maxwell (*Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism*), although many scientific theories postulate the existence of entities that are too small or too large to observe with the five senses (for example, atoms and subatomic particles), we have no good reason to believe that these entities actually exist—we merely postulate them in order to explain what we can empirically observe. Another philosopher of science, Bas van Fraasen, argues, on the other hand, that we can "indirectly" see atoms and other extremely small or large entities (with an electron microscope, for example), and that we should therefore acknowledge their actual existence.

It is interesting to see that, despite the enormous credibility enjoyed by the physical sciences, the most important developments in the philosophy of science in recent years actually cast doubt on the absolute authority of science. The most popular claim of this sort is articulated by Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), who explains

changes in scientific thinking as a result of "paradigm shifts." Traditionally, philosophers had argued that science is rationally objective and therefore removed from irrational non-scientific considerations. Kuhn argues, on the contrary, that the best way to understand major changes (paradigm shifts) in scientific theories is to see them as embedded in all sorts of nonscientific, nonrational factors of psychology, sociology, history, and politics. Kuhn thus rejects the widespread view that scientific theories always progress inevitably toward "the truth." Instead, he favors a more relativistic theory of truth.

Another skeptical and relativistic argument was advocated much earlier by W. V. Quine in his famous article "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." According to Quine, scientific theories can never be completely verified or refuted (and in that sense are said to be "undetermined"), especially when we reflect on the historical and sociological factors that "holisti-cally" help shape any scientific theory. Some examples (though not Quine's) might be: Why do we tend to think modern medicine is better than traditional African or Chinese remedies? Because it is based on modern scientific methods. But what makes us so sure these methods are better than traditional African or Chinese methods? Is it just because they are ours?

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In a broader context, however, the positions of Kuhn and Quine simply raise once more the larger question, what is the difference between scientific claims and nonscientific claims? If both sorts of theories are relative to the social, political, economic context, why should we trust science more than other sorts of theories? Is the theory of evolution more objectively valid than the theory of creationism (intelligent design)?

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the difference between an inductive argument and a deductive argument?
2. Is all scientific reasoning inductive generalization from particulars? If not, what else is it?
3. How does hypothesis formulation and testing resemble MT?
4. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the following arguments:
   (a) "In attempting to understand the elements out of which mental phenomena are compounded, it is of the greatest importance to remember that from the protozoa to man there is nowhere a very wide gap either in structure or in behavior. From this fact, it is a highly probable inference that there is also nowhere a very wide mental gap." (Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind*)
   (b) "And indeed since the planets are seen at varying distances from the earth, the center of the earth is surely not the center of their orbits." (Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*)
   (c) "Suppose someone tells me that he has had a tooth extracted without an anesthetic, and I express my sympathy, and suppose that I am then asked, 'How do you know that it hurt him?' I might reasonably reply, 'Well, I know that it would hurt me. I have been to the dentist and know how painful it is to have a tooth filled without an anesthetic, let alone taken out. And he has the same sort of nervous system as I have. I infer therefore that in these conditions he felt considerable pain, just as I should myself.' " (A. J. Ayer, *Problem of Knowledge*)
   (d) "Since Venus rotates so slowly, we might be tempted to conclude that Venus, like Mercury, keeps one face always toward the Sun. If this hypothesis were correct, we should expect that the dark side would be exceedingly cold. Pettit and Nicholson have measured the temperature of the dark side of Venus. They find that the temperature is not low. . . . The planet must rotate fairly often to keep the dark side from cooling excessively." (Fred L. Whipple, *Earth, Moon and Planets*)
5. What advantages can scientists achieve when they are critical of their own methods?

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1. According to William James, what are the links between science and philosophy?

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2. According to Hume, what does the possibility of natural religion require?

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3. How did some of the greatest minds of history use skepticism to challenge conventional wisdom?

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Strategies for Philosophical Arguments

The valid argument forms we have been considering, taken singly or in some combination, can be used as templates for constructing arguments in any area of discourse. Since reasoning is the *primary* tool of philosophers, however, such argument forms are especially prominent in philosophical writing. Here are a few real examples of arguments offered by philosophers that are based on basic valid argument forms.

It seems that mercy cannot be attributed to God. For mercy is a kind of sorrow, as Damascene says. But there is no sorrow in God; and therefore there is no mercy in him. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*)

M: Mercy is attributed to God.
S: Sorrow is attributed to God.

$$M \rightarrow S$$
$$\underline{-S} \qquad \text{MT}$$
$$\therefore -M$$

Intense heat is nothing else but a particular kind of painful sensation, and pain cannot exist but in a perceiving being. It follows that no intense heat can really exist in an unperceiving corporeal substance. (George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*)

H: Something is heat.
S: Something is sensation.
P: Something cannot exist in an unperceiving being.

$$H \rightarrow S$$
$$\underline{S \rightarrow P} \qquad \text{HS}$$
$$\therefore H \rightarrow P$$

Our ideas reach no farther than our experience. We have no experience of divine attributes and operations. I need not conclude my syllogism. You can draw the inference yourself. (David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*)

E: We do not experience divine attributes.

I: We do not have ideas of divine attributes.

$$E \to I$$
$$\underline{E} \qquad \text{MP}$$
$$\therefore\ I$$

If then, it is agreed that things are either the result of coincidence or for an end, and these cannot be the result of coincidence or spontaneity, it follows that they must be for an end. (Aristotle, *Physics*)

C: Things are the result of coincidence.

E: Things are for an end.

$$C \lor E$$
$$\underline{-C} \qquad \text{DS}$$
$$\therefore\ E$$

Here are several arguments that display more than one basic valid argument form.

Whensoever a man transfers his right, or renounces it, it is either in consideration of some right reciprocally transferred to himself or for some other good he hopes for thereby. For it is a voluntary act: and of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself. And therefore there be some rights, which no man can be understood by any words, or other signs, to have abandoned or transferred. As first a man cannot lay down the right of resisting them, that assault him by force, to take away his life, because he cannot be understood to aim thereby at any good to himself. (Hobbes, *The Leviathan*)

T: A person transfers or abandons his right.

V: A person acts voluntarily.

G: A person aims at some good for himself.

R: A person abandons his right to protect himself.

$$T \to V$$
$$\underline{V \to G} \qquad \text{HS}$$
$$\therefore\ T \to G$$

$$R \to T$$
$$\underline{T \to G} \qquad \text{HS}$$
$$\therefore\ R \to G$$

$$R \to G$$
$$\underline{-G} \qquad \text{MT}$$
$$\therefore\ -R$$

And no man can be a rhapsode who does not understand the meaning of the poet. For the rhapsode ought to interpret the mind of the poet to his hearers, but how can he interpret him well unless he knows what he means? (Plato, *Ion*)

R: A person is a true rhapsode.
I: A person interprets the poet.
M: A person knows what the poet means.

$$R \rightarrow I$$
$$\underline{I \rightarrow M} \quad \text{HS}$$
$$\therefore R \rightarrow M$$

$$R \rightarrow M$$
$$\underline{-M} \quad\quad \text{MT}$$
$$\therefore -R$$

Here are some more examples of the use of modus tollens (MT). See if you can formulate each one as an MT.

I do know that this pencil exists, but I could not know this if Hume's principles were true. Therefore, Hume's principles, one or both of them, are false. (G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*)

If number were an idea, then arithmetic would be psychology. But arithmetic is no more psychology than, say, astronomy is. Astronomy is concerned not with ideas of the planets, but with the planets themselves and by the same token the objects of arithmetic are not ideas either. (Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic.* Used by permission of Northwestern University Press.)

If error were something positive, God would be its cause, and by Him it would continually be procreated (by Prop. 12). But this is absurd (by Prop. 13). Therefore error is nothing positive. (Baruch Spinoza, *The Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated by the Method of Geometry.* Reprinted with permission from Open Court Publishing Company, a division of Carus Publishing.)

NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS

In addition to constructing arguments that utilize basic valid argument forms, another important philosophical activity with which the reader will want to be familiar is the attempt to provide definitions or "analyses" of important philosophical concepts by specifying what are known as "necessary and sufficient conditions." This can be readily understood in terms of our discussion of conditional statements ($P \rightarrow Q$) and their role in modus ponens (MP) and modus tollens (MT).

What a conditional statement ($P \rightarrow Q$) says is that P is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for Q and that Q is necessary but not sufficient for P. What do we mean here by *necessary* and *sufficient?* P is sufficient for Q if P is all that is required for Q to occur. Thus, raining is all that is required to get the streets wet. But P is not *necessary* for Q, meaning that P is not the only way for Q to occur. Although raining is sufficient for getting the streets wet, they could be gotten wet in other ways, without it having rained.

This is all that MP really says. It states that since P is sufficient for Q (that is, P is all that is required to show Q) and P actually occurred, that is all we need in order to know that Q also occurred. MP, in other words, goes through because P is a sufficient condition for Q. And, by the same token, the fallacy of affirming the consequent is based on the idea that Q is *not* a sufficient condition for P. Just because the streets are wet is not enough to enable us to know that it rained, since there are other ways the streets could have gotten wet.

On the other hand, Q is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for P, meaning that although it is possible for the streets to be wet without it having rained, it is not possible for it to rain without the streets getting wet. A necessary condition of it raining therefore is that the streets get wet. This is simply what the conditional $(P \rightarrow Q)$ states. So if Q is absolutely necessary for P to occur, then we know that without Q, P cannot occur. And this is really what MT asserts. If Q is necessary to P $(P \rightarrow Q)$, then P cannot occur without Q. Hence, $-Q \rightarrow -P$. By the same token, the fallacy of denying the antecedent is based on the fact that P is not necessary for Q. Does it have to rain in order for the streets to get wet? No. So, the mere fact that it did not rain does not guarantee the conclusion that the streets are not wet.

A frequent method of philosophical analysis of an important concept is to try to state its necessary and sufficient conditions. Take the concept *knowledge,* for example. Many philosophers believe that if we can state the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing something, we will have succeeded in adequately explaining what knowledge is. Plato offers an example of such an attempt in *Theaetetus.* One necessary condition for knowing something is believing it (you cannot know something without believing it), but that is obviously not sufficient. Why not? The answer to this question will indicate to us another necessary condition. The reason believing is not sufficient for knowledge is that you could believe something that was not true. Thus, truth is a second necessary condition for knowledge. You cannot know something unless you believe it *and* it is true. But is *this* sufficient? Could a person believe something that was true and yet not know it, and if so, why not? (Again, the answer will give us a third condition.) What if a person believed that an earthquake would occur in southern California on March 14 and, sure enough, it does. It looks as though he *knew* it would occur. But what if we ask him why, and he replies that he made this discovery by consulting tea leaves. Now what would we say? Did he know there would be an earthquake or not? And if not, *why* not? Many of us would say he did *not know* there would be an earthquake because he did not have any good reasons for believing it. Thus, we have a third necessary condition to add to the other two. In order to know something, a person must believe something that is true and have good reasons for so believing. But is this at last sufficient? Plato and many contemporary philosophers have thought so, though others disagree. But if so, then by adding to our list of necessary conditions until the entire list is also sufficient, we have succeeded in adequately explaining what knowledge is.

INDIRECT PROOFS

Philosophers have traditionally spent a great deal of effort trying to find flaws in the arguments of others. This is not as negative as it may sound, for discovering errors is one step toward finding the truth. Socrates claimed over and over that until we know our view is wrong, we are not in a position to seek the truth. Consequently, much of Socrates' philosophical life was spent criticizing the views of his contemporaries, especially those who

claimed to be authorities in some particular area. He would ask if they knew the answer to some pressing question (What is justice? What is religious piety? What is knowledge?). His friends would answer as best they could. Socrates would then examine each view to see what it logically implied, and if it entailed something patently false, absurd, or self-contradictory, then the person would have to admit that his original position was untenable. The basic form of this strategy, known as indirect proof, resembles MT, where the original position being criticized is P and the absurd consequence is Q.

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{-Q}$$
$$\therefore -P$$

Indirect proofs are one of the most common forms of philosophical reasoning, though some people who use such methods do not even realize that they are doing it. In addition to understanding indirect proofs as a form of MT, you can think of them in the following way. Suppose your opponent in a philosophical argument holds a position you think is silly. To convince your friend of this, you do the following:

1. Accept provisionally your opponent's view.
2. Show how, on your opponent's premises, an absurdity results.
3. Conclude that, since your opponent's view leads to absurdity, his or her view must be mistaken, and your view, which is the *opposite,* is therefore correct.

In the history of philosophy, indirect proofs were used quite successfully by the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno, who is credited with developing this method of proof. Zeno was a disciple of Parmenides, who held the view that nothing could change. Things appear to change, but Parmenides held that they didn't *really* change and that change itself was an illusion. To defend his teacher's point of view, Zeno took his opponents' viewpoint and showed how the assumption that things do change leads to startling and, he thought, absurd consequences.

We can diagram an indirect proof as follows:
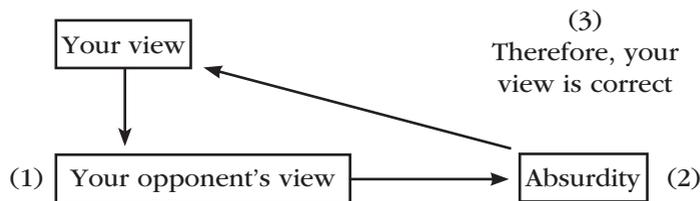
Zeno argued, on the basis of commonly accepted notions of space, that it was impossible for a man to run across the equivalent of a football field! His argument went something like this. Let's say a football player receives a kickoff in his end zone and decides to run it out. Before he can reach the opposite goal line, he must cross the 50-yard line, and before he can do that he must cross the 25, and before that the 12, the 6, and so on to infinity according to the common notion that space is infinitely divisible. So, no matter how hard he runs, he will never make it, though he is very good and has a clear field ahead. The point of this argument is not to prove that a man *cannot* run the length

of a football field. This would be absurd. We all know that he can. The point is that our ordinary viewpoint seems to imply an absurd conclusion. There must, then, be something wrong with the ordinary concept, some unclarity that, until tested, was not known to exist. In this case, Zeno's argument showed that our ordinary concepts are contradictory. Once we see it, it is obvious, but it took Zeno's shock tactics to make this clear.

DIALECTICAL REASONING

After Socrates' death, Plato developed Socrates' critical approach into a more structured philosophical method known as *dialectic*. Dialectic is basically an attempt to discover the truth about something using critical reasoning to work your way through a series of partial truths, discarding the ones that cannot stand the test of scrutiny, until you reach the insight you seek. In the process of dialectical arguments, as Plato understood it, one begins with a partial and perhaps even inaccurate understanding. Through a process of examination and critical inquiry, the inadequacies of this beginning point are seen, and a new attempt is made to formulate a newly discovered insight—a whole series, in other words, of *indirect proofs,* gradually approximating to an acceptable position.

Crucial to the process of dialectical reasoning, Plato thought, was the willingness to subject each idea to the test of rigorous examination and debate. Consequently, Plato, like Socrates, thought that a philosophical inquiry took place best in a dialogue in which two or more persons debate the strength of proposed definitions or ideas. We might diagram the dialectical process in the following way.

Third revised
position (etc.)

Second revised   Contradiction
position   or absurdity

Revised   Contradiction
position   or absurdity

Initial   Contradiction
position   or absurdity
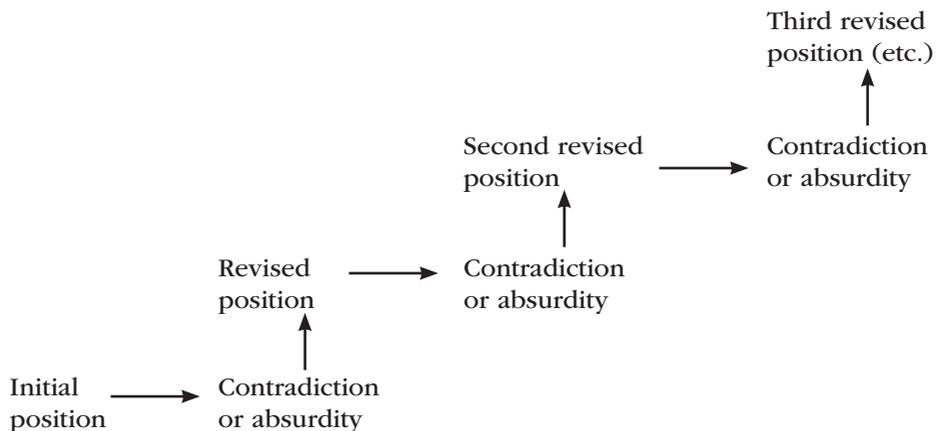
This is the Socratic method of the early Platonic dialogues in which Socrates examines some common belief by "knowledgeable" people to see what its logical implications are. Usually, these consequences reveal some inconsistency and thus the unacceptability of the original belief. Thus, the form of the procedure is hypothetical. "Suppose P is true. If so, then Q, but if Q, then R, but R is clearly unacceptable, so we cannot accept P after all." This is an example of an indirect proof, assuming the truth of a premise in order to show, by its absurd consequences, its falseness.

In *The Republic,* Socrates asks, "What is justice?" To this, Cephalus, a respected and honorable merchant, replies that justice is speaking the truth and paying your debts. Socrates' response is to see where such a view leads, that is, to determine whether its consequences are acceptable or not.

> Suppose that a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he asks for them when he is not in his right mind. Ought I to give them back to him? No one would say that. . . . I should be right in doing so, any more than they would say that I ought always to speak the truth to one who is in his condition. (Plato, *The Republic*)

So, Cephalus' definition is unacceptable and another definition is proposed that also founders on inconsistencies, and so on through much of the first part of the dialogue. This negative form of argument, called *indirect proof,* can be seen as a form of MT:

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{-Q}$$
$$\therefore -P$$

This is a common form of argument in everyday life: "If the senator were a wise legislator, then our state would have benefited during his twelve years in office, but in all important respects, the fortunes of our state have declined these past twelve years. Therefore, I conclude that the senator has not been a wise legislator."

THE DILEMMA

Finally, a popular argument among philosophers is the *dilemma*. Formally, it looks like this:

$$P \text{ v } R$$
$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{R \rightarrow S}$$
$$\therefore Q \text{ v } S$$

Your opponent is forced to accept one of two possibilities (*P* or *R*), each of which leads to unacceptable consequences (*Q* or *S*). Either you have stolen some money or you have made a bookkeeping error, but in either case, you are unfit to be a bookkeeper. Either you knew your subordinates were breaking the law, or you did not, but either way you fell down on the job. This painful choice is picturesquely described as "being impaled on the horns of a dilemma." The following is an example of a dilemma from a lecture by William James.

> The dilemma of this determinism is one whose left horn is pessimism and whose right horn is subjectivism. In other words, if determinism is to escape pessimism, it must leave off looking at the goods and ills of life in a simple objective way, and regard them as materials, indifferent in themselves, for the production of consciousness, scientific and ethical in us. (William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism")

In the preceding example, the dilemma is explicitly labeled as such. Other dilemmas may not be indicated as clearly as these examples but are present nonetheless, as in the case of the following two passages from Plato:

> A man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know. For if he knows, he has no need to enquire, and if not, he cannot, for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire. (Plato, *Meno*)

> And what a life should I lead, at my age, wandering from city to city, ever changing my place of exile, and always being driven out! For I am quite sure that wherever I go, there, as here, the young men will flock to me, and if I drive them away, their elders will drive me out at their request, and if I let them come, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes. (Plato, *Apology*)

((•⊡ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Plato— Apology* on **MySearchLab.com**

Once you develop the ability to recognize dilemmas, you will find them in more places than you might expect.

The argument strategies given in this section are only a few of the types found in philosophical analysis and argumentation. They are fairly common, however, and you will discover these as well as other examples used in the course of the readings in this book.

DEFINITIONS

From Plato to the contemporary philosopher John Rawls, much work in philosophy has been concerned with successfully defining important words, such as justice, art, religion, and knowledge, just to mention four. Why is this such a problem? Why not just look up the word in the dictionary? In Part 1, "What Is Philosophy?" we talked about how philosophy is reflective of commonsense, intuitive, everyday prephilosophical notions, yet philosophical theories of justice, art, religion, and knowledge are more than mere statements of what people already think. These ordinary intuitive, prephilosophical notions are generally vague, unclear, even contradictory. Partly this is because these words of a natural language (English, French, Chinese, German) have a long history of slowly evolving and changing meanings.

Art, for example, originally meant anything humanly made, as in the word *artifact,* and was synonymous with a skillful craft, a kind of technological application of knowledge to some desired end. Later the word came to mean only the fine arts, and so a division was created between the making of poetry, music, sculpture, and the making of beer kegs, harnesses, and candles. Still later, *art* became associated with important ideas of brilliant individuals who were able to express those ideas in works of fine art. Finally, *art* came to be associated with the view that these ideas expressed in art had to be highly original, innovative, inventive, creative, and not just well done or beautiful.

In the gradual evolution of language, the older meanings do not drop out of sight altogether. They merely get covered over with newer meanings, the result being that all these different meanings coexist together, but in a volatile, unstable mix. By reflecting on such ambiguities, confusions, and unclarities, philosophers want not only to call attention to these problems, but to fix them, and that often means proposing more consistent

definitions that, although they are in line with ordinary intuitive notions, make these ordinary notions more consistent by emphasizing certain features of the ordinary notion and deemphasizing others. For example, *art* might be defined in terms of innovative ideas expressed by the artist and thereby downplaying the skill required to create artwork. If the philosopher is successful in getting us to accept this new definition, it will have the effect of altering our ideas and our approach to what is being defined. In the preceding case, by defining art in terms of innovative ideas (rather than the skillful creation of the artwork), we are more likely to include "ready-mades" as art than we were before. As an example, Marcel Duchamp displayed an ordinary hat rack as a work of art.

Because philosophy is reflective, such definitions stand or fall by their capability to correspond to ordinary usage. If the newly proposed definition is too far from ordinary usage, critics will challenge the new definition by calling attention to precisely where it deviates from common sense. In the preceding example, the critic will argue that a machine-made object cannot be a work of art because a work of art must be made by someone because that is the part of the meaning of the word *art* left out of the new definition. Of course, the philosopher proposing the new definition can reply that, in a sense, Duchamp did "make" the ready-made object. That is, by displaying it as a work of art, he modified the object in a significant way. In the new definition of art, attention shifts from the word *art* to the word *making*.

Another commonly used word is a term political theorists often speak about: *human rights*. But what exactly are rights? Until we have a clear sense (or definition) of what rights are, it will be impossible to answer related questions. For example, do human beings really have unalienable, God-given human rights? Do animals have rights? Do future generations of humans have rights? Do a thousand acres of wetlands have rights? If we define rights, as some philosophers do, as interests, then it will be easy to argue that landscapes or environments do not have rights since, being inanimate, they can have no interests. Do animals, however, have interests? That depends on whether a creature has to be *aware* of interests in order to have them. Now the philosophical debate can shift to what it means to "have an interest." If having an interest requires *wanting* something, then that would seem to exclude the wetlands but might include animals. At least a case could be made that animals do want certain things, and so have interests in this sense; therefore, animals indeed do have rights.

Another important term in philosophical discussion since Plato's time is *justice*. In general, philosophers agree that the word *justice* has something to do with equality; equals should be treated equally. But this does not tell us what are equals and what are not. Some philosophers define justice as equal goods for equal talent, with the unequal distribution of goods based on unequal merit or talent (that is, some people deserve more than others because they are smarter or work harder). Other philosophers, in contrast, define justice as an equal distribution of goods: the total goods divided equally among the people. If you want to argue for an unequal distribution (that is, there is no injustice in a physician earning more money than a server at a fast-food restaurant), then you will want to define justice in terms of what people deserve. If justice is defined as what people deserve, however, that will raise additional questions about what it means to say a person deserves something. Do you deserve the benefits you receive by having wealthy or influential parents (or were you just lucky)? Do you deserve the benefits you receive by being smart or physically attractive (or, again, were you just lucky)? Do you deserve the benefits you receive from working harder than anyone else (or were you just

lucky to be born with good genes that enable you to work hard)? If no one deserves the fruits of any of these advantages, then perhaps justice is best defined as dividing the pie into equal shares, the same for everyone, since no one really deserves any more than any other person. If you favor justice as unequal shares, you will want to define justice in terms of desert and define desert as innate talents. If you favor justice as equal shares, you will want to challenge the idea of desert and argue that no one *deserves* anything, so therefore no one deserves more than anyone else.

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

Closely related to a definition is the effort by philosophers to analyze the meanings of a word in order to verify some of these meanings while discarding others. Again, consider the word *art* that estheticians, or philosophers of art, try to define in order to provide a theory of art. An early twentieth-century-philosopher, R. G. Collingwood, distinguishes between art as technology and art proper. Collingwood is well aware that the word *art* has shifted considerably over the centuries and, as we indicated earlier, that the old meanings hang on as new meanings become attached to the old ones. Collingwood knows that this creates problems in our understanding of art.

In the past, *art* could refer to the skillful means of accomplishing an intended task, as in the phrase *medical arts*. Universities contain colleges of arts and sciences, and here *arts* does not include fine arts (such as painting, sculpture, and dance) but the application of knowledge to accomplish certain goals. In this sense, although medicine is based on science, it is nonetheless an art and not a science. As Collingwood is aware, this sense of *art* has tended to become dissociated with the notion of the fine arts, but he is nonetheless worried that some of the old ideas of art as technology linger on in a disguised way that confuses our contemporary notions of fine art. Specifically, he worries that because of the old notion of art as technology, many people continue to think of the fine arts as designed to accomplish specific tasks, such as to induce a quasi-religious, mystical state, to make us happy, or to make us feel patriotic. This is precisely the sort of idea about art that Collingwood strongly opposes. So his philosophical method differentiates these meanings of art as sharply as possible, allowing him to argue for the relevance of some of these meanings and against others.

Similarly, a philosopher who favors the definition of punishment as retribution (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) will want to differentiate sharply the idea of retribution from the associated notion of vengeance, since retribution will tend to be rejected if it is associated in people's minds with the spiteful, negative connotations of revenge. On the other hand, a philosopher favoring the notion of punishment as a deterrent will want to identify retribution with getting even because that is what works. What good does it do to coddle criminals if they persist in their criminality? Prison should be unpleasant so criminals will *want* to avoid going there. Still other philosophers may admit that the word *punishment* does connote the notion of taking revenge, getting even, but argue that this is a primitive, savage notion that we should avoid while moving on toward more progressive concepts such as rehabilitation.

As in the preceding example, a philosophical analysis can refer to dividing a complex issue into more manageable parts. Consider the question of abortion. One of the reasons this issue is so hard to deal with is that it contains so many different issues. There is the religious issue, which sees the fetus as having an immortal soul and therefore

being fully a person. This makes abortion an act of murder. There is also the legal issue of how to enforce the law now that abortion is legal in certain circumstances. There is the issue of free speech, in terms of which pro-life advocates argue that they should be free to protest at abortion clinics. There is the question of civil disobedience when protesters block clinic doors and try to prevent others from entering them. There is also the issue of a woman's right to use her own body as she chooses, which includes the right not to use her body to carry a fetus that she does not want to carry to full term. There is also the political issue argued by the pro-choice advocates that the state has no right to restrict a woman's decision even when what she decides to do might be morally wrong.

Those who favor abortion may want to separate these issues so that they can focus attention on the political issue to the exclusion of other issues. Yes, they may say, abortion may be morally wrong; it may also be contrary to your most deeply held religious convictions. Nonetheless, we live in a pluralistic democracy in which no one has the right to impose moral or religious belief on others. So we reluctantly have to allow people to decide for themselves, even though we know they will often decide to do the wrong thing. Pro-life advocates will not want to separate the moral and religious questions from the political issues. They will argue that whereas, generally speaking, we have to live and let live, this principle reaches a limit where the murder of innocent children is concerned. Here, they say, we have to impose restrictions on the behavior of our fellow citizens.

THE DISCOVERY OF FALLACIES

Another important philosophical strategy in criticizing others' arguments is to spot within the argument common mistakes in reasoning, traditionally known as fallacies. In ordinary language, the word *fallacy* has a number of different meanings. For our purposes, however, we will use the term to refer to a common error in reasoning. The term is used most often to refer to an error in reasoning that is not immediately obvious. In other words, we attach the term *fallacy* to an argument that at first glance may seem convincing but upon closer scrutiny turns out not to be so.

In Chapter 5, "Argument Forms," we saw some of the common fallacies in deductive arguments. In this section, we shall be concerned with informal fallacies, or fallacies that pertain to inductive arguments. It is important to be on the lookout for these fallacies, as they occur in daily life. Sometimes an author will purposely employ a fallacy, as in the case of advertising, but often an author is unaware of employing fallacious reasoning.

In this unit, we will familiarize ourselves with some of the more widespread fallacies. By becoming familiar with certain fallacious arguments, you will then be better equipped to read more critically and not be misled by these types of arguments.

Argumentum ad Baculum

The argumentum ad baculum fallacy is an appeal to force as the basis for accepting or rejecting a point of view. It is committed whenever a proposition is said to be true because those in positions of power say it is. It occurs not only in its blatant forms when someone makes "an offer you can't refuse," but also in more subtle instances, such as the following statement from a letter to a congressman: "May I remind you, Congressman, that your vote against the pro-life bill is unacceptable and that 80 percent of the voters in your district are Roman Catholics."

Ad Hominem Attack

The *ad hominem* fallacy is committed when an author attempts to refute another author's position by attacking the person rather than the argument. In other words, rather than attempting to disprove an author's argument, you attack the author. Suppose you are reading an article that argues in favor of affirmative action for blacks, and you say that the position is wrong because it was written by a black person and that a black person would naturally favor affirmative action. You would be attacking the author rather than the argument.

Argument from Ignorance

The argument from ignorance fallacy is committed whenever it is argued that a proposition is true because it has not been proved false, or a certain proposition is false because it has not been proved true. This fallacy often occurs in situations in which there exists little evidence either for or against a position. So, if you argue that there is no life after death because it has not been proved that there is, or that there must be flying saucers since they have never been disproved, you are guilty of this fallacy.

Appeal to Pity

The appeal to pity occurs when a writer makes an appeal to pity in order to get a position accepted. This fallacy often occurs in law courts when a defense attorney will plead for the acquittal of the defendant by appealing to the pity of the jurors. An attorney might argue that the jury should not convict a certain woman of shoplifting because she is unmarried, out of work, and has six children. This has nothing to do with her guilt or innocence but is employed for the purpose of arousing pity in the jurors.

Appeal to Authority

The appeal to authority is a little more tricky than the appeal to pity. It occurs when an author appeals to the testimony of an authority in matters *outside that authority's realm of specialization.* Often such an appeal can strengthen an argument if it is an appeal for testimony within the authority's province of specialization. So, it is often a matter of degree. If a tennis star endorses a particular tennis shoe, this is all well and good, but if the tennis star endorses a certain sports car, the appeal becomes fallacious. After all, what does a professional basketball player know about breakfast cereals? What does a movie star know about long-distance telephone companies?

Hasty Generalization

Hasty generalization occurs when an author cites an example that is not typical in order to make a general point covering all cases. Often it is argued that marijuana should be legal because in some cases it is valuable in treating illnesses. If you were to say that because your father is an alcoholic, alcohol is evil, you would be making a hasty generalization.

Argumentum ad Populum

A favorite device of the propagandist and the advertiser, the *argumentum ad populum* occurs when one attempts to win popular assent to a conclusion by arousing enthusiasm

in the masses or appealing to emotional issues of patriotism, motherhood, or decency, rather than by appealing to facts. "Are we going to let these newfangled notions make us forget the virtues of honesty, hard work, fair play, and basic decency—values which made our country great?"

Begging the Question

Begging the question, which we came across earlier, occurs whenever a person *assumes* what the argument is trying to *prove.* For example, "To allow complete, unfettered freedom of speech is advantageous to the interests of the state. For it is clearly helpful to the community to have each individual freely express his or her own point of view." Begging the question is one of the most frequently committed fallacies.

Complex Question

Complex question is the familiar double or loaded question, such as "Have you stopped beating your wife?" Here the stated question presupposes an affirmative answer to an unasked question. More serious forms occur in propaganda techniques that *presume,* rather than *win,* our assent to some highly controversial issue, as in the following example. "Why are privately controlled industries so much more efficient than government-run operations like the post office?"

Equivocation

This fallacy occurs whenever an argument turns on a crucial shift in the meaning of a significant word or phrase. A famous example is attributed by G. E. Moore to John Stuart Mill's argument for ethical utilitarianism, in which Mill argues that the only proof possible that something is desirable is that people actually desire it. The argument turns on a crucial ambiguity in the meaning of the word *desirable.* On the one hand, *desirable* means "capable of being desired," and in *that* sense the fact that people do actually desire something is ample evidence that it is desirable. But, on the other hand, when we say in an ethical context that something is desirable, we mean that it *ought* to be desired or *deserves* to be desired, not just that it *can* be desired. In *that* sense, it does *not* follow that something is desirable just because people actually desire it. Is it desirable, for example, that a recovering alcoholic have a double martini for lunch?

Red Herring

Red herring is the fallacy of sidetracking the argument from the issue under consideration to a completely different issue. Usually, this occurs when the central question at issue is problematic or doubtful and the red herring issue is one readily agreed to by all sides. By confusing the central issue with the red herring issue, the illusion is created that our assent to the red herring issue is really assent to the controversial central issue. Consider this example: "More money should be budgeted for the library. Look at the value books have brought to people's lives for hundreds of years: sheer reading pleasure, intellectual stimulation, helpful advice, information storage, to mention only a few." We all agree that books are a good thing, but that is not what is being debated—namely, whether more money should be set aside for the library.

Straw Man

The straw man is the fallacy of substituting for your opponent's position a simplistic caricature. By defeating the caricature (the straw man), the fallacious impression is created that you have defeated your opponent's position. For example, "The Democratic party doesn't trust the hard-working American citizen to know best how to spend their own money," or "The Republican party is willing to jeopardize Social Security to give the wealthy a tax break." Neither political party would accept the position attributed to it.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the difference between a necessary condition and a sufficient condition?

2. The following arguments are examples of MT, MP, disjunctive syllogism, and dilemma. Analyze and correctly classify them.

   (a) "No names come in contradictory pairs, but all predicables come in contradictory pairs. Therefore, no name is a predicable." (Peter Geach, *Reference and Generality*)

   (b) "The argument under the present head may be put into a very concise form. Either the mode in which the federal government is to be constructed will render it sufficiently dependent on the people, or it will not. On the first supposition, it will be restrained by that dependence from forming schemes obnoxious to their constituents. On the other supposition, it will not possess the confidence of the people, and its schemes of usurpation will be easily defeated by the state governments, who will be supported by the people." (James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*)

   (c) "Man tends to increase at a greater rate than his means of subsistence; consequently he is occasionally subject to a severe struggle for existence." (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*)

   (d) "According to Aristotle, none of the products of Nature are due to chance. His proof is this: That which is due to chance does not reappear constantly nor frequently, but all products of Nature reappear either constantly or at least frequently." (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*)

   (e) "We seem unable to clear ourselves from the old dilemma. If you predicate what is different, you ascribe to the subject what it is *not;* and if you predicate what is *not* different, you say nothing at all." (F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*)

   (f) "Logic is a matter of profound human importance precisely because it is empirically founded and experimentally applied." (John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*)

   (g) "The after-image is not in physical space. The brain process is. So the after-image is not a brain process." (J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," in *Philosophical Review,* 1959)

   (h) "If a mental state is to be identical with a physical state, the two must share all properties in common. But there is one property, spatial localizability, that is not so shared. Hence, mental events and states are different from physical ones." (Jaegwon Kim, "On the Psycho–Physical Identity Theory," in *American Philosophical Quarterly,* 1966)

   (i) "The law does not expressly permit suicide, and what it does not expressly permit it forbids." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*)

   (j) "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." (David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*)

   (k) "If error were something positive, God would be its cause, and by Him it would continually be procreated. But this is absurd. Therefore, error is nothing positive." (Baruch Spinoza, *The Principles of Philosophy demonstrated by the Method of Geometry*)

   (l) "Either wealth is an evil or wealth is a good, but wealth is not an evil. Therefore, wealth is a good." (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*)

   (m) "We possess some immaterial knowledge. No sense knowledge, however, can be immaterial; therefore, and so on." (Duns Scotus, *Oxford Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*)

(n) "If each man had a definite set of rules of conduct by which he regulated his life he would be no better than a machine. But there are no such rules, so men cannot be machines." (A. M. Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind,* 1950. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)

(o) "We define a metaphysical sentence as a sentence which purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis. And as tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical." (A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*)

(p) "I am an Idealist, since I believe that all that exists is spiritual." (John McTaggart, *Philosophical Studies*)

(q) "There is no case in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for in such a case, it would be prior to itself, which is impossible." (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*)

(r) "The soul through all her being is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal." (Plato, *Phaedrus*)

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LOGIC

Before speaking of recent developments in the study of logic, a little history is in order. As the material in this section shows, the study of logic, in the sense of rules for correct thinking, began with Aristotle. Aristotelian logic was further refined by the philosophers of the Middle Ages, and that is all there was to logic until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Two English philosophers, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, collaborated on a book that was to be a treatise on the foundations of mathematics. Russell was well known as a philosopher and mathematician, as well as for his political activism and many public lectures espousing a variety of both popular and unpopular causes. Whitehead was a mathematician and philosopher of science who found in quantum physics the basis for constructing a new metaphysics. He built on the work of the philosopher Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) and developed an entirely new metaphysical vocabulary in his major work *Process and Reality*.

Russell and Whitehead envisioned their collaborative work, *Principia Mathematica* (3 vols, 1910–1913), to be a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between mathematics and logic. One might be tempted to accuse them of a bit of arrogance in that their title echoed that of the work by the great physicist Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687). In their *Principia* Russell and Whitehead wanted to show that mathematics could ultimately be reduced to logical principles. Among the techniques they developed was the use of the notational system of algebra, called *Boolean notation*, for expressing argument forms. This algebraic notation is called Boolean after its inventor, the English mathematician George Boole (1815–1865). Russell and Whitehead hoped Boolean notation would bring clarity to logic that heretofore had been expressed only in natural languages, and in many respects they succeeded, developing a new form of logical expression called symbolic logic.

As is often the case of inquiry, they didn't get all that they wanted. Their attempt to prove that mathematics could be reduced to logic was not entirely successful, but their book was not a failure, for it clarified many important issues in both mathematics and logic. It also provided the language on which all computer codes depend. Even though they didn't intend logical notation to be used for computer codes, since the first computer wasn't even to be built until decades later, that is what happened. Even today, many people think computers are about computation using numbers (*computer, computation*), but that is not the case. Computers are about logic, and computer code is a series of statements involving logical connections.

Here's why. Symbolic logic is a two-valued system; statements are either true or false. There is no other possibility. These parts of symbolic logic are referred to as truth-functional calculus. Computer

architecture is also based on two values, a binary number system in which all numbers are expressed by zeros and ones. T (true), F (false), 0 (zero), 1 (one). There you have it. The building blocks of all computer languages. The truth-functional calculus expresses the logical form of statements, which are in turn translated into zeros and ones. Of course, computer code writing is complex stuff requiring knowledge of lots of things. Fundamentally, however, it demands knowledge of logic. If you have ever set up a spreadsheet or even done searches on computer data bases, you have been using logical notation.

Ever since the appearance of symbolic logic, the dream of many philosophers has been to use it to bring clarity to puzzling philosophical issues. It is now understood that just as Russell and Whitehead failed to reduce mathematics to logic, the attempts to reduce all philosophical questions to symbolic notation also fails. Some issues can be clarified by formal analysis, but others cannot. It has been tempting for some philosophers to claim that issues, which cannot be analyzed by formal techniques are meaningless and are not to be treated as serious questions. Few philosophers today hold such extreme views. Some philosophers, though, are more interested in questions that can be analyzed using formal techniques than in those issues not open to such analysis. They might find it difficult to take seriously the work of colleagues who use other techniques, but most philosophers today think philosophy is a big enough tent to include both.

Recent developments in logic center on expanding the scope and techniques of logic, especially the development of modal and many-valued logics. Logic, as we have seen, is more of a tool than a subject of investigation, and like mathematics, it is an important tool not only for philosophers but for researchers in many other fields. Mathematics, computer science, physics, and economics are just a few of those fields. As a result of this wide application of logic, the study of logic has expanded into new forms designed to serve particular groups of researchers engaged in specialized research projects. One such effort is the attempt to go beyond a two-valued logic (true, false) to a many-valued logic (true, false, and undetermined). Another development is modal logic, which shows the logical relations among "necessarily p," "in fact, p," and "maybe p." Tense logic, sometimes called fuzzy or vagueness logic, goes beyond truth-functional analysis to develop decision procedures when truth values are more ambiguous.

Many students study logic today without identifying it as a part of philosophy. Some teachers of logic share joint appointments in departments of philosophy and another department such as computer science or mathematics.

The most far-reaching recent development in the study of logic centers on informal techniques of analysis, such as thorough grounding in informal fallacies. Helping students identify faulty reasoning as it appears in public pronouncements, newspaper editorials, advertisements, polling reports, graphs, and charts is the goal of what has come to be called "critical reasoning" courses. A book attacking administration policy creates a stir, and the author is portrayed by administration spokespersons as being opportunistic, not really "in the loop," or merely a malcontent. Recognizing this as a classic *ad hominem* response helps separate the relevant from the irrelevant aspects of responses to the book. A newspaper article on home accidents reports the claim that "more people are injured on ladders than on motorcycles." That more people own ladders than motorcycles makes the claim somewhat useless. Identifying faulty reasoning is the goal of critical thinking courses, as is also developing the ability to avoid fallacious statements in one's own writing and speaking. Aristotle, the founder of logic as a philosophic discipline, recognized the importance of precise thinking whenever possible, and that the level of precision will vary from discipline to discipline. In a statement oft-quoted, he comments, "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of . . . for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits. . . ." (*Nicomachean Ethics,* 1094b, 11–25)

Suggestions for Further Reading

Browne, Neil M., and Stuart M. Keeley. *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking,* 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003. Offers strategies for developing critical thinking skills.

Chaffee, John. *Thinking Critically,* 7th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002. A good, readable introduction to critical thinking.

Glymour, Clark. *Philosophy of Science.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1990. An introduction to issues in scientific reasoning.

Schick, Theodore, Jr., and Lewis Vaughn. *How to Think about Weird Things,* 2nd ed. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1998. An impressive introduction to critical thinking through a discussion of paranormal claims.

Shermer, Michael. *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time.* W. H. Freeman & Co., 1998. Considers the range of beliefs and the errors in logic used to support them.

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1. According to Berkeley, what is the only thing we can conceive of?

   ((•●─ **Listen** to the **podcast:** *John Campbell on Berkeley's Puzzle* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. According to Hobbes, why would anyone give up their freedom to become part of an organized state?

   ((•●─ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Hobbes—Leviathan* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Of what crime was Socrates accused?

   ((•●─ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Plato—Apology* on **MySearchLab.com**

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CHAPTER **8**

Introduction to Metaphysics

Metaphysics is an area of philosophy that tries to answer this question: What is reality? Just as moral philosophy attempts to discover general criteria for what is morally good, and how that differs from other good things, such as music or art, and just as epistemology (or the theory of knowledge) tries to determine what is knowledge and how that differs from mere opinion, so metaphysics seeks to discover general criteria for what is real and how that differs from what may seem to be real but actually is not.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

The distinction between appearance and reality is already familiar to us, of course, through common sense and ordinary language. That is, we know what someone means when he or she says that the building *appeared* to be structurally sound, but *really* was severely damaged by termites. What philosophers try to do is *explain* this difference, that is, to say *why* something is said to be real, or what *counts* as reality; in short, to state clearly the standards or criteria for what is real.

Metaphysics is by far the most ancient branch of philosophy, beginning with the pre-Socratic Milesian philosopher-scientists (sixth century b.c.e.), who speculated on the "ageless, deathless" substance underlying the changing temporal world. Some thought this was water, others air, and still others felt there had to be more than one basic ingredient in order to account for the enormous variety of things in the world. For many centuries, this occupied the central place in philosophy. Originally called First Philosophy, metaphysics was thought to be the necessary starting point, or foundation, for all the other areas of philosophy. Before one could reasonably decide in moral philosophy, for example, if values are relative or absolute, one must first decide whether values are the kind of thing that can exist independently of human perception. If so, then values could indeed be absolute, but if not, then all values would be relative to an individual's or a society's point of view. Similarly, before one could reasonably speculate on the fate of the soul after death, one would first have to determine if there *is* a soul. In this sense metaphysics was seen as the most fundamental part of philosophy, presupposed by all the rest.

Despite its profound, occult, and mysterious sound, the word *metaphysics* resulted from a misunderstanding by an editor. Aristotle wrote a series of books dealing with nature, which he called the *Physics* (from the Greek word *physis,* "nature"). An even more

fundamental inquiry, he thought, was the nature of ultimate reality. Aristotle called this inquiry "first philosophy." But when his editor, several decades after Aristotle's death, was sorting through his works and giving them titles, he came to the batch of writings that followed the *Physics* (most of which, incidentally, were probably Aristotle's students' lecture notes). The editor did not know what to call them, so he invented a word—"After Physics" (*meta* meaning "after," and *physica* meaning "physics"). So the exalted inquiry into the nature of reality forever after has been known as metaphysics—and all due to an editorial mistake.

In the modern period (beginning with Descartes in the seventeenth century), philosophers became increasingly suspicious of the overly ambitious and even pretentious nature of metaphysics. Discovering the ultimate nature of reality, they thought, may simply lie beyond the limits of mortal man. David Hume in the eighteenth century and A. J. Ayer in the twentieth century rejected metaphysics as complete nonsense. According to this "positivist" view, there are only two kinds of meaningful statements—those that are true by definition (for example, "All bachelors are unmarried") and those whose truth or falsity can be confirmed by sense experience—and metaphysical statements belong to neither and are therefore meaningless. Today the question of metaphysics is being reexamined anew, and many philosophers are returning to metaphysics as an indispensable part of the total task of philosophy.

Metaphysics, then, attempts to determine the difference between appearance and reality. "But," you may say, "why should this be a problem for philosophy? Is it not obvious what is real and what is not? Reality is what one can touch, see, feel, smell, taste, and hear." Notice first that this is itself a definition or theory of reality. It establishes as the criterion for what is real what can be discovered by the five senses, a theory of knowledge that is known in philosophy as *empiricism*. Empirical knowledge is the kind of knowledge that comes from the senses, and if you think that is the only source of knowledge, then you are an empiricist and your point of view is called empiricism.

CRITERIA FOR REALITY

To become philosophically respectable, the empirical view must be subjected to critical scrutiny to determine if it is as obvious as it first sounds. The view that reality is what can be known by the five senses implies two things, which we must consider very carefully—first that things which are not empirically detectable cannot be real, and second that whatever is empirically experienced is real. Can we really accept either of these? If not, then we must reject or severely modify our metaphysical view. Let us consider the first problem.

1. The laws of gravity
2. The chair you are sitting on
3. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution
4. Your love of your parents
5. God
6. Your thoughts at this moment
7. The meaning of the words on this page
8. Justice
9. Hamlet

The list could go on, but stop for a moment and ask yourself which of these items are known by the five senses. Probably only the second. But do you want to conclude that all the others are not real? Which ones *do* you think are real? Probably you will exclude Hamlet. You might also exclude justice if you are a cynic, and God if you are an atheist. But if you consider these and others, such as the laws of nature, the meaning of words, civil laws, thoughts, or love, to be real, then you are conceding that some non-empirical things can be real and are thus rejecting empiricism, at least in the simple and extreme form which we are now considering. (You might be tempted to modify your empiricism to include a sixth inner sense by which you realize love, or God. But then you have severely weakened your original position by postulating something very difficult to prove—a sixth sense.)

Now look at the second problem mentioned previously: Is everything empirical real? Your senses tell you that there is space behind a mirror, and that objects lose their color in the dark. Sometimes people quite sincerely report having seen little green men emerging from flying saucers. But do we believe any of this really happens? If not, *why* not? Well, for one thing, little green spacemen are very unexpected and unusual, and for another they were not observed by more than one individual at the same time. The space behind the mirror conflicts with our firm belief that there is a solid brick wall just behind the mirror. But now we are introducing other sets of criteria for what is real, which may conflict with the empirical criteria:

1. Observable to more than one individual (intersubjectively verifiable)
2. Fits in with normal expectations (consistent with our other beliefs)

And these criteria are just as plausible intuitively as the empiricist criterion. Suppose you think you hear someone at the door, so you ask me if I heard anything. If I say no, you will assume it was just your imagination (you were hearing things). But if I say yes, then you will get up to see who is there. If you believe in the laws of biology and the general rules governing common sense, then you will tend to discount a walking, talking tree even though you "saw it with your own eyes."

But since there are other plausible criteria for reality that may conflict with the empiricist criterion, it is clearly not obvious that reality is limited to what we can see and touch. Nor can we simply conclude that there are several criteria for what is real, since the criteria may conflict—one telling us that so-and-so is real and others saying it is not. In order to come up with a dependable and usable criterion we must reconcile these differences and establish some sort of priority among them—and this calls for philosophical reflection. The problem with common sense or intuitively "obvious" criteria is that they often turn out, upon examination, to be inconsistent. We may find that each of these criteria is intuitively obvious, but since they conflict our intuitions are of no use to us in deciding what is real.

We have now mentioned several plausible standards for reality, and we can easily think of others. Which is more real, the Cheshire cat or its smile, that is, an object or its properties? If you think the object is more real, *why* do you think so? Probably you are thinking that it is more permanent and independent. The properties can change (the cat begins to frown), but the object remains the same. The smile cannot exist without the cat (except in Lewis Carroll), but the cat does quite well without the smile. In this sense one might conclude that the chemical elements which make up the physical world are more real than the objects which they comprise. The wood is converted

into paper and the paper finally burned, but the particles of carbon, which existed all along, linger on in the air. One could then go a step further and conclude that since the chemical elements are made out of still simpler elements (atoms and molecules), these entities are more real than the chemical elements of which they are a part. One might even conclude that the mathematical principles governing these atomic and chemical compositions are still more real, since even if there were no such chemicals, the mathematical principles would remain in force. Instead of saying that what is most real is what we know through the *senses,* this view asserts that what is most real is what we know through the *intellect,* a view that gives rise to a theory of knowledge known as *rationalism.*

THE MIND AND REALITY

Closely related to the notion of reality as independent of other *things* is the idea that what is real must be independent of the *mind.* Imagine that instead of completing your philosophy assignment, you are now lying on the beach in Florida. Of course, you are not really there, but *why* not, in what sense are you not? It is simply in your imagination. This pleasant fantasy exists only so long as you are thinking of it; as soon as your mind returns to the philosophy assignment, the fantasy dissolves. It is in this sense we feel that we cannot control reality simply by thinking about it. You cannot change your philosophy assignment by imagining it is not there, nor can you complete it simply by *thinking* you have. Reality, in this sense, stubbornly opposes our minds; we must conform our thinking to it if we are to have an accurate and reliable picture of the world. In short, reality is not dependent on our minds.

We have now mentioned five criteria for what is real:

1. Empirically observable
2. Intersubjectively verifiable
3. Consistent with other beliefs
4. Permanent and independent of other objects
5. Mind-independent

Assuming we could reconcile differences in the criteria for what is real, our second task as metaphysicians would be to *use* that standard to determine what sorts of things in the world actually meet those standards, that is, to find out what *is* real by the criteria established. So, for example, if our standard of reality is what can be seen and touched, then we will conclude that ordinary physical objects are real while atoms and molecules, thoughts, laws, and rules are not. Or if we decide on permanence and independence from other entities as our criteria, then physical objects will be less real than atoms, which will, in turn, be less real than physical and mathematical laws. Pushing this line of argument to its logical conclusion, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) argued that only God was fully real since God alone existed completely independent and unchanging, whereas all other things depended at least on God for their existence. In a similar way, Idealist metaphysicians have carried empiricism from its commonsensical position that physical objects are real because we can see and touch them, to the opposite extreme conclusion that since we are most immediately aware of our own sensations, rather than physical objects, which we simply infer from the sensations, our sensations are therefore more real than physical objects.

Although the philosophical pursuit of metaphysics is a specialized and often highly technical discipline, metaphysics is really only an extension of a fundamental and necessary drive in every human being to know what is real. One of the most important tasks each of us faces in our lives is sorting out the differences between appearance and reality, the phony and the genuine, the mask and the substance. In fact, everyone distinguishes appearance from reality, though not usually in a very systematic way. Most of us simply rely on the appearance–reality distinction which we were taught by our parents and teachers at an early age—Santa Claus and the Wicked Weasel are not real, but Alaska, Eskimos, and blue whales are. In your childhood games you are not really a doctor, or a fireman, or a mother, but you really did break some of your mother's fine china playing house, for which you must be punished. Throughout our formative years we are taught to distinguish fiction from fact, film and dramatic representation from reality. Consider the role of expressions like "this is only make-believe," "it is only a movie," "it is just a play; they are only acting." Similarly, most of us learn fairly early the difference between telling a joke and telling a lie. If you are being chased by an angry tree, but at the last moment find yourself lying in your own bed at home, you realize (and at an early age are taught) that the tree monster was "not real" but was "only a dream."

As we grow older, we may begin to modify what we have been taught is real and unreal, selecting our own personal views about reality in the light of our experiences and beliefs. We may begin to think the Devil is real, though our parents told us this was not so, or we may begin to think that the American Dream, which we were taught is real, is only a fiction. It is very important for each person to decide what is real and learn how to balance reality against fantasies, dreams, hopes, and wishes—which are also important, but only if clearly distinguished from reality. A key factor in assessing mental and emotional health is the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy and wishful thinking. Much of our *public* debate is also concerned with distinguishing what is real from what is not. What really happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963, when John F. Kennedy was fatally shot?

"Candid Camera," an old TV series, was based on our ordinary sense of reality and appearance. Highly unusual things happen to people and the audience gets to see how people respond to bizarre situations. In one episode an unattended hot dog stand talks to customers, taking their orders, asking whether they prefer mustard or sauerkraut, challenging customers who tried to short-change this clever vending machine. Some of the passersby accepted this situation as though nothing was wrong. But others were clearly startled. Suppose it happened to you. What would you think or do? Would you suspect that some trick was being played on you and start looking under or inside for hidden microphones? Or would you think you were dreaming, hallucinating, or had simply gone crazy? If you were to respond in any of these ways, you would clearly demonstrate that you do not think that what appears before you is real. "It just *couldn't* be real." Why not? "It's impossible! Mechanical things can't talk." Why not? We know how they are made; we also know something about the relation of speech to intelligence and intelligence to life. In other words, the talking hot dog stand just doesn't fit with a great many other things which we believe strongly to be real and on which many other beliefs rest.

This example reveals a lot about the metaphysician's search for reality, and we can learn from it if we reflect on it philosophically. What we ordinarily call reality is only a

small part of the totality of our experience. We experience things in daydreams, fantasies, playacting, wishing, planning, and imagination, but these are usually discounted as unreal. Why? Because they do not fit with our decided opinions about reality—opinions that do for the most part fit snugly together into a total pattern we call reality. But notice, in the example, that as soon as you feel that what you experienced is not real, you immediately feel the need to explain what it *is*. If the hot dog stand did not really speak to you, then what did happen? How did the sound of a man's voice emanate from the stand? *Something* happened, a voice certainly came from the cart; there is no denying that. The question is how to account for this unreal thing in terms of what you can accept as real. Thus, a very big part of the metaphysician's task is to explain that part of our experience which we call unreal in terms of what we call real. Electronic sound equipment inside the hot dog stand linked to a microphone inside the cafe across the street could really occur, and if so would explain what we are experiencing—a hot dog stand which appears to be talking is really only a man across the street talking to us through a microphone. It was not really a talking hot dog stand, it only seemed to be. Now we feel a sense of relief. At first that mass of ordinary beliefs about the world seemed threatened; maybe we have been mistaken about the links between speaking, intelligence, and life, on which so much of the rest of our thinking is based. But now we have dissipated that threat and explained the bizarre phenomenon in terms of the ordinary.

Looking at it this way, the task of the metaphysician is to select from all the things we experience those which fit together into a coherent package, and call this *reality*. Those things which do not fit are called *appearance*. Then the metaphysician tries to explain the group known as appearance on the basis of the group known as reality.

It is important for us to understand the difference between saying that something is not real and saying that it does not exist at all. When Materialist philosophers, whose views we shall examine later, claim that minds are not real, they do not mean that there are no thoughts, wishes, or intelligence. They simply mean that thoughts, wishes, intelligence, and the like are by-products of and can be explained in terms of physical matter, in this case the human body and particularly the brain and nervous system. Similarly, when Idealist philosophers, whose views we will also look at in more detail, say that material substance is unreal, they do not mean that there are no rocks, trees, or mountains. They simply mean that rocks, trees, and mountains exist only be-
cause of and as parts of thinking minds. There are rocks and trees, but they exist only in the mind. A famous story is told of Dr. Samuel Johnson; this well-known eighteenth-century Brit-

ish critic, when hearing of George Berkeley's Idealist metaphysical system, went out and kicked a stone and remarked, "Thus I refute Berkeley." But Johnson failed to understand the nature of a metaphysical claim. Berkeley did not deny that stones exist, nor did he deny that they hurt one's toe when kicked; he simply explained all this in terms of minds and their sensations. There was a visual sensation of the stone, then the desire to kick it, then the kinesthetic sensation of kicking it, then the sharp pain from having done so—all sensations! Calling something real or unreal is therefore a way of classifying it. Calling something unreal is putting it in a category of things considered less basic, less important in the scheme of things. If you explain minds on the basis of bodily functions, as the Materialists do, then you are elevating matter and playing down mind; if you explain material bodies on the basis of mental phenomenon, as the Idealists do, then you are elevating mind and playing down matter.

THE TASKS OF METAPHYSICS

What is the point of all this elaborate sorting and classifying of things into different systems? Why do we, as well as metaphysicians, break up the world into these two compartments, reality and appearance, explaining the latter in terms of the former? Basically it is the only way yet devised to make sense of an often contrary and confusing world. There are so many things we experience, many of which are jumbled, contradictory, and confusing, that we try to simplify, reducing this incoherent mass to some more systematic order. But we can do this only by selecting some kinds of experience as more basic and explaining other kinds in terms of those more fundamental. And those which finally prove most useful in explaining the others are considered more real.

Simplicity, comprehensibility, comprehensiveness, and consistency within our view of the world are therefore crucial in our determination of what is real and what is not. And this is true both in everyday life and in the history of metaphysics. But, as with other areas of philosophy, although metaphysics arises out of everyday life and common sense, it often goes beyond common sense in its search for perfection. In our everyday attempts to understand the world in terms of appearance and reality we try to make things comprehensible by simplifying, reducing the mass of things we call appearance to a relatively fewer number of things we call reality. But the metaphysician carries this process much further, trying to find the fewest possible elements of reality that will suffice to explain all the rest. Thus, most metaphysical accounts attempt to reduce the wealth of experience to one or two or at most three basic elements. It is this tendency to reduce the many items of experience to one or two basic underlying realities that has led to the charge (which we will examine shortly) that metaphysics is *reductionist,* always claiming that the whole of reality is "nothing but" this or that.

Philosophical accounts of reality also differ from those of the ordinary person in that, whereas ordinary persons tend to select as reality the same sorts of everyday items of experience as those which they designate appearance, the philosophical metaphysician tends to call reality elements which lie beyond ordinary experience. And this too requires some explanation.

At first it might seem that the most obvious way to explain things metaphysically would be to select as "reality" a common element from everyday experience and to use this to explain everything else. But, paradoxically, it turns out that the most comprehensible, comprehensive, and simple metaphysical systems tend to explain the things we can experience in terms of things which we cannot experience in daily life. Let us try to see why this is so. Suppose we said, as did the first metaphysician, Thales, that everything is water. That is, we are claiming that everything we experience can be divided up into two categories—water, which we call "reality," and everything else, which we call "appearance," and we then set out to try to explain everything else (appearance) in terms of water (reality). Clouds, for example, or blocks of ice do not look like water, but they can be explained in terms of water—when water evaporates, it becomes clouds, and when water freezes, it becomes ice. We might, then, try to go a step further and say that all those things which *depend* on water and which we already know are largely *composed* of water are also really nothing but water. But even if we were successful and could make a plausible, convincing case for such examples, what could we say about rocks or fire? How can these things, which intuitively seem the opposite of water, be explained in terms of water? The problem is that water is already understood in daily life to have

certain properties that can be experienced—namely, wetness, transparency, and so on—and it is difficult to see how these properties can ever account for their opposites. It was for this reason that Thales' successor, Anaximander, proposed that the basic reality out of which everything was to be explained could not be any known element but something completely different. And most metaphysicians thereafter have agreed with Anaximander. If you set out trying to explain everything in terms of one or two basic elements, this element or elements must be different from the usual sorts of things we experience in everyday life.

METAPHYSICS AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE

As it turns out, the simplest, most comprehensible, comprehensive, and consistent of all views often involve explaining the things we can experience in terms of things we cannot directly experience. To illustrate this point, consider a problem that Greek philosophers faced over two thousand years ago. How is it that children grow by eating bread, cheese, milk, and so on? The food they eat does not simply accumulate and expand their bodies; the added weight is in flesh, and blood, and bones, not in meat and grain. Somehow the food gets converted into flesh and bone, but how? Various answers were proposed, but the most interesting was the atomic hypothesis. The atomists reasoned that if food and flesh and bones were all made of the same particles, then it would be easy to explain how the food becomes flesh and bone. But, of course, this is contrary to direct empirical observation. No matter how small you break up the piece of bread you cannot find any tiny flesh or bone fragments in it. So, they reasoned, these ultimate particles must be very small—so small you cannot see them. And the atomic theory also proved useful in explaining many other things—for example, how things gradually wear away without having their visible parts fall out. But this is very curious. In order to explain observable phenomena (the fact that children grow by eating food), the atomists had to postulate unobservable entities (the atoms). And so it is with most metaphysical theories. It is very hard to explain, as the early Greek philosophers tried to do, everything on the basis of water, air, or any other common, observable element. How can water be changed into things like fire or dust, which seem completely unlike water as we know it? Thus, the tendency is to look for some unobservable substance *underlying* observable substances, which has no well-defined empirical character of its own that might conflict with the character of things we want to explain. Both the Idealist and the Materialist metaphysical theories are similarly based on unobservable entities—mind and matter. Of course, we can see things *made* of matter, such as a book or a chair, but we cannot see the underlying matter itself. And although we can experience within our own minds thoughts, ideas, plans, desires, and fantasies, we cannot observe or experience the mind itself which is having these thoughts, ideas, and desires.

It is this tendency to explain the observable in terms of the unobservable that has given metaphysics a bad name in the minds of more down-to-earth, empirically minded philosophers. How do we know that these unobservable entities exist if we cannot directly see or touch them? And if we do not know for sure that they exist, why bother speculating about them? And how can we decide between competing metaphysical theories if each appeals to a different unobservable principle? If you say the table is made of atoms and I say it is made of tiny gremlins, who can say which of us is correct, since

neither the atoms nor the tiny gremlins can be observed? Of course, the effects of each can be observed, but what if these effects are just the same? You say that it is the atoms that give the table its shape, color, texture, and so on, and I reply that it is the tiny gremlins that give it its shape, color, texture, and so on. On the level of what is directly observable, there appears absolutely no difference between the two theories. And if that is the case, many philosophers will conclude that there is no real debate between the two, that it is a phony, idle speculation, simply a waste of time.

We have seen that the metaphysician's motive in postulating unobservable entities is not simply to dream up fanciful things that no one can prove or disprove, but to explain the observable world in the simplest, most comprehensible, comprehensive, and consistent way possible. Still, the critics have a point. There is little agreement among metaphysicians. The reason is that there is more than one way to explain anything. This is not to say that any theory is as good as any other. There are certain tests that any good metaphysical theory will have to pass—it must be simple, consistent, comprehensible, and comprehensive (that is, it must explain everything that needs explaining). But even so, there will still be many adequate metaphysical theories that pass these tests. And since there seem to be no other independent tests for choosing among adequate metaphysical schemes, there seems little we can do to reduce the disagreement among metaphysicians. Every good science should have built within it a procedure for deciding which among competing theories is the best and discarding the rest, but there does not seem to be any such decision procedure for metaphysics, and so it has been attacked as a sham science.

Everyone has dreams, for example, but how can we explain them? One metaphysical theory is that dreams are unreal and exist "only in the mind." But other theories are possible which are initially just as plausible. What if we said that there was both a physical reality and a mental reality and that dreams were real examples of mental reality? What if we went a step further and said that dreams connect us with a spiritual realm which is more real than the physical world? In our dreams, we might say, the ancestors or spirits speak to us and carry us off to faraway places in a higher, spirit world. How comprehensible, consistent, and comprehensive is this theory in terms of the rest of our waking experience? That is, can other things be explained in terms of it? Sure. Why do accidents occur, where do people go when they die, why do some people suddenly go crazy, why do some people occasionally go into a trance, dancing or speaking in strange ways which they later do not remember? We now have a simple, consistent, comprehensible, and comprehensive explanation for all this—in terms of spiritual forces acting inside material objects. And there are many other ways of metaphysically explaining dreams. See if you can think of a few.

THE VALUES OF METAPHYSICS

What is the value of metaphysical speculation if there is no way to prove or disprove metaphysical theories? Even if metaphysics fails as a *science* of reality in the strictest sense, it still provides a much needed and perhaps even necessary tool for organizing our experience into a comprehensible, intelligible, and meaningful whole. And this is the sense in which contemporary philosophers are returning to metaphysics with renewed interest, although this interpretation of metaphysics was first articulated by Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth

century. In Kant's view, we look at metaphysics not so much as a science of the under-lying reality of the world, but as a set of guiding assumptions or hypotheses which the mind requires to make sense of the world. Kant called this interpretation of metaphysics a *second* Copernican revolution, because of its radical shift of attention from metaphysics as a description of the world to metaphysics as a description of how human beings must think if they are to make sense of the world at all.

As an example, do you think you could have a coherent view of the world if you did not group your various experiences into relatively stable entities which you could name and place in groups of like kinds (dogs, tables, trees)? Suppose for example that instead of regarding the top view of the desk, the side view, the view of the desk from a distance, at twilight, and so on, as parts of one identical object, you saw each as a separate entity. Now consider further what would happen if you regarded each change affecting an entity not simply as a modification of that entity, but as a transformation into a different entity. You would not be the same person you were yesterday since you have lost an ounce, or grown a few sprigs of hair, or gotten a bruise or a tan. Indeed, each second, each millisecond, you would be something different until finally there would be nothing left of you at all. In such a world, what would you call things, how would you recognize them, how could you talk about them? Obviously, the entire enterprise of orga-nizing the world into meaningful units by which we can communicate with other people would come to a halt. Could you even *think* if there were no things to think about? So, to think or talk, we must treat our various perceptions as belonging to identifiable entities which are relatively unchanging over time. We must think of the world as made up of physical objects even if it is not! The value of metaphysics, therefore, according to this view lies in giving us a comprehensible view of the world. Ironically, those who continue to conduct metaphysics in the old positive and constructive sense of actually discovering the most basic structure of the universe are mainly the scientists, rather than the philosophers.

In the following chapters we will look more closely at three general metaphysi-cal theories (Chapters 9, "Dualism," 10, "Materialism," and 11, "Idealism") and two specific issues (Chapters 12, "The Mind–Body Problem and Personal Identity," and 13, "Freedom and Determinism: The Metaphysics of Human Agency"). For now we are concerned with arriving at as clear an idea as possible concerning the basic nature of metaphysics. And already we can see that there are at least two basic types or ideas of metaphysics. First, the more ambitious task of a kind of science of reality, or, since reality is, as we have just noted, usually something which cannot be experienced, we might call this type of metaphysics a science of the supersensible. Just as physics is a science of sensible reality, so, in this view, metaphysics is a science of supersensible reality, those things which cannot be seen. The second type of metaphysics is the more modest task of describing the most basic principles of the world as we experience it. In either case it would be unfair, as already indicated, to charge the metaphysician with constructing "castles of air" for the sheer sport of it. In every case, we have said, the metaphysician is trying to make sense of the world of ordinary experience. The differ-ence, then, has to do with the degree to which the metaphysician is prepared to depart from ordinary experience in order to find those principles which he or she thinks are needed to make sense of the ordinary world of our sense experience. Metaphysicians of the first sort are prepared to speculate fairly widely and to depart fairly radically from ordinary experience, whereas those of the second sort are more pedestrian and stick closer to the confines of common sense.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you think of an instance from your own experience in which you at first thought something was real and later decided that it was not? What criteria did you use to make that decision?

2. Review how Kant redefined our understanding of the nature of metaphysics. How does metaphysics in this sense relate to metaphysics in the older sense of an "inquiry into ultimate reality"?

3. Several large bookstore chains have sections of books labeled "Metaphysics." What sort of books would you find there? Why are these books called metaphysical?

4. Look at the list of items given earlier in this chapter as candidates for reality. Which of them do you think should be excluded from the list as unreal? Why? What other realities might you add to the list?

5. Give specific reasons why the study of metaphysics is beneficial.

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3. What might have been motivating Kant's approach to metaphysics?

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CHAPTER 9

Dualism

As we saw in Chapter 8, one of the criteria for something's being real is that it be "permanent and independent of other objects." Some things, like a snowflake, are very impermanent and dependent, while others, like a mountain, or, more so, a molecule, are very permanent and independent. But is anything completely permanent and independent? Some philosophers, like Spinoza, thought that only God was fully real in this sense; others held that atoms were real in this sense, and still others, like the Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna, argued that nothing was real in this sense.

For Plato only the "Forms" or "Ideas" were fully real in the sense that only they were eternally unchanging, independent of any other object, not caused by anything else, and existed just as they were cognized in pure intellectual intuition. For Plato the Forms (sometimes misleadingly translated "Ideas") are the objects of intellectual, conceptual thought. When we think about mathematical entities (triangles, circles, lines, or numbers), groups and classes of objects (snakes in general, the class of birds as a whole), and ideals (perfect beauty, absolute justice, true wisdom), what are we talking and thinking about? Certainly, we are not talking and thinking about anything physical, which we can perceive with our five senses and which exists in space and time. We can draw a triangle on a piece of paper, but the interior angles of the triangle in this drawing do not equal exactly 180 degrees (because its three sides are not absolutely straight lines—indeed, because a line is made of points and points have no width, a real line would have no width and so would be invisible—so, the line you can see in the drawing is therefore not really a line, and the drawn "triangle" is not really a triangle!).

If I am a scientist investigating the mating habits of cobra snakes, I am not writing about any particular snakes, such as my pet cobras, Martha and Jeremy, but cobras in general, and the cobra species (the group of cobras as a whole) is not a physical object existing in space which can be perceived with the five senses, like Martha and Jeremy. And, while some people are more beautiful, more just, more wise than others, none are absolutely, perfectly, completely beautiful, just, or wise, and so when I think, talk, or write about beauty, justice, or wisdom, I am not talking about anything existing in space which we can see with our eyes, hear with our ears, touch with our fingers, or taste with our tongues.

So, if these objects of intellectual, conceptual thought are not physical objects, what are they? If there are no such objects, then all our thinking, talking, and writing about mathematics, biological species, and abstractions like beauty and justice is really about nothing and therefore meaningless nonsense. But that seems absurd. Perhaps such

objects exist only "in the mind," like the objects in a dream. But then they wouldn't exist when no one is thinking about them. But surely triangles and the species of cobra snakes existed before anyone discovered them and began to think and talk about them. So, Plato reasons, these objects of conceptual thought must be immaterial and exist independently of human thought. They are independent of both the material world and the human mind.

Furthermore, Plato argues, because these objects of conceptual thought are permanent and unchanging, while physical objects are impermanent and constantly changing, these objects of conceptual thought (triangles, species of snakes, perfect justice, and so on) are fully "real," while physical objects that exist in space and time and are perceived by the five senses are not fully real. Indeed, Plato held, the only reality physical objects have is the reflected, partial reality they gain from their relationship to the Forms. Insofar as ordinary physical objects "participate in," "imitate," and "approximate to" the Forms, they, too, share a limited and relative being, "rolling about between being and nonbeing," as Plato said, parasitic on the firm reality of the Forms. Thus, for Plato there are degrees of reality. Martha and Jeremy "participate in," or are members of, and so are less real than, the species cobra; the triangle I drew on paper "imitates" and "approximates," and so is less real than, a fully real triangle (that is, the lines are very close to being straight, and the sum of the interior angles is therefore very close to being 180 degrees), and while the grading system in your philosophy class is not absolutely just, it is as just or fair as is humanly possible, and so "approximates to" or "imitates" true justice.

Plato thought there were Forms, or Ideas, for abstract entities. But what about constructed objects such as this treasury of Athens at Delphi? Questions such as these pushed Plato's theory of Forms to its limits. Photo by David Stewart.

METAPHYSICAL DUALISM

Though Plato believed that material objects have a lesser degree of reality than the Forms, his belief that they do have some degree of reality makes his theory one version of "Metaphysical Dualism." A metaphysical dualist believes that reality is made of up of two kinds of things that cannot be fully reduced to one another. Metaphysical dualism contrasts with metaphysical monism (from the Greek *monos*, meaning "one" or "alone"), the theory that all of reality can be explained in terms of one basic kind of thing. In the next two chapters, Chapter 10 (Materialism) and Chapter 11 (Idealism), we will look at the two most common forms of metaphysical monism. Materialists believe that all that is real can be explained in terms of matter and its states. Idealists believe that all that is real can be explained in terms of immaterial minds and their states. Here we have two very different views, to be sure; however, they share the common trait of holding that reality can be explained in terms of one basic kind of thing. Metaphysical dualists, like Plato, deny this, maintaining instead that a full account of reality demands that one recognize two kinds of things, neither of which can be fully reduced to nor explained in terms of the other.

An important consequence of Plato's metaphysical dualism, and one that has had enormous influence on Western thought and culture, is the sharp distinction Plato draws between the mind and the body—often referred to as "mind–body dualism." Mind–body dualism is the theory that a human person is a composite of an immaterial mind and a material body, each of which can exist without the other. Interestingly, one reason Plato believed in mind–body dualism is that it helped explain how human beings acquire knowledge of the Forms. Because the Forms are not part of the material world, they cannot be perceived by the five senses. How, then, do we come to know them, given that we currently find ourselves existing in a material, sensible world? Plato's answer is that we actually acquire knowledge of the Forms only in a preexistent state before we were born! Before birth, our immaterial souls existed apart from our material bodies. In this disembodied state, our minds

were able to contemplate the immaterial Forms directly and thereby acquire knowledge of the unchanging essences underlying reality. Upon birth, however, our souls were placed into our bodies, an event that causes our knowledge of the Forms to be forgotten, but not completely lost. What we call learning in this life is simply a process of remembering the knowledge of the Forms that was actually acquired when our souls existed outside of our bodies before birth. Hence for Plato, knowledge of the Forms in this life involves a kind of "recollection." Our mind or soul has lived through many previous bodies over thousands of years. And when we die, our mind or soul continues to exist quite apart from our old, or any other, body. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this "mind–body dualism" influenced the medieval notion of the soul surviving the body after the death of the person (but not *before* the person was born, as Plato had thought) and still later the mind–body dualism of Descartes and other modern philosophers.

Both Plato's general metaphysical dualism and his mind–body dualism are evident in the following selection from Plato's dialogue, *The Phaedo*. In this selection, Plato divides reality into visible, material things that are accessed by the senses and invisible, immaterial things that are accessed by the intellect. He then proceeds to argue that the human body belongs in the category of material things and the human soul in the category of immaterial things in order to show that the soul survives the destruction of the body that occurs upon death.

Plato: The Immortality of the Soul

Well, said Socrates, must we not ask ourselves this question? What kind of thing is liable to suffer dispersion, and for what kind of thing have we to fear dispersion? And then we must see whether the soul belongs to that kind or not, and be confident or afraid about our own souls accordingly.

That is true, he answered.

Now is it not the compound and composite that is naturally liable to be dissolved in the same way in which it was compounded? And is not what is uncompounded alone not liable to dissolution, if anything is not?

I think that that is so, said Cebes.

And what always remains in the same state and unchanging is most likely to be uncompounded, and what is always changing and never the same is most likely to be compounded, I suppose?

Yes, I think so.

Now let us return to what we were speaking of before in the discussion, he said. Does the being, which in our dialectic we define as meaning absolute existence, remain always in exactly the same state, or does it change? Do absolute equality, absolute beauty, and every other absolute existence admit of any change at all? Or does absolute existence in each case, being essentially uniform, remain the same and unchanging and never in any case admit of any sort or kind of change whatsoever?

It must remain the same and unchanging, Socrates, said Cebes.

And what of the many beautiful things, such as men, and horses, and garments, and the like, and of all which bears the names of the ideas, whether equal, or beautiful, or anything else? Do they remain the same or is it exactly the opposite with them? In short, do they never remain the same at all, either in themselves or in their relations?

These things, said Cebes, never remain the same.

You can touch them, and see them, and perceive them with the other senses, while you can grasp the unchanging only by the reasoning of the intellect. These latter are invisible and not seen. Is it not so?

That is perfectly true, he said.

Let us assume then, he said, if you will, that there are two kinds of existence, the one visible, the other invisible.

Yes, he said.

And the invisible is unchanging, while the visible is always changing.

Yes, he said again.

And which of these kinds of existence should we say that the body is most like, and most akin to?

The visible, he replied; that is quite obvious.

And the soul? Is that visible or invisible?

It is invisible to man, Socrates, he said.

But we mean by visible and invisible, visible and invisible to man; do we not?

Yes; that is what we mean.

Then what do we say of the soul? Is it visible or not visible?

It is not visible.

Then it is invisible?

Yes.

Then the soul is more like the invisible than the body; and the body is like the visible.

That is necessarily so, Socrates.

Have we not also said that, when the soul employs the body in any inquiry, and makes use of sight, or hearing, or any other sense—for inquiry with the body means inquiry with the senses—she is dragged away by it to the things which never remain the same, and wanders about blindly, and becomes confused and dizzy, like a drunken man, from dealing with things that are ever changing?

Certainly.

But when she investigates any question by herself, she goes away to the pure, and eternal, and immortal, and unchangeable, to which she is akin, and so she comes to be ever with it, as soon as she is by herself, and can be so; and then she rests from her wanderings and dwells with it unchangingly, for she is dealing with what is unchanging. And is not this state of the soul called wisdom?

Indeed, Socrates, you speak well and truly, he replied.

Which kind of existence do you think from our former and our present arguments that the soul is more like and more akin to?

I think, Socrates, he replied, that after this inquiry the very dullest man would agree that the soul is infinitely more like the unchangeable than the changeable.

And the body?

That is like the changeable.

Consider the matter in yet another way. When the soul and the body are united, nature ordains the one to be a slave and to be ruled, and the other to be master and to rule. Tell me once again, which do you think is like the divine and which is like the mortal? Do you not think that the divine naturally rules and has authority, and that the mortal naturally is ruled and is a slave?

I do.

Then which is the soul like?

That is quite plain, Socrates. The soul is like the divine and the body is like the mortal.

Now tell me, Cebes, is the result of all that we have said that the soul is most like the divine, and the immortal, and the intelligible, and the uniform, and the indissoluble, and the unchangeable; while the body is most like the human, and the mortal, and the unintelligible, and the multiform, and the dissoluble, and the changeable? Have we any other argument to show that this is not so, my dear Cebes?

We have not.

Then if this is so, is it not the nature of the body to be dissolved quickly, and of the soul to be wholly or very nearly indissoluble?

Certainly.

DEGREES OF REALITY

Perhaps even more striking than his metaphysical dualism is Plato's belief that there are degrees of reality. What is real, according to Plato, can be classified on an ascending scale, from a mirror image that has a minimal degree of reality to physical objects, which have a greater degree of reality, to the Forms, which have the greatest reality. It is a startling claim that runs counter to common sense in at least two respects. First, we tend to think in only two categories: something is either real or unreal and thus the notion of degrees of reality seems alien to us. Second, it seems bizarre to maintain that things like mountains, houses, trees, and diamonds have less reality than, say, the immaterial Form of circularity or the immaterial Form of justice. But part of Plato's genius is found in his drawing attention to beliefs we take for granted that perhaps we should not. Concerning the first point, it is true that most of us view reality as being like an on/off switch such that things are either real or not, with no degrees in between. But is this the case? Is it not plausible to distinguish between the reality of dreams and the objects of which dream images are only pale shadows? If I dream of a new car, surely we would want to say that the dream image of the car is not as real as the car itself; yet, we would not for all that want to say that the dream is absolutely nothing and has no reality whatsoever. And with respect to the second point—which would have sounded ridiculous to the ordinary person even in Plato's own time—Plato would push us to question why we would view a wheel, for instance, as more real than the geometric Form of circularity. A wheel will eventually perish, but the principles of geometry that define circularity cannot change or perish; so, if we take independence and durability as criteria for determining degree reality—as we do, perhaps, when we view physical objects as more real than dreams of such objects—then perhaps we should follow Plato in viewing the immaterial forms as more real still.

Earlier in this chapter, we noted that part of Plato's motivation for believing in the Forms was that he wanted to provide a foundation for knowledge of truths that were certain and unchanging. It is, thus, not surprising that Plato believed that there are also degrees of knowledge, where the degree of knowledge is directly related to the degree of reality of the thing known. Plato thus believed that the highest degree of knowledge is found in knowing those things with the highest degree of reality and the lowest degree of knowledge is found in awareness of those things with the lowest degree of reality. Consequently, knowledge of the Forms constitutes the highest degree of knowledge and awareness of illusions constitutes the lowest degree of knowledge. So instead of the two-dimensional world in which many of us live, Plato offers us a multistoried reality to which each level of reality offers us a different degree of knowledge.

Plato describes these levels of reality and knowledge in one of the passages in the reading that follows. He refers there to the "divided line." That may not strike you as what Plato intended it to be—a musical analogy. The Pythagoreans (named after their leader Pythagoras, who also gave his name to the famous geometrical theorem) discovered that the principles of music lie in mathematical ratios. In fact, we owe a great deal of our current musical terminology to them: we speak of fourths, fifths, thirds, and so on—mathematical ratios to express musical tones. If we take a musical instrument with a single string, a monochord, and tune it to A 440 and then stop it with our finger exactly halfway between its two ends, the tone we get is an octave above A 440. The analogy Plato therefore suggests to us is a twofold division between appearance and reality, with *reality* a term reserved for the higher level.

For each of the degrees of reality, and its corresponding degree of knowledge, Plato used a specific term. The divided-line illustration with the Greek terms Plato used and their usual English translations are given in the following diagram. Appropriate to each level of reality is a type of knowledge and a means of knowing. The senses guide us through the world of appearance, but reason takes us beyond appearance into the realm of the Forms: pure Ideas unalloyed with the uncertainty of the world of appearances.

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Better at this point to let Plato speak for himself. But first a word about *The Republic* and how it is structured. *The Republic* is a far-ranging treatise touching on virtually every area of Plato's philosophy. It can also be read as a work on the ideal political organization for human society, as a utopia. It is presented as a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, one of Plato's older brothers, though he is portrayed here as a young man. The literary form of the dialogue was a favorite of Plato's, but here the conversations are recalled by Socrates, so what we really have is a reminiscence of a dialogue.

We break in on the conversation (or on Socrates' recollections of the conversation) when he and Glaucon begin to talk about education for the rulers of the ideal state. Socrates is making a case for the view that education of the rulers (here called Guardians) should be a philosophical education. In short, the rulers should be philosophers, because philosophers are not interested in transitory things that might corrupt them but rather have their concerns directed toward the eternal principles of things and the organization of human society on the ideal model of perfect justice and the ideal state. In the process of describing why kings should be philosophers, Socrates also tells us a great deal about Plato's theory of reality and knowledge. The conversation recorded here never took place, but Plato uses Socrates—his teacher—and his brother as the dramatic personae of this engaging philosophical work. Some of the views presented may have been those Socrates taught Plato, but we should consider them mainly as Plato's own.

	Objects		**States of Mind**
	The Good		
Intelligible World	Forms	D	Intelligence *(noesis)* or knowledge *(episteme)*
	Mathematical objects	C	Reason *(dianoia)*
World of Appearances	Visible things	B	Belief *(pistis)*
	Images	A	Illusion *(eikasia)*

Plato: The Divided Line

"You must suppose, then," I went on, "that there are these two powers of which I have spoken, and that one of them is supreme over everything in the intelligible order or region, the other over everything in the visible region—I won't say in the physical universe or you will think I'm playing with words. At any rate you have before your mind these two orders of things, the visible and the intelligible?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, suppose you have a line divided into two unequal parts, and then divide the two parts again in the same ratio, to represent the visible and intelligible orders. This gives you, in terms of comparative clarity and obscurity, in the visible order one subsection of images: by 'images' I mean first shadows, then reflections in water and other close-grained, polished surfaces, and all that sort of thing, if you understand me."

"I understand."

"Let the other sub-section stand for the objects which are the originals of the images—the animals around us, and every kind of plant and manufactured object."

"Very good."

"Would you be prepared to admit that these sections differ in that one is genuine, one not, and that the relation of image to original is the same as that of the realm of opinion to that of knowledge?"

"I most certainly would."

"Then consider next how the intelligible part of the line is to be divided."

"How?"

"In one sub-section the mind uses the originals of the visible order in their turn as images, and has to base its inquiries on assumptions and proceed from them not to a first principle but to a conclusion: in the other it moves from assumption to a first principle which involves no assumption, without the images used in the other sub-section, but pursuing its inquiry solely by and through forms themselves."

"I don't quite understand."

"I will try again, and what I have just said will help you to understand. I think you know that students of geometry and calculation and the like begin by assuming there are odd and even numbers, geometrical figures and the three forms of angle, and other kindred items in their respective subjects; these they regard as known, having put them forward as basic assumptions which it is quite unnecessary to explain to themselves or anyone else on the grounds that they are obvious to everyone. Starting from them, they proceed through a series of consistent steps to the conclusion which they set out to find."

"Yes, I certainly know that."

"You know too that they make use of and argue about visible figures, though they are not really thinking about them, but about the originals which they
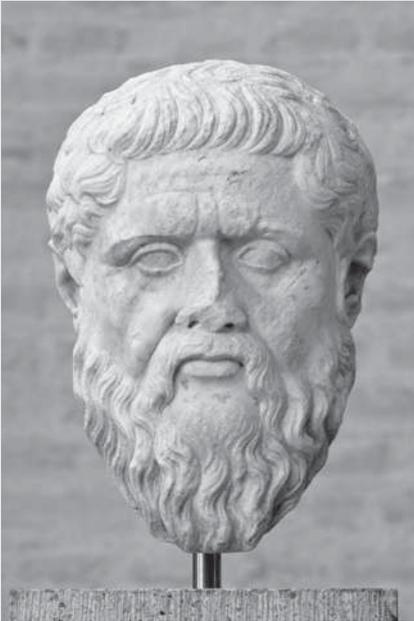
Plato (428/7-348/7 B.C.E.) Born in Athens, Plato became a student of Socrates and is mentioned in the Apology as being present at his trial. After the death of Socrates, Plato traveled outside of Greece but returned eventually to Athens where he founded the Academy in 388 or 387 B.C.E. In many ways the first university, the Academy provided study in philosophy, mathematics, and the physical sciences. © Erin Babnik/Alamy.

resemble; it is not about the square or diagonal which they have drawn that they are arguing, but about the square itself or diagonal itself, or whatever the figure may be. The actual figures they draw or model, which themselves cast their shadows and reflections in water—these they treat as images only, the real objects of their investigation being invisible except to the eye of reason."

"That is quite true."

"This type of thing I called intelligible, but said that the mind was forced to use assumptions in investigating it, and did not proceed to a first principle, being unable to depart from and rise above its assumptions; but it used as illustrations the very things which in turn have their images and shadows on the lower level, in comparison with which they are themselves respected and valued for their clarity."

"I understand," he said. "You are referring to what happens in geometry and kindred sciences."

"Then when I speak of the other sub-section of the intelligible part of the line you will understand that I mean that which the very process of argument grasps by the power of dialectic; it treats assumptions not as principles, but as assumptions in the true sense, that is, as starting points and steps in the ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle of everything; when it has grasped that principle it can again descend, by keeping to the consequences that follow from it, to a conclusion. The whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world, but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms."

"I understand," he said; "though not fully, because what you describe sounds like a long job. But you want to distinguish that part of the real and intelligible which is studied by the science of dialectic as having greater clarity than that studied by what are called 'sciences.' These sciences treat their assumptions as first principles and, though compelled to use reason and not sense-perception in surveying their subject matter, because they proceed in their investigations from assumptions and not to a first principle, they do not, you think, exercise intelligence on it, even though with the aid of a first principle it is intelligible. And I think that you call the habit of mind of geometers and the like reason but not intelligence, meaning by reason something midway between opinion and intelligence."

"You have understood me very well," I said. "So please take it that there are, corresponding to the four sections of the line, these four states of mind; to the top section intelligence, to the second reason, to the third belief, and to the last illusion. And you may arrange them in a scale, and assume that they have degrees of clarity corresponding to the degree of truth possessed by their subject-matter."

"I understand," he replied, "and agree with your proposed arrangement."

"I want you to go on to picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition somewhat as follows. Imagine an underground chamber like a cave, with a long entrance open to the daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Some way off, behind and higher up, a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and their audience, above which they show their puppets."

"I see."

"Imagine further that there are men carrying all sorts of gear along behind the curtain-wall, projecting above it and including figures of men and animals made of wood and stone and all sorts of other materials, and that some of these men, as you would expect, are talking and some not."

"An odd picture and an odd sort of prisoner."

"They are drawn from life," I replied. "For, tell me, do you think our prisoners could see anything of themselves or their fellows except the shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave opposite them?"

"How could they see anything else if they were prevented from moving their heads all their lives?"

"And would they see anything more of the objects carried along the road?"

"Of course not."

"Then if they were able to talk to each other, would they not assume that the shadows they saw were the real things?"

"Inevitably."

"And if the wall of their prison opposite them reflected sound, don't you think that they would suppose, whenever one of the passers-by on the road spoke, that the voice belonged to the shadow passing before them?"

"They would be bound to think so."

"And so in every way they would believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were the whole truth."

"Yes, inevitably."

"Then think what would naturally happen to them if they were released from their bonds and cured of their delusions. Suppose one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire; all these actions would be painful and he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows. What do you think he would say if he was told that what he used to see was so much empty nonsense and that he was now nearer reality and seeing more correctly, because he was turned towards objects that were more real, and if on top of that he were compelled to say what each of the passing objects was when it was pointed out to him? Don't you think he would be at a loss, and think that what he used to see was far truer than the objects now being pointed out to him?"

"Yes, far truer."

"And if he were made to look directly at the light of the fire, it would hurt his eyes and he would turn back and retreat to the things which he could see properly, which he would think really clearer than the things being shown him."

"Yes."

"And if," I went on, "he were forcibly dragged up the steep and rugged ascent and not let go till he had been dragged out into the sunlight, the process would be a painful one, to which he would much object, and when he emerged into the light his eyes would be so dazzled by the glare of it that he wouldn't be able to see a single one of the things he was now told were real."

"Certainly not at first," he agreed.

"Because, of course, he would need to grow accustomed to the light before he could see things in the upper world outside the cave. First he would find it easiest to look at shadows, next at the reflections of men and other objects in water, and later on at the objects themselves. After that he would find it easier to observe the heavenly bodies and the sky itself at night, and to look at the light of the moon and stars rather than at the sun and its light by day."

"Of course."

"The thing he would be able to do last would be to look directly at the sun itself, and gaze at it without using reflections in water or any other medium, but as it is in itself."

"That must come last."

"Later on he would come to the conclusion that it is the sun that produces the changing seasons and years and controls everything in the visible world, and is in a sense responsible for everything that he and his fellow-prisoners used to see."

"That is the conclusion which he would obviously reach."

"And when he thought of his first home and what passed for wisdom there, and of his fellow-prisoners, don't you think he would congratulate himself on his good fortune and be sorry for them?"

"Very much so."

"There was probably a certain amount of honour and glory to be won among the prisoners, and prizes for keensightedness for those best able to remember the order of sequence among the passing shadows and so be best able to divine their future appearances. Will our released prisoner hanker after these prizes or envy this power or honour? Won't he be more likely to feel, as Homer says, that he would far rather be 'a serf in the house of some landless man', or indeed anything else in the world, than hold the opinions and live the life that they do?"

"Yes," he replied, "he would prefer anything to a life like theirs."

"Then what do you think would happen," I asked, "if he went back to sit in his old seat in the cave? Wouldn't his eyes be blinded by the darkness, because he had come in suddenly out of the sunlight?"

"Certainly."

"And if he had to discriminate between the shadows, in competition with the other prisoners, while he was still blinded and before his eyes got used to the darkness—a process that would take some time—wouldn't he be likely to make a fool of himself? And they would say that his visit to the upper world had ruined his sight, and that the ascent was not worth even attempting. And if anyone tried to release them and lead them up, they would kill him if they could lay hands on him."

"They certainly would."

"Now, my dear Glaucon," I went on, "this simile must be connected throughout with what preceded it. The realm revealed by sight corresponds to the prison, and the light of the fire in the prison to the power of the sun. And you won't go wrong if you connect the ascent into the upper world and the sight of the objects there with the upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region. That at any rate is my interpretation, which is what you are anxious to hear; the truth of the matter is, after all, known only to god. But in my opinion, for what it is worth, the final thing to be perceived in the intelligible region, and perceived only with difficulty, is the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence. And anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private life must have sight of it."

"I agree," he said, "so far as I am able to understand you."

"Then you will perhaps also agree with me that it won't be surprising if those who get so far are unwilling to involve themselves in human affairs, and if their minds long to remain in the realm above. That's what we should expect if our simile holds good again."

"Yes, that's to be expected." . . .

"If this is true," I continued, "we must reject the conception of education professed by those who say that they can put into the mind knowledge that was not there before—rather as if they could put sight into blind eyes."

"It is a claim that is certainly made," he said.

"But our argument indicates that the capacity for knowledge is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same

way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"Then this turning around of the mind itself might be made a subject of professional skill, which would effect the conversion as easily and effectively as possible. It would not be concerned to implant sight, but to ensure that someone who had it already was not either turned in the wrong direction or looking the wrong way."

"That may well be so."

"The rest, therefore, of what are commonly called excellences of the mind perhaps resemble those of the body, in that they are not in fact innate, but are implanted by subsequent training and practice; but knowledge, it seems, must surely have a diviner quality, something which never loses its power, but whose effects are useful and salutary or again useless and harmful according to the direction in which it is turned. Have you never noticed how shrewd is the glance of the type of men commonly called bad but clever? They have small minds, but their sight is sharp and piercing enough in matters that concern them; it's not that their sight is weak, but that they are forced to serve evil, so that the keener their sight the more effective that evil is."

"That's true."

"But suppose," I said, "that such natures were cut loose, when they were still children, from all the dead weights natural to this world of change and fastened on them by sensual indulgences like gluttony, which twist their minds' vision to lower things, and suppose that when so freed they were turned towards the truth, then this same part of these same individuals would have as keen a vision of truth as it has of the objects on which it is at present turned."

"Very likely."

"And is it not also likely, and indeed a necessary consequence of what we have said, that society will never be properly governed either by the uneducated, who have no knowledge of the truth, or by those who are allowed to spend all their lives in purely intellectual pursuits? . . . Then our job as lawgivers is to compel the best minds to attain what we have called the highest form of knowledge, and to ascend to the vision of the good as we have described, and when they have achieved this and see well enough, prevent them behaving as they are now allowed to."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Remaining in the upper world, and refusing to return again to the prisoners in the cave below and share their labours and rewards, whether trivial or serious."

"But surely," he protested, "that will not be fair. We shall be compelling them to live a poorer life than they might live."

"The object of our legislation," I reminded him again, "is not the special welfare of any particular class in our society, but of the society as a whole; and it uses persuasion or compulsion to unite all citizens and make them share together the benefits which each individually can confer on the community; and its purpose in fostering this attitude is not to leave everyone to please himself, but to make each man a link in the unity of the whole."

KNOWLEDGE IS KNOWLEDGE OF FORMS

Before going further, we should reflect a bit more on the Forms or Ideas. Consider the Form of justice. What is justice? This is an important and difficult question, one that Plato considers in many of his dialogues, since Plato's theory of reality is intertwined with his theory of knowledge. Unless we know what justice is, how will we ever be able to manifest it in human affairs? Unless we understand such basic principles, we can never achieve them, even in a partial and limited way, in our state. The same thing holds for such Ideas as excellence or virtue, piety, and so on. Many colleges state on their letterheads that they are committed to excellence in education, but what is it that is named by excellence? Before claiming they are committed to it, should not the leaders of such colleges at least know what it is they are talking about? Plato would have thought so.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

In the allegory of the cave (the translator of the previous selection calls it a simile) we get Plato's view of the difference between those who claim knowledge but only know the particular things of sense experience and those whose knowledge is of universal principles. The situation he describes is of a group of prisoners sitting in an underground cavern looking at shadows on the wall made by persons holding up cut-out figures of objects in front of a fire. The prisoners have never seen anything but the images; for them, that is reality. But one of the prisoners is freed from his chains and makes his way up a long and tortuous ascent to the outside world. There his vision is blinded by the sun, but as his eyes adjust themselves, he sees real objects, the realities of which he has heretofore experienced only in the images he has seen. Think how stunned he must be to suddenly grasp the difference between appearance and reality, between images and real things. He then returns to the cave to deliver the truth to his fellow prisoners. But they do not want to hear that what they think is reality is only a dim shadow of the real. So they kill the messenger and are content to remain in ignorance.

This allegory has several levels of meaning. At one level Plato uses it to explain why the citizens of Athens executed Socrates. Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth by leading them to question authority and the accepted explanations for things; he was a troubling influence. It also offers Plato's account of the human situation. People are happy in their ignorance. They resent those who force them to recognize that they are ignorant. That is why philosophers are viewed with suspicion and distrust. We are comfortable with our prejudices and do not want them disturbed.

At another level, the allegory characterizes Plato's view of philosophy. Philosophy is a time-consuming and difficult way of life (comparable to the long and difficult ascent from the cave). How do we know the Forms? It is not easy, but it is possible, and Plato describes the proper preparation for the pursuit of such knowledge. Young people should not begin the study of philosophy because their interests are distracted by other things. Only in middle age, and after a rigorous study of mathematics, should one be allowed to pursue the discipline of philosophy. The method whereby one seeks knowledge of the Forms is the dialectic (discussed in some detail in Part 2, "Thinking About Thinking [Logic]"). To discover the nature of justice, for example, one has to begin with whatever provisional and partial understanding of justice one has. But through careful questioning that exposes the limitations of this provisional view, one can then proceed to
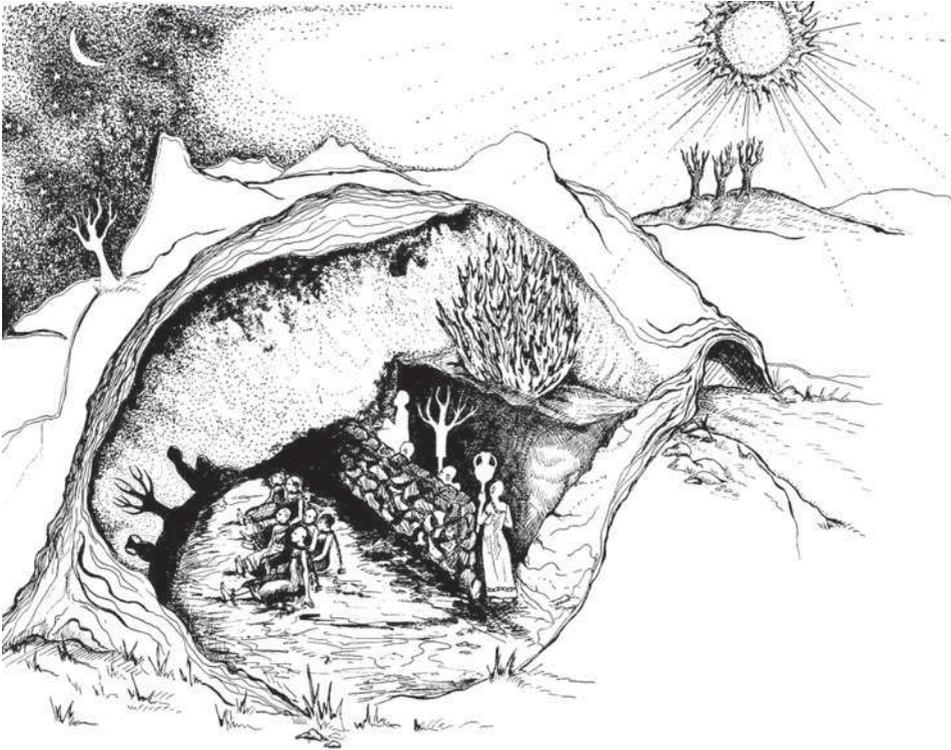
In the allegory of the cave, Plato likened individuals unenlightened by philosophy to persons chained in a cave who think that images cast on a wall are reality. Drawing copyright 1987 by Candice Blocker.

a better definition. Again, one examines this definition and exposes its inadequacies. This process, repeated again and again, leads us ever closer to the truth we seek.

At still another level, the allegory states Plato's view of knowledge and reality. The Forms or general principles of things are the proper objects of knowledge. And philosophers are not like other persons, for they have their gaze firmly fixed on the unchanging Forms, on the eternally true principles of things, not the changing and transient world of experience. For this reason, Plato thought a society's rulers should be philosophically trained, for they would seek the good of society and would not be misled by a search for fame, fortune, or wealth.

THE FORM OF THE GOOD

Running throughout the passages cited here are references to the Form of the Good. The Good looms large in Plato's theory of knowledge, but he never really tells us what the Good is. The closest he comes to a definition is a simile: The Good is to knowing as the sun is to seeing. When Plato speaks of the Good, it is always with the greatest awe. Knowledge of the Good is the highest kind of knowledge, a kind of enlightenment of which it is said that only a few fortunate seekers achieve. It is easy to see how the Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages equated the Good with God. For them, the power

of reason comes from God. Each of us exhibits in our own reasoning ability a reflection of the rationality that permeates the whole created order. The Greek term logos can mean both "word" and "reason." Such texts as John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word, . . ." gave added impetus to this interpretation.

After Plato's death, some of his followers emphasized this side of his philosophy to the exclusion of the dialectical and logical aspects of this thought. They sought the Good for its own sake in a kind of mystical experience. This philosophical tradition culminated in the neo-Platonists represented by the thinker Plotinus. Other followers of Plato devoted themselves to the mathematical and analytical side of Plato's work. Among these was his most famous student, Aristotle, who took some of the basic Platonic views and reshaped them into works of considerable power and endurance. We will examine some of Aristotle's writings on ethics in Part 5, "What Ought We to Do? (Ethics)."

Questions for Discussion

1. Show how the allegory of the cave illustrates both Plato's theory of reality and his view of the importance of philosophy.
2. What considerations can be advanced in support of Plato's theory of Forms? Against it? On which side do you find yourself? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Why do you think we find it difficult to accept the view that there are degrees of reality corresponding to degrees of knowledge?

4. Do you agree that mathematics is a bridge between the sensible and the intelligible realms of reality? Why or why not?
5. Read again Plato's discussion of the Good. What do you think the Good is? Be prepared to defend your answer.

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3. According to Plato, how are we able to learn anything new?

     Listen to the **podcast:** *M. M. McCabe on the Paradox of Inquiry* on **MySearchLab.com**

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Materialism

I n Chapter 9, we considered Plato's metaphysical dualism. In this chapter and Chapter 11, we turn to the two most important versions of metaphysical monism: materialism and idealism. Though they share the feature of attempting to explain all of reality in terms of one, fundamental kind of thing, these theories are otherwise opposites and are usually found in competition with each other. Idealism is the view that only mind and its ideas and thoughts are real, and that matter is an unfounded illusion. Materialists, on the other hand, believe that only matter and its physical properties are real, while mind, thoughts, and the like are simply manifestations of matter. The idealist tries to explain physical matter as a by-product of mind; the materialist tries to explain mind as a by-product of matter.

MATERIALISM AND IDEALISM

As we have indicated, materialism is an ancient philosophical view. The first philosophers, the Milesians in ancient Greece, looked at the world primarily from a materialist outlook, seeking always to find the underlying material substratum of the universe, whether water, air, or some combination of such elements. We have mentioned the emergence in Greek philosophy of atomism, which is primarily a materialist theory. Idealism, on the other hand, is a distinctly modern philosophical outlook. The roots of modern idealism can be traced to René Descartes, although Descartes was not himself an idealist. We shall examine Descartes' views in more detail in Part 4, "How Do We Know? (Epistemology)," but for now we shall look briefly at Descartes' famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum:* "I think, therefore I am."

Descartes vowed to believe nothing of which he could not be absolutely certain, and so he sought those things which were beyond doubt. Everything, Descartes reasoned, could be doubted except the fact that he was thinking. If I think I am thinking, how could I be wrong? Even if I were mistaken, I would still be mistakenly *thinking*. More important for later philosophers was Descartes' argument that we are far more certain that we are *thinking* that something exists than we are certain that that thing exists. If I believe that my car is in the garage, I may be proved wrong (I forgot I had left it in the driveway). But even so, it is certainly true that I *thought* my car was in the garage. If I say "The car is in the garage," I am more likely to be proved wrong than if I say "I *think* my car is in the garage." This is why, in ordinary speech, we will

generally retreat to "I think so" whenever we are uncertain, as a kind of guarantee against being contradicted. The conclusion seems to be that those things we actually know most immediately, directly, and with the greatest assurance are not physical objects and facts as we might suppose at first, but our own thoughts and ideas. When we make statements about physical objects, we always go beyond what we actually see before us, interpreting, judging, evaluating what we see, and it is in this leap that error can occur.

In a murder trial, for example, the witness for the prosecution claims to have seen the accused, Jones, running from the victim's house immediately after hearing the gunshot and the victim's screams for help. But now the defense attorney, during cross-examination, will ask how the witness can be sure it was Jones. "What did you actually see?" the lawyer will ask. "Well," the witness responds, now taking a more cautious stance, "I saw someone running out of the house, and the person I saw was certainly dressed like Jones." "But are you positive?" the defense will press. "Isn't it just possible that it was not Jones at all but someone else masquerading as Jones?" "Well, it's possible, I suppose," the witness will be forced to admit. When we make claims about objects in the physical world, we are claiming that our idea of that object corresponds with the object itself. But since the object and the idea of it can conflict, no matter how careful we are, there is always a gap between the two into which error can creep. We can never be certain about those objective entities to which our thoughts and ideas are directed. But if we limit our claims just to the ideas themselves, then there is no way for them to fail to correspond to some physical object and thus no way for them to be mistaken. So if I say "It looked like Jones," or "I thought it was Jones," I make no claim whatever about whether it was actually Jones or not. I simply report what my thoughts were like at that moment and about that I can apparently never be mistaken. This is the essential step in all idealists' arguments that mind alone is real. All that we know for sure, argue the idealists, are our own thoughts and ideas. These ideas may correspond to some nonmental object, or they may not, but we cannot know for sure. So why not stick to what you know rather than speculate on what you do not know?

At first it may seem sheer madness to try to deny the physical reality of the world. If I am not thinking of you, do you cease to exist? Every metaphysical theory aims for comprehensiveness, and so idealism tries to avoid the appearance of contradicting the plain facts of everyday life. Of course, physical objects exist, replies the idealist, but their existence consists in their being perceived. As Berkeley put it, *esse* is *percipi*, "to be is to be perceived." But common sense seems to insist that physical objects exist even when they are not being perceived. Does not the desk exist later at night when everyone is asleep? Yes, reply the idealists, but only in the sense that the desk would be perceived if anyone were there to look at it. Berkeley adds that, even so, God is always there to keep an eye on things, so that physical objects constantly exist because they are constantly being perceived by God.

Here we find the greatest contrast between idealism and materialism. In our ordinary experience we are not normally aware of any conflict between the empiricist criterion and the mind-independent criterion. We see tables and chairs, and they exist independently of our seeing or thinking of them. But there is an implicit conflict which emerges very clearly in the idealist-materialist debate. For if the idealist's argument is correct, the empiricist criterion reduces to a mind-dependent criterion, which obviously contradicts the mind-independent criterion. If reality is what we know through sense experience, and what we know through sense experience are simply sensations which are mind dependent, then reality is mind dependent. So if we stress the empiricist criterion of reality, that what is real is what is directly perceptible, then it looks like the idealists are right and the materialists

are wrong. But if we insist on the mind-independent criterion, then the idealists are clearly mistaken from the start and the materialists emerge triumphant.

MATERIALISM AND SCIENCE

Materialism is the metaphysical system supporting and supported by both common sense and science. Whatever speculative problems arise in trying to prove there is a physical world outside my mind, there are few beliefs more stubbornly held by the vast majority of people. And because natural scientists concentrate their attentions on the physical aspect of the world, and because they have been so enormously successful in their theorizing, it seems plausible to suppose that scientists are on the right metaphysical track. If we are successful in constructing simple, comprehensive, and comprehensible theories based solely on matter, then is materialism not clearly the best metaphysical theory for today?

But is it completely comprehensive? Just as idealism has trouble explaining the existence of an unperceived physical world, so materialism has great difficulty in explaining the mind and its activities. Does it really make sense to say that thoughts are simply electrochemical events in the brain? Thoughts seem so nonphysical. You do not gain weight by learning more, nor can you diet by trying to forget. The size of our skull or brain seems to pose no limitations on what we can think about. It just does not seem to make any sense to ask how big, heavy, smooth, or solid your ideas are. Physicists do not have to worry about this problem, since they do not claim that *everything* can be explained physically (and in fact many physicists believe that some things can be explained only on religious grounds). It is only the *philosophical* metaphysician who makes this larger claim and thereby takes on the larger problem of explaining the mental in terms of the physical.

DUALISM AND THE MIND–BODY PROBLEM

Many philosophers of the modern period, including Descartes, avoid both the problem of idealism in explaining matter and the problem of materialism in explaining mind by combining both in what is known as dualism. Descartes believed that the human body is a physical object inside which is a mental substance of a quite different sort. But dualism faces very serious problems of its own, particularly in trying to explain the obvious interaction between mind and body within ordinary human experience. When physical injury causes mental anguish, the body seems to be acting on the mind. And when we decide to get up and walk out of a boring movie, the mind seems clearly to be acting on the body. As we

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have seen, the metaphysician's task is not to invent or deny the way things normally appear, but to account for and explain the appearances in terms of a theory of reality. Even if there is no real mind–body interaction, why does it seem that way? If mind and body are two completely different kinds of things, how *can* they interact on one another? This is known in philosophy as the problem of interaction (which we will examine in more detail in Chapter 12, "The Mind–Body Problem and Personal Identity").

In the modern period, following Descartes, materialism and idealism have flourished primarily to avoid this problem. Each can claim to have removed the mind–body problem simply by denying one of the two items that make up the duality. So the materialist says, "There is no problem in explaining how mind and body can interact since there is no such thing as mind," and the idealist responds that idealism resolves the mind–body problem by eliminating matter. Modern idealist theories more often arise, however, as a reaction

to some of the negative implications of materialism. As the American philosopher William James noted, philosophical theories are differentiated not only by logical arguments and conclusions, they are also distinguished by more subtle factors of temperament and lifestyle. So, materialism is more the philosophy of what James called the "tough-minded" and idealism of the "tender-hearted." Materialism tends to endorse a deterministic and mechanistic world view which appears to threaten both religious and humanistic values. The materialist tends to believe that everything that happens in the universe, including human behavior, is the product of strict causal laws governing the movement of material bodies. Thus when I decided to get up and walk out of the boring movie, it seemed to me that I first made up my mind and then moved my body. It appears, on a commonsense level, that the decision was mine. I was not forced to leave. I could have stayed had I wanted to. I left only because I decided to. But most materialists argue that this is only an illusion, that in reality your body moved because it was acted on by other physical forces, such as nerve impulses, which in turn were the inevitable product of other physical causes, so that you really had nothing to do with it at all. In fact, despite the appearances to the contrary, you actually had no choice in the matter whatsoever; you could not have done anything but get up and leave. Of course, the materialist would admit that the fact that you wanted to leave influenced your action, but this desire was itself caused by other factors, and these by still other factors, such as your biological makeup, your early training, and so on, factors over which you had absolutely no control. But if this is so, then people are not free, and if they are not free, then they are not responsible for their actions, and if not, then they cannot reasonably be criticized, blamed, praised, or otherwise held accountable for their actions. All of this is devastating to our view of human beings as autonomous agents in control of their lives, responsible for their actions and accountable for them; for if materialism is true then so is determinism, but if determinism is true then our entire moral and ethical framework is nothing but a pretense. Thus, arguing by hypothetical syllogism introduced in Chapter 5, if materialism is true, then morality is a sham. Materialism is therefore often seen as the enemy of morality. We will take a closer look at the issue of determinism in Chapter 13, "Freedom and Determinism: The Metaphysics of Human Agency."

MATERIALISM AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Materialism is also perceived as a threat to religious belief. If the world is nothing but a giant machine, then there is no place in such a system for God, or the immortal soul, or of any possibility of God's working out his plan in the universe, or of our freely accepting God's plan for humankind. This is not to say that a materialist cannot have a moral theory or be a moral person, or even be a religious person in a certain sense, and have religious beliefs. Indeed, some materialists have been deeply religious (for example, Gassendi). Nonetheless, the main thrust of materialism is often perceived, with some justification, to be antithetical to some of the most basic tenets of morality and religion. As we look at materialism more closely in this chapter we will consider some of these responses to the apparently negative side of materialism.

The idealist also finds materialism strangely alien to our most immediate and direct experience of the world. The irony is that while materialism seems at first glance to correspond closely to ordinary commonsense beliefs, which the idealist appears to flatly contradict, in some ways quite the opposite is true. The idealist's theory is based on those things most immediately familiar to each of us, our thoughts, feelings, ideas,

beliefs, and our own experience in *thinking* those thoughts, and *feeling* those feelings, and *sensing* those sensations. The materialist's theory, on the other hand, is generally based on things such as atoms, molecules, light waves, photons, alpha particles, and so on, which play no part in anyone's direct experience of the world. These things may help to *explain* what we experience, but they are not themselves directly experienced, as the mental phenomena on which the idealist bases his theory surely are. Thus, materialist philosophers usually distinguish between primary and secondary qualities of objects. Primary qualities are those properties of objects, such as hardness, weight, and solidity, which really are in the object as they appear to us in perception. Secondary qualities are those properties of objects, such as colors, tastes, and odors, which are not at all in the object as they appear to us in perception. In fact, these qualities arise only *in* perception. The apple is not really red; it simply has the kind of primary qualities which can cause the sensation of red in the perceptions of men and animals. Here again, materialism diverges sharply from common sense. Where materialism *is* closer to commonsense beliefs is in the assumption of an unperceived physical reality, which idealism denies.

Materialism has often been perceived by its opponents as a threat to religious and humanistic values and as alienating us from our direct experience of the world. This negative perception of materialism and the desire to counteract it has provided the main springboard for the development of modern idealism. The great strength of materialism, on the other hand, is its alliance with science. Scientists appear to have explained almost everything in materialistic terms, everything, in fact, but the essence of life and thought, and even here they claim to be getting closer and closer. Why cling to the archaic view that there exists something forever out of reach of a materialist explanation, say the materialists; it is simply a matter of time before everything will be explained in purely physical terms. Thus materialists see themselves as visionaries optimistically anticipating the future, and they see idealists as reactionaries anxiously clinging to an antiquated past. The materialist's advice to the idealist is to "get with it."

More recent scientific developments, especially in relativity and quantum theory, have softened the clash between idealists and materialists. Today when scientists speak of matter, it is less palpably hard, solid, and unchanging, and the deterministic model of the world has given way to one governed more by chance and statistical probability. Still, the debate is far from over. And we must now examine that debate for ourselves.

ANCIENT MATERIALISM: ATOMISM

The most persistent form of materialism is known as atomism. This is the metaphysical view that reality consists of nothing but atoms and empty space. Atoms are defined as the smallest units of matter, which cannot themselves be further divided or destroyed. Like Plato's Forms, they are therefore eternal and unchanging. They can move about through the empty space, and, by joining and breaking apart from other atoms, they are responsible for all the physical objects and their properties which we find in everyday experience. When the atoms are joined together and densely packed, they create the appearance of things like tables and chairs, hard and solid objects. When they are more loosely packed, the conglomerate appears to us as a liquid, and when further dispersed, they are perceived by us as gases. As atoms are constantly being emitted from objects, their interaction with our bodies, especially our sense organs, produces what we perceive as sense qualities, smells, colors, sounds, and so on.

Atomism is one of the earliest philosophical and scientific theories, appearing first among the pre-Socratic Greeks, Leucippus and Democritus, but so little remains of their writings that we know few of the details of this early form of atomism. Atomism next appears among the philosophers who followed Plato and Aristotle, especially in the work of Epicurus and his Roman follower, Lucretius. Epicurus (born 342 B.C.E.) is best known as a hedonist from whom the familiar term *epicureanism* derives. But, as often happens, different branches of philosophy are closely interwoven in a particular philosophical system, with especially close links between metaphysical, epistemological, moral, and religious positions. It is easy to see how this might occur. In general, materialism will be conducive to the view that all knowledge comes from sense experience. For materialists, a human being is nothing more than a complex material machine. Therefore, their explanation of knowledge will tend to be in terms of our bodily interaction with the physical world, that is, sense experience in which my body physically interacts with physical stimuli bombarding me from surrounding physical objects, air vibrations striking the ear, light waves hitting the eye, and so on. Similarly, with its stress on the body, materialists will tend to emphasize physical pleasure as the good life when they discuss ethics and morality. And in addressing religious concerns, materialists will tend to deny the existence of immaterial human souls or gods.

And so it is with Epicurus. Knowledge comes from sense impressions, the "images," "effluences," or "idols" he speaks of; good is to be understood in terms of pleasure (though here it must be said that Epicurus was no voluptuary and was very refined in his own tastes). Unlike Plato and Aristotle, who started schools dedicated to the discovery and dissemination of pure knowledge for its own sake, much like our modern-day universities, Epicurus' school, which lasted long after his death, was primarily concerned with establishing a personally satisfying way of life for the individual, a kind of substitute for religion.

ATOMISM AND FREEDOM

Although Epicurus follows the usual trend of materialists regarding the good life and how we come to know things, he departs in some very interesting ways from the usual pattern when it comes to the implications of materialism for religion and for the question of human freedom. In general, as we have seen, materialism will tend to have negative conclusions regarding religion. Since God, gods, and the human soul are usually considered immaterial objects, the materialist cannot accept them as real, and since the existence of God, gods, and the soul are usually thought to be of comfort to human beings, this materialist conclusion is generally a pessimistic one. But Epicurus and his follower, Lucretius, argue that the denial of an immaterial soul which outlives the body in some nonmaterial afterlife is *good* news rather than bad, since, according to them, the greatest cause of human suffering is our fear of the terrors of life after death, like our own "hellfire and damnation." Interestingly, Epicurus and Lucretius do not deny the existence of gods or the soul but only their immateriality. We have a soul, they say, but it is a material object made up of atoms, as are the gods. Nor should we worry very much about the gods even during our lifetimes, according to the atomists, since the course of natural events is largely controlled by natural, material forces over which the gods are virtually powerless.

Finally, unlike most materialists who are strict determinists, Epicurus and Lucretius argue for an element of human freedom, choice, spontaneity, and accident in the world generally. This is introduced in the following reading, from a letter Epicurus wrote to Herodotus, in the curious discussion of the occasional "swerving" of the atoms. Generally,

all atomists think they need to explain that everything in the world is physical atoms moving in straight lines through empty space. Everything else that happens in our world is explained in terms of the collisions of atoms, which result in their joining together and breaking apart again. Since the atoms are described as moving in a completely mechanical fashion, like billiard balls on a pool table, everything that happens is caused by previous events; that ball moved because it was hit by this one which in turn was struck by a cue stick, and so on, in a completely deterministic fashion which rules out the possibility of choice or freedom of action. Everything I do is caused by the previous motions of atoms going back millions of years, and there is nothing I can now do about it. I may *imagine* I am free to close this book and turn on the TV if I choose, and I may think that if I decide not to watch TV that I nonetheless *could* have done so had I chosen to. But this is merely an illusion.

Epicurus is unusual in trying to reconcile materialistic atomism with human freedom. He also needs the "swerve" to explain how the collisions between the atoms get started. He postulates that, at first, the atoms are raining down in straight parallel lines and never colliding with one another. But then, he says, there are occasional, spontaneous, unexplainable "swervings" which cause collisions, which, in turn, cause others, and so on. This is obviously a very weak explanation and indicates, more than anything else, problems within Epicurus' system. As often happens in any philosophical system, there are things which philosophers want to say which can't be said or are difficult to say within the system, and then they are tempted to introduce additional ad hoc elements, which do nothing but allow them to say those things that don't really fit in with the rest of the system. So, in this case, in a materialistic, mechanistic account, there is really no place for such spontaneous movement. To the extent that such things do occur, they indicate the *inadequacy* of a materialistic account of the world.

ATOMISM AND MENTAL PHENOMENA

Another obvious problem for Epicurus, as for most materialists, is how to explain mental phenomena, especially how we come to have ideas of things and to think about them and describe them linguistically. Sensations, ideas, the meanings of words—these are the things that are difficult for a materialist to explain. Epicurus holds that tiny, thin images or likenesses of objects are constantly being emitted by those objects, and perception occurs when some of these happen to enter the eye. But there are many problems with such a view. First, there is no evidence that such images *are* thrown off by objects. Certainly we cannot *see* them as they are being emitted. To account for this, Epicurus postulates that the images move very fast just as the reason given why we can't *see* atoms is that they are very small, but this seems very ad hoc. Secondly, if they are made of atoms, which they must be, how do they penetrate the eye, which is also made of atoms? We would expect some resistance, some collisions. To explain away this discrepancy, Epicurus argues that the images are so finely textured that they can penetrate solid objects, which again sounds like an ad hoc explanation. Finally, even if the images or "idols" did enter the eye, how do we *see* them? When a photograph is put in front of a fence post, does perception take place? A picture of an object is not the same as *seeing* that picture, and it would seem to be just as difficult to explain how the picture is seen as to explain how the object is seen (which the picture has been introduced to explain!).

In other ways, however, Epicurus seems very modern and convincing, anticipating recent views. He describes error, much like Descartes and others nearly two thousand

The Greek atomists believed that circular motion of the atoms was what gave rise to a cosmos, a theory for which the Whirlpool Galaxy would have given support had they been able to see it. Courtesy of Hansen Planetarium Publications, Salt Lake City, Utah. Courtesy of Jason Ware/Photo Researchers, Inc.

years later, as going beyond what is actually given in sensation (I see a person in a crowd but mistakenly judge that she is my friend Mabel).

Epicurus also anticipates the modern mind–body problem when he remarks that it is nonsense to talk about an incorporeal soul without sensations. Epicurus is not merely claiming that immaterial souls do not exist; he is saying, much like the contemporary philosopher, Antony Flew, that it makes no sense to even imagine an immaterial soul. Why? According to Epicurus (and Flew), the only way we can really think of our minds or souls is in terms of their interaction with our bodies (feeling cold, receiving sensations of color, sound, and so on). An immaterial soul, which, by definition, can have no contact or interaction with a body, is therefore inconceivable.

Epicurus: First Principle of Materialism

Now . . . we must consider the phenomena that cannot be perceived by the senses. The first principle is that nothing can be created from the nonexistent; for otherwise any thing would be formed from any thing without the need of seed. If all that disappears were destroyed into the nonexistent, all matter would be destroyed, since that into which it would be dissolved has no existence. Truly this universe has always been such as it now is, and so it shall always be; for there is nothing into which it can change, and there is nothing outside the universe that can enter into it and bring about a change.

Moreover, the universe consists of material bodies and void. That the bodies exist is made clear to all by sensation itself, on which reason must base its judgment

From Greer, Russell, *Letters, Principal Doctrines and Vatican Sayings,* 1st edition, © 1964. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Epicurus (341–270 b.c.e.) Born on the island of Samos, Epicurus founded a philosophical community in Athens that was open to all and stressed the atomistic physics of Democritus. The belief that all reality was matter led him to conclude that pleasure is the goal of life. This hedonistic view was tempered by rational evaluation of pleasures and led to the conclusion that intellectual pleasures are superior to physical ones. Epicureans held that the soul has no independent reality apart from the body and does not survive its death. © INTERFOTO/Alamy.
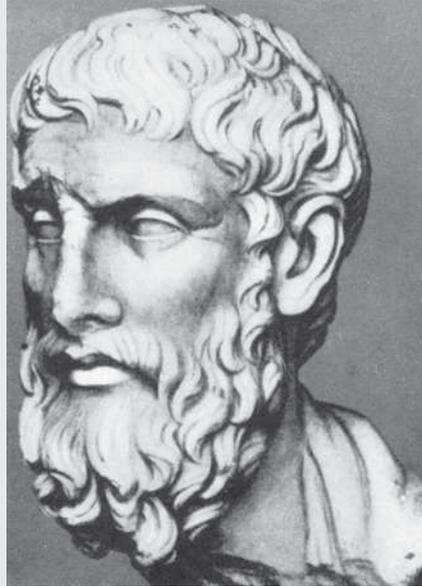
in regard to what is imperceptible, as I have said above. If that which we call "void" and "space" and "the untouchable" did not exist, the particles of matter would have no place in which to exist or through which to move, as it is clear they do move.

In addition to these two, there is nothing that we can grasp in the mind, either through concepts or through analogy with concepts, that has real existence and is not referred to merely as a property or an accident of material things or of the void.

Of material things, some are compounds, others are the simple particles from which the compounds are formed. The particles are indivisible and unchangeable, as is necessary if all is not to be dissolved to nothing, but something strong is to remain after the dissolution of the compounds, something solid, which cannot be destroyed in any way. Therefore, it is necessary that the first beginnings be indivisible particles of matter.

Moreover, the universe as a whole is infinite, for whatever is limited has an outermost edge to limit it, and such an edge is defined by something beyond. Since the universe does not have an edge, it has no limit; and since it lacks a limit, it is infinite and unbounded. Moreover, the universe is infinite both in the number of its atoms and in the extent of its void. If, on the one hand, the void were infinite and matter finite, the atoms would not remain anywhere but would be carried away and scattered through the infinite void, since there would be no atoms from without to support them and hold them together by striking them. If, on the other hand, the void were finite, there would not be room in it for an infinite number of atoms.

In addition, the indivisible solid particles of matter, from which composite bodies are formed and into which such bodies are dissolved, exist in so many

different shapes that the mind cannot grasp their number; for it would not be possible for visible objects to exhibit such great variation in form and quality if they were made by repeated use of atoms of conceivable variety. The number of atoms of each shape is infinite, but the number of varieties cannot be infinite, only inconceivably great.

The atoms move without interruption through all time. Some of them fall in a straight line, some swerve from their courses, and others move back and forth as the result of collisions. These last make up the objects that our senses recognize. Some of those that move in this way after collisions separate far from each other; the others maintain a vibrating motion, either closely entangled with each other or confined by other atoms that have become entangled. There are two reasons for this continued vibration. The nature of the void that separates each of the atoms from the next permits it, for the void is not able to offer any resistance; and the elasticity that is characteristic of the atoms causes them to rebound after each collision. The degree of entanglement of the atoms determines the extent of the recoil from the collisions. These motions had no beginning, for the atoms, and the void have always existed.

If all these things are remembered, a statement as brief as this provides a sufficient outline for our understanding of the nature of that which exists.

Finally, the number of worlds, some like ours and some unlike, is also infinite. For the atoms are infinite in number, as has been shown above, and they move through the greatest distances. The atoms suited for the creation and maintenance of a world have not been used up in the formation of a single world or of a limited number of them, whether like our world or different from it. There is nothing therefore that will stand in the way of there being an infinite number of worlds.

Moreover, there are images of the same shape as the solid bodies from which they come but in thinness far surpassing anything that the senses can perceive. It is not impossible that emanations of this sort are formed in the air that surrounds a body, that there are thin, hollow films, and that the particles composing them retain as they flow from the solid object the same position and relative order that they had while on its surface. Such images we call "idols."

Nothing in nature as we see it prevents our believing that the idols are of a texture unsurpassed in fineness. For this reason, their velocity is also unsurpassed, since they always find a proper passage, and since moreover their course is retarded by few, if any, collisions, while a body made up of an inconceivably large number of atoms suffers many collisions as soon as it begins to move.

Moreover, there is nothing to prevent our believing that the creation of idols is as swift as thought. They flow from the surfaces of a body in a constant stream, but this is not made evident by any decrease in the size of the body since other atoms are flooding in. For a long time the idols keep their atoms in the same relative position and order that they occupied on the surface of the solid, although sometimes they combine in the air. . . .

We must suppose that we see or think of the outer form of a thing when something comes to us from its surface. . . .
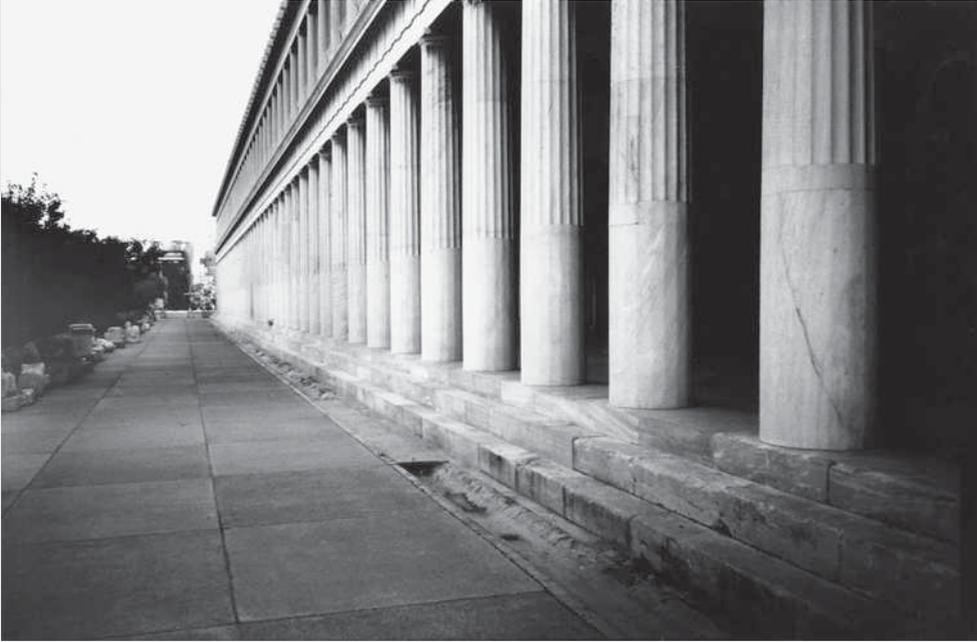
Here in the colonnaded porch, or stoa, in Athens, the Epicureans argued with the Stoics about the nature of reality. The Stoics took their name from the fact that they frequented the stoa, which has been reconstructed in Athens using some ancient materials. Photo by David Stewart.

When, by the purposeful use of our mind or of our organs or sense, we receive a mental picture of the shape of an object or of its concomitant qualities, this picture is true, since it is created by the continuous impact of the idols or by an impression left by one of them. Whatever is false and erroneous is due to what opinion adds (to an image that is waiting) to be confirmed, or at least not to be contradicted, by further evidence of the senses, and which then fails to be so confirmed (or is contradicted). The mental pictures that we receive in the images that either come to our minds in sleep or are formed by the purposeful use of the mind or of the other instruments of judgment would not have such similarity to those things that exist and that we call true if there were not some such material effluence actually coming to us from the objects, and the errors would not occur if we did not permit in ourselves some other activity similar (to the purposeful apprehension of mental images) but yet different. From this other activity error results if its conclusions are not confirmed by further evidence or are contradicted, but truth if they are so confirmed or are not contradicted. . . .

Moreover, we hear when a kind of stream is carried *to* our ears from a person who speaks or from an object that makes a sound or noise or in any way whatever arouses in us the sense of hearing. . . .

We must also suppose that, like sounds, smells could not produce any sensation if there were not carried from the object certain particles of a nature proper to

stir the organ of this sense. Some of these are disorderly and unpleasant; some are gentle and agreeable.

We must suppose that the atoms possess none of the qualities of visible things except shape, mass, and size, and whatever is a necessary concomitant of shape. For every quality changes, but the atoms do not change in any way, since in the dissolution of composite things something hard and indestructible must survive that will make changes possible; not changes into nothingness and from nothingness, but changes brought about by alterations in the positions of some atoms and by the addition or removal of some. It is necessary that the particles that alter their positions and come and go be indestructible, not sharing in the nature of the visible things that are changed, but having their own peculiar shapes and masses, for this much must be unalterable. Even among sensible things, we see that those that are altered by the loss of matter on all sides still retain shape, but the other qualities do not survive in the changing object, as shape survives, but are removed from the whole body. These properties that remain are enough to cause the differences in composite things, since it is necessary that something survive and be not utterly destroyed.

Next, we cannot suppose that in a finite body the parts, no matter how small, are infinite in number. Therefore, not only must we exclude infinite division into smaller and smaller parts lest we make everything weak, and in our conception of the parts that compose a whole be compelled to make them less and less, finally reducing real things to nothingness, but also in dealing with finite things we must not accept as possible an infinite progression to parts each smaller than the last. For if once you say that in a finite thing there are parts infinite in number even if of the least possible size, you cannot think how this can be. For how can a thing containing infinite parts be finite in size? It is clear that the infinite parts are each of some size, and however small they may be, the whole must be infinite in magnitude. . . .

Moreover, it is necessary that the atoms possess equal velocity whenever they are moving through the void and nothing collides with them. For heavy bodies will not be carried more quickly than small, light ones when nothing at all opposes them, nor do the small bodies, because they all find suitable passages, excel the large ones, provided the latter are not obstructed. This is equally true of the atoms' motions upwards or to the side because of collisions and of their downward motion because of their own weight. The atom will traverse space with the speed of thought as long as the motion caused in either of these ways maintains itself, that is, until the atom is deflected either by some external force or by its own weight which counteracts the force of the earlier collision. Moreover, since the motion through the void takes place without any interference from colliding particles, any conceivable distance is completed in an inconceivably brief time. For it is the occurrence or nonoccurrence of collisions that gives the appearance of slow or rapid motion. . . .

Next, referring to the sensations and the feelings as the most certain foundation for belief, we must see that, in general terms, the soul is a finely divided, material thing, scattered through the whole aggregation of atoms that make up the body, most similar to breath with a certain admixture of heat, in some ways resembling the one, in some ways the other. But there is also a part of the soul that goes beyond even these two in fineness, and for this reason it is more ready to share in the

feelings of the body. All this is made evident to us by the powers of the soul, that is, by its feelings, its rapidity of action, its rational faculties, and its possession of those things whose loss brings death to us.

Next, we must conclude that the primary cause of sensation is in the soul, yet it would not have acquired sensation if it had not been in some way enclosed by the rest of the body. But the rest of the body, having given the soul the proper setting for experiencing sensation, has itself also gained from the soul a certain share in this capacity. Yet it does not fully share with the soul, and for this reason when the soul departs, the body no longer experiences sensation. . . . For this reason, sensation is never lost while the soul remains, even though other parts of the body have been destroyed. Indeed, even if a portion of the soul is lost with the loss in whole or in part of that portion of the body that enclosed it, if any part at all of the soul survives, it will still experience sensation. . . . However, if the whole body is destroyed, the soul is scattered and no longer enjoys the same powers and motions, and as a result, it no longer possesses sensation. Whenever that in which the soul has existed is no longer able to confine and hold it in, we cannot think of the soul as still enjoying sensation, since it would no longer be within its proper system and would no longer have the use of the appropriate motions.

Moreover, we must clearly observe this also, that the word "incorporeal" in its common use is applied only to that which we can think of as existing by itself. Now there is no incorporeal thing that we can think of as existing by itself except the void. The void can neither act nor be acted upon; it only gives to corporeal things a space through which to move. Therefore, those who say that the soul is incorporeal are talking nonsense; for in that case the soul would be unable to act or be acted upon, and we clearly see that the soul is capable of both. . . .

In the next place, shapes, colors, sizes, mass, and all other things that are spoken of as belonging to a body must be thought of as properties either of bodies in general or of bodies that are perceptible and are recognized by our perception of these properties. These properties are not to be regarded as having existence by themselves, for we cannot think of them apart from things of which they are properties, nor are they wholly without existence. They are not some kind of immaterial thing attached to the body, nor are they parts of the body, but from all of them together the body as a whole receives its permanent character. . . .

In addition to what we have said, it is necessary to believe that the worlds and every limited complex that has a continuous similarity to the visible world have been formed from the infinite, each of them, greater and smaller, separating out from its own whirling mass. We must suppose also that these will all be dissolved again, some more quickly and some more slowly, some afflicted by one calamity and others by another.

One must not suppose that because of necessity worlds in a single pattern were created, or in every possible pattern. . . . Moreover, we may believe that in all the worlds there are animals, plants, and the other things we see; for no one can show that the seeds from which grow animals, plants, and the other things we see might or might not have been included in one particular world and that in another kind of world this was impossible.

Moreover, we may assume that by the conditions that surround them, men were taught or forced by instinct to do many things of many kinds, but reason later elaborated on what had been begun by instinct and introduced new inventions. In some fields, great progress was made, in others, less; and in some times and ages reason had more success in freeing men from their fears of the powers above than in others.

So too we may suppose that in the beginning words did not receive meaning by design. The natural characters of men who underwent different experiences and received different impressions according to their tribes, caused them to emit air from their lips formed in harmony with each of the experiences and impressions, the men of each tribe different in their own separate ways as the tribes differed because of their differing environments. But later in each race, by common agreement, men assigned particular meanings to particular sounds so that what they said to each other might be less ambiguous and the meaning be more quickly made clear. When men who had known them introduced certain things not previously seen, they assigned names to them, sometimes being forced instinctively to utter the word, but someone making their meaning clear by logically selecting the sound in accordance with the general usage.

Now as to celestial phenomena, we must believe that these motions, periods, eclipses, risings, settings, and the like do not take place because there is some divinity in charge of them, who so arranges them in order and will maintain them in that order, and who at the same time enjoys both perfect happiness and immortality; for activity and anxiety, anger and kindness are not in harmony with blessedness, but are found along with weakness, fear, and dependence on one's neighbors. We must also avoid the belief that masses of concentrated fire have attained a state of divine blessedness and undertaken these motions of their own free will. In all the terms with which we set forth our conceptions of such blessedness, we must preserve due reverence lest from irreverent words there grow opinions that deny this majesty. If we fail, this contradiction will cause the greatest confusion in our souls. Therefore we must believe that, at the time of the first formation of these bodies at the creation of the world, the law of their motions was fully ordained. . . .

In addition to these general matters, we must observe this also, that there are three things that account for the major disturbances in men's minds. First, they assume that the celestial bodies are blessed and eternal yet have impulses, actions, and purposes quite inconsistent with divinity. Next, they anticipate and foresee eternal suffering as depicted in the myths, or even fear the very lack of consciousness that comes with death as if this could be of concern to them. Finally they suffer all this, not as a result of reasonable conjecture, but through some sort of unreasoning imagination; and since in imagination they set no limit to suffering, they are beset by turmoil as great as if there were a reasonable basis for their dread, or even greater. But it is peace of mind to have the essential principles of the whole system of belief. We must therefore turn our minds to immediate feelings and sensations—in matters of general concern to the common feelings and to every immediate evidence from each of the means of judgment. If we heed these, we shall rightly track down the sources of disturbance and fear, and when we have learned the causes of celestial phenomena and of the other occasional happenings, we shall be free from what other men most dread.

MATERIALISM AND THE NEW SCIENCE

After the Greek and Roman period, materialism did not reappear again until its incorporation in the rise of modern science in the sixteenth century. The conception of atomism during this period of the "new science" was virtually the same as it was for the ancient philosopher-scientists, with this important exception: What the Greeks and Romans had merely speculated about, the modern physicists, Galileo, Kepler, and others, tried to support with hard, empirical evidence.

Crucial to materialistic atomism during its renaissance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was its apparent clash with Christianity, and it was to soften that clash that Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), a contemporary of Descartes, devoted much of his writing.

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fourth century C.E., philosophy was almost forgotten in Europe until it was reintroduced through Muslim Arabic translations of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek and Roman writers uncovered during the Muslim conquest of much of the Mideastern world. At first religious leaders were unsure whether to accept such pagan learning, especially as it appeared to contradict certain parts of holy scriptures contained in the Bible and the Koran. Most Greek and Roman philosophers held, for example, that the physical world had not been created from scratch at some point in time, but that creation had rather been a matter of ordering and rearranging pre-existent physical material. And this directly contradicted the religious account of God's creation of the world from nothing. The Muslims finally decided that it was unwise to try to mix religion with the newly discovered Greek and Roman philosophy and science and so rejected it in the end. But the Christians worked out a different formula by which those parts of ancient, pre-Christian learning that contradicted church teaching could be rejected while those parts that did not directly contradict Christian doctrine could be retained.

In general terms, this accommodation of Greek philosophy-science with Christianity had been worked out by the end of the thirteenth century. But the rise of modern science raised some of the same issues all over again, and Gassendi was one of those who tried to continue the reconciliation of Greek thought with Judeo-Christian traditions. As we will see in Part 6, "Philosophy of Religion," this reconciliation is an ongoing affair, continuing up to the present day.

PIERRE GASSENDI (1592–1655): French priest and philosopher who also achieved prominence as a mathematician. He attempted to reconcile materialism with Christian doctrine, thinking that the only materialistic metaphysics was comparable with the new science. His philosophical views placed him not only in opposition to the philosophy of Decartes but also to that of Aristotle. He is also noted for his restatement of the metaphysical and ethical views of Epicurus. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

RECONCILING MATERIALISM AND RELIGION

Insofar as ancient materialists, like Epicurus, held that the atoms were eternal, they must be refuted and corrected in the light of more recent biblical knowledge. But in correcting their limited insights, Gassendi argued that we do not have to reject everything they had to say about atoms. All we need to add is that in creating the world from nothing, God created the atoms. We must also correct the Greek view that atoms move by themselves, since this too seems to detract from God's active role in the creation. So, we must also add that material bodies such as atoms have no inherent principle of motion; they are essentially lifeless and can only be made to move by the agency of some immaterial soul or spirit, such as God. Thus, in creating the world, God not only creates the atoms, He also sets them in motion. But thereafter the future history of each atom is determined naturalistically, simply by the physical principles involved in its speed, mass, angle of collision, shape, and so on, just as we found in Epicurus. Once God has created the atoms and set them in motion, God can then sit back and relax and let the rest take care of itself automatically. This is a position known later as Deism, but, as you can see, its reconciliation with Christianity preserves only a part of religious thinking. In Deism the existence of God and his creation of the world is preserved, but lost is the biblical account of God's ongoing concern to intervene in the world. God would not be very important in a Deist's day-to-day life. You would not pray to God or ask for anything, since, having created the world, God has no ongoing concern with the world.

Gassendi's attempt to reconcile materialism with Christian faith is interesting, since materialism has historically been used to undercut the claims of those who believe in an immaterial God. One could argue that Gassendi was not really a materialist, since he believed that at least one immaterial soul or spirit (God) exists. Perhaps he should be classified more as a dualist. But Gassendi claimed to be a materialist and argued that this metaphysical position was not opposed to the Christian faith. Gassendi was also a French Catholic priest who never renounced his Christian commitments.

Today we may feel that neither materialism nor idealism leads inevitably to belief in God. This is due in part to the fact that we no longer think of matter as little bits of "stuff" floating through the void, the view of materialism shared by Epicurus and by Gassendi.

God and Materialism

There is nothing to prevent us from defending the opinion which decides that the matter of the world and all the things contained in it is made up of atoms, provided that we repudiate whatever falsehood is mixed in with it. Therefore, in order to recommend the theory, we declare first that the idea that atoms are eternal and uncreated is to be rejected and also the idea that they are infinite in number and occur in any sort of shape; once this is done, it can be admitted that atoms are the primary form of matter, which God created.

Next we declare that the idea that atoms have impetus, or the power to move themselves inherent in their nature, is to be rejected. It may then be admitted that atoms are mobile and active from the power of moving and acting which God instilled in them at their very creation, and which functions with his assent, for he compels all things just as he conserves all things.

Pierre Gassendi

Our own views of physical reality have been shaped by the breakthroughs in physics in our own century and the one before it that force on us the realization that matter can be transformed into energy and that the constituent parts of atoms are units of energy. Once again we see that scientific knowledge does not answer questions of ultimate reality and why such questions are fundamentally not physical, but metaphysical ones.

Questions for Discussion

1. The ancient materialists agreed that materialism removes the fear of death. For if *all* consciousness ceases when the body ceases to function, then there is nothing to fear *after* death. Do you agree that a materialistic view makes death less fearsome? Why or why not?

2. Does the view that the mind is nothing but a highly complex mechanism operating according to mechanical law pose any threat to the independence and rationality of thought? Explain.

3. Do you think that a materialistic metaphysics is supported or threatened by contemporary views of natural science? Give reasons to support your answer.

4. Some materialists claim that if our knowledge were unlimited, all future events could be predicted. What evidence is there for this view? Against it?

5. Do you find materialism to be a convincing viewpoint? Why or why not?

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Idealism

We have just seen various responses to the pessimistic consequences of material-ism, especially for moral, humanistic, and religious values. For Bishop George Berkeley the only way round these difficulties of materialism was to reject it completely in favor of its opposite, idealism.

BERKELEY'S SUBJECTIVE IDEALISM

There are two kinds of idealism in the modern period, subjective idealism and absolute idealism. Subjective idealism, represented in the readings by George Berkeley, is the view that only minds and their thoughts and feelings are real. Absolute idealism devel-oped out of subjective idealism in the nineteenth century, especially from the philoso-phy of Hegel, expanding the mental substance of Berkeley to include the whole world, and unifying the individual minds of subjective idealism into a single all-encompassing world soul or mind. Where the subjective idealist sees the world as a collection of minds and their ideas, the absolute idealist sees everything in the world as a part of one all-embracing universal mind.

George Berkeley was an Irish clergyman who tried to undo the dangers he per-ceived in the growing scientific materialism of his day, a materialism first articulated in Britain by Thomas Hobbes and later popularized in the scientific theories of Sir Isaac Newton. Berkeley's main argument is that all we know immediately are our own ideas, and since we have no direct experience of any underlying material substrate, there is no reason to believe such a thing actually exists. The only reason for introducing the fiction of an unperceived underlying matter, Berkeley thought, was to provide some unifying foundation for the many different properties of physical objects. As we saw earlier in our discussion of Kant and the Copernican revolution in Chapter 8, "Introduction to Metaphysics," it seems use-ful, if not absolutely necessary, to group the redness, tartness, roundness, shininess of an object such as a tomato into a single composite entity, the tomato. But what holds these different properties together? The materialist's answer is that they all inhere in a material "stuff" or substrate. But Berkeley argues that this is unnecessary, since a better alternative is available. *I* see the redness, *I* taste the tartness, *I* feel the round-ness, hence these sensations are brought together and integrated within my *mind.* As John Locke, an English philosopher, had argued

a generation earlier, the mind itself associates or combines the "simple" ideas of redness, tartness, and so on into the "complex" idea of a tomato. Because Berkeley analyzes the perception of any property as the sensing of sensations, he finds the idea of properties (that is, sensations) inhering in an unperceived, unperceiving material substance not only unverifiable, but downright contradictory. If properties, such as redness, are sensations, then it makes no more sense to say that there are sensations which are not being perceived than it would to speak of pains which are not felt by anyone.

According to Berkeley's analysis, seeing an object such as a tomato *is the same* as having sensations of a certain sort. But if we allow him to make this identification, then we do indeed seem to be committed to idealism. It would seem to follow that if all our knowledge and perception of the world is no more than having sensations (which are, by definition, mind dependent), then everything in the world which we know and perceive is mind dependent. And so we arrive at idealism. Let us take a closer look at Berkeley's argument.

What kinds of things can we know and perceive? Common sense would answer: physical objects, people, mathematical laws, and so on. But Berkeley says we can know *only* ideas. Why? One answer that Berkeley gives is that when we see a tomato, which is a physical object, we are only having sensations of redness, roundness, and so forth. Since sensations are ideas which exist only in the mind, it follows that what we see is only an idea existing, as ideas must, in the mind. But there is a problem with this line of reasoning on its own. While it may be true that in seeing a tomato we have certain sensations and indeed that without these sensations we could not see the tomato, it does not follow from this that seeing a tomato *is the same thing* as having sensations. Having sensations may be a *necessary* condition for our knowledge of the world, but that does not mean that it is also a *sufficient* condition. If *seeing an object* and *having sensations* are not identical, then it does not follow that what I see (the objects of perception) are only ideas as Berkeley says.

Though the above argument is clearly inconclusive, Berkeley does offer several additional arguments against the existence of an external material world. Some of these arguments are found in the following selection from Berkeley's work, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*. Philonous, from the Greek words for love (philo) and mind (nous), is the spokesperson on behalf of idealism. Hylas, from the Greek word

GEORGE BERKELEY (1685–1735): Irish philosopher and Anglican Bishop of Cloyne. Believing that accepting the existence of matter led to atheism, Berkeley argued for his idealistic metaphysics principally in two works: A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

for matter (hyle), represents the view that material objects do exist independently of minds and their ideas. Following in the tradition of Plato's dialogues, Berkeley has Philonous make the case for idealism slowly and methodically, winning Hylas' assent to small and seemingly uncontroversial steps that eventually lead to idealism. The arguments are painstaking and nuanced. As you read through the selection, ask yourself whether (a) there are claims Hylas accepts that you would reject, and (b) there are any assumptions behind Philonous's reasoning that you find questionable.

George Berkeley: Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous

In Opposition to Skeptics and Atheists

The First Dialogue

HYL.   You were represented in last night's conversation as one who maintained the most extravagant opinion that ever entered into the mind of man, to wit, that there is no such thing as *material substance* in the world.

PHIL.   That there is no such thing as what philosophers call "material substance," I am seriously persuaded, but if I were made to see anything absurd or skeptical in this, I should then have the same reason to renounce this that I imagine I have now to reject the contrary opinion.

HYL.   What! can anything be more fantastical, more repugnant to common sense or a more manifest piece of skepticism than to believe there is no such thing as matter?

PHIL.   Softly, good Hylas. What if it should prove that you, who hold there is, are, by virtue of that opinion, a greater skeptic and maintain more paradoxes and repugnancies to common sense than I who believe no such thing?

HYL.   You may as soon persuade me the part is greater than the whole, as that, in order to avoid absurdity and skepticism, I should ever be obliged to give up my opinion in this point.

PHIL.   Well, then, are you content to admit that opinion for true which, upon examination, shall appear most agreeable to common sense and remote from skepticism?

HYL.   With all my heart. Since you are for raising disputes about the plainest thngs in nature, I am content for once to hear what you have to say.

PHIL.   Pray Hylas? What do you mean by a "skeptic? . . ."

HYL.   I mean what all men mean, one that doubts of everything . . . but I should have added: or who denies the reality and truth of things.

PHIL.   What things? Do you mean the principles and theorems of sciences? But these you know are universal intellectual notions, and consequently independent of matter; the denial therefore of this does not imply the denying them.

HYL.   I grant it. But are there no other things? What think you of distrusting the senses, of denying the real existence of sensible things, or pretending to know nothing of them. Is not this sufficient to denominate a man a skeptic?

PHIL. Shall we therefore examine which of us it is that denies the reality of sensible things or professes the greatest ignorance of them, since, if I take you rightly, he is to be esteemed the greatest skeptic?

HYL. That is what I desire.

———————

PHIL. What mean you by "sensible things?"

HYL. Those things which are perceived by the senses. Can you imagine that I mean anything else?

PHIL. Pardon me, Hylas, if I am desirous clearly to apprehend your notions, since this may much shorten our inquiry. Suffer me then to ask you this further question. Are those things only perceived by the senses which are perceived immediately? Or may those things properly be said to be "sensible" which are perceived mediately, or not without the intervention of others?

HYL. I do not sufficiently understand you.

PHIL. In reading a book, what I immediately perceive are the letters, but mediately, or by means of these, are suggested to my mind the notions of God, virtue, truth, etc. Now, that the letters are truly sensible things, or perceived by sense, there is no doubt, but I would know whether you take the things suggested by them to be so too.

HYL. No, certainly, it was absurd to think God or virtue sensible things, though they may be signified and suggested to the mind by sensible marks with which they have an arbitrary connection.

PHIL. It seems then, that by "sensible things" you mean those only which can be perceived immediately by sense.

HYL. Right.

PHIL. Does it not follow from this that, though I see one part of the sky red, and another blue, and that my reason does thence evidently conclude there must be some cause of that diversity of colors, yet that cause cannot be said to be a sensible thing or perceived by the sense of seeing?

HYL. It does.

PHIL. In like manner, though I hear a variety of sounds, yet I cannot be said to hear the causes of those sounds.

HYL. You cannot.

PHIL. And when by my touch I perceive a thing to be hot and heavy, I cannot say, with any truth or propriety, that I feel the cause of its heat or weight.

HYL. To prevent any more questions of this kind, I tell you once for all that by "sensible things" I mean those only which are perceived by sense, and that in truth the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately, for they make no inferences: The deducing therefore of causes or occasions from effects and appearances, which alone are perceived by sense, entirely relates to reason.

PHIL. This point then is agreed between us—that sensible things are those only which are immediately perceived by sense. You will further inform me whether we immediately perceive by sight anything besides light and colors and figures;

or by hearing, anything but sounds; by the palate anything besides tastes; by the smell, besides odors; or by the touch more than tangible qualities.

HYL.   We do not.

PHIL.   It seems, therefore, that if you take away all sensible qualities, there remains nothing sensible?

HYL.   I grant it.

PHIL.   Sensible things therefore are nothing else but so many sensible qualities or combinations of sensible qualities?

HYL.   Nothing else.

PHIL.   Heat is then a sensible thing?

HYL.   Certainly.

PHIL.   Does the reality of sensible things consist in being perceived, or is it some thing distinct from their being perceived, and that bears no relation to the mind?

HYL.   To exist is one thing, and to be perceived is another.

PHIL.   I speak with regard to sensible things only, and of these I ask, whether by their real existence you mean a subsistence exterior to the mind and distinct from their being perceived?

HYL.   I mean a real absolute being, distinct from and without any relation to their being perceived.

PHIL.   Heat therefore, if it be allowed a real being, must exist without the mind?

HYL.   It must.

PHIL.   Tell me, Hylas, is this real existence equally compatible to *all* degrees of heat, which we perceive, or is there any reason why we should attribute it to some and deny it to others? And if there be, pray let me know that reason.

HYL.   Whatever degree of heat we perceive by sense, we may be sure the same exists in the object that occasions it.

PHIL.   What! the greatest as well as the least?

HYL.   I tell you, the reason is plainly the same in respect of both: they are both perceived by sense; nay, the greater degree of heat is more sensibly perceived; and consequently, if there is any difference, we are more certain of its real existence than we can be of the reality of a lesser degree.

PHIL.   But is not the most vehement and intense degree of heat a very great pain?

HYL.   No one can deny it.

PHIL.   And is any unperceiving thing capable of pain or pleasure?

HYL.   No, certainly.

PHIL.   Is your material substance a senseless being or a being endowed with sense and perception?

HYL.   It is senseless, without doubt.

PHIL.   It cannot, therefore, be the subject of pain?

HYL.   By no means.

PHIL.   Nor, consequently, of the greatest heat perceived by sense, since you acknowledge this to be no small pain?

HYL.   I grant it.

PHIL.   What shall we say then of your external object: is it a material substance, or no?

HYL.   It is a material substance with the sensible qualities inhering in it.

PHIL. How then can a great heat exist in it, since you own it cannot in a material substance? I desire you would clear this point.

HYL. Hold Philonous, I fear I was out in yielding intense heat to be a pain. It should seem rather that pain is something distinct from heat, and the consequence or effect of it.

PHIL. Upon putting your hand near the fire, do you perceive one simple uniform sensation or two distinct sensations?

HYL. But one simple sensation.

PHIL. Is not the heat immediately perceived?

HYL. It is.

PHIL. And the pain?

HYL. True.

PHIL. Seeing therefore they are both immediately perceived at the same time and the fire affects you duly with one simple or uncompounded idea it follows that this same simple idea is both the intense heat immediately perceived and the pain; and, consequently, that the intense heat immediately perceived is nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain.

HYL. It seems so.

PHIL. Again try in your thoughts, Hylas, if you can conceive a vehement sensation to be without pain or pleasure.

HYL. I cannot.

PHIL. Or can you frame to yourself an idea of sensible pain or pleasure, in general, abstracted from every particular idea of heat, cold, tastes, smells, etc.?

HYL. I do not find that I can.

PHIL. Does it not therefore follow that sensible pain is nothing distinct from those sensations or ideas—in an intense degree?

HYL. It is undeniable and, to speak the truth, I begin to suspect a very great heat cannot exist but in a mind perceiving it. . . .

PHIL. Suppose now one of your hands hot, and the other cold, and that they are both at once put into the same vessel of water, in an intermediate state. Will not the water seem cold to one hand, and warm to the other?

HYL. It will.

PHIL. Ought we not therefore, by your principles, to conclude it is really both cold and warm at the same time, that is, according to your own concession, to believe an absurdity?

HYL. I confess it seems so.

PHIL. Consequently, the principles themselves are false, since you have granted that no true principle leads to an absurdity.

HYL. But, after all, can anything be more absurd than to say, "there is no heat in the fire?"

PHIL. To make the point still clearer, tell me whether, in two cases exactly alike, we ought not to make the same judgment?

HYL. We ought.

PHIL. When a pin pricks your finger, does it not rend and divide the fibers of your flesh?

HYL. It does.

PHIL.   And when a coal burns your finger, does it any more?

HYL.   It does not.

PHIL.   Since, therefore, you neither judge the sensation itself occasioned by the pin, nor anything like it to be in the pin, you should not, conformably to what you have now granted, judge the sensation occasioned by the fire, or anything like it, to be in the fire.

HYL.   Well, since it must be so, I am content to yield this point and acknowledge that heat and cold are only sensations existing in our minds. But there still remain qualities enough to secure the reality of external things.

PHIL.   But what will you say, Hylas, if it shall appear that the case is the same with regard to all other sensible qualities, and that they can no more be supposed to exist without the mind than heat and cold?

HYL.   Then, indeed, you will have done something to the purpose, but that is what I despair of seeing proved.

PHIL.   Let us examine them in order. What think you of tastes—do they exist without the mind, or no?

HYL.   Can any man in his senses doubt whether sugar is sweet, or wormwood bitter?

PHIL.   Inform me, Hylas. Is a sweet taste a particular kind of pleasure or pleasant sensation, or is it not?

HYL.   It is.

PHIL.   And is not bitterness some kind of uneasiness or pain?

HYL.   I grant it.

PHIL.   If, therefore, sugar and wormwood are unthinking corporeal substances existing without the mind, how can sweetness and bitterness, that is, pleasure and pain, agree to them? . . .

        May we not therefore conclude of smells, as of the other fore mentioned qualities, that they cannot exist in any but a perceiving substance or mind?

HYL.   I think so.

PHIL.   Then as to sounds, what must we think of them, are they accidents really inherent in external bodies or not?

HYL.   That they inhere not in the sonorous bodies is plain from hence because a bell struck in the exhausted receiver of an air pump [i.e., a vacuum] sends forth no sound. The air, therefore, must be thought the subject of sound.

PHIL.   What reason is there for that, Hylas?

HYL.   Because, when any motion is raised in the air, we perceive a sound greater or lesser in proportion to the air's motion, but without some motion in the air we never hear any sound at all.

PHIL.   And granting that we never hear a sound but when some motion is produced in the air yet I do not see how you can infer from thence that the sound itself is in the air.

HYL.   It is this very motion in the external air that produces in the mind the sensation of sound. For, striking on the drum of the ear, it causes a vibration which by the auditory nerves being communicated to the brain, the soul is thereupon affected with the sensation called "sound."

PHIL.   What! Is sound then a sensation?

HYL.   I tell you, as perceived by us it is a particular sensation in the mind.

PHIL.   And can any sensation exist without the mind?

HYL.   No, certainly.

PHIL.   How then can sound, being a sensation, exist in the air if by the air you mean a senseless substance existing without the mind? . . .

HYL.   To deal ingenuously, I do not like it. And, after the concessions already made, I had as well grant that sounds, too, have no real being without the mind.

PHIL.   And I hope you will make no difficulty to acknowledge the same of colors.

HYL.   Pardon me, the case of colors is very different. Can anything be plainer than that we see them on the objects?

PHIL.   The objects you speak of are, I suppose, corporeal substances existing without the mind?

HYL.   They are.

PHIL.   And have true and real colors inhering in them?

HYL.   Each visible object has that color which we see in it.

PHIL.   How! is there anything visible but what we perceive by sight?

HYL.   There is not.

PHIL.   What! Are then the beautiful red and purple we see on yonder clouds really in them? Or do you imagine they have in themselves any other form than that of a dark mist or vapor?

HYL.   I must own, Philonous, those colors are not really in the clouds as they seem to be at this distance. They are only apparent colors.

PHIL.   "Apparent" call you them? How shall we distinguish these apparent colors from real?

HYL.   Very easily. Those are to be thought apparent which, appearing only at a distance, vanish upon a nearer approach.

PHIL.   And those, I suppose, are to be thought real which are discovered by the most near and exact survey.

HYL.   Right.

PHIL.   Is the nearest and exactest survey made by the help of a microscope or by the naked eye?

HYL.   By a microscope, doubtless.

PHIL.   But a microscope often discovers colors in an object different from those perceived by the unassisted sight. And in case we had microscopes magnifying to any assigned degree it is certain that no object whatsoever viewed through them would appear in the same color which it exhibits to the naked eye.

HYL.   I confess there is something in what you say.

PHIL.   Besides, it is not only possible but manifest that there actually are animals whose eyes are by nature framed to perceive those things which by reason of their minuteness escape our sight. What think you of those inconceivably small animals perceived by glasses? Must we suppose they are all stark blind? Or, in case they see, can it be imagined their sight has not the same use in preserving their bodies from injuries which appears in that of all other animals? And if it has, is it not evident they must see particles less than their own bodies, which will present them with a far different view in each object from that which strikes our senses? Even our own eyes do not always represent

objects to us after the same manner. In the jaundice everyone knows that all things seem yellow. Is it not therefore highly probable those animals in whose eyes we discern a very different texture from that of ours, and whose bodies abound with different humors, do not see the same colors in every object that we do? From all which should it not seem to follow that all colors are equally apparent, and that none of those which we perceive are really inherent in any outward object?

HYL.   It should.

PHIL.   The point will be past all doubt if you consider that, in case colors were real properties or affections inherent in external bodies, they could admit of no alteration without some change wrought in the very bodies themselves, but is it not evident from what has been said that, upon the use of microscopes, upon a change happening in the humors of the eye, or a variation of distance, without any manner of real alteration in the thing itself, the colors of any object are either changed or totally disappear? Nay, all other circumstances remaining the same, change but the situation of some objects and they shall present different colors to the eye. The same thing happens upon viewing an object in various degrees of light. And what is more known than that the same bodies appear differently colored by candlelight from what they do in the open day? Add to these the experiment of a prism which, separating the heterogeneous rays of light, alters the color of any object and will cause the whitest to appear of a deep blue or red to the naked eye. And now tell me whether you are still of opinion that every body has its true real color inhering in it, and if you think it has, I would fain know further from you what certain distance and position of the object, what peculiar texture and formation of the eye, what degree or kind of light is necessary for ascertaining that true color and distinguishing it from apparent ones. . . .

HYL.   I frankly own, Philonous, that it is in vain to stand out any longer. Colors, sounds, tastes, in a word, all those termed "secondary qualities," have certainly no existence without the mind. But by this acknowledgment I must not be supposed to derogate anything from the reality of matter or external objects; seeing it is no more than several philosophers maintain, who nevertheless are the farthest imaginable from denying matter. For the clearer understanding of this you must know sensible qualities are by philosophers divided into *primary* and *secondary*. The former are extension, figure, solidity, gravity, motion, and rest. And these they hold exist really in bodies. The latter are those above enumerated, or, briefly, all sensible qualities besides the primary, which they assert are only so many sensations or ideas existing nowhere but in the mind. But all this, I doubt not, you are already apprised of. For my part I have been a long time sensible there was such an opinion current among philosophers, but was never thoroughly convinced of its truth 'till now.

PHIL.   You are still then of opinion that *extension* and *figure* are inherent in external unthinking substances?

HYL.   I am.

PHIL.   But what if the same arguments which are brought against secondary qualities will hold good against these also?

HYL.   Why then I shall be obliged to think they too exist only in the mind. . . .

PHIL.   Is it not the very same reasoning to conclude there is no extension or figure in an object because to one eye it shall seem little, smooth, and round, when at the same time it appears to the other great, uneven, and angular?

HYL.   The very same. But does this latter fact ever happen?

PHIL.   You may at any time make the experiment by looking with one eye bare, and with the other through a microscope.

HYL.   I know not how to maintain it, and yet I am loath to give up *extension;* I see so many odd consequences following upon such a concession.

PHIL.   Then as for *solidity* either you do not mean any sensible quality by that word, and so it is beside our inquiry, or if you do, it must be either hardness or resistance. But both the one and the other are plainly relative to our senses: it being evident that what seems hard to one animal may appear soft to another who has greater force and firmness of limbs. Nor is it less plain that the resistance I feel is not in the body.

HYL.   I own the very sensation of resistance, which is all you immediately perceive, is not in the *body,* but the cause of that sensation is.

PHIL.   But the causes of our sensations are not things immediately perceived, and therefore not sensible. This point I thought had been already determined. . . .

HYL.   I acknowledge, Philonous, that, upon a fair observation of what passes in my mind, I can discover nothing else but that I am a thinking being affected with variety of sensations, neither is it possible to conceive how a sensation should exist in an unperceiving substance. But then, on the other hand, when I look on sensible things in a different view, considering them as so many modes and qualities, I find it necessary to suppose a material *substratum,* without which they cannot be conceived to exist.

PHIL.   "Material substratum" call you it? Pray, by which of your senses came you acquainted with that being?

HYL.   It is not itself sensible; its modes and qualities only being perceived by the senses.

PHIL.   I presume then it was by reflection and reason you obtained the idea of it?

HYL.   I do not pretend to any proper positive idea of it. However, I conclude it exists because qualities cannot be conceived to exist without a support. . . .

   To speak the truth, Philonous, I think there are two kinds of objects: the one perceived immediately which are likewise called "ideas"; the other are real things or external objects, perceived by the mediation of ideas which are their images and representations. Now I own ideas do not exist without the mind, but the latter sort of objects do. I am sorry I did not think of this distinction sooner; it would probably have cut short your discourse.

PHIL.   Are those external objects perceived by sense or by some other faculty?

HYL.   They are perceived by sense.

PHIL.   How! Is there anything perceived by sense which is not immediately perceived?

HYL.   Yes, Philonous, in some sort there is. For example, when I look on a picture or statue of Julius Caesar, I may be said, after a manner, to perceive him (though not immediately) by my senses.

PHIL.   It seems then you will have our ideas, which alone are immediately perceived, to be pictures of external things: and that these also are perceived by sense in as much they have a conformity or resemblance to our ideas?

HYL.   That is my meaning.

PHIL.   And in the same way that Julius Caesar, in himself invisible, is nevertheless perceived by sight, real things, in themselves imperceptible, are perceived by sense.

HYL.   In the very same.

PHIL.   Tell me, Hylas, when you behold the picture of Julius Caesar, do you see with your eyes any more than some colors and figures, with a certain symmetry and composition of the whole?

HYL.   Nothing else.

PHIL.   And would not a man who had never known anything of Julius Caesar see as much?

HYL.   He would.

PHIL.   Consequently, he has his sight and the use of it in as perfect a degree as you?

HYL.   I agree with you.

PHIL.   Whence comes it then that your thoughts are directed to the Roman emperor, and his are not? This cannot proceed from the sensations or ideas of sense by you then perceived, since you acknowledge you have no advantage over him in that respect. It should seem therefore to proceed from reason and memory, should it not?

HYL.   It should.

PHIL.   Consequently, it will not follow from that instance that anything is perceived by sense which is not immediately perceived. Though I grant we may, in one acceptation, be said to perceive sensible things mediately by sense—that is, when, from a frequently perceived connection, the immediate perception of ideas by one sense suggests to the mind others, perhaps belonging to another sense, which are wont to be connected with them. For instance, when I hear a coach drive along the streets, immediately I perceive only the sound; but from the experience I have had that such a sound is connected with a coach, I am said to hear the coach. It is nevertheless evident that, in truth and strictness, nothing can be *heard* but *sound,* and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but suggested from experience. So likewise when we are said to see a red-hot bar of iron; the solidity and heat of the iron are not the objects of sight, but suggested to the imagination by the color and figure which are properly perceived by that sense. In short, those things alone are actually and strictly perceived by any sense which would have been perceived in case that same sense had then been first conferred on us. As for other things, it is plain they are only suggested to the mind by experience grounded on former perceptions. But, to return to your comparison of Caesar's picture, it is plain, if you keep to that, you must hold the real things

or archetypes of our ideas are not perceived by sense, but by some internal faculty of the soul, as reason or memory. I would, therefore, fain know what arguments you can draw from reason for the existence of what you call "real things" or "material objects," or whether you remember to have seen them formerly as they are in themselves, or if you have heard or read of anyone that did.

HYL.   I see, Philonous, you are disposed to raillery, but that will never convince me.

PHIL.   My aim is only to learn from you the way to come at the knowledge of *material beings.* Whatever we perceive is perceived either immediately or mediately—by sense, or by reason and reflection. But, as you have excluded sense, pray show me what reason you have to believe their existence, or what *medium* you can possibly make use of to prove it, either to mine or your own understanding.

HYL.   To deal ingenuously, Philonous, now I consider the point, I do not find I can give you any good reason for it. But this much seems pretty plain, that it is at least possible such things may really exist. And as long as there is no absurdity in supposing them, I am resolved to believe as I did, till you bring good reasons to the contrary.

PHIL.   What! Is it come to this, that you only believe the existence of material objects, and that your belief is founded barely on the possibility of its being true? Then you will have me bring reasons against it, though another would think it reasonable the proof should lie on him who holds the affirmative.

 . . . How then is it possible that things perpetually fleeting and variable as our ideas should be copies or images of anything fixed and constant? Or, in other words, since all sensible qualities, as size, figure, color, etc., that is, our ideas, are continually changing upon every alteration in the distance, medium, or instruments of sensation—how can any determinate material objects be properly represented or painted forth by several distinct things each of which is so different from and unlike the rest? Or, if you say it resembles some one only of our ideas, how shall we be able to distinguish the true copy from all the false ones?

HYL.   I profess, Philonous, I am at a loss. I know not what to say to this.

PHIL.   But neither is this all. Which are material objects in themselves—perceptible or imperceptible?

HYL.   Properly and immediately nothing can be perceived but ideas. All material things, therefore, are in themselves insensible and to be perceived only by their ideas.

PHIL.   Ideas then are sensible, and their archetypes or originals insensible?

HYL.   Right.

PHIL.   But how can that which is sensible be like that which is insensible? Can a real thing, in itself *invisible,* be like a *color,* or a real thing which is not *audible* be like a *sound?* In a word, can anything be like a sensation or idea, but another sensation or idea?

Hyl.   I must own, I think not. . . .

CHALLENGES FOR BERKELEY'S VIEW

Setting aside objections that might be raised against the specific arguments in this selection, Berkeley's idealism faces at least two significant challenges. First, it encounters the problem we would expect any idealist to have to confront; namely, how to account for our ordinary belief in physical objects. Second, it faces the more unexpected and surprising difficulty of how to account for our knowledge of our own minds. We consider these challenges in turn below.

No philosopher wants to appear to directly contradict common sense, and Berkeley tries hard to show that there is nothing in the common sense view of physical objects, which is denied by him. When the man on the street says that there is a tomato, does he mean anything more than that he sees it, tastes it (or could taste and feel it)? Berkeley thinks not, but his critics have always insisted that there *is* something more to the common sense belief which Berkeley denies. But what is this missing ingredient? Perhaps it is what Samuel Johnson was getting at when he kicked the stone—the stubborn, if inarticulate, belief that there is an unperceived, unperceiving physical reality which exists completely independently of anyone's mind. Surely, we feel, objects exist when they are not being perceived. As we already indicated in the preceding chapter, Berkeley handles this difficulty by recourse to the ever-watchful mind of God.

The relation in Berkeley's philosophy between the mind of God and the reality of the physical world is well put in the following limerick, attributed to Ronald Knox.

> There was a young man who said, God
> Must think it exceedingly odd
>   If he finds that this tree
>   Continues to be
> When there's no one about in the
> Quad.

REPLY

> Dear Sir:
>   Your astonishment's odd:
> I am always about in the Quad.
>   And that's why the tree
>   Will continue to be,
> Since observed by
>   Yours
>   faithfully,
>   GOD.

Though some find Berkeley's appeal to God in handling this challenge unsatisfying, as a theist himself, Berkeley is being thoroughly consistent in going this route. The second challenge mentioned is, however, even more vexing in that it is not clear that an appeal to God can help address it. To understand the significance of the challenge of explaining how we know our own minds, we must recall that Berkeley is clear in maintaining that we can only perceive our ideas; thus, all we can perceive are our ideas,

but not the underlying mental substance which *has* these ideas. Thus, it should follow that we cannot know the underlying mental substance of the mind. This is precisely the kind of argument Berkeley uses against the belief in *material* substance. As David Hume later said of Berkeley, the argument works equally well against mental substance as it does against physical substance (so Hume's metaphysical system consists solely of ideas with no underlying substance of any kind!). Berkeley tries to get around this difficulty by arguing that while we do not have an *idea* of mind, we do have a "notion" of it. He must have felt a little sheepish when he said that.

Despite these challenges, idealistic philosophy was no mere eighteenth-century intellectual curiosity; it reigned virtually supreme in European universities until the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was replaced by a philosophy less concerned with traditional metaphysical questions than with the analytical skills philosophy could bring to bear on the problems that arose out of the work of natural science.

Questions for Discussion

1. When asked how to refute Berkeley, Samuel Johnson kicked a stone and said, "I refute him thus." Was this really a refutation of Berkeley? Why or why not?
2. Make sure you understand the difference between Berkeley's idealism and Epicurus' materialism. Assuming that you had to choose one of these metaphysical views, which would you select? Why?
3. How would *you* criticize Berkeley's assertion that all we know are ideas? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Crucial for Berkeley's argument is to collapse the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Do you find his arguments on this point convincing? Why or why not?
5. Do you think Berkeley's idealistic metaphysics is supported or threatened by contemporary findings in natural science? Give reasons to support your answer.

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2. Why did Kant compare his epistemology to the Copernican revolution in astronomy?

   ((•─ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Kant—Critique of Pure Reason* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Is Berkeley's God the God of Christianity?

   [•]─ **Read** the **profile:** *George Berkeley* on **MySearchLab.com**

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The Mind–Body Problem and Personal Identity

I n the preceding three chapters, we looked at three general theories about the fundamental nature of reality. In Chapter 9, "Dualism," we considered Plato's contention that reality is divided into two distinct kinds of beings; the material and the immaterial. In Chapter 10, "Materialism," we looked at examples of materialism, the theory that the universe and all things in it are ultimately composed only of matter. Finally, in Chapter 11, "Idealism," we explored Berkeley's arguments in defense of idealism, the view that immaterial minds and their ideas are all that really exist. Based on the arguments and theories presented in those chapters, one might get the impression that metaphysics is concerned only with telling grand and sweeping stories about the fundamental nature of what is real. This, however, would be a misimpression. In addition to considering such sweeping accounts of the ultimate nature of reality, the discipline of metaphysics also considers specific issues related to determining the reality and nature of specific kinds of things. Thus it is that metaphysical issues crop up in various philosophical subfields. In the philosophy of mathematics, philosophers consider whether numbers and geometric figures exist independently of the material world and the human mind. In the philosophy of physics, philosophers argue about whether subatomic particles really exist or are simply explanatory fictions. In the philosophy of language, philosophers debate whether the meanings of propositions exist independently of the conventions adopted by human beings for expressing and communicating them.

While these specific metaphysical topics might seem like excursions into the obscure and thus perhaps best left for specialists, there are specific metaphysical issues that engage topics of direct significance to all reflective persons. Three such issues are the subject of this chapter and the next. In Chapter 13, "Freedom and Determination: The Metaphysics of Human Agency," we consider the issue of human freedom, asking whether human beings are free and, if so, in what their freedom consists. In this chapter, we consider two issues crucial to an understanding of ourselves as rational and self-aware beings. The first, traditionally called the "mind–body problem," considers the nature of the human mind and whether it is material or immaterial. The second, known as "the problem of personal identity," explores what it is to be a person and what is required for a person to be the same person over time.

Most human beings are struck at various points in their lives by a sense of feeling out of place in the world—a sense of not being sure where we belong, a sense of not knowing what we're made for, a sense of being ill at ease in our lives. It is a sense that philosophers have expressed in different ways. Augustine remarked that our hearts are restless. Marx wrote of humanity's alienation. Kierkegaard noted the

despair that dogs our endeavors in life. Camus declared flatly that life is absurd. As you will see in Chapter 26, "Religion and Life's Meaning," different philosophers offer different pre-scriptions concerning how one might best respond to the problem of life's meaning; none-theless, most philosophers would agree that investigating the issues of this chapter and the next are important first steps in approaching the problem of the meaning of human life. In investigating whether we are free or fully determined and what our minds are made of and who we are, most essentially, as persons, we are attempting to supply three important pieces to the puzzle that is the life of a human being.

THE MIND–BODY PROBLEM

One possible reason for the common human sentiment of being ill at ease in the world is that a human being seems to involve two very different natures. On one hand, it would seem clear that we are embodied beings, constituted by matter no less than a stone or the ocean or the planet Venus. On the other hand, we are rational and self-aware and thus possibly unique among embodied beings. Moreover, at least on the surface, the ultimate constituents of the material universe—inanimate particles of matter in motion—seem unlikely as candidates to explain our rationality and self-awareness. Our predica-ment, then, is this: the fact that we are embodied seems to tell us that we belong to the world of matter; but the fact that we are rational and self-aware seems to tell us that our most important characteristics can't belong fully to the world of matter.

In addition to partly explaining our discomfort in the world, these two sides to human nature have prompted many philosophers to conclude that neither materialism nor ideal-ism by itself is an adequate metaphysical theory. Both have strong points, but each has its fatal flaws, and no issue makes this more apparent than the mind–body problem. To be more specific, you are a reality that is both mind and body, and when we are speaking of the mind–body problem we are not talking about a highly abstract, purely theoretical issue but rather about concrete individuals, real persons. Our ordinary ways of speaking certainly refer to two different kinds of reality; we speak of our mind as though it were a reality as real as our body, and we speak of our body as a part of the visible world in which we live.

MIND–BODY DUALISM

This is the position known as *mind–body dualism*; *dual* meaning that there are *two* things, both mind *and* matter. In Chapter 9, we saw a general metaphysical dualism advocated by Plato, but in this chapter we turn to the best-known dualist in the modern period (from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth): seventeenth-century French phi-losopher and mathematician René Descartes (see Chapter 15, "René Descartes: The Quest for Certainty"). Strictly speaking, Descartes held that there were *three* realities, or "substances" as he called them, one uncreated reality (God) and two created realities (mind and matter). Yet, at least in his account of the natural, or "created," world, Descartes held a dualistic position. For Descartes these two realities are completely different from each other; mat-ter is defined by its spatial extension, and mind by its ability to think. Minds cannot be spatially located or described, and material objects cannot think, nor can minds be bro-ken up or divided, as can physical objects. Thus, the two are not only different; they are totally different *kinds* of things.

> ## Cartesian Dualism
>
> I must begin by observing the great difference between mind and body. Body is of its nature always divisible; mind is wholly indivisible. When I consider the mind—that is, myself insofar as I am merely a conscious being—I can distinguish no parts within myself and understand myself to be a single and complete thing. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet when a foot or an arm or any other part of the body is cut off I am not aware that any subtraction has been made from the mind. Nor can the faculties of will, feeling, understanding and so on be called its parts, for it is one and the same mind that wills, feels, and understands. On the other hand, I cannot think of any corporeal or extended object without being readily able to divide it in thought and therefore conceiving of it as divisible. This would be enough to show me the total difference between mind and body, even if I did not sufficiently know this already.
>
> René Descartes
> *Meditations on First Philosophy*

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato advances an account of human nature in which the soul is sharply distinguished from the body, the soul belonging to the eternal, intelligible, unchanging realm of ideas, and the body, a part of the changing, confusing, and contradictory world of physical appearances. Like Descartes, Plato also sees the human being as the temporary joining together of two completely different sorts of things. The soul, Plato says, is like a bird in the cage of the body waiting to be released.

The advantage of dualism, then, is that it allows us to express philosophically some of the facts of everyday experience which seem difficult to express from either the materialist or the idealist positions, and is therefore in many ways much closer to common sense and ordinary experience and a better articulation of the facts of our experience. The problem with dualism, however, is to see and to say precisely how the two *are* joined together. How can two such fundamentally different sorts of things be joined together? It just doesn't seem possible. Of course, we know that minds and bodies do affect each other because we experience this in our own cases a hundred times each day. I want to answer a question in class so I raise my arm; here apparently my mind is directing and controlling my body. And when I try to finish my term paper with a severe case of flu, I know perfectly well how my body affects my mind. Of course mind and body interact, but how *can* they if they are as different from each other as we have said? To raise my arm, I have to move certain bones, and in order to do that I have to contract certain muscles, and in order to do that, I have to transfer certain chemical–electrical energy to the muscle. But how is a completely immaterial mind, which cannot even be located in space, going to accomplish that? Similarly, how are the fever and muscle stiffness of flu able to causally interact with a nonphysical, nonspatial mental thing I call my mind?

THE PROBLEM OF INTERACTION

The problem of interaction is the problem of how mind and body can interact if they are such different sorts of things. And this is an excellent example of a philosophical problem. A philosophical problem occurs when we want to hold—and there are good reasons to hold—two apparently contradictory positions. We want to say—and

we have good reason to say—that there are both minds and physical objects which are fundamentally different from each other, and we also want to say that they can act on one another. The problem is how both these statements can be true at the same time. If mind and body are so different, then they cannot interact, and if they interact, then they cannot be so different from each other. To solve a philosophical problem is to figure out a way around such difficulties. Perhaps minds and bodies do not really interact, they only seem to. This is the position known as *parallelism*. Mental events go on in one realm and physical events go on in another, but the two realms never connect. Of course, there are problems with this position, too, but at least it might solve the mind–body problem. Or we might say that the problem is due to a faulty and confused conception of causality which makes it seem so difficult for different kinds of things to interact on each other, and so we might try to formulate a more refined interaction theory with a different causal concept to solve the mind–body problem.

THE IDENTITY THESIS

One way to solve the mind–body problem is by accepting one of the two nondualistic theories we started off with—materialism or idealism. A current form of materialism is known as the "identity thesis," which holds that words like *mind* and *body* refer to the same "identical," material entity. How would accepting a monistic theory "solve" the mind–body problem?

The materialist's answer would be that anything you say about the mind is really about the body, since the body is material, and matter is the only reality. The idealist would insist, to the contrary, that statements made about the body are really statements about minds and ideas, since that is the only reality. If you want to have it both ways and say that there are minds and bodies, then you are a dualist and are stuck with all the problems that have plagued that position. Richard Taylor, a twentieth-century American philosopher, explains what some of these problems are. And he goes on to sort out some of the most prevalent theories that have been developed to get around the difficulties raised by a dualistic point of view: parallelism, occasionalism, interactionalism, preestablished harmony, and so forth.

We can use our knowledge of logic from Part 2, "Thinking About Thinking (Logic)," to analyze Taylor's arguments against materialism. Taylor points to a central difficulty of the materialist's position as the following: if mind and body are identical, then whatever we say about the one we must also be able to say about the other. For example, if we say that "my mind has a wish" then we must also say that "my body has a wish," which sounds odd. Or if we say, "I am religious," this also means "my body is religious," which makes no sense at all. We can readily see that we have here an "indirect argument" based on *modus tollens* (MT). Remember that the MT argument form has the following structure:

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{-Q}$$
$$\therefore -P$$

Taylor's argument against materialism (an argument that a dualist would accept) can be cast into the MT form:

If mind and body are identical (P), then it follows that to say "I am religious" also means that "my body is religious" (Q).

It is absurd to say that "I am religious" means that "my body is religious" (–Q).

Therefore, it cannot be the case that my mind and body are identical (–P).

Taylor at this stage is not taking either the materialist or the dualist position; he is simply presenting the problem faced by the materialist, a problem he poses as a dilemma: The identity of mind and body implies that mental attributes must also apply to the body. But this forces the materialist into the dilemma of either (1) accepting absurd consequences or (2) abandoning materialism in favor of dualism.

What does Taylor think of the dualist option? Not much. It is true, he points out, that we often speak of "my body," or "having a body," as though we possessed our bodies as we possess a pair of shoes, and this might seem to support the dualist claim that we (our minds) are distinct from our bodies. But Taylor argues that the relationship of our selves or our minds to our bodies is far too intimate to be thought of as one distinct entity possessing another. The greatest difficulty with dualism is that it leads to the awful problem of indicating how mind and body, if different, are nonetheless related. Each theory proposed for answering the mind–body problem, Taylor argues, is so bizarre as to lead many philosophers to abandon dualism altogether.

A COUNTERARGUMENT FOR THE IDENTITY THESIS

Before leaving this topic, we will briefly examine the counterargument for the identity thesis, represented by the work of such contemporary philosophers as J. J. C. Smart. While the argument of Taylor and others does indeed show that *at least* there must be two different *languages,* Smart argues that that is also the *most* that it shows. The fact that we *speak* in two different ways does not prove that there are two different *things* being referred to. Smart uses an example that had already been made famous fifty years earlier by the German philosopher Gottlob Frege, concerning the "morning star" and the "evening star." The evening star has been known for thousands of years as the first star to appear in the evening; and the morning star as the last highly visible star to become invisible in the morning. Astronomers discovered in the nineteenth century that the morning star and the evening star were in fact the same, identical "star," namely, "the planet Venus. " Here, then, is a clear example of one and the same object being described in two different ways, with very different meanings. The expression "evening star" obviously *means* something different from the expression "morning star"; "evening star" means "the first star to appear in the evening" (that's why it's called the evening star), and "morning star" is defined to mean "the last star to disappear from view in the morning" (hence called the morning star). But this does not prove there must be two different *things* to which these words refer. Another well-known example often used in this regard concerns Sir Walter Scott, the author of the Waverley novels. Imagine a student taking freshman English, who didn't know that the author of the Waverley novels was in fact Scott. The words *Sir Walter Scott* will mean *something* to this person. She may understand these words to refer to a man who lived and wrote in Scotland during the nineteenth century, who was knighted by the British monarchy, and perhaps

even that this is the man who wrote *Ivanhoe*. Such a person will also understand some of the meaning of the expression "the author of the Waverley novels," namely, that this expression refers to a person who wrote several novels which are called the Waverley novels. But when we ask the student, perhaps in the English 101 final exam, "Who is the author of Waverley?" she may think it was Tennyson. Thus, she is in very much the same position as the majority of people in the nineteenth century who knew what the words "morning star" and "evening star" meant but mistakenly believed they referred to two different things. And just as these individuals later learned that these two expressions with their two different meanings referred to the same thing, so the poor freshman student will discover when she picks up her exam that "Sir Walter Scott" and "the author of Waverley" are in fact one and the same person.

But suppose we agree with Smart that the fact that mental concepts and physical concepts have fundamentally different meanings, even amounting to two quite different languages, does not prove that these different meanings or languages refer to two different objects. Two different concepts with quite different meanings can refer to one and the same identical object. Even if we agree with Smart, does it follow that only matter exists? Not at all. As we have seen many times in this book, to refute your opponent's argument does not prove your position to be the correct one. If Smart's argument is sound, it shows only that Taylor and others are wrong in arguing that the fact that we speak and think differently about minds and bodies proves that minds and bodies are distinct entities. Even if Smart is correct, it is still possible that mind and bodies *are* distinct, though not for the reasons Taylor offers. And even if dualism is defeated, it doesn't follow that all is *matter*. It is just as plausible that what we call matter is an aspect of an underlying mind as it is to conclude, as Smart would want us to, that what we call mind is just an aspect of an underlying matter, as the materialists would have us think. It is also possible that mind and matter are aspects of a third reality underlying both, a dual-aspect position held by the seventeenth-century philosopher Spinoza, by the early twentieth-century philosopher Husserl, and by the twentieth-century philosopher P. F. Strawson. Nonetheless, the "identity thesis" is a topic of ongoing debate among philosophers today.

A DEFENSE OF DUALISM

The identity thesis is really just a modern, somewhat more sophisticated version of materialism, which holds that minds are really identical with our physical bodies. Taylor offered one of the most persuasive arguments against the identity of mind and body, namely that what we *mean* by mental words and concepts is fundamentally different and cannot be reduced to what we *mean* by physical-object words and concepts.

Dualism in Our Language

Whether minds and bodies are identical or not, we certainly cannot *talk* or *think* about them in the same way. At the very least there are two quite different languages, the mental language we use to describe minds (she is clever, intelligent, sulky, stubborn, moody) and a different language we use to describe physical objects (it is too heavy, too large, too hard). Of course, we can describe human beings in *either* way, but this is precisely because human beings have both minds and bodies.

In any metaphysical system in which many different things are explained in terms of one of several fundamental underlying realities, there is always the attempt to explain one thing, which is understood in its own way and has its own meaning, in terms of some other thing, which is understood in a very different way and has its quite distinct meaning. When the atomist, for example, tries to explain a table in terms of atoms, a table *means* something quite different from atoms. A dining room table we see and understand as a piece of furniture, something humanly made, which serves a certain human use, in this case, "to eat off of" and which is sold in furniture shops, usually made of wood, and so on. None of this conception of what we *mean* by "dining room table" is contained in what we mean by the word "atom." By "atom" we mean "the smallest indivisible unit of matter." The idealist encounters similar problems when trying to account for the same dining room table in terms of ideas and sensations in someone's mind. The meaning of "idea" is quite different from the meaning of "table" and so it is just as surprising to hear Berkeley proposing that tables are nothing but ideas as it is to hear Epicurus proclaiming that the same table is nothing but a collection of atoms.

Nonetheless, there is an important difference, which the dualist urges, between these attempts to explain one thing in terms of another, and the identity theorist's attempt to explain mind in purely physical terms. In the other cases, although we are initially shocked and surprised by the translation of "table" into either atoms or ideas, we can, after a while, begin to see how the one could be explained in terms of the other. That is, we can, after some time, begin to see how you get from the one to the other. All the individual trees of a forest look like one solid object from an airplane. Perhaps if we were very small the table would appear to us as a collection of distinct, individual objects. We may not *agree* with atomism, but at least we can see how the explanation works; we can see how it might be true. Idealism is a similar case. People have dreams, and in those dreams objects seem to be fully real; they can be touched, tasted, heard, and yet when we awaken we realize that it was all in our minds. Might it not be possible that this is what occurs in our waking life? Again, we may not *accept* idealism, but at least we can understand how the physical world can be explained in terms of ideas and sensations. In this sense to explain *A* in terms of *B* we must be able to see how *A* could be experienced as *B*. But, the dualist insists, this is precisely what we cannot do when we try to explain life or mind in terms of inanimate matter. We begin with lifeless matter and end up with a living, thinking person. Can you see how the one will become the other? If we cannot understand the intervening steps, that is, cannot see how matter could become mind, then, according to this sense of explanation, the one cannot be explained in terms of the other, and so we must retain both.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DEBATE

Having examined the mind–body problem and the lengthy dispute which problem has generated, you may well wonder what difference it makes who eventually wins the debate. There are problems if you distinguish mind and body, and there are problems if you identify the two. In the end, really, who cares?

One obviously important ramification of the mind–body problem will be its implications for the question of life after death. At first glance, dualism would seem to be the only viable option for those who want to believe in a personal afterlife. If the mind is just the body, what hope could there be that I will survive the destruction of my body? If, on

the other hand, the mind is an immaterial substance that can exist apart from the body, there would seem to be little problem in maintaining that a personal afterlife is a serious possibility. As far as the possibility of hoping for a personal afterlife goes, the dualist would seem to be in a much more advantageous position. As with so many other issues in philosophy, however, matters are not as simple as they first appear.

Perhaps the most obvious respect in which matters are not as simple as this is the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, embraced by many within the Christian tradition as more in line with the biblical account than the Platonic notion of the immaterial soul. This might provide a materialist with the resources needed to make sense of an afterlife for human beings. Surely, the materialist might reason, though all the king's horses and all the king's men would not be up to the task, an all-powerful God could reconstitute our bodies even after they've returned to dust. Tempting though this simple response is, it is not without its challenges. Foremost among these is the worry that the most the resurrection body could be is a perfect duplicate of the earthly body. This, which we can call the "replica objection," can be better appreciated by considering the following sort of example used by Peter van Inwagen to set up a version of this objection. Imagine that your three-year-old son has built a tower out of blocks. While he is taking a nap, you accidentally knock over the tower. Being aware, however, that he wanted to show the tower to his mother upon her return from work, you painstakingly set about rebuilding the tower, making sure that the same blocks are in exactly the same places as in the original. Now, even assuming that you succeed in placing the same blocks in exactly the same positions, the question still remains of whether the reconstructed tower *is* the very tower built by your son. While most of us would be willing to grant that the reconstituted tower is a perfect reproduction or replica of the original, we would be inclined to say that it is not numerically the same tower as that built by your son. But if we're willing to draw this conclusion in the case of the block tower, it is not clear that we can avoid drawing the same conclusion about the resurrection body. Perhaps it is a perfect reproduction of some earthly body; however, it is not the very same body. Survival of death by bodily resurrection, then, would be like being survived by a twin one had never met. It would be nice for the twin, perhaps, but not for you.

Now if you are convinced by the replica objection, you might be tempted to conclude that the resurrection of the body really didn't, after all, provide a good reason to question the quick initial judgment that the materialist has a far harder time making sense of a personal afterlife than the dualist. Once again, however, this conclusion would be too fast, and not only because the replica objection itself has its critics and is therefore controversial. Even if we grant the replica objection its full force, the foregoing discussion of this objection puts us in position to appreciate a deeper reason that the matter really is much more controversial than was recognized in our original reaction. To see why, consider the following response that might be given by a materialist who accepts that the resurrection body is numerically different from the earthly body.

> Even though the replica objection does show that the resurrection body is numerically distinct from the earthly body, the *person* of the afterlife might still be numerically the same as the *person* of this life. What needs to be recognized in order to see how this is possible is that conditions for the identity of a person might be very different from conditions for the identity of the body or, more narrowly, of that part of it which thinks. Being a person

is importantly connected to having a personality, and having a personality amounts to having a certain collection of beliefs, memories and psychological character traits. It amounts, that is, to having a certain psychological history and psychological makeup. That's why we're inclined to view a human being suffering in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease as, tragically, not being the same person he once was. Even though he has the same brain, the brain no longer holds the psychological history and character it once did; thus, he is not the same person. By contrast, however, imagine what we would say if our loved one's Alzheimer's were to undergo a dramatic remission. Wouldn't we say things like, "It's wonderful to have *you* back!" where by "you" we could only mean the person, since the individual's body and brain were never absent. And doesn't all this suggest that personal identity has much more to do with the preservation of an individual's psychological history than it does with the preservation of the identity of the thing that is doing the thinking? As long as the person's memories and character traits are preserved, we might imagine, as Immanuel Kant did, a person's distinctive consciousness to be passed from one thinking thing to another, just as motion is passed from one billiard ball to another. And just as the transfer of motion from one billiard ball to another involves only matter and its states, so too the transfer of one's personhood from one material thing to another need not involve anything other than matter and its states. And that, my friend, is why a materialist can maintain that the resurrection body is not identical with any body of this life while still believing that the person of the afterlife is identical with a person of this life. Moreover, if this general point about what constitutes personal identity is correct, we have a deeper reason still to distrust the claim that the materialist is much worse off than the dualist in making sense of a personal afterlife. If the identity of the thinking thing isn't necessary or sufficient for the identity of the person, this means that a dualist is not obviously in a better position than the materialist when it comes to making sense of the possibility of a *personal* afterlife. Even if there is an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of the human body, on its own this does not tell us whether the *person* has survived the death of the body.

THE PROBLEM OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

In addition to illustrating the complexity of the issues involved in deciding whether a materialist or dualist is in a better position with respect to the hope for a personal afterlife, the materialist's argument that concluded the preceding section also introduced the second of the specific metaphysical issues to be covered in this chapter: the problem of personal identity. The problem of personal identity is the problem of determining what makes a person the person she is and, relatedly, what makes a person the same person over time. Though this issue is related to the mind–body problem, one thing illustrated by our imagined materialist's argument is that the two issues are distinct and that the answer to the question of what the mind is and what a person is may well come apart. The specific view that the materialist used to make this point is a version of a theory of personal identity most associated with the seventeenth-century British philosopher John Locke. Locke maintained

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that what is essential to a person is consciousness and thus that the preservation of an individual's consciousness is essential to the preservation of the identity of the person over time.

In the following delightful essay, Al Lent draws upon literature, the history of philosophy, pop culture, neuroscience, and contemporary analytic philosophy to provide an overview of the main philosophical theories of personal identity and to evaluate the highly influential contemporary version of Locke's theory advanced by Derek Parfit. In addition to providing an excellent introduction to the philosophical problem of personal identity, Lent's use of diverse sources serves as a reminder that philosophical issues are a natural outgrowth of the shared human capacity to wonder at our lives and the world in which we find ourselves.

Alfred C. Lent: Surviving in a Different Body

Introduction: The Body-Swap Intuition

A short-lived situation comedy from the early 1960's asked us to play along with the idea that the main character's dead mother had somehow become embodied in a 1928 Porter automobile. She talks through the radio speaker and eventually convinces the befuddled hero that this is indeed his departed mother who has returned as a car. The show was appropriately called *My Mother the Car*. It was a hard story to play along with and *My Mother the Car* was canceled after its first season.

The idea that one might die and return as an antique car is a preposterous premise, even for a situation comedy. It is even too preposterous to be a doctrine of philosophers. But not by much.

There are three main views concerning the question of what makes a person the same through time. The first is the dualist view, according to which, what makes a person the same through time is the continued existence of a simple immaterial substance, often called a soul.[1] The second is the bodily view that takes a person's identity through time to consist in the sameness of a live human body.[2] The third is the psychological view, according to which what makes a person the same through time are relations among psychological events such as the experience of an event and the subsequent memory of that experience, or the intention to perform an action and the subsequent carrying out of that action.[3]

John Locke is the first to have defended this third view.[4] According to Locke, personal identity consists in consciousness alone, not in the sameness of substance, whether in an immaterial substance such as a soul or in a material substance such as a human body. On the traditional understanding of Locke's view, were it possible to transfer consciousness from one body to another the same person would be said to survive in a different body, even if nothing of the original substance remains.

The most influential work on personal identity in the twentieth century comes from Derek Parfit[5] whose theory is a descendent of the Lockean view. While Parfit

does not ask us to imagine something as preposterous as the possibility that a person can survive in an antique car, the view he defends uses many imaginary cases that range from the plausible to the highly implausible bordering on the preposterous.

Parfit's theory begins with a claim that few have found preposterous or extraordinary; namely, one can survive in a different body if either one's soul or one's brain became associated with a different body. Call the claim that one can survive in a different body "The Simple Body-Swap Intuition." Defense of this claim often rests on an imaginary case that does not seem preposterous: imagine that one's brain is successfully transplanted in a different body. In this case it would seem that one's consciousness—one's beliefs, desires, intentions, memories, etc.—would remain intact and become associated with a different body. It may be false that one's consciousness would remain intact in a brain transplant, I don't really know, but it does not seem to me to be preposterous. But his defense culminates in an extraordinary claim that relies on cases that some have thought to be preposterous.[6] Parfit asks us to imagine that there is a machine that scans and destroys the brain and body and makes a replica out of different matter with the same psychological makeup as the original. Parfit supposes that the replica would be indistinguishable from the original even to itself. He uses this case to argue that what matters in a person's existence can be preserved even if nothing of the original substance remains. Call this "the Unqualified Body-Swap Intuition."

It is tempting to reject imaginary cases such as the one described above as providing any plausible evidence for a philosophical position. In the first section, I consider two fundamental questions about the philosophical problem of personhood and explain why the method of imaginary cases, often called thought experiments, is well-suited to addressing these questions. In the second section, I turn to Parfit's novel use of two popular imaginary cases and explain his argument from the Simple Body-Swap Intuition to the Unqualified Body-Swap Intuition.[7] I then consider whether Parfit is vulnerable to the claim that his argument is faulty on methodological grounds. In the third section, I argue that the root of the problem with Parfit's view is the philosophical neglect of the body enshrined in the Simple Body-Swap Intuition that begins Parfit's train of reasoning.

Thought Experiments

There are two central questions about personhood. The first is the question of what it is that makes something a person rather than, say, a mere sentient creature. Normal adult humans are persons if persons exist at all, while rabbits are not. What do normal adult humans have that rabbits do not that makes humans and not rabbits persons? The first question, then, demands an answer to the question, "what is it to be a person?" The second question is the one I began considering above: the question of the sameness of a person at different times. It is natural to assume that I am the same person today as yesterday, despite my having lost and no doubt gained a few parts. How much change can one undergo and remain the same person? Clipping one's nails is a change one can endure; losing an extremity or two, or a kidney or a lung, are also changes one can endure. One can also suffer minor loss of memory and remain the same person. Nonetheless, if we imagine the changes growing by

degree there will come a point at which we are sure that it is no longer the case that a person has survived as the same person.

Both of these questions invite us to use our imagination, to devise a thought experiment in an attempt to isolate the relevant feature or features from among a set of actual features. We can see the need for thought experiments with the following example.

It is uncontroversial that normal adult humans are persons but controversial whether a fetus or a human in a persistent vegetative state is a person. It is necessary to ask, then, what is it that a normal adult human has that a fetus and a human in a vegetative state are alleged to lack? Now, a normal adult human may have many things that one or the other lacks. A normal adult human has, for example, a developed reproductive system, something that a fetus lacks and a human in a vegetative state may still possess. If what it is to be a person is to have a developed reproductive system, a fetus is not a person. But why think that a developed reproductive system is what makes a normal adult human a person? Why not a properly functioning brain, something that at least a late term fetus has and a human in a vegetative state lacks?

It is necessary to ask which of the things a normal adult human has are the relevant ones. A common way to approach this question is to isolate the relevant feature or features by use of a thought experiment, an imaginary case that supposes certain things to be the case that are in fact not the case.

Consider the first question: What is it to be a person, a creature with moral rights? Mary Ann Warren answers this question by proposing the following thought experiment. She asks us to imagine a space traveler who lands on an unknown planet and encounters alien nonhuman beings, beings that do not have a human genetic code. She says,

> If he wants to be sure of behaving morally towards these beings, he has to somehow decide whether they are people, and hence have full moral rights, or whether they are the sort of thing which he need not feel guilty about treating as, for example, a source of food.[8]

This example asks us to make a supposition contrary to fact. It has never happened that a space traveler has faced such a situation; nor is it likely to happen any time in the foreseeable future. Still, we can imagine being convinced that alien nonhumans are persons, say, if they possessed certain features, such as intelligence, self-awareness, and language.

Influential work on the second question typically proceeds likewise. John Locke poses the following classic thought experiment in answering the question "what makes a person the same through time?" He says,

> should the Soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince's past Life, enter and inform the Body of a Cobler as soon as deserted by his own Soul, every one sees, he would be the same Person with the Prince, accountable for the Prince's Actions.[9]

The core idea behind this thought experiment is that if one's psychological make-up could be transferred to a different body, the resulting person would be the one with the psychological make-up and not the one with the original body.

The thought experimental method is well-suited to the two questions about personhood because it allows us to make distinctions that nature has concealed.

But one can object to some of these cases on methodological grounds. In other words, one can claim that because the thought experiment proposed is impossible in some sense, there is no good reason to accept the conclusion drawn from it. After all, *My Mother the Car* is preposterous and it is easy to see how one can refuse to accept any claim about personal identity that relies on the supposition that a dead person can come to exist embodied in a car.

Consider what a materialist should say about Locke's cobbler/prince case. A materialist believes that everything that exists is at bottom material, that there are no immaterial substances, no souls, or spirits. As it stands, the materialist can refuse to play along since the cobbler/prince case relies essentially on an assumption that the materialist rejects, that there are souls that are only contingently related to bodies. Unless this case can be described in materialistically respectable terms, this case will not be compelling to the materialist.

The cobbler/prince case, however, is easily modified to make Locke's point in materialistically respectable terms: suppose the brain of a prince with the consciousness of the prince's life were transplanted into the body of a cobbler after the cobbler's brain had been removed. This is just like Locke's case except that belief in immaterial substances is not required to imagine it. The case is not preposterous whether one believes in souls or not.

On both of these questions about personhood, there is something of a received view. Something is a person if it is conscious in the relevant way and something is the same person if there is psychological continuity. Some, such as Locke, make a stronger claim: consciousness is necessary and sufficient for personhood. Some, such as Joseph Butler, allow a weaker claim: consciousness is the earmark of personal identity because it is the best evidence that there is an immaterial soul present.[10] On the received view (strong or weak), a brain transplant would preserve consciousness and thus personal identity as well.

The brain-transplant thought experiment has been judged the least problematic on methodological grounds. Are brain-transplants possible? If not, how can a plausible conclusion be drawn by imagining that they are? As we shall see in the next section, although Parfit begins with the relatively unproblematic brain-transplant case, the cases he uses after that grow harder to imagine as Parfit nears his conclusion. This in turn invites the charge that Parfit's Unqualified Body-swap Intuition is unacceptable because it relies on preposterous cases.

Parfit's Argument

As I said earlier, Parfit defends the Unqualified Body-swap Intuition, the view that what matters in a person's existence through time can be preserved even if nothing of the original substance remains. The argument for Parfit's extraordinary position comes in three stages. The first stage asks us to imagine that one's brain is transplanted in a different body. The consensus on the two questions about personhood gives a consensus here as well. Given what we know about the role of the brain as bearer of the mental life, it seems plausible that if a brain were successfully transplanted in a different body, the resulting person would wake with the brain

donor's beliefs, memories, etc. This means the resulting entity would be a person (the received answer to the first question) and would be the same person as the brain donor (the received answer to the second question).

Stage one, then, is relatively uncontroversial given the received view. The only questions remaining are whether this is possible and, if it is impossible, whether the impossibility is relevant. But most agree that if this were possible, we would have a case of a person surviving in a different body.

In the second stage, Parfit makes effective use of some controversial results that have emerged from experiments with commissurotomy patients, those who have had the corpus collosum—the large band of fibers connecting the two hemispheres of the higher brain—severed surgically. Commissurotomies were performed on severe epilepsy patients in the 1940's in order to alleviate the effects of the disease.[11] At first, there were no noticeable changes in the behavior of these patients beyond the improvement of their epilepsy. Every now and then, however, a patient displayed unusual behavior such as buttoning a coat with one hand and unbuttoning it with the other. One man would embrace his wife with one hand and try to push her away with the other.

In a remarkable series of experiments in the early 1960's, Sperry and Myers were able to direct sensory input to one hemisphere or the other. One set of experiments flashed a series of images to one visual field or the other. If the images were flashed to the right half of the visual field, what was seen can be reported verbally, since the right half of the visual field and speech are controlled by the left hemisphere. If an image of, say, the word "hat" was flashed to the left half of the visual field, the person would report verbally that he or she had seen nothing, while the left hand, however, would select a hat from a group of objects.

These results have suggested to some, including Parfit, that each hemisphere has its own stream of consciousness. Parfit makes use of this research in a thought experiment he calls *My Division*, a thought experiment proposed in the service of establishing the conclusion that personal identity is not what matters.

> My body is fatally injured, as are the brains of my two brothers. My brain is divided, and each half is successfully transplanted into the body of one of my brothers. Each of the resulting people believes that he is me, seems to remember living my life, has my character, and is in every other way psychologically continuous with me. And he has a body that is very like mine. (253–5)

Parfit proceeds by noting the widespread belief that a successful brain-transplant would preserve personal identity, which is what I am calling the Simple Body-swap Intuition. He then cites the Sperry-Myers research, which Parfit interprets as demonstrating that each hemisphere has its own stream of consciousness. He then proceeds to claim that if each hemisphere has its own stream of consciousness, a person can survive as the same person if either hemisphere is transplanted. We have heard of cases of people who have survived the loss of one hemisphere or the other either by disease or accident. Thus, if a brain-transplant preserves personal identity as the Simple Body-swap Intuition grants, so would a half-brain transplant, since one hemisphere is supposed to be enough to support consciousness. It would seem, then, that we should treat a half-brain transplant as preserving the identity of

the brain donor. But, of course, then we must allow that if either hemisphere of the brain were transplanted rather than the other, either would be sufficient to ensure the person survives as the same person.

If both are transplanted into different bodies, however, we cannot say the original person is identical to both survivors if by "identical" we mean numerically identical. The reason is that identity is a transitive relation: if A is identical to B and B is identical to C, then A is identical to C. In this case, the original person A is not identical with both B and C since B and C are distinct from and therefore not identical with each other.

Parfit concludes from this that personal identity is not what matters, since what matters in a person's identity is preserved, even if it is preserved twice over. Parfit asks rhetorically, "How could a double success be a failure?" (256). Another way of saying the same thing is that the fact that we have a unique survivor is merely a contingent fact about us, something that is ordinarily the case but might not be.

Kathleen Wilkes has objected to the second stage of Parfit's argument on methodological grounds.[12] She argues that there is much to suggest that transplanting a hemisphere would not have the results Parfit envisages. She cites empirical evidence that suggests that the brain stem plays an important role in consciousness and the brain stem does not have discreet halves the way the cortex does. If what matters cannot be divided, Parfit is not entitled to his conclusion that personal identity is not what matters.

In the third stage Parfit argues that what does matter with respect to personhood through time is psychological continuity alone, regardless of the causal mechanism that brings consciousness about. The argument here focuses on what Parfit thinks of as the ordinary cause of our mental life, namely a properly functioning brain. Ordinarily, psychological continuity is caused by the brain. But, might it not be brought about in some other way? He argues that what matters is psychological continuity and not the ordinary cause.

The argument that the ordinary cause does not matter uses an analogy between the ordinary cause of psychological continuity and the ordinary cause of seeing. Suppose one lost one's sight and then had artificial eyes installed that give one experiences qualitatively indistinguishable from those had with natural eyes. Parfit asks whether we should say that such a person is seeing. He answers,

> If we insist that seeing must involve the ordinary cause, we would answer No. But even if this person cannot see, what he has is *just as good as* seeing, both as a way of knowing what is within sight, and as a source of visual pleasure. If we accept the Psychological Criterion, we could make a similar claim. If psychological continuity does not have its ordinary cause, it may not provide personal identity. But we can claim that, even if this is so, what it provides is *as good as* personal identity. (209)

His point is that if a) one's visual experiences with artificial eyes are qualitatively indistinguishable from one's visual experiences with natural eyes and b) artificial eyes provide the same experiences of one's environment as natural eyes, then, with respect to what is important about seeing, artificial eyes are as good as natural eyes, since the experiences given by one are indistinguishable from the other and the relation between the experiences and the world are the same.

Parfit claims this case is analogous to the case regarding the cause of psychological continuity. An artificial cause of psychological continuity is as good as the

ordinary cause even if it does not provide personal identity. If the ordinary cause does not matter, then the continuity of the brain does not matter.

If Parfit is right, we should say that the following case captures all that matters, even if it does not preserve personal identity. He asks us to imagine a person poised to step into a machine that will

> destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact state of all my cells. It will then transmit this information by radio. Traveling at the speed of light, the message will take three minutes to reach the Replicator on Mars. This will then create, out of new matter, a brain and body exactly like mine. (199)

Parfit argues that one's prospects here are as good as if one had traveled to Mars by spacecraft, even if the machine malfunctions resulting in two persons (201).

Is this example preposterous on empirical grounds? Some have argued that it is. If it is preposterous, Parfit's conclusion can be avoided. If there is no sensible way to imagine an interruption in the usual causal chain, then the ordinary cause does matter. That move would effectively thwart the argument of the third stage.

Parfit is vulnerable at the second and third stage of his argument on methodological grounds. If the cases he imagines are not possible, his arguments at the second and third stage are not sound. Of course, stopping Parfit's chain of reasoning at either the second or third stage is sufficient to block his extreme conclusion. Still, even if our best empirical evidence at present suggests that the cases Parfit imagines are impossible, there are at least two reasons to be less than satisfied with this strategy.

First, what seems to be physically impossible now may be a limitation only in our present technology. Perhaps Wilkes is right that transplanting a hemisphere alone will not have the result Parfit envisages because the brain stem plays a crucial role in supporting consciousness. Even though the brain stem does not have discreet halves, it is hard to be confident that there is not a way to isolate the relevant portions. Perhaps what we think is physically impossible is only technologically impossible. Claims of technological impossibility on the grounds that we do not have the technology now or we cannot even conceive of what the technology would look like are uninteresting and ill-suited to rest anything of great philosophical importance on because of the astonishing technological progress we have made these last few generations. The generation that was introduced to the 30 ton ENIAC computer would have thought it technically impossible to make a machine as powerful as the ENIAC that one could carry in one's shirt pocket. But they would have been wrong.

The second reason to be less than satisfied with this strategy is that I think it misses what is at the heart of the problem, which is the ubiquitous Simple Body-Swap Intuition. In the next section, I look more carefully at the Simple Body-Swap Intuition and identify what I take to be the problem with it.

Neglecting the Body

As I said in the last section, Parfit's view is vulnerable to attack on grounds that the cases he uses are in some sense preposterous. But his vulnerability on these grounds is limited to the second two stages. I think, however, that the problem is at the first stage, where few have suspected a problem. In this section, I explain what I take to be wrong with the Simple Body-Swap Intuition.

Barbara Harris's novel *Who is Julia?* provides a book-length thought experiment to make my point. It centers on a tall, beautiful, well-educated blonde woman named Julia North and a plain-looking simple-minded brunette woman named Mary Frances Beaudine. Julia is severed in half by a streetcar as she saves Bobby, Mary Frances's son, who had run in front of the streetcar. Mary Frances suffers a stroke at the scene and shortly thereafter is declared dead. A team of physicians is in place to do a brain-transplant, which is described in the novel as an experimental procedure, one that had not yet been performed. The physicians and hospital administration defend what I am calling the Simple Body-Swap Intuition in their confrontation with the husbands of the women.

To procure permission from Jack Beaudine, Mary Frances's husband, the hospital administrator tells him

> We have a team of surgeons here who are ready to perform a brain transplant. That is, they are ready to put a healthy brain in your wife's body if you will give us permission. You must understand, however, that this means you will be giving up your wife's body. She's the donor. With the other woman's brain she will no longer *be* your wife. The recovery period is slow, but when it's over, and if it's successful, the woman whose brain lies in your wife's body will only look like your wife. Her memory, her education, her emotions, and personality will be as they were in her former body. (9)

At first, Jack is indignant and refuses to grant permission. He capitulates, reluctantly, when he learns that the brain-donor and body-recipient is the one who saved his son.

Julia's husband, Don North, is told of the operation after the fact. The physician tells Don about the accident saying,

> We couldn't restore her body, the body she sacrificed to save the life of a child. That child's mother died of a cerebral hemorrhage the same moment your wife was hurt. We couldn't restore the brain of that young woman. There was only one avenue open to us, and we took it. We removed your wife's brain, and we have reconnected it in the body of that other woman. (41)

He, too, is at first indignant, then incredulous, asking how it is possible for Julia to be alive when her body is dead. The doctor reassures him by giving the standard defense of the Simple Body-Swap Intuition. He says, "if we are successful as we believe we can be, your wife's mental faculties—her personality—will be in tact. She'll be alive for you to talk with—to go on living with . . . She is alive, Don. Her body is different, but everything else will be the same" (42).

Throughout the story, both husbands are confronted by what is the same and what is different about the Julia-brain/Mary Frances-body. Don looks at the still-unconscious person lying in the hospital bed and thinks, "This homely, ordinary woman was not, could not be Julia" (60). He recalls her lovely cultivated voice and wonders if it will sound the same. When he is able to be near her, "He smelled her skin and her hair, fresh and clean, but strange to his nostrils" (178). Don is struck by the differences between Julia as she was and the Julia/Mary Frances composite.

Jack is struck by the sameness between Mary Frances as he knew her and the Julia/Mary Frances composite. When Jack sees Mary Frances lying in the bed breathing on her own, he is convinced that she is alive and no argument can persuade

him otherwise. When she wakes, Jack becomes even more convinced that this is the woman he fell in love with and married. After all, much of what he loved about her is present. The voice coming from her mouth, though uttering strange words, sounds like Mary Frances, since it is produced by the same vocal chords and mouth. The face he loved and the eyes that once gazed lovingly into his are Mary Frances's. Furthermore, this is the very body that bore their son.

Later in the story, Jack runs off with the Julia/Mary Frances composite in spite of her protestations and later on has sex with her, again, in spite of her protestations. If this encounter led to conception and birth, the child would be Jack and Mary Frances' son Bobby's sibling, not merely a half-sibling.

The Simple Body-Swap Intuition would have us ignore these things as irrelevant to personhood. It would have us ignore the differences between Julia and the Julia/Mary Frances composite and it would have us ignore the sameness between Mary Frances and the Julia/Mary Frances composite. These samenesses and differences must be disregarded as irrelevant to personhood. But this, I claim, is deeply problematic.

The problem is masked by the fact that Julia's mind is preserved. Part of what is imagined in a brain-transplant thought experiment is that one mind (preserved by the continued existence of the same brain) is associated with one body at one time and a different body at another time. The assumption (an assumption I grant for the sake of argument) is that preserving a properly functioning brain preserves the mind. When the Julia/Mary Frances composite wakes, the resulting person has the memories etc. of Julia.

The conclusion we are considering, however, is not whether the same mind is preserved, but whether surviving as the same mind is surviving as the same person. Is the Julia/Mary Frances composite the same person as Julia? To say "yes" and to leave it at that would be misleading. In order to claim the Julia/Mary Frances composite is the same person as Julia, we would need to ignore the samenessess between the Julia/Mary Frances composite and Mary Frances as unimportant to personhood.

I think the correct thing to say of this case is that the resulting person is a monster, a grotesque fusion of what is left of two persons. What makes the case monstrous is that there are two rival sets of personal concerns: the concern for what is left of Julia and the concern for what is left of Mary Frances. Both sets of concerns are normally part of a person's survival and each has some weight, even if we are inclined to see concern for a mind as weightier.

The ordinary case is not monstrous in this way. The ordinary process of decay that human beings undergo is in many ways familiar. We suffer decaying cartilage, thinning or graying hair, loss of stamina, loss of strength. Initially we may suffer benign instances of forgetfulness and later, we often suffer more severe instances. Not every human being suffers these losses toward the end, though the end is always the same.

Accident or disease may cause such losses more abruptly. It remains true that persons can suffer the loss of limbs and of organs and survive as the same person. They may also suffer the loss of memories, desires, virtue, or other psychological characteristics.

Consider the debilitating psychological change that Alzheimer's disease brings. There is no question that a person survives as the same person when at first his memory begins to slip. As the disease progresses and a blank-faced human with no memories is all that remains, we may wonder if the same person remains.

Such cases are sad, even tragic, but not monstrous because there is not a rival to play the roles left vacant by these deteriorations. Change follows change in the ordinary case until we are asked when we shall call an end to the life of a person. These changes are not monstrous even in the Alzheimer's case because of the lack of intrusion of a rival set of concerns. It is one thing for a person to fade away or to be snuffed out, a lamentable condition that will befall us all, and another thing for someone else to fade or pop in during the process. This intrusion of another makes the brain-transplant a monstrous prospect, not the surviving of a single person but the partial survival of two.

In the ordinary case, the survival of a person, both mentally and physically, includes milestones in growth and decay. The reason to include both physical and mental features has to do with the value of certain historical facts.

Robert Nozick argues that many of our norms are rooted in historical facts. Justice, for example, is historical, and thus depends on what was actually done.[13] Pride and shame look to the past as do reward and compensation. These norms presuppose the existence of persisting persons, of entities with a history.

Many of our norms are historical and so, according to Nozick, is love. Love is historical in that

> it depends upon what actually occurred. An adult may come to love another because of the other's characteristics; but it is the other person, and not the characteristics, that is loved. The love is not transferrable to someone else with the same characteristics, even to one who "scores" higher for these characteristics. And the love endures through changes in the characteristics that gave rise to it.[14]

Even Parfit argues that love is historical. He says, "loving someone is a process, not a fixed state. Mutual love involves a shared history" (295).

But if it is true that love is historical, the body cannot be treated as an unimportant feature of our existence. Ordinary objects may gain significance in virtue of their history. The ring I placed on my wife's finger when I made my vow to her has value, not simply because it is made of gold, but because it is the very ring I placed on her finger when I made my vow. No other ring would have this value. If the ring I placed on my wife's finger has this value in virtue of its history, surely the finger on which I placed it has value as well.

Conclusion

There are two considerations, then, that indicate we have left out what is important about persons if we neglect the body as an object with a history. The first is what Bernard Williams calls the deeply body-based situation we actually have.[15] The second is the deeply historical situation we actually have.

Our interest in persons is a complex phenomenon: it is not merely interest in a simple thing such as a soul nor even in a single organ such as the brain. Our interest in persons is as complex as the moral and prudential norms that govern them. Taking care of myself—the prime directive of prudence—requires that I take care of my body, that I recognize its potential for growth and decay, and that I treat it appropriately for a thing of this kind. Beneficence, which most moral theories recognize as a duty, brings the same demand with respect to other persons as prudence brings with

respect to oneself. Promoting the good of others requires, in part, knowing what constitutes a good for things of this kind. And, of course, bodily health is a good for members of the human kind.

The mistake of the Simple Body-Swap Intuition is not that it is false, then, but that it is misleading. The deeply body-based situation we actually have, combined with the historical nature of love implies that the body qua object with a history, is an important component in our concern for human persons. The deeply body-based situation we actually have and the deeply historical situation we actually have require that we recognize certain changes as losses. It reminds us that losing a leg, one's eyes, one's memory, is losing part of oneself. One might think it true that one can survive as the same person in a different body. But one must also hold that any preservation of personal identity which is not accompanied by the preservation of one's body is not all it's cracked up to be. Surviving in this way is a monstrous prospect in that one loses nearly all of what made personal identity worth worrying about at all.

Endnotes

1. Modern dualists include Joseph Butler, "On Personal Identity" and Thomas Reid, "On Mr. Locke's Account of our Personal Identity" both in *Personal Identity,* ed. John Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press 1975). Contemporary dualist treatments of personal identity include Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976) Chapter 3 and Richard Swinburne *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).
2. Bodily theorists include the early Sydney Shoemaker *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), although Shoemaker later embraced the psychological view. Bernard Williams defends the bodily view in, "Are Persons Bodies" in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) Chapter 5. A more recent bodily theory can be found in Eric T. Olsen's *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
3. Contemporary psychological theorists include H.P. Grice, "Personal Identity;" and Anthony Quinton, "The Soul". Both of these are in *Personal Identity* ed. John Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). John Perry, "The Importance of Being Identical" and David Lewis "Survival and Identity" are in *The Identities of Persons* ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Sydney Shoemaker's most extensive treatment is found in his debate with Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).
4. In his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) Book 2, Chapter 27.
5. All references to Parfit are from *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
6. Most notably, Kathleen Wilkes in *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) Chapter 1.
7. I call it "the Unqualified Body-swap Intuition" because there is no requirement that there be any substance in common.
8. "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," Mary Ann Warren in *The Ethics of Abortion,* eds. Baird, Robert M. and Stuart Rosenbaum (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1989) p. 77.
9. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). 2, 27, 15.
10. Joseph Butler, "On Personal Identity" in *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press 1975) p 99 ff. See also Thomas Reid, "On Mr. Locke's Account of our Personal Identity," also in the Perry volume.

11. The discussion of split brains relies on Thomas Nagel's "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness" in *Personal Identity*, ed. by John Perry. For a more cautious treatment of this phenomenon, see, Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*, Chapter 13 and Kathleen Wilkes's *Real People* Chapter 1.
12. See Wilkes, Chapter 1.
13. Robert Nozick *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) pp. 149–157, 161–163, 167–169.
14. Nozick, 168.
15. This phrase comes from Bernard Williams, "Are Persons Bodies?" in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) Chapter 5. Williams is one of the most prominent defenders of the bodily view in recent times.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways is the identity thesis a problem for the materialist? Does it also present problems for an idealist? Explain.
2. Taylor claims that a person does not "*have* a body in the way in which he has anything else at all." Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. What, in your view, is the most serious problem associated with metaphysical dualism?
4. How do you think a person's view of the mind–body problem would affect that individual's practice of medicine? Of psychotherapy?
5. Think of other areas of human activity in which people's attitudes would be affected by what they believe about the mind–body question. Here are two to start with: the penal system; our response to substance abuse. Discuss these and add to the list.
6. What are Lent's two reasons for concluding that "the body cannot be treated as an unimportant feature of our existence"?
7. Lent concludes that the transfer of a person's psychological history would result in a "monstrous" state of affairs. What do you think he means by this? Do you agree with him?

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Freedom and Determinism: The Metaphysics of Human Agency

O n June 14, 1494, the grand mayor of St. Martin de Laon declared that the penalty for a case of infanticide in which the victim had been suffocated and disfigured would be death by hanging. Given that the crime was horrendous, it is not particularly noteworthy that a fifteenth-century French court would impose the death penalty. What is noteworthy about the case is who or—more appropriately—what the defendant was. The death penalty was to be imposed on a "jeune pourceaux," a young pig, that had been found guilty of murdering an infant.[1] There is, of course, nothing unusual about the decision to destroy a dangerous animal. What is likely to strike us as bizarre, however, is that the decision to destroy such an animal should be made in the context of a criminal trial, with the animal (not its owner) as defendant. No less bizarre is that the manner of killing the beast was the one traditionally used as a form of punishment. The offending pig was not to be taken out back and knocked over the head. As the purpose was punishment and not mere destruction, the swine was to be hanged in a public forum and that only after a period of incarceration.

The reason that the notion of an animal trial strikes us as so odd, of course, is the same reason we would find it absurd to hold accountable an inanimate object such as a volcano: we are strongly inclined to believe that human beings alone among natural things are morally responsible agents, agents who ought to be held morally accountable for what they do. We tend, that is, to think that humans are sometimes capable of acting in a special way, a way that is unique to us and justifies the ascription of moral responsibility. That we have this special way of acting is what we are after when we describe ourselves as "free." Thus it is that philosophical discussions about human freedom often reduce to attempts to decide whether human beings really do have this special way of acting and of what this special way of acting consists.

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[1] A description of this case can be found on pp. 306–307 of E. P. Evan's fascinating work *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals: The Lost History of Europe's Animal Trials* (London: Farber & Farber, 1988).

THEORIES OF HUMAN ACTION

Though the metaphysical issue of human freedom can be put fairly simply, as in the preceding paragraph, the actual theories philosophers have advanced on the topic of human freedom are varied, complex, and nuanced. Nonetheless, without too much distortion, they can all be placed within one of the following three categories:

1. *Hard determinism*   The theory that all human actions are fully causally determined, and therefore, no human actions are free.
2. *Libertarianism*   The theory that some human actions are free and therefore are not fully causally determined.
3. *Compatibilism (or "soft determinism")*   The theory that some human actions are free, even though all human actions are fully causally determined.

"Compatibilism" is so called because it maintains that freedom is compatible with a thoroughgoing causal determinism. Being free, according to a compatibilist, does demand the ability to perform actions that flow from one's desires, emotions, and beliefs; however, it does not require that these mental states themselves be uncaused. Hard determinists and libertarians, on the other hand, are sometimes referred to as "incompatibilists," for both assert that freedom and causal determinism are mutually exclusive, or "incompatible." The libertarians maintain that there are some free human actions and that determinism is therefore false. The hard determinists maintain that all actions are fully causally determined and that therefore there are no free actions.

To understand these various theories of human agency, it is important to know what philosophers mean by "causal determinism." As with many other issues in philosophy, giving a precise and thorough definition of causal determinism is a very complex issue; nonetheless, for our purposes, determinism can be thought of as the following theory: the way the universe was at any given moment in the past uniquely fixes the way the universe will be in any future moment. Given that there was a way the world was before there were any human beings, what determinism implies for human beings is the following: everything that is true of every human being—including all their feelings, desires, choices, and actions—was fixed before any human being existed. The present orbit of Mercury, the number of galaxies in the universe, the chemical composition of Comet Hale–Bopp, and your decision to have a second helping of yams are all of a piece on a causal determinist view of the universe. They are all equally and irretrievably fixed by the initial stages of cosmic history.

One further point of clarification that must be made before we consider the details of the debate has to do with our use of the term *libertarianism*. "Libertarianism," as it is used in this chapter, refers to a particular account of the metaphysics of human choice.

In what follows, it will be important to distinguish "libertarianism" in this sense from the political theory of the same name. "Libertarianism," as it is used in political philosophy, refers to the view that human freedom is a fundamental good that governments should be extremely slow to restrict. A metaphysical libertarian may or may not be a libertarian in the political sense, and a political libertarian may or may not be a metaphysical libertarian. It is important to remember that we are focusing exclusively on metaphysical libertarianism in what follows.

THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE

There are really two issues of central importance to philosophical treatments of freedom. The first issue is whether human beings are as causally necessitated as the rest of the natural order. Hard determinists and compatibilists maintain that they are. Libertarians maintain that they are not. The second issue is the question of what it amounts to for an action to be done freely. Hard determinists and libertarians line up on one side of this issue, alleging that what it means to say that an action is free is that the person who performed the action was not causally determined and thus could have done otherwise. (Of course, the hard determinist believes that this never happens and thus that there are no free actions; nonetheless, this is, according to the hard determinist, one of the things that would be required for an action to be free if any free actions there were.) Compatibilists, on the other side of the divide, contend that an action is free if the action was chosen by the person and thus was not produced by *external* constraint or compulsion.

The first issue is a factual issue; thus, it is natural to look to the sciences to answer it. There are, however, two reasons it would be a mistake to think that science is in a position to provide a definitive answer to this question. The first reason is simply that the sciences are not—at least yet—able to supply an unequivocal answer to the question of whether all events are causally determined. If anything, developments in physics—and especially in quantum mechanics—over the past century seem to be heading in the direction of maintaining that there is a measure of indeterminacy built into nature, but the matter is far from settled. (A good place to look at what science can tell us on the issue of freedom and determinism is John Earman's *A Primer on Determinism.*) The second reason it would be a mistake to think that science might provide a definitive answer to the question of whether all human actions are causally necessitated is that even if science ultimately comes down on the side of unqualified causal determinism, moving from this conclusion to the claim that all human actions are fully causally necessitated is a legitimate inference only if one adopts a realist understanding of science—that is, if one believes that science is in the business of uncovering the true nature of the reality that underlies our experience of the world. Many philosophers and scientists, however, believe that this is a mistaken view of science. According to some such philosophers and scientists, the so-called "instrumentalists," science is merely an instrument that can be used to make predictions about the world of our experience. According to these philosophers, science does not unveil a deeper and truer level of reality; therefore, if science does embrace unqualified determinism, this only means that determinism has turned out to be the most effective predictive tool there is. It does not mean that underlying causes really causally necessitate all human actions. Human actions might be as undetermined as ever, but viewing them as determined is merely the most effective way to handle them in science.

The second issue mentioned in the preceding paragraph really amounts to a debate over the correct definition of *free*, as this term is applied to human action. The key to resolving this issue, or so it has seemed to most philosophers engaged in the debate, is to focus on the close connection between the concept of freedom and the concept of moral responsibility. Each side to the debate points out that the one thing a decent theory of freedom had better be able to do is make sense of our practice of holding people morally accountable for actions they perform freely. And then each side appeals to strong intuitions about the conditions of moral responsibility to show

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the superiority of its view. The incompatibilists assert that a condition on holding an individual responsible for an action is that the individual could have done otherwise—a condition that can be fulfilled only if determinism is false. At that point, of course, the hard determinists and the libertarians part company, the hard determinists insisting that determinism is true and that there is no moral responsibility, and the libertarians insisting that persons are sometimes responsible and that determinism is thus false. Compatibilists, on the other hand, highlight the importance of being able to causally trace the chosen action back to the responsible person as its source, a condition that can be satisfied only if the choice that caused the action was itself caused by other factors that are components of the person who performed the action. Whereas the incompatibilist emphasizes the need that the person be able to avoid doing what she did, the compatibilist emphasizes the requirement that the person be the source of the action. In the next two sections, we consider these challenges in turn.

AVOIDABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY: A PROBLEM FOR COMPATIBILISM

A widely accepted principle governing moral responsibility is that an individual should not be held responsible for some action or state of affairs unless the individual could have avoided performing the action or bringing about the state of affairs in question. Imagine the driver of a car trying to beat the arrival of a train at a crossing, only to stall his car on the tracks with the train a mere hundred feet away and moving at a healthy clip. In such circumstances, we would not hold the conductor responsible when the train demolishes the car for the simple reason that there was nothing the conductor could have done to stop the train in time. lf, on the other hand, the train is sufficiently far away to stop in time, but the conductor—fed up with drivers who run crossing gates—speeds up because he wants to teach this particular gate runner a lesson, then we would be willing to hold the conductor responsible because she could have avoided the ensuing crash.

This seemingly obvious condition on moral responsibility—which might be called the avoidability condition—is significant to philosophical discussions of freedom in that it is often the single most important reason libertarians and hard determinists refuse to be compatibilists. To see why this is so, one must remember that a compatibilist is committed to causal determinism and thus believes that all human actions are fully causally necessitated, a causal necessitation of all human action which entails that no person could have avoided doing any of the things that he or she does. But if the avoidability condition holds, it follows that the determinism that is part of compatibilism entails that no person is morally responsible for any of her actions. And this would mean, of course, that compatibilist theories of free action fail in precisely that respect in which no decent theory of freedom can fail: they fail to make sense of the practice of holding people morally responsible for their free actions.

A common compatibilist response to this objection is to contend that the avoidability condition on moral responsibility requires only that an individual could have done otherwise if she had chosen to do otherwise. Drawing upon the example of the two train conductors mentioned earlier, a compatibilist might note that the second conductor would have done otherwise if she had chosen to do otherwise and thus is morally responsible but that the first conductor's choosing otherwise would have made no difference to the eventual outcome. Thus it is on the standard compatibilist response that the difference between the two cases can be made without further demanding that the

second conductor actually have been able to choose otherwise. All that is required, says the compatibilist, is that if she had chosen otherwise, things would have gone otherwise. This response, however, has largely failed to convince opponents of compatibilism who see no good reason to believe it is not morally significant whether a person could have avoided choosing what she did choose. It's not enough to ask what would have happened if the person had chosen otherwise, for one must also ask whether the person actually could have chosen otherwise. Imagine a case in which an individual's choices are completely determined by her character, and her character was formed as a result of severe abuse suffered as a child. In such a case, we would not want to hold an individual responsible for her choices precisely because she could not have avoided making the choices she made. But if this is right, why shouldn't we draw the same conclusion about compatibilist choices generally? Whether a person's inability to choose is the product of abuse or more mundane causal pathways, the outcome is still the same: the individual could not have chosen otherwise and for this reason should not be held responsible.

Compatibilists, of course, have adopted various strategies for dealing with this concern; nonetheless, the debate over the ability of compatibilist accounts of freedom to make sense of moral responsibility is as heated today as ever. Given the difficulties confronting compatibilist accounts of freedom, it might be tempting to conclude that those who believe in freedom ought to go the libertarian route. Whether the matter is actually as simple as that is the subject of the next section.

CHANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY: A PROBLEM FOR LIBERTARIANISM

From a commonsense perspective, it is natural to assume that determinism is the enemy of freedom. (Indeed, students are often puzzled when they first learn of compatibilist theories of freedom, their furrowed brows conveying what they are often too shy to express: "Surely, I've missed something; compatibilists can't really be saying what they seem to be saying.") And just as it is natural from a commonsense perspective to assume that determinism is the enemy of freedom, it is no less natural to infer that indeterminism is the friend of freedom. But some natural inferences are too quick, and some friends are false, and—as the compatibilist is happy to point out—an uncritical readiness to admit indeterminism as the ally of freedom may well be a case of both.

The problem that indeterminism poses for freedom begins to emerge when one realizes that a person is causally responsible for a choice to perform an action only if there is a sense in which she is the source of the choice to perform the action. If the person is not, in some sense, the source of the choice, what possible reason could there be for holding the person morally responsible for the choice? But in order to be the source of the choice, there must be a sense in which the person caused the choice—that is, some sense in which the choice flowed from the very beliefs, desires, emotions, and character traits we take to define who a person is. If one has a desire for revenge and a vindictive character, and these components of one's personality are the source of her choice to slander an associate, it is clear in what respect the action can be traced to the *person* who performed it and who is to be held accountable for it. But if one spills coffee on an associate's shirt because of a neurological tick that is not connected with any traits of one's personality, it seems equally clear that even though one's body is causally responsible for the action, that *person* is not the source of the action and thus should not be held

accountable for it. The libertarian, however, is adamant in denying that a free choice is causally necessitated by any further traits of the person or events within the person. Thus, the compatibilist notes, the libertarian seems to have made all choices much like the neurological tick just described. But this, in turn, seems to imply that there is no meaningful sense in which the person can be said to be the source of the choice and thus no real basis for holding that person responsible for the choice.

This criticism of libertarianism is given eloquent expression by eighteenth-century British empiricist David Hume, in the following passage from his *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding:*

> Actions are by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honor if good, nor infamy if evil. The actions themselves may be blamable; they may be contrary to all the rules of morality and religion; but the person is not answerable for them and, as they proceeded from nothing in him that is durable and constant and leave nothing of that nature behind them, it is impossible he can, upon their account, become the object of punishment or vengeance. According to the principle, therefore, which denies necessity and, consequently, causes, a man is as pure and untainted, after having committed the most horrid crime, as at the first moment of his birth, nor is his character anywise concerned in his actions, since they are not derived from it; and the wickedness of the one can never be used as a proof of the depravity of the other.[2]

One strategy that some libertarians have used to combat this problem is to employ a theory of causality known as "agent" or, sometimes, "immanent" causality. It is true, such libertarians say, that no prior event or trait of the person caused the person's choice; however, it does not follow from this that the choice is uncaused and thus not connected to the person, for there is the possibility that the person—and not some event or trait within the person—is the cause of the choice. The choice is still free in that nothing causally necessitated the person to choose as she did, but the choice is also caused by the person and thus satisfies the requirement that a person can be responsible for a choice only if she is the source of the choice. In fact, the person has become the cause of the choice in a very strong sense, for the choice is alleged to flow directly from the person and not merely from some psychological events or states within the person. And though the terms *agent causality* and *immanent causality* have the liability of most philosophical jargon—they have the whiff of philosophical artifice and thus seem suspect—it is important to note that agent causality actually fits rather well our natural way of speaking about persons and their decisions. We do, after all, talk of the person as simply making a choice. And we would be disinclined to speak of the choice as being made or produced by the person's beliefs or desires. Perhaps the choice was made in the light of such factors, but it is ultimately the person and not these factors that we naturally speak of as making the choice. Indeed, that seems to be the way we naturally speak of our own choices. I chose the jelly doughnut over the cruller or the maple log and may have even done so because "I was in the mood

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[2]David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* edited by Charles W. Hendel (Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1955).

for a doughnut with a raspberry-flavored filling"; however, I do not experience my desire for raspberries as causing me to make the choice I did. As an ultimate explanation of why we chose to act on our desire for a raspberry flavor, we are comfortable saying, "I just chose it." By contrast, it sounds strange to say, "My desire for the raspberry taste caused me to choose the raspberry doughnut; thus, I could choose no other."

But the problem with agent causality is that it doesn't get the libertarian as far as he needs to go. While agent causality may provide a basis for saying that the person is the cause of the choice, it is not clear that it provides a basis for saying that the person is the cause of the choice in a morally significant way. If the choice flows from the person but is not otherwise causally connected to anything about the person, it is hard to see that agent causality has made of the person anything more than a random choice generator. And if the person's making a choice is a random or chance event, then it is hard to see how the choice is connected to the person in a way that would ground holding him responsible, for we don't want to hold someone responsible for what happens merely by chance. Famous twentieth-century logical positivist A. J. Ayer has put the matter thus:

> Either it is an accident that I choose to act as I do or it is not. If it is an accident, then it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise: and if it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise, it is surely irrational to hold me morally responsible for choosing as I did. But if it is not an accident that I choose to do one thing rather than another, then presumably there is some causal explanation of my choice: and in that case we are led back to determinism.[3]

Just as compatibilists devise various strategies to handle the concern that they render all human action unavoidable, so libertarians have adopted various strategies to deal with the worry that they render all human action random. Instead of considering these responses in more detail, however, we will now consider whether attempts to make sense of freedom are really warranted. Perhaps the reasonable thing to do at this point is abandon the view that human beings are free. Unless there is a very good reason to believe we are free, the most reasonable course might be to join the hard determinist in denying that there is any such thing. In the next section, we consider what most advocates of freedom take to be the strongest positive grounds for believing that human beings are free.

ARE WE FREE?

Given the difficulties involved in formulating a fully satisfactory account of freedom, one might wonder why so many philosophers continue to devote significant amounts of effort and energy to the attempt to find a satisfactory account. The answer, for many, is found in a commitment to honoring our moral practices. Since these practices require freedom, it must be the case that there is human freedom. This argument, sometimes called the "moral argument for freedom," can be stated quite simply, as in the following passage from the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274): "Man has free will: otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards and punishments would be in vain" (ST, I, 83, 1, resp.). A more elaborate version of this moral argument for freedom is found in the following selection from Peter van Inwagen's *An Essay on Free Will*.

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[3]A. J. Ayer, *Philosophical Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 275. Used by permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

Peter van Inwagen: The Moral Argument for Freedom

There is hardly anyone who has supposed that we could be held morally accountable for what we do if we have no choice about what we do. But if the reality of moral responsibility entails the existence of free will, then, I would suggest, we have a perfectly good, in fact, an unsurpassably good, reason for believing in free will. For surely we cannot doubt the reality of moral responsibility?

There are, perhaps, people who not only doubt but reject the thesis that *they* are morally responsible agents. (I am thinking of psychopaths. I say "perhaps" because it is not clear to me what goes on in the mind of, say, the man who rapes and murders a little girl and afterwards feels no remorse.) But few people if any will react to an act of gratuitous injury deliberately done them by a human being in the way that they would react if that same injury were caused by a bolt of lightning or a bough broken by the wind. When some *person* injures *us*—at least if we believe he knew what he was doing and that he could have helped doing it—we react in certain characteristically human ways: we blame, we remonstrate, we hate, we reflect on the futility of hate, we plan revenge, we remind ourselves that the desire for revenge is a desire to usurp God's prerogative. Which among these things we do will presumably be partly a function of our constitution and our education. That we shall do at least some one of them follows from our being human, if not simply from our being rational beings. And to react in any of these ways is to demonstrate more surely than any high-minded speech ever could that we believe in moral responsibility.

I have listened to philosophers who deny the existence of moral responsibility. I cannot take them seriously. I know a philosopher who has written a paper in which he denies the reality of moral responsibility. And yet this same philosopher, when certain of his books were stolen, said, "That was a *shoddy* thing to do!" But no one can consistently say that a certain act was a shoddy thing to do *and* say that its agent was not morally responsible when he performed it: those who are not morally responsible for what they do may perhaps deserve our pity; they certainly do not deserve our censure.

I don't think it is *impossible* for us to cease talking in ways that manifest a belief in moral responsibility. It would be merely very, very difficult. I ask you to try to imagine what it would he like never to make judgements like "What a perfectly despicable way for him to behave" or "You'd think a person with her advantages would know better than that" or "I can never think of what I did without feeling sick." If you try to imagine this, perhaps you will experience what I do when I try the experiment. I find that one difficulty I anticipate in giving up making such judgements is very much like a difficulty I should anticipate in giving up making judgements like "That car is dangerous because of its bad brakes" and "The mushrooms growing under that tree are poisonous." This difficulty arises from two facts: such judgements are often *right* and they are extremely important for getting along in the world. Think of some piece of behaviour you have witnessed that you really would call "perfectly despicable." Isn't that the right thing to call it? Doesn't it *describe* it? Isn't it just as "objective" a description (whatever that means) as "dangerous" or as "poisonous"?

Peter van Inwagen. *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 206–209.

Many philosophers, I suspect, will say that they use such words as these to describe people's behaviour, but that in doing so they are not ascribing to those people moral responsibility for that behaviour. This seems to me to be wrong. Suppose that there is a certain man who did a thing that led us to say, "That was a perfectly despicable thing for him to do." Suppose that we later discover that he did that thing shortly after he had been given, without his knowledge or consent, a drug that is known to alter human behaviour in radical and unpredictable ways. Suppose this discovery led us to decide that he had "not been responsible for what he was doing" at the time he performed the act. It seems to me that we could not then go on saying, "That was a perfectly despicable thing for him to do," not even if we qualified this assertion by adding, "though he wasn't responsible for his acts when he was doing it." That additional clause, in fact does not seem to me to be a coherent qualification of the original assertion (unless, perhaps, "That was a perfectly despicable thing for him to do" is taken to mean, "*Normally* what he did would be a perfectly despicable thing for someone to do"; but that is not the case we are considering). The reason is simple. To call an act "despicable" is to censure its agent for performing it, while to say of an agent that he was not responsible for what he was doing when he performed an act is to excuse him for performing it; and one cannot simultaneously excuse and censure.

We all, therefore, believe that people are sometimes morally responsible for what they do. We all believe that responsibility exists. And, I think, if we examine our convictions honestly and seriously and carefully, we shall discover that we cannot believe that this assent is merely something forced upon us by our nature and the nature of human social life, as our behavioural manifestations of assent to the proposition that we have free will are forced upon us by the sheer impossibility of a life without deliberation. I think that we shall discover that we cannot but view our belief in moral responsibility as a justified belief, a belief that is simply not open to reasonable doubt. I myself would go further: in my view, the proposition that often we are morally responsible for what we have done is something we all know to be true.

That we are convinced that we know something does not, of course, prove that we do know it or even that is true. But it *is* true that we are morally responsible, isn't it? And we *do* know it to he true, don't we?

If we do know that moral responsibility exists, then we should have no doubt about whether we have good reason to believe we have free will. It is this and only this, I think, that provides us with a reason for believing in free will. It may well be that, ironically enough, we believe that we are free because we have no choice about what we believe about this (owing to the necessity, for one's deliberations, of a belief in one's own free will). But this fact cannot be anyone's *reason* for believing in free will: at most it could be someone's excuse if he were charged with believing in free will without having any reason that supported his belief. If someone were asked to *defend* his belief in free will, he could not reply by saying that neither he nor anyone else had any choice about what he believed about free will. But it is as adequate a defence of the free-will thesis as has ever been given for any philosophical position to say, "Without free will, we should never be morally responsible for anything; and we are sometimes morally responsible."

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the obstacles a compatibilist faces in making sense of moral responsibility?
2. What are some of the obstacles a libertarian faces in making sense of moral responsibility?
3. Does a libertarian or a compatibilist have a harder time making sense of moral responsibility? Defend your answer.
4. Philosophers often distinguish between descriptive claims, which describe what is the case, and prescriptive claims, which prescribe what ought to be the case. The moral argument moves from a prescriptive claim, "people ought to be held morally accountable for some of their actions," to a descriptive claim, "some human actions are free." Is it legitimate to argue from a prescriptive premise to a descriptive conclusion? If so, can you think of other examples in which we legitimately do so.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN METAPHYSICS

In an age of science and technology, metaphysics has seemed to many to represent the worst aspects of philosophy—dogmatic, unbridled, and unverifiable speculation on some mysterious thing called *reality* underlying the ordinary physical space–time world of sense experience. In a practical sense, if philosophy is not to be tossed out of higher education completely (putting all philosophy teachers out of a job!), it has to appear more useful regarding the everyday world in which we live. For some, that means getting rid of its more speculative elements and concentrating on its more useful traits; in short, getting rid of metaphysics and developing more applied philosophy courses.

Some philosophers, such as the logical positivists, saw metaphysics as a bad habit to be overcome, a misuse of language that will disappear with proper linguistic care. On the other hand, in what might be called a neo-Kantian spirit, a descriptive metaphysics proposes to explore what things become through human classification. Our human world includes murder, art, and human races, for example, because we human beings classify what we experience into conceptual categories of murder, art, and black, brown, and white races. Similarly, phenomenologists analyze the essential aspects of human experience, such as how we experience something as a work of art, as opposed to a religious icon, or a useful tool, or a natural object. This sort of metaphysics concerns itself with the "what" of things—what a thing is, what we call it, how we see it and classify it, and the role it plays in our experience.

In Chapter 8, "Introduction to Metaphysics," two approaches to metaphysics were noted. The first, and certainly the more ancient, is more ambitious and seeks to develop a science of reality. It proposes a vocabulary with which to distinguish appearance from reality and seeks to give a coherent account of the most fundamental structure of things. The second kind of metaphysics, and certainly the most popular form in recent years, is more modest, seeking only to account for the most basic principles of the world as we perceive and describe it.

Although metaphysics in the first sense is less popular today, it has not disappeared. The twentieth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) offers a new metaphysical vocabulary consistent with the change in physics resulting from the onset of quantum mechanics. According to the new physics, the old conceptual model of reality that consisted of tiny things (atoms) moving about in space was inadequate. Instead, reality must be conceived of in terms of bundles of energy with some indeterminacy (the "swerve" of Epicurus?). With a new vocabulary that Whitehead thinks is neither materialistic nor idealistic, he rejects the notion of reality as a collection of unchanging and independent material objects. Instead, we should understand reality as a network of interdependent and dynamic entities that he calls *actual entities*. Chairs, tables, stones, and trees are actual entities. Thanks to quantum physics, we now know that these realities are dynamic collections of events: electrons hurling around, subatomic particles being thrown off, units of energy held together in dynamic tension. Consequently, reality should be understood as a dynamic world process, a theme reflected in Whitehead's major work, *Process and Reality*. This

is the world of quantum physics: a table is composed of cells, the cells of molecules, the molecules of atoms, and atoms of particles, all of which are in motion and in dynamic tension with everything else.

The full inventory of reality includes not only actual entities but also *creativity,* which advances reality to new possibilities, and *eternal objects,* the patterns and structures that permeate all reality. If you think you recognize a bit of Plato here, you are not wrong. Whitehead said that all philosophy is but a series of footnotes to Plato. Finally, there is God, whom Whitehead calls the everlasting actual entity. Reality, then, is not matter, nor is it composed of ideas; it is *process.* What this means, among other things, is that reality is constantly changing and achieving new possibilities.

Process thought, as it has come to be called, has been more readily embraced by theologians than by philosophers. In a point of view known as *process theology,* God is seen as the pull of the future and the world as an arena for the working out of God's purposes. Process thought has an explanation for evil: the world is not what it will be when God's purposes are fully realized. So the appropriate human response is to join with God in helping reduce evil and increase the amount of good in the world. Much of the application of Whitehead's metaphysics to religious thought is through the work of Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000) (*Reality as Social Process*) and his followers. It offers both an explanation for the problem of evil and a view of God as ultimate in goodness, not necessarily as ultimate in being.

The most prevalent form of metaphysical inquiry occurring today is of the second type mentioned earlier: an analysis of the most basic principles of the world as we experience it and as we give expression to that experience. A warning here: metaphysical research of this type has become highly technical, using the full range of analytic tools offered by symbolic logic. Its practice is not for beginners, and students new to philosophy may find themselves bewildered by the sheer complexity of this kind of metaphysical discourse. However, a few summary comments can at least provide some indication of the issues included in the scope of this metaphysical inquiry.

Consider references to immaterial objects. Often, when we talk about ordinary things, we seem to refer to immaterial entities that do not exist in space and time but that seem necessary for us to make sense of the world. For example, when we speak sentences, we can refer to their propositional content. So in addition to sentences, there are propositions. In addition to words, there are meanings. What are we talking about here? Also, when we talk about mathematical structures, laws of nature, social classes, castes, or nations, what are these entities? However we want to account for them, we can scarcely avoid trying to understand their role in speaking and thinking.

The philosopher Saul Kripke (1940–) (*Naming and Necessity*) is noted for his work on logic and language. He uses the technique of "possible worlds" analysis—a possible world being a world that differs in some degree from our actual world. Kripke, using modal logic, attempts to understand better the meaning of a necessary truth; for him it is a statement that is true in all possible worlds. One implication of Kripke's analysis is the separation of the *a priori* and necessary. Traditionally, philosophers have held that necessary statements ("two plus two equals four") are known *a priori*—that is, apart from experience. Contingent statements ("it is raining outside") are not necessary and are known *a posteriori*—that is, based on experience. Kripke argues that in a possible world, some necessary truths can be *a posteriori* and some contingent truths can be *a priori*. Truly necessary statements are those that are true in all possible worlds.

The British philosopher Peter F. Strawson (*Individuals*) could be described as following Kant's lead in understanding metaphysics as a description of the concepts used in our understanding of reality rather than offering an account of that reality itself. Fundamental for his analysis is the primacy of material objects and persons inhabiting material bodies. From particulars of this kind, we extrapolate our concepts to include other items such as events. Rejecting dualism, Strawson understood an individual person not to be a mind in a body or a body having mental properties but a psychophysical being. In this sense, persons occupy a distinctive place having both physical and psychological properties.

As metaphysical inquiry continues to develop, it encounters and has fruitful dialogue with those who investigate philosophy of mind with its corollary inquiries into artificial intelligence. Kant summed up all metaphysical inquiry into three topics: questions about God, questions about the world in general, and questions about the human soul or mind. Regardless of methods used by inquirers, these three questions still dominate metaphysics.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Aune, Bruce. *Metaphysics: The Elements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. Clearly written for university students, a development of Professor Aune's metaphysical speculations over many years.

Chisolm, Roderick M. *On Metaphysics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. A brief, clearly written overview by an outstanding American Philosopher.

Earman, John. *A Primer on Determinism*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1986.

Garcia, Jorge J. E. *Metaphysics and Its Task. The Search for the Categorical Foundation of Knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. Offers a systematic survey of the discipline and how it has survived the attacks of its critics.

Hamlyn, D. W. *Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. A defense of metaphysics interpreted in an Aristotelian form of what Hamlyn calls "ontology."

Kane, Robert. *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Körner, Stephan. *Metaphysics: Its Structure and Function*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. A defense of metaphysics, on Kantian grounds, as necessary to most fields of thought.

Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Strawson, P. F. *Individuals,* London: Methuen, 1959.

Sprague, Elmer. *Metaphysical Thinking*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. Clear, short, general introduction to metaphysics.

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CHAPTER 14

Introduction to Epistemology

The *theory of knowledge,* or, as it is sometimes called, *epistemology,* is a branch of philosophy which investigates the nature, scope, and quality of human knowledge. What is knowledge? How extensive is it? How good is it? Just as metaphysics tries to discover what is real and how reality differs from appearance, so the theory of knowledge tries to discover what knowledge is and how it differs from mere opinion. That is, epistemology tries to establish normative criteria for what is to count as knowledge. Epistemology is obviously an important topic, since knowledge is so important in human life. Human beings are capable of holding and expressing a wide range of opinions on a variety of topics. But although we may be said to possess genuine knowledge in some of these cases, there are many others in which we do *not* know, but only *think* we know. And the most obvious difference between the two clearly indicates why knowledge is so important.

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KNOWLEDGE, OPINION, AND BELIEF

When you know something you not only have an opinion, but that opinion is true; that is, it coincides with reality. When you merely believe something but do not know it, then it is possible that what you believe is not true but only exists in your mind. This means that when we think something is the case but do not know it we are more liable to be mistaken. And herein lies the practical importance of knowledge. The whole point of a great deal of our thinking is to correctly adjust our beliefs to the way things actually are in the world. It is essential to our very survival that we be able to do so at least most of the time. For these reasons it is clear why knowledge is preferable to mere opinion. The very word *knowledge* has an honorific quality, connoting a positive value. Knowledge is, in short, a much more reliable guide to action than mere belief or opinion.

Now we see the significance of the philosopher's question, "What is the difference between knowledge and mere opinion?" Because knowledge is so important and desirable in human affairs, it would be very good if we had a reliable way of picking it out from the larger class of beliefs.

This is going to be a difficult thing to do, however, as we will see. Let us examine the problem to see what solving it involves. At first glance it seems fair to say that although everything we know is also believed, not everything we believe is known. Why, what is the difference?

As we saw in Part 2, "Thinking About Thinking (Logic)," in discussing the traditional analysis of knowledge in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, it seems intuitively clear that where we believe something which we do not know, that belief could be false, whereas when we truly know something it could not be false. Here we see the intimate connection between problems of knowledge and considerations of truth and falsity. Can a person believe something which is false? Sure. But can a person *know* something that is false? Here we come back to the honorific or complimentary character of the word *knowledge*. When you say that someone knows something, you are paying that person a compliment, that what the person believes is true. But what if we later discover that what we said this person knew turned out to be false after all? We would retract our claim that we were dealing with knowledge and substitute the more evaluatively neutral claim that the person merely believed or thought it was true.

KNOWLEDGE AND CERTAINTY

Part of the complimentary flavor of the word *knowledge* lies in the fact that those who know something have a right to a certain confidence in their belief as a true and reliable guide to action. Knowledge implies being sure, being certain. Would you say you knew something if you were not sure about it? "I know he will be here, but I am not sure." This sounds odd. On the other hand, there is no problem saying you believe something but are not sure. "I think so, but I'm not sure." Might not this provide us with the criterion we are seeking? But there are problems with this, too. If I merely believe something I will have some hesitancy, some doubt about it, and if I claim to know something I will feel much more certain and confident about it. But will this criterion always and necessarily work? Do people always know what they feel confident about? No. People we judge to be fanatics are precisely those we feel have maximum feelings of certitude and minimum information. I can, of course, always tell how certain I feel about a given opinion, but that will do me little good in my theory of knowledge unless that feeling of certainty is firmly linked with genuine knowledge of the truth, which, unfortunately, is not the case. We shall return to the relationship of knowledge and certainty in a moment, but first let us examine one final possible criterion for distinguishing knowledge from belief.

Part of our greater confidence in the truth of what we claim to know arises from the fact that we have better *reasons* for believing our information to be true. We examined this position briefly in Chapter 5 on reasoning. Sometimes we deny that a person knows something even though it turns out to be true, simply because the person's reasons for believing it were not good enough. In other words, part of our compliment in saying that someone knows something is that the person has good grounds for confidence in its truth. And this criterion, though perhaps not perfect, as we shall see, does provide a better practical guide than either truth or certainty. The other criteria do not really tell us what to do; this one does. The human dilemma as regards knowledge is that we cannot easily distinguish in our own case what is true from what we merely think is true, and we cannot place too much confidence simply in our own feelings of certainty. But what we *can* do is get ourselves into the best possible position to know—weighing all the evidence, examining all the arguments, pro and con. The result of this is not necessarily or absolutely the truth, but what is most probable and therefore the likeliest to be true. And this, short of our becoming gods, may be all that humans are capable of.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

Perhaps the goals and concerns of epistemology will be clearer if we contrast them with the goals and concerns of psychology. Both epistemology and psychology are concerned with human consciousness, and it might at first appear that epistemology is only trying to do what psychology is in a position to do better. But there is a fundamental difference between the two approaches. Psychology is an attempt to *describe* the way the human mind actually operates; epistemology seeks to establish normative criteria for how we *ought* to think. In its more experimental mode, psychology centers its attention on the physiological aspects of the knowing process on the brain, stimulus–response mechanisms, the nervous system, and so forth. As a descriptive enterprise, it is not the purpose of psychology to delve into the intricacies of separating opinion from knowledge and belief from opinion. Whereas the epistemologist is concerned with standards of acceptability in terms of which to judge beliefs, the psychologist is mainly interested in understanding the *how* of human thinking.

In short, epistemology is concerned with discovering a sure guide to truth. But what *is* truth? This is an old question, the question Pilate asked Jesus. When we look at the kinds of answers given by philosophers, they all gravitate toward three principal theories: (1) the correspondence theory of truth, (2) the coherence theory, and (3) the pragmatic test of truth. The difference between them is basically this: the correspondence theory holds that our thoughts are true if they *correspond* to reality. This theory works best if you hold to a theory of knowledge (such as the British empiricists did) that thoughts and ideas are copies of physical objects mediated by the senses. The correspondence theory works pretty well as long as you are dealing with physical objects, less well when dealing with nonphysical objects—moods, emotions, hopes, ambitions, fears, moral truths, arithmetic, and so on. The coherence theory, in contrast to the correspondence theory, holds that we are entitled to accept the truth of a statement if it is *coherent* with our other accepted items of belief and knowledge. For example, astronomers believed in the existence of the planet Pluto before they were able to see it with telescopes; they predicted its existence from the behavior of the other planets whose orbits were skewed as they would be if there existed a ninth planet. Moreover, there was nothing about believing in the existence of another planet that in any way threatened existing views about the solar system. Adding another planet is coherent with our established beliefs, and it causes the minimum of alteration in these beliefs. (More recently, however, Pluto has been demoted from its status as a "planet," having failed to meet the definition of a planet.) Suppose, though, we do not have empirical evidence for the truth of a new claim, but it is coherent with our other established beliefs. How do we determine whether to accept or reject it? Here the *pragmatic test* is suggested by some philosophers as a way of judging hypotheses proposed to us for acceptance. If given two hypotheses, and no other way of determining the truth or falsity of them, ask yourself what the practical difference would be if you accepted one and rejected the other. If you have no other basis on which to decide, make your choice on the basis of this practical difference. If there is no practical difference between them, then no matter of truth is really at stake. A difference that makes no difference is really no difference at all.

Philosophers who argue for each of these views of truth are usually pretty one-sided in their defense of their view. A defender of a correspondence theory of truth will want you to believe that all matters of truth must be so decided. The defender of a coherence

theory will similarly try to convince you that the coherence test is the only satisfactory way of resolving doubt. In practice, we probably use all three methods of judging the truth of claims presented to us. We accept some claims because there is a correspondence with empirical data. Others we adopt because they fit in well with our other well-established views. Still other matters must be decided by appealing to the practical difference resulting from our acceptance or rejection of the truth claim or item presented to us for belief.

Epistemology is also important in philosophy because it serves as a bridge to other philosophical issues. If we are concerned with knowing reality, we must also take up the question of what is real (metaphysics). A consideration of how we should judge statements as to their truth value leads us directly into a consideration of principles of reasoning (logic). And when we attempt to relate matters of belief and knowledge to choices of action, we are led immediately into a discussion of principles that should guide our actions (ethics).

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Having looked at the area of epistemology in general, in the remaining chapters of this part we shall examine in detail one very important problem in epistemology, the source of our knowledge. Is knowledge based entirely on reason as the rationalists maintain, or must it be, as the empiricists allege, grounded in direct sense experience of the world. Or perhaps, it requires some combination of the two?

The core belief of rationalism is that *a priori* knowledge of reality is possible and provides our deepest insight into the nature of what exists, where *a priori* knowledge is knowledge that is not ultimately grounded in or derived from sense experience. The core belief of empiricism is that knowledge of reality is entirely or predominantly *a posteriori,* where *a posteriori* knowledge is knowledge that is ultimately grounded in or derived from sense experience. They are both very old traditions in epistemology. Rationalism can trace its roots back at least as far as Plato (428/7–348/7 B.C.E.) and empiricism back at least as far as Plato's great student, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.).

Plato believed that there are truths we know that are certain and unchanging. Mathematical truths (such as $2 + 3 = 5$) and moral truths (such as "it is wrong to slander a friend for trivial personal gain") are examples of truths which Plato believed ought to be accepted by all people at all times. We need not worry that either of these sorts of truths might some day cease to be the case. Certain groups of people might, of course, deny them, but this would just mean that those individuals believed what is false and not that the truths themselves had changed. Because knowledge of these truths is knowledge of what is certain and unchanging, Plato believed that this knowledge could not ultimately be derived from sense experience. Since the senses reveal to us only the ongoing flux of sensory experiences, they cannot be the source of knowledge that is certain and unchanging. Instead, Plato believed that such knowledge was acquired ultimately through the use of *a priori* reason alone. We may recall from Chapter 9 that Plato was so impressed by the certainty and immutability of what we know that much of his metaphysics was motivated by an interest in providing a satisfactory foundation for this knowledge. The foundation for such knowledge, he believed, could not be in the changing material world that our senses reveal to us. What is changeable cannot provide a foundation for what is unchanging. In order to provide a foundation for certain and unchanging truth, Plato posited the existence of the Forms; perfect, immaterial and unchanging archetypes that material

and sensory objects of this world imperfectly resemble. Of course, having posited these Forms, Plato had to explain how we could access them to gain knowledge. After all, we currently find ourselves in a sensory, material world, and not an immaterial realm of perfect and unchanging archetypes. To handle this question, Plato supposed that the human soul existed apart from the body in a previous life and that it then acquired all knowledge by contemplating the Forms directly. When the soul was placed in the body upon birth, however, it was traumatized and forgot (at least temporarily) the knowledge it had acquired. Learning in this life, according to Plato, was thus a process of using reason to recall the knowledge of the forms that had really been acquired in a previous existence when the soul was not connected to a body. This account of what learning in this life involves has come to be known as Plato's theory of recollection.

There is much to be said for the epistemology that Plato built to account for our having knowledge of certain and unchanging truths. Even though they might not accept all the details of Plato's account—such as the theory of recollection—there are many philosophers working today who would consider themselves Platonists at least with respect to believing in the possibility and importance of *a priori* knowledge. Still, Plato's rationalism proved too fanciful for many philosophers. His epistemology, such philosophers would say, overcomplicates matters. If we had to start with what we know first and most immediately, would we not start by noting that we exist in a physical world and that our senses provide us information about this world? Even though our senses make mistakes and provide us with an ever-changing array of sensory experiences, we need not despair that they can be a source of knowledge about reality. We can scrutinize and reflect on our sensory experiences to recognize patterns in them and thereby achieve knowledge of the material world. Aristotle was of this mind. Unlike his teacher Plato, he advocated an epistemology that emphasized the significance of *a posteriori* knowledge of the world and thus was largely empiricist in orientation. Much of Aristotle's work was devoted to acquiring knowledge of the natural world by critically reflecting on the information provided by sense experience. Indeed, many contemporary natural sciences, such as physics and biology, trace their origins to various systematic treatises that Aristotle wrote on these subjects. Like Plato's rationalism, Aristotle's empiricist epistemology continues to have advocates today.

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In the next two chapters, we will consider empiricism and rationalism in greater depth by looking in detail at two of the most influential proponents of these epistemological traditions. First, in Chapter 15, we will consider the rationalism advocated by the seventeenth-century French philosopher, René Descartes. Then, in Chapter 16, we will look at the empiricism of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, David Hume. Having looked in depth at a rationalist and an empiricist from the modern period, in Chapter 17 we will consider an attempt to synthesize the rationalist and empiricist traditions by the eighteenth-century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Finally, in Chapter 18, we will consider an epistemological tradition that adopts a very different approach to epistemological questions than Descartes, Hume, or Kant. Though these three disagree about how we ultimately acquire knowledge that accurately represents reality, they do share the view that the essence of knowledge is found in the presentation of accurate information about the nature of reality. The pragmatists, however, adopt a very different tack. In their view, the fundamental aim of knowledge is the promotion of effective action. The issue of how faithfully our beliefs capture the true nature of reality is thus subordinated to the question of whether the beliefs promote practical success.

Questions for Discussion

1. If you had to characterize your own epistemological views, would you say you accept a correspondence, coherence, or pragmatic theory? Why?
2. In your own words, characterize the difference between *knowledge, belief,* and *opinion.*
3. From your own experience, give an example of how your thinking about a particular issue moved from error to truth. What considerations supported this change? Can you formulate them precisely?
4. What is appealing about giving the senses a primary role in knowledge? What are the limitations of this approach?
5. What is appealing about giving reason a primary role in knowledge? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

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3. How does Aristotle refute Plato's rationalism?

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René Descartes: The Quest for Certainty

The need to achieve certainty was the principal philosophic concern of René Descartes. During the seventeenth century, one could find philosophers arguing for a certain point of view, convinced of their correctness, even though one could also find other philosophers arguing for the exact opposite view. In contrast to the skeptical disrepute into which philosophy had fallen, mathematics seemed to be a model of elegance and certainty. The proofs of mathematicians could be checked by other mathematicians, and universal agreement could be claimed for their conclusions. No similar state of affairs could be claimed for philosophy. Confusion seemed to reign everywhere, with philosophers divided over all manner of issues, not the least of which was the proper method philosophy ought to pursue in its quest for knowledge. It seemed to Descartes that perhaps by imitating the methods of mathematics, philosophy could be reconstituted on better foundations and so find the certainty that had thus far proved to be so elusive.

SEARCH FOR A METHOD

Descartes was not the first philosopher to be enticed by the rigors of mathematics as a model for philosophical inquiry. In ancient Greece Plato had even prescribed a stiff program of mathematical studies as preparation for students who wished to engage in philosophical inquiry. After Descartes, the Dutch philosopher Benedict Spinoza and the German Wilhelm Leibniz had likewise attempted to mathematize philosophy. In the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl and Bertrand Russell were attracted to mathematics as a possible model for certain kinds of philosophical inquiry. But Descartes was the first philosopher in modern times to approach the epistemological problem with the methods of mathematical inquiry.

What is the mathematical method? Think of geometry as a model. There you begin with axioms. To these are added postulates, and on the basis of those first principles of the system you are able to derive theorems for all the things you wish to prove. Notice that in a deductive system like mathematics the certainty of the conclusions depends on the certainty of the initial assumptions, which is the reason that geometry begins with axioms and postulates that are claimed to be, in some sense, self-evident. Axioms such as "the shortest distance between two points is a straight line" cannot really be proved. Without something that is given as self-evident, as too plain to be doubted, there could be no deductive science like geometry. What we need in philosophy, Descartes thought, was a similar self-evident axiom on which to build—or better, rebuild—the whole of philosophy. Such an axiomatic

RENÉ DESCARTES (1596–1650): French philosopher and mathematician, regarded by many as the thinker who signaled the end of medieval philosophy and the rise of modern philosophical themes. His two most famous philosophical words are *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

beginning point would have to be self-evident at least in the sense of being beyond the possibility of skeptical doubt.

Is such a self-evident point of departure possible? Descartes found the search for the elusive point of departure all important, especially so in view of the skeptical attacks of the enemies of philosophy. Driven largely

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Montaigne on Skepticism

Let us leave aside that infinite confusion of opinions that is seen among the philosophers themselves, and that perpetual and universal debate over the knowledge of things. For this is a very true presupposition: that men are in agreement about nothing. I mean even the most gifted and ablest scholars never agree, not even that the sky is over our head. For those who doubt everything also doubt that, and those who deny that we can understand anything say that we have not understood that the sky is over our head, and these two views are incomparably the strongest in number.

Besides this infinite diversity and division, it is easy to see by the confusion that our judgment gives to our own selves, and the uncertainty that each man feels within himself that it has a very insecure seat. How diversely we judge things! How many times we change our notions! What I hold today and what I believe; I hold and believe it with all my belief; all my tools and all my springs of action grip this opinion and sponsor it for me in every way they can. I could not embrace or preserve any truth with more strength than this one. I belong to it entirely, I belong to it truly. But has it not happened to me, not once, but a hundred times, a thousand times, and every day, to have embraced with these same instruments, in this same condition, something else that I have since judged false?

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Michel de Montaigne
from *Apology for Raimond Sebond*

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by the work of the great French philosopher and essayist, Michel de Montaigne, skepticism experienced a revival in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century France. It was, thus, a real worry for Descartes. In what was a brilliant insight into the nature of the problem, Descartes decided to use skepticism as a means of overturning skepticism. Like the enemies of philosophy, Descartes would doubt; in fact he would out-doubt the skeptics by doubting everything he had ever believed until (he hoped) he arrived at something that could not be doubted. For this reason, Descartes' method is often called the method of systematic doubt. It is a method of doubt in that he resolves to accept as true only those beliefs he can find no reason to doubt. It is systematic in that he subjects to doubt the foundations of his former belief. There is no need for him to search for a reason to call *each* of his beliefs into doubt individually. If a building inspector surveys the foundation of a building and finds the foundation seriously unstable, he need not do any more inspecting to know that all the floors resting upon the foundation are likewise unstable. In the same way, Descartes proceeds by subjecting to doubt the foundations of his former beliefs. If he can find a reason to doubt the foundations of these beliefs, he will not have to consider them one by one in order to know that he has a reason to doubt each of them.

SUBJECTING THE FOUNDATIONS TO DOUBT

Descartes describes the process whereby he discovered the grounds for certainty in a series of essays entitled *Meditations*. In the following selection from the First Meditation, Descartes subjects to doubt the two foundations of his former beliefs: sense experience and intellectual intuition. He has relied on sense experience in acquiring beliefs about the external, material world, and he has relied on intellectual intuition (the act of forming beliefs through the light of reason alone) in acquiring beliefs in subjects like logic and mathematics. He proceeds by exploring various possible bases for subjecting these foundations to doubt. The American thinker C. S. Peirce argued that Descartes' method was illegitimate, since he did not really doubt all the things he mentions. But this criticism misses the point: Descartes was using the method of systematic doubt as a way of overcoming doubt. Whether he really doubted in his heart all the things he mentions is irrelevant. He could not accept anything for certain unless he had dispelled all bases for doubt. So what we encounter in his first meditation and the opening pages of the second meditation is a list of all plausible reasons for doubting the testimony of our senses.

Notice as you read that Descartes is allowing fantastic, extremely far-fetched possibilities—he calls them "hyperbolic" at one point—as legitimate reasons to doubt the foundations of his former beliefs. For instance, the main reasons he gives to doubt the reliability of sense experience as a source of information about the external world is the possibility that all of these experiences might be occurring within an elaborate dream. And perhaps even more outlandish than the dreamer hypothesis is his calling into doubt the truths of mathematics because there might be a deceiving God or evil demon who is using its power to bring it about that he is deceived even when forming beliefs on very simple matters—such as $5 + 7 = 12$—by the light of reason alone. These are certainly far-fetched grounds of doubt; however, it is by allowing in such extravagant reasons to doubt that Descartes plans to turn skepticism against itself. If he can find a belief that is immune even to such outlandish reasons to doubt, he will be confident that the belief will be immune to all future skeptical challenges, and he will have a point of certainty on which to construct his philosophy.

At this point we will let Descartes speak for himself as he describes the beginning of this search that he refers to as the "arduous" quest for certainty.

René Descartes: Meditations

First Meditation—Concerning Things That Can Be Doubted

There is no novelty to me in the reflection that, from my earliest years, I have accepted many false opinions as true; and that what I have concluded from such badly assured premises could not but be highly doubtful and uncertain. From the time that I first recognized this fact, I have realized that if I wished to have any firm and constant knowledge in the sciences, I would have to undertake, once and for all, to set aside all the opinions which I had previously accepted among my beliefs and start again from the very beginning . . . . I will therefore make a serious and unimpeded effort to destroy generally all my former opinions. In order to do this, however, it will not be necessary to show that they are all false, a task which I might never be able to complete, because, since reason already convinces me that I should abstain from the belief in things which are not entirely certain and indubitable no less carefully than from the belief in those which appear to me to be manifestly false, it will be enough to make me reject them all if I can find in each some ground for doubt. And for that it will not be necessary for me to examine each one in particular, which would be an infinite labor, but since the destruction of the foundation necessarily involves the collapse of all the rest of the edifice, I shall first attack the principles upon which all my former opinions were founded.

Everything which I have thus far accepted as entirely true (and assured) has been acquired from the senses or by means of the senses. But I have learned by experience that these senses sometimes mislead me and it is prudent never to trust wholly those things which have once deceived us.

But it is possible that, even though the senses occasionally deceive us about things which are barely perceptible and very far away, there are many other things which we cannot reasonably doubt, even though we know them through the senses—as, for example, that I am here, seated by the fire, wearing a (winter) dressing gown, holding this paper in my hands, and other things of this nature. And how could I deny that these hands and this body are mine, unless I am to compare myself with certain lunatics whose brain is so troubled and befogged by the black vapors of the bile that they continually affirm that they are kings while they are paupers, that they are clothed in [gold and] purple while they are naked; or imagine (that their head is made of clay, or) that they are gourds, or that their body is glass? [But this is ridiculous;] such men are fools, and I would be no less insane than they if I followed their example.

Nevertheless, I must remember that I am a man, and that consequently I am accustomed to sleep and in my dreams to imagine the same things that lunatics imagine when awake, or sometimes things which are even less plausible.

How many times has it occurred that (the quiet of) the night made me dream (of my usual habits): that I was here, clothed (in a dressing gown), and sitting by the fire, although I was in fact lying undressed in bed! It seems apparent to me now, that I am not looking at this paper with my eyes closed, that this head that I shake is not drugged with sleep, that it is with design and deliberate intent that I stretch out this hand and perceive it. What happens in sleep seems not at all as clear and as distinct as all this. But I am speaking as though I never recall having been misled, while asleep, by similar illusions! When I consider these matters carefully, I realize so clearly that there are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep that I am quite astonished, and my bewilderment is such that it is almost able to convince me that I am sleeping.

So let us suppose now that we are asleep and that all these details, such as opening the eyes, shaking the head, extending the hands, and similar things, are merely illusions and let us think that perhaps our hands and our whole body are not such as we see them. Nevertheless, . . . even if these types of things—namely, [a body,] eyes, head, hands, and other similar things—could be imaginary, nevertheless, we are bound to confess that there are some other still more simple and universal concepts which are true [and existent], from the mixture of which, neither more nor less than in the case of the mixture of real colors, all these images of things are formed in our minds, whether they are true [and real] or imaginary [and fantastic].

Of this class of entities is corporeal nature in general and its extension, including the shape of extended things, their quantity, or size and number, and also the place where they are, the time that measures their duration, and so forth. That is why we will perhaps not be reasoning badly if we conclude that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all the other sciences which follow from the consideration of composite entities are very dubious [and uncertain], whereas arithmetic, geometry, and the other sciences of this nature, which treat only of very simple and general things without concerning themselves as to whether they occur in nature or not, contain some element of certainty and sureness. For whether I am awake or whether I am asleep, two and three together will always make the number five, and the square will never have more than four sides; and it does not seem possible that truths [so clear and] so apparent can ever be suspected of any falsity [or uncertainty].

Nevertheless, I have long held the belief that there is a God who can do anything, by whom I have been created and made what I am. But how can I be sure but that he has brought it to pass that there is no earth, no sky, no extended bodies, no shape, no size, no place, and that nevertheless I have the impressions of all these things [and cannot imagine that things might be other than] as I now see them? And furthermore, just as I sometimes judge that others are mistaken about those things which they think they know best, how can I be sure but that [God has brought it about that] I am always mistaken when I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or when I judge of something else even easier, if I can imagine anything easier than that?

I am at last constrained to admit that there is nothing in what I formerly believed to be true which I cannot somehow doubt, and this not for lack of

thought and attention, but for weighty and well-considered reasons. Thus I find that, in the future, I should [withhold and suspend my judgment from these matters, and] guard myself no less carefully from believing them than I should from believing what is manifestly false if I wish to find any certain and assured knowledge [in the sciences].

I will therefore suppose that, not [a true] God, is the supreme source of truth, but a certain evil spirit, not less clever and deceitful than powerful, has bent all his efforts to deceiving me. I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds and all other objective things [that we see] are nothing but illusions and dreams that he has used to trick my credulity. I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing that I have all these things. I will remain resolutely attached to this hypothesis; and if I cannot attain the knowledge of any truth by this method, at any rate [it is in my power to suspend my judgment. That is why] I shall take great care not to accept any falsity among my beliefs and shall prepare my mind so well for all the ruses of this great deceiver that, however powerful and artful he may be, he will never be able to mislead me in anything

COGITO ERGO SUM

If we are to achieve certainty, we must be able to establish something that cannot be doubted. It next occurs to Descartes that the act of doubting itself shows us the way. Doubting is a form of mental activity, a type of thinking. Even if we are confused about what we are, where we are, or the nature of the world that surrounds us, we cannot doubt that we are a thinking, feeling, willing, doubting being. All these forms of mental activity are indubitable. Even if we are deceived in dreams, by mental disorders, or even by a powerful but evil demon, the one thing of which I can never be deceived is that there is an I, an ego that is being deceived. That I think (in the broadest sense of the term) is a certainty of which I cannot be in error. From the fact that I think I can conclude that I exist. Here is the indubitable, axiomatic truth: *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." Nothing can cause us to deny the truth of this, and *it is true every time we think it*.

Notice that in the process of attempting to discover an indubitable truth on which he could base his rebuilding of philosophy, Descartes never appeals to the senses. The senses too often deceive us. Descartes' standard for proof is rational and deductive. Only if we can discover an argument through the power of reason alone do we have a basis for accepting anything. So far this approach leads Descartes to the first truth—*cogito ergo sum*—which, while perhaps certain, is also empty. All we can know at this point in our investigation is the existence of the thinking self. We do not know if there exists anything else to think about—including whether the thinking thing is or is associated with a body—since we have already discarded the testimony of the senses as unreliable. It may be that the meditator is nothing more than an immaterial mind that thinks; nonetheless, it is certain that he is at least a thing that thinks because this is necessary for even being deceived. In the following selection from the Second Meditation, we find Descartes' formulation of this famous argument.

Watch the **podcast:** *A. C. Grayling on Descartes' Cogito* on **MySearchLab.com**

Second Meditation—Of the Nature of the Human Mind, and That It Is More Easily Known Than the Body

Yesterday's Meditation has filled my mind with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power to forget them. Nor do I yet see how I will be able to resolve them; I feel as though I were suddenly thrown into deep water, being so disconcerted that I can neither plant my feet on the bottom nor swim on the surface. I shall nevertheless make every effort to conform precisely to the plan commenced yesterday and put aside every belief in which I could imagine the least doubt, just as though I knew that it was absolutely false. And I shall continue in this manner until I have found something certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned with certainty that there is nothing certain in this world. Archimedes, to move the earth from its orbit and place it in a new position, demanded nothing more than a fixed and immovable fulcrum; in a similar manner I shall have the right to entertain high hopes if I am fortunate enough to find a single truth which is certain and indubitable.

I suppose, accordingly, that everything that I see is false; I convince myself that nothing has ever existed of all that my deceitful memory recalls to me. I think that I have no senses, and I believe that body, shape, extension, motion, and location are merely inventions of my mind. What then could still be thought true? Perhaps nothing else, unless it is that there is nothing certain in the world.

But how do I know that there is not some entity, of a different nature from what I have just judged uncertain, of which there cannot be the least doubt? Is there not some God or some other power who gives me those thoughts? But I need not think this to be true, for possibly I am able to produce them myself. Then, at the very least, am I not an entity myself? But I have already denied that I had any senses or any body. However, at this point I hesitate, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent upon the body and the senses that I could not exist without them? I have just convinced myself that nothing whatsoever existed in the world, that there was no sky, no earth, no minds, and no bodies, have I not thereby convinced myself that I did not exist? Not at all; without doubt I existed if I was convinced [or even if I thought anything]. Even though there may be a deceiver of some sort, very powerful and very tricky, who bends all his efforts to keep me perpetually deceived, there can be no slightest doubt that I exist, since he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never make me be nothing as long as I think that I am something. Thus, after having thought well on this matter, and after examining all things with care, I must finally conclude and maintain that this proposition: *I am, I exist,* is necessarily true every time that I pronounce it or conceive it in my mind.

But I do not yet know sufficiently clearly what I am, I who am sure that I exist. So I must henceforth take very great care that I do not incautiously mistake some other thing for myself, and so make an error even in that knowledge which I maintain to be more certain and more evident than all other knowledge [that I previously had]. That is why I shall now consider once more what I thought myself to be before I began these last deliberations. Of my former opinions I shall reject all that are rendered even slightly doubtful by the arguments that I have just now offered, so that there will remain just that part alone which is entirely certain and indubitable.

What then have I previously believed myself to be? Clearly, I believed that I was a man. But what is a man? . . . I shall rather pause here to consider the ideas which previously arose naturally and of themselves in my mind whenever I considered what I was. I thought of myself first as having a face, hands, arms, and all this mechanism composed of (bone and flesh and members), just as it appears in a corpse, and which I designated by the name of "body." In addition, I thought of the fact that I consumed nourishment, that I walked, that I perceived and thought, and I ascribed all these actions to the soul. . . .

But I, what am I, on the basis of the present hypothesis that there is a certain spirit who is extremely powerful and, if I may dare to say so, malicious [and tricky], and who uses all his abilities and efforts in order to deceive me? Can I be sure that I possess the smallest fraction of all those characteristics which I have just now said belonged to the nature of body? I pause to consider this attentively. I pass and re-pass in review in my mind each one of all these things—it is not necessary to pause to take the time to list them—and I do not find any one of them which I can pronounce to be part of me. Is it characteristic of me to consume nourishment and to walk? But if it is true that I do not have a body, these also are nothing but figments of the imagination. To perceive? But once more, I cannot perceive without the body, except in the sense that I have thought I perceived various things during sleep, which I recognized upon waking not to have been really perceived. To think? Here I find the answer. Thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone is inseparable from my nature.

I am, I exist—that is certain, but for how long do I exist? For as long as I think, for it might perhaps happen, if I totally ceased thinking, that I would at the same time completely cease to be. I am now admitting nothing except what is necessarily true. I am therefore, to speak precisely, only a thinking being, that is to say, a mind, an understanding, or a reasoning being, which are terms whose meaning was previously unknown to me.

I am something real and really existing, but what thing am I? I have already given the answer: a thing which thinks. . . . A thinking being. What is a thinking being? It is a being which doubts, which understands, [which conceives,] which affirms, which denies, which wills, which rejects, which imagines also, and which perceives. . . . It is certainly not a trivial matter if all these things belong to my nature. But why should they not belong to it? Am I not that same person who now doubts almost everything, who nevertheless understands [and conceives] certain things, who [is sure of and] affirms the truth of this one thing alone, who denies all the others, who wills and desires to know more about them, who rejects error, who imagines many things, sometimes even against my will, and who also perceives many things, as though the medium of (the senses) [or the organs of the body]? Is there anything in all that which is not just as true as it is certain that I am and that I exist, even though I were always asleep and though the one who created me directed all his efforts to deluding me? And is there any one of these attributes which can be distinguished from my thinking or which can be said to be separable from my nature? For it is so obvious that it is I who doubt, understand, and desire, that nothing could be added to make it more evident. And I am also certainly the same one who imagines, for once more, even though it could happen that the things I imagine are not true, nevertheless this

power of imagining cannot fail to be real and it is part of my thinking. Finally I am the same being which perceives—that is, which observes certain objects as though by means of the sense organs, because I do really see light, hear noises, feel heat. Will it be said that these appearances are false and that I am sleeping? [Let it be so yet at the very least] it is certain that it seems to me that I see light, hear noises, and feel heat. This much cannot be false, and it is this, properly considered, which in my nature is called perceiving and that, again speaking precisely, is nothing else but thinking.

GOD AS THE GUARANTOR OF CERTAINTY As we saw in the above reading, by the end of the Second Meditation, Descartes has defeated extreme skepticism by finding a belief that cannot be called into doubt. Even the most powerful skeptical hypothesis—that there might be a deceiving God—cannot render doubtful the meditator's belief that he exists as a thinking thing. Still, if this all that the meditator can know with certainty, Descartes' defeat of skepticism would be a hollow victory at best. His goal was to build an entire system of philosophy and science on a foundation of certainty. He does not want the scope of his knowledge confined within the prison of a lone meditator's mind. At this point in the *Meditations*, we can thus think of Descartes as intent on escaping this prison of his own mind. His challenge is to use the belief that he exists as a thinking thing and the ideas that he thinks about to fashion his escape into a wider epistemological world. It is this challenge that he takes up in the Third Meditation.

Descartes begins the task of extending his knowledge by asking what it is about the belief in his existence as a thinking thing that makes it certain. His initial answer is that he understands the belief clearly and distinctly; that is, he understands it with such precision by the mind's eye that he immediately grasps its truth through the light of reason alone. He understands it by an act of immediate intellectual intuition. With this answer in hand, he next considers whether this could be used to construct the following rule for extending his knowledge:

Whatever is understood clearly and distinctly is true.

If this rule is trustworthy, Descartes can begin using it to extend his knowledge beyond his own thoughts and his own existence as a thinking thing, for he can start compiling all propositions that he understands clearly and distinctly as things that he knows. In this, the rule may be the key that allows the meditator to escape from his epistemic imprisonment within himself. Clearly, if the rule can be trusted, it may be a powerful tool for the construction of Descartes' system and his full defeat of skepticism.

Before he can apply this rule, however, Descartes realizes that there is a serious problem he must overcome. To see the problem, ask yourself this question: other than the belief that you exist as a thinking thing, what might be some examples of beliefs that you would say you understand clearly and distinctly. That is, what are examples of beliefs that are understood—by the intellect and not the senses—with such vividness and immediacy that you are unable to withhold your assent as soon as you understand them? Probably, like Descartes, some of the first examples you thought of were basic truths of mathematics, such as "5 + 7 = 12" or "The sum of the interior angles of a triangle

equals the sum of two right angles." But here we must recall that in the First Meditation, Descartes was able to call such beliefs into doubt by supposing that there may be a deceiving God who brings it about that the meditator is systematically mistaken in his basic acts of intellectual intuition. Thus, Descartes reasons, before he can trust the truth rule and thus clear and distinct ideas generally, he must first prove that God exists and is not a deceiver. This task is the focus of the selection below from the Third Meditation. Before turning to this reading, however, it is important to understand two important points of background to the argument.

The first point of background is that Descartes, like Plato, believes that there are degrees of reality. The degree of a thing's reality, according to Descartes, is a direct function of the degree of its perfection. That is, the more perfect a thing is, the more real it is. So, for instance, Descartes would say that a dog is more real than a stone. Even though both are substances—things that exist without being mere modes (characteristics) of other things—the dog has the perfection of life which the stone lacks. A human being would be more real than both since a human being has reason (in addition to life) and thus has a higher degree of perfection than either the stone or the dog. A color, on the other hand, would have less reality than any of these three. The reason is that the stone, the dog and the human being are all finite substances; that is, things that exist without being mere characteristics of some other finite thing. Color, on the other hand, is what Descartes calls a "mode," a term he applies to that which can exist only as a characteristic of some other thing. For instance, one never encounters the color *red* on its own; rather, one always encounters red things such as red balls or red stones or red hair or red paint. The color red, thus, is a mere mode that must be a characteristic of some substance in order to exist. It thus has the imperfection of being radically dependent on other finite entities in this way and has, for this reason, a lesser degree of reality than the stone, dog or human being. The latter three are things that are independent of other finite things in the sense of not being mere characteristics of other finite things, and this metaphysical independence is viewed by Descartes as an important perfection.

The second point of background relevant to Descartes' proof for God's existence is a distinction he draws between "objective reality" and "formal reality." To understand this distinction, it is important that you forget what we typically mean by "objective" and "formal" and simply treat these as technical terms in Descartes' system. By "objective reality", Descartes means the degree of reality that a thing has in virtue of its representational content. By "formal reality" he means the reality that a thing actually has in its own right. The sketch below can help to illustrate the distinction.

If we ask what the objective reality of the sketch is, the answer would be "a flower." That's the representational content expressed by the sketch. But if we ask what the formal reality of the sketch is, the answer would be ink and paper. That's the reality that the sketch has in its own right. Were we to burn it, we would only be destroying ink and paper, but not a flower. To take another case, if we consider the statue, Michelangelo's "David", the objective reality would be a human male, and the formal reality would be the marble of which the statue is composed. In general, anything that has representational content–such as paintings, sculptures, books, and photos–has objective reality in addition to formal reality.

What's important about this distinction for Descartes' proof for God's existence is that a thinking thing's *ideas* have representational content and thus have both objective reality and formal reality. And when Descartes combines the fact that ideas have both
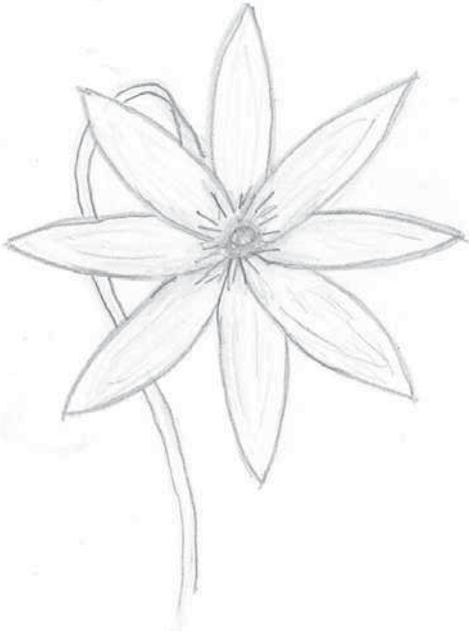
Who can straighten? –Helena Petrik. Used by permission of James Petrik/Helena Petrik.

objective and formal reality with his belief that there are degrees of reality, he is able to note that ideas have very different degrees of reality in terms of their objective reality. From the standpoint of their formal reality, he notes that all ideas are merely modes of consciousness—ideas being thought by a thinking thing—and thus have the same degree of reality when they are considered in their own right. (It is, in fact, the rather low degree of formal reality common to modes.) But from the standpoint of their objective reality—what they represent—ideas differ dramatically and thus have different degrees of objective reality. Consequently, if we consider an idea of the color red, an idea of a stone and an idea of a dog, Descartes can make the following two claims: (1) from the standpoint of their formal reality, they are all simply ideas (modes of thought) and thus have the same degree of reality; and (2) from the standpoint of their objective reality (what they represent), they have different degrees of reality, with the idea of the color red having the lowest degree of objective reality and the idea of the dog having the highest and the idea of the stone intermediate between them.

The belief that there are degrees of reality and the distinction between objective and formal reality are both very important for Descartes' attempt to prove God's existence. To see this, we can recall that the only thing he is sure of at the start of the Third Meditation is that he exists as a thinking thing. His challenge, as we noted above, is to draw upon his existence as a thinking thing and the ideas that he has as a thinking thing to show that something else exists in the universe other than the thinking thing and its ideas. By recognizing that ideas have both objective reality and formal reality and considering this fact in light of his belief that there are degrees of reality, Descartes introduces two metaphysical dimensions entirely within the realm of ideas that he then draws upon in his attempt to prove the existence of

something—a non-deceiving God, to be specific—in addition to the thinking thing
and its ideas. Exactly how this can be done, according to Descartes, is the subject of
the following selections from the Third Meditation.

Third Meditation—Of God: That He Exists

But there is still another path by which to seek if, among the things of which I pos-
sess ideas, there are some which exist outside of myself. If these ideas are consid-
ered only in so far as they are particular modes of thought, I do not recognize any
[difference or] inequality among them, and all of them appear to arise from myself
in the same fashion. But considering them as images, of which some represent one
thing and some another, it is evident that they differ greatly among themselves. For
those that represent substances are undoubtedly something, and contain in them-
selves, so to speak, more objective reality [or rather, participate by representation
in a higher degree of being or perfection,] than those that represent only modes or
accidents. Furthermore, that by which I conceive a supreme God, eternal, infinite,
[immutable,] omniscient, omnipotent, and the universal creator of all things that exist
outside of himself—that idea, I say, certainly contains in itself more objective reality
than do those by which finite substances are represented.

   Now it is obvious, according to the light of nature, that there must be at least
as much reality in the total efficient cause as in its effect, for whence can the effect
derive its reality, if not from its cause? And how could this cause communicate reality
to the effect, unless it possessed it in itself?

   And from this it follows, not only that something cannot be derived from noth-
ing, but also that the more perfect—that is to say, that which contains in itself more
reality—cannot be a consequence of [and dependent upon] the less perfect. This
truth is not only clear and evident in regard to the effects which have [what philoso-
phers call] actual or formal reality, but also in regard to the ideas where one consid-
ers only [what they call] objective reality. For example, the stone which has not yet
existed cannot now begin to be, unless it is produced by a being that possesses in it-
self formally or eminently all that enters into the composition of stone [that is, which
contains in itself the same things as, or others more excellent than, those which are
in stone]. Heat cannot be produced in a being that previously lacked it, unless by
something which is of an order [a degree, or a type] at least as perfect as heat, and
so forth. But still, in addition, the idea of heat or of stone cannot be in me, unless it
was put there by something which contains in itself at least as much reality as I con-
ceive there is in heat or stone; for even though that cause does not transfer to my
idea anything of its actual or formal reality, we must not therefore suppose that such
a cause is any less real, nor that the nature of an idea [since it is a work of the mind]
is such that it does not require any other formal reality than what it receives and bor-
rows from thought or mind, of which it is only a mode [that is, a way or manner of
thinking]. In order that an idea should contain one particular objective reality rather
than another, it should no doubt obtain it from some cause in which there is at least
as much formal reality as the idea contains objective reality. For if we suppose that

there is some element in an idea which is not present in its cause, this element must then arise from nothing. However imperfect may be this mode of being, by which a thing exists objectively or is represented by a concept of it in the understanding, certainly we can nevertheless say that this mode and manner of being is not nothing, and consequently the idea cannot derive its origin from nothingness.

Nor must I imagine that, since the reality that I consider to be in my ideas is only objective, the same reality need not be present formally [or actually] in the causes of these ideas, but that it is sufficient that it should be objectively present in them. For just as this manner of existing objectively belongs to ideas as part of their own nature, so also the manner or fashion of existing formally belongs to the causes of these ideas, or at the very least to their first and principal causes, as part of their own nature. And even though it might happen that one idea gives birth to another idea, that could continue indefinitely; but we must finally reach a first idea, the cause of which is like an archetype [or source], in which is contained formally [and in actuality] all the reality [or perfection] that is found only objectively or by representation in the ideas. Thus the light of nature makes me clearly recognize that ideas in me are like paintings or pictures, which can, truly, easily fall short of the perfection of the original from which they have been drawn, but which can never contain anything greater or more perfect. And the longer and the more carefully I consider all these arguments, the more clearly and distinctly I know that they are true.

What, then, shall I conclude from all this evidence? Clearly, that if the objective reality [or perfection] of some one of my ideas is such that I recognize clearly that this same reality [or perfection] does not exist in me, either formally or eminently, and consequently that I cannot myself be its cause, it necessarily follows that I am not alone in the world, but that there is also some other entity that exists and is the cause of this idea. On the other hand, if I find no such idea in myself, I will have no argument which can convince me and make me certain of the existence of any entity other than myself; for I have diligently searched for all such arguments and have been thus far unable to find any other.

Among all these ideas which exist in me, besides that which represents myself to myself, concerning which there can be no difficulty here, there is another which represents a God, others corporeal and inanimate things, others angels, others animals, and still others which represent men similar to myself. But as far as the ideas which represent other men, or animals, or angels are concerned, I can easily imagine that they could be formed by the [mixture and] combination of my other ideas, of myself, of corporeal objects, and of God, even though outside of me there were no other men in the world, nor any animals, nor any angels. And as far as the ideas of corporeal objects are concerned, I recognize nothing in them so great [or so excellent] that it seems impossible that they could arise from myself. For if I consider them more closely and examine them in the same way that I examined the idea of wax yesterday, I find that there are only a few elements in them which I conceive clearly and distinctly—namely, size, or extension in length, width and depth; shape, which results from the termination and limitation of this extension; location, which the variously shaped objects have with respect to one another; and movement, or the changing of this location. To this one may add substance, duration and number. As for other

elements, such as light, colors, sounds, odors, tastes, heat, cold, and the other qualities involved in the sense of touch, they occur in my thought with so much obscurity and confusion that I do not even know whether they are true or false and only apparent, that is, whether my ideas of these qualities are really ideas of actual bodies or of non-bodies [which are only chimerical and cannot exist]. For even though I have previously stated that true and formal falsity can characterize judgments only, there can exist nevertheless a certain material falsity in ideas, as when they represent that which is nothing as though it were something. For example, my ideas of cold and heat are so little clear and distinct that I cannot determine from them whether cold is only the absence of heat or heat the absence of cold, or whether both of them are real qualities, or whether neither is such. Besides, [since ideas are like pictures,] there can be no ideas which do not seem to us to represent objects; and if it is true to say that cold is nothing but an absence of heat, the idea of cold which represents it as something real and positive could, not inappropriately, be called false, and so for other similar ideas.

And assuredly, it is not necessary for me to attribute to such ideas any other source than myself. For if they are false—that is, if they represent entities which do not exist—the light of nature lets me know that they proceed from nothingness; that is, that they occur in me only because something is lacking in my nature and that the latter is not altogether perfect. And if these ideas are true, nevertheless, since they show me so little reality that I cannot even [clearly] distinguish the object represented from the nonexistent, I do not see why they could not be produced by myself [and why I could not be their author].

As for my clear and distinct ideas of corporeal things, there are some of them which, it seems to me, might have been derived from my ideas of myself, such as my ideas of substance, duration, number, and other similar things. For I think that stone is a substance, or a thing which is capable of existing by itself, and that I myself am also a substance, even though I understand perfectly that I am a being that thinks and that is not extended, and that stone, on the contrary, is an extended being which does not think. Nevertheless, even though there is a notable difference between these two conceptions, they seem to agree in this fact that both of them represent substances. In the same way, when I think I exist now and remember in addition having existed formerly, or when I conceive various thoughts of which I recognize the number, I acquire the ideas of duration and number which I afterward am able to apply to any other things I wish. As for the other qualities of which the ideas of material entities are composed—namely, extension, shape, location, and movement—it is true that they are not formally in my nature, since I am only a thinking being; but since these are only particular modes of substance, [or, as it were, the garments in which corporeal substance appears to us,] and since I am myself a substance, it seems that they might be contained in my nature eminently.

Thus there remains only the idea of God, in which we must consider if there is something which could not have come from myself. By the word "God" I mean an infinite substance, [eternal, immutable,] independent, omniscient, omnipotent, and that by which I myself and all other existent things, if it is true that there are other existent things, have been created and produced. But these attributes are such

[—they are so great and so eminent—] that the more attentively I consider them, the less I can persuade myself that I could have derived them from my own nature. And consequently we must necessarily conclude from all that I have previously said that God exists. For even though the idea of substance exists in me from the very fact that I am a substance, I would nevertheless have no idea of an infinite substance, I who am a finite being, unless the idea had been placed in me by some substance which was in fact infinite.

And I must not imagine that I do not conceive infinity as a real idea, but only through the negation of what is finite in the manner that I comprehend rest and darkness as the negation of movement and light. On the contrary, I see manifestly that there is more reality in infinite substance than in finite substance, and my notion of the infinite is somehow prior to that of the finite, that is, the notion of God is prior to that of myself. For how would it be possible for me to know that I doubt and that I desire—that is, that I lack something and am not all perfect—if I did not have in myself any idea of a being more perfect than my own, by comparison with which I might recognize the defects of my own nature?

And we cannot say that this idea of God might be materially false, and that in consequence I might derive it from nothingness, [or, in other words, that it might be in me as a deficiency,] as I have just now said about the ideas of heat and cold, and other similar things. For, on the contrary, this idea is very clear and very distinct and contains more objective reality than does any other, so that there is no other which is more true from its very nature, nor which is less open to the suspicion of error and falsity.

This idea, I say, of a supremely perfect and infinite being, is entirely true; for even though one might imagine that such a being does not exist, nevertheless one cannot imagine that the idea of it does not represent anything real, as I have just said of the idea of cold. It is also very clear and very distinct, since everything real and true which my mind conceives clearly and distinctly, and which contains some perfection, is contained and wholly included in this idea. And this will be no less true even though I do not comprehend the infinite and though there is in God an infinity of things which I cannot comprehend, or even perhaps suggest in thought, for it is the nature of infinity that I who am finite and limited, cannot comprehend it. It is enough that I understand this and that I judge that all qualities which I conceive clearly and in which I know that there is some perfection, and possibly also an infinity of other qualities of which I am ignorant, are in God formally or eminently. Then the idea which I have of God is seen to be the truest, the clearest, and the most distinct of all the ideas which I have in my mind.

And truly it must not be thought strange that God, in creating me, put this idea in my nature in much the same way as an artisan imprints his mark on his work. Nor is it necessary that this mark be something different from the work itself. From the very fact that God has created me, it is very credible that he has made me, in some sense, in his own image and similitude, and that I conceive this similitude, in which the idea of God is contained, by the same faculty by which I conceive myself. In other words, when I reflect upon myself, I not only know that I am [an imperfect being,] incomplete and dependent upon some other being, and a being which strives

and aspires incessantly to become something better and greater than I now am, but also and at the same time I know that the being upon which I depend possesses in itself all these great qualities [to which I aspire and the ideas of which I find in myself, and possesses these qualities], not indefinitely and merely potentially, but [really,] actually, and infinitely, and so that it is God. And the whole force of the argument [I have here used to prove the existence of God] consists in the fact that I recognize that it would not be possible for my nature to be what it is, possessing the idea of a God, unless God really existed—the same God, I say, the idea of whom I possess, the God who possesses all these [high] perfections of which my mind can have some slight idea, without however being able fully to comprehend them; who is subject to no defect [and who has no part of all those qualities which involve imperfection]. And from this it is quite evident that he cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that deception must always be the result of some deficiency.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the general method used by Descartes to defeat skepticism? Do you believe that he is consistent in his application of this method.

2. Do you think that philosophy can and should be modeled after the methods of mathematics? Why or why not?

3. What is the skeptical hypothesis that Descartes gives for doubting the truths of mathematics?

4. Explain the meaning of *cogito ergo sum* in the context of Descartes' philosophy.

5. How does Descartes defend his claim that the idea of an infinitely perfect being could not have been created by negating our ideas of finitude and imperfection? Do you accept his justification for this claim? Why or why not?

6. At the very end of the selection from the Third Meditation, Descartes explains why God could not be a deceiver. What is his explanation? Are you convinced by it?

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David Hume: Trust Your Senses

What could be more obvious than the view that the senses are the only dependable source of knowledge? "Seeing is believing," we say. If you cannot trust your own sense experience, what can you trust?

Such sentiments were readily acceptable to David Hume, the eighteenth-century thinker who was a librarian by profession and a philosopher by obsession. Hume, like many other thinkers of the eighteenth century, was concerned with human knowledge more than with any other philosophical problem. Hume's major contribution to the growing literature of the eighteenth century dealing with epistemology was entitled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Hume had earlier written a book dealing with similar topics under the title *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Like the first book of many authors, the *Treatise* did not sell well; Hume described it as having fallen "stillborn from the press." So he rewrote the arguments of the book, simplifying them in places, and reissued his work under the new title *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, a book he described as the *Treatise* "shorn of its nobler parts." Because the presentation of the second work is clearer, it is from the *Enquiry* that the selections from Hume in this chapter are taken.

SEARCH FOR SIMPLICITY

Insofar as there is a national temperament in philosophy, Hume represents a very British attitude toward philosophical investigation. English philosophers have almost always been concerned with cutting through obfuscation and getting to the heart of issues. They tend to reject complicated lines of dialectical reasoning, the sort of thing one finds in German philosophers, aiming instead for clarity of expression and simplicity of analysis. English philosophers are also generally empirical, logical, and concerned with common sense. John Locke, whom we shall meet again in the chapter on social and political philosophy, laid the foundations for the kind of empirical philosophy Hume continued by analyzing knowledge in terms of what Locke referred to as a *historical plain* method. It was *historical* in that he examined the history of knowledge, beginning with its origins and showing how knowledge developed in ways ever more complex; it was plain in the sense that Locke rejected the "scholastic disputations" of continental philosophers and preferred to emphasize common sense in his analysis.

Locke argues that there is nothing in the mind that was not previously in the senses; the senses are the only means we have of knowing anything. He finds an innate idea now and then (such as the idea of God, implanted in our understanding by the creator), but everything else is presented to us through the senses. Locke argues that the senses give us a sort of "alphabet" of knowledge. Just as we take twenty-six simple letters and combine them in units of ever increasing complexity—words, sentences, paragraphs—so in learning, we begin with simple impressions, which are then combined into units of increasing complexity. We can recall to mind past sensations through the power of memory, and we can combine sensations and the ideas resulting from them in fanciful ways through the power of imagination—winged horses, centaurs, and things like that. All this was pretty much accepted by Hume. His contribution to the philosophic tradition, however, was in pushing these principles to their conclusion, which produced some very startling consequences, consequences which show that empiricism by itself tends to lead to skepticism.

A SCIENCE OF THE UNDERSTANDING

Parts of David Hume's inspiration in conducting his inquiry into the operation of human understanding were Isaac Newton's remarkable advances in physics in the seventeenth century. With his theory of gravitation, Newton, we recall, advanced the theory of universal gravitation and thereby provided a unified system of mechanics. That is, he advanced a set of simple principles—there's that British appreciation for simplicity again!—that could explain both the motions of celestial bodies (stars, planets and comets) and the motions of terrestrial bodies (physical objects, such as arrows and cannonballs, within the Earth's atmosphere).

It is, perhaps, hard for us to appreciate the enormity of the impact that Newton's work had on the intellectual climate of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but the following couplet by Alexander Pope (1688–1744) helps to convey the extent of Newton's remarkable stature in eighteenth century European Culture:

> *Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night;*
> *God said Let Newton be! and all was light.*

Hume aspired to do something similar for human sensory and cognitive faculties in that he wanted to provide simple and comprehensive principles that would explain the source and nature of all human knowledge. Like many scientists, Hume's first move is to provide a classification of the object of his study. In his case this meant providing a general classification of the contents of the human mind.

In classifying the contents of the mind, Hume starts with the more basic and moves to the more complex. He begins by considering the class of what he calls "perceptions." By "perception" Hume means a nonpropositional item of thought. A brief word of explanation here may shed light on what Hume has in mind. A proposition is any sentence capable of being true or false, such as, "The horse is in the meadow." Note, however, that a proposition is made up of smaller units of meaning that are not themselves propositions. There is the content associated with the word "horse" and the content associated with the word "meadow" and there is the relational content associated with the word " in." Taken individually these are "non-propositional" items of thought in that they are not capable of being true or false on their own. The mere thought of a

horse on its own, for instance, is neither true nor false. Truth or falsity enter the picture only when a statement is formed by combining this content, horse, with other contents such as "meadow" and "in."

In the following selection from Section II of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume classifies these "perceptions" (non-propositional contents of thought) as falling into one of the two following categories: impressions and ideas. These are distinguished, according to Hume, by their relative force and vivacity, with impressions being very forceful and lively and ideas less so. In all other respects, impressions and ideas are qualitatively similar. In the category of impressions, Hume would place actual sensations, desires and emotions; and in the category of ideas Hume would place recollected or imagined sensations, desires and emotions.

To understand what Hume has in mind here, contrast actually watching a sunset with a recollection of a particular sunset using the imagination. They are in many respects very similar. Roughly the same colors are found in both, in the same proportions and related in the same way; yet, there is a clear difference between the experiences. What's the difference? According to Hume, it is only that the actual experience of the sunset is more vivid and forceful than the imagined recollection of the experience of the sunset. The experience of the actual sunset, for instance, is much more likely to produce a reaction of awe (a gasp or exclamation) than is a mere memory of the experience. Or recall the last time you had dental work done. If you received an injection of Novocain, the pain you felt at the time of the injection is an example of an impression and your recollection of it at present is an example of an idea. Again, the actual pain and the recollection of it are similar, with the key difference between them being the much greater vivacity and force of the actual pain as compared with the recollected pain.

Having drawn this general distinction between impressions and ideas, Hume uses it to formulate a rule that is central to his epistemology and reflects his commitment to empiricism. The rule, sometimes called the "Copy Principle," is the following:

"All our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones."

Though it is expressed in his specific jargon, note that the principle is merely stating that all the non-propositional contents of the mind arise first through what we would call experience; either through the five external senses of sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell, or the internal sensing of states, such as desires and emotions. Having stated this principle, Hume does proceed to qualify it, allowing there might be complex ideas–such as a golden mountain—that were not previously encountered as impressions; however, he maintains that even in such cases the complex idea is composed of component ideas, "gold" and "mountain", that had previously occurred as impressions. Putting Hume's point in terminology more familiar to us, he is claiming that all the contents of the mind are either experiences, copies of experiences or constructions made out of copies of experiences. Notice that the fundamental notion in all three of these cases is *experience*; thus, the copy principle expresses Hume's empiricist conviction that all the content of our thought is derived ultimately from experience. In the following selection from Section II of Hume's *Enquiry*, Hume provides his classification of perceptions and then uses it to advance and explain his copy principle. As you read the following selection, pay particular attention to identifying the arguments that Hume provides in defense of his copy principle.

David Hume: Of the Origin of Ideas

Here therefore we may divide all the perceptions of the mind into two classes or species, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity. The less forcible and lively are commonly denominated *Thoughts* or *Ideas*. The other species want a name in our language, and in most others; I suppose, because it was not requisite for any, but philosophical purposes, to rank them under a general term or appellation. Let us, therefore, use a little freedom, and call them *Impressions*; employing that word in a sense somewhat different from the usual. By the term impression, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And *impressions* are distinguished from ideas which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned.

Nothing, at first view, may seem more unbounded than the thought of man, which not only escapes all human power and authority, but is not even restrained within the limits of nature and reality. To form monsters, and join incongruous shapes and appearances, costs the imagination no more trouble than to conceive the most natural and familiar objects. And while the body is confined to one planet, along which it creeps with pain and difficulty; the thought can in an instant transport us into the most distant regions of the universe; or even beyond the universe, into the unbounded chaos, where nature is supposed to lie in total confusion. What never was seen, or heard of, may yet be conceived; nor is any thing beyond the power of thought, except what implies an absolute contradiction. But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience. When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, *gold* and *mountain*, with which we were formerly acquainted. A virtuous horse we can conceive; because, from our own feeling, we can conceive virtue; and this we may unite to the figure and shape of a horse, which is an animal familiar to us. In short, all the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment: the mixture and composition of these belongs alone to the mind and will. Or, to express myself in philosophical language, all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones.

To prove this, the two following arguments will, I hope, be sufficient. First, when we analyze our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. Even those ideas, which, at first view, seem the most wide of this origin, are found, upon a nearer scrutiny, to be derived from it. The idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom. We may prosecute this enquiry to what length

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, selection from Section II.

we please; where we shall always find, that every idea which we examine is copied from a similar impression. Those who would assert that this position is not universally true nor without exception, have only one, and that an easy method of refuting it; by producing that idea, which, in their opinion, is not derived from this source. It will then be incumbent on us, if we would maintain our doctrine, to produce the impression, or lively perception, which corresponds to it.

Secondly. If it happens, from a defect of the organ, that a man is not susceptible of any species of sensation, we always find that he is as little susceptible of the correspondent ideas. A blind man can form no notion of colours; a deaf man of sounds. Restore either of them that sense in which he is deficient; by opening this new inlet for his sensations, you also open an inlet for the ideas; and he finds no difficulty in conceiving these objects. The case is the same, if the object, proper for exciting any sensation, has never been applied to the organ. A Laplander . . . has no notion of the relish of wine. And though there are few or no instances of a like deficiency in the mind, where a person has never felt or is wholly incapable of a sentiment or passion that belongs to his species; yet we find the same observation to take place in a less degree. A man of mild manners can form no idea of inveterate revenge or cruelty; nor can a selfish heart easily conceive the heights of friendship and generosity. It is readily allowed, that other beings may possess many senses of which we can have no conception, because the ideas of them have never been introduced to us in the only manner by which an idea can have access to the mind, to wit, by the actual feeling and sensation.

———————

Here, therefore, is a proposition, which not only seems, in itself, simple and intelligible; but, if a proper use were made of it, might render every dispute equally intelligible, and banish all that jargon, which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasonings, and drawn disgrace upon them. All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure: the mind has but a slender hold of them: they are apt to be confounded with other resembling ideas; and when we have often employed any term, though without a distinct meaning, we are apt to imagine it has a determinate idea annexed to it. On the contrary, all impressions, that is, all sensations, either outward or inward, are strong and vivid: the limits between them are more exactly determined: nor is it easy to fall into any error or mistake with regard to them. When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impressions is that supposed idea derived*? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. By bringing ideas into so clear a light we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute, which may arise, concerning their nature and reality.

Notice Hume's belief that the copy principle will play an important role in cleaning up the discipline of philosophy. Hume believed that the discipline of metaphysics in particular was beset by a loose use of language, with many terms being employed without there being a clear meaning behind them. When metaphysicians talk about fate or

destiny or an immaterial realm of perfect and unchanging archetypes, the copy principle provides a quick reason for dismissing such language as meaningless. Since there are no impressions to which these terms can be traced, they must, according to the copy principle, be set aside as nothing more than words with no meaning.

RELATIONS OF IDEAS AND MATTERS OF FACT

Having provided a classification of the more basic elements of thought, Hume turns his attention to classifying the more complex mental state involved in affirming propositions or making judgments. Hume calls judgments "objects of reason" and notes that they can be divided into two kinds. "All the objects of human reason," Hume claims, "may naturally be divided into two kinds . . . 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact.'" We will discuss each of these in turn below.

      Relations of ideas is the term that Hume uses for all judgments that are known with certainty. Examples of judgments expressing relations of ideas would include the following: "Every triangle has three angles," "2 + 3 = 5," "All bachelors are unmarried," and "A red ball is colored." Such judgments, according to Hume, are known to be true *a priori*. They are known not by appealing to the senses, but rather by examining the logical relations among the ideas. For this reason—that is, we do not have to worry about sense experience ever falsifying them—they are necessarily true. While the *a priori* status of judgments expressing relations of ideas might, at first, seem to conflict with Hume's empiricism, there are two reasons that this is not so. First, even though Hume believes that judgments expressing relations of ideas can be known *a priori*, he insists that they do not provide us with any positive knowledge about what exists. Though it may be true that "every triangle has three angles," this does not tell us whether there are any perfect geometric triangles existing in reality. Likewise for the statement, "all bachelors are unmarried," which we can know to be true and still not know whether there are actually any bachelors who really exist. To know whether bachelors exist and how many there are, we must have recourse to experience. Notice how different this is from the rationalist epistemology of Descartes in which we can know much about reality *a priori*, including that there is a God, and the soul can exist apart from the body. The second reason that the *a priori* status of relations of ideas doesn't conflict with Hume's empiricism concerns the scope of his copy principle. We must recall that it is a principle concerning the content of our *ideas* and not a principle about what grounds the truth of *judgments*. Thus, even though Hume believed that every judgment was composed of ideas that were derived from experience, he also believed that some of these judgments were known to be true merely in virtue of the relations that hold among the ideas themselves and thus there was no need to appeal to experience to know that the ideas were actually so related. Consider the example given above, "A red ball has color." While it is certainly true that the ideas behind the terms "red ball" and "color" have empirical content, to know that these characteristics are *related* in the manner asserted in the judgment we do not need further recourse to experience. Indeed, we would think it strange were a person to set out to confirm the truth of the judgment in an empirical manner, perhaps by surveying a large group of red balls to see if they also have color. No such survey is required, we might say, because having color is part of the meaning of what it is to be red. Nor do we worry that we might someday encounter in experience a red ball that does not have color. That every red ball has color is simply true by definition or, as Hume might put it, merely in virtue of the relation of the ideas involved. This, of course, is true of every judgment

expressing a relation of ideas. All of them are true merely in virtue of the relations of ideas they contain; thus, they cannot be falsified by experience and are known to be true *a priori*.

That judgments expressing relations of ideas are true merely in virtue of the relations of the meanings of the terms involved entails, according to Hume, the following very important rule: the denial of a judgment expressing a relation of ideas will always result in an internally contradictory statement. As we will see below, this rule—which we will call the "negation test"—will play a very important role in Hume's epistemology in that he believes a sure test for whether a judgment is a relation of ideas is to deny the judgment and see if the result is an internally contradictory statement. If it is, then the original judgment did express a relation of ideas and was, thus, known with *a priori* certainty. If the result is not an internally contradictory statement, then the original judgment did not express a relation of ideas. Instead, it must express a matter of fact. We turn now to this second main category of judgments recognized by Hume.

Judgments expressing matters of fact are contingent—neither their truth nor their falsity is contradictory—and thus they are not known with certainty. Examples would include: "The apple is red," "The horse is in the meadow," "There was a lighting strike a few seconds ago," and "The Sun will rise tomorrow morning." Notice that any of these statements might be either true or false and that all of them can be denied without the result being an internally contradictory statement. They are not, therefore, true merely in virtue of the meanings involved.

You may have noticed that in our characterization of matters of fact, we refrained from saying that every judgment concerning matters of fact is known to be true or false on the basis of direct experience. Given that relations of ideas are known *a priori*, it would be natural to suppose that all judgments concerning matters of fact are grounded on direct observation. The situation, however, is not that simple according to Hume. It is certainly true that many judgments concerning matters of fact that we assert with confidence are known on the basis of direct experience. Considering the examples given in the preceding paragraph, we might be looking at the apple and thus know that "The apple is red" or we might be looking at the meadow where we see the horse and thus know that "the horse is in the meadow" on the basis of direct observation. But now consider the third example given, "There was a lightning strike a few seconds ago." Perhaps we assert this because we actually saw the stroke of lightning as it lit up the sky. But it may be that we make this claim only because we heard the characteristic rumble of thunder that we associate with lightning without actually seeing the stroke of lightning itself. In this case, the judgment that there was a lightning strike a few seconds before is not something that was directly observed. Finally, consider the claim about the sun rising tomorrow morning. Since it is a claim about the future, it cannot be based on direct observation inasmuch as we do not have direct sensory access to events that have not yet happened. So, it seems that judgments concerning matters of fact that we assert with confidence are sometimes based on direct experience and sometimes not. But this realization leads to a question. While it seems reasonable to trust judgments made on the basis of direct observation, what is our justification for asserting judgments concerning matters of fact that we did not directly observe? It is, at least on the surface, an innocuous question; however, when we reflect on the fact that all judgments about the future fall into the category of matters of fact not directly observed and we recognize how commonly we make such judgments about the future, the question bristles with potential significance. Indeed, in the next section, we will see that Hume reaches a very surprising answer to this question.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Hume's initial answer to this question is to point out that the principle of cause and effect is the link that ties our direct experience of the world to claims about matters of fact that are not directly observed. We assume that grass we have never seen is green because whatever makes grass green operates uniformly all around the world all the time. When we see the Sun rising in the east in the morning, we assume that there is some kind of causal relationship that makes this matter of fact not only true for us at the present moment when we are experiencing it but also true in the future. How do we know that the future will resemble the past? We know that tomorrow 2 + 5 = 7 will be true, for its truth is independent of the senses and is based on the meaning of the terms themselves. But what about matters of fact which seem to depend upon our being able to prove that things are related causally?

This line of questioning only leads us closer to the crucial issue: What is our rational justification for asserting the causal relations we assert? Why do we believe that lightning causes thunder or that the earth causes an unsupported stone to fall toward it? In answering these questions, Hume first notes that it cannot be the case that assertions

John Locke on Knowledge

All ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost

((•⎯ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Locke—Essay* on **MySearchLab.com**

endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word, from EXPERIENCE; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.

The objects of sensation one source of ideas. First, our senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways wherein those objects do affect thence; and thus we come by those ideas we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities, which when I say the senses convey into the mind, I mean, they from external objects convey into the mind what produces there those perceptions. This great source of most of the ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding, I call SENSATION.

The operations of our minds the other source of them. Secondly, the other fountain, from which experience furnished the understanding with ideas, is the perception of the operation of our own minds within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got, which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas which could not be had from things without: and such are perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all the different actings of our own minds, which we being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understanding as distinct ideas, as we do from bodies affecting our senses... But as I call the other Sensation, so I call this REFLECTION, the ideas it affords being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself.

John Locke
An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,
Book II, Chapter 1

of such causal relations are judgments asserting relations of ideas. To see why, remember that the sure test for whether a judgment expresses a relation of ideas is that its negation will lead to an internally contradictory statement. But that doesn't happen when we negate a causal relation. Even though we may never encounter a case of a stone being released within the earth's atmosphere and it not falling, there is nothing flatly contradictory in conceiving of this happening. Indeed, it is quite easy to imagine it. It is even possible to imagine without contraction an event just happening, without a cause; thus, even the general rule that every event has a cause is not known *a priori*.

What then is the basis of our asserting causal relations? According to Hume, we derive them from experience. Specifically, when we experience two states of affairs—such as a stone being released within the Earth's atmosphere and its falling—to be routinely conjoined in our experience, we believe that there is a causal connection between the two events such that an occurrence of the first will *always* be accompanied by an occurrence of the second. But here we must notice something interesting about the causal relations we assert: we believe that they hold of all occurrences of the two states of affairs in question. For instance, in saying that lightning causes thunder, we are saying that an occurrence of lightning will *always* be followed by an occurrence of thunder. But this means that the causal relation is believed to hold even for cases in which we have not directly observed the correlation between the two events. We believe, for instance, that causal relations will hold into the future. But, if causal relations apply to matters of fact not directly observed, and if our belief in causal relations is grounded in direct experience of correlations among events, notice what we are doing. We are using matters of fact directly observed to draw conclusions about matters of fact not directly observed. Philosophers call this sort of inference—that is, one that proceeds from matters of fact directly observed to conclusions about those not directly observed—an *inductive inference*. But why, Hume next asks, should we believe that this sort of inference is reliable? Is there a rational justification that can be given for inductive inferences? It is certainly true that we make such inferences all the time, but in formulating a science of the mind's operations, it is nonetheless important to ask whether a rational justification can be given for our practice of making such inferences. Hume's surprising answer, and one for which he is famous, is that there is no rational justification for our practice of making inductive inferences.

THE PROBLEM OF INDUCTION

The difficulty of providing a rational justification for inductive inferences is now known as the "Problem of Induction." It is a problem that Hume is famous for having formulated carefully. He is no less famous for having argued that it cannot be given a rational solution. The strategy that Hume employs to reach this startling conclusion is to begin by noting that any justification for inductive inferences would have to be *a priori* or *a posteriori*; that is, it would have to involve principles known to be true either because they are relations of ideas or they are grounded in direct experience. He then proceeds to consider possible general principles that might be used to provide a rational justification for inductive inferences, but then argues that these principles cannot be legitimately justified on either *a priori* or *a posteriori* grounds. To illustrate Hume's strategy, we might consider the principle that "every event must have a cause" as a possible rational justification for our inductive practices. If it is the case that causal relations hold exceptionlessly, then the principle that every event has a cause would justify our inductive practices. But is this

principle true? Can it be rationally justified? Well, if it is justified, its justification must be either that it is known *a priori* or it is grounded in direct experience. Let's consider these alternatives in turn. If the principle of universal causality were known *a priori*, then its negation would lead to an internal contradiction. But we have already seen that this is not so as we can easily and consistently imagine events that occur without being caused. Perhaps the suggestion that it is known *a posteriori* is more promising. It is certainly true that our past experience of the world has exhibited correlations among events. It is also true that these correlations have endured the progress of time. Correlations observed ten years ago were observed to hold five years later, and correlations observed to hold five years later are observed to still hold today. And since we have direct observation of correlations enduring through time, we have, we might say, *a posteriori* evidence for believing that these potential causal correlations will continue to hold in the future. What's wrong with this fully empiricist answer? What's wrong with it, according to Hume, is that it involved making an inductive inference. That is, we are using direct observation about past correlations enduring through time to conclude that these correlations will continue to hold in future cases that we have not, at least yet, directly observed; thus, we are using an inductive inference to give a rational justification for our practice of making inductive inferences and we are, thus, guilty of a circular justification.

Hume believes that all plausible general principles that might be suggested to provide a rational foundation for inductive inferences will meet the same fate as the principle of universal causality discussed above. None of them can be rationally justified either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. And since these are the only two sorts of rational justifications there can be, we are forced to conclude that our inductive practices are not rationally justified.

Being unable to prove the reliability of our practice of making inductive inferences does not, however, mean, according to Hume, that we should discard those practices. It does mean that the basic principle operative in human understanding cannot be rationally demonstrated to be true. We only can experience event B following event A, which eventually leads us to associate them in our thinking in terms of a causal relationship. What is the reason for this? Why do we form this association that leads us to expect B when we encounter A. Hume answers that it is the result of *non-rational* principle of *custom* or *habit*. By our experience of a constant conjunction of event A and event B we come to anticipate B whenever we experience A. Just as Pavlov's dogs were not relying on reason when they began to salivate with the ringing of a bell, so we come to expect patterns we've already encountered to repeat themselves even though we have no rational basis for doing so. Can you see how startling this is? A dedicated empiricist, for whom sense experience is the basis of all knowledge, discovers that we cannot offer empirical proof for the most basic of principles required for knowledge of the world. Empiricism has thus proved that there is no proof for empiricism. And perhaps even more startling is the fact that an essential part of the procedure of the natural sciences involves making inductive inferences. If Hume is right, he has shown that a practice essential to the natural sciences is itself not grounded in reason. Rather, it is grounded in the non-rational principle of custom or habit. His commitment to empiricism has led to a surprising skeptical conclusion.

Here again, though, we must pause to emphasize that Hume had a profound respect for the natural sciences. He wanted, after all, to do for the operation of the human mind what Newton had done for the behavior of physical objects. Though he reached the conclusion that the natural sciences are not ultimately founded upon reason, he did not think that we should stop pursuing the sciences or stop making inductive inferences in everyday

life. We should, on his view, continue to trust our inductive practices and the results of the natural sciences. But if we are committed to finding the truth and following the argument wherever it leads us, we must also recognize the interesting fact that we have no rational justification for doing so. Our confidence in the practice of making inductive inferences is ultimately grounded on nothing more than habit.

In the following selections from sections IV and V of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume formulates—in his characteristically elegant prose—the problem of induction and explains in detail his reasons for concluding that there is no rational justification for inductive inferences. It also includes his argument that our inductive practices are grounded in the non-rational principles of custom or habit.

David Hume: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding

All the objects of human reason or inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds to wit, "Relations of Ideas," and "Matters of Fact." Of the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic, and, in short every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides is a proposition which expresses a relation between these figures. That three times five is equal to the half of thirty expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or a triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would forever retain their certainty and evidence.

Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner, nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible, because it can never imply a contradiction and is conceived by the

DAVID HUME (1711–1776): Scottish philosopher and historian who never received a university post because of his skeptical views. He expressed his empirical philosophy in *A Treatise of Human Nature, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* The latter, because of its attack on accepted religious beliefs, was not published until after Hume's death. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

From David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* selections from Sections IV and V.

mind with the same facility and distinctness as if ever so conformable to reality. That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation *that it will rise.* We should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood. Were it demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind.

It may, therefore, be a subject worthy of curiosity to inquire what is the nature of that evidence which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact beyond the present testimony of our senses or the records of our memory. This part of philosophy, it is observable, had been little cultivated either by the ancients or moderns, and, therefore, our doubts and errors in the prosecution of so important an inquiry may be the more excusable while we march through such difficult paths without any guide or direction. They may even prove useful by exciting curiosity and destroying that implicit faith and security which is the bane of all reasoning and free inquiry. The discovery of defects in the common philosophy, if any such there be, will not, I presume, be a discouragement, but rather an incitement, as is usual, to attempt something more full and satisfactory than has yet been proposed to the public.

All reasonings concerning matters of fact seem to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man why he believes any matter of fact which is absent, for instance, that his friend is in the country or in France, he would give you a reason, and this reason would be some other fact: as a letter received from him or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises. A man finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island would conclude that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connection between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. The hearing of an articulate voice and rational discourse in the dark assures us of the presence of some person. Why? Because these are the effects of the human make and fabric, and closely connected with it. If we anatomize all the other reasonings of this nature, we shall find that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect.

Suppose a person, though endowed with the strongest faculties of reason and reflection, to be brought on a sudden into this world; he would, indeed, immediately observe a continual succession of objects and one event following another, but he would not be able to discover anything further. He would not at first, by any reasoning, be able to reach the idea of cause and effect, since the particular powers by which all natural operations are performed never appear to the senses, nor is it reasonable to conclude, merely because one event in one instance precedes another, that therefore the one is the cause, the other the effect. The conjunction may be arbitrary and casual. There may be no reason to infer the existence of one from the appearance of the other: and, in a word, such a person without more experience could never employ his conjecture or reasoning concerning any matter of fact or be assured of anything beyond what was immediately present to his memory or senses.

Suppose again that he has acquired more experience and has lived so long in the world as to have observed similar objects or events to be constantly conjoined together—what is the consequence of this experience? He immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other, yet he has not, by all his

experience, acquired any idea or knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other, nor is it by any process of reasoning he is engaged to draw this inference, but still he finds himself determined to draw it, and though he should be convinced that his understanding has no part in the operation, he would nevertheless continue in the same course of thinking. There is some other principle which determines him to form such a conclusion.

This principle is *custom* or *habit*. For wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding we always say that this propensity is the effect of custom. By employing that word we pretend not to have given the ultimate reason of such a propensity. We only point out a principle of human nature which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects. Perhaps we can push our inquiries no further or pretend to give the cause of this cause, but must rest contented with it as the ultimate principle which we can assign of all our conclusions from experience. It is sufficient satisfaction that we can go so far without repining at the narrowness of our faculties, because they will carry us no further. And it is certain we here advance a very intelligible proposition at least, if not a true one, when we assert that after the constant conjunction of two objects, heat and flame, for instance, weight and solidity, we are determined by custom alone to expect the one from the appearance of the other. This hypothesis seems even the only one which explains the difficulty why we draw from a thousand instances an inference which we are not able to draw from one instance that is in no respect different from them. Reason is incapable of any such variation. The conclusions which it draws from considering one circle are the same which it would form upon surveying all the circles in the universe. But no man, having seen only one body move after being impelled by another, could infer that every other body will move after a like impulse. All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning.

Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action as well as of the chief part of speculation.

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? A simple one, though, it must be confessed, pretty remote from the common theories of philosophy. All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object present to the memory or senses and a customary conjunction between that and some other object; or, in other words, having found, in many instances, that any two kinds of objects, flame and heat, snow and cold, have always been conjoined together: if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to believe that such a quality does exist and will discover itself upon a nearer approach. This belief is the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits, or hatred, when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding

is able either to produce or to prevent. At this point it would be very allowable for us to stop our philosophical researches. In most questions we can never make a single step further, and in all questions we must terminate here at last, after our most restless and curious inquiries. But still our curiosity will be pardonable, perhaps commendable, if it carry us on to still further researches and make us examine more accurately the nature of this belief and of the customary conjunction whence it is derived. By this means we may meet with some explications and analogies that will give satisfaction, at least to such as love the abstract sciences, and can be entertained with speculations which, however accurate, may still retain a degree of doubt and uncertainty. As to readers of a different taste, the remaining part of this Section is not calculated for them, and the following inquiries may well be understood, though it be neglected.

Questions for Discussion

1. Both Hume and Descartes see mathematics as an important kind of knowledge. But are their respective views about mathematics the same or different? Explain.

2. Explain in your own words the distinction Hume makes between "matters of fact" and "relations of ideas." Do you agree that these are different objects of knowledge? Are there others? Why or why not?

3. Explain why cause and effect pose such a problem for Hume. Do you think causality would offer similar difficulties for any empiricist? Give reasons for your answer.

4. Would it be correct to say that Hume did not believe in cause and effect? If so, why? If not, why not?

5. Do you see any way for an empiricist like Hume to avoid skepticism?

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Immanuel Kant: A Compromise

Who is right in this epistemological debate: the empiricists, with their emphasis on the senses as the exclusive source of our knowledge of the world, or the rationalists, who insist on reason alone as the final arbiter of truth? As is often the case in philosophical quarrels, many philosophers settled on an answer that was at neither extreme of this polarity by finding a middle ground between the one-sided claims of the antagonists in this debate. The philosopher who did the most to bring rationalism and empiricism together in a workable harmony was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).

The form of rationalistic philosophy that dominated German universities in the eighteenth century finds its roots in Descartes but was most heavily influenced by the great German philosopher Leibniz (1646–1716). Leibniz's epistemology was, in some ways, even more confident in the power of reason to discover the ultimate truth about reality than was Cartesian thought, and was optimistic about its power to discover the complete, and certain, truth about the nature of God, the nature and destiny of the human soul, and the world as a totality. Questions like whether the world has a beginning in time or is eternal, inquiries into the nature of the soul—whether it is an indissoluble unity (Leibniz's view) or a collection of discrete soul substances—and arguments over the attributes of God were commonplace. Each side in every such philosophical debate was absolutely convinced that its arguments were inviolate and its conclusions unassailable. Though all sides to the controversies invoked reason as authority, none of them could lay out standards that were so universally clear and accepted that everyone would recognize that a solution had been found to a philosophical argument. Such significant disagreement among the rationalists sowed the seeds for some to begin doubting whether *a priori* reason could really make headway on such profound metaphysical issues. Even though he was trained in this tradition and a practitioner himself early in his career, Kant eventually began to despair of the prospects of making any headway in rationalist metaphysics.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the English Channel, empiricists were laying siege to reason's authority by following empirical assumptions to their own, often bitter, conclusions. Hume, as we have seen, was willing to accept these conclusions, even though they ended in limited skepticism. Though the empiricists began with opposite assumptions about the source of knowledge, they were driven to conclusions that placed our ability to know in as much jeopardy as did the intricate arguments of the rationalists. This consequence of strict empiricism was as much of a concern to Kant as the disagreements among the rationalist metaphysicians of his day; thus, turning from rationalism to empiricism was not an attractive option for the sage of Königsberg.

Kant's intellectual dilemma, then, was the following. Are we to face the Scylla of dogmatism (Kant's term for rationalism) or the Charybdis of skepticism (Kant's equally unflattering term for empiricism)? Like the rock and whirlpool of Greek mythology, rationalism and empiricism appeared to Kant to pose twin threats to philosophy's fragile ship. Both dogmatism and skepticism give philosophy a bad name, since they present philosophy as engaging only in idle controversies that produce nothing and reach no lasting conclusions. In contrast, the efforts of natural science and mathematics are productive and generate new insights into reality. Can philosophy hope for as much? Kant thought the answer to this was yes, if philosophy examines its own foundations and generates a firm basis for its future work.

The area of philosophical investigation that had been called into question by the wrangles of empiricists and rationalists was metaphysics. "Time was," Kant observed,

"when metaphysics was entitled the queen of all the sciences. . . . Now, however, the changed fashion of the time brings her only scorn; a matron outcast and forsaken. . . ." Metaphysics' queenly rule has been challenged by dual threats, Kant goes on to say. "Her government under the administration of the dogmatists was at first despotic. But inasmuch as the legislation still bore traces of the ancient barbarism, her empire gradually through intestine wars gave way to complete anarchy, and the skeptics, a species of nomads, despising all settled modes of life, broke up from time to time all civil society."

Kant freely admits that reading the work of David Hume was the stimulus that roused him from his "dogmatic slumber," as he put it. Hume's attack on

the principle of cause and effect as unfounded in reason but due rather to custom or habit was a claim that, if allowed to stand, would undercut the legitimacy of natural science and could eventually destroy confidence in reason's

IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804): German philosopher important for his "critical philosophy," an attempt to reconcile continental rationalism and British empiricism. Known as the sage of Königsberg (his home town), Kant's most famous works include *Critique of Pure Reason, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* and *Critique of Judgment.* Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ability to do anything. A side effect would be to cast further doubt on the legitimacy of philosophy as a tool of analysis. It was with these and similar problems in view that Kant wrote his massive *Critique of Pure Reason,* from which the selections that follow are taken. Before turning to the analysis and arguments offered in the selection, a word about reading Kant is in order. Kant is not easy to read, but you may get some comfort from knowing that one of his friends returned a copy of the *Critique* to him with the comment that he feared reading it completely would drive him mad. One of the reasons Kant is sometimes difficult to understand is simply that he is dealing with difficult topics. In addition, Kant, in his effort to push philosophical analysis beyond the position it had achieved in his day, introduces much new terminology, some of which is now familiar to us because it has entered the standard philosophical vocabulary, though other terms of his still strike modern readers as opaque. Even though Kant may be difficult, he occupies an extremely important place in the history of philosophy, for many of the concerns philosophers have addressed during the past two hundred years were first articulated by Kant.

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

The empiricists had shown a proper concern with understanding the origin of knowledge, but they were guilty of several unexamined assumptions about the knowing process. The first of these assumptions was that the mind of the knower is purely passive, a receptacle for impressions (Hume's term) or sensations (Locke's term). John Locke had explicitly described the knowing mind as a blank tablet, a *tabula rasa* on which the senses write, or as an empty cabinet filled with ideas which are but copies of sensations. The second unexamined assumption was that the mind is incapable of generating anything out of its own internal operations necessary for the knowing process. Empiricists assumed that somehow—though they never really explained it—sense impressions, after being turned into ideas, get associated with each other into composites of ever-increasing complexity. Kant challenges both of these assumptions. Even though "there can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience," Kant observes, "it does not follow that it all arises out of experience." The empiricists were right in thinking that all our knowledge involves experience of the world; they were wrong in assuming that the mind has a purely passive role and contributes nothing to the content of what is known. Kant likens his epistemological view to the Copernican revolution in astronomy. Prior to the time of Copernicus it was believed that the Earth was the center of the universe and that the heavenly bodies revolved around it. Now we know that the Sun is the center of our solar system, and the Earth one of the planets orbiting it. Similarly, prior to Kant's time the empiricists thought that ideas were only copies of objects perceived by the senses. Kant's "revolution" reversed prevailing epistemological theories by presenting the view that we know things as objects only because the mind itself contributes important organizing principles which make knowledge of objects possible. The emphasis has shifted from the mind as passive to its playing an active role in shaping the "world" that can be known.

But this is getting ahead of ourselves. Think for a moment about what makes natural science so successful. As we pointed out in Part 2, "Thinking About Thinking (Logic)," real insights into nature have not come about merely as the result of collecting a lot of sense impressions. If that were the case, natural science would have developed long before it did—human beings, after all, have been having perceptual experiences of the

world as long as there have been human beings in the world. Natural science really got going, at least according to Kant's description of the scientific process, when human beings began to impose a structure upon their scientific investigation. Discovery of the secrets of nature occurs only when we know what sorts of questions to pose, and the right sort of questions arise when we approach our investigation of nature in terms of a plan of investigation (such as a scientific hypothesis). In a comparable way, if we are to know about *knowing* we have to approach the knowing process with a plan of attack, and Kant's proposed plan of attack is to question the prevailing assumption about the passivity of the mind and see if assuming that the mind plays an active role in the knowing process gets us any further.

A PRIORI AND *A POSTERIORI* KNOWLEDGE

Armed with his new hypothesis, Kant plunges into the difficult question of investigating the knowing process. For Kant, the fundamental acts by which we know are judgments about what is the case. Here he distinguishes between two ways in which judgments are known to be true. There are those known to be true completely *a priori* (independent of the senses), and there are those known to be true *a posteriori* (on the basis of sense experience). In characterizing *a priori* judgments, Kant stresses that they are necessary; that is, they cannot be falsified by sense experience. What's crucial for a judgment to be known *a priori*, according to Kant, is that the conditions for the judgment's being true or false are not grounded in experience. Consider "5 + 7 = 12." This judgment is *a priori* because there is no possible sense experience that would falsify it. Though the clearest examples of *a priori* judgments are found in mathematics, there are many nonmathematical judgments that are also *a priori*. To see this, it is important to remember a point that was made in our discussion of Hume's classification of judgments: it is possible to have *a priori* judgments in which some of the concepts are derived from experience. Consider again the statement, "A red ball has color." Though *red* and *color* are both empirical concepts, the judgment itself is *a priori* since it is necessarily true; no possible sense experience could falsify it. Indeed, it would be contradictory to suppose that there might be a red ball that had no color. A final terminological note on Kant's discussion of the *a priori*: sometimes Kant refers to that which is *a priori* as "pure" This, in fact, is the sense in which he uses "pure" in the title of his classic work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. (You will be reading selections from this work later in this chapter.)

A *posteriori* knowledge, or empirical knowledge as Kant usually calls it, is found in judgments that have their truth grounded in sense experience. Such judgments for Kant are always contingent—that is, they might be false—with their truth (or falsity) resting on evidence provided by sense experience. Examples of this kind of knowledge are easy to give: "The temperature of the air is 70°F." "The sky is blue." "The lawn needs mowing." Each of these might be either true or false, with their truth or falsity hinging on what is revealed by sense experience.

Kant's distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgments may well remind you of Hume's distinction between "relations of ideas " and "matters of fact," and there certainly are similarities between them. Nonetheless, there are crucial differences in the way Kant understands this distinction. In fact, Kant believes that Hume's classification of judgments is somewhat sloppy and that it is this sloppiness that ultimately leads Hume down the path to a limited skepticism. To see where Hume goes wrong, according to

Kant, it is important to recognize a second sort of distinction that can be drawn between kinds of judgments. In distinguishing between them as *a priori* and *a posteriori*, we are focusing on how they are known to be true or false. We can, however, also look at them in terms of how the concepts they employ relate to one another. When we do, according to Kant, we arrive at a distinction between those judgments that are analytic and those that are synthetic.

ANALYTIC AND SYNTHETIC JUDGMENTS

By the term *judgment* Kant means a statement in which there is a subject term and a predicate term and which is either true or false (today, judgments are referred to generally as *propositions*). Consider the following list of statements.

1. The temperature of the water is 70°F.
2. All human beings are under 12 ft. tall.
3. All bachelors are males.
4. All bodies take up space.
5. All bodies are heavy.
6. All triangles have three angles.

Not all these statements are of the same type. In some the predicate term extends your knowledge; it adds something that is not contained already in the subject. (Kant expresses this point by saying that such judgments are "ampliative" since the predicate term "amplifies" or adds to the content expressed by the subject term.) In other statements the predicate does not add anything not already contained in the subject. (Kant expresses this point by saying that such judgments are "explicative" since the predicate term merely "explicates" or unpacks the meaning of the subject term.) Kant calls the former kind of statement *synthetic*, the latter *analytic*. Since the predicate of an analytic statement adds nothing new to the subject term, an analytic judgment is true by definition and, if denied, leads (unlike a synthetic statement) to a contradiction.

Here is the distinction again:

Synthetic—Predicate adds something and is not contained in the subject.

Analytic—Predicate adds nothing and is contained in the subject.

Now go back over the list of statements and determine for yourself which are synthetic and which are analytic. If your answer was that statements 1, 2, and 5 are synthetic, and statements 3, 4, and 6 are analytic, you got it right.

To get clearer on the distinction, let's take a closer look at examples 4 and 5 above, which might on the surface seem to be very similar. In the case of 4, "All bodies take up space," it is part of the very meaning of what it is to be a body that it take up space; thus, adding this predicate to the subject "body" only unpacks the meaning already contained within the subject term and does not add to it. When we turn to example 5, "All bodies are heavy," and ask whether the characteristic of heaviness is already part of the meaning of what it is to be a body, we see that the answer is "no". The predicate of heaviness adds something to the content contained in the subject concept. Bodies only have weight when they are subject to the gravitational effect of other bodies, and being in the presence of the gravitational effect of other bodies is simply not part of the core meaning of what it is to be a body. Perhaps the most dramatic way to illustrate this point is to note

that if "having weight" were part of the meaning of "body," it would be contradictory to speak of bodies in a weightless environment; yet, this is not the case. After all, we've all seen dramatic video of astronauts floating in a weightless environment! Judgment 5 is therefore synthetic.

Kant, thus, has introduced two distinctions that can be used to classify judgments. There is the distinction between judgments that are known *a priori* and judgments that are known *a posteriori*, and there is the distinction between judgments that are analytic and judgments that are synthetic. We can, of course, apply these two distinctions to judgments at the same time. This is precisely what Kant does, and this is where matters get more interesting. It is also, according to Kant, where we can see exactly how Hume goes astray.

KANT'S FOURFOLD CLASSIFICATION OF JUDGMENTS

When we combine Kant's two distinctions, we arrive at the following fourfold classification of judgments: the synthetic *a posteriori*, the analytic *a priori*, the analytic *a posteriori* and the synthetic *a priori*. Turning to the first category first, we know that synthetic *a posteriori* judgments would have to have both the characteristics that make a judgment synthetic and those that make a judgment *a posteriori*. Specifically, as synthetic, it would be the case that the content of the predicate term of such judgments is not contained within the subject term and that, consequently, such judgments could be negated without the result being an internally contradictory statement. Additionally, as *a posteriori*, such judgments would be known on the basis of sense experience, and they would be contingent in the sense described earlier; namely, it would be possible for sense experience to falsify them as well as verify them. Examples of synthetic *a posteriori* judgments would include the following:

> *All humans are under twelve feet tall.*
> *All tomatoes are edible.*
> *Mount Everest is the highest mountain on the Earth.*

Turning to the second category listed above, the analytic *a priori*, we know that such judgments would have the following characteristics: (a) as analytic, the meaning of the predicate term of such judgments would be contained within the meaning of the subject term and their negation would lead to an internal contradiction and (b) as *a priori*, they would be known to be true independently of sense experience and they would be necessarily true. Examples of analytic *a priori* judgments would include the following:

> *All bachelors are male.*
> *All triangles have three angles.*
> *A red ball has color.*

The third category, the analytic *a posteriori*, would apply to judgments in which the meaning of the predicate term is contained within the meaning of the subject term and which are known to be true on the basis of sense experience. Kant notes, however, that there cannot be any examples of analytic *a posteriori* judgments and that this class of judgments is therefore empty. To see why, we must recall that the denial of an analytic judgment always results in an internally contradictory statement. This means that the falsity of an analytic judgment is logically impossible, but saying that it is logically

impossible for an analytic judgment to be false is another way of saying that all analytic judgments are necessarily true. This necessity, however, is directly at odds with the contingency that is one of the essential characteristics of an *a posteriori* judgment; thus, there cannot be any judgments that are both analytic and *a posteriori*.

As some readers may well have worked out on their own, from this line of reasoning it also follows that all analytic judgments are *a priori,* and all *a posteriori* judgments are synthetic. It does not, however, follow that all synthetic judgments are *a posteriori*. In fact, Kant maintains that this is not the case. Not only does he maintain that there are examples of synthetic *a priori* judgments, he also maintains that it was Hume's failure to recognize the possibility of such judgments that set him on his ill-fated course into the Charybdis of skepticism. We turn now to a discussion of this crucial fourth category of judgments.

SYNTHETIC *A PRIORI* JUDGMENTS

Concerning this fourth possible class of judgments, we begin by noting that such judgments would have to possess the characteristic marks of both the synthetic and the *a priori*. As synthetic, the predicate of such a judgment would not be contained within the content of the subject and, for this reason, its negation would not result in an internally contradictory statement. Nonetheless, as *a priori*, such a judgment would be known to be true independently of sense experience and would, for this reason, be necessarily true. Do we really have such judgments? According to Kant, the answer is *yes*. The first place one finds synthetic *a priori* judgments is, for Kant, in mathematics. Specifically, he believes that many of the propositions of both arithmetic and geometry are synthetic and *a priori*. Two examples that Kant gives of such synthetic *a priori* judgments are the following:

$$7 + 5 = 12$$

and

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

The first example, "$7 + 5 = 12$," is highly controversial. In fact, few philosophers have been convinced by Kant's contention that such arithmetic judgments are synthetic. The justification that Kant gives is that one can fully understand the concepts of 7, 5 and addition, and still not know that their combination is equal to 12 until one actually performs the calculation. To see that this is so, Kant suggests, we should consider equations in which we add much larger numbers in which performing the calculation is necessary to see the truth of the proposition. We mistakenly believe that $7 + 5 = 12$, is analytic only because we've done the calculation so many times that we can now supply the answer without actually going through the process of calculation.

The second example, from geometry, is less controversial, as far as its being synthetic is concerned. Kant's justification for the claim that this judgment is synthetic is that the subject term, *shortest distance between two points*, is a quantitative notion and the predicate term, *straightness*, is a qualitative notion; thus, the meaning of the predicate term can't be contained in the meaning of the subject term because they are very different concepts. Where this example runs into trouble, however, is with respect to its *a priori* status. Shortly after Kant's life, groundbreaking work was done in the development

of non-Euclidean geometry. Specifically, consistent systems of geometry were developed, by mathematicians such as Riemann, in which one of the foundational postulates of Euclid's geometry was denied. In some of these systems, many of the claims of Euclidean geometry that Kant took to be necessary were not true, including Kant's example above, "the shortest distance between two points is a straight line." For this reason, many think that the claims of Euclidean geometry are not necessary and thus not *a priori*.

Moving on from mathematics, Kant also asserts that certain claims at the foundations of the natural sciences are synthetic *a priori*. These would include the following:

> *The total quantity of matter is preserved in all changes.*
> *The velocity of a body remains unchanged unless it is acted upon by an external force.*
> *Every event must have a cause.*

If Kant is right in contending that these are *a priori* judgments, notice that the third example above provides him with a possible avenue of escape from Hume's skeptical conclusion concerning inductive inferences and the assertion of causal relations. Here we must recall Hume's belief that every *a priori* judgment was such that its negation resulted in an internally contradictory statement. It is by applying this test that Hume was able to conclude that judgments like "every event has a cause" or "the future will resemble the past" are not known *a priori*. Since we can consistently imagine an event taking place that is not preceded by a cause and since we can consistently imagine the future not resembling the past, we know, says Hume, that these judgments cannot be rationally justified by saying that we know them *a priori*. But if Kant is correct in his classification of judgments, this Humean line of argument is seriously flawed, for there is a whole class of *a priori* judgments—the synthetic ones—for which Hume's negation test does not work. Moreover, if Kant is correct in contending that judgments underlying inductive inferences—such as, "every event has a cause"—are synthetic *a priori*, then Kant will have supplied an *a priori* justification of inductive inferences and thereby avoided Hume's "skeptical solution."

Kant realizes that his contention that there are synthetic *a priori* judgments will seem very strange to most readers. How could there be judgments that are necessarily true without their necessity being grounded in the law of noncontradiction? Kant is convinced by the example of mathematics that such judgments do exist, but he believes that he owes us an explanation of how we could have such strange judgments. And this challenge contains the question that Kant proposes to frame his entire epistemology: How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible? Unless he can answer this question, his response to Hume will seem nothing more than fanciful speculation.

KANT'S COPERNICAN REVOLUTION IN EPISTEMOLOGY

Drawing upon the analogy that Kant himself draws between his own epistemological project and Copernicus' revolution in astronomy, Kant's answer to the question of how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible is sometimes called Kant's "Copernican Revolution in Epistemology." Since the full details and defense of this answer are very long and highly complex—critics of Kant would say, "overly obscure"—we can here only give the barest of sketches. Put very generally, Kant's Copernican Revolution in Epistemology is the theory that objects of sensation and knowledge must conform to the nature of the knowing and perceiving subject. That is, the world of our experience is largely the product of a construction by our sensory and cognitive faculties.

More specifically, Kant's suggestion is that all human awareness of the world involves two faculties: sensibility and the understanding. Sensibility is a passive faculty that receives sensory appearances and the understanding is an active faculty that combines these appearances in achieving knowledge of the world of experience. Kant believed that both of these faculties contributed *a priori* elements to our knowledge of the world. In the case of sensibility, the appearances resulting from things engaging outer sense (the faculty to which external objects are given) are ordered by the necessary form of space, and the appearances resulting from things engaging inner sense (the faculty to which one's own psychological states are given) are ordered by the necessary form of time. In the case of the understanding, Kant maintains that there are twelve *a priori* concepts—including, for instance, causation and substance—that necessarily organize the appearances given to sensibility. Kant calls these twelve *a priori* concepts the "categories." For a subject to become aware of sensory appearances, according to Kant, there must first be a synthesis of these appearances by the categories. It is important to note that this conditioning and ordering by sensibility and the understanding is not something we are consciously aware of doing; rather, Kant argues that our awareness of ourselves and the world of experience distinct from ourselves is only possible given this initial and ongoing imposition of order by sensibility and the understanding.

But how does this answer the key question of Kant's epistemology: how are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible? How does this help to ground the necessity of synthetic *a priori* judgments? To see how it answers this question, let's consider a specific synthetic *a priori* judgment, and one that is particularly relevant to Kant's interest in answering Hume:

> *Every event has a cause.*

First, note again that *having a cause* is not part of the meaning of the subject term, *event*. Though *having a cause* is part of the meaning of the related term, *effect*, an *event* is just a change over time; thus, it can be defined without using the concept of being caused. The above statement is, thus, clearly a synthetic statement. How then can it be known *a priori?* How can we know with absolute confidence that this principle will never be falsified by our experiencing an event that is not caused. Kant's answer—and again, please remember that we are here only scratching the surface of his full answer—is that any experience of an event is *an experience*. As an experience, our experience of an event was subject to the *a priori* conditions imposed by sensibility and the understanding; thus, it was subject to a necessary synthesis by the categories, including, most importantly in this case, the category of causation. For this reason, a necessary condition for our having an experience of an event is that we experience the event as caused, and this means that it is impossible for us to experience an uncaused event. It is not possible, therefore, that we will ever have an experience that falsifies the claim—every event has a cause—because we can only experience an event once it has been synthesized by the *a priori* category of causation.

THE COST OF THE COPERNICAN REVOLUTION IN EPISTEMOLOGY

Though the brilliance of Kant's innovation in epistemology is hard to overstate, Kant himself realized that his response to Hume came with a price. To see the cost that Kant pays, we must reflect on what it is our minds impose an order upon in his epistemological

system. It is, of course, the basic sensory representations—the appearances (which Kant calls the "phenomena")—that are caused by objects engaging our sensory faculties. Since it is the appearances that are being ordered by the forms of sensibility and the categories of the understanding, it is only to the world as presented via those appearances—the world of experience—that our *a priori* knowledge extends. It does not extend to things as they are in themselves (which Kant calls the "noumena") that stand behind the appearances. Indeed, not only does Kant conclude that we lack *a priori* knowledge of things as they are in themselves, he also maintains that all of our knowledge is confined to the phenomena, objects of experience, and that we can know nothing whatsoever about the noumena, things as they are in themselves. Since all of our access to objects comes via sensibility and all our *a priori* concepts and principles can have application to these objects only in virtue of having ordered and structured these sensory appearances, it follows that we have no way of knowing anything about the noumena.

So far, we have been emphasizing the respect in which Kant's epistemology can be seen as a response to Hume. Now, however, we are in position to see why it would be wrong to view his epistemology as an unqualified acceptance of rationalism and a thorough rejection of empiricism. Like the rationalists, Kant does believe that we have *a priori* knowledge of the world; however, like the empiricists, he believes that all this *a priori* knowledge only extends to the world *of experience*. We can know *a priori*, for instance, that every event we experience must have a cause, but we cannot use this *a priori* knowledge to draw any conclusions beyond those pertaining to possible experience.

Traditional rationalist metaphysics was accustomed to using *a priori* concepts and principles to go beyond the world of experience and prove the existence of God or an immortal soul or that the entire universe must have a cause. Given Kant's explanation of the only manner in which we can have *a priori* knowledge of the world; however, this sort of traditional metaphysics involves an abuse of *a priori* concepts and principles. These concepts and principles have application only because they are necessarily involved in ordering and structuring the appearances given to our sensibility. It is because they play this necessary role in constructing our experience that they have application to objects of experience. Since they play no similar role in ordering and structuring the things as they are in themselves—including God, the entire universe and the human soul—they have no application to this noumenal world. Traditional metaphysicians, according to Kant, have been falsely encouraged in their practice of extending *a priori* concepts and principles beyond the bounds of experience because their conclusions are not about experience and thus there is never any chance that experience will refute them. But in this encouragement, they were subject to an illusion and didn't realize that their concepts and principles could make no progress at all in understanding things as they are in themselves. To convey this mistake by traditional rationalist metaphysicians, Kant constructs a beautiful metaphor in which he compares such a metaphysician to a dove reflecting upon its flight.

> The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of the senses, as setting too narrow limits to the understanding, and ventured out beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of the pure understanding. He did not observe that with all his efforts he made no advance—meeting no resistance that might, as it were, serve as a support upon which he could take a stand, to which he could apply his powers, and so set

his understanding in motion. (All quotations from Kant in this chapter are from his *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith.)

Kant's point in this metaphor is that the rationalist metaphysicians thought they could make incredible progress in our knowledge by extending inquiry beyond the constraints of experience. But just as the dove cannot fly without the resistance of the air, so too we cannot make progress in our understanding without the content found in experience.

It is important to remember, however, that Kant's point here is about what we can *know*. Though he concludes that the rationalist metaphysicians' claims to know that God exists or the immortality of the soul were completely unfounded, it would be a mistake to conclude that Kant was therefore hostile to belief in God's existence or the immortality of the person. To see why this would be a mistake, we must note that attempts to disprove God's existence involve the same illegitimate attempt to extend our knowledge beyond the bounds of experience; thus, in showing the equal illegitimacy of arguments for and against the claims of traditional metaphysics, Kant believed he had opened up the possibility of believing (without knowing) many of the claims of traditional metaphysics. This was, in fact, part of Kant's explicit goal. "I found it necessary" he writes in the Preface to the Second Edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room *for faith*."

Were Kant writing today, he might find metaphors for his description of the knowing process in computer technology. We talk a great deal today about data processing. The empiricists had ignored the *process;* all they were concerned about was the input data. The rationalists had ignored the input data; all they were concerned about was the process. Kant brings both together. We need the data supplied by the senses if we are to have knowledge, but these data need to be processed by the concepts (such as cause and effect) that the mind supplies out of its own operations. Both sensing and thinking are important. Without either, knowledge is impossible.

The following selections are from the Introduction to the Second Edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In it we find his painstaking classification of judgments and his formulation of the key question of his epistemology: How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?

Immanuel Kant: Two Sources of Knowledge

When Galileo caused balls, the weights of which he had himself previously determined, to roll down an inclined plane, when Torricelli made the air carry a weight which he had calculated beforehand to be equal to that of a definite volume of water, or in more recent times when Stahl changed metals into oxides, and oxides back into metal, by withdrawing something and then restoring it, a light broke upon all students of nature. They learned that reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own, and that it must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature's leading-strings, but must itself show the way with principles of

From Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith. St. Martin's Press, 1933.

judgment based upon fixed laws, constraining nature to give answer to questions of reason's own determining. Accidental observations, made in obedience to no previously thought-out plan, can never be made to yield a necessary law, which alone reason is concerned to discover. Reason, holding in one hand its principles, according to which alone concordant appearances can be admitted as equivalent to laws, and in the other hand the experiment which it has devised in conformity with these principles, must approach nature in order to be taught by it. It must not, however, do so in the character of a pupil who listens to everything that the teacher chooses to say, but of an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer questions which he has himself formulated. Even physics, therefore, owes the beneficent revolution in its point of view entirely to the happy thought, that while reason must seek in nature, not fictitiously ascribe to it, whatever as not being knowable through reason's own resources has to be learnt, if learnt at all, only from nature, it must adopt as its guide, in so seeking, that which it has itself put into nature. It is thus that the study of nature has entered on the secure path of a science, after having for many centuries been nothing but a process of merely random groping.

The Distinction Between Pure and Empirical Knowledge

There can be no doubt that *all* our knowledge begins with experience. For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience? In the order of time, therefore, we have no knowledge antecedent to experience, and with experience all our knowledge begins.

But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself. If our faculty of knowledge makes any such addition, it may be that we are not in a position to distinguish it from the raw material, until with long practice of attention we have become skilled in separating it.

This, then, is a question which at least calls for closer examination, and does not allow of any off-hand answer—whether there is any knowledge that is thus independent of experience and even of all impressions of the senses. Such knowledge is entitled *a priori,* and distinguished from the empirical, which has its sources *a posteriori,* that is, in experience.

The expression "*a priori*" does not, however, indicate with sufficient precision the full meaning of our question. For it has been customary to say, even of much knowledge that is derived from empirical sources, that we have it or are capable of having it *a priori,* meaning thereby that we do not derive it immediately from experience, but from a universal rule—a rule which is itself, however, borrowed by us from experience. Thus we would say of a man who undermined the foundations of

his house that he might have known *a priori* that it would fall, that is, that he need not have waited for the experience of its actual falling. But still he could not know this completely *a priori.* For he had first to learn through experience that bodies are heavy, and therefore fall when their supports are withdrawn.

In what follows, therefore, we shall understand by *a priori* knowledge, not knowledge independent of this or that experience, but knowledge absolutely independent of all experience. Opposed to it is empirical knowledge, which is knowledge possible only *a posteriori,* that is, through experience. *A priori* modes of knowledge are entitled pure when there is no admixture of anything empirical. Thus, for instance, the proposition, every alteration has its cause, while an *a priori* proposition, is not a pure proposition because alteration is a concept which can be derived only from experience.

The Distinction Between Analytic and Synthetic Judgments

In all judgments in which the relation of a subject to the predicate is thought (I take into consideration affirmative judgments only, the subsequent application to negative judgments being easily made), this relation is possible in two different ways. Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A as something which is (covertly) contained in this concept A, or B lies outside the concept A, although it does indeed stand in connection with it. In the one case I entitle the judgment analytic, in the other . . . synthetic. Analytic judgments (affirmative) are therefore those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is thought through identity; those in which this connection is thought without identity should be entitled synthetic. The former, as adding nothing through the predicate to the concept of the subject, but merely breaking it up into those constituent concepts that have all along been thought in it, although confusedly, can also be entitled explicative. The latter, on the other hand, add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any wise thought in it, and which no analysis could possibly extract from it, and they may therefore be entitled ampliative. If I say, for instance, "All bodies are extended," this is an analytic judgment. For I do not require to go beyond the concept which I connect with "body" in order to find extension as bound up with it. To meet with this predicate, I have merely to analyze the concept, that is, to become conscious to myself of the manifold which I always think in that concept. The judgment is therefore analytic. But when I say, "All bodies are heavy," the predicate is something quite different from anything that I think in the mere concept of body in general, and the addition of such a predicate therefore yields a synthetic judgment.

Judgments of experience, as such, are one and all synthetic. For it would be absurd to found an analytic judgment on experience. Since, in framing the judgment, I must not go outside my concept, there is no need to appeal to the testimony of experience in its support. That a body is extended is a proposition that holds *a priori* and is not empirical. For, before appealing to experience, I have already in the concept of body all the conditions required for my judgment. I have only to extract from it, in accordance with the principle of contradiction, the required predicate, and in so doing can at the same time become conscious of the necessity of the judgment—and that is what experience could never have taught me. On the other hand, though I do not include in the concept of a body in general the predicate "weight," none the less

this concept indicates an object of experience through one of its parts, and I can add to that part other parts of this same experience, as in this way belonging together with the concept. From the start I can apprehend the concept of body analytically through the characters of extension, impenetrability, figure, etc., all of which are thought in the concept. Now, however, looking back on the experience from which I have derived this concept of body, and finding weight to be invariably connected with the above characters, I attach it as a predicate to the concept, and in doing so I attach it synthetically, and am therefore extending my knowledge. The possibility of the synthesis of the predicate "weight" with the concept of "body" thus rests upon experience. While the one concept is not contained in the other, they yet belong to one another, though only contingently, as parts of a whole, namely, of an experience which is itself a synthetic combination of intuitions.

But in *a priori* synthetic judgments this help is entirely lacking: I do not here have the advantage of looking around in the field of experience. Upon what, then, am I to rely, when I seek to go beyond the concept A, and to know that another concept B is connected with it? Through what is the synthesis made possible? Let us take the proposition, "Everything which happens has its cause." In the concept of "something which happens," I do indeed think an existence which is preceded by a time, etc., and from this concept analytic judgments may be obtained. But the concept of a "cause" lies entirely outside the other concept, and signifies something different from "that which happens," and is not therefore in any way contained in this latter representation. How come I then to predicate of that which happens something quite different, and to apprehend that the concept of cause, though not contained in it, yet belongs, and indeed necessarily belongs, to it? . . . It cannot be experience, because the suggested principle has connected the second representation with the first, not only with greater universality, but also with the character of necessity, and therefore completely *a priori* and on the basis of mere concepts. Upon such synthetic, that is, ampliative principles, all our *a priori* speculative knowledge must ultimately rest; analytic judgments are very important, and indeed necessary, but only for obtaining that clearness in the concepts which is requisite for such a sure and wide synthesis as will lead to a genuinely new addition to all previous knowledge.

In All Theoretical Sciences of Reason Synthetic A Priori Judgments Are Contained as Principles

1. *All mathematical judgments, without exception, are synthetic.* This fact, though incontestably certain and in its consequences very important, has hitherto escaped the notice of those who are engaged in the analysis of human reason, and is, indeed, directly opposed to all their conjectures.

For as it was found that all mathematical inferences proceed in accordance with the principle of contradiction (which the nature of all apodeictic certainty requires), it was supposed that the fundamental propositions of the science can themselves be known to be true through that principle. This is an erroneous view. For though a synthetic proposition can indeed be discerned in accordance with the principle of contradiction, this can only be if another synthetic proposition is presupposed, and if

it can then be apprehended as following from this other proposition; it can never be so discerned in and by itself. First of all, it has to be noted that mathematical propositions, strictly so called, are always judgments *a priori*, not empirical; because they carry with them necessity, which cannot be derived from experience. If this be demurred to, I am willing to limit my statement to *pure* mathematics, the very concept of which implies that it does not contain empirical, but only pure *a priori* knowledge. We might, indeed, at first suppose that the proposition 7 & 5 = 12 is a merely analytic proposition, and follows by the principle of contradiction from the concept of a sum of 7 and 5. But if we look more closely we find that the concept of the sum of 7 and 5 contains nothing save the union of the two numbers into one, and in this no thought is being taken as to what that single number may be which combines both. The concept of 12 is by no means already thought in merely thinking this union of 7 and 5; and I may analyse my concept of such a possible sum as long as I please, still I shall never find the 12 in it. We have to go outside these concepts, and call in the aid of the intuition which corresponds to one of them, our five fingers, for instance, or, as Segner does in his *Arithmetic*, five points, adding to the concept of 7, unit by unit, the five given in intuition. For starting with the number 7, and for the concept of 5 calling in the aid of the fingers of my hand as intuition, I now add one by one to the number 7 the units which I previously took together to form the number, 5, and with the aid of that figure [the hand] see the number 12 come into being. That 5 should be added to 7, I have indeed already thought in the concept of a sum = 7 & 5, but not that this sum is equivalent to the number 12. Arithmetical propositions are therefore always synthetic. This is still more evident if we take larger numbers. For it is then obvious that, however we might turn and twist our concepts, we could never, by the mere analysis of them, and without the aid of intuition, discover what [the number is that] is the sum. Just as little is any fundamental proposition of pure geometry analytic. That the straight line between two points is the shortest, is a synthetic proposition. For my concept of *straight* contains nothing of quantity, but only of quality. The concept of the shortest is wholly an addition, and cannot be derived, through any process of analysis, from the concept of the straight line. Intuition, therefore, must here be called in; only by its aid is the synthesis possible. What here causes us commonly to believe that the predicate of such apodeictic judgments is already contained in our concept, and that the judgment is therefore analytic, is merely the ambiguous character of the terms used. We are required to join in thought a certain predicate to a given concept, and this necessity is inherent in the concepts themselves. But the question is not what we *ought* to join in thought to the given concept, but what we *actually* think in it, even if only obscurely; and it is then manifest that, while the predicate is indeed attached necessarily to the concept, it is so in virtue of an intuition which must be added to the concept, not as thought in the concept itself.

Some few fundamental propositions, presupposed by the geometrician, are, indeed, really analytic, and rest on the principle of contradiction. But, as identical propositions, they serve only as links in the chain of method and not as principles; for instance, $a = a$; the whole is equal to itself; or $(a \& b) > a$, that is, the whole is greater than its part. And even these propositions, though they are valid according to pure concepts, are only admitted in mathematics because they can be exhibited in intuition.

2. *Natural science (physics) contains* a priori *synthetic judgments as principles.* I need cite only two such judgments: that in all changes of the material world the quantity of matter remains unchanged; and that in all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal. Both propositions, it is evident, are not only necessary, and therefore in their origin *a priori*, but also synthetic. For in the concept of matter I do not think its permanence, but only its presence in the space which it occupies. I go outside and beyond the concept of matter, joining to it *a priori* in thought something which I have not thought *in* it. The proposition is not, therefore, analytic, but synthetic, and yet is thought *a priori*; and so likewise are the other propositions of the pure part of natural science.

3. *Metaphysics*, even if we look upon it as having hitherto failed in all its endeavours, is yet, owing to the nature of human reason, a quite indispensable science, and *ought to contain* a priori *synthetic knowledge*. For its business is not merely to analyse concepts which we make for ourselves *a priori* of things, and thereby to clarify them analytically, but to extend our *a priori* knowledge. And for this purpose we must employ principles which add to the given concept something that was not contained in it, and through *a priori* synthetic judgments venture out so far that experience is quite unable to follow us, as, for instance, in the proposition, that the world must have a first beginning, and such like. Thus metaphysics consists, at least *in intention*, entirely of *a priori* synthetic propositions.

The General Problem of Pure Reason

Much is already gained if we can bring a number of investigations under the formula of a single problem. For we not only lighten our own task, by defining it accurately, but make it easier for others, who would test our results, to judge whether or not we have succeeded in what we set out to do. Now the proper problem of pure reason is contained in the question: How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible? That metaphysics has hitherto remained in so vacillating a state of uncertainty and contradiction, is entirely due to the fact that this problem, and perhaps even the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, has never previously been considered. Upon the solution of this problem, or upon a sufficient proof that the possibility which it desires to have explained does in fact not exist at all, depends the success or failure of metaphysics. Among philosophers, David Hume came nearest to envisaging this problem, but still was very far from conceiving it with sufficient definiteness and universality. He occupied himself exclusively with the synthetic proposition regarding the connection of an effect with its cause (*principium causalitatis*), and he believed himself to have shown that such an *a priori* proposition is entirely impossible. If we accept his conclusions, then all that we call metaphysics is a mere delusion whereby we fancy ourselves to have rational insight into what, in actual fact, is borrowed solely from experience, and under the influence of custom has taken the illusory semblance of necessity. If he had envisaged our problem in all its universality, he would never have been guilty of this statement, so destructive of all pure philosophy. For he would then have recognised that, according to his own argument, pure mathematics, as certainly containing *a priori* synthetic propositions, would also not be possible; and from such an assertion his good sense would have saved him.

Questions for Discussion

1. Explain what is revolutionary about Kant's "Copernican revolution."
2. What are the similarities, if any, between Kant's analytic and synthetic judgments and Hume's "matters of fact" and "relations of ideas"? Explain.
3. Give some examples of propositions that are analytic and *a priori* other than those cited in the text.
4. Do you think there are synthetic *a priori* judgments? Why or why not? (Note: Kant thought one could find such judgments in mathematics and the foundations of the natural sciences. Do you agree?)
5. Explain what Kant meant by the statement "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."

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3. How did Kant influence subsequent developments in philosophy?

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Knowledge and Human Practices: The Pragmatist Tradition

As is evident from the three preceding chapters, there are significant respects in which the epistemologies of Descartes, Hume, and Kant differ. Descartes attempted to establish a certain foundation for philosophy and the natural sciences on the basis of *a priori* concepts and principles that faithfully represent the true nature of things, including realities—such as God—that are not objects of any possible sense experience. Hume, by contrast, denied that *a priori* representations give one any knowledge about reality and insisted instead that all of our meaningful judgments about the nature of reality are grounded entirely in sensory experience. Kant disagreed with Hume, maintaining that *a priori* judgments give one knowledge of reality; however, he also disagreed with Descartes by maintaining that the only reality to which *a priori* concepts and judgments have legitimate application is the world given through experience.

Though the preceding chapters have thus highlighted respects in which rationalism, empiricism, and Kantianism differ, these differences can obscure important respects in which these very different epistemologies overlap. Foremost among these points of overlap are the following: (1) the function of judgment is to represent reality, (2) the aim of inquiry is to represent reality accurately, and (3) knowledge is having a belief or beliefs we are fully justified in taking to be accurate representations of reality. Descartes was optimistic about the extent to which such knowledge could be achieved and believed he had provided a method for doing so. Hume was pessimistic about the possibility of achieving such knowledge, maintaining that there was no full rational justification for our beliefs about reality. Kant was both optimistic and pessimistic. He was optimistic with respect to our achieving knowledge of the world as it is encountered in sensory experience, maintaining that he had responded conclusively to Hume's skeptical arguments in the realm of experience. He was pessimistic, however, insofar as he maintained that our knowledge of the world as it is given in sensory experience does not constitute knowledge of the world as it is in itself and apart from how it appears to us.

THE FAILURES OF REPRESENTATIONALISM

Though each of the epistemologies covered in the preceding chapters still has its defenders, each has also been charged with suffering from serious flaws. Many of the criticisms of Descartes' system focus on his appeal to God to justify the accuracy of the *a priori* concepts and principles he used to understand reality. The most serious of these is the

charge that his justification is circular in that he argues that self-evident truths—what he called "clear and distinct ideas"—can be trusted only if one can prove God's existence; yet, he trusts clear and distinct ideas in his proofs for God's existence. Reflecting the attitude of many critics of the Cartesian system, Kant offered the following scathing comment on this aspect of Descartes's epistemology: "The *deus ex machina* in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge is the greatest absurdity one could hit upon."[1] The *deus ex machina* was a device in Ancient Greek theatre in which a protagonist would be extricated from a hopeless situation by a god, whose role was represented by a statue mechanically lowered from above or raised from below the stage. By Kant's reckoning, a philosopher such as Descartes realized his epistemology was in a hopeless predicament in that he couldn't find any plausible way to account for the connection between *a priori* representations and the reality they were alleged to represent; thus, he introduced God as a way of magically extricating himself from the problem.

Hume's epistemology, on the other hand, troubled many philosophers in that it maintained that we have no rational grounds for various beliefs that virtually all human beings accept as a matter of common sense. Specifically, Hume's strict empiricism led him to conclude that we have no rational basis for believing in a self that endures throughout one's conscious history or causal relations among physical objects or even the existence of enduring physical objects.

For his part, Kant did provide a rational justification for the connection between *a priori* judgments and the world of experience that did not go through God. In doing so, he also provided a rational justification for those commonsense beliefs that Hume's account had set adrift. Nonetheless, Kant could only achieve these aims via what still seemed to many a different but no less severe violation of common sense than that found in Hume. According to Kant's "Copernican Revolution in Epistemology," things considered as they are in themselves (apart from how they are given to human beings in experience) are neither spatial nor temporal nor subject to causal relations, for all these aspects of reality as we know it are supplied by the perceiving and knowing subject. In addition, some critics found Kant's epistemological theory overly elaborate. If Descartes' invocation of God to ground his epistemology was a *deus ex machina* in epistemology, it might be alleged that Kant's "Copernican Revolution" was an epistemological Rube Goldberg device. While it might achieve its intended aim—though even this is difficult to track with confidence, given the complexity of Kant's arguments—it seems an overly elaborate justification for beliefs even young children know full well.

Given the difficulties besetting rationalism, empiricism, and Kantianism, it was perhaps inevitable that some philosophers would start to wonder whether the characterization of belief, inquiry, and knowledge shared by these three groups was itself the ultimate source of the problems they all encountered. Perhaps it is the assumption that representing reality is the fundamental task of these activities that sets epistemology off on the wrong track from the outset. Though it is initially difficult to see what the fundamental aim of all cognitive endeavor might be if it is not that of accurately representing the way things are, a highly influential alternative was developed and advanced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by a group of American philosophers now known as the *classical pragmatists*. Principally identified with the work of Charles Saunders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, classical pragmatism rejected the long-standing epistemic view that the primary aim of belief, inquiry, and knowledge is to

Trained as an engineer at the University of California-Berkeley, Rube Goldberg (1883–1970) was best known for his illustrations of absurdly elaborate machines—invented by Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts (another Goldberg creation)—designed to perform simple tasks. The above photo of a very elaborate light switch nicely illustrates the sorts of devices borne of Rube Goldberg's whimsy. Jeffrey Coolidge/Stone/Getty Images.

accurately represent reality, maintaining instead that there was a more basic principle animating the human search for knowledge. The ultimate aim and nature of belief, inquiry, and knowledge, according to pragmatism, is the promotion of effective action. In the pragmatist movement, questions of the ultimate fidelity of our beliefs to the true nature of reality were thus subordinated to questions of the practical implications of belief for our ability to make our way in the world.

It would, however, be inaccurate to suggest that the perceived failure of previous epistemologies was the entire motivation for the development of classical pragmatism. Just as Kant's epistemology drew inspiration from Copernicus' revolution in astronomy, the classical pragmatists drew inspiration from a different scientific breakthrough: the ascendency of the theory of evolution in the late nineteenth century in the wake of Charles Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859.

ON THE ORIGIN OF CLASSICAL PRAGMATISM

There are two principal respects in which Darwin's theory of evolution had an impact on the development of classical pragmatism. First, it emphasized that human beings are themselves the product of natural selection and thus are continuous with the rest of nature in a stronger sense than had to that point been recognized. Second, it drew attention to what seemed to be a fundamental fact about all living organisms—that is, fitness for survival is the dominant principle that drives their development and the characteristics they exhibit. Approaching the human capacity for rational inquiry with these points in mind, the classical pragmatists were in a position to reflect on the fact that, according to Darwin, our cognitive faculties are as much the product of natural selection as other natural traits, such as opposable thumbs. Moreover, given that fitness for survival is thus the principle responsible for the nature of our cognitive capacities, it was natural for the pragmatists to speculate that epistemology ought to be recast to reflect this fact; that is, epistemology ought to be refashioned by replacing the view that the ultimate

aim of inquiry is the accurate representation of the way things are with the view that the ultimate aim of rational inquiry is efficient and effective action.

For the classical pragmatists, then, the point of inquiry was not that of building an edifice of propositions that are true in virtue of revealing how things truly are. For them, the task of inquiry was the cultivation of beliefs that direct human action in a way that is beneficial to our survival and flourishing. Privileging our role as travelers in the world over our role as spectators of it, pragmatism rejects as worthless any metaphysical dispute or theory that has no implications for our lives and how we live them. To get a sense for the sort of metaphysical theorizing the classical pragmatists deemed suspect, think back to Chapters 10, "Materialism," and 11, "Idealism," which dealt with the metaphysical theories of materialism and idealism. Though the dispute seems momentous on the surface in that the views appear to be radically different ways of conceptualizing the world around us, filling in the details of both systems brings them closer and closer to one another, especially with respect to their implications for human life. Berkeley's idealism is particularly illustrative of this point. Initially, it appears highly counterintuitive to maintain that only minds and ideas are ultimately real; however, the more one reads Berkeley, the more one realizes that he leaves the world in which we act and live completely untouched. (Indeed, Berkeley himself maintained that his theory was in accord with a commonsense perspective of the world.) Nothing in the way of human experience or action need be altered to accommodate Berkeley's model of the world. To put the matter in specific terms, an idealist and a materialist might together play tennis or enjoy a meal or work on experimental astronomy, with neither one having to alter her ultimate metaphysical theory one jot. On the representationalist model of inquiry, it is nonetheless perfectly meaningful to wonder whether reality *really* is ideal or material. For the pragmatist, such an inquiry is idle and pointless.

In the following selections from "What Pragmatism Means," psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910) summarizes the pragmatic conception of inquiry in his characteristically elegant and engaging prose.

William James: What Pragmatism Means

Some years ago, being with a camping party in the mountains, I returned from a solitary ramble to find every one engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute. The *corpus* of the dispute was a squirrel—a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree-trunk; while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught. The resultant metaphysical problem now is this: *Does the man go round the squirrel or not?* He goes

William James, "What Pragmatism Means," in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907).
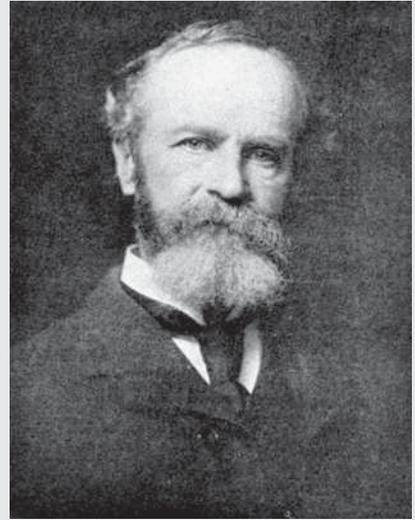
WILLIAM JAMES (1842–1910), American psychologist and philosopher, founder of Pragmatism, and brother of novelist Henry James. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

round the tree, sure enough, and the squirrel is on the tree; but does he go round the squirrel? In the unlimited leisure of the wilderness, discussion had been worn thread-bare. Everyone had taken sides, and was obstinate; and the numbers on both sides were even. Each side, when I appeared therefore appealed to me to make it a major-ity. Mindful of the scholastic adage that whenever you meet a contradiction you must make a distinction, I immediately sought and found one, as follows: "Which party is right," I said, "depends on what you *practically mean* by 'going round' the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him, for by the com-pensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned towards the man all the time, and his back turned away. Make the distinction, and there is no occasion for any farther dispute. You are both right and both wrong according as you conceive the verb 'to go round' in one practical fashion or other."

Although one or two of the hotter disputants called my speech a shuffling evasion, saying they wanted no quibbling or scholastic hair-splitting, but meant just plain bones English "round," the majority seemed to think that the distinction has as-suaged the dispute.

I tell this trivial anecdote because it is a peculiarly simple example of what I wish now to speak of as *the pragmatic method*. The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual?—here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically

make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right.

A glance at the history of the idea will show you still better what pragmatism means. The term is derived from the same Greek word $\pi\rho\alpha'\gamma\mu\alpha$ (pragma), meaning action, from which our words "practice" and "practical" come. It was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878. In an article entitled "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in the "Popular Science Monthly" for January of that year.* Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that, to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.

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It is astonishing to see how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence. There can *be* no difference anywhere that doesn't make a difference elsewhere—no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen. The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one.

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Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest. We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and on occasion, make nature over again by their aid. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one at work.

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*Translated in the *Revue Philosophique* for January, 1879 (vol. vii).

CLASSICAL PRAGMATISM'S LEGACY

It is misleading to talk of the *legacy* of classical pragmatism if this is taken to suggest that the philosophies of Peirce, James, and Dewey are no longer studied or defended as viable in their own right. In fact, all three of their systems have their contemporary advocates. Nonetheless, though classical pragmatism continues to have its proponents, its primary

influence on contemporary epistemology has been to inspire a group of highly influential epistemologies that share some of its broad themes. Specifically, in the second half of the twentieth century, W. V. Quine, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty all developed epistemological theories that share at least two points emphasized by the classical pragmatists. The first was the view that epistemology ought to be naturalized; that is, it ought to be viewed as continuous with the natural sciences. The second was that they rejected representationalist accounts of meaning and knowledge, opting instead for semantic holism and epistemic holism. The first of these, semantic holism, denies that terms or statements can be meaningful apart from the rest of the language in which they are embedded. The latter, epistemic holism, maintains that individual judgments—claims to know—cannot be verified or falsified directly by either experience or the meanings of the terms used to express them. Rather, every claim is verified or falsified both by experience and the entire language in which it is formulated. In this, these neo-pragmatists rejected the common division of judgments into those that had their truth conditions set entirely by experience (what Kant called synthetic *a posteriori* judgments) and those that had their truth conditions set entirely by the meanings of the terms used in the judgment (what Kant called analytic *a priori* judgments). As Quine put it, "it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience; but this duality is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one."[2] Given that the conditions for the truth of any given proposition have this "double dependence" on experience of the world and language, it is no longer legitimate, according to Quine, to think of any proposition being true merely in virtue of the fact that it directly represents the nature of some fact about the world. The following passage nicely illustrates Quine's rejection of the representationalist notion that the function of claims about what is the case is to express the true nature of reality. Moreover, his explanation of what makes a judgment a good one has a distinctly pragmatist flavor.

> I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries—not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience.[3]

What is particularly noteworthy in this passage with respect to seeing Quine as continuing the pragmatist tradition is the contention that natural science should not be thought of primarily as a description of the way things really, truly are; rather, it should be thought of as "a tool . . . for predicting future experience." Our concept of an enduring physical object is not of value, for Quine, because it models the true nature of reality; rather, it is of value because it is an efficient way of helping human beings navigate through the world of experience.

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT: PHILOSOPHY AND ITS HISTORY

As in the foregoing parts of the chapter, the histories that philosophers tell of their own discipline often emphasize the respects in which the new theory is destructive of the old. This, of course, is natural and even helpful, for understanding the problems of the past that the next theory attempts to rectify provides valuable insight into the nature of the successor theory. Nonetheless, this way of recounting the history of philosophy runs the risk of grossly underemphasizing the seriousness philosophy accords its history. It does not view its history as merely of value as a record of ideas permanently supplanted—a sort of museum of mistakes of the past. Rather, it returns to its history for a variety of intellectual fruits. Sometimes it does serve as a cautionary tale of mistakes best not repeated, but no less often it serves as a source of insight and innovation, clarification and challenge. Perhaps in philosophy more than any other discipline, the figures of the past are active participants who influence the current of contemporary thought even though they are separated from philosophy's present practitioners by centuries and, sometimes, even millennia.

The following essay by Nathaniel Goldberg is an excellent illustration of the positive role philosophy's history can exert on its present. After explaining Quine's holisms and his commitment to the possibility of multiple conceptual schemes, Goldberg explains Donald Davidson's argument to show that that the idea of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible. With these preliminaries in place, Goldberg then proceeds to show that Davidson's arguments against the intelligibility of a conceptual scheme might be pushed in a roughly Kantian direction. Instead of taking his arguments to show what Davidson intended (it is meaningless to talk of a conceptual scheme), Goldberg contends that they might be used to show that there can be only one conceptual scheme. (Recall Kant's belief that the forms of sensibility and the categories of the understanding are necessary conditions for human beings to perceive and understand the world; therefore, Kant believed that there could be only one conceptual scheme for human beings.) Having given this neo-Kantian turn to Davidson's arguments, Goldberg merges this possibility with Quine's holism and proposes for consideration a new epistemology he calls "monoschematic holism." By thus engaging Kant (1724–1804), Quine (1908–2000), and Davidson (1917–2003) in philosophical conversation, Goldberg synthesizes the representationalist tradition with the pragmatist tradition to fashion an epistemological theory that may be unprecedented in the history of philosophy. Thus it is that in addition to being an excellent example of the positive role that philosophy's history often plays in its present development, Goldberg's essay may be an example of philosophical history in the making.

Nathaniel Goldberg: Where Does Knowledge Come From? Quine, Davidson, and Traditional Epistemology

Where do our various knowledge claims come from? Rationalists like Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz argue that all substantive knowledge claims derive from reason. Empiricists like Locke, Berkeley, and Hume declare that all such claims derive from experience. Kant maintains that some knowledge claims, like those in mathematics and what he calls "pure natural science," derive from reason, while those about the world derive from the interanimation of reason and experience.

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Two American philosophers have recently challenged the very idea of asking where our various knowledge claims come from. Willard van Orman Quine (1908–2000) insists that it is wrong to ask about the source of any such claims in isolation from one another. We must be epistemic holists and ask about knowledge in total. We can *then* realize that the human contribution (what had traditionally been called "reason") and the empirical contribution ("experience") to knowledge are always combined. The challenge made by Donald Davidson (1917–2003), Quine's student, is even more radical. Not only is Davidson an epistemic holist. He also contends that the notion of human and empirical contributions to knowledge is itself unintelligible. Knowledge does not come *from* anywhere. Nonetheless it can still be *about* the world, of which we are a part.

Coming to grips with Quine's and Davidson's positions is of paramount importance to epistemology. If either is correct, then Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant are all incorrect. But Quine's and Davidson's consequences are more far-reaching still. If Quine is right, then knowledge has to be reimagined, because *all* that we know turns out to be based partly on experience. Arithmetic and archeology are both empirical disciplines. If Davidson is right, then the *theory* of knowledge has to be reimagined. If knowledge has no sources—if it is simply about the world, without having anything to do with reason or experience—then the subject matter of much epistemology has vanished.

Our aim will be to consider some of Quine's and Davidson's arguments. Nothing less than how we are to imagine knowledge, and the theory of knowledge, hang in the balance.

1. Quine's Arguments

Though he challenges traditional empiricism, rationalism, and Kantianism alike, Quine follows many contemporary philosophers by talking not about "reason" as some mysterious faculty but about "language" as some behaviorally observable phenomenon. Reason and experience become for Quine *language* and experience. As such, Quine gives arguments meant to show that the traditional project of locating sources for knowledge claims, construed as sentences, is bankrupt. His most famous arguments concern the alleged tenability of maintaining that some sentences are true merely in virtue of language. Quine purports to show that there are no such sentences.[1] Nonetheless, even if Quine is right, and every sentence does depend for its truth on language and experience, this does not show that language and experience fail to contribute to the truth of knowledge claims individually. In other words, even if Quine's arguments against there being sentences true merely in virtue of language succeed, he has not thereby established epistemic holism. Conversely, holism would itself lead one to reject the existence of sentences true merely in virtue of language. So holism is the stronger view. Quine argues for it by examining how scientific hypotheses are tested.[2]

Consider how Quine would handle the following example. Suppose that we are testing the hypothesis that objects near the earth's surface accelerate at a rate of 9.8 m/s^2. We ascend to the 20th floor of a building, find a window, release an object from it, and time its decent to the ground. Then we measure the distance between

the center of the object when released to its center when it hits, and divide by the square of the time that it took to hit. That should provide the object's rate of acceleration. Instead of 9.8 m/s^2, however, suppose that we calculate 9.0 m/s^2.

What should we do? Quine contends that in principle we have unlimited latitude in explaining why our calculation was off. We could argue that air resistance or temperature slowed the rate of acceleration. We could argue that our formula for calculating acceleration was incorrect. We could argue that a nonphysical demon slowed the rate of acceleration. We could argue that the rules of arithmetic that we employed to make the calculations were incorrect. We could even argue that 9.8 m/s^2 and 9.0 m/s^2 are not incompatible values. In other words, we could allow that 9.8 m/s^2 and some value that is *not* 9.8 m/s^2 could both be the rate of acceleration! This would be to reject a cardinal law of logic, the law of non-contradiction.

Of course we would more likely take into consideration things like air resistance than we would call into question rules of arithmetic and logic. But Quine's point is that when faced with an observation that resists fitting in with our total theory of the world, we can revise *any* part of that total theory to make it fit. Quine deduces from this that "the unit of empirical significance is the whole of science."[3] When we evaluate any prediction about the world, we are ultimately testing every claim that we hold true, whether the claim concerns logic, mathematics, physical theory, or observations. Even logic and mathematics are then sensitive to experience.

Quine concludes that the sources of all our knowledge are double: there is the way that we think, incorporated into our language, and there are the sensory stimulations that we experience, which we use language to formulate into knowledge claims. Tracing the contribution that language and experience make to individual sentences is a mistake.

2. Evaluating Quine's Argument

Quine is correct. Logic and mathematics, on the one hand, and physical theory and observation, on the other, are mutually dependent on each other, and on language and experience in turn. Moreover, the history of science itself supports this. In the seventeenth century, Isaac Newton presupposed the claims of Euclidean geometry when he accounted for the movement of physical objects. (Euclidean geometry is the geometry studied in high school; it maintains, among other things, that parallel lines do not meet.) In the twentieth century, Albert Einstein presupposed the claims of Riemannian geometry when he accounted for the same. (Riemannian geometry differs from Euclidean precisely by maintaining that parallel lines do meet.) Now this is key. Because Einstein better accounted for observations of Mercury's movement around the Sun than did Newton, scientists rejected Euclidean and accepted Riemannian geometry as explanatory of the world. Mathematical systems, even the properties of parallel lines, are thus sensitive to empirical results.

Quine himself provides an example meant to illustrate how experience impacts logic also. Quine maintains that certain consequences of quantum mechanics seem best explained by claiming that a photon can be both a particle and not a particle simultaneously.[4] This is akin to our scientist above who could argue that 9.8 m/s^2 and not 9.8 m/s^2 are both the rate of acceleration. Here empirical results

might encourage scientists to revise logic itself. The truth or falsity of logical claims, like the law of non-contradiction, depends on what we observe in the world.

Considerations such as these show that it does make no sense to speak about human and empirical contributions to knowledge claims in isolation from one another. Mathematics, logic, and all the rest are part of our total theory of the world, each part of which impacts all the others. Now, recall, Davidson maintains that it makes no sense to speak about contributions to knowledge in the first place. We consider Davidson's arguments next.

3. Davidson's Argument[5]

Rather than "reason" or "language," Davidson calls the alleged human contribution to knowledge a "conceptual scheme." Rather than "experience," Davidson calls the alleged empirical contribution "empirical content." Nonetheless in Quinean spirit Davidson understands conceptual schemes linguistically; "we may identify conceptual schemes with languages . . . , or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of intertranslatable languages."[6] Davidson's arguments against the intelligibility of speaking about sources of knowledge amount to arguments against the intelligibility of distinguishing conceptual scheme from empirical content. To show that scheme–content dualism is unintelligible, Davidson asks what would count as evidence for the dualism. What would?

One answer would be drastic disagreement in the knowledge claims that different human beings make in the same empirical settings. We could then say that the disagreement came from each applying her own conceptual scheme to the same empirical content. But what would be evidence of that? We cannot read one another's minds. We can, however, talk to one another. By analyzing our descriptions of the world, differences in conceptual schemes (if there are any) should become manifest. Here Davidson's linguistic understanding of conceptual schemes comes in handy. If claims that you make in your language cannot be translated into claims that I make in mine, or vice versa, then each of us has a conceptual scheme that subsumes empirical content relative to our own way of conceiving of the world. Davidson thus maintains that the test for the intelligibility of scheme–content dualism is the possibility of non-intertranslatable languages. His strategy is to show that such non-intertranslatability is impossible.

Davidson considers two kinds of non-intertranslatability: complete and partial. Here is what he says about complete. Davidson suggests two ways of explaining how scheme and content interact generally. On the one hand, the scheme, understood as a language, can *organize* (or "categorize," "systematize," or "divide up") empirical content. On the other hand, it can *fit* (or "predict," "account for," or "face the tribunal of") such content. Neither, he maintains, can establish the possibility of complete non-intertranslatability. Consider each in turn.

Davidson contends that a language can only "organize" something already containing objects. When one organizes a closet, one organizes shoes, shirts, and boxes. The process of organizing entails that the thing to *be* organized is already individuated into parts. Hence, if a language can organize empirical content, then that content must already be individuated also. But individuation requires a

principle by which parts are separated out, and such a principle would involve or be a concept. In fact, Davidson observes, a conceptual scheme is itself meant to individuate empirical content. Conceptualization is the alleged means by which it does so. But therein lies the problem. Understanding conceptualization as organization presupposes that empirical content is already individuated, which, by hypothesis, only conceptualization itself could do. So for a conceptual scheme to organize empirical content that content must already both be and not be individuated—which is a logical contradiction.[7] Davidson concludes that because of this contradiction, understanding language as organizing empirical content cannot provide any evidence of completely non-intertranslatable languages.

The other way that language, understood as a conceptual scheme, might interact with its empirical content is by *fitting* it. What would this mean? Davidson decides that a language fits its empirical content only if it is *true* of that content. Now there are many ways to understand truth. Davidson appeals to the least controversial, Alfred Tarski's semantic conception of truth.[8] Tarski presupposes that we already have a pretheoretical understanding of translation. He then defines truth in terms of it. Basically Tarski maintains that the concept of truth in a language is exhausted by the total set of T-sentences constructible from that language. T-sentences have this form:

(T)   *s is true in a language if and only if p.*

Where *s* is a sentence in the language being studied, and *p* is the translation of that sentence in the language being used to study it. Suppose that Spanish is the language being studied and English is the language used to study it. This would then be one T-sentence:

(T_1)   *"La nieve es blanca" is true in Spanish if and only if snow is white.*

By identifying each *s* with its translation *p*, the totality of T-sentences for a language captures what it is for any sentence to be true in that language. It tells us what truth in that language is.

What does appealing to Tarski accomplish? Recall that the idea of a conceptual scheme's "fitting" empirical content was supposed to explain the possibility of complete failure of inter-translatability. Now, according to Davidson, since "fitting" is best understood as implicating truth, which itself implicates translatability, claiming that conceptual schemes "fit" their empirical content cannot provide any evidence of completely *non*-intertranslatable languages. We have no way of making scheme–content dualism intelligible here either.

Davidson's argument against the possibility of complete non-intertranslatability is controversial. Later we shall evaluate it and Davidson's argument against the possibility of partial non-intertranslatability together. Here we should consider his argument against the possibility of the partial variety instead. Davidson begins by asking what would be required for us to interpret a language about which we know nothing. He responds that we would need to be able to recognize the conditions under which each sentence that a speaker of that language

could utter are true. Recognizing any old truth conditions, however, is insufficient. "La nieve es blanca" is true in Spanish whenever *any* of the following conditions obtain: snow is white, New York has skyscrapers, 1 + 1 = 2, etc. To interpret "La nieve es blanca," we need to recognize not just any conditions under which it is true in Spanish; we need to recognize conditions reflective of what is happening in the world when our speaker utters "La nieve es blanca." Though sometimes our speaker would not utter "La nieve es blanca" in the presence of snow that is white, sometimes she would.

More generally, to be able to interpret a speaker's language we must assume that at least sometimes the speaker makes her utterances in response to what is happening in her environment. Other times we would interpret in light of these privileged cases.[9] Now, Davidson notes, it is up to us interpreters to discern which environmental features the speaker is responding to when we are in such privileged cases. The only way in which we could do so, Davidson concludes, is by constraining our interpretation by the principle of charity. We must assume that the speaker believes roughly what we believe about the world. This guarantees that she would find the same environmental features perceptually salient as we do, and so would at least sometimes respond to them when speaking her language.[10]

How does this establish the impossibility of partial non-intertranslatability? Davidson surmises that since reliance on the principle of charity is a necessary condition on interpretation: "Given the underlying methodology of interpretation, we could not be in a position to judge that others had concepts or beliefs radically different from our own."[11] Without the possibility of recognizing radically different concepts or beliefs, we could not be in a position to judge that any significant part of anyone's language failed to be intertranslatable with ours either. Whatever difficulty we might have in translating a speaker's utterances could never rise to the level of partial non-intertranslatability. In fact, Davidson concludes, *every* language must be basically intertranslatable into our own, if it is a language at all. But then there could never be any evidence of anyone's conceiving the world relative to her way of thinking instead of ours.

Since Davidson claims to have disqualified the possibility of completely and partially non-intertranslatable languages, he claims to have disqualified the possibility of our ever having any evidence of scheme–content dualism. Davidson concludes that the very idea of a human and empirical contribution to our knowledge is unintelligible. Does he think that we know nothing? Quite the contrary, while knowledge does not come *from* anywhere, it is still *about* something. For Davidson, it is about the world, of which we human beings are a part. Once we rid ourselves of the notion that knowledge has contributing factors, Davidson believes, we realize that we are in cognitive contact with the world *directly*. Neither reason or experience, nor reason or language, intercedes. Davidson concludes: "In giving up the dualism . . . we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."[12] Absent scheme–content dualism we have direct realism. The world itself, rather than our conception or experience of it, is what we know.

4. Evaluating Davidson's Argument

Davidson's arguments are problematic. Consider the argument against the possibility of complete non-intertranslatability first. Even if Davidson is right that understanding a language as organizing or fitting empirical content gives us no license on such a possibility, he fails to show that scheme and content can interact in *only* these ways. While Davidson does make an effort to subsume other notions under the notions of organization and fit, for all we know other notions are left out. We then have no definitive reason to accept his argument against the possibility of complete non-intertranslatability.

Luckily for Davidson, he does not need that argument. Though he does not realize it, disqualifying the possibility of partial non-intertranslatability disqualifies the possibility of the complete variety also. If it is not the case that parts of two languages are non-intertranslatable, then it is not the case that the whole of two languages are non-intertranslatable either. Put differently, if we cannot be in a position to judge that others have concepts or beliefs radically different from our own, then we cannot be in a position to judge that others possess languages partly *or* completely non-intertranslatable into our own. Davidson's argument against scheme–content dualism therefore rests on his argument against the possibility of partially non-intertranslatable languages.

What should we make of that argument? Suppose that we could never be in a position to judge that others have concepts or beliefs radically different from ours. Languages still seem to contribute *something* to what we know. Say that we read in a textbook: "China has over one billion people." If the textbook is written in American English, then it says that China has over one thousand million people, since in American English "one billion" means one thousand million. In this case it says something true. If the textbook is written in British English, then it says that China has over one million million people, since in British English "one billion" means one million million. This time it says something false. If the textbook is written in Chinese, then "China has over one billion people" says nothing at all. This is not a legitimate sentence in Chinese. The status of our knowledge claims depends on the language in which we express them. Considerations of language therefore seem to be of the utmost importance when considering what counts as knowledge.

Of course Davidson would respond that "China has over one billion people" can be *translated* from American English into British English and Chinese. There would be no evidence that speakers of any of these languages conceive of the world differently, only that they use different words to express the same thing. But this gives rise to a different worry. Why has Davidson shown that we can have *no* scheme rather than the *same* scheme? We asked above what would count as evidence of scheme–content dualism. The answer that we gave was drastic disagreement in the knowledge claims that different human beings reach, which would result in completely or partially non-intertranslatable languages. But if a conceptual scheme is meant to be the human contribution to knowledge, then non-intertranslatable *or* intertranslatable languages should be sufficient evidence for the intelligibility of a conceptual scheme. After all, human beings contribute *language*, intertranslatable or not. And Davidson had himself claimed: "We may

identify conceptual schemes with languages . . . , or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of inter-translatable languages."[13] Davidson does in fact think that he has shown that all languages are intertranslatable. Why should we not take Davidson at his word? Why has he not shown that there can be a single conceptual scheme?

> Davidson responds to just this worry:

> If I am right, then there never can be a situation in which we can intelligibly compare or contrast divergent schemes, and in that case we do better not to say that there is one scheme, as if we understood what it would be like for there to be more.[14]

If we cannot know what it would be for schemes to differ, then it makes no sense to say that all those whose languages we can interpret have a scheme that is the same. We would have no contrast class to the case of there being only one conceptual scheme.

Davidson's reasoning, however, is fallacious. Consider all the logically possible worlds that exist—all the different ways that reality could be. All these possible worlds together comprise a single set, the set of all logically possible worlds. This is true even though there could be no *other* set of logically possible worlds. Now consider all the intertranslatable languages. If Davidson is right, then all languages are intertranslatable, so the set of all intertranslatable languages just is the set of all languages. This is true even though there could be no other set of languages. Further, if a contrast class is required to identify them as a set, then the contrast need not be the set of *non*-intertranslatable languages. If all languages are intertranslatable, then anything that contrasts with languages will do. The set of noises that are not languages can contrast with and thus allow us to identify the set of languages that are intertranslatable. The languages would comprise a scheme; the noises, not. The very idea of a conceptual scheme makes sense after all.

Finally, with the scheme idea now intelligible, the empirical-content idea is intelligible also. Davidson thinks that we have knowledge about the world. If it makes sense to say that our language contributes to that knowledge by providing us with concepts, then it also makes sense to say that the world contributes to that knowledge by providing us with experience. Scheme–content dualism returns.

5. Lessons

What should we make of Quine's and Davidson's arguments? Let me draw three lessons. First, Quine is right. It makes no sense to speak about the sources of our knowledge claims in isolation from one another. All our knowledge depends holistically on the way in which we conceive of the world and the way that the world contributes to that conception. Further, as we saw at the outset, this *also* means that disciplines traditionally thought to be non-empirical, like logic and mathematics, depend for their truth or falsity on experience too. Knowledge itself has to be reimagined. Nothing that we know is divorced from experience.

Second, Davidson is wrong. It does make sense to speak about human and empirical contributions to knowledge. Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, can more or less stay as it is. Further, if Davidson shows anything, it is that we

can never have evidence of beings who conceive of the world in ways radically different from how we ourselves do. That does not make scheme–content dualism unintelligible; it makes a polyschematic form of the dualism unintelligible. We can understand what it would be for beings to contribute the same basic input to their knowledge as we do ourselves. *Different* input is the problem.

Third, whether or not Davidson is right, his arguments point the way to an epistemic position that shares important features of Quine's and Kant's, yet is interesting in its own right. On the one hand, Quine, unlike Kant, thinks that knowledge is holistic. Though Davidson claims to reject Quine's dualism of language and experience, he endorses Quine's holism.[15] On the other hand, Kant, unlike Quine, thinks that all human beings have the same conceptual scheme. Though Davidson claims to reject the very idea of such a scheme, his arguments make such a universal scheme intelligible. Thus the view that Davidson in fact leaves us is this. Though there is no tracing the non-empirical and empirical contributions to individual knowledge claims, all human beings contribute the same non-empirical factors to what we know. While this "holistic Kantianism"—or "monoschematic holism"—is not necessarily correct, it is a position that, so far as I know, no one in the history of philosophy has articulated.

Endnotes

1. Quine's most famous arguments occur in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays*, 2nd ed., revised (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 20–46).
2. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," pp. 42–6.
3. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," p. 34.
4. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," p. 43. Instead of being a particle, the photon would be a wave.
5. Davidson most famously argues for this in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 183–98). This and the next section partly draw from my "*E Pluribus Unum:* Arguments against Conceptual Schemes and Empirical Content," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (2004) 42: 411–38.
6. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 185.
7. I am assuming with Quine that we so far have no compelling reason to reject the law of non-contradiction.
8. "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1944) 4: 341–75.
9. We would presumably identify these privileged cases, when the speaker does make her utterances in response to what is happening in her environment, by trial and error.
10. See my "The Principle of Charity," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* (2004) 43: 671–83.
11. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 197.
12. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 198.
13. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 185.
14. "Psychology as Philosophy and Replies," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 229–44), p. 243.
15. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 137–58), p. 144.

Questions for Discussion

1. In discussing the challenges facing representation-alism, it was noted that some fault Kant's epistemology for being highly complex. Is a high degree of theoretical complexity always a flaw in a theory? If so, why? If not, are there conditions for deciding when theoretical complexity is problematic and when it is not?

2. The metaphysical dispute between materialists and idealists was offered as an example of a philosophical dispute the resolution of which would have no impact on human life. Do you agree that this is so? If not, what practical implications do you think could follow from the resolution of this dispute?

3. How does William James answer the question of whether the man went round the squirrel? Do you accept his answer?

4. How does Davidson respond to the suggestion that his argument against the possibility of a conceptual scheme might be used to show that there can be only one conceptual scheme? Why does Goldberg find this response unconvincing? Who do you think is right on this issue?

Endnotes

1. Immanuel Kant, "Letter to Marcus Herz, February 21, 1772" in Kant: *Selections*, ed. by Lewis White Beck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), p. 83 (Ak. X 131).
2. W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays*, 2nd ed., revised (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 43).
3. Ibid., p. 44.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EPISTEMOLOGY

Generally speaking, contemporary epistemology is going through a skeptical phase. Philosophers today are far less confident than they were in the modern period (the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries) in our ability to discover the absolutely certain foundations of knowledge. Recall how Descartes sought to find a grounding for all knowledge on absolutely certain foundations: the thinking self, the cogito, and how empiricism tried to find a grounding for knowledge on the absolute certainty of sense perception. Similarly, philosophy in the twentieth century tried to ground knowledge on the absolute certainty of logic and mathematics.

Today this quest for certainty seems to many only a lost dream. Most philosophers today are fallibilists—that is, they reject the idea that knowledge can ever be based on such absolute certainties. However, fallibilism does not imply that knowledge is impossible, nor does it lead to skepticism. If we understand knowledge as something less than absolute certainty, then knowledge is indeed possible.

A more skeptical attitude toward knowledge, however, arose among French philosophers in the middle of the twentieth century and has led to a point of view known as postmodernism. If modernism was dominated by the desire for absolute foundations for knowledge and the quest for certainty, postmodernism rejects both. The postmodern view is espoused in the writings of Jacques Derrida (*Of Grammatology*) and Michel Foucault (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*), among others. Much of this approach is alien to American and British traditions, and there has been great resistance to this invasion of these ideas by those working in the mainstreams of Anglo-American philosophical thought. Not only are the postmodernist ideas themselves highly controversial, they are also written in a dense and incomprehensible style that is difficult for the person not versed in the jargon of postmodernism to understand. Especially in the writings of Derrida,

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postmodernism challenges the fundamental epistemological assumption of modern philosophy and science, the possibility of discovering the truth about anything. Postmodernists claim that any attempt to verify the truth of a claim by its correspondence with reality is an impossible illusion.

Postmodernism's Challenges

Traditionally most philosophers have found skepticism about knowledge unacceptable and have sought ways around it. Postmodernism is radical and controversial in that it joyfully embraces radical, skeptical subjectivism and relativism and offers to help the rest of us come to terms with this "brave new world." For such reasons, postmodernism has gained little acceptance among philosophers, though it has made major inroads into literary and art criticism and even into social theory. Whether postmodernism represents a major turning point in philosophy or simply one more in a long series of periodic skeptical phases in the history of philosophy remains to be seen, though if its recent history is any judge, it is probably the latter.

To get a sense of the radical claims of postmodernism, consider the traditional view of knowledge. The only reason it makes sense to speak of one real object or event about which there have been many different theories or interpretations over the years is the assumption, which postmodernism denies, that these interpretations are "about" something—that is, more or less true or accurate descriptions of that real object or event. It is because of this modernist assumption that we imagine we are comparing an interpretation to the reality, to see how accurate or inaccurate it is.

Because, on this traditional, modern philosophical assumption, there are many more or less accurate interpretations describing the same object, we assume that there is a single reality that all these interpretations are interpretations of and at which they all aim. Imagine many people shooting at the same target; to speak of some shots as "close" and others as "way off" presupposes they are all directed at a single bull's-eye. But if language fails completely to describe an external reality, then there is really no longer any point in talking about an object apart from particular interpretations, or "readings," of it. In the target analogy, if shots going up, down, north, south, east, and west were all said to be equally accurate, we would begin to wonder whether there was a target at all.

The belief in an independent external reality is what postmodernism tries to destroy by "deconstructing" language—that is, by showing first the gap between word and object, language and reality, and then by showing that the so-called reality is simply created by the language itself. Deconstruction shows how language has constructed what we refer to as reality; it then deconstructs these linguistic constructions. What this accomplishes, when successful, is to expose as myths those linguistic descriptions masquerading as reality: the myth of truth as the correspondence of idea to reality, the myth of universal cross-cultural objectivity, and the myth of neutral, value-free scientific investigation.

As Derrida and other deconstructionists put it, what are deconstructed are traditional, Western, value-laden dichotomies (which he calls *binaries*): presence/absence, nature/culture, male/female, central/marginal. In each case the first of the pair is preferred and ranks above the second. Such value-laden, hierarchical binaries, according to deconstructionists, provide the foundations for our Western intellectual tradition. In order to settle disputes, we must have standards on which we all agree for distinguishing true from false, correct from incorrect, real from illusory, and in order to do that we must be able to appeal to something that is beyond dispute. This is what dichotomous binaries provide, for without such binaries there can be no foundation.

For Derrida, *presence* (and its binary opposite, *absence*) is the root idea in Western culture. Knowledge begins by seeing just the object "right in front of us," and then comparing "representations" (that is, interpretations) of the object to the object actually "present" to us. If I say it's green and you say it's red, we simply look at the object and see that it is in fact red, so you are right and I am wrong. Without presence there can be no representation, and without representation there can be no stability of meaning—that is, no way to decide on the one correct meaning or interpretation and therefore no way to determine intersubjectively the final and complete truth of anything once and for all.

There are, however, many visible aspects of an object, so we must distinguish those that are central (color and shape, for example) from those that are of only marginal importance (such as aesthetic properties). Without giving priority or preference for *centrality*, we can now see that what has previously been considered *marginal* is seen as just as important as what has traditionally been considered central, since

there really is no difference between what is central and what is marginal. Whereas previously the evaluative laden binaries constrained and limited thought and language to a supposed presence (that is, objective truth to which thought and language had to conform), the rejection of presence frees thought and language to "play," as Derrida calls it, with the "reading" or interpretation of the "text"—that is, to interpret the object or event freely without being restricted by considerations of correctness or truth.

But if no one theory or interpretation is any better than any other, as postmodernism claims, how is it that in fact some theories and interpretations have succeeded historically whereas others have failed? Postmodernism says this is due to political forces. There are no truer or better interpretations, only stronger interpretations—that is, those which are more persuasive at a particular time and for a particular audience. But what is persuasive is rhetorically powerful for one particular social group at the expense of another. The traditional creation of an official list of accepted theories is therefore just an advertising sales pitch aimed at elevating one social group into power (aristocratic, white, European males) and holding other social groups (lower classes, women, non-Europeans) down. Once we realize that this is the case, we realize that there is a revolutionary side to postmodernism that encourages all the left-out, "marginalized" groups to demand their full share of center stage. Distinctions of scientific and popular, major and minor, good and bad, established and alternative are all swept away.

Most philosophers would use the same arguments against this view that Plato used against the Sophists. If all theories become important only because they are politically more powerful or acceptable, then if postmodernism becomes accepted it is only because it, too, has become politically acceptable and powerful. But then it could be attacked as putting the views it rejects on the margins, thus becoming guilty of the very things it condemns in the views it attacks. In other words, postmodernism undercuts its own foundations.

A Search for Common Ground

Postmodernism is both disturbing and attractive. It is disturbing in that it urges that we cut ourselves adrift from solid and stable boundary markers of what is right and wrong, good and bad, correct and incorrect, true and false, real and illusory. But it also opens up an emphasis on the legitimacy of the individual's "reading," or interpretation, of an object or event however it may deviate from the opinion of the experts. It also provides an opening to hitherto "marginalized" thought of women, minorities, and disenfranchised groups, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and homeless street people.

As often happens when new movements challenge older, established positions, confrontational battle lines are drawn up, with differences between the established tradition and the new challenge exaggerated. Each side pictures the other's view as an extreme, simplistic caricature. As in any intense intellectual debate, there are those who embrace extreme positions as the best way of differentiating their positions from the opposition as sharply as possible, and this, too, contributes to a sense of an irreconcilable gulf between the two positions.

The truth probably lies somewhere in between these two extremes. How so? When we finally make an assessment of postmodernism, we see some major similarities to the mainstream tradition of modern philosophy, as well as some major differences. Postmodernism rejects absolutes, but a hint of this can also be seen in the modern philosophical tradition, though not universally accepted by all, from Locke's rejection of innate ideas, to Kant's elimination of knowledge of the thing-in-itself, to the twentieth-century rejection of an absolutely empiricist foundation for knowledge. Modernism was already moving toward the view that a fundamental illusion deeply embedded in our Western intellectual outlook is to think that there are absolutely secure and certain foundations for knowledge, reality, and objective truth free from all human bias. The adoption of fallibilist positions referred to earlier is modernism's response to this state of affairs.

However, the major difference between postmodernism and the tradition of modern philosophy is the kind of responses we make to this rejection of absoluteness. The postmodern response is to go from one extreme position to the opposite extreme. The attitude of postmodernism seems to be that "if God is dead, everything is possible." Much of the language of postmodernism is the language of extremes. If there are no absolutes, then in place of knowledge and the rational search for intersubjective, objective truth we are now free to "play" or, in Derrida's expression, to "trope." There are no external standards or even internal standards of personal or cultural consistency and

coherence to restrict us. We are, therefore, free to go with what seems at the moment compelling to us and we are guided in our articulations by only the desire to persuade, to gain a receptive following.

Within the modern philosophic tradition, by contrast, there has been the attempt to recover regulative, relative, pragmatic standards which take the place of the old absolutes. Even if there is no knowledge of the thing-in-itself, we can learn more and more about things as they appear to us. Even if our knowledge is biased by our interests, we can still learn what an object is like relative to our interests which we more or less share with others for a longer or shorter period of time. Even if our knowledge, beliefs, and meanings are based on changing social conventions, these conventions change slowly enough to allow us to establish acceptable and workable rules operating within a given time span. Even if there is no indubitable empirical given, we can still continue to assess our theories in the light of our experience of the world. Even if there is no certainty, there can be higher and higher probabilities. Even if analytic statements are true relative to social conventions, there can still be, at any given time, a high degree of social agreement on conventions over a long period of time. Even if there are no essences, there are family resemblances. Even if there are no brute facts, there are relatively more socially acceptable beliefs in any given situation, which function as and can be regarded as the facts relative to that context. Even if we cannot know ultimate reality, we can know aspects of reality and can continue to talk meaningfully about the regulative ideal of improving our understanding.

Other Epistemological Views

Deriving some strategies from postmodern skeptical theories of knowledge, but offering a view that is less extreme then postmodernism, are various "social epistemologies," including *feminist epistemology*. According to postmodern theories, knowledge is not an individualistic achievement and cannot be achieved by separating oneself from the experiences and circumstances of the knowing subject or group of subjects. Social groups may differ on the approach to the knowing process, some preferring a more intuitive approach, others a more rational approach. Feminist epistemologists point to the undeniable fact that most, if not all, philosophers who developed epistemological theories were male, giving rise to what they refer to as *androcentric* biases. Women experience things and look at the world differently than do white, affluent males, and as a result their knowledge claims are different but are just as valid as those from a masculine perspective. Whereas the mainstream, androcentric epistemologies have focused exclusively on reason, feminine epistemologies take seriously the embodied aspect of the knower; women's embodiment is different than men's, and they therefore experience the world differently. Feminist epistemologists do not think that gender is the only variable that should be considered. Others include race, ethnic origins, social standing, age, class, and whether or not one is a member of a marginalized group.

Another new development is known as *virtue epistemology*, which focuses on certain character traits of the knower, which are likely to lead to true beliefs. As we will see in Part 5 devoted to ethics, a virtue is a stable and generally helpful character disposition. Virtues, in other words, are like good habits: they define who we are, how we are likely to act, and they help us lead better, happier, and more successful lives. In many ways virtue epistemology is simply a new interpretation of the most subjective part of the traditional definition of knowledge as true belief accompanied by good reasons. The virtues associated with having good reasons would include our being willing to be critical, to look for and ask for reasons, to be willing to listen to opposite points of view, to be willing to reject beliefs we have come to see are not supported by the evidence. Virtue epistemology claims that a true belief that results from the epistemic virtues deserves to be called knowledge (that is, knowledge defined as true belief resulting from epistemological virtue). Just as with the older definition of knowledge as true belief accompanied by good reasons, there is no guarantee that being epistemologically virtuous will always result in true beliefs (and therefore knowledge), but this is probably the best we can ever hope for. Getting ourselves in the best possible position to know something—looking at all the evidence, weighing all the facts, listening to all sides of the issue, thinking things through—is more likely to generate knowledge than not doing these things.

Closely related to virtue epistemology are various forms of *reliablist epistemologies*, whose main idea is that a belief is justified if it is caused by a reliable process (for example, basing a belief on statistical probability rather than tea leaves). Again, adherence to a reliable process does not guarantee

one will never be mistaken but does improve one's chances and increases the odds of being right.

All of the social epistemologies share the common assumption that knowledge may always be partial and imperfect, but it is knowledge nonetheless. If we are less certain than was Descartes who tried to reach absolute certainty, we nonetheless do not need to embrace either skepticism (no knowledge is possible) or relativism (all knowledge claims, even contradictory ones, are equally true).

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Suggestions for Further Reading

Alcoff, Linda Martin, and Elizabeth Potter, editors. *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Explores the question of how the social position of the knower affects the acquisition of knowledge.

Belenky, Mary Field, editor. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Basic Books, 1996. Collection of essays from feminist thinkers from a variety of backgrounds.

Chisholm, Roderick M. *The Foundations of Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, 1982. Clearly written, short overview from Chisholm's modified phenomenological perspective.

Code, Lorraine. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. Cornell University Press, 1991. A work by one of the most prolific writers in feminist epistemology outlining the basic claims of that position.

Goldman, Alan. *Epistemology and Cognition*. Harvard University Press, 1988. Argues that epistemology cannot be separated from psychology and that knowledge of cognitive processes is important for understanding how we form beliefs and solve problems.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford University Press, 1993. Offers an analysis of the notion of warrant, which the author says is a concept nearly all of us regularly use.

Williams, Michael. *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*. Oxford University Press, 2001. Offers a critical overview of analytic epistemology.

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1. Why did James describe himself as a "radical empiricist"?

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2. How was Friedrich Nietzsche a precursor of postmodern thought?

   Listen to the **program:** *Brian Leiter on Nietzsche Myths* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Review the authors you studied in metaphysics and epistemology before proceeding to ethics in the next chapter.

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Introduction to Ethical Reasoning

Ethics, sometimes called moral philosophy, investigates the methods and principles used to evaluate human actions in terms of their goodness, badness, rightness, and wrongness. Traditionally, the field of ethics is divided into the three subfields of normative ethics, metaethics, and applied ethics. Normative ethics involves the attempt to formulate systems of rules and values that are used to distinguish between morally permissible and morally impermissible behavior. The golden rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"—is one example of a normative principle. It is a rule that one might consult when deciding how to behave. In Chapters 22, 23, and 24, you will be reading about the normative moral systems advanced by Aristotle (Chapter 22, "Eudaemonism: The Morality of Self-Realization"), John Stuart Mill (Chapter 23, "Utilitarianism: Morality Depends on the Consequences"), and Immanuel Kant (Chapter 24, "Deontology: Morality Depends on the Motives").

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Metaethics is the study of moral reasoning itself. Not directly concerned with identifying or justifying specific rules of behavior, metaethics investigates the foundations of our very reasoning about moral matters. It is concerned, for instance, with specifying the meanings of fundamental moral terms such as *right, wrong, duty, obligation, virtue,* and *vice.* It is also concerned with the question of whether moral values are invented or discovered. In considering this question, metaethicists investigate whether moral values are objective in a way that makes sense of the widely held belief that there are moral facts to which we must conform our judgments of moral value.

Applied ethics, finally, is the application of normative theories to specific moral problems within specific disciplines. Though both metaethics and normative ethics continue to be vibrant areas of philosophical study, work in applied ethics has experienced significant and ever-increasing growth over the past fifty years. In fact, some of the most intensive work being done in ethics today involves philosophers working on biomedical ethics, wrestling with the vexing issues raised by new medical technologies, including stem cell research, genetic manipulation, and when to use and terminate methods of artificial life prolongation. And while bioethics is the largest and best-known area of applied ethics, more and more attention is being paid to issues in numerous other fields, including engineering ethics, computer ethics, business ethics, legal ethics, and military ethics.

While the study of ethics is conveniently divided into these three categories, it is important to note that the study of ethics is also an organic whole in which there is

significant overlap and interplay among these three areas. The most obvious instance of overlap and interplay is that one's normative principles will influence the conclusions one reaches on various issues in applied ethics; however, the influence goes in other directions as well. One might, for instance, have strong intuitions about an issue in applied ethics that eventually shapes one's normative theory. In addition, it often happens that one's commitments in metaethics shape and are themselves shaped by one's normative commitments. Given this interrelation among the three branches of ethics, good philosophical reasoning in ethics is often global in that it considers both the foundations of the reasoning itself and highly specific contexts in which moral concerns are present. Though questions asked in the three different domains of ethics can seem very different, they constitute a unified line of inquiry. The common aim of metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics is to gain insight into the fundamental values that ought to inform a person's life.

NORMATIVE ETHICS AND THE VARIETIES OF VALUE

Ethics is an important branch of philosophy because it directs our attention not only to human morality but to values in general. Moral philosophy raises questions such as the following: Are there standards that ought to govern all human behavior? If so, how can we know what they are? Even if we know there are such ethical standards, why should we follow them, especially when they seem not to be in our own self-interest? In general, what makes something good or bad? Is there any common property, for example, that not only makes a chocolate cake good but that also makes a lawn mower good? Or is goodness just a feeling people have of liking or wanting something? What makes an action right or wrong? Does the same thing that makes lying wrong make failure to help a friend wrong? More generally still, are human actions and human lives good or bad for reasons similar to those that would make a good lawn mower or chocolate cake?

This last question brings out an important sense of the word *good* which serves to differentiate one of the two major types of normative ethical theories. Aristotle long ago pointed out that when we talk about something being good or bad, we usually mean whether it satisfies the purpose or function for which it was made. A lawn mower is good if it cuts the grass evenly, quietly, and efficiently, because that is what it is supposed to do. A good pencil, on the other hand, is one that writes evenly and without a mess. The properties that make a thing good or bad vary with each kind of item according to its particular purpose or function, though all are alike in being good for the same general functional reason, that each does what it was meant to do. Thus, if I ask in general, what makes a shagrink a good shagrink, there is no answer forthcoming (except the general answer "it does what it is supposed to do") until we know what a shagrink *is* and thereby what its function is.

Notice that while one thing may be good for the sake of some particular end, that end may itself be a means to some further end. So, for example, the nail is useful in building a house, and the house is useful in providing shelter. By pursuing this line of reasoning we soon arrive at the most general aims or purposes or needs of human life and thus to a theory about what good *in general* is. This means/end analysis of good is called *teleological,* from the Greek word *telos,* meaning "end" or "purpose."

Does the means/end chain go on forever, or does it come to rest, and if so where? What, for example, is the shelter that the house provides good for? Health and comfort. Okay, but what are these good for? Here we seem to arrive at the end of the road. These and other things are ultimately good for our happiness and well-being, and here the chain definitely comes to an end. If we ask what happiness or well-being is good for, the question makes no sense. In this sense, then, happiness is the ultimate or most general or final good. Thus the kind of approach to ethics which emphasizes the purposeful sense of good usually leads to the conclusion that good is ultimately or finally human happiness or well-being.

Of course, it is one thing to say that happiness is the ultimate human good, and another to specify more precisely what this happiness consists in. Among teleological approaches that identify happiness as the ultimate human good, there have been two primary accounts of the nature of this happiness: *eudaemonism* and hedonism. According to *eudaemonism*, happiness is equated with human flourishing, the general fulfillment of a human being's significant capacities. The term *eudaemonism*, which comes from ancient Greek, was originally a religious notion. In Greek, *Eu* is the root for "good" and *daemon* was a guiding spirit who oversaw an individual's life. Thus, the

((•● Listen to the podcast: *Myles Burnyeat on Aristotle on Happiness* on MySearchLab.com

original idea is that if one's life is going well and one is flourishing, one has a guiding spirit that is doing a good job. In eudaemonist moral theories, however, the religious overtones faded into the background, and the term came to refer to any moral view that saw individual human flourishing as the ultimate good. Perhaps the most influential form of eudaemonism, and the one that will be the focus of Chapter 22, was that propounded by Aristotle, who made the primary focus of eudaemonia the fulfillment of a human being's rational nature.

According to *hedonism,* which comes from the Greek word for pleasure, ultimate human good is pleasure and happiness is thus equated with the maximization of pleasure. Anything is good, according to this theory, if it contributes to human pleasure. And here it is customary and useful to distinguish two kinds of hedonism. If the pleasure is for the agent alone, it is *egoistic hedonism,* but if the pleasure is for the largest number of people possible, then it is known as *utilitarianism.* If cheating in general causes more pain than pleasure, then it is bad, but if it creates more pleasure all round, then it is good. Not all teleological theories are hedonistic, but only those which specify pleasure as the ultimate end, or purpose, of action. If we suppose the ultimate end or purpose of any action is power, or wealth, our theory is teleological but not hedonistic. Both of these forms of hedonism are examples of consequentialist teleological theories in that they identify the goodness of states and actions in terms of the quantity of some state—in the case of hedonism, pleasure—that the action produces. Consequentialist theories are distinct from eudaemonist theories discussed above in that the ultimate end of human life on a eudaemonist theory is not something that can be conceived of in a quantitative manner.

HUMAN AND FUNCTIONAL GOODNESS

This kind of analysis works fairly well for manufactured articles, but what about natural things, and, more important, what about persons? Looked at in this way, what makes a tree a good tree and what makes a person a good person? In the case of natural objects we might consider extending to them, by analogy, the same teleological attitudes we

have toward manufactured objects. Although we did not make the tree, we can regard it as an object which can similarly serve our needs and purposes, such as shade, decoration, wood for the fireplace, or wood for the new barn. So a good tree would be one which was either broad and leafy, attractive to look at, slow and even burning, or durable yet easily workable. Perhaps we have no right to bend natural objects to our own purposes—if whales are good for their oil, are we justified in using all the remaining whales to meet this need?

Assuming that we can justify this treatment of the natural world simply as an object of human use, what can we say about the goodness and badness of people based on this analogy? We know what makes a lawn mower a good one because we know what its purpose is, and we know *that* because we (collectively) made it. But, on this analysis, a good person would be one who served the purpose for which he or she was "made." But is there such a purpose, and if so, can we know what it is? The answers to these questions may be affirmative, but they are not obviously or clearly so.

Perhaps the human purpose or function is as Plato and Aristotle thought, to do what people do best or uniquely. Human purpose on this view would be to fulfill human nature or potential. That might include thinking rationally and creating art, and these activities do sound like good ones for people. But people are also uniquely capable of brutal warfare. Which of these activities are part of our true potential and which are perversions of that potential?

Despite these problems, this approach to ethics (applying the functional analysis of manufactured goods to the analysis of human goodness) does lead to the ethical position of eudaemonism mentioned earlier. A good life, according to this view, is one which taps to the fullest the inherent capacities of each person. This view would prescribe, for example, that, other things being equal, a person would make a grave mistake to reject whole dimensions of human experience—avoiding, for example, all creative endeavor, all leadership capability, all responsibility, all caring for others, and so on. It would also insist that any attempt to restrain the full development of such capacities by outside control (such as slavery or class, race, or sex restrictions) would necessarily be wrong.

DEONTOLOGICAL VIEWS

Nonetheless, many philosophers believe that there is something unsatisfactory about looking at human goodness in the same way we look at toothpick goodness. This point can be brought out most forcefully perhaps by considering the ambiguity in the word *good* when applied to human beings. Consider Jones, for example, who is a professional murderer. Is Jones good? Well, in one sense, yes, though certainly not in another sense. Jones is a good professional, does the job of killing well, never makes mistakes and kills the wrong person, makes the kill cleanly, inconspicuously, and never leaves clues which might incriminate Jones's employer. But in another sense we surely feel that Jones is a very bad person and is doing what is bad. But why? Is it because it fails to serve some purpose or does not have a function? Perhaps. Aristotle would maintain that such behavior is contrary to the fulfillment of our rational natures found in living a life of virtue. On the other hand, it also seems to be bad for a fundamentally different sort of reason. It is intrinsically bad; it is simply not right. Would it be wrong to deceive another person even if that person never found out, while at the same time, it helped you in some way? Perhaps, it even contributed to your engaging in an act of charity so that both you and

others would benefit. If you feel that if no one (including yourself) was hurt it was all right, then you are using a teleological criterion. But if you feel (at least partly) that it would be wrong even if no one was hurt (and in fact even if some were benefited by it), then you are applying a different criterion.

An ethical view that gives central place to the sense that some acts are intrinsically or unconditionally wrong and that their wrongness is not, therefore, ultimately determined by the purposes they achieve, is called *deontological* ethics (from the Greek word for "obligation"). This is also known, more simply, as the *ethics of duty*. This name reflects the fact that deontological ethics views an action as having true moral worth only if the agent is motivated by the recognition that it is one's moral *duty* to perform the action.

The ethics of duty, usually associated with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, presents a striking contrast with teleological ethics, but especially with self-centered, "egoist" varieties of teleological ethics. Some, though not all, teleological positions in ethics are egoist, examining each action from the standpoint of how much benefit or utility it will bring to the agent. What will I get out of it? Something is good if it is good *for me*. But this is the opposite point of view of the ethics of duty. When most persons think of someone doing "the morally right thing," they normally have in mind a person who acts either out of concern for others or as a matter of principle, whether it is to the *agent's* personal benefit or not. Acting from a sense of duty, however, may be contrary to our most immediate interests—I can improve my grades by cheating, avoid embarrassment by lying, strengthen my financial situation by stealing. Even though acting from duty may demand a sacrifice of self-interest, the two are not always or necessarily incompatible— my self-interest may happen to coincide with what I consider it my duty to do.

The ethics of duty is usually associated with the position that principles of ethics are universal, absolute, and invariable, applying to everyone and in all circumstances. If something is right for one person then it is right for everyone in that situation. This accords with many of our commonsense assumptions about morality. I am apt to be angry when I hear that some people do not pay their taxes, whereas I do. And most of us feel a sense of injustice when we hear that a poor black man was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for the same crime for which an upper-middle-class white person was given a six-month suspended sentence. Why *shouldn't* the same rule apply in all cases? If there are good, that is, morally relevant, reasons, then we allow for exceptions, although these exceptions themselves simply form a new *universal rule:* "*Everyone* earning more than $—, and *no one* earning less than that, must pay federal income tax." In the absence of any good reason, we face a conflict of duty and self-interest.

Utilitarian ethical theories are in agreement with the ethics of duty in rejecting the self-interested standpoint of *egoism,* inasmuch as they aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. And although utilitarians, unlike those who believe in the ethics of duty, might justify lying, stealing, breaking promises, etc., if this creates more happiness, the utilitarian, nonetheless, does believe in the universality of moral standards in the sense that everyone must, in all circumstances, do what produces the most happiness for the largest number of people. But there are other ways in which the ethics of duty sharply differs from utilitarianism.

The most important difference between the ethics of duty and utilitarianism concerns our treatment of people. According to the ethics of duty, a person can never be treated merely as a means to an end, however worthy that end may be. If something is wrong, then it is wrong in all circumstances, for every person, regardless of the

consequences. This is what we mean when we say that persons have "certain inalienable rights." A right is something a person has *regardless,* and something which others have an absolute obligation to honor and protect. For example, we feel that every person has the right to be free. This is not a gift or a privilege that one must earn, but an inherent untouchable prerogative which every person has simply because one is a human being. It cannot be bought or traded and it cannot be legitimately taken away from that person for any reason whatever.

Imagine a situation in which the happiness of the greatest number of people could be increased by instituting slavery. This is not so difficult to imagine. Some people are less upset about the removal of their freedom than others (though no one is particularly happy about it). What if we selected as slaves those who seemed to value their freedom the least and, say, we selected only a small proportion of our society for this subservient role, and further that we indoctrinated this minority to believe that it was natural and right for them to be slaves, perhaps even drugging them to feel less pain. Finally, we would give them those menial but essential jobs which everyone else in the society was delighted not to have to do. Now, if we measure the total amount (or the average amount) of expected happiness in our society before and after our new program of slavery and found that people were on the whole happier *after,* would we be morally obligated to institute the new slavery program? No, of course not, our moral intuitions tell us. But it is hard to see how the utilitarian could avoid saying that we should, since this would be the best thing to do under the circumstances. The ethics of duty, on the other hand, is more in line with our own intuitions in rejecting this position. In principle it is always wrong to enslave another, whatever the consequences (even if that person *wants* to be enslaved).

As we shall see in the readings in the following chapters, there are problems with the ethics of duty as well. Difficulties with the Kantian ethics of duty arise when you try to apply it to a concrete situation. Moral situations in real life sometimes involve not one but several conflicting moral principles, each of which we have a duty to perform! By insisting on the absoluteness of every moral duty, the Kantian position is not very helpful in guiding us in making those painful decisions as to which moral principles to obey and which ones to break.

In Chapters 22, 23, and 24, we will examine three approaches to normative ethics: *eudaimonism,* which takes human fulfillment as the ultimate goal of life (Aristotle), the *consequentialist ethics* of utilitarianism, which takes the maximation of pleasure as the ultimate goal life (John Stuart Mill), and finally, the *deontological ethics of duty*, which makes performing one's moral duty for its own sake the only unconditional good (Immanuel Kant).

But first we will need to look at two closely related topics in metaethics. First, in Chapter 20 ("Moral Skepticism"), we consider a challenge that threatens the very core of our traditional reasoning and theorizing about right and wrong, good and bad. Though there are different varieties of moral skepticism, they share the common theme of rejecting the most basic values and principles upon which the main normative traditions in ethics are founded. In this sense, the moral skeptic is challenging the status of the fundamental facts that ground our moral traditions and our ordinary view of the moral standing of human behavior. In this chapter, we look at two of the most important forms of moral skepticism and also consider what a defender of the facts underlying our basic moral theories might say in response. Second, in Chapter 21 ("Morality and Metaphysics"), we

continue our study of metaethics by further exploring our ordinary commitment to the existence of moral facts by investigating what sort of ontological status such facts might have and whether there is a need to supply a foundation for them by appealing to a God who has commanded them.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you believe that a person whose life contained more pain than pleasure could still live a fulfilling life? How about a good life? In each case, explain your answer.

2. Explain the difference between egoistic hedonism and utilitarianism.

3. Do you believe that a teleological approach to the ultimate good of human life leaves out any important aspects of a good human life that are captured by a deontological theory of ethics? Explain your answer.

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1. How would Aristotle, John Stuart Mill, or Immanuel Kant decide what to do in Iraq?

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2. According to Aristotle, what does our function imply about how we should live?

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3. According to Aristotle, why can't children be happy in a meaningful sense?

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CHAPTER 20

Moral Skepticism

As was noted in the previous chapter, there are important differences in the three main normative theories that have dominated the history of philosophy. In Chapters 22, 23, and 24, you will have a chance to look in more depth at these different systems of morality. In this chapter, however, we begin by noting that there is much that these normative systems have in common. First, they all make an attempt to accommodate, explain and justify many aspects of traditional morality. All of them, for instance, place importance on such traditional notions as justice, charity, courage, and honesty. They might justify these values differently or prioritize them differently; nonetheless, some form of these traditional values would all have an important place in these distinct moral systems. A second point of agreement among these main normative theories is that they all hold that there are moral facts. That is, they hold that morality is not something invented by human choice or whim or desire or belief; rather, some acts are simply morally correct and others morally incorrect, and it is incumbent upon human beings to conform their beliefs and their actions to these facts. Slandering a friend for the sake of fitting in with the powerful and popular, for example, is morally wrong, and anyone who believes otherwise believes what is false and anyone who acts otherwise does what is morally wrong.

In this chapter, we consider philosophers who reject one or the other of these shared components of the three main normative theories. First, we will consider philosophers who accept the second of the aforementioned core components of traditional morality—the belief that there are moral facts—but who reject the traditional understanding of these facts, maintaining that the traditional valuing of ideals such as justice, charity, courage, and honesty fails to capture what is *actually* morally correct. Traditional morality for such philosophers turns out to involve a valuing of that which is really morally incorrect. Second, we will consider philosophers who deny completely that there are moral facts at all, maintaining instead that belief in moral facts is like the belief in the tooth fairy or Santa Claus. Though these two positions are different in important respects, they are both forms of *moral skepticism* in that they are different ways of calling into doubt the core of traditional morality outlined above. We will consider each of these forms of moral skepticism in turn, beginning with those that assert the existence of moral facts but deny that traditional morality accurately captures these facts.

AN INVERSION OF ORDINARY MORALITY

We begin our discussion of those who have challenged our traditional conceptions of justice and value by asking the following crucial question: Why *should* we be moral? Why not just pursue our own interests and let everybody else do the same? A moment's reflection shows how impossible this would be. Part of the difficulty of life is that there are clashes of self-interest. What is in my best interest may not be in yours. The goals you set for yourself may be in direct conflict with those of your neighbors. And what happens to your self-interest and your personal goals when those of your neighbors conflict with yours and they are stronger than you are? The obvious answer to this question is that the stronger person or group in a society will always prevail, and if you do not happen to be in that group, then you cannot follow your own self-interest.

Morality and Might

Let's take this view as far as we can and see if it will stand up under scrutiny. We will assume that morality simply is what the most powerful in the society want. One practical problem with this view is whether persons holding this view will always have the power to get their way. And if we mean by "morality" what the strongest want, then there is one morality for the strong and another morality for the weak. It will be in the self-interest of the stronger to do what they like and to force others to do likewise. It will be in the interest of the weaker, on the other hand, to suppress their selfish desires and to do what they are told to do. This can be understood as a kind of enlightened self-interest. If I am a peasant, it is not in my self-interest to pay the king sixty percent of my annual harvest, but it is even less in my self-interest to have my head removed, which is the penalty for refusal to pay the annual tax. Looked at in this way, doing the right thing (that is, following self-interest) is simply to do what the strong and powerful believe is in their self-interest and what they command us to do. Might makes right.

The alternative to this form of servitude on the part of the weak is to band together to prevent such tyrannical action by mutual consent. This is the type of compromise Glaucon proposes to Socrates in Plato's work titled *The Republic* and which we will discuss more fully in Part 8, "Social and Political Philosophy," in terms of the social contract

What people say is that to do wrong is, in itself, a desirable thing; on the other hand, it is not at all desirable to suffer wrong, and the harm to the sufferer outweighs the advantage to the doer. Consequently, when we have had a taste of both, those who have not the power to seize the advantage and escape the harm decide that they would be better off if they made a compact neither to do wrong nor to suffer it. Hence they began to make laws and covenants with one another, and whatever the law prescribed they called lawful and right. That is what right or justice is and how it came into existence; it stands half-way between the best things of all—to do wrong with impunity—and the worst, which is to suffer wrong without the power to retaliate. So justice is accepted as a compromise, and valued, not as good in itself, but for lack of power to do wrong; no man worthy of the name, who had that power would ever enter into such a compact with anyone; he would be mad if he did that.

Glaucon
The Republic

theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. According to Glaucon, acting in a moral way is a kind of compromise between the best of all situations, in which the strongest individuals do what they like, take what they want, and always get their way, and the worst of all situations, in which the weaklings must serve the interests of the stronger. Because most of us are afraid that we may not be one of the few lucky strong ones, we decide to agree to submit to certain rules and principles restricting the tyranny of one person over the rights of others.

What is odd about such a view is that it makes ordinary morality sound bad—that is, undesirable, or at best the lesser of two evils. It also devalues such morality as being the result of weakness and fear of those who are stronger. It is, as Nietzsche put it, a "slave morality." It has the extremely odd consequence that the best thing is to be able to do the wrong thing, while the worst thing is to have to do what is right.

Nietzsche's New Morality

Friedrich Nietzsche was a philosopher who held that in a new and different sense of right, the strong person who refuses to do the conventionally moral thing and who acts by ordinary standards immorally is in fact the moral person.

For Nietzsche, the powerful have a natural right to rule. His is not the cynical view that everything we call right is in fact dictated by those who are truly stronger as individuals, for Nietzsche was well aware of the fact that the weaker can band together to restrict the powerful and, more than this, that they have the ability to label their weakness "moral right." Once the weaklings have joined together to restrict the bully and the tyrant, then to make sure that everyone follows the new guidelines, they try to make

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900): German philosopher and social historian, Nietzsche was appointed to a professorship of Greek literature and philosophy at Basel when he was only 24. His numerous works include *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, and *The Will to Power*. © DIZ Muenchen GmbH, Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy.

it *seem* as though this is the morally right way to behave, and people who patiently await their turn, respect the rights of others, and help those in need are not just helping themselves in an enlightened self-interested way but are good people. Indeed, what most of us think of as the highest moral principles of Judeo-Christian and liberal thought is branded by Nietzsche as "slave morality," which unjustly robs the powerful of their natural right to rule.

But there are several things in Nietzsche's claim that are not at all clear. First, what exactly is meant by *powerful?* Imagine two societies about to go to war against each other. The first is ruled by what Nietzsche calls a slave morality. That is, it is governed by laws, and citizens cooperate and work together for mutually agreed upon goals. In the second a few strong individuals try to grab everything for themselves at the expense of everyone else, devoting considerable energies to warring against each other and putting down frequent revolts from the miserable underdogs who secretly despise them. Which society would you bet on? Social cooperation is not a weakness but a strength for a society. It is not even a weakness for an individual.

If human beings are by nature social beings, as Aristotle held, then the uncooperative, antagonistic, selfish individual may simply be a deformed and sick individual incapable of living up to full human potential. Even on Nietzsche's own account, there is undoubted strength in a slave's morality. Nietzsche acknowledged, and indeed this is what made him so angry, that by banding together the weak can overpower the strong. But then who is really the stronger? In a democracy where the rule of law operates, the average citizen has enormous power over tyrannical individuals. If might makes right, what right does the person who is in some other sense stronger have to rule over the rest of us? Also, in what sense are we using stronger—physically stronger, possessing aristocratic virtues, more intelligent, more creative, better able to survive, possessing survival

In a tour through the many finer and coarser moralities which have hitherto prevailed or still prevail on the earth, I found certain traits recurring regularly together, and connected with one another, until, finally two primary types revealed themselves to me, and a radical distinction was brought to light. There is master morality and slave-morality; I would at once add, however, that in all higher and mixed civilizations, there are also attempts at the reconciliation of the two moralities, but one finds still oftener the confusion and mutual misunderstanding of them, indeed, sometimes their close juxtaposition—even in the same man, within one soul. The distinctions of moral values have either originated in a ruling caste, pleasantly conscious of being different from the ruled—or among the ruled class, the slaves and dependents of all sorts. In the first case, when it is the rulers who determine the conception "good," it is the exalted, proud disposition which is regarded as the distinguishing feature, and that which determines the order of rank. The noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the opposite of this exalted, proud disposition displays itself: he despises them. Let it at once be noted that in this first kind of morality the antithesis "good" and "bad" means practically the same as "noble" and "despicable."... A morality of the ruling class, however, is more especially foreign and irritating to present-day taste in the sternness of its principle that one has duties only to one's equals, that one may act towards beings of a lower rank, towards all that is foreign, just as seems good to one, or "as the heart desires," and in any case "beyond good and evil."

Friedrich Nietzsche
Beyond Good and Evil

value as an individual or as a species, or as a society? Nietzsche does not really clarify these various ways of interpreting the meaning of the term *strong*. He does, however, face up to the problems his view causes in our moral vocabulary. He proposes what he calls the transvaluation of values; that is, he wants to change the use of the terms *good* and *bad*. The slave morality—kindness, beneficence, mutual cooperation—is henceforth to be called bad. The morality of the masters—absolute self-reliance, arrogance, self-will—is to be called good.

THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALITY

In the preceding section, we saw Nietzsche challenge traditional morality and advocate supplanting it with a radically different set of moral concepts and principles. He was, in this sense, a skeptic concerning the claims made by traditional morality and recognized by the dominant philosophical systems of normative ethics. Note, however, that he doesn't go so far as to deny that there are moral principles and values that should be followed by human beings. In this, his moral skepticism is limited to rejecting the claims of traditional morality. In this section, we consider a more radical form of moral skepticism in which the very existence of objective moral principles and values is denied.

Moral Facts

In the Patagonian Ice fields of South America, there rises a forbidding spire of granite called Cerro Torre. Though its height is modest in comparison to the Earth's other great peaks, the sheerness of its faces and ferocious weather make it one of the most difficult mountains to summit. It is also the focus of a great mountaineering controversy.

On February 3, 1959 decorated Italian climber Cesare Maestri was found, collapsed from exhaustion, on a glacier at the base of the mountain's forbidding East Face. He and his climbing partner, the renowned Austrian climber, Toni Egger, had not been seen or heard from since heading out on their summit attempt six days earlier. When he was found, Maestri's report was of both triumph and tragedy. The triumph was that three days earlier he and Egger had achieved what many mountaineers at the time viewed as well-nigh impossible. They had reached the summit of Cerro Torre.[1] The tragedy was that Egger had been swept to his death by an avalanche during their descent. Maestri reported that Egger had performed heroically. With the mountain encrusted in a rime of ice from a recent spell of bad weather, Egger had drawn on his superb ice-climbing skill to lead the two men swiftly up the 4000-foot Northeast Face. It was an astonishing achievement for which Maestri was hailed upon his return to Italy. It was also an achievement for which he had no solid evidence. The lone camera used by the duo was carried by Egger and was lost along with the Austrian. Nonetheless, the climbing community was content for the most part to take such a renowned climber at his word . . . at least for a while.

In the years following the Egger–Maestri climb, numerous other accomplished climbers set out to repeat their achievement by following the same line to the summit. For decades, none of them succeeded in reaching the summit; however, several groups did get high enough up the line to make two discoveries that cast doubt on Maestri's claim. The first was that during the initial 1000 feet of the climb they found numerous

items of climbing gear left behind by Egger and Maestri, but after this initial stretch they found no such gear. The second was that the terrain above this initial thousand-foot stage differed dramatically from the description given by Maestri. Still, Maestri persisted, insisting that he and Egger had placed numerous bolts very high on the Northeast Face. Should a party reach that high, Maestri reassured the climbing community, his claim would be vindicated. Unfortunately for Maestri, a climbing party eventually did reach that high. In 2005, Rolando Garibotti, Ermanno Salvaterra, and Alessandro Beltrami, reached the summit of Cerro Torre by the Northeast Face and, in the process, searched for evidence that would confirm Maestri's claim. They found none. What they did find was terrain that, once again, differed significantly from that described by Maestri. The upshot of Garibotti, Salvaterra, and Beltrami's achievement is that there is more skepticism than ever concerning Maestri's claim to have summited Cerro Torre by its Northeast Face.

Though most in the climbing community now doubt Maestri's claim, proving that two men did not stand on a summit is not an easy task. For one thing, mountains are big. Perhaps we are misled by the geometric-sounding precision of the climber's expression of the "line" up a mountain into expecting that subsequent parties climbing the same "line" would find evidence of the earlier climb. For another, it is possible that the description of a route given by a man who climbed it under the duress of extreme fatigue and cold and dehydration would be sparse in its details and loose in its accuracy. Perhaps. Though the climbing community does seem to be tilting fairly decidedly in the direction of rejecting Maestri's claim, there is room for rational disagreement on the matter. This, however, is in contrast to two matters we're inclined to treat as leaving no room for reasonable disagreement. The first is that there is a fact of the matter about whether Egger and Maestri stood on the summit of Cerro Torre in January of 1959. We may not know with certainty what the fact of the matter is, but it is a fact that they did one or the other. The second is that if Maestri lied about having summited Cerro Torre—and we here pause to stress the "if"—then what he did was *wrong*. And these two matters concerning which there is no room for reasonable disagreement are where the Cerro Torre controversy intersects our discussion of metaethics. They illustrate our ordinary willingness to treat the moral worth of an action as no less a fact than facts about the physical world, such as whether two men stood on a particular summit at a particular time.

What we seem committed to in our ordinary understanding of morality is the objectivity of moral values. We don't act as if they were matters established by human desire or choice or emotion or belief. We treat them as having a different status than, say, fashion or flavor preferences, which would seem to be largely a matter of personal taste and choice. And the different, objective status we routinely accord them is underscored particularly when we look at matters of even greater moment than dishonesty about a moutaineering accomplishment. We are not at all inclined to view the wrongness of enslavement or rape or child abuse as mere matters set by human preference. Rather, we believe that we must conform our beliefs and behavior to these moral standards lest we believe what is false or do what we ought not, and that's just the way it is.

One way to illustrate the depth of our ordinary inclination to view morality as objective is to recall one of the skeptical devices we saw Descartes use in Chapter 15. In order to call beliefs grounded on intellectual intuition into doubt—at

least initially—Descartes has recourse to what he views as the most powerful skepti-cal device available, the deceiving God hypothesis. He posits the possibility that an all-poweful but evil being uses its infinite power to deceive us consistently in matters given to intellectual intuition, such as basic mathematical judgments on the order of $2 + 3 = 5$. It is only God's goodness, he later concludes, that guarantees that this is not the case; however, if God's power alone is considered then it must be conceded that an omnipotent being might have deceived us about such matters. Descartes is, however, strikingly silent about how the deceiving God might accomplish this. He is content to rest the whole matter on the being's omnipotence and even counsels that we should not try to understand how an omnipotent being might do this because we are utterly unable to do so. It is easy to understand why he offers this counsel, for it is hard to see how we might even begin to give specific content to the suggestion that our basic arithmetic "truths" might actually be false. Though Descartes himself does not attempt to subject basic moral beliefs to doubt, it is worth considering how these might fare against the deceiving God hypothesis. To this end, let us consider the wrong-ness of slowly torturing a two-year-old to death and ask whether a deceiving God might bring it about that we were deceived in holding this belief. Though we might begrudgingly concede that omnipotence might be capable of this, we would likely be as at great a loss of explaining how the deceiving God would accomplish this as we are concerning how this might be accomplished in the case of basic mathematical truths. We seem no more able to give specific content to the suggestion that this basic moral belief might be false than we can give content to the suggestion that $2 + 3$ does not equal 5. What would it mean for such a horrific act to be morally cor-rect? Our intellectual intuition thus seems no less strong in the case of moral truths than in the case of mathematical truths, and thus our ordinary commitment to the objectivity of at least some moral values is strong indeed.

Ethical Subjectivism

Despite the strength of our ordinary commitment to the existence of moral facts, there are philosophers who argue that this commitment is mistaken and that there are, in truth, no moral facts. While many of these philosophers grant that our ordinary inclination is to believe in such facts, they go on to note that there are good philosophical reasons for not accepting this ordinary inclination as the final word on the matter. Before consider-ing one of the main arguments such philosophers have given for doubting our ordinary belief in the objectivity of moral value, it is worth pausing to note that we are familiar with other cases in which careful reason has led us to abandon what would have seemed common sense.

Before the ascendency of the heliocentric theory of the solar system in the late sixteenth century, it was commonly viewed as a fact that the Sun orbited the Earth. Indeed, it might have even been thought to be obvious to our common experience. Given that the Earth is the main fixed point of reference for our ordinary perception of motion, it is natural that it would look to us as if it were the Sun that was in mo-tion around the Earth, and not vice versa. Nonetheless, good astronomical reasoning revealed that this is not so. We now believe that the Earth revolves around the Sun, even as it may still *appear* to us that it is the Sun that is in motion, an appearance that is reflected in our ordinary ways of describing the Sun's position with respect to the

Earth. It is the Sun that "rises" and "sets" and "traverses" a course from East to West on a daily basis. And we may not bother putting on sunscreen, or we may choose to defend a particular soccer goal late in the afternoon since the Sun is "lower" in the sky at that time. Yet for all that our apparent experience and common idiom would have us believe, we have known better for several centuries and now recognize that the natural conclusion we might draw from both of these would be incorrect. It is the other way around. The Earth orbits the Sun.

The lesson from this brief digression through astronomy is that a conviction's being a reflection of ordinary experience and common sense does not render it immune to refutation. While it seems right to give the benefit of the doubt to beliefs reflecting ordinary experience and common sense and accept them until they are proven suspect, such beliefs can be overturned by a compelling argument to the contrary. That, of course, is precisely what some philosophers believe is the case with respect to our ordinary disposition to believe that there are objective moral facts: it is a conviction that we have compelling reason to correct. In the next section, we look at one of the most influential arguments offered by those who believe that our commonsense commitment to objective moral facts is a belief very much in need of correction.

An Argument to Show That There Are No Objective Moral Facts

The significant variation in moral beliefs and practices exhibited across cultures and even by individuals within the same culture is a very common starting point for those who deny the existence of objective moral facts. In contemporary U.S. society, for instance, women's suffrage is an established legal right, but in Saudi Arabia, this is not the case. In Italy, on the other hand, capital punishment is strictly prohibited; whereas, it is practiced within many of the fifty U.S. states. And similar variation concerning moral issues can be found within individual societies, including contemporary U.S. society. Indeed, the list of topics of a typical applied ethics text—abortion, capital punishment, just war, gay marriage, and euthanasia, just to name a few— serves as testimony to the substantial disagreement over moral issues to be found within our own society.

Before turning to consider an argument against the existence of moral facts that appeals to diversity of opinion on matters moral, it is important to note a point that is granted even by advocates of such arguments; namely, the mere fact of disagreement on moral issues does not, of itself, mean that there is no objective fact of the matter on moral issues. To see why, we must get clear on exactly what is involved in holding that there is an objective fact of the matter on some issue. Holding that there is an objective fact of the matter on some issue—whether it be moral or otherwise—does not commit one to holding that nobody disagrees on the issue. All it commits one to holding are the following two points: (a) there is a way that things are and (b) this way is not simply the product of human subjective states such as beliefs, desires, emotions and choices. Notice that it does *not* require holding that all human beings *agree* on the matter. Indeed, it does not even require that any two human beings agree on the matter. There was a time when virtually all believed that the Earth orbited the Sun, but this does not mean that there is no objective fact of the matter on this issue. All it means is that there was a time when virtually all people had a false belief about the nature of the solar system. Thus it is that all a commitment to the objectivity of an issue requires

with respect to disagreement on the issue is that anyone whose belief does not conform to the way things really are happens to believe what is false. This is no less true of a commitment to the existence of objective moral facts than it is of a commitment to any other sorts of objective facts.

Still, even though diversity of opinion on moral matters does not on its own prove that there are no moral facts, it can serve as the premise of a more complex argument purporting to show that moral facts are a myth. In the following selection, a highly influential moral skeptic, twentieth-century philosopher, J. L. Mackie, explains how such an argument would run. One thing worth noting in advance about the reading is that early on in his discussion of the argument, Mackie concedes the very point made in the preceding paragraph. He notes that variation in moral codes "is in itself merely a truth of descriptive morality, a fact of anthropology which entails neither first order nor second order ethical views." By *first order* ethical views Mackie means the specific rules and moral practices one uses to govern one's life. By *second order* ethical views, Mackie has in mind what we have been calling metaethical views; that is, views about the nature and foundation of various ethical terms and principles. Thus, in saying that diverstiy on moral issues does not of itself entail any second order ethical views, Mackie is noting that ethical subjectivism does not follow immediately from the fact of diversity of moral opinion. Having made this point, however, Mackie goes on to argue that this diversity of opinion on ethical issues can be joined with other premises to form a powerful argument against the objectivity of moral values. In the following selection from his work, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Mackie makes his case for this conclusion.

J. L. Mackie: The Argument from Relativity

The argument from relativity has as its premiss the well-known variation in moral codes from one society to another and from one period to another, and also the differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community. Such a variation is in itself merely a fact of descriptive morality, a fact of anthropology which entails neither first order nor second order ethical views. Yet it may indirectly support second order subjectivism: radical differences between first order moral judgments make it difficult to treat those judgments as apprehensions of objective truths. But it is not the mere occurrence of disagreements that tells against the objectivity of values. Disagreement on questions in history or biology or cosmology does not show that there are no objective issues in these fields for investigators to disagree about. But such scientific disagreement results from speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence, and it is hardly plausible to interpret moral disagreement in the same way. Disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people's adherence to and participation in different ways of life.

The causal connection seems to be mainly that way round: it is that people approve of monogamy because they participate in a monogamous way of life rather

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From J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1977).

than that they participate in a monogamous way of life because they approve of monogamy. Of course, the standards may be an idealization of the way of life from which they arise: the monogamy in which people participate may be less complete, less rigid, than that of which it leads them to approve. This is not to say that moral judgments are purely conventional. Of course there have been and are moral heretics and moral reformers, people who have turned against the established rules and practices of their own communities for moral reasons, and often for moral reasons that we would endorse. But this can usually be understood as the extension, in ways which, though new and unconventional, seemed to them to be required for consistency, of rules to which they already adhered as arising out of an existing way of life. In short, the argument from relativity has some force simply because the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values.

Watch the **program:** *Pope Benedict Warns against Moral Relativism* on MySearchLab.com

But there is a well-known counter to this argument from relativity, namely to say that the items for which objective validity is in the first place to be claimed are not specific moral rules or codes but very general basic principles which are recognized at least implicitly to some extent in all society—such principles as provide the foundations of what Sidgwick has called different methods of ethics: the principle of universalizability, perhaps, or the rule that one ought to conform to the specific rules of any way of life in which one takes part, from which one profits, and on which one relies, or some utilitarian principle of doing what tends, or seems likely, to promote the general happiness. It is easy to show that such general principles, married with differing concrete circumstances, different existing social patterns or different preferences, will beget different specific moral rules; and there is some plausibility in the claim that the specific rules thus generated will vary from community to community or from group to group in close agreement with the actual variations in accepted codes.

The argument from relativity can be only partly countered in this way. To take this line the moral objectivist has to say that it is only in these principles that the objective moral character attaches immediately to its descriptively specified ground or subject: other moral judgments are objectively valid or true, but only derivatively and contingently—if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right. And despite the prominence in recent philosophical ethics of universalization, utilitarian principles, and the like, these are very far from constituting the whole of what is actually affirmed as basic in ordinary moral thought. Much of this is concerned rather with what Hare calls 'ideals' or, less kindly, 'fanaticism.' That is, people judge that some things are good or right, and others are bad or wrong, not because—or at any rate not only because—they exemplify some general principle for which widespread implicit acceptance could be claimed, but because something about those things arouses certain responses immediately in them, though they would arouse radically and irresolvably different responses in others. . . .

Mackie's attempt to show that diversity of opinion on moral values can serve as a premise in an argument showing that moral values are not objective begins with the claim that there are only two ways of explaining cases of widespread disagreement on an issue: either (a) there is a lack of adequate evidence on the issue or (b) the issue is not objective. Notice that this is a general claim that applies to all instances of widespread disagreement and not merely that found on moral issues. Before considering the application of this principle to the case of moral disagreement, it will help to clarify Mackie's claim with cases that have nothing to do with morality.

First, consider the claim that there is likely to be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. There is considerable disagreement among astronomers, biologists and probability theorists about whether this is likely true or false; however, this disagreement is not the result of the issue being subjective. Whether there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe is an issue about as objective as they come. Thus, the only alternative remaining for explaining the disagreement on this issue is that there must be a lack of adequate evidence. Moreover, upon reflection that does seem like a very plausible explanation for the widespread disagreement on this issue, if only for the reason that the universe is, well, rather roomy, and we've been able to study only a tiny fraction of it. The significant disagreement over whether there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe thus illustrates the first of Mackie's two ways one may explain widespread disagreement on an issue. It results from a lack of adequate evidence.

Second, consider the significant disagreement you would witness if you asked a typical college classroom of fifty or more students whether chocolate or vanilla was a tastier flavor of ice cream. Surely, there would be substantial difference of opinion, no doubt expressed with disporportionate vigor. Again, we have an issue about which there is widespread disagreement; thus, we know that one of Mackie's two possible explanations must be the case. But which one? In this case, it does not seem at all plausible that the disagreement is due to a lack of adequate evidence, for all (or at least an overwhelming majority) of the students would have tasted both vanilla and chocolate ice cream; thus, they would have been exposed to the relevant data. The explanation, then, must be that the issue is not objective. And again, independent reflection does reveal this to be a plausible explanation. After all, tastes in food are really just expressions of individual preferences, and we are not at all inclined—at least in our calm moments!—to believe that there is an objective fact of the matter about which flavor of ice cream is tastier.

Having asserted that widespread disagreement on an issue can only be explained in one of the foregoing two ways, Mackie then applies this claim to the significant variation one encounters on ethical issues. Doing so allows him to draw the following intermediate conclusion: Either (a) there is a lack of adequate evidence on ethical issues or (b) ethical issues are not objective. Just as we did with the issues in the two preceding paragraphs, we must now decide which explanation is more plausible. Are moral issues more like aliens or ice cream? For Mackie, the answer is obvious. He thinks that it isn't at all plausible to believe that disputes over moral issues are explicable by a lack of adequate evidence; thus, it must be the case that moral issues simply are not objective. Instead, he contends, they are issues driven entirely by human subjective states such as choices, beliefs, emotions and preferences. Moreover, independent reflection bears this out, according to Mackie, as it seems that the best explanation for the diversity of opinion one encounters on ethical values is that individuals brought up in and living within a community will tend to internalize—have an unreflective commitment to—the mores of

their community in virture of their having practiced the "forms of life" endorsed by that community. Thus, of the only two explanations available for widespread disagreement, the only one capable of plausibly explaining the wide diversity of opinion on moral issues is that moral issues are not objective.

Before evaluating Mackie's argument from relativity, it is worth reviewing the argument's structure in light of the argument forms discussed in Chapter 5. Doing so reveals that the argument has a fairly simple structure, for it can be set up as a modus ponens combined with a disjunctive syllogism.

Reconstruction of Mackie's Argument from Relativity

A. Modus Ponens Component

   1. If there is significant disagreement on an issue, then either (a) there is a lack of adequate evidence on the issue or (b) the issue is not objective.

   2. There is widespread disagreement on ethical issues.

   Therefore, by modus ponens,

   3. Either (a) there is a lack of adequate evidence on ethical issues or (b) ethical issues are not objective.

B. Disjunctive Syllogism Component

   4. Either (a) there is a lack of adequate evidence on ethical issues or (b) ethical issues are not objective. (Conclusion from Modus Ponens Component)

   5. Disagreement on ethical issues is not the result of a lack of adequate evidence.

   Therefore, by a disjunctive syllogism,

   6. Ethical issues are not objective.

With a clear sense of the structure of the argument from relativity in place, we can now turn to evaluating Mackie's argument. We begin by considering premise 5.

Though Mackie maintains that "it is hardly plausible to interpret moral disagreement" as a result of a lack of adequate evidence, he doesn't explain why he thinks it would be implausible. He does note his belief that diversity on moral values is *best* explained by the individuals in different cultures having been brought up participating in different, particular forms of life; however, he does not further defend this claim. And without an independent argument showing the implausibility of explaining the disagreement as a result of inadequate evidence, it is hard to see why Mackie's proposed explanation is superior to the moral objectivist's explanation that appeals to inadequate evidence.

We might, however, speculate that Mackie has in mind something like the following. If we consider the disagreement over the morality of abortion, for instance, we can find plenty of individuals on both sides of the debate who are fully aware of all the relevant biological facts. There are physicians and Ph.Ds in human anatomy who are pro-choice and other physicians and Ph.Ds in human anatomy who are pro-life, with both sides agreeing on the various facts concerning fetal development. Given this, it isn't plausible to suppose that their disagreement is a result of inadequate evidence. Instead, isn't it more likely that the disagreeing groups came from families or communities (religious or secular) that valued and emphasized different values and

practices? Similar arguments, moreover, can be given for other moral disputes such as the debates over euthanasia and capital punishment. Thus, we seem to have inductive grounds for concluding that disagreement concerning moral issues is not a result of a lack of adequate evidence. Let us call this possible justification on Mackie's behalf the *Implausibility Argument*.

Assuming that this is Mackie's justification for the implausbility of explaining moral disagreement as a result of a lack of adequate evidence, what might an objectivist about morality say in reply? One thing she might say is that the justification may well be guilty of begging the question against the objectivist. To see why, note the following feature of the Implausibility Argument: to show that the disagreement on the issue of abortion is not due to a lack of adequate evidence, the Implausibility Argument emphasized that the disputants over the morality of abortion agree about the *biological* facts. The problem with resting one's case upon this claim is that many moral objectivists believe that moral facts are distinct from the sorts of facts that can be captured by the natural sciences. In Chapter 21, we will discuss in much greater detail why many philosophers believe this. For now, however, the point that needs to be emphasized is that the Implausibility Argument works only if one assumes that there are no distinctive moral facts on the abortion debate that might count as evidence. But the very thing that Mackie's argument is supposed to prove is that there are no moral facts; thus, the justification for one of Mackie's key premises given in the Implausibility Argument assumes what is intended to be the conclusion of his argument.[2]

But let us set aside Mackie's silence on the issue of why it is implausible to suppose that disagreement on moral values results from a lack of adequate evidence and let us also set aside the circularity of the Implausibility Argument. Let us assume with Mackie that widespread difference of opinion on moral issues is not the result of a lack of adequate evidence. Must we then accept that the disagreement is due to the fact that the issue is not an objective matter? Or is it possible that there is at least one explanation for significant disagreement on an issue in addition to the two recognized by Mackie. Another way to put the question is to ask whether there are cases in which there is widespread disagreement on an issue even though the issue is objective and there is adequate evidence with respect to it. If there are such cases, there must, of course, be an explanation for the disagreement other than the two possible explanations of widespread disagreement recognized by Mackie. Contemporary analytic philosopher, Michael Wreen, has argued that there are such cases and that Mackie's first premise above has thus overlooked at least one possible explanation for widespread disagreement.

To see what Wreen has in mind, consider the fact that there are many people who believe that Elvis Presley is still alive even though the issue is objective and the evidence that Elvis is dead is publicly available and overwhelming. This, then, is a case of an objective issue for which there is adequate evidence and about which there is significant disagreement; thus, there must be an explanation for this disagreement other than the two recognized by Mackie. One explanation that has *prima facie* plausibility is that those who cling to the belief that Elvis is still alive do so because they have a strong emotional need to believe that the King is not dead. Perhaps his music was uniquely powerful for them. Perhaps it helped them through the worst patch of their lives. Perhaps, it played a crucial role in bringing them together with the love of their life. There are numerous possible reasons a person might have a deep emotional

attachment to the life and music of Elvis Presley and thus would find it too emotionally painful to accept his death.[3]

   Of course, Mackie might consider trying to effect a quick fix to his argument from relativity by simply recognizing this third possible explanation of disagreement and then arguing that it is not a plausible explanation of disagreement on moral issues. But this quick fix is not as promising as it might at first appear, for it is not clear that this third possible explanation is not plausible in the case of disagreement on moral issues. To see why, reflect on how emotionally charged debates on moral issues often are. Consider the level of vitriol on both sides of the abortion debate or the capital punishment debate. Consider also that what participants may view as at stake in such debates is nothing less than the worth of the basic principles according to which they are leading their lives. The kind of self-evaluation prompted by debate on an ethical issue is unsettling, and it is not implausible to suppose that the strong emotions such debate prompts can skew one's judgment such that it doesn't accord with the adequate evidence that exists on the issue. For these reasons, it seems intuitively plausible to hold that disagreement on ethical issues may be due to a strong emotional need that at least some of the disputants have to hold a particular belief and not to an alleged subjectivity of ethical values. Just to avoid a possible misunderstanding, we must pause here to note that what this objection supposes can be shaped by strong emotions are human *beliefs* concerning ethical values and not the *values themselves*. The latter would be a subjectivist account of ethical values, but the former—which is the claim crucial to this criticism of Mackie's argument—does not entail subjectivism.

   For the above reasons, Mackie's argument from relativity does not present a compelling case in favor of the subjectivity of ethical values. It is, thus, a challenge that our ordinary commitment to the existence of moral facts can withstand. There are, of course, other challenges to this commitment that might be mounted. One sort of challenge might proceed by emphasizing that it is very hard to see what grounds the moral facts to which we are commited in our ordinary ways of thinking and acting. One might grant that we think and act and speak as if there are moral facts and still wonder exactly what is the objective basis of this thinking and speaking and acting. This is the subject of the next chapter, "Morality and Metaphysics." In it, we consider what, exactly, is the basis in reality of the moral facts that we feel obliged to respect in our thought and behavior.

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Questions for Discussion

1. Niettzsche contends that traditional morality is a "slave" morality. What did he mean by this? Do you believe that he is right?

2. List some of the challenges facing the view that what is actually morally correct is what the strongest in society want.

3. The authors claim that our ordinary way of thinking about moral matters involves a commitment to the existence of objective, moral facts. Do you find this claim plausible? Defend your answer.

4. The authors of this text contend that giving specific content to the suggestion that a basic moral belief is false is as difficult as giving content to the suggestion that a basic arithmetic belief is false. Do you accept this claim? Why or why not?

5. Wreen contends that Mackie overlooks possible sources of widespread disagreement. Explain what Wreen has in mind? Do you accept his charge? Defend your answer.

Endnotes

1. This account of the Cerro Torre controversy is based upon the following two articles:

Kelly Cordes, "Cerro Torre's Cold Case: A bold Patagonian climb ends a 47-year mystery and bags one of alpine climbing's greatest prizes" in *National Geographic Adventure*. http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/photography/patagonia/cerro-torre-maestri.html

Ed Douglas, "Special Report," in *Observer Sport Monthly*, Sunday 7 May 2006, p. 51. http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2006/may/07/features.sport5

2. A slightly different–and more nuanced–way of formulating the charge that Mackie's argument may be circular can be found in Michael Wreen, "Mackie on the Objectivity of Values" in *Dialectica: International Journal of Philosophy of Knowledge* (Volume 39, 1985): 147–156. We discuss another of Wreen's objections to the argument from relativity in the text below, but here take a moment to note that his concise article is an excellent overview and critique of all of Mackie's arguments for the subjectivity of ethical value. Both the overview and criticism of Mackie's argument from cultural relativity provided in this chapter owe a significant debt to Wreen's article.

3. Wreen, p. 150. Wreen uses the example of belief in the Loch Ness Monster to illustrate his point.

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Morality and Metaphysics

As we noted in the previous chapter, ordinarily we are inclined to believe that at least some moral claims are assertions of fact. That it is right to offer assistance to those in peril or be faithful to one's spouse and wrong to torture a toddler for amusement or betray a friend for personal gain, we view as facts with no less standing than, say, the fact that Mount Everest has a greater height above sea level than any of the Earth's other mountains. We are, that is, not inclined to believe that the rightness and wrongness of various actions is set by what any group of human beings happens to want or choose or believe. Far from it being the case that human wants, choices and beliefs establish moral truths, we believe it is incumbent on human beings to conform their wants, choices and beliefs to the moral facts that ground such truths. Indeed, we are inclined

to believe that even if a majority of (or even all) human beings came to believe that it was okay to torture a toddler for amusement, it would still be wrong, and a majority of human beings simply would be mistaken in this belief. In this respect, our attitudes to judgments about moral facts are very much like our judgments about physical facts—such as the relative heights of mountains—mentioned above. We believe it is a fact that it is wrong to torture toddlers and anyone who disagrees with this belief is simply mistaken just as we believe it is a fact that Everest is the highest above sea level of any of the Earth's summits and anyone who disagrees with this belief is simply mistaken. Early in the eighteenth century it was widely held that the Earth's highest mountain was in the Andes in South America, and it was widely held that slavery was morally acceptable. We have no hesitation today in concluding that both of these widely held beliefs were simply mistaken and that they just don't fit the facts of the matter.

But now we must note an important difference between judgments about alleged moral facts and judgments about physical facts. When we ask the question of what it is that grounds the truth or falsity of our judgments concerning the world's highest mountain, it is easy to identify this ground. It is the mountains themselves. More specifically, it is their heights above sea level relative to one another. But when we ask the same question about our judgments concerning alleged moral facts, it is not so clear what we should say. When we say, for instance, that it is wrong to betray a friend for personal gain, it doesn't seem possible to capture the wrongness of this action by pointing to any of the action's physical properties. Focusing on the action's physical properties, we can note that it is performed by an organism with a certain mass, in a specific location, which

engages in a certain range of motion over a specific duration; but none of these proper-ties seems to capture the *wrongness* of the act. Many philosophers, in fact, contend that an action's rightness or wrongness cannot be fully grounded in any of its physical prop-erties and thus conclude that it is not possible to give what philosophers call a *natural-istic* account of moral value. A *naturalistic* account, in this context, refers to any account that uses only properties and principles that are recognized by and employed within the natural sciences. In the next section, we consider one highly influential argument for concluding that there can be no satisfactory naturalistic account of moral value.

G.E. MOORE AND THE OPEN QUESTION ARGUMENT

The main reason that many philosophers doubt that it is possible to provide a naturalis-tic account of moral facts has to do with a crucial difference between natural truths and moral truths. Natural truths merely describe what *is* the case and are thus are said to be *descriptive*. Moral truths, on the other hand, prescribe what *ought* to be the case and thus are said to be *prescriptive* (or *normative*). For this reason, every attempt to provide a fully naturalistic account of moral value is doomed to failure. One can cite descriptive prop-erties of a state of affairs or action in numbing detail; yet, such a listing of descriptive properties will only tell us what *is* the case. It cannot tell us what *ought* to be the case.

To approach the problem facing naturalistic accounts of moral value from a differ-ent angle, imagine that you are assigned the following task. You must adequately convey the flavor of some dish—butter chicken perhaps—to a person who has never tasted it, but you must operate under the restriction that you can only use color concepts to do so. All your attempts, obviously, would fall short. Indeed, because flavor concepts and color concepts are such radically different kinds of things, it is hard to see how you would even begin such a task. For many philosophers, attempting to fully explain moral value in terms of natural properties involves a similarly futile attempt to explain one thing in terms of that which is a radically different kind of thing in that it involves the attempt to fully explain a prescriptive fact about what ought to be the case in terms of a descriptive fact about what is the case. Put generally, the point that one cannot fully explain moral value in terms of natural properties is sometimes expressed with the following general principle:

> You cannot derive an *ought* from an *is*.

Though this way of framing the challenge facing naturalistic accounts of moral value goes back at least to David Hume in the eighteenth century, the point gained heightened prominence in the early twentieth century with the thought of G.E. Moore who dubbed the failure to respect this principle in one's reasoning the *naturalistic fallacy*. In addition to coining this term, Moore came up with a simple device for showing that all naturalis-tic accounts of moral value are doomed to fail. If an account of moral value in terms of some natural property were correct, Moore observed, it would not be an open question whether an action or state of affairs that had the natural property was morally good. That is, a person who understood both the moral value and the natural property with which it was being identified would not be able to meaningfully ask whether an action or state of affairs which had the property was good. The matter would be settled, and a person who understood both the moral value and the natural property could no more wonder whether the action that had the property was good than a person who understood the

concept of a square and the concept of four sides could wonder whether a square had four sides. But, Moore claimed, irrespective of which natural property one identifies with moral value, this is manifestly not the case, for it will always be meaningful to ask whether an action that had the property was morally good or not. It will, as Moore put it, always be an "open question" whether an action having some natural property was good; thus, it cannot be the case that moral value is merely some natural property or set of natural properties.

Here we can consider a specific naturalistic account of moral value that happened to be very popular at the time Moore was working: hedonism. According to one variety of hedonism, moral goodness just is the property of maximizing net pleasure. We know, according to Moore, that this cannot be a full account of the nature of moral goodness since it is perfectly intelligible to acknowledge that some particular action maximizes pleasure, yet wonder whether it is *good*. Indeed, many philosophers—including Aristotle and Immanuel Kant—who would understand the terms of the question perfectly well answer it in the negative. It seems obvious to them that an action may be exceedingly— indeed, maximally—pleasurable for all concerned, and yet fail to be morally good. For this reason, it cannot be that moral goodness simply is the maximization of pleasure. There must, according to the open question argument, be more to moral value than that or, for that matter, any other natural property. But that, of course, raises the question of what this "more" is.

NON-NATURALISM AND INTUITIONSIM

If we are not tapping into natural facts in our judgments about alleged moral facts, ex- actly what are we tapping into? When we say that it is a fact that Everest is the highest mountain, it is easy to point to the objective ground of this fact: the mountains. When we consider assertions about alleged moral facts, however, it is not so clear what grounds them, especially given that they are not grounded in any set of natural properties. What, we might ask, are the mountains of morality?

Moore answered this question by maintaining that there are non-natural moral properties that provide an ultimate foundation for our objective moral judgments. Moral properties, he held, are a distinct class of objective properties which cannot be identi- fied with or reduced to any non-moral properties, including, of course, the natural ones. Moore did note that one may be a non-naturalist about moral properties and still hold that moral properties are *correlated* with some natural property or set of properties. (Many utilitarians, in fact, hold precisely this view.) One can do so and still be a non- naturalist provided one does not take the further step of *identifying* the moral properties with (or reducing them to) the natural properties with which they are correlated. Irre- spective of whether there is a correlation between moral properties and natural proper- ties, the crucial point for Moore is that moral properties are a distinct and irreducible feature of reality that has at least as much claim on our behavior and judgment as do natural properties. Indeed, it might be said that they have more claim on our behavior in that natural properties do not prescribe, on their own, any particular behavior.

Moore's argument against naturalism in ethics and his proposed non-naturalism were, in the beginning of the twentieth century, highly influential and inspired numerous other philosophers to take up the non-naturalist banner. A challenge awaiting these phi- losophers, however, was that of explaining how we know non-natural moral facts. Our

access to particular facts in the external world comes, by and large, originally through the senses. Moreover, our senses seem capable of providing information only about natural properties such as size, location, and duration. There is no sensory content we can point to that is the "goodness" of a state of affairs or "rightness" of an action; thus, it is not clear how we access the alleged non-natural properties that populate the objective world. One very popular response to this challenge at the time was *intuitionism*, a theory which supposed that humans had a special capacity for knowing these non-natural properties. For some advocates of intuitionism, this special capacity was a sensory power that was distinct from the five traditional sensory modalities and was able to detect the *moral* in a situation. For others, this special capacity was an intellectual ability to grasp, non-inferentially, self-evident moral principles which, when applied, revealed the moral value attaching to an action or state of affairs. Either way, the problem of explaining how we know moral properties was handled by positing a cognitive ability whose job description was that of knowing the moral properties. It is a strategy with an impressive pedigree, for it can be traced back to Plato's positing of the theory of recollection (discussed in Chapter 9 of this text) as a way of explaining how human beings are able to have knowledge that could not have been derived ultimately from sense experience. It is also a strategy that many contemporary metaethicists have been less than eager to embrace. The reason for this muted reception is the subject of the next section.

A FURTHER FOUNDATION FOR MORAL FACTS

For many philosophers Moore's answer has proven less than satisfying and has seemed more like the raising of a white flag of surrender than a viable account of the fundamental nature of moral value. Moore's metaethics—and the various non-naturalist and intuitionist accounts it inspired—feels to such philosophers a bit too much like an *ad hoc* appeal to some mysterious realm of non-natural properties and a subsequent *ad hoc* appeal to a mysterious faculty for knowing the mysterious realm of non-natural properties to account for our conviction that there are moral facts. It also leaves numerous issues that cry out for further explanation. Why is it that certain values are associated with certain sets of natural properties? What is the ontological status of these properties? Are they qualities of the natural substances and, if so, how can a natural substance have non-natural properties? Or are they completely independent realities, but of a completely non-natural sort, ghostly moral properties that haunt the natural world without being explicable in terms of it?

Convinced by Moore's arguments that moral values cannot be natural properties but otherwise unconvinced by what they saw as the extravagances of such non-naturalism, some philosophers advocated a rejection of the objectivity that was allegedly exhibited by our ordinary moral judgments. A common strategy was to hold that moral "judgments" were actually just expressions of subjective states of agents that were mistakenly taken to be reports about objective features of the world. For some, the emotivists, the function of our ordinary moral discourse was merely to express an emotional reaction to a state of affairs and not to describe some fact about it. For others, the prescriptivists, the function of moral discourse was merely to prescribe or recommend certain courses of actions or states of affairs to others. Neither school, however, allowed the apparent objectivity of ethical judgments to stand. Instead, this apparent feature of moral judgments needed to be explained away as a confusion of language or a cognitive illusion.

For other philosophers, however, this "explaining away" of the apparent objectivity of moral judgments seemed no less implausible than the claims of a Moorean non-naturalism and intuitionism. After all, it seems patently obvious that if we know anything at all, we know the wrongness of slavery and rape. Still, though committed to the existence of moral facts, some of these same philosophers felt the force of the charge that a Moorean non-naturalism left too much to mystery and appeared *ad hoc*. Though they believed that Moore was correct in holding that moral values are non-natural, such philosophers reasoned that a further explanation of their origin and foundation was required to make belief in them rationally acceptable. For philosophers of this mind who are also theists, one very popular route for doing so is to look for the deeper foundation and explanation of moral values in a transcendent creator of the universe. In the following essay, contemporary philosopher, Matthew Jordan, explores and defends precisely this possibility. After carefully reviewing different things one might mean in saying that morality is dependent on God, Jordan defends the view that the most viable foundation for the existence of moral facts is found in the commands of God.

Matthew Carey Jordan: God and Morality

I. The Dependency Thesis

Many people believe that there is a deep connection between religion—or, more specifically, *God*—and morality. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre famously held (in words he wrongly attributed to Fyodor Dostoevsky) that "if God does not exist, then everything is permissible,"[1] and this is widely taken to be an expression of common sense. If there is a God, the thinking goes, then morality makes sense. Some things really are right, and others really are wrong. If not—that is, if we live in an atheistic universe—then we live in an amoral universe too. Theists and atheists alike often agree: if there is no cosmic lawgiver, then there is no moral law. In more general terms, morality depends upon God. The question I will address in this essay is a simple one: *does it?* Does morality depend upon God, or not?

Let us say that a person who answers this question in the affirmative embraces *the Dependency Thesis*. The Dependency Thesis is the assertion that yes, morality does depend upon God. Thus our question becomes, *is the Dependency Thesis true?* In order to answer it, we need to define our terms. Who is the "God" on whom morality is widely thought to depend? After all, there are many different conceptions of the divine, and significant disagreement, even amongst believers, about what God is like. For our purposes, I will understand the word 'God' to refer to *a benevolent entity of maximal power and intelligence who created the physical universe and sustains it in existence*. There may be other plausible ways to think of God, but I will not attempt to adjudicate between them here. This definition should be acceptable to a wide range of religious believers, and it expresses the

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[1] *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* (Bussière à Saint-Amand, France: Gallimard, 1996), 39. Sartre wrote, "Dostoïevsky avait écrit: << Si Dieu n'existait pas, tout serait permis.>> C'est là le point de départ de l'existentialisme."

conception of the divine being that most people seem to have in mind when they assert the Dependency Thesis.

Not so easy to define is the key term 'depend'. What does it mean to say that morality *depends* on God? A number of answers have been proposed. Some people think that morality depends upon God in a purely practical sense. They believe that faith in God is necessary if people are to be motivated to do what's morally right. This, however, seems dubious. Many atheists are magnificent human beings, giving generously of their time and resources to charitable causes, manifesting genuine concern for others' well-being, and so on. The fact that a person is an atheist does not guarantee that she will be a decent human being, but neither does the fact that a person believes in God. Indeed, many overwhelmingly secular societies (e.g., Scandinavian countries) boast of lower rates of violent crime than do many largely religious nations (e.g., the United States).[2] This does not prove much about morality *per se*, of course, but it does make it exceedingly difficult for theists to plausibly maintain that society will fall apart if individuals abandon belief in God.

There's a closely related idea that may be more plausible. There are some who maintain that morality depends upon God in the sense that *atheists are guilty of practical irrationality* when they perform actions that are morally right. ("Practical rationality" comes into play whenever we're thinking about what to do; someone who is guilty of practical *ir*rationality has made some kind of mistake in her deliberations.) The thinking goes like this: morality sometimes requires us to sacrifice our own well-being for the sake of other people. We might give money to charity, for example, instead of going to the movies or buying a nice bottle of wine because we think it is morally right to do so—even if we anticipate receiving no benefit as a result of the donation and would have really liked to see the movie or drink the wine. On theism, this kind of sacrifice makes sense. If we believe that God exists, then we may expect that our generosity *will* benefit us in the long run; God will make it worth our while in the afterlife, if not here and now. But the atheist can have no such hope. In a godless universe, money that you give away is just *gone*; an atheist who gives money to charity knowingly imposes a net loss on himself, and that is the very essence of practical irrationality. To be blunt: such behavior is downright stupid. Morality depends upon God in the sense that doing what's right is *prudent* only if God exists. Or so the thinking goes.

It seems to me that this conception of dependency won't work either, for at least two reasons. First, although it may be true that theists (but not atheists) can be confident that virtue will one day be rewarded, this seems not to have much to do with *morality* as we usually understand it. For the sake of illustration, consider two salespeople, Arnie and Baxter. They're in the widget-selling business, and both are scrupulously honest. Everybody knows that if you go to Arnie for your widgets, you'll get a fair shake. Arnie will never try to trick you, will always be up front and honest, and, in short, is worthy of your complete trust. Baxter is the same way. When you're in the market for new widgets, Arnie and Baxter are the guys you want.

There's an interesting thing about Arnie and Baxter. Even though their *behavior* is indistinguishable, their *reasons* for being honest are actually quite different. Arnie is

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[2]See Chapter 3 of Walter Sinnott–Armstrong's *Morality Without God?* (Oxford, 2009) for details.

honest because he values truth, respects other people, and believes that he ought to treat others the way he would like to be treated. Baxter, on the other hand, does not care much about truth, thinks that most other people are suckers who can be easily played, and seeks to do whatever will bring himself the most wealth. He took an online business course, however, and learned that empirical studies have shown that honesty is indeed the best policy; salespeople who deal fairly with their customers will, over the long haul, fare better than those who are dishonest (even if they occasionally lose out in the short term). Baxter *would* lie to you about widgets if he thought he'd make more money that way, but he believes that deception is always bad business. Arnie *will not* lie to you about widgets, because he believes that it's wrong to do so.[3]

From the moral point of view, these actions are not equivalent. Arnie's actions are praiseworthy in a way that Baxter's are not, precisely because Arnie is setting aside concerns about maximizing his own well-being when deciding how to treat other people. Baxter's truth-telling may be better, morally speaking, than *lying* would be, but he's not morally praiseworthy because all he really cares about is himself. This fact is a problem for the theist who thinks that doing what's right makes sense only if we can expect to be rewarded in the afterlife. A person who gives to charity, tells the truth, keeps her promises, and so on—in other words, a person who consistently does what is morally right—but who does so *merely* because she expects to be rewarded for her behavior *is doing exactly the same thing as Baxter*. Such a person seems to have utterly rejected what we call "the moral point of view." To say that moral behavior makes sense only if a person can expect to be rewarded for engaging in it (or punished for failing to engage in it) is to misconstrue, at a fundamental level, the very idea of morality. This is a serious problem for the theist who seeks to accuse atheists of practical irrationality.

The second problem with understanding the Dependency Thesis in terms of practical rationality is closely related: there's nothing inherently irrational about valuing something other than one's own well-being more than one's own well-being. Again, the idea that someone might do so is deeply ingrained in our commonsense thinking about morality. Consider the Freedom Riders, who rode into Alabama and Mississippi in 1961 on racially mixed buses, knowing that, as a result, they might suffer enormously or even be killed. They did this because they cared more about justice than about their own lives. This is moral heroism of a high order, and nearly everyone recognizes it as such. Many of us wonder whether we would have the same strength of character in the face of egregious injustice, but no one—not even the angry racists who attacked the Freedom Riders with lead pipes and baseball bats—can deny that their actions were perfectly coherent in light of the values they held. Nor can it be denied that an atheist might hold precisely the same combination of values, caring more deeply for justice than for her own safety.

Two other problematic interpretations of the Dependency Thesis can be dismissed more quickly. One is the idea that morality depends upon God for its *semantics*: that is, the very meanings of words like 'right', 'wrong', 'good', and 'bad' include religious

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[3]Immanuel Kant uses a similar example to illustrate roughly the same point in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Ethics*; see pages 6–7 of the 1836 edition (translated and edited by J. W. Semple).

ideas. On this view, the statement 'rape is wrong' simply *means* that rape is forbidden by God (or something like that). This, however, seems to be obviously false. Atheists and agnostics hold all kinds of moral beliefs and are able to communicate those beliefs to theists and each other even though they lack a belief in God. If the semantic version of the Dependency Thesis were true, this, it seems, would be impossible.

Similar things can be said about an *epistemological* interpretation of the Dependency Thesis, according to which morality depends upon God in the sense that we cannot know anything about what is right or wrong unless we know what God has said on the matter. As with the semantic proposal just considered, it is difficult to reconcile this claim with the fact that many atheists seem to know quite well that you shouldn't steal others' possessions or attack innocent passers-by. The epistemological interpretation of the Dependency Thesis is an especially awkward position for theists in the Judeo-Christian tradition to defend, because they need to deal with biblical passages that seem to deny it. Amos 1 and Romans 1 both appear to teach that there is a moral law which can be known even by those who do not know anything about the Hebrew God.

So, if the Dependency Thesis is understood in terms of practical dependency, practical rationality, semantic dependency, or epistemological dependency, I think it is pretty clearly false. One more option remains, however, and that is to suggest that morality depends upon God in a *metaphysical* way. Here the idea is that *moral facts do not exist unless God also exists*. If there is no God, then morality is a farce. In the words of Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, it is merely "an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate."[4] I believe that this version of the Dependency Thesis is true. In a godless universe, nothing is really right or wrong. I will explain why before we are done. In order to do so, however, I need to define one more key term: the misleadingly simple, mundane, commonsensical term 'morality'.

What do people have in mind when they speak of "moral" reasons for doing something? We say things like, "I understand why you would *want* to do that, but you shouldn't because it would be *wrong*," "those of us who are well-off have an *obligation* to help the needy," and "you *ought* to tell the truth," and so on. But what do we mean when we say these things? It seems so simple, yet this question proves to be very tricky to answer. I think we can make some progress on this front by thinking about the kinds of situations in which distinctively moral concerns are likely to arise. Consider, for example, the following three scenarios:

> *Borrowed Book:* Christy has ordered an expensive textbook for her philosophy class. Unfortunately, a problem arises with the publisher and shipping is delayed for two weeks. Christy needs the book *now*. She talks to Donald, who works at the university bookstore, and Donald agrees to give her a free copy. "When your copy arrives," Donald tells her, "just bring it to us and we'll call it even." Christy agrees, promising to do so as soon as her book arrives. Donald makes no record of this transaction, however, and does not mention it to any other bookstore employees. A week later, he quits his job. When Christy's book finally arrives, she is tempted to sell it online; it's worth at least $50, and she could really use the money.

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[4]"The Evolution of Ethics," *New Scientist* 108:1478 (October 1985), 50.

Stupid Mistake: Eric is a salesperson. He recently made a foolish error that will cost his company its most important account. Eric expects that when his supervisor, Fred, learns of the error, Eric will be fired. To Eric's surprise, Fred mistakenly attributes the mistake to Gretchen, another salesperson. Fred intends to fire Gretchen, and he mentions this plan (and the reason for it) to Eric. Eric wonders whether he should admit that the mistake was his.

Fake Romance: Hannah wants to join an elite secret society at her university. It is well known that membership in this society is a path to enormous success after graduation. To be "in" with this group is to be virtually guaranteed a lifetime of wealth, power, and influence.She balks, however, when she learns that prospective members of the society are required to get someone to fall in love with them, and then break their hearts.

In each of these scenarios, we find a person who is aware of at least two distinct kinds of reasons for acting. Some reasons, to use a term introduced earlier, are *prudential* reasons. You have a prudential reason to do something when it serves your interests. Christy has a prudential reason to sell her extra textbook. Eric has a prudential reason to let Gretchen take the fall for his mistake. Hannah has a prudential reason to break someone's heart. In the three scenarios, however, the agents involved do not find it obvious that they *ought* to do the thing that it would be *prudent* to do. All of them recognize—as virtually everyone does—that there are reasons for acting that go beyond one's perceived self-interest. The mere fact that selling the book would be prudent does not settle the matter for Christy; likewise for Eric and Hannah. When deciding what to do, there are things to consider beyond what will advance our own interests. To care about such considerations is to have moved toward the domain of morality.

At a minimum, therefore, we can say this: *morality involves reasons for acting that are logically independent of an agent's perceived self-interest*. This, I think, is the core of morality. It is not the whole story, though. After all, we can have reasons to act which satisfy this description but which are not moral reasons. If you and I are having dinner, and I am charged with setting the table, I have a reason to place our forks to the left of our plates. Doing so is a matter of good etiquette, even though it may make life marginally more difficult for right-handers like me. It would be very odd, however, to say that morality compels me to put the forks there, even though my reason for doing so is logically independent of my perceived self-interest. To put this idea in more technical terms: being logically independent of perceived self-interest is a *necessary*, but not *sufficient*, condition for something to count as a moral reason to act. There must be more we can say about what morality is. There must be other things that set morality apart as a distinctive area of human concern.

What are these other things? By thinking carefully about scenarios like the three we discussed a moment ago—by reflecting on what it's like to face the kinds of choices faced by Christy, Eric, and Hannah; by imagining what kind of advice we might give them; by asking whether we would endorse some options and disapprove of others—we can identify other distinctive aspects of the moral domain. Consider, for example, how we might counsel Hannah if she came to us for advice about whether to do what it takes to join her secret society. "You shouldn't do it," we

might say, "Sure, it would be great for your career, but that's not the only thing that matters. What they want you to do is to treat a fellow human being as a mere object, as a thing that you can use to achieve your purposes. That's just *wrong*."

In saying this, we are expressing the conviction that other persons *merit* a certain kind of treatment. People should not be used as mere instruments. Furthermore, we are assuming that Hannah is capable of recognizing this fact. She should be able to see that some things are important, or valuable, or worthwhile independently of their usefulness to her. On one level, this merely restates the point that has already been made: moral considerations are logically independent of considerations of perceived self-interest. But we're saying something else as well. By assuming that other persons do, in fact, merit being treated with respect, we seem to be acknowledging what philosophers call the *objectivity* of morality. This can mean at least two different things; I think we should acknowledge both:

- Morality is metaphysically objective: the correctness of a general moral principle does not depend upon its being acknowledged by any particular human person or any group of human persons.
- Morality is epistemically objective: a cognitively mature human person can be expected to recognize the correctness of general moral principles.

It is important to note that I am not (yet) attempting to defend these claims in their own right. All I am saying here is that our ordinary way of talking about moral issues seems to presuppose that morality is objective in these ways. Would we not expect Hannah to be able *to see* that persons *really do* merit different treatment than things? Surely we would. Perhaps these assumptions will not stand up under philosophical scrutiny, but that is not the issue here. The issue here concerns what we're talking about when we talk about morality itself. My claim is that the way we use moral terms—the way moral discourse actually functions in normal, everyday contexts—indicates that our *idea* of morality is the idea of something objective. We treat moral considerations as though they are the kind of thing that can be recognized by our fellow human beings, and we do not act as though their legitimacy derives from our having embraced them. Let us, therefore, say this: *morality involves reasons for acting that are objectively valid and which can be understood and appreciated by cognitively mature human persons.*

A third noteworthy feature of moral reasons becomes evident when we reflect on circumstances in which an agent has knowingly done what is wrong. Consider, for example, the *Borrowed Book* scenario. Suppose that Christy gives in to temptation and sells the book instead of returning it to the bookstore. She doesn't believe that she's morally justified in doing this; to the contrary, she believes that she has a moral obligation to keep her promise and also that she has no right to sell that book (it's not, properly speaking, hers). But the deed is done. Now consider two of the possible responses Christy might make. One possibility is that she feels guilty. Having broken a promise and made an illicit profit, she regrets what she did. (To keep things as simple as possible, let us stipulate that Christy experiences only a psychologically healthy amount of guilty feelings.) Another possibility is that she feels elated. She is thrilled about having made fifty bucks, and just doesn't care that what she did was wrong.

What we need to attend to here is the relationship between each of these possible responses and the act itself. Assuming that what Christy did was, in fact, morally

wrong, feelings of shame and guilt are *appropriate*. They "fit" her wrongdoing in a way that feelings of elation and indifference do not. A person who knowingly does what is wrong without remorse has missed something. For our purposes here, we can say this: *morality involves reasons for acting which are such that failure to respect them makes feelings of remorse appropriate.*

One more observation about the nature of moral reasons will be sufficient for us to move on. Let us say this: *morality involves especially weighty reasons for acting.* What I mean is that moral considerations are normally thought to be of enormous importance in our deliberations. When deciding what to do, a person who takes morality seriously will often view moral reasons as "practical trump cards;" if something is morally wrong, then we have a compelling reason not to do it, no matter how high the stakes may be. This is *not* to say, of course, that everyone does take morality seriously, nor is it to say that those of us who do care about morality will always do what we think is right. Rather, it is to say that moral reasons present themselves as exceedingly important reasons for acting. In the *Stupid Mistake* scenario, it is easy to imagine Eric deliberating as follows: "I don't want to lose my job. I don't know what I'll do if I get fired. But it would be cowardly and dishonest to allow Gretchen to be fired for my mistake. I'm going to tell Fred the truth *because it's the right thing to do.*" Anyone who finds this line of thinking understandable must agree that moral reasons are indeed weighty reasons. Morality is important in a way that most other kinds of concerns are not.

At long last, we have reached something that looks like a definition of 'morality'. *Morality is the branch of practical rationality that deals with weighty, objectively valid reasons for acting which are logically independent of an agent's self-interest and which are such that failure to conform to them merits remorse.* Now let us return to the Dependency Thesis, which asserts that morality depends upon God. I've already argued that there are multiple senses in which the Dependency Thesis is false. People can behave morally, care about morality, know the difference between right and wrong, and understand moral language whether they believe in God or not. But I have also suggested that there is at least one extremely important sense in which the Dependency Thesis is true: morality depends *for its existence* on God. If there is no God, then all of our talk about right and wrong is really about nothing at all. If there *is* a God, on the other hand, then morality is real too. There really are reasons for acting of the kind we've been discussing. Our question now becomes, *why would anyone think that?*

II. Theism, Atheism, and the Nature of Morality

Consider what a theistic view of morality might look like. One common idea, embraced by many theistic philosophers, is known as *divine command theory* (DCT). According to DCT, an action is morally wrong if it is forbidden by God, morally obligatory if it is required by God, and morally optional if it is neither forbidden nor required by God. On this view, morality is *constituted* by divine commands.

Much of the appeal of DCT stems from the fact that it can explain why morality has the features it does. Consider:

- Divine commands are objectively valid. Whether or not God has issued a command does not depend upon whether any particular human or group of humans agrees with that command.

- Divine commands give us reasons to act. If God exists, then he is the supreme authority in the universe. The universe exists on his terms and for the sake of his purposes, as do we. As his creatures, we have reason to do what he commands.[5]
- The content of a divine command is logically independent of any particular agent's interests.[6]
- If God exists, then he is not merely the creator of the universe, but a being of maximal power and intelligence, who controls our individual and collective destinies, and who—at least according to many religious traditions—desires the flourishing of all. Obedience to his commands is therefore a matter of great importance.
- To violate a divine command is to commit an offense against a *person*; God is understood by theists to be a thinking, relational being, not an impersonal cosmic force. Remorse and guilt are appropriate responses to offenses against persons.

In other words, if there is a God, and if God issues commands, then there is something in reality that supports our moral practice. There is an honest-to-goodness realm of moral facts, because there are facts about what God has commanded.

The problem for atheism is that in a merely physical universe, there are no comparable facts that could undergird our moral practice and explain why there is such a thing as morality. On an atheistic view of reality, there seem to be three possibilities for explaining what morality is and where it comes from:

- Option #1: General moral principles are unexplainable ("basic"), necessary truths. They are part of the furniture of the universe, and neither have nor need a source outside themselves.
- Option #2: General moral principles are the product of human social evolution. Animals that cooperate with each other will be more successful in passing along their genes than animals that seek merely their own self-interest. Animals that have a "moral sense"—i.e., critters who feel like some things "must" or "must not" be done, who feel guilty when violating basic moral principles, etc.—will therefore fare better in the Darwinian struggle than purely selfish creatures.
- Option #3: General moral principles are human inventions. They enable us to organize our social lives in ways that work well for (nearly) everybody.

None of these possibilities is satisfactory.

The difficulty with Option #1, in colloquial terms, is that morality is really weird. Strike that. Morality is really, *really* weird. Much of the appeal of atheism in

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[5]It should be noted that, although I think this is basically correct, the whole story here is far more complex than this brief comment suggests. The idea that divine commands constitute reasons for acting is defended in great detail in Robert Adams's book *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford, 1999; see Chapters 10 and 11 in particular) and in John Hare's *God's Call* (Eerdmans, 2001).

[6]This statement assumes that at least some divine commands would be *general* commands, i.e., not issued merely to a particular individual or group. "Particularistic" commands of this kind would not be good candidates to explain the nature of fundamental moral facts. (See Chapters 13 and 15 of Adams's *Finite and Infinite Goods* for a detailed discussion of the relevant issues.)

the contemporary world stems from the remarkable and ever-increasing ability of the natural sciences to explain the workings of the physical universe. The more we learn about the natural world, the better we understand how each "level" of physical reality depends on some more basic level for its existence. Science has given us remarkable insights into the development and workings of the universe, and, frankly, it has done so without appealing to the action of supernatural agents like God. Richard Dawkins famously wrote that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually satisfied atheist,"[7] and many atheists today would be happy to replace 'Darwin' in this sentence with 'science' more broadly.

General moral principles, however, have no place in the (so-called) "scientific picture of the world," for at least three reasons. First, the methods of science cannot yield knowledge of general moral truths. Empirical investigation can tell us how gravity works, why plate tectonics cause earthquakes, how fast light travels in a vacuum, and so on. It cannot tell us whether it is permissible to use persons as objects, or when (if ever) a person is justified in breaking a promise, or whether we always ought to seek to produce the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. First-order moral questions are in principle closed to the methods of scientific inquiry.

Second, there is at least one respect in which the principles of morality are quite different—and quite a bit weirder—than facts about the physical universe and the laws of logic.[8] Moral principles are *normative*: they purport to tell us what we ought to do, independently of whatever goals and desires we might have. The laws of physics and chemistry are not like this; they are merely *descriptive*. They tell us how the universe works, not how it ought to be. Some would say that the laws of logic are also normative, in that they tell us how we ought to think (rather than, say, describing how we actually do think), but this seems to be a mistake. Logic can tell us how to reason *if we care about reasoning well*, but it does not pretend to instruct us that we ought to love truth rather than error. The idea that truth is worthy of being pursued is a moral idea, not a logical one.

Third, and last, morality is a bad fit within the contemporary atheistic world view because there is no good reason to think that creatures who evolved intelligence through purely naturalistic mechanisms would have evolved the ability to correctly discern the content of necessarily true, general moral principles. Evolution on our planet has produced creatures who, for the most part, think that compassion is preferable to outright cruelty. Things need not have turned out this way, though. To deny this is to assert that it's *impossible* for an alien race like the Klingons (the war- and honor-obsessed beings of *Star Trek* fame) to have evolved via naturalistic processes. But this seems absurd. Surely evolution could have produced intelligent animals with moral sensibilities substantially different from our own. Given this possibility, an atheist has no grounds for believing that our minds are capable of giving us access to a realm of necessary moral truths. In a nutshell, Option #1 *might* solve the problem of morality in a godless universe (setting aside the question of why

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[7]*The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1986), 6.

[8]I am assuming for the sake of argument that the laws of logic do have a place within the "scientific picture of the world" because, even if they are not the kinds of truths we can discover by way of empirical investigation, they must be presupposed for science to work. Moral laws are not like this.

feelings of remorse are appropriate when one has violated moral norms), but in such a universe, we would have no warrant for thinking that Option #1 is true.

What about Option #2? Perhaps general moral principles are simply the product of biological evolution.[9] We have already seen one problem for this view: such an explanation of morality's source seems to make the content of morality unacceptably *arbitrary* (think of the Klingons). There is also a serious worry here about why a rational person who accepts this explanation of the origins of morality would nevertheless take morality seriously. That is, if our sense of moral duty is merely a useful sociobiological adaptation, then why is it important to sacrifice other kinds of concerns out of respect for it? To use the terminology we used earlier, what accounts for the *weightiness* of moral considerations? Christy *might* value promise-keeping more than she values $50; Eric *might* think cowardice and dishonesty are worse than unemployment. But why *should* they? What are they missing, on Option #2, if they prefer their own well-being to the dictates of morality? The answer, it seems, is *nothing at all*. A person who embraces Option #2 may not be practically irrational for caring deeply about morality; the problem is, she also wouldn't be irrational for discarding or ignoring it. If we embrace Option #2 as our account of morality, then we seem to undercut both its objectivity and its importance.

Before we turn to Option #3, let us note that theistic accounts of morality have been thought to face the same kind of problem explaining the objectivity of morality. This challenge goes back at least as far as ancient Greece and Plato's dialogue, *Euthyphro*. What many people have argued is that morality is clearly *not* objective if it depends upon God, for if God would have issued very different commands, then the content of morality would have been very different. For example, God could make cruelty morally obligatory simply by commanding us to be cruel. This objection to theistic ethics is mistaken, primarily because it fails to appreciate that, on theism, God has a metaphysically necessary nature. He is understood to be an *essentially* benevolent being. Thus God's own nature constrains the content of the commands that God issues.[10,11] DCT does not imply that morality is arbitrary, because God is not the kind of being who issues capricious commands.[12]

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[9]This is an extremely popular view. It is interesting to note that as this essay was being written, Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson was generating controversy by suggesting that evolution cannot explain the origins of altruism. If Wilson is right, then his claims pose yet another problem for Option #2. (See http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2011/04/17/where_does_good_come_from/?page=full; accessed 28 April, 2011.)

[10]For a much more detailed discussion of this objection (and others), see my "Theistic Ethics: Not as Bad as You Think" in *Philo* 12:1 (Spring/Summer 2009), pp. 31–45.

[11]The present discussion has assumed that a theist who grounds moral facts in facts about God will embrace some form of DCT, but it is worth noting that there are other theistic options—such as divine attitude theory and natural law theory (which may not be mutually exclusive)—that are not voluntaristic. On such accounts, the substantive content of morality does not depend upon the divine will, and the worry about arbitrariness does not arise.

[12]Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theists who hold this view need to reconcile it with apparently unjust commands issued by Yahweh in the Hebrew scriptures. An excellent source on this topic is Paul Copan's *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker, 2011).

The problems with atheistic Option #3 are similar to the problems with Option #2, and you may have already anticipated what they are. If morality is a human invention, then it is not, by definition, objective. The validity of any particular moral principle would depend upon its having been accepted by human persons, and the content of morality would be subject to change in accordance with the sensibilities of those persons. Instead of a deeper set of concerns against which cultural attitudes may be evaluated, morality would be nothing more than the content of those attitudes themselves. Slave owners in the antebellum South, German Nazis in the twentieth century, and corrupt African dictators today do not hold *mistaken* beliefs about how to treat other people, just *different* ones. Furthermore, it is again unclear why a person who accepts this explanation of the nature of morality would nevertheless take the requirements of morality to be especially important or binding. Certainly, there are many advantages to behaving morally; as a rule of thumb, acting well is beneficial for us. But there is no shortage of instances in which a person might benefit himself by doing something wrong. Think again of Christy, Eric, and Hannah in the scenarios imagined earlier. On Option #3, it is difficult to see any respect in which they would be acting foolishly by acting wrongly, or any reason why they should think of the moral issues at stake as being in any way weightier than their own desires. If what we call "morality" is merely a human invention, then it just isn't worthy of the name.

In short, the need for a divine being to explain the existence of morality can best be seen when we ask this question: *what would the world have to be like in order to contain objective moral duties?* Given the conception of morality I outlined in the first part of this talk, where *could* morality come from? To say that it exists without explanation ought to make atheists extremely uncomfortable, because moral facts seem to be utterly unlike any of the other basic facts about the universe. They just don't fit in the scientific picture of the world that motivates so much contemporary atheism. We can try to fit morality into that picture of the world by giving it a biological or sociological explanation, but to do that is to strip it of its characteristic features; it is to turn morality into what some have called "shmorality," an impoverished, poor man's version of the fundamental principles governing how we ought to live our lives.[13] Theism, in contrast, has the resources to explain what moral rightness and wrongness really are, and thereby to locate them in a satisfying way within a coherent view of the world.

So where does this leave us? I think I have shown that there is an important sense in which the Dependency Thesis is true. Morality does depend upon God in the sense that, if there *is* a God, then it is comprehensible how there can be weighty, objectively valid reasons for acting which are logically independent of an agent's self-interest and which are such that failure to conform to them merits remorse. If there is *not* a God, then the existence of such reasons seems to be a fantasy; morality sure looks like "an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate," not a set of genuinely important considerations to which we owe our allegiance.

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[13]The term 'shmorality' was coined by Simon Blackburn, in "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value," *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (Routledge, 1985). It should be noted that Blackburn himself is not dismayed by the prospect of embracing shmorality, and argues, in fact, that "proper shmoralizing is proper moralizing" (152). My reasons for disagreeing are, roughly, the considerations presented above.

What then, should we do? Where do we go from here? For the atheist, perhaps the best response is to make more modest claims about things like rightness and justice, recognizing that "real," "robust" morality is not something we can have, but suggesting that we *can* come up with a set of principles that most, or many, or some of us will find appealing as suggestions for how we might conduct our lives. For the theist, these considerations may be fodder for a version of the moral argument for God's existence: if morality requires theism, and morality is real, then it follows that God is real too. Which is it? Is it more reasonable to believe that we inhabit a godless universe in which morality is illusory, or to believe that morality's importance derives from God himself and hence that God exists? These are fantastically interesting and important questions. Unfortunately, they are questions for another time.

This concludes our discussion of metatethics; however, as you read the following chapters on the three main normative traditions in ethics, keep in mind a point made in the introduction. The three distinct branches of ethics—methaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics—constitute a unified line of inquiry such that arguments and positions advanced in one of these subfields may influence arguments and positions advanced in one of the others. As you read the following chapters on normative theories, then, you should continue to reflect on the issues discussed in this chapter and Chapter 20 and consider whether the accounts of the ultimate human good given in the normative traditions of eudaemonism, utilitarianism and deontology lead you to revise your assessment of the various positions encountered in our discussion of metaethics.

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Questions for Discussion

1. In Chapter 12, "The Mind–Body Problem and Personal Identity," we looked at Richard Taylor's critique of the identity thesis and J. J. C. Smart's response to this critique using the distinction between sense and reference. Given that Moore's open question argument uses a strategy similar to Taylor's to show that moral properties can't be identical with any natural property, might an opponent of Moore use Smart's strategy to counter the open question argument?

2. Why does Matthew Jordan reject the claim that atheists are guilty of practical irrationality? Do you accept his reasons? Why or why not?

3. What version of the dependency thesis does Matthew Jordan defend in his essay?

4. Might one use the open question argument to challenge Jordan's contention that moral facts are grounded in God's commands? Why or why not?

5. Why does Matthew Jordan reject the view that our moral principles are ultimately the product of human social evolution? Do you accept his reasons? Why or why not?

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Eudaemonism: The Morality of Self-Realization

T he whole enterprise of morality presupposes that we want to be moral, though we may not be sure what moral standards to follow, how we can know them, assuming they do exist, and how to decide between competing sets of moral principles. But all this is against the background of the assumption that I want to be a moral person. But, really, why *should* I be moral, especially as this often restricts my ability to get what I want?

The Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, answered this question by claiming that the moral person is happier than the immoral person. And this is because living according to moral standards is an important part of human nature, and the key to happiness, they held, is living according to one's human nature. In order to be happy one must consider what it is to be a human being, what our human nature is. And according to Plato and Aristotle, it is not within a human being's nature to be gluttonous, aggressive, and power hungry.

Plato goes further than Aristotle in this respect, arguing that the moral person *is* the reasonable person and that people do wrong only out of ignorance. All persons aim at their own good, and if they fail, it is only through faulty understanding of what is really good for them and how to achieve it. For Plato, the hardened criminal is a fool who mistakenly thinks a life of crime will bring happiness. If criminals were more intelligent, they would realize that a life of crime is a life of fear, insecurity, social alienation, and isolation and therefore not only immoral but an intellectual mistake. Morality, for Plato, *is reason*.

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Aristotle does not go as far as Plato. Aristotle also recognizes the important role played in morality by habit and training. People become moral human beings, Aristotle argues, not just by calculating what is truly in their long-term best interests, but through practice and training which develops good lifelong habits and a permanent disposition to do the right thing. Criminals, similarly, are not only stupid, they are also unfortunate in having formed some bad habits through poor moral training in youth. Nonetheless, Aristotle also holds the criminal responsible for getting into those bad habits in the first place.

MORALITY AND HUMAN NATURE

The root of this Greek way of thinking lies in its teleological perspective. Nothing is good or bad apart from the performance of its particular function, which is defined by its nature. Everything is good or bad according to its kind. What makes a screwdriver good,

its peculiar virtue, is not the same as what makes a piece of chalk good. To know what makes a piece of chalk good (its virtue), we have to know what it is (its nature), and that is defined in terms of its function. A piece of chalk is a device for writing on a chalkboard. Notice how we have defined its nature by specifying its purpose or function (for the purpose of writing). Thus a piece of chalk which writes evenly, cleanly, and clearly, is a good one, and one which is either too hard or too soft to get the job done is a bad one. That is, it is good if it fulfills its functions and bad if it does not.

In Chapter 19, "Introduction to Ethical Reasoning," we mentioned a challenge facing the application of the teleological model beyond the range of humanly made articles whose purpose and function is clear because we human beings have made them for specific purposes. In the case of natural objects, such as trees, lakes, and more so in the case of human beings, it is less clearly applicable because it is less clear what the purpose and function of a tree, lake, or human being are.

One way to try to answer this question is to ask what is special, distinctive, and peculiar to human beings. What can humans do that no other creature or object in the universe can do? Looked at in this way the answer most philosophers have given over the centuries is the distinctive human capacity for reason. Unlike animals, human beings can reflect, calculate, weigh pros and cons, ask why, formulate explanations, and put off short-term enjoyment for long-term satisfaction. Thus, for both Plato and Aristotle, to allow passion, power, or pleasure to dominate one's life is to fail to live up to one's full potential as a human being. This means, for the Greek philosophers, to be deformed and unhappy. To be ruled by reason; to allow reason its rightful place to control our lives, our passions, and our desires; to help us find that balance between extremes, which has come to be called the "doctrine of the mean," is to be fully human, virtuous, mentally healthy, and happy, all at once.

MORALITY AND RATIONALITY

There are problems with this approach which come back to the difficulty in determining what is human nature. There are many things which human beings uniquely do, and not all of these are as high-sounding and conducive to morality as reason—for example, our potential to murder, engage in warfare, as well as some other morally neutral capacities, such as laughter, wonder, tool making, and so on. Nor is it clear that reason alone will always lead to morality. In its long history, philosophers have used the word *reason* to cover many wonderful and beautiful human capacities. One of the most interesting we will see shortly is Kant's quite different alignment of morality with reason. Insofar as morality is understood as the commitment to *universal* standards, applicable equally to everyone, a moral person must essentially be a rational and logically consistent person.

For Aristotle, reason is aligned with morality in another sense: Reason is a necessary ingredient in any moral action, in that an irrational person, even with the best of intentions, can do the wrong thing. Suppose we consider generosity, courage, and modesty to be important human virtues. Does it follow that the ideally generous person is one who gives whatever money he or she has at the time to anyone who asks for it? What will this person's family and creditors think? Is this person virtuous or just plain stupid? Similarly, do we admire as the ideally courageous individual one who fights back whatever the odds? Is the person who single-handedly attacks a crazed mob brave or foolhardy? Obviously, a virtuous person must exercise common sense and judgment in carrying out

moral principles. The blind pursuit of moral rules with no regard for context, balancing competing rules, timing, and a concern for matters of degree, is just that—blind.

Thus, for Aristotle, the moral virtues, being temperate, courageous, and so on, require reason in helping us strike the right balance required by virtuous conduct. All the Greek philosophers stressed balance and order as key ingredients in the good life, but for Aristotle this is especially important in his famous discussion of the "doctrine of the mean."

Virtue, Aristotle argues in the reading that follows, is always a balance between extremes, that bravery is avoiding both the extreme of running whenever danger appears and the opposite extreme of rushing headlong into every dangerous situation. The brave person is one who knows when to resist, when to retreat, and when to remain silent, depending on the situation. As he says, achieving the "mean" in our actions does not always involve striking the precise halfway point between extremes, but rather to be guided by reason and habit in finding the right balance appropriate to the situation at hand.

There is one last sense in which Aristotle extols reason and its alliance with morality, and this is the view which he shares with Plato that the ideal life for a human being is a life of intellectual pursuits. It is good for human beings to use their minds, not only for the sake of something else, but because this is good in itself, the self-sufficient perfection of the most unique aspect of human nature—our capacity for rational reflection.

INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL VIRTUES

The values of such a life of reason Aristotle calls the "intellectual virtues," in contrast to the "moral virtues" associated with the "doctrine of the mean." In the moral virtues, reason is useful for the further end of practical action, whereas the intellectual virtues represent the intrinsic value of the life of reason for its own sake.

You might think that Aristotle has exaggerated the value of rational activity for its own sake because he is a philosopher, but we will surely agree with Aristotle that the failure to develop one's mind is one of the greatest tragedies, which can befall a person. Thus, for Aristotle, reason is a necessary ingredient in any *moral* virtue, but it is also the key to what he calls the *intellectual* virtue of a life dedicated to reasoning for its own sake. As Aristotle rightly points out, things are means to ends, which in turn are means to other ends, which turn out to be the means to still other ends and so on. Either this process goes on forever or it comes to rest with an end for the sake of which everything else is done but which is not the means to anything else. From a teleological point of view, and certainly for Aristotle, this is the *highest* good, being completely self-sufficient. And what could this be, Aristotle asks, but the life of reason, that is, the intellectual life of rational contemplation?

HAPPINESS AND PLEASURE

One of the most interesting and valuable parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* selections from which you are about to read, is Aristotle's account of happiness and how it differs from pleasure. At first the two might seem to be the same, or very similar, and John Stuart Mill, whose work we will read in Chapter 23, certainly argued that they were the same. But think about it: Are they really the same? For one thing, Aristotle points out, happiness characterizes a much longer time span than does pleasure. And, finally, happiness but not
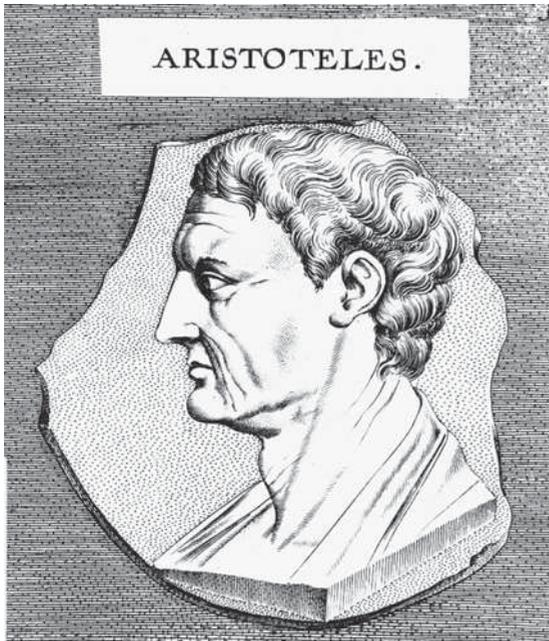
ARISTOTLE (384–322 B.C.E.): Greek philosopher born in Stagira in Thrace (leading to references to him as the Stagerite). Aristotle's father, Nicomachus, was a court physician to the King of Macedon and sent Aristotle to Athens, where he became associated with Plato and a member of the Academy for over twenty years. After Plato's death, Aristotle accepted the position as tutor to Alexander, son of Philip II of Macedon. Alexander is now better known to us as Alexander the Great. Returning to Athens around 335, Aristotle founded his own school called the Lyceum, whose members carried on their philosophical discussion while walking, giving rise to the label "the peripatetics." Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

pleasure involves our believing both before and after we have achieved our goals that they are consistent with and fulfill our best image of ourselves and that we are doing well what we really ought to be doing. It is for these reasons that we sometimes are not sure whether we are happy or not, though we can more easily tell whether we are feeling pleasure or pain. To know you are experiencing pleasure requires that you introspect a sensation; to know you are happy requires a cognitive judgment about

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who you are, what you most want, and whether you are doing what best suits you, all of which may be difficult to know. It is in these senses that Aristotle is able to say that happiness is the goal of life, and also that pleasure is *not* the most significant part of a happy life.

Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the

Nicomachean Ethics, translated by W. D. Ross, Clarendon Press, 1908.

activities. Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity—as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others—in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. It makes no difference whether the activities themselves are the ends of the actions, or something else apart from the activities, as in the case of the sciences just mentioned.

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them; and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, for example, strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man. For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states. These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry aims, since it is political science, in one sense of that term.

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admit of much variety and fluctuation of opinion, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature. And goods also give rise to a similar fluctuation because they bring harm to many people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage. We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better. In the same spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be received; for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.

Now each man judges well the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. And so the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject, and the man who has received an all-round education is a good judge in general. Hence a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life, but its discussions start from these and are about these; and, further, since he tends to follow his passions, his study will be vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action. And it makes no difference whether he is young in years or youthful in character; the defect does not depend on time, but on his living, and pursuing each successive object, as passion directs. For to such persons, as to the incontinent, knowledge brings no profit; but to those who desire and act in accordance with a rational principle knowledge about such matters will be of great benefit.

These remarks about the student, the sort of treatment to be expected, and the purpose of the inquiry, may be taken as our preface.

Let us resume our inquiry and state, in view of the fact that all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what it is that we say political science aims at and what is the highest of all goods achievable by action. Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honour; they differ, however, from one another—and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor; but, conscious of their ignorance, they admire those who proclaim some great ideal that is above their comprehension. Now some thought that apart from these many goods there is another which is self-subsistent and causes the goodness of all these as well. To examine all the opinions that have been held were perhaps somewhat fruitless; enough to examine those that are most prevalent or that seem to be arguable. . . .

Let us again return to the good we are seeking, and ask what it can be. It seems different in different actions and arts; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other arts likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely that for whose sake everything else is done. In medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else, and in every action and pursuit the end; for it is for the sake of this that all men do whatever else they do. Therefore, if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action.

So the argument has by a different course reached the same point; but we must try to state this even more clearly. Since there are evidently more than one end, and we choose some of these (for example, wealth, flutes, and in general instruments) for the sake of something else, clearly not all ends are final ends; but the chief good is evidently something final. Therefore, if there is only one final end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most final of these will be what we are seeking. Now we call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more final than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more final than the things that are desirable

both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore we call final without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.

Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself.

From the point of view of self-sufficiency the same result seems to follow; for the final good is thought to be self-sufficient. Now by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship. But some limit must be set to this; for if we extend our requirement to ancestors and descendants and friends' friends we are in for an infinite series. Let us examine this question, however, on another occasion; the self-sufficient we now define as that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such we think happiness to be; and further we think it most desirable of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others—if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods; for that which is added becomes an excess of goods, and of goods the greater is always more desirable. Happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action.

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or an artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the "well" is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to it, the other in the sense of possessing it and exercising thought. And, as "life of the rational element" also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term. Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say "so-and-so" and "a good so-and-so" have a function which is the same in kind, for example, a lyre, and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well): if this

is the case, and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case, human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

But we must add "in a complete life." For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy. . . .

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (ethike) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word ethos (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.

Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, for example, men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. . . .

We must, however, not only describe virtue as a state of character, but also say what sort of state it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well; for example, the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well. Similarly the excellence of the horse makes a horse both good in itself and good at running and at carrying its rider and at awaiting the attack of the enemy. Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.

How this is to happen we have stated already, but it will be made plain also by the following consideration of the specific nature of virtue. In everything that is continuous and divisible it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relatively to us; and the equal is an intermediate between excess and defect. By the intermediate in the object I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, which is one and the same for all men; by

the intermediate relatively to us that which is neither too much nor too little—and this is not one, nor the same for all. For instance, if ten is many and two is few, six is the intermediate, taken in terms of the object; for it exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount; this is intermediate according to arithmetical proportion. But the intermediate relatively to us is not to be taken so; if ten pounds are too much for a particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order six pounds; for this also is perhaps too much for the person who is to take it, or too little—too little for Milo, too much for the beginner in athletic exercises. The same is true of running and wrestling. Thus a master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this—the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us. . . .

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, that is, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme.

But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, for example, spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency; for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of deficiency. But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong; for in general there is neither a mean of excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency of a mean.

We must, however, not only make this general statement, but also apply it to the individual facts. For among statements about conduct those which are general apply more widely, but those which are particular are more genuine, since conduct has to do with individual cases, and our statements must harmonize with the facts in these cases. We may take these cases from our table. With regard to feelings of fear and confidence courage is the mean; of the people who exceed, he who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (many of the states have no name), while the man who exceeds in confidence is rash, and he who exceeds in fear and falls short in confidence is a coward. With regard to pleasures and pains—not all of them, and not so much with regard to the pains—the mean is temperance, the excess self-indulgence. Persons deficient with regard to the pleasures are not often found; hence such persons also have received no name. But let us call them "insensible."

With regard to giving and taking of money the mean is liberality, the excess and the defect prodigality and meanness. In these actions people exceed and fall short in contrary ways; the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending. (At present we are giving a mere outline or summary, and are satisfied with this; later these states will be more exactly determined.) With regard to money there are also other dispositions—a mean, magnificence (for the magnificent man differs from the liberal man; the former deals with large sums, the latter with small ones), an excess, tastelessness and vulgarity, and a deficiency, stinginess; these differ from the states opposed to liberality, and the mode of their difference will be stated later. With regard to honour and dishonour the mean is proper pride, the excess is known as a sort of "empty vanity," and the deficiency is undue humility; and as we said liberality was related to magnificence, differing from it by dealing with small sums, so there is a state similarly related to proper pride, being concerned with small honours while that is concerned with great. For it is possible to desire honour as one ought, and more than one ought, and less, and the man who exceeds in his desires is called ambitious, the man who falls short unambitious, while the intermediate person has no name. The dispositions also are nameless, except that that of the ambitious man is called ambition. Hence the people who are at the extremes lay claim to the middle place; and we ourselves sometimes call the intermediate person ambitious and sometimes unambitious, and sometimes praise the ambitious man and sometimes the unambitious. The reason of our doing this will be stated in what follows; but now let us speak of the remaining states according to the method which has been indicated.

With regard to anger also there is an excess, a deficiency, and a mean. Although they can scarcely be said to have names, yet since we call the intermediate person good-tempered let us call the mean good temper; of the persons at the extremes let the one who exceeds be called irascible, and his vice irascibility, and the man who falls short an inirascible sort of person, and the deficiency inirascibility.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think is the relationship between morality and happiness? Are moral persons always happy? Should they be? Why or why not?

2. Construct an example of your own to illustrate Aristotle's claim that the mean in an action may vary from individual to individual, such that what is appropriate for one person to do in one set of circumstances is not appropriate for another. Do you accept Aristotle's claim that the mean is relative to the individual? Why or why not?

3. Do you agree that there is a difference between happiness and pleasure? If so, what is this difference? If not, why not?

4. What is the implication of Aristotle's observation that ethical investigations are inexact for ethics as a philosophical inquiry?

5. Aristotle said, "For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one sunny day." What does this statement reveal about his ethical theory?

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Utilitarianism: Morality Depends on the Consequences

U nlike many other ethical theories that have remained merely theoretical systems never given the acid test of real-world application, the ethical view known as *utilitarianism* was originated as a plan for political action. The founder of the utilitarian movement was Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), whose book *Principles of Morals and Legislation* was put forward as a guide for legislators as they considered legislation affecting welfare. The utilitarians were an extremely influential group in Great Britain and were responsible for many social reforms of the nineteenth century. Bentham was a close friend of James Mill, whose son John Stuart Mill emerged as one of the utilitarians' most eloquent spokesmen. It is therefore from Mill's description of the principles of utilitarianism that the following reading is taken.

John Stuart Mill's statement of the basic principle of utilitarianism is worth quoting in full:

> 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 absence of pleasure.

That seems straightforward enough, with the added advantage of appearing to be a fairly simple basis for morality. Since the good aimed at by utilitarianism is pleasure or happiness, utilitarianism is a variety of hedonism. For Bentham, pleasure and pain were the twin standards for determining the rightness or wrongness of an action, and Bentham discovered what every other serious hedonist has known—that in order to maximize one's pleasure it is necessary to consider what has come to be known as a hedonistic calculus. In other words, you have to be able to measure the degree and preferability of one pleasure over another. Bentham actually worked out several standards for this hedonistic calculus, but all of the standards seem to be quantitative, with virtually no emphasis on quality. "Pushpin is as good as poetry," if it produces as much pleasure, he said. (Pushpin was a simple child's game.) The following doggerel verse, which appeared in

the second edition of Bentham's book, sums up nicely, he thought, the main tenets of his version of utilitarianism.

> *Intense, long, certain, speedy, fruitful, pure—*
> Such marks in *pleasures* and *pains* endure.
> Such pleasures seek, if *private* be thy end;
> If it be *public,* wide let them *extend.*
> Such *pains* avoid, whichever be thy view;
> If pains *must* come, let them *extend* to few.

How nice to be able to sum up one's philosophy in a few lines of verse!

Bentham's version of what has come to be called hedonistic utilitarianism (though he did not call it that) seemed to bring forth criticism from all sides, but the criticism that hit hardest was that Bentham's emphasis on the sheer quantity of pleasure seemed to rule out of calculation the possibility that there are "higher" pleasures—such as the enjoyment of philosophical reasoning, good music, esthetic experience in general, and other intellectual pleasures—which are qualitatively superior to the lower, sensory pleasures. Is pushpin *really* as good as poetry even if it is just as much fun? Is it better to have a gallon of muscatel rather than a glass of Dom Perignon? Is a bodily pleasure really as good as an intellectual satisfaction? And is not the pursuit of knowledge really the most important task of all regardless of whether it produces pleasure or not? In short, should we not introduce some sort of *qualitative* distinction into utilitarianism? John Stuart Mill thought so, and he broke with Bentham's interpretation of utilitarianism by suggesting that our hedonistic calculus should have qualitative as well as quantitative standards. Mill's response to this issue got him involved in other difficulties, as we shall see, but at least it appeared to be an improvement over the somewhat narrow focus offered by Bentham. In one of Mill's more famous quotations, he made his emphasis on qualitative distinctions unmistakably clear.

> It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they know only their side of the question.

JOHN STUART MILL AND IDEAL UTILITARIANISM

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), who was destined to become one of the most influential English philosophers of the nineteenth century, was something of a child prodigy. Educated principally by his father at home, young John began the study of Greek at age three and Latin at age eight.

In addition to his work on utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill wrote works titled *On the Subjection of Women* (which he was against) and *On Liberty* (which he was for), as well as works on logic and economics. As noted above, the form of utilitarianism advanced by Mill recognizes qualitative distinctions and not just the quantitative measure of pleasure endorsed by Bentham. But here he got himself into a difficult problem. How are we to tell which of two pleasures is the qualitatively better one? How, for example, are we to distinguish Dom Perignon as being qualitatively superior to muscatel? Poetry to pushpin? Mozart to Mick Jagger? Studying philosophy to working crossword puzzles? Mill's answer seems straightforward enough: Ask the person who has experienced *both* pleasures, for

Bentham's Hedonistic Calculus

To a person considered by himself, the value of a pleasure or pain considered by itself, will be greater or less according to the four following circumstances:

1. *Its intensity.*
2. *Its duration.*
3. *Its certainty or uncertainty.*
4. *Its propinquity or remoteness.*

These are the circumstances which are to be considered in estimating a pleasure or a pain considered each of them by itself. But when the value of any pleasure or pain is considered for the purpose of estimating the tendency of any act by which it is produced, there are two other circumstances to be taken into the account. These are:

5. *Its fecundity, or the chance it has of being followed by sensations of the same kind: that is, pleasures, if it be a pleasure; pains, if it be a pain.*
6. *Its purity, or the chance it has of not being followed by sensations of the opposite kind: that is, pains, if it be a pleasure; pleasures, if it be a pain.*

These two last, however, are in strictness scarcely to be deemed properties of the pleasure or the pain itself; they are not, therefore, in strictness to be taken into the account of the value of that pleasure or that pain. They are in strictness to be deemed properties only of the act, or other event, by which such pleasure or pain has been produced; accordingly are only to be taken into the account of the tendency of such act or such event.

The six criteria earlier apply to an individual's calculation of pleasure. If deliberation concerns the welfare of a group, a seventh criterion must be added—the extent of the pleasure, that is, the number of persons affected. After listing the value of each pain and pleasure, Bentham then says: "Sum up all the values of the *pleasures* on one side, and those of all the *pains* on the other. The balance, if it be on the side of pleasure, will give the good tendency of the act . . . if on the side of pain, the *bad* tendency of it."

such a person is in a position to tell which of the two is best. Here is how Mill puts it: "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."

THE INTRODUCTION OF QUALITATIVE DISTINCTIONS

Of course, Mill thinks that the person who has experienced two (or more) forms of entertainment will naturally prefer the "higher" of the pleasures, but is this necessarily so? Everyone has read and seen some of Shakespeare's plays, but if there is a choice some evening between watching *King Lear* and a detective show on TV, which is our impartial judge more likely to choose?

And even if Mill's impartial judge did consistently prefer the better pleasures, this would still have some very strange, and possibly contradictory, consequences for this theory. We started out saying that the pleasures of the individual are the good at which our actions should aim. But when we distinguish some pleasures as qualitatively superior to others, we introduce the notion of an expert, another person who, because of wide

experience, is able to tell us that what we *thought* makes us happy is not really a very good pleasure. Remember that, as a moral theory, utilitarianism tells us what we *ought* to do. And the principle of utilitarianism is that we ought to do that which produces the greatest pleasure. But *now* we are told that somebody else is a better judge of what makes us happy than we are. Such a conclusion seems to contradict the very spirit of utilitarianism, and it is certainly far removed from Jeremy Bentham's original proposal.

And what can Mill mean by *better* when he says "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied"? *Better* means *more good* and therefore, according to utilitarianism, *more pleasurable.* But then the test of a better pleasure is one that is more pleasurable and we are thrown back on Bentham's purely quantitative measure. And if *better* means anything else, then we seem to have abandoned the utilitarian theory altogether. This is an example of a *dilemma,* which we discussed in Part 2, "Thinking About Thinking (Logic)."

$$P \lor R$$
$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$R \rightarrow S$$
$$\therefore \overline{Q \lor S}$$

P: Better means more pleasure.

R: Better means something else.

Q: Mill's quality of pleasure reduces to Bentham's quantity of pleasure.

S: Mill has abandoned utilitarianism.

It seems difficult, in other words, to see how a utilitarian can sensibly and consistently discuss qualitative differences between higher and lower pleasures.

How do you suppose Aristotle would try to account for this intuitive difference? Why is it better to be a dissatisfied human being than a satisfied pig? Surely Aristotle would say it is because we are human beings and every creature must be true to its nature. But Mill cannot take this line of argument without giving up or seriously modifying his utilitarian stance. (Also recall the distinction Aristotle makes between pleasure and happiness, which Mill seems to equate.) Suppose I offered you a pill that would give you the same feeling of pleasure as accomplishing your most sought after goal—whether to write the great American novel, climb a mountain, travel around the world, or become president of the United States—but without deceiving you into believing that this had really occurred. Would you substitute the pill for the actual accomplishment? Why or why not?

RULE AND ACT UTILITARIANISM

We have already looked at the *utility principle,* or *greatest happiness principle,* as Mill called it. When we say that those actions are right, which tend to produce the most pleasure, we next have to ask, whose pleasure? Mill consistently denied that the pleasure or happiness to be sought was *only* that of the person acting—it should include the greatest number possible. Hence the greatest happiness principle was reworded to include *the greatest happiness of the greatest number.* To look after the welfare of the greatest number of people each time you act is a heavy responsibility. Every act would have to be tested by the greatest happiness principle to determine whether it would produce, on

balance, a greater amount of happiness than unhappiness. Utilitarians since Mill's time have distinguished between the view just described, which they call *act utilitarianism,* and *rule utilitarianism.* These are not distinctions that were made during Mill's day, but they seem to be demanded by subsequent interpretations of utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism is the view that we assess the rightness or wrongness of *each act* by its tendency to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Rule utilitarianism says that we use the greatest happiness principle not to regulate each act but to arrive at general rules which, if kept throughout society, will enhance the general welfare and increase the total amount of happiness. Here is how the distinction works. Suppose that you are an act utilitarian and are tempted to tell a lie. If telling the lie does not seem to decrease the pleasure of others but increases your pleasure, then on act utilitarian principles it would seem to be all right to lie. A rule utilitarian, however, would argue that the rule "tell the truth," if made a general rule of society, contributes to the general happiness and increases the sum total of happiness for everyone. Rule utilitarianism, therefore, would say that lying is wrong because of the rule that was generated on utilitarian principles.

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FURTHER DIFFICULTIES OF UTILITARIANISM

Utilitarianism, as a moral theory that bases the morality of actions on their consequences, is still alive. However, contemporary defenders recognize that there are several basic difficulties with the original formulation of the utilitarian view, which they must come to terms with if they are to have a viable form of utilitarian ethics. Here are three of the principal ones.

Fairness and Minority Rights

If all we have is the greatest happiness principle ("the greatest happiness for the greatest number"), we would be perfectly justified on utilitarian principles in depriving a minority of basic rights so long as our action contributed to the general welfare. Utilitarianism does not seem to have a strong argument against such extreme denials of basic rights as would result from imposing slavery on a small segment of the population. John Stuart Mill argued strongly in his book *On Liberty* against any kind of infringement of the rights of minorities, and his basic argument was based on the claim that a society will be more peaceful and therefore happier if maximum liberty is extended to all members of society, and a more harmonious society will promote the general welfare and happiness. In general, we probably would want to agree with Mill's principle. But suppose it could be demonstrated that society would be threatened unless it imprisoned a certain minority (say, all those of Japanese ancestry), and it would even be useful to society if Japanese Americans were forced to sell their property at prices below market value. It is difficult to see how a utilitarian, on utilitarian grounds alone, could object to such a proposal. (During World War II, the United States imprisoned citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry for more or less the grounds just given.) Most of us would probably want to say that the infringement of the rights of a minority, even if it could be justified on utilitarian principles, is morally wrong; clearly, then, we need another principle in addition to the greatest happiness principle, such as a fairness principle, or a principle that points out that some actions are wrong no matter how much happiness may result from them.

The Problem of Conflicting Rules

Even a brief exposure to ethical philosophy makes clear that the really difficult problem in ethics is not the generation of rules to govern conduct but the determination of what to do when our various rules conflict with one another. Rule utilitarianism would be no exception to this, and when the rules generated by utilitarian principles clash, we need some way to rank our rules in order of priority, or perhaps we need another rule that tells us how to choose one rule in preference to another. Such rules as "Do not kill" and "You ought to protect your homeland from invasion" can obviously clash, and when they do, utilitarianism does not seem, by itself, to be able to tell you how to choose between them. The addition of rules that regulate the application of other rules is one way of resolving difficulties arising from the clash of rules, and most contemporary forms of utilitarianism offer some sort of ranking system for placing moral rules in a hierarchy of priorities.

Proof for Utilitarianism

Finally, a difficulty in all forms of utilitarianism is the matter of proving that utilitarianism is true. In the conclusion of the following selection from Mill, he takes up the issue of proof. "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible," he says, "is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and . . . the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it." That sounds okay. Right? Perhaps, but like the introduction by Mill of qualitative distinctions into the hedonistic calculus, Mill's proof produces some very odd consequences.

As we pointed out in Part 2 "Thinking about Thinking (Logic)", Mill's proof, according to G. E. Moore, commits the fallacy of equivocation. When we say something is visible, we mean it is *capable* of being seen. By analogy, then, Mill is arguing that "desirable" means *capable* of being desired, and in *that* sense an adequate proof that something is capable of being desired is that people actually do desire it. But is that what "desirable" means in a moral context? If I say that in bicycle-touring a ten-speed bicycle is desirable, do I mean that such a thing is *capable* of being desired, or do I mean that it is what one *ought* to desire? Surely the latter. If Mill means that something is desirable in this second sense, then Mill is indeed guilty of equivocation. In so doing, he collapses the important distinction between the factual descriptions of psychology and the normative prescriptions of moral philosophy.

Remember that ethics, and Mill would have agreed with this, is *prescriptive:* it tells us how we *ought* to *behave*. And the principle of utilitarianism is that we ought to act in accordance with the greatest happiness principle. As Mill follows this line of argument to its logical conclusion, a most startling thing happens. We can perhaps best indicate this by listing the various steps in Mill's argument:

1. People ought to do what produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number (the *utility* or *greatest happiness* principle).
2. We can discover what produces happiness by examining what people in fact do to bring happiness.
3. Therefore, people ought to do what they in fact do.
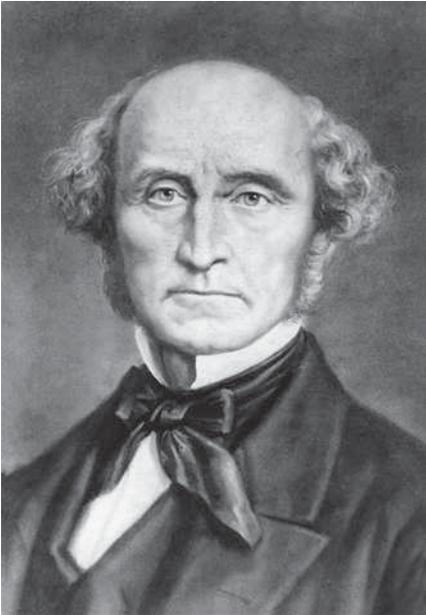
JOHN STUART MILL (1806–1873): English philosopher, economist, social critic and one of the leaders in the social movement known as utilitarianism, Mill was a staunch advocate of individual liberty and women's equality. Among his books are *System of Logic* (two volumes), *Principles of Political Economy* (two volumes), and *Utilitarianism*. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

But where is the sense of moral obligation? If we *ought* to do what we *do,* then moral philosophy offers nothing that obliges us to act in one way rather than another. *Whatever* we do would turn out to be what we ought to have done.

In spite of its internal difficulties, utilitarianism had a profound effect on English social life in the nineteenth century and continues to offer an appealing framework in which to discuss moral problems. The various attempts to patch up the internal difficulties of the theory and the ongoing debate that centers on utilitarian principles shows that there is still a great deal of vitality in the following views expressed by Mill.

John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism

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

John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism* Selections are from Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

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 as 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 conception 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 more 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 out-weighing 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 probably of more acute suffering, and 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 facilities, 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 Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are 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.

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.

Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility Is Susceptible

It has already been remarked that questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. To be incapable of proof by reasoning is common to all first principles: to the first premises of our knowledge as well as to those of our conduct. But the former, being matters of fact, may be the subject of a direct appeal to the faculties which judge of fact—namely, our senses, and our internal consciousness. Can an appeal be made to the same faculties on questions of practical ends? Or by what other faculty is cognizance taken of them?

Questions about ends are, in other words, questions about what things are desirable. 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 fulfill—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 the other sources of our 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 of 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. Happiness has made out its title as *one* of the ends of conduct, and consequently one of the criteria of morality.

But it has not, by this alone, proved itself to be the sole criterion. To do that, it would seem, by the same rule, necessary to show, not only that people desire happiness, but that they never desire anything else. Now it is palpable that they do desire things which, in common language, are decidedly distinguished from happiness. They

desire, for example, virtue, and the absence of vice, no less really than pleasure and the absence of pain. The desire of virtue is not as universal, but it is as authentic a fact, as the desire of happiness. And hence the opponents of the utilitarian standard deem that they have a right to infer that there are other ends of human action besides happiness, and that happiness is not the standard of approbation and disapprobation.

But does the utilitarian doctrine deny that people desire virtue, or maintain that virtue is not a thing to be desired? The very reverse. It maintains not only that virtue is to be desired, but that it is to be desired disinterestedly, for itself. Whatever may be the opinion of utilitarian moralists as to the original conditions by which virtue is made virtue; however they may believe (as they do) that actions and dispositions are only virtuous because they promote another end than virtue: yet this being granted, and it having been decided, from considerations of this description, what *is* virtuous, they not only place virtue at the very head of the things which are good as means to the ultimate end, but they also recognize as a psychological fact the possibility of its being, to the individual, a good in itself, without looking to any end beyond it; and hold that the mind is not in a right state, not in a state conformable to utility, not in the state most conducive to the general happiness, unless it does love virtue in this manner—as a thing desirable in itself, even although, in the individual instance, it should not produce those other desirable consequences which it tends to produce, and on account of which it is held to be virtue. This opinion is not, in the smallest degree, a departure from the happiness principle. The ingredients of happiness are very various, and each of them is desirable in itself, and not merely when considered as swelling an aggregate. The principle of utility does not mean that any given pleasure, as music, for instance, or any given exemption from pain, as for example health, is to be looked upon as means to a collective something termed happiness and to be desired on that account. They are desired and desirable in and for themselves; besides being means, they are a part of the end. Virtue, according to the utilitarian doctrine, is not naturally and originally part of the end, but it is capable of becoming so; and in those who love it disinterestedly it has become so, and is desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as a part of their happiness.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think the utility principle would be a useful guide for the Congress of the United States to follow in passing legislation? Why or why not?

2. Do you think that a hedonistic calculus is possible? Why or why not?

3. Do you agree with Mill that some pleasures are qualitatively superior to others? Or do you agree with Bentham that "pushpin is as good as poetry"? Give reasons for your answer.

4. Explain in your own words the difference between act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. Which do you think is preferable? Why?

5. After looking at the pros and cons of utilitarianism, would you consider yourself a utilitarian or not? Explain.

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Deontology: Morality Depends on the Motives

There are at least two major problems with making the morality of an action depend on its consequences: (1) we are not always in a position to predict correctly the consequences of our actions, and (2) a utilitarian standard of morality would allow for moral worth to be accorded for actions done for the worst possible reasons. Immanuel Kant was the great champion of the moral theory, which bases the moral worth of an action on the motives of the acting agent, not the consequences, and there are obvious ways in which our ordinary moral intuitions show that Kant was right.

Consider, for example, an act that has negative moral consequences: hitting and killing someone with a moving automobile. If we judged the morality of that action by the effects, we would have to say that legally and morally the driver of the automobile was guilty of murder. But if we place the emphasis on the motives of the driver, whether or not the driver intended to kill the pedestrian is of vital importance. Our assessment of the moral significance of the act would vary greatly depending on whether the driver was a professional murderer or an ordinary citizen whose right front tire just happened to blow out as the car turned a curve, causing the vehicle to swerve into the pedestrian. In the former case, we would accuse the driver of first-degree murder; in the latter case, assuming that there were no acts of negligence on the part of the driver, we would probably assess no moral blame at all.

In the case of some positive action to which we would want to accord moral worth, we likewise would miss an important aspect of the action were we to ignore the motives. Let us suppose a large gift of money is given to a charity, and we find out that the donor actually saved on income taxes by making the gift and that the giver was not really interested in the charity at all. In contrast, a smaller gift from a person genuinely concerned about relieving human misery would seem to us to have more moral significance than a large gift given out of reasons of self-interest. A morality based solely on consequences would have difficulty making such distinctions as these, whereas Kant thought that morality can only be understood properly if we do emphasize the motives.

THE GOOD WILL

As was mentioned in the introductory section, there are many things we would want to call good, but Kant insisted that there is only one good that is good without qualification. Let us see what he means. Many goods can be used for harmful and immoral purposes.

Intelligence is a good thing, but when possessed by a crook, it makes the criminal's actions more threatening. Wealth is good, but in the hands of an evil person can be used to threaten and destroy. No matter what the good is that we are thinking of, unless it is coupled with goodness of intention, it can become the source of great evil. There is only one thing, Kant says, that is good without qualification, and that is the *good will*. Morality resides only in the goodness of intention or motive.

By the good will, however, Kant does not mean just a kind of wishful thinking. If you see someone starving and say, "I hope you find something to eat," you are not acting out of a good will. A truly good will is the intention to act coupled with all the powers at your disposal. If you do not act on your motive, how can you say that your motive was good? But if in attempting to act on your good intention you are thwarted and prevented from carrying through on your intention, you nonetheless could be said to have acted morally.

Here is one more way to think of Kant's claim that a good will is the only thing that is good without qualification. For all other goods, there is a possible set of circumstances under which we would be inclined to say, "It would be better, all things considered, if that good were not the case." A person might have great wealth or intelligence or strength, but if we imagine that person using those gifts only to exploit others, it would be right to say that under those circumstances it would be better if the individual lacked the goods of wealth or intelligence or strength. In the case of a good will, however, there is no possible set of circumstances under which it would be right to say, "It would be better, all things considered, if the individual lacked a good will." Certainly, Kant would concede, there can be circumstances in which a person of good will suffers horribly because of his or her good will, perhaps as a result of being persecuted and ostracized because he or she will not capitulate in the evil of those around her. Nonetheless, though such circumstances could reasonably prompt us to say, "It would be better, all things considered, if the person of good will weren't living in the company of those who are corrupt *or* the corrupt didn't have the power they do *or* she was more skilled at escaping their onslaughts"; these circumstances could not, if Kant is right, prompt us to reasonably conclude, "It would be better, all things considered, if she didn't have a good will."

ACTING FROM DUTY

A truly moral act—moral in Kant's sense—is an action carried out from a sense of duty. But what is duty? Kant said that duty is the recognition that you are under a moral obligation, an obligation to do what is right. We might say, in good Kantian fashion, that duty is acting out of respect for the moral law. But here are two additional terms that demand clarification: *moral* and *law*. Let us take the notion of law first.

Usually we think of a moral action as one done out of principle rather than out of self-interested expedience of the moment. In that sense, moral acts are generally thought of as those which follow a general rule or law. But there are laws imposed on us by others, and there are laws imposed on us by ourselves (if the notion of law seems too formidable, think instead of the notion of rule). Now we cannot be moral if we are acting in accordance with a law or rule imposed on us by someone else. Again, Kant's view is compatible with our moral intuitions. The moral significance of someone's action seems to vanish if we discover that the person was *forced* to act in a certain way by an external law or threat. We would want to agree with Kant that you cannot force people to be

moral. If they act in accordance with a law, but it is not a rule that they have accepted freely, the moral significance of their actions seems to disappear. The kind of action based on laws imposed on us Kant refers to as *heteronomy*. The truly moral action is one that is, in contrast, *autonomous,* a word which literally means "self-legislated." In short, we are acting morally when we act in accordance with laws or rules that we freely accept and impose on ourselves.

So far, we can see that a moral action must be based on a self-imposed principle that we freely accept as a law or rule for action. But how are we to discover such rules? Kant's suggestion is that we first ask ourselves what *maxim* (or principle) is the basis for our action. That is, any time we are thinking of doing something, try to state the principle. His example is of a person promising to repay money when the individual knows that repayment will be impossible. The *maxim* or *principle* here would seem to be, "When in distress, I can falsely promise with no intention to keep my promises." Kant then suggests, once we have discovered what our maxim is, that we should ask ourselves whether we could make our maxim a rule for everybody, a universal law. If we can, then our action is moral; if we cannot, then our action is immoral. In the case of falsely promising to repay borrowed money, if everyone acted on our maxim, soon the possibility of anyone's borrowing money would disappear, since it would not be possible to accept anyone's promises to repay. If, when we universalize our maxim, it is seen to contradict itself (that is, I can falsely promise to repay money only because most people *keep* their promises), then the action is immoral.

Let us summarize. Kant is suggesting a two-stage process of self-analysis: first, you discover what your maxim or principle of acting is. Second, you ask yourself whether your maxim could become a universal law. If the answer is *no,* then the action is immoral.

HYPOTHETICAL AND CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

Kant called the principle of morality the *categorical* imperative. Where this term came from can be shown by contrasting it with *hypothetical* imperatives. Both terms come from the study of logic in Kant's day. A hypothetical statement was one with the form "If . . . then." The words that follow the *if* express the condition upon which the truth of the statement following the then depends. "If (you want to make good grades) then you should study." "If (you want to have friends) then be friendly." The word *imperative* means "command," so a hypothetical imperative is an "if, then" sort of command which is based on the acceptance of a condition or set of conditions.

From Kant's point of view, utilitarianism would be based on hypothetical imperatives: "If you want to do the greatest good for the greatest number, then. . . ." But for reasons we have already looked at, Kant did not think morality could be based on an assessment of consequences. The kind of command Kant thought proper for morality was the *categorical* imperative.

A categorical imperative is unconditioned (it is not "iffy"), and it alone is the principle of moral duty. A categorical command would say, "Tell the truth regardless of the consequences."

Kant's usual formulation of the categorical imperative is to "act on that maxim that you can will to be a universal law." This is the two-step process referred to previously. He also says that the categorical imperative is a rule freely imposed on us by ourselves; hence, it is autonomous. And a third way he characterizes the categorical imperative is

with reference to the goal of action. Every action is aimed at some end (though the *calculation* of consequences forms no part of morality). If we could discover something that is always a moral end, we could perhaps better see what the categorical imperative is. The final moral end of an action cannot be our own happiness, for if happiness were the goal of life, then the robber baron would be the most moral of persons. There is one thing, and one thing only, Kant argues, that is the proper end of actions, and that is to treat humanity, whether your own or that of another person, always as an end in itself. We should never use another person merely as a means but should treat everyone as worthy of respect and dignity.

Though Kant claims there was one and only one categorical imperative, he did suggest three dimensions to it:

1. An action is morally permissible if and only if the maxim on which it is based can be universalized.
2. An action is morally permissible if and only if it is carried out based on a freely imposed rule (autonomy).
3. An action is morally permissible if and only if it treats persons as ends in themselves.

As was mentioned previously, there is much in Kant's view that seems to agree with our ordinary moral intuitions. But there are, nonetheless, problems that arise when we attempt to apply Kantian principles. Are we, for example, always able to know what principles we are acting on? And if we do, are the consequences of an action never important in our moral deliberations? Could we tell a lie in order to save a life? Kant would say no, but we might think that telling a falsehood is preferable to seeing life lost. And it is not as easy to apply the abstract principle of the categorical imperative as Kant seems to suggest. Our moral decisions, particularly the difficult ones, rarely come to us in a neat and tidy choice between an obvious good and an obvious evil; rather, real-life moral problems are a confusing combination of mixed goods and ambiguous evils.

In spite of its limitations, Kantian ethics does provide a needed correction to the calculative ethics of utilitarianism. Some acts are wrong in themselves regardless of the beneficial consequences. But on the other hand, the consequences are sometimes important and should not be ignored in our moral deliberations, as Kant would have us do.

Immanuel Kant: Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics

Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgement, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and

Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics, trans. by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900.

mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, consti-
tutes what is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune.
Power, riches, honour, even health, and the general well-being and contentment
with one's condition which is called happiness, inspire pride, and often presump-
tion, if there is not a good will to correct the
influence of these on the mind, and with this
also to rectify the whole principle of acting
and adapt it to its end. The sight of a being

who is not adorned with a single feature of a pure and good will, enjoying unbro-
ken prosperity, can never give pleasure to an impartial rational spectator. Thus a
good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of being worthy of
happiness.

There are even some qualities which are of service to this good will itself and
may facilitate its action, yet which have no intrinsic unconditional value, but always
presuppose a good will, and this qualifies the esteem that we justly have for them
and does not permit us to regard them as absolutely good. Moderation in the affec-
tions and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation are not only good in many re-
spects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person; but they
are far from deserving to be called good without qualification, although they have
been so unconditionally praised by the ancients. For without the principles of a good
will, they may become extremely bad, and the coolness of a villain not only makes
him far more dangerous, but also directly makes him more abominable in our eyes
than he would have been without it.

A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its apt-
ness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition;
that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher
than all that can be brought about by it in favour of any inclination, nay even of the
sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfa-
vour of fortune . . . this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if
with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only
the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our
power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has
its whole value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitfulness can neither add nor take away
anything from this value. . . .

The second proposition is: That an action done from duty derives its moral
worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by
which it is determined, and therefore does not depend on the realization of the ob-
ject of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has
taken place, without regard to any object of desire. It is clear from what precedes
that the purposes which we may have in view in our actions, or their effects re-
garded as ends and springs of the will, cannot give to actions any unconditional or
moral worth. In what, then, can their worth lie, if it is not to consist in the will and in
reference to its expected effect? It cannot lie anywhere but in the principle of the will
without regard to the ends which can be attained by the action. For the will stands
between its a priori principle, which is formal, and its a posteriori spring, which is
material, as between two roads, and as it must be determined by something, it must

be determined by the formal principle of volition when an action is done from duty, in which case every material principle has been withdrawn from it.

The third proposition, which is a consequence of the two preceding, I would express thus: Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law. I may have inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action, but I cannot have respect for it, just for this reason, that it is an effect and not an energy of will. Similarly I cannot have respect for inclination, whether my own or another's; I can at most, if my own, approve it; if another's, sometimes even love it; that is, look on it as favourable to my own interest. It is only what is connected with my will as a principle, by no means as an effect—what does not subserve my inclination, but overpowers it, or at least in case of choice excludes it from its calculation—in other words, simply the law of itself, which can be an object of respect, and hence a command. Now an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and consequently the maxim[1] that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it, nor in any principle of action which requires to borrow its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects—agreeableness of one's condition and even the promotion of the happiness of others—could have been also brought about by other causes, so that for this there would have been no need of the will of a rational being; whereas it is in this alone that the supreme and unconditional good can be found. The pre-eminent good which we call moral can therefore consist in nothing else than the conception of law in itself, which certainly is only possible in a rational being, in so far as this conception, and not the expected effect, determines the will. This is a good which is already present in the person who acts accordingly, and we have not to wait for it to appear first in the result.

But what sort of law can that be, the conception of which must determine the will, even without paying any regard to the effect expected from it, in order that this will may be called good absolutely and without qualification? As I have deprived the will of every impulse which could arise to it from obedience to any law, there remains nothing but the universal conformity of its actions to law in general, which alone is to serve the will as a principle, that is, I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law. Here, now, it is the simple conformity to law in general, without assuming any particular law applicable to certain actions, that serves the will as its principle and must so serve it, if duty is not to be a vain delusion and a chimerical notion. The common reason of men in its practical judgements perfectly coincides with this and always has in view the principle here suggested. Let the question be, for example: May I

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[1]A maxim is the subjective principle of volition. The objective principle (that is, that which would also serve subjectively as a practical principle to all rational beings if reason had full power over the faculty of desire) is the practical law.

when in distress make a promise with the intention not to keep it? I readily distinguish here between the two significations which the question may have: Whether it is prudent, or whether it is right, to make a false promise? The former may undoubtedly be the case. I see clearly indeed that it is not enough to extricate myself from a present difficulty by means of this subterfuge, but it must be well considered whether there may not hereafter spring from this lie much greater inconvenience than that from which I now free myself, and as, with all my supposed cunning, the consequences cannot be so easily foreseen but that credit once lost may be much more injurious to me than any mischief which I seek to avoid at present, it should be considered whether it would not be more prudent to act herein according to a universal maxim and to make it a habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it. But it is soon clear to me that such a maxim will still only be based on the fear of consequences. Now it is a wholly different thing to be truthful from duty and to be so from apprehension of injurious consequences. In the first case, the very notion of the action already implies a law for me; in the second case, I must first look about elsewhere to see what results may be combined with it which would affect myself. For to deviate from the principle of duty is beyond all doubt wicked; but to be unfaithful to my maxim of prudence may often be very advantageous to me, although to abide by it is certainly safer. The shortest way, however, and an unerring one, to discover the answer to this question whether a lying promise is consistent with duty, is to ask myself, "Should I be content that my maxim (to extricate myself from difficulty by a false promise) should hold good as a universal law, for myself as well as for others?" and should I be able to say to myself, "Every one may make a deceitful promise when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot otherwise extricate himself?" Then I presently become aware that while I can will the lie, I can by no means will that lying should be a universal law. For with such a law there would be no promises at all, since it would be in vain to allege my intention in regard to my future actions to those who would not believe this allegation, or if they over hastily did so would pay me back in my own coin. Hence my maxim, as soon as it should be made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself.

I do not, therefore, need any far-reaching penetration to discern what I have to do in order that my will may be morally good. Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for all its contingencies, I only ask myself: Canst thou also will that thy maxim should be a universal law? If not, then it must be rejected, and that not because of a disadvantage accruing from it to myself or even to others, but because it cannot enter as a principle into a possible universal legislation, and reason extorts from me immediate respect for such legislation. I do not indeed as yet discern on what this respect is based (this the philosopher may inquire), but at least I understand this, that it is an estimation of the worth which far outweighs all worth of what is recommended by inclination, and that the necessity of acting from pure respect for the practical law is what constitutes duty, to which every other motive must give place, because it is the condition of a will being good in itself, and the worth of such a will is above everything. . . .

Now all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, that is, as objectively necessary.

Since every practical law represents a possible action as good and, on this account, for a subject who is practically determinable by reason, necessary, all imperatives are formulae determining an action which is necessary according to the principle of a will good in some respects. If now the action is good only as a means to something else, then the imperative is hypothetical; if it is conceived as good in itself and consequently as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, then it is categorical. . . .

There is one end, however, which may be assumed to be actually such to all rational beings (so far as imperatives apply to them, viz., as dependent beings), and, therefore, one purpose which they not merely may have, but which we may with certainty assume that they all actually have by a natural necessity, and this is happiness. The hypothetical imperative which expresses the practical necessity of an action as means to the advancement of happiness is assertorial. We are not to present it as necessary for an uncertain and merely possible purpose, but for a purpose which we may presuppose with certainty and a priori in every man, because it belongs to his being. Now skill in the choice of means to his own greatest well-being may be called prudence, in the narrowest sense. And thus the imperative which refers to the choice of means to one's own happiness, that is, the precept of prudence, is still always hypothetical; the action is not commanded absolutely, but only as means to another purpose. . . .

Finally, there is an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This imperative is categorical. It concerns not the matter of the action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what it may. This imperative may be called that of morality. . . .

When I conceive a hypothetical imperative, in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain until I am given the condition. But when I conceive a categorical imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that the maxims[2] shall conform to this law, while the law contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim of the action should conform to a universal law, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary.

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[2]A maxim is a subjective principle of action, and must be distinguished from the objective principle, namely, practical law. The former contains the practical rule set by reason according to the conditions of the subject (often its ignorance or its inclinations), so that it is the principle on which the subject acts; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and is the principle on which it ought to act that is an imperative.

There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Now if all imperatives of duty can be deduced from this one imperative as from their principle, then, although it should remain undecided what is called duty is not merely a vain notion, yet at least we shall be able to show what we understand by it and what this notion means.

Since the universality of the law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form), that

is the existence of things so far as it is determined by general laws, the imperative of duty may be expressed thus: Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature.

We will now enumerate a few duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and to others, and into perfect and imperfect duties.[3]

1. A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is: "From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction." It is asked then simply whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature. Now we see at once that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself and, therefore, could not exist as a system of nature; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty.

2. Another finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself.

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[3]It must be noted here that I reserve the division of duties for a future metaphysic of morals; so that I give it here only as an arbitrary one (in order to arrange my examples). For the rest, I understand by a perfect duty one that admits no exception in favour of inclination and then I have not merely external but also internal perfect duties. This is contrary to the use of the word adopted in the schools; but I do not intend to justify it here, as it is all one for my purpose whether it is admitted or not.

For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretences.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which with the help of some culture might make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rust and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species—in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him and have been given him, for all sorts of possible purposes.

4. A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: "What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress!" Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires.

These are a few of the many actual duties, or at least what we regard as such, which obviously fall into two classes on the one principle that we have laid down. We must be able to will that a maxim of our action should be a universal law. This is the canon of the moral appreciation of the action generally. Some actions are of such a character that their maxim cannot without contradiction be even conceived as a universal law of nature, far from it being possible that we should will that it should be so. In others this intrinsic impossibility is not found, but still it is impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, since such a will would contradict itself. It is easily seen that the former violate strict or rigorous (inflexible) duty; the latter only laxer (meritorious) duty. Thus it has been completely shown how all duties depend as regards the nature of the obligation (not the object of the action) on the same principle.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the ongoing quarrel between those who say the morality of an action depends on motives and those who say it depends on consequences, which side do you find yourself on? Why?

2. Do you agree with Kant that a moral imperative must be *categorical?* Give reasons for your answer.

3. Do you accept Kant's claim that the only thing that is good without qualification is good will? If yes, defend your answer.

4. Do you think that the categorical imperative is similar to the "golden rule" of Jesus? Explain.

5. What do you consider to be the major strong points of Kant's ethical view? Its major weaknesses?

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHICS

Applied Ethics

Of all the areas dealt with by philosophy, none is undergoing as much ferment as is ethics. The field of applied ethics, which originally encompassed such areas as business ethics and medical ethics, has expanded to include a variety of additional fields, such as journalism ethics, computer ethics, and environmental ethics. In a world where philosophers are clustered in academic departments that live or die on the basis of enrollments and student credit hours, some have argued that applied philosophy is just a way of boosting enrollments and keeping the academic wolf from the door. This criticism finds comfort in Immanuel Kant's claim that the business of philosophy should be the discovery and exposition of basic ethical principles. The application of those principles is not the philosopher's job, though Kant was fuzzy on saying precisely whose job it is.

Proponents of applied philosophy argue, to the contrary, that philosophers from Socrates onward have applied philosophy to a range of topics, civil disobedience and free speech being among the most obvious. And what else could the philosophers of the Enlightenment be said to be doing when they championed a social contract view of government if not applying philosophical concepts to real-world problems? Philosophers also argue that they are better equipped than are other disciplines to help students deal with the thorny ethical issues they will meet in the world of business and the professions.

The Revival of Virtue Ethics

Another recent development is the emergence of several new ethical theories that claim either to supplant or to supplement utilitarianism and Kant's ethics of duty, which were the dominant ethical views of the past two hundred years. Among the most significant of these is *virtue ethics.*

Virtue ethics is a revival of an older—indeed the oldest—ethical theory in Western philosophy. It appears prominently in the ancient period (500 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.) and draws much of its inspiration from the eudaemonism of Aristotle. The renewal of interest in virtue ethics in the twentieth century was led primarily by Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*), G. E. M. Anscombe (*Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics*), and Phillipa Foot (*Virtues and Vices*). Most ethical theories since 1500, mainly Kantian and utilitarian, see the primary task of ethics as laying down and defending rules for action. Virtue ethics, in contrast, sees the role of moral theory as being concerned with strategies for perfecting human nature and for helping individuals become well-developed human beings. Which is more important, doing the right thing or being a good person? Obviously the two are related; a good person will generally do the right thing, and one who generally does the right thing will be considered a good person. But there is a significant difference. A good person will *want* to do the right thing and not just do it grudgingly. And this is where virtue ethics takes its stand.

A virtue is a stable disposition or tendency. Glass has a tendency to break, for example. That does not mean it is constantly, spontaneously shattering, but only that if dropped on a hard surface it will break. Similarly, an honest person is not someone who constantly acts honestly twenty-four hours a day but someone who will always do the honest thing when the occasion arises. Such a person will tend always to do the right thing out of his or her own stable disposition. But of course this takes years of practice and discipline; a person is not born virtuous but must train for it. In this sense, a virtuous person is one in whom rules of conduct and behavioral standards have been completely internalized so that the person actually *wants* to do the right thing. (Confucius once remarked that when he turned seventy he could do whatever he felt like doing, without fear of doing anything wrong.) Virtue ethics, therefore, is more concerned with how to develop good habits and dispositions which will lead to good actions than with trying to find ways to get individuals to conform to a set of rules for good actions.

Another big difference between virtue ethics and other modern ethical theories is that, whereas Kantian and utilitarian theories talk about the most *general* moral qualities (being good, doing what is right), virtue ethics prefers to talk about particular virtues: being honest, courageous, industrious, compassionate, for example. When we speak of virtue we generally mean one of several things—either the peculiar excellence of each distinctive kind of thing (the virtue of turpentine, for example), or more particularly, the peculiar excellence of human beings (whatever that turns out to be), or still more particularly, the socially constructed norms of behavior approved in different societies. In this last sense, different cultures and societies have a different set of virtues. The ancient Greeks emphasized the virtues of courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice. In the Middle Ages, the Christians added the virtues of love and mercy. The ancient Chinese stressed the virtues of *ren* (human heartedness), *li* (propriety), *yi* (righteousness), and *zhi* (wisdom). These virtues are not contradictory but are rather clustered by each society into a culturally significant set.

Since ethical theories generally attempt to establish a universal, cross-cultural standard for good and bad, right and wrong, virtue ethics theories try to show that the particular virtues of their particular society are in fact universal, that is, that when properly analyzed they can be shown to be necessary to the flourishing of human nature in general. Plato, for example, tries to show that in order to be successful and happy, human beings must be just. Justice, therefore, for Plato, is not just the behavioral norm which the Greeks happened to favor but something absolutely necessary for anyone to be a fully developed human being. Similarly, the early Chinese Confucian scholar Mengzi (known in the West as Mencius) argues that everyone is born with the innate desire to be human hearted, righteous, courteous, and wise, so that these virtues are not peculiar to the Chinese but universal expressions of the human nature common to all human beings. As these examples indicate, virtue ethics not only has prompted a new look at ancient Greek ethical theories, it also has found points of contact with non-Western cultures and thought systems that underscore the commonality of these themes.

Feminist Ethics of Care

Another new current of thought within ethics is labeled the *feminist ethics of care.* Whenever a new theory, such as the feminist ethics of care, appears for the first time in a branch of philosophy which is over two thousand years old, it is interesting and important to ask, why now? Why not before? One of the reasons there has been no feminist ethics, or, more generally, feminist philosophy, is that, until recently, there have been practically no women philosophers. With some notable exceptions, such as Hypatia, the Alexandrian Greek neoplatonist; Damaris Masham, the seventeenth-century friend of Locke and philosophical correspondent with Leibniz; Duchess Sophia; Countess Palantine of Simmern, who also corresponded with Leibniz; Anne Conway, author of *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy;* and Mary Wollstonecraft, the late-eighteenth-century feminist who argued for extending the doctrine of the "rights of man" to the "rights of women," it is only recently that women have entered the legal, medical, and academic professions in any numbers. When women did become professional philosophers, many of them began to see that the entire history of philosophy had not just been written by men but written from a masculine perspective. As a result of this male dominance, a feminist perspective had

never been allowed to surface. That has changed with the appearance of many books and journal articles on feminist epistemology, feminist theology and philosophy of religion, feminist esthetics, feminist philosophy of science, as well as feminist ethics.

This development raises the enormously controversial question whether there are fundamental psychological, personality, and intellectual differences between men and women, and if so, whether these differences are due more to nature (heredity) or nurture (socialization). Women are themselves divided on this issue. For over a hundred years, women have argued that the best way to promote women's rights is to stress the essential *sameness* of men and women, the implication being that there is nothing in the professions that a woman cannot do as well as a man, since all biological differences are irrelevant to one's performance as a physician, teacher, lawyer, or business executive. More recently, however, some women have begun to argue that there *are* innate differences between men and women that do *not* relegate women to a genetically inferior position. The claim is that women on the whole have positive, valuable, socially useful features which men on the whole tend to lack.

When we look at the features which are claimed to characterize the feminist perspective—that women are more caring, more concerned to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, and more intuitive than men—we might think that these differences are mainly the product of socialization, the result of tens of thousands of years in which women all over the world were the primary homemakers and caregivers. If these differences are due to the way girls have traditionally and historically been treated at home and in school, then we would expect this to change, even if slowly, as the traditional role of women in society changes. Whether innate or the product of socialization, the feminist perspective continues to dominate a large part of our social interactions and, as Virginia Held (*Feminist Morality*) points out, the morality of the private sphere of the home needs to be added to the more public sphere of politics and the workplace.

In many ways feminist ethics arose with the work of Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*). As a psychology graduate student, Gilligan conducted experiments designed by her teacher Lawrence Kohlberg (*Child Psychology and Childhood Education*) to test the moral developmental level of young people. Following the work of Jean Piaget, Kohlberg developed a hierarchy of levels of human moral development. On the bottom of this moral scale, for example, a person would do the conventionally right thing in order to be rewarded with praise and to avoid punishment. At a higher level a person would do the right thing out of an inner desire to be a moral person and with a firm sense of the right thing to do. For Kohlberg, the highest level of moral development resembled the Kantian sense of duty, acting, as we say, "on principle."

Gilligan, however, discovered that boys tended to score significantly higher on these tests than girls. There was nothing new in this. Aristotle had already argued that women were generally inferior to men, and Freud made similar claims about the morally inferior status of women. But these tests seemed to provide hard empirical evidence. What Gilligan began to develop was an alternative explanation of these empirical findings. Perhaps, she reasoned, women had a different moral orientation to the world and should be judged by a different set of standards or developmental hierarchy than men. Further testing led her to argue that men tend to view morality from the perspective of justice, whereas women tend to view morality from the perspective of care.

When we think of justice we often think of the symbol of a blindfolded Greek woman holding an old-fashioned scale balance. She is blindfolded in order to provide impartiality so that the same law and punishment applies to everyone equally, the stranger and the family member alike. This fits Kant's notion of universalizing moral laws that apply equally to each and every case, with no exceptions. The ethics of care, on the other hand, looks to the personal factors that vary from case to case. For example, a mother may punish her son less severely than her daughter for the same misbehavior because she feels he is having more problems and is nonetheless trying harder than his sister to behave.

The justice typical of men stresses a rationally recognized universal moral code and the rights of the autonomous individual regardless of special circumstances (unless these can themselves be universalized). The care perspective typical of women emphasizes our social responsibility and

responsiveness to particular other people in spe-cific circumstances. If the Greek lady takes off the blindfold and sees that the guilty party is someone she knows stole food to keep his family alive and is now obviously shamed and humiliated, she will be lenient, whereas if she sees before her someone who has become wealthy by cheating the govern-ment food-stamp program, she will throw the book at him.

For Gilligan, the dominant ethical perspective is that of the autonomous independent individual freely contracting with other equally autonomous in-dividuals. But that is very different, she points out, from the relationship of a mother and a newborn infant or a woman caring for an aging senile parent or in-law. Another feminist ethicist, Annette Baier (*Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*) argues for the view that ethics involves not just refraining from do-ing immoral things but requires actively intervening in the lives of dependent persons such as the very young and those unable to care for themselves. In general, we could conclude that the feminist ethics of care need not be seen as contradicting Kantian and utilitarian ethical theories but supplementing them with insights into obligations they often overlooked.

Look at the way Barbara MacKinnon (*Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*) contrasts male and female orientations:

Female	Male
personal	Impersonal
partial	Impartial
private	Public
natural	Contractual
feeling	Reason
compassionate	Fair
concrete	Universal
responsibility	Rights
relationship	Individual
solidarity	Autonomy

Ethical Obligations to Animals

One of the most controversial new streams in ethi-cal thought is the development of animal rights theories. An outspoken advocate of this view is Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*). Singer does not develop a new ethical theory. He rather uses the basics of utilitarianism to defend his claims. He draws on the utilitarian theorist Jeremy Bentham, who argues that the foundations of utilitarian the-ory reside in the empirical fact that we all seek to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. Basic to utilitar-ian thinking is that it is fundamentally wrong to inflict pain on another person. Even if that person is our intellectual inferior, or even if the person is severely limited in intelligence, that person has a right to be free from pain, and we correspondingly have a duty not to inflict pain on them. Although animals differ from us in many ways, intellectual as well as moral, they share with us an interest in avoiding pain. Given these premises, it is a short step to Singer's conclusion that we should avoid inflicting pain on animals.

Some have argued that ethical treatment of animals means that they should be allowed to live in humane environments and killed painlessly when required for human use, but Singer will have none of this. His stance is absolute: killing animals just because we can and because they are useful to us is morally unacceptable. Animals have as much right to life on the planet as we do. We should not eat animals, kill them for their fur or hides, or use them for testing beauty products and pharmaceuti-cals. We should just leave them alone and become vegetarians.

In time we may see that some of these new themes in ethics will endure, whereas others will not. It is still too early to tell which is which. What is certain, however, is that the study of ethics has never been more exciting than it is now.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Blackburn, Simon. *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Shows how a consideration of human nature is important for ethics.

Darwall, Stephen. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability.* Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. A sustained development of the idea that the second-person perspective is crucial to a full and adequate moral theory.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. Offers perspectives on the role of gender in moral issues and in their expression.

Levin, David Michael. *The Philosopher's Gaze.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Using the language of phenomenology the author explores moral character and the pathologies of the current age.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory.* South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd ed., 1984. Argues that ethics requires membership in a moral community.

Mackie, John Leslie. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong.* London, England: Penguin Books, 1977. This highly influential work in meta-ethics puts forth a sustained argument for and detailed development of a subjectivist account of ethical values.

Scanlon, Thomas Michael. *What We Owe to Each Other.* Cambridge, MA: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998. Shows the considerations involved in moral reasoning and why we should give priority to moral judgments.

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Here are a few questions and activities to help you understand this chapter:

1. How might Kant's conception of good will have been shaped by his religious views?

   Read the **profile:** *Kant* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. How might Aristotle respond to Kant's conception of good will?

   Listen to the **audiobook:** *Kant—Groundwork of Metaphysic of Morals* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. What is the connection between metaphysics and ethics for Kant?

   Read the **profile:** *Kant* on **MySearchLab.com**

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CHAPTER **25**

Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Consider the following range of activities: a Wednesday night prayer meeting. A group of students studying astral projection. A Hindu holy man sitting motionless in meditation all day. A faith healer calling on a crippled lady to throw down her crutches and walk toward him. Jews praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. A temple in which food is offered to ancestors. An altar in the forest of Guatemala on which a hen is offered to ward off evil spirits. A Mass celebrated in St. Patrick's Cathedral. A Japanese samurai focusing on his oneness with the Buddha as he lops off the head of his opponent.

What makes all these diverse activities *religious*? Or, to pose the question differently, what definition of religion would be adequate to encompass such a wide range of human activities? The preceding list is only partial; it could be extended for pages just in describing religious *activities*. If we were to include a description of religious *beliefs* and attitudes stemming from these beliefs, the task of describing the phenomenon known as religion would seem formidable indeed.

The question "What *is* religion?" is the kind of question that philosophy of religion considers. In addition to its own proper subject matter, philosophy is an activity that seeks to understand the basic principles and presuppositions inherent in various *other* activities and disciplines, which gives us philosophies *of* (philosophy *of* science, *of* education, *of* art, *of* law, and even such new areas of inquiry as philosophy of sport). In all these inquiries, the task of philosophy is to analyze and clarify, not necessarily to engage in, the activity itself. Of course, there are many ways to analyze and clarify something without being philosophical. And that is certainly true of the study of religion. Religion is such an enormously rich and varied phenomenon that the study of religion is correspondingly diverse. One can engage in a scholarly study of ancient texts and the histories of religions, perhaps coupled with archeological examination of ancient religious centers. Anthropologists study the religious practices of primitive peoples in order to learn more about the meaning and function of religion in different cultural contexts. Adherents to a particular religion develop theological statements designed to unify a body of doctrine and beliefs. Other writers show the relevance of religious doctrines to contemporary issues.

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN RELIGION

How does the *philosophy* of religion differ from these approaches? As you might expect from our examination of other kinds of philosophical inquiry, philosophy of religion is concerned with clarifying such basic religious ideas as the concept of God, trying

to remove alleged inconsistencies in religious belief, probing the grounds of religious knowledge, examining the problems of religious language, as well as looking at the question of the nature of religion. It may at times be difficult to separate the philosophical study of religion clearly from other approaches, but maybe a few brief examples will show better the kinds of questions with which philosophy of religion is concerned.

First, what do we mean by the word *God?* What are the most basic attributes in our concept of God? God is said to be all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, the creator, and a transcendent spirit. But it is not always clear what some of these attributes mean, nor is it obvious that they are consistent with one another. What do we mean, for example, when we say that God is all-powerful? Can God do *anything?* Can God make a square circle, or make something so heavy God can't lift it? Can God break a promise or tell a lie? If not, does it follow that God is *not* all-powerful, after all? As philosophers, we might begin by trying to spell out more precisely what we mean by saying that God "can do anything." We might specify, as the seventeenth-century German philosopher Leibniz did, that God can do anything *possible* to which we might want to add, anything possible which God *chooses* to do. That will remove the problem of the square circle and the stone too heavy to lift, but what about God's ability to tell a lie or break a promise? God does not want to do these things, but what if God wanted to? Can God want to do something evil? What, in other words, is the relationship between God's goodness and power? Is God good by choice, or does God choose good because God is by nature good? There are problems with either approach. If God is good because of choice, then we seem to be asserting that God is capable of evil, and this contradicts our religious assumptions that a completely good being *could* not do anything bad. But if we opt for the second approach, that God chooses good things because God *is* good, then we seem to be saying that God does not really freely *choose* good. But being good seems to presuppose choosing to do good. Can God be good if God does not freely choose to do good, and can God freely choose good if God is incapable of evil?

If you were able to follow all the twists and turns of this analysis of the attributes of God, you can see how quickly the philosophy of religion gets into very complicated issues, issues that occupy the best philosophical minds of every generation. Perhaps you will conclude that there really is no ultimate contradiction between God's goodness and omnipotence, since God's nature is such that God is wholly good, so if God is true to his nature, God will never choose evil. But just when you think you have that question nailed down, you will discover that it raises another issue; in this case, the difficulty of reconciling God's goodness with omnipotence points us directly to the problem of evil.

The problem of evil has been stated in many ways, but perhaps the following is the simplest and most direct: How can there be evil in the world if God is both all-good and all-powerful? If God is all-good and all-powerful, then God would want to and be able to and therefore succeed in preventing evil. These three propositions—God is all-good, God is all-powerful, evil exists—appear then to be logically inconsistent. Any two of them can be true so long as the third is false, but they cannot all three be true at once. God may be all-good and want to prevent evil, but not all-powerful and so unable to prevent it. Or God might be able to prevent evil but not want to (that is, be all-powerful but not all-good). It is even possible that God is both all-good and all-powerful, and there *really* is no evil in the world (despite some pretty convincing appearances to the contrary). Philosophically, how might we try to reconcile this internal contradiction, that is, how can we analyze these three propositions so that they are no longer in conflict?

We might say, with Leibniz, that God does not choose between good and evil but only among the best of all *possible* worlds. We might imagine God considering which of the two following possibilities to bring into creation. On the one hand, there could be a world in which evil did not and could not exist. But this would have to be a world in which human beings were compelled to do good and could not choose to do evil. This would have the consequence that people could not freely choose good and so in that sense, as we saw earlier, could not truly be good of their own free will. On the other hand, there could be a world in which people were free to choose between good and evil, but in that case they would have to be free to choose evil and so the possibility of evil in the world would exist. Faced with these two alternatives, God chooses the better of the two, although neither is perfect. God can only choose the lesser of two evils. Why can God not choose a world where people are free and evil cannot exist? It's because that is impossible, and not even God can make the impossible happen. Does that imply that God is not all-powerful? This takes us back to the problem we considered earlier in analyzing the concept of God.

The consideration of these two questions in the philosophy of religion—the nature of God and the problem of evil—shows how intertwined such separate questions can be. Our consideration of the nature of God leads immediately to problems associated with the nature of religious language. We have been discussing philosophical investigations about the nature of God in plain English. But is this appropriate? Can we legitimately use ordinary language in talking about a reality (God) that is totally beyond human comprehension?

On the one hand, if God is said to lie beyond all limitations of our finite understanding, then God cannot be caught in the web of our human words and concepts. On the other hand, we do describe God in ways similar to ways we describe other things in our world. We say that God is good, knowing, loving, a father, and so on, but if these words are used in their ordinary sense, then such a use of language would seem to erase the *difference* between God and human beings. On the other hand, if we emphasize the fact that God is *totally* different from us, how can we say *anything* about God? One way out of this difficulty—and the way argued for by St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century—is to suggest that we use language analogously when we speak of God. God is not literally a father but is *like* a father; God's goodness is, when compared to the magnitude of his being, *like* the goodness we attribute to human beings in comparison to other beings.

But suppose that we cannot eliminate all of the logical puzzles from our consideration of the attributes of God. What if we are unable to solve the problem of evil, or come up with a completely adequate view of the nature of religious language? A great deal of effort has been spent in the philosophy of religion trying to construct logical proofs for the existence of God. Yet these too are full of difficulties and unresolved controversies. Are we nonetheless justified in *believing* in God or adopting a religious attitude even when we don't have rational proof? The relation between faith and reason is another of the perennial topics dealt with by the philosophy of religion. Some writers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, have argued that what we can know about God by reason and what we can know about God through sacred scripture constitute two parallel paths toward knowledge of God. Other philosophers, such as Søren Kierkegaard, have insisted to the contrary that faith is not based on reason at all but is a "leap" beyond rationality in a move that acknowledges utter

dependence on a power greater than ourselves. A consideration of the relation between faith and reason also points us toward another question relating to the source of our religious knowledge. Do we learn about the religious life from authority figures, from scripture, from religious experience, or are we completely dependent on reasoning and arguments? On the other hand, are arguments—such as those for the existence of God— really compelling without faith?

In Chapters 27, 28, and 29, we will look in detail at various attempts to prove or disprove God's existence. In Chapter 26, we will consider the implications of religious belief or unbelief for the meaning of human life. Before turning to these issues, however, we will devote the remainder of this introductory chapter to the exceedingly thorny issue of whether a definition can be formulated that adequately captures what we mean by *religion* and *religious* in all their uses. What, exactly, are we saying when we characterize a human activity or text or belief or concept as religious?

SOME ATTEMPTS AT DEFINITION

At first our task seems easy. Look at all the things we call religions, and figure out what they all have in common. If we can come up with a list of characteristics that apply to every religion, but do not apply to anything else, then we have successfully defined "religion" in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, as we saw in Chapter 7, "Strategies for Philosophical Arguments," is the standard model for a precise definition. But when we look at all the things called religion, it begins to appear more difficult to locate even a single feature they all have in common, particularly if we are seeking some feature that is not shared by things which fall outside the scope of religion.

Consider something as apparently basic to religion as belief in God. Though many religions—perhaps even most—include belief in some kind of divine being or beings, this is not true of all religions. Two major world religions, Buddhism and Confucianism, do not embrace the concept of God. Some religions are exclusively concerned with developing powers to ward off evil spirits. Others are devoted principally to developing certain kinds of physical powers through mastery of spiritual laws. Other religions are committed mainly to ancestor worship. On the other hand, there are persons who

> ▶ **Watch** the **video:** *Ann-Ping Chin: The Authentic Confucius* on **MySearchLab.com**

might admit to belief in God or in divine beings of some kind but who nonetheless do not engage in any activity or hold any other beliefs that could be legitimately called religious. If we cannot find a defining characteristic of religion in something as apparently basic as belief in God, then we can see the difficulty in discovering any characteristic common to all religions.

One alternative is to group religions into families determined by features they have in common but do not share with other religions. This approach would give us a family of monotheistic religions, a family of polytheistic religions, and a family of pantheistic religions, depending on whether a religion espoused belief in one god, many gods, or held the view that *everything* is God. Within each family we could separate out additional families of common characteristics: religions that have priesthoods versus those that do not, religions with sacred scriptures, religions that believe in immortality, religions that have a high ethical content, and so on. This kind of descriptive enterprise is interesting and useful to those who want to understand religion as a cultural or historical

phenomenon, but it fails as a philosophical analysis because it does not, by itself, lead to an understanding of the nature of religion.

INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC CRITERIA

If we cannot find a defining characteristic of religion, we might try discovering what *function* religion serves. Here we seem to be on firmer ground, for defining religion in terms of its function rather than something inherent in its practice at least allows us to examine features that will enable us to see religion as a whole. When we look at the various proposed *functional* definitions of religion, we find that they fall into two broad categories. In the first category are those definitions that attempt to explain religion in terms of *extrinsic criteria;* in the second category are those definitions that attempt to explain religion in terms of *intrinsic criteria*. The first kind of definition attempts to explain what religion is by explaining how it is related to things other than religion, through things extrinsic to religion, as though religion had no intrinsic character of its own. The second kind of definition attempts to explain the function of religion in terms of something having value and importance in and of itself.

We might want to say that attempts to provide extrinsic definitions of religion are reductive put-downs; that is, they insist that religion is "nothing but" a fear of the unknown, or an attempt to provide consolation in the face of life's uncertainties, or "nothing but" a device used by the ruling classes to keep the laboring classes in line. The extrinsic definitions of religion would not be accepted by the followers of religions so described. Believers in a religion would prefer intrinsic definitions that emphasize religion as the search for God, or the holy, or the infinite, or however they understand the nature of their religious commitments. They would also claim that a religious commitment makes life more meaningful than a nonreligious view of things. To be sure, it would be difficult to imagine anyone being committed to an activity unless that activity had some meaning and purpose, and religion is no exception. Unless the followers of a religion feel that it contributes in some sense to the meaning of their lives, they would cease to devote themselves to it with the intensity demanded by a religious concern. In Chapter 26, we will examine one thinker's expression of the centrality of religious faith for a meaningful life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Try your hand at defining religion. Based on your experience, how would you describe it?
2. Given what you know about philosophy at this point, how would a study called *philosophy* of religion differ from the study of a particular religious tradition?
3. Who do you think is in a better position to understand a particular religion—a believer who accepts the claims of that religion or a nonbeliever who has some distance from that religion?
4. What are some of the reasons people are religious? What are some of the barriers to religious belief?
5. From your own analysis and experience, what do you think are the most important issues in the study of religion?

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Here are a few questions and activities to help you understand this chapter:

1. How might evil be a problem for nonbelievers?

   ((•⁻ **Listen** to the **podcast:** *Marilyn McCord Adams on Evil* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. According to Kierkegaard, why isn't faith based on reason?

   ((•⁻ **Listen** to the **audiobook:** *Soren Kierkegaard—Either/Or* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. According to Confucius, what is the defining characteristic of religion?

   👁⁻ **Watch** the **video:** *Ann-Ping Chin: The Authentic Confucius* on **MySearchLab.com**

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Religion and Life's Meaning

The question of the relation between religion and life can be formulated in many different ways. Some religions, such as Christianity and Islam, find that the present life can only be fully understood as preparation for a future life. This means, among other things, that there can be no comprehension of the significance of life on earth without this added belief in human destiny. There is a strong sense that this present life is not the life we were meant to have, but only a preparation for life in the fullest sense.

At the opposite pole is Confucianism with its total absence of any belief either in God or in a future life. The primary concern of Confucianism is with the correct ordering of this present life with its emphasis on the well-organized society, filial piety, and respect for ancestors. Still another view is that shared by Hinduism and Buddhism, which consider release from human life on earth as their goal. Trapped in a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, human beings seek *moksha,* or release, from this cycle through piety and inner illumination. Salvation is considered not a future life, as in Christianity and Islam, but Nirvana, a state in which there is the total loss of individual identity.

What are we really asking when we inquire into life's meaning? To explore this issue is such a huge task that we cannot examine all the varieties of answers given to the question. Indeed, some philosophers have even suggested that the question of life's meaning is either so vast or so vague as to be unanswerable. Whatever else it might entail, the question involves attention to such additional issues as these: Who, or what, am I? Why am I here? What am I to do? These questions form the basis for an attempt to make rational sense out of life. We might say that this cluster of concerns raises the issue of the significance of life itself. Some philosophers have concluded that no one single thing gives life meaning, no big fact that makes life purposeful. What we can have, they conclude, is a collection of activities, beliefs, and relationships that provide many small meanings that together give life purpose and significance.

THE ABSURDIST RESPONSE

Others are not so sure. They ask what life would be like without any overall meaning at all. This attitude has found expression in the literature of the absurd, which focuses on the meaninglessness of life and the vacuity of human existence. Represented by the novels and short stories of Franz Kafka and the plays of Samuel Beckett, the absurdists present a vision of life devoid of any significance and purpose. Perhaps the paradigm

for this point of view is contained in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot,* whose entire action centers on two vagrants who are waiting for a Mr. Godot (God?) who never arrives. This vision of things seems to imply that life is a kind of cosmic joke in which the major participants wait vainly for an understanding of the significance of existence. There is no answer to the question of meaning, so human life goes on without it. The absurdists present a stark picture of human existence in which no meaning and purpose is available.

The philosophers of the mid-twentieth century classified as *existentialists* reject such a gloomy conclusion, though they agree that the question of the meaning of human existence is a central one for philosophy. This would not be the first time or the first issue on which philosophers have disagreed with literary figures. Philosophers, whose business is meaning, by and large reject the meaninglessness of life portrayed by absurdist literature and find significance even in a world without a God to provide a single, overarching meaning. The nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche expressed this philosophical attitude well when he said that "any meaning is better than no meaning." He found the possibility of meaningful life in the creation of noble values, great artistic achievements, and, in general, the elevation of human creativity in all its forms. Another nineteenth-century philosopher who is also cited as a precursor of existential philosophy, Søren Kierkegaard, gave a different answer. For him, life's meaning comes only through faith in God. Since God cannot be known by reason, a meaningful life requires a personal commitment, a *leap* of faith, as he put it. These twin responses to the question of life's meaning were continued in the existentialist philosophy of the twentieth century. Gabriel Marcel and Nikolai Berdyaev, among others, continued the themes of Kierkegaard by responding to the question from the context of the traditions of the Judeo-Christian religion. Others, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, worked out the meaning of human existence in a completely non-theistic context, although the intensity with which they devote themselves to the question of meaning can be perhaps thought of as "religious" in Paul Tillich's sense of faith as "ultimate concern."

TOLSTOY'S RESPONSE

What makes Tolstoy's response so interesting is that he considered both alternatives—theistic and non-theistic—to the question of life's meaning. He found the question itself overwhelming: "One can only live while one is intoxicated with life," he said. "As soon as one is sober it is impossible not to see that it is all a mere fraud and a stupid fraud! That is precisely what it is: there is nothing either amusing or witty about it, it is simply cruel and stupid." Tolstoy gravitated to this gloomy conclusion as a result of the realization that life is not only difficult and hard, but ends in utter defeat—death. How can we possibly have any delight in an enterprise that is ultimately doomed to disaster? Tolstoy desperately wanted an answer, and he searched—in vain, as he discovered—in science and philosophy for it. As he analyzed possible responses to life's meaninglessness, he discovered four common responses given to the question. The first was simply ignorance, a refusal of people to face up to the absurdity of life. The second kind of response was *epicureanism,* Tolstoy's term for seeking the maximum of pleasures in life. (Epicureanism was an ancient Greek hedonistic ethical system.) The third way was strength and energy—the noblest response, Tolstoy thought—and culminated in suicide: "a rope round one's neck, water, a knife to stick into one's heart, or the trains on the railways."

Finally there is the fourth way, that of weakness, which involves recognizing the absurdity of life yet doing nothing about it. This is the class of people in which Tolstoy found himself.

Tolstoy, the distinguished author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina,* is an exceptionally powerful writer, and in the selection that follows from "A Confession," one can sense the anxiety and dread Tolstoy experienced as he grappled with the question of life's meaning. There was, it turned out, a fifth response to life that Tolstoy finally discovered, and that was the response he witnessed in the Russian peasants: faith in God. The road to faith as Tolstoy experienced it was neither quick nor easy, but it provided the solace he needed. "I should long ago have killed myself," he says, "had I not had a dim hope of finding Him. I live, really live, only when I feel Him and seek Him."

One of the obstacles standing in the way of assessing statements of religious experience such as that offered by Tolstoy is the difficulty of understanding what he is talking about if you have never had a similar experience. The sense of the presence of God is an intensely private experience, more like falling in love than providing the proof of a geometrical theorem or demonstrating a chemical reaction in a laboratory.

A second difficulty experienced by many people who are drawn to faith in God is that while they can believe in God, they have trouble accepting the practice of religion as it goes on in the churches. This was Tolstoy's concern, for he found much in the Russian Orthodox Church that disturbed him. Like Marx, Tolstoy saw that religious *institutions* can be used to manipulate the poor and oppressed. And he was appalled by the fact that the gospel's message of peace and love had been largely ignored by the churches. Rather than preach nonviolence, the clergy stressed the patriotic duty to serve the czar by destroying the enemies of mother Russia. Rather than accepting the simple life and giving

LEO TOLSTOY (1828–1910): Born into the Russian aristocracy, Count Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy was trained in law and oriental languages but did not take a university degree. He renounced his fortune and position and sought the meaning of life in a return to a simple Christian lifestyle. Tolstoy was one of the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century, the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina.* Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

all their goods to the poor, the churches had become repositories of great wealth and privilege. Tolstoy's response was to seek a simple life of piety and faith, while remaining one of his generation's severest critics of the churches. It is ironic that during his lifetime Tolstoy's religious writings were suppressed by the Russian Orthodox Church, and after his death his religious writings were suppressed by the political authorities. The following selection is taken from the short work entitled "A Confession," which describes not only Tolstoy's religious pilgrimage but also his difficulties accepting the practices of the established church.

Leo Tolstoy: A Confession

There is an Eastern fable, told long ago, of a traveller overtaken on a plain by an enraged beast. Escaping from the beast he gets into a dry well, but sees at the bottom of the well a dragon that has opened its jaws to swallow him. And the unfortunate man, not daring to climb out lest he should be destroyed by the enraged beast, and not daring to leap to the bottom of the well lest he should be eaten by the dragon, seizes a twig growing in a crack in the well and clings to it. His hands are growing weaker and he feels he will soon have to resign himself to the destruction that awaits him above or below, but still he clings on. Then he sees that two mice, a black and a white one, go regularly round and round the stem of the twig to which he is clinging and gnaw at it. And soon the twig itself will snap and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveller sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish; but while still hanging he looks around, sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the twig, reaches them with his tongue and licks them. So I too clung to the twig of life, knowing that the dragon of death was inevitably awaiting me, ready to tear me to pieces; and I could not understand why I had fallen into such torment. I tried to lick the honey which formerly consoled me, but the honey no longer gave me pleasure, and the white and black mice of day and night gnawed at the branch by which I hung. I saw the dragon clearly and the honey no longer tasted sweet. I only saw the unescapable dragon and the mice, and I could not tear my gaze from them. And this is not a fable but the real unanswerable truth intelligible to all.

The deception of the joys of life which formerly allayed my terror of the dragon now no longer deceived me. No matter how often I may be told, "You cannot understand the meaning of life so do not think about it, but live," I can no longer do it: I have already done it too long. I cannot now help seeing day and night going round and bringing me to death. That is all I see, for that alone is true. All else is false.

The two drops of honey which diverted my eyes from the cruel truth longer than the rest: my love of family and of writing—art as I called it—were no longer sweet to me.

"Family" . . . said I to myself. But my family—wife and children—are also human. They are placed just as I am: they must either live in a lie or see the terrible

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This and all other selections from Tolstoy in this chapter are from *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief* by Leo Tolstoy, translated by Aylmer Maude (1921).

truth. Why should they live? Why should I love them, guard them, bring them up, or watch them? That they may come to the despair that I feel, or else be stupid? Loving them, I cannot hide the truth from them: each step in knowledge leads them to the truth. And the truth is death.

"Art, poetry?" . . . Under the influence of success and the praise of men, I had long assured myself that this was a thing one could do though death was drawing near—death which destroys all things, including my work and its remembrance; but soon I saw that too was a fraud. It was plain to me that art is an adornment of life, an allurement to life. But life had lost its attraction for me, so how could I attract others? As long as I was not living my own life but was borne on the waves of some other life—as long as I believed that life had a meaning, though one I could not express— the reflection of life in poetry and art of all kinds afforded me pleasure: it was pleasant to look at life in the mirror of art. But when I began to seek the meaning of life and felt the necessity of living my own life, that mirror became for me unnecessary, superfluous, ridiculous, or painful. I could no longer soothe myself with what I now saw in the mirror, namely, that my position was stupid and desperate. It was all very well to enjoy the sight when in the depth of my soul I believed that my life had a meaning. Then the play of lights—comic, tragic, touching, beautiful, and terrible—in life amused me. But when I knew life to be meaningless and terrible, the play in the mirror could no longer amuse me. No sweetness of honey could be sweet to me when I saw the dragon and saw the mice gnawing away my support.

Nor was that all. Had I simply understood that life had no meaning I could have borne it quietly, knowing that that was my lot. But I could not satisfy myself with that. Had I been like a man living in a wood from which he knows there is no exit, I could have lived; but I was like one lost in a wood who, horrified at having lost his way, rushes about wishing to find the road. He knows that each step he takes confuses him more and more, but still he cannot help rushing about.

It was indeed terrible. And to rid myself of the terror I wished to kill myself. I experienced terror at what awaited me—knew that that terror was even worse than the position I was in, but still I could not patiently await the end. However convincing the argument might be that in any case some vessel in my heart would give way, or something would burst and all would be over. I could not patiently await that end. The horror of darkness was too great, and I wished to free myself from it as quickly as possible by a noose or bullet. That was the feeling which drew me most strongly towards suicide.

Not finding an explanation in science I began to seek for it in life, hoping to find it among the people around me. And I began to observe how the people around me—people like myself—lived, and what their attitude was to this question which had brought me to despair.

And this is what I found among people who were in the same position as myself as regards education and manner of life.

I found that for people of my circle there were four ways out of the terrible position in which we are all placed.

The first was that of ignorance. It consists in not knowing, not understanding, that life is an evil and an absurdity. People of this sort—chiefly women, or very

young or very dull people—have not yet understood that question of life which presented itself to Schopenhauer, Solomon, and Buddha. They see neither the dragon that awaits them nor the mice gnawing the shrub by which they are hanging, and they lick the drops of honey. But they lick those drops of honey only for a while: something will turn their attention to the dragon and the mice, and there will be an end to their licking. From them I had nothing to learn—one cannot cease to know what one does know.

The second way out is epicureanism. It consists, while knowing the hopelessness of life, in making use meanwhile of the advantages one has, disregarding the dragon and the mice, and licking the honey in the best way, especially if there is much of it within reach. Solomon expresses this way out thus: "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: and that this should accompany him in his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

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"Therefore eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart. . . . Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity . . . for this is thy portion in life and in thy labours which thou takest under the sun. . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

That is the way in which the majority of people of our circle make life possible for themselves. Their circumstances furnish them with more of welfare than of hardship, and their moral dullness makes it possible for them to forget that the advantage of their position is accidental, and that not everyone can have a thousand wives and palaces like Solomon, that for everyone who has a thousand wives there are a thousand without a wife, and that for each palace there are a thousand people who have to build it in the sweat of their brows; and that the accident that has today made me a Solomon may tomorrow make me a Solomon's slave. The dullness of these people's imagination enables them to forget the things that gave Buddha no peace—the inevitability of sickness, old age, and death, which to-day or to-morrow will destroy all these pleasures.

So think and feel the majority of people of our day and our manner of life. The fact that some of these people declare the dullness of their thoughts and imaginations to be a philosophy, which they call Positive, does not remove them, in my opinion, from the ranks of those who, to avoid seeing the question, lick the honey. I could not imitate these people; not having their dullness of imagination I could not artificially produce it in myself. I could not tear my eyes from the mice and the dragon, as no vital man can after he has once seen them.

The third escape is that of strength and energy. It consists of destroying life, when one has understood that it is an evil and an absurdity. A few exceptionally strong and consistent people act so. Having understood the stupidity of the joke that has been played on them, and having understood that it is better to be dead than to be alive, and that it is best of all not to exist, they act accordingly and promptly end this stupid joke since there are means: a rope round one's neck, water, a knife to

stick into one's heart, or the trains on the railways; and the number of those of our circle who act in this way becomes greater and greater, and for the most part they act so at the best time of their life, when the strength of their mind is in full bloom and few habits degrading to the mind have as yet been acquired.

I saw that this was the worthiest way to escape and I wished to adopt it.

The fourth way out is that of weakness. It consists of seeing the truth of the situation and yet clinging to life, knowing in advance that nothing can come of it. People of this kind know that death is better than life, but not having the strength to act rationally—to end the deception quickly and kill themselves—they seem to wait for something. This is the escape of weakness, for if I know what is best and it is within my power; why not yield to what is best? . . . I found myself in that category.

———————

During that time this is what happened to me. During that whole year when I was asking myself almost every moment whether I should not end matters with a noose or a bullet—all that time, together with the course of thought and observation about which I have spoken, my heart was oppressed with a painful feeling, which I can only describe as a search for God.

I say that that search for God was not reasoning, but a feeling, because that search proceeded not from the course of my thoughts—it was even directly contrary to them—but proceeded from the heart. It was a feeling of fear, orphanage, isolation in a strange land, and a hope of help from someone.

Though I was quite convinced of the impossibility of proving the existence of a Deity (Kant had shown, and I quite understood him, that it could not be proved), I yet sought for God, hoped that I should find Him, and from old habit addressed prayers to that which I sought but had not found. I went over in my mind the arguments of Kant and Schopenhauer showing the impossibility of proving the existence of a God, and I began to verify those arguments and to refute them. Cause, said I to myself, is not a category of thought such as are Time and Space. If I exist, there must be some cause for it, and a cause of causes. And that first cause of all is what men have called "God." And I paused on that thought, and tried with all my being to recognize the presence of that cause. And as soon as I acknowledged that there is a force in whose power I am, I at once felt that I could live. But I asked myself: What is that cause, that force? How am I to think of it? What are my relations to that which I call "God"? And only the familiar replies occurred to me: "He is the Creator and Preserver." This reply did not satisfy me, and I felt I was losing within me what I needed for my life. I became terrified and began to pray to Him whom I sought, that He should help me. But the more I prayed the more apparent it became to me that He did not hear me, and that there was no one to whom to address myself. And with despair in my heart that there is no God at all, I said: "Lord, have mercy, save me! Lord, teach me!" But no one had mercy on me, and I felt that my life was coming to a standstill.

But again and again, from various sides, I returned to the same conclusion that I could not have come into the world without any cause or reason or meaning; I could not be such a fledgling fallen from its nest as I felt myself to be. Or, granting that I be such, lying on my back crying in the high grass, even then I cry because I know that a mother has borne me within her, has hatched me, warmed me, fed me, and loved

me. Where is she—that mother? If I have been deserted, who has deserted me? I cannot hide from myself that someone bore me, loving me. Who was that someone? Again "God"? He knows and sees my searching, my despair, and my struggle.

"He exists," said I to myself. And I had only for an instant to admit that, and at once life rose within me, and I felt the possibility and joy of being. But again, from the admission of the existence of a God I went on to seek my relation with Him; and again I imagined *that* God—our Creator in Three Persons who sent His Son, the Saviour—and again *that* God, detached from the world and from me, melted like a block of ice, melted before my eyes, and again nothing remained, and again the spring of life dried up within me, and I despaired and felt that I had nothing to do but to kill myself. And the worst of all was that I felt I could not do it.

Not twice or three times, but tens and hundreds of times, I reached those conditions, first of joy and animation, and then of despair and consciousness of the impossibility of living.

I remember that it was in early spring: I was alone in the wood listening to its sounds. I listened and thought ever of the same thing, as I had constantly done during those last three years. I was again seeking God.

"Very well, there is no God," said I to myself; "there is no one who is not my imagination but a reality like my whole life. He does not exist, and no miracles can prove His existence, because the miracles would be my imagination, besides being irrational.

"But my *perception* of God, of Him whom I seek," I asked myself, "where has that perception come from?" And again at this thought the glad waves of life rose within me. All that was around me came to life and received a meaning. But my joy did not last long. My mind continued its work.

"The conception of God is not God," said I to myself. "The conception is what takes place within me. The conception of God is something I can evoke or can refrain from evoking in myself. That is not what I seek. I seek that without which there can be no life." And again all around me and within me began to die, and again I wished to kill myself.

But then I turned my gaze upon myself, on what went on within me, and I remembered all those cessations of life and reanimations that recurred within me hundreds of times. I remembered that I only lived at those times when I believed in God. As it was before, so it was now; I need only be aware of God to live; I need only to forget Him, or disbelieve Him, and I died.

What is this animation and dying? I do not live when I lose belief in the existence of God. I should long ago have killed myself had I not had a dim hope of finding Him. I live, really live, only when I feel Him and seek Him. "What more do you seek?" exclaimed a voice within me. "This is He. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life."

"Live seeking God, and then you will not live without God." And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me.

And I was saved from suicide. When and how this change occurred I could not say. As imperceptibly and gradually the force of life in me had been destroyed and I had reached the impossibility of living, a cessation of life and the necessity of suicide, so imperceptibly and gradually did that force of life return to me. And strange

to say the strength of life which returned to me was not new, but quite old—the same that had borne me along in my earliest days.

I quite returned to what belonged to my earliest childhood and youth. I returned to the belief in that Will which produced me and desires something of me. I returned to the belief that the chief and only aim of my life is to be better, that is, to live in accord with that Will. And I returned to the belief that I can find the expression of that Will in what humanity, in the distant past hidden from me, has produced for its guidance: that is to say, I returned to a belief in God, in moral perfection, and in a tradition transmitting the meaning of life. There was only this difference, that then all this was accepted unconsciously, while now I knew that without it I could not live.

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Questions for Discussion

1. What question, or problem, does religion answer, according to Tolstoy? Do you agree with Tolstoy that religion is the *only* answer to this question? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Although Tolstoy found faith in God to be the source of the meaning he sought, he was not attracted to the kind of religion offered by the churches. Was this a contradiction in his views? Why or why not?

3. Tolstoy said that he considered, and rejected, the possibility that life simply has no meaning. What were his reasons for such a conclusion? Do you agree with them?

4. Explain, in your own words, the four ways Tolstoy thinks people try to come to terms with the question of life's meaning. Do you think there are others? Which one have *you* chosen?

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1. According to Camus, what is the only true philosophical question?

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2. How has Epicurus often been misunderstood?

   ((•⦏ **Listen** to the **program:** *Philosophy: A Guide To Happiness, Alain de Botton* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. How might an anthropologist explain Tolstoy's religious need?

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A Priori Arguments for God's Existence

Are psychological grounds for belief in God—that is, our need for God—a sufficient basis for belief? Tolstoy asserted that, in his own search for meaning and significance in life, it was only after he had found God that life became meaningful. But is the human need for God due, as Tolstoy put it, to the inevitable emptiness that we feel apart from God? Or is it a creation occasioned by our weakness when faced with life's trials and tribulations? To answer this question, we must go beyond the human need for God to rational grounds for knowledge claims about God. But can we claim to have knowledge of God? If so, how? If not, why not? Is such knowledge the result of reason and inference, of argument and analysis? Or does it come from some direct experience of the divine presence? The latter claim is made by the *mystics,* those who say they have had an experience of God. Usually mystics claim such experiences to be extremely private, and they are unable to describe this experience. Such experiences, they claim, are *ineffable,* beyond explanation and understanding. Mystical experience, indeed, religious experience in general, is itself a fascinating topic in the philosophy of religion, as well as a topic of interest to the psychology of religion. The American philosopher William James produced one of the classics dealing with this topic in his monumental work *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Rather than examine the nature, scope, and veracity of religious experience as evidence for the existence of God, we will turn instead to the arguments that have been advanced for God's existence.

REASON AND RELIGION

Two things commend our attention to arguments for God's existence rather than to evidence for God's existence from religious experience. The first is that arguments are public; they can be examined by anyone and tested by the standards of logic, in contrast to religious experience, which tends to be private and perhaps even unexplainable. The second advantage offered by arguments for God's existence is that the religious heritage of the West has always given an important place to reason. In the Christian thought of the Middle Ages, reason and divine revelation (that is, holy scripture) were considered twin paths to the truth. According to this twofold truth view, there could be no contradiction between reason and revelation since truth was truth, no matter whether one arrived at it through reason unaided by revelation or from sacred scripture. If there appeared

to be a conflict, it was due either to the faultiness of one's reasoning or error in one's interpretation of scripture.

Before considering any specific argument for God's existence, it is important to note that arguments for God's existence are traditionally divided into those that depend largely on evidence drawn from sense experience and those that depend largely on concepts and principles alleged to be derived from reason alone. The former are classified as *a posteriori* arguments because the premises are "posterior to," and thus dependent upon, evidence provided by the senses. The latter are called *a priori* arguments because the principles and concepts used to prove God's existence are thought to be "prior to," or independent of, sense experience. In Chapter 28, we will explore some of the most influential *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence. In this chapter, our focus is on *a priori* arguments for God's existence. We begin with what is the most influential such attempt to prove God's existence *a priori,* the ontological argument. Though the argument was first put forward by St. Anselm of Canterbury over 900 years ago, even today it has proponents and critics, as it continues to be the subject of much philosophical study and debate.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The term *ontological* comes from the Greek word for *being;* an ontological analysis is simply an analysis of the nature or being of something. Sometimes ontological analysis is virtually a synonym for what we have referred to as metaphysical analysis in Part 3, "What Is Real? (Metaphysics)." We could carry out an ontological analysis of anything—a chair, a table, a human being, a triangle, a painting. As part of our analysis we would attempt to define the object, to understand its nature and to be able to list all its qualities or attributes. Another task of ontological analysis would be to distinguish between something that is merely imagined and something that is real. Remember that determining the difference between appearance and reality was one of the tasks of metaphysics.

Let us consider a painting as the object of our ontological analysis. Before the artist paints it, the painting is merely imagined. It does not exist until the painter commits it to canvas. Then the painting is both in the artist's understanding and exists as an object for others to examine. Would you say that the painting that has been painted by the painter is, in some sense, greater than the painting only imagined by the painter? If so, you would probably want to say that it is greater because the real painting is both as the artist imagined it *and* available as a reality to be examined by others. It certainly would seem strange to say that the imagined painting was greater than the real painting. We might say that the conception of the painter was greater than the painter's ability to draw, but that is only a comment about the painter's ability, not about the difference between appearance and reality. The real painting is *ontologically* greater than the imagined painting.

Armed with this commonsense distinction, Anselm proceeds to construct an argument for God's existence based on an analysis of the concept of God, or we could say on an ontological analysis of the concept of God.

What do we mean when we use the term *God?* Most Jews and Christians have meant a being that is greatest in power, in knowledge, in goodness, and in reality;
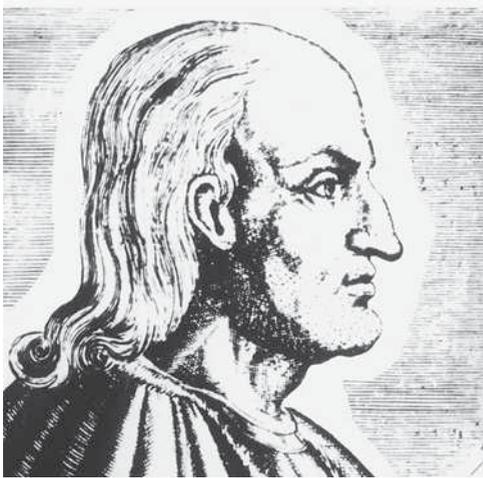
ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033–1109): A French monk who became one of the first major thinkers of the Middle Ages to defend rational analysis of theological doctrines. Born of a noble family, Anselm studied at the Benedictine Abbey at Le Bec and subsequently became a Benedictine. In 1093 he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. © TopFoto/The Image Works.

in short, God is conceived as the most perfect being. This is a view of God that accords with the faith commitments of most believers, so Anselm uses it in his ontological analysis. God, according to Anselm's definition, is "that being than which none greater can be conceived." God is not only the greatest being, God is the greatest *conceivable* being.

Now, suppose someone says that such a being exists only in one's understanding. This is flatly contradictory, according to Anselm. For a being that existed *both* in the understanding *and* in reality would be greater than a being that existed in the understanding alone (remember the difference between the imagined and the real painting). Therefore, a person who says that God exists only in the understanding is a fool ("The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God,'" Psalms xiv.i). Anselm's argument is that to say that one has a conception of a non-existing God would be as foolish as to say that one has a conception of a four-sided triangle, a round square, or a conception of water that is really fire.

Before looking at Anselm's argument, consider a word or two about who he was. Anselm was an eleventh-century archbishop (of Canterbury, England). He lived at a time when Christianity provided the total intellectual and cultural milieu of Europe. But in addition to Christian influences, the intellectual heritage of Europe was Greek as well. And in Greek philosophy, reason held a prominent place. The Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages, as has already been mentioned, sought to meld faith and reason by showing that one could by reason discover what one also believed by faith. Anselm was a believer, but he sought a single argument for God's existence that would not depend upon sacred scripture or upon the faith commitments of the believer. When he discovered such an argument, he formulated it in a small document he entitled *Proslogion,* that is, a "dialogue." The form of the *Proslogion* is a meditation, an almost prayerlike statement to God of the argument and Anselm's thankfulness for being allowed to discover it. Before commenting further on the argument, we will look at Chapters II, III, and IV of the *Proslogion*.

St. Anselm: Proslogion

Chapter II

And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalms xiv.i) But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—a being than which nothing greater can be conceived—understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

For it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality, which is greater.

Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence there is no doubt that there exists a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

Chapter III

And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.

So truly, therefore, dost thou exist, O Lord, my God, that thou canst not be conceived not to exist; and rightly. For if a mind could conceive of a being better than thee, the creature would rise above the Creator: and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except thee alone, can be conceived not to exist. To

thee alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence in a higher degree than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence in a less degree it belongs to it to exist. Why, then, has the fool said in his heart, there is no God (Psalms xiv.i), since it is so evident, to a rational mind, that thou dost exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is dull and a fool.

Chapter IV

But how has the fool said in his heart what he could not conceive; or how is it that he could not conceive what he said in his heart, since it is the same to say in the heart, and to conceive?

But, if really, nay, since really he both conceived, because he said in his heart; and did not say in his heart, because he could not conceive; there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived. For, in one sense, an object is conceived when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood.

In the former sense, then, God can be conceived not to exist; but in the latter not at all. For no one who understands what fire and water are can conceive fire to be water, in accordance with the nature of the facts themselves, although this is possible according to the words. So, then, no one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist; although he says these words in his heart, either without any, or with some foreign, signification. For, God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. And he who thoroughly understands this assuredly understands that this being so truly exists, that not even in concept can it be non-existent. Therefore, he who understands that God so exists cannot conceive that he does not exist.

I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now so understand by thine illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that thou dost exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT IN RECENT THOUGHT

Although first formulated in the eleventh century, the ontological argument continues to fascinate philosophers. In the seventeenth century, Descartes advanced an argument remarkably like that of Anselm, although there is no evidence that Descartes knew of Anselm's argument. In the eighteenth century, Kant attacked the ontological argument as an example of the fallacious reasoning that the human mind falls into when it attempts to soar beyond its proper boundaries.

In the formulations of the ontological argument by both Descartes and Anselm, the assumption is made that existence is a perfection. To put this another way, both philosophers assume that existence is a quality that adds something to the concept of a thing. An existing triangle or painting is greater than the mere idea of a triangle or painting, since the real triangle and the real painting have an additional quality—existence—and hence are more perfect than the mere concept of them. Without the assumption that existence is a quality that can be predicated of a thing, neither Anselm's argument nor Descartes' formulation of the

ontological argument is satisfactory, for they both argue that the most perfect being, or the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, would have to possess existence as one of the qualities or perfections that are part of the idea of God.

The assumption that existence is a perfection or quality was examined thoroughly by Immanuel Kant. We have already seen in Part 4 on epistemology something of the distinction Kant makes between *analytic* and *synthetic* statements, and this distinction is important to his criticism of the ontological argument. One aspect of his critique was to attempt to clarify the ambiguity that surrounds the use of the term *is,* or its other tense forms (*are, was,* etc.), when it is used as a synonym for *exists*. The forms of the verb *to be* function in different ways. Notice the ways they function in the following three sentences:

1. Bachelors are.
2. Bachelors are males.
3. Bachelors are deplorable.

Statement 1 is a claim that there are things in the world called bachelors, and we can substitute for the statement "bachelors are" the synonymous statement "bachelors exist." Statement 2 offers what Kant called an "identical proposition," that is, the predicate "males" is contained in the subject "bachelors."

There are several interesting things about statement 2. First, we can tell whether the statement is true or false simply by examining the meaning of the term *bachelors*. In a purely *a priori* fashion, we can determine quite apart from sense experience, that the statement is true, assuming that we know the meaning of the English language and the term *bachelor*. Kant called this type of statement *analytic,* and a second interesting thing about analytic statements is that we cannot deny the predicate without contradicting ourselves. It would be an obvious contradiction to say that bachelors are not males, since the very meaning of the term *bachelor* includes maleness. We can, however, deny the predicate "males" without contradiction if we also deny the subject, that is, if we deny that there are things in the universe to which the name *bachelor* properly belongs. This may sound very strange when we are dealing with things such as bachelors, which we all agree exist. But suppose we are talking about unicorns. We can state that "unicorns are one-horned creatures," and this statement would be analytically true. However, we can deny that there are unicorns, and in so doing we are denying the subject (unicorn) with its predicate (one-horned). The very meaning of unicorn implies creatures with one horn; a two-horned unicorn would be as contradictory as a four-sided triangle.

Statement 3 is different from statement 2 in that it adds a predicate (deplorable) to the subject (bachelors). There is nothing in the concept of bachelor that leads us to say *a priori* that bachelors are deplorable. This statement may be true, or it may be false, and there is no way to determine which merely by examining the meaning of the terms, as we could do with statement 2. The only way to determine whether statement 3 is true or false is to appeal to experience—ours or that of someone else. In other words, statements like statement 3 can only be verified *a posteriori*. Kant called such statements *synthetic,* since the predicate adds something to the subject (*synthetic* literally means "putting together"). We take a predicate, or quality, and add it to a subject, and a synthetic statement results. Unlike with the predicates of analytic statements, we can deny the predicates of synthetic statements without contradiction. It is not contradictory to say

"Bachelors are not deplorable," for whether or not bachelors are deplorable can be discovered only by an appeal to our experience of bachelors.

In both statements 2 and 3, the term *are* functions only as a copula; it links the predicates with the subject. In neither case does it add anything to the subject. In statement 1, however, it appears that *are* does add something to the subject, namely, existence. But, according to Kant, when we use one of the forms of the verb *to be* to mean "exists," it does not serve as a predicate, since existence is not a real predicate. This is the basis for Kant's rejection of the ontological argument. To say that something exists in no way changes or adds to the concept of the thing and thus is not what Kant would call a "real predicate." What is the difference between an existing triangle and the mere concept of a triangle? Kant's reply is that the difference between them is not one that can be captured by pointing to a predicate that the former has and the latter lacks. Both the existing triangle and the idea of a triangle contain the same predicates: three sides, three angles, and so on.

But surely, we might want to say, an existing triangle is different in some sense from the mere idea of a triangle. Any difference we might want to attribute to the existing triangle, however, has nothing to do with the nature of triangularity. About all we can say is that when we state that a triangle exists, we are making a claim that there are objects in reality to which we can correctly give the name *triangle* with all the predicates that inhere in this idea. In short, we are claiming that there is an instance of "triangle," the idea of which we can explore purely *a priori*. Whether or not something exists, though, is not a matter of *a priori* investigation but rather requires an appeal to the senses and hence is *a posteriori*.

Kant admits that it is possible to make analytically true statements about God. Such statements would include "God is all-powerful," "God is eternal," and "God is infinite." All these statements derive their predicates from an analysis of the concept of God. What we cannot claim is that "existence" is one of the predicates that belongs to the idea of God, since existence is not a real predicate. Hence, the ontological argument is fallacious.

EXISTENCE IS NOT A QUALITY

Kant's objections to the ontological argument may sound difficult, but the charges he makes against the argument amount principally to two:

1. Existence is not a perfection (or a quality or real predicate) that can be added to a concept to change the concept in any way.
2. All existence statements are *a posteriori* and synthetic.

Most philosophers today would agree with Kant that existence is not a perfection. We do not speak of "existence," even in ordinary language, as something that changes the concept or idea of a thing. For example, if you were describing your ideal automobile, you could list all its qualities, among which would be that it has a turbo-charged engine, four-on-the floor, removable top, red paint, and so forth. No matter how exhaustive you might make this list of qualities, you would not include the statement, "and oh yes, it exists." But if existence is not a quality, what is it? To say that something exists is to claim that there is something in reality (in space and time and open to verification by experience) to which our concept refers. And how do we know the existence of something? Kant's answer is that the way we discover the existence of anything is by empirical

verification. That is, our senses (or the senses of someone else) tell us whether or not a thing exists. That is why Kant says that all existence claims are *a posteriori* and, thus, synthetic. We take a concept and add to it the claim that there is in fact something that can be experienced corresponding to our concept.

Therefore, Kant's claim that existence is not a predicate and that all existence statements are *a posteriori* and thus synthetic is another way of saying that all we can legitimately term *knowledge* of reality must be derived from what we can experience with our senses. This, of course, would include what others have experienced and have related to us. But in general, Kant argues that unless a thing can be experienced, it cannot be known to exist. This point brings us full circle—back to the question of religious experience with which we began Part 6, "Philosophy of Religion." We seem to be as far from having a logical argument for God's existence as ever.

As we saw in the discussion of Kant in Part 4 on epistemology, the human mind is capable of asking a great many questions it cannot answer. The human mind being what it is, we want knowledge about things we cannot experience through the senses. We want to know about God. We want to know about the human soul, whether it is an indivisible unity, or whether it is composed of parts, or just if there is a human soul independent of the body. In addition, we want to ask questions about the universe: Did the world have a beginning in time, or is it eternal? While all these questions are interesting and arise in human consciousness inevitably, they cannot possibly be answered—at least if we accept Kant's view. As has already been pointed out during our discussion of epistemology, Kant devotes considerable attention to showing that when philosophers attempt to answer such questions, they fall helplessly into confusion and phony reasoning. If Kant is right, then the ontological argument is only an enticing temptation to faulty reasoning.

Kant was not an atheist. He believed in God, and he believed that faith was philosophically defensible. But he insisted that we cannot *prove* that there is a God or claim to *know* that God exists. His attack on the ontological argument undercuts its attempt to provide a basis in knowledge for what we also believe by faith. Kant was arguing that there is no way we can go from the mere thought of something to the claim that it exists. To demonstrate existence requires that we be able to appeal to sense experience. But the ontological argument attempts precisely to argue for God's existence completely *a priori* and without any appeal to sense experience whatsoever.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT'S ONGOING RELEVANCE

Does this mean that the ontological argument is entirely discredited and that in studying it we are merely exhuming a few bones of a philosophic carcass one thousand years old? Far from it. In spite of Kant's (and others') objections, the ontological argument is still debated by respectable philosophers. In fact, thinkers have consumed an astonishing amount of scholarly paper and ink in recent years in examining further the issues raised by Anselm. To conclude our examination of the ontological argument, we will briefly note two of these.

The objection that we cannot go from the mere thought of something to the existence of that thing is a fairly obvious rejoinder to the ontological argument. You may have thought of this objection yourself as you were reading through the argument. It is obvious that we can think of many things that have no real existence. The world of fiction and mythology is filled with them. Even on a more ordinary level, you can think

of the perfect house you would like to build, or the most perfect painting you hope to paint, or whatever. In all these cases, you have no illusion that merely thinking about a thing proves that it exists or even that it will exist sometime in the future.

This obvious objection to the ontological argument was made to Anselm by a brother monk, Gaunilo, who wrote a treatise titled "On Behalf of the Fool." Here Gaunilo attempted to show that the ontological argument was faulty, and his objection took the form of a counterexample. Think of the most perfect islands which, because they are situated in a remote part of the ocean, have not been discovered. They are islands of inestimable wealth; in fact, they are greater than all the countries now inhabited. And since they are the most perfect islands, and actually existing islands are more perfect than merely imaginary islands, these islands must exist. Gaunilo did not think this argument was valid, but he argued that it was exactly like the ontological argument. Consequently, the ontological argument is invalid also.

In responding to Gaunilo, Anselm reiterated a form of the ontological argument he previously presented in Chapter III. (You might at this point go back and reread Chapters II and III of the Anselm selection.) Many philosophers have noticed that the form of the ontological argument in Chapter III is different from the form of the argument in Chapter II. It is not evident that Anselm was aware of the difference or that he had presented two different forms of the ontological argument.

The difference between these two forms of the argument centers on the kind of existence attributed to God. In his first argument (in Chapter II), Anselm merely speaks of the existence of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. In his second argument (in Chapter III), Anselm speaks of God as existing *necessarily,* although he does not use those exact words. Here is how Anselm puts it:

> And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist, and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist.

CONTINGENT AND NECESSARY EXISTENCE

The distinction between the two kinds of existence discussed by Anselm in Chapter III has come to be known as the difference between *contingent existence* and *necessary existence*. That which exists contingently depends on something else for its existence and can be conceived not to exist without contradiction. The notion of contingency has figured prominently in arguments for God's existence, and more will be said about it in Chapter 28, which deals with cosmological arguments for God's existence.

Basic to a contingent being's existence is the possibility of its non-existence. A tree, for example, is a contingent being. It depends upon soil or its equivalent, carbon dioxide, water, and light. Deprive it of any of these, and it will die. A tree is only one example. It seems, however, that everything in nature is contingent and is dependent upon something else. A necessary being, in contrast, is not dependent upon anything else for its existence. And it is precisely the thought of God as a *necessary* being that Anselm proposes in his second form of the ontological argument.

The British philosopher Norman Malcolm has written extensively in defense of the ontological argument. He bases his defense on the claim that Anselm's formulation of the argument in terms of necessary existence avoids the usual criticisms. Malcolm

agrees that contingent existence is not a perfection but argues that necessary existence is a perfection. That is, a necessary being is more perfect than a contingent being. Part of what is implied by the notion of a necessary being is a being whose non-existence is logically impossible. Hence, when opponents of the ontological argument say that all it proves is that "If God exists, then God exists necessarily," they are contradicting themselves. For the "if" of the previous statement implies the possibility that God does not exist, but a necessary being cannot not exist.

We can summarize the differences between the two kinds of existence in the following way:

Contingent Existence	Necessary Existence
Non-existence is possible	Non-existence is impossible
Dependent	Independent
Not a quality or perfection	Is a perfection

Even if we accept the claim that necessary existence is a quality or perfection that is immune to Kant's attack on the ontological argument, what about Kant's claim that all existence statements are synthetic and must be proved by an appeal to sense experience? Malcolm responds by reminding us that in geometry we accept the proof that there is an infinite set of prime numbers. *In some sense,* then, we would want to say that an infinite set of prime numbers *exists,* although they do not exist in the same sense that tables, stones, and trees exist. And we can prove the theorem that there is an infinite set of prime numbers by the use of reason alone without any appeal to the senses, just as we can argue for the existence of God without appealing to experience.

Whereas Kant's attack on the ontological argument pointed out the ambiguity of the word *is,* Malcolm's defense of the argument turns on the ambiguity of the word *exists*. There may be many different senses in which things can exist, and in one of these senses one could say that the ontological argument proves that God exists. But in what sense? Do entities that exist in this sense exist in a greater degree? If so, what is this degree? And how can we be sure that we are not just playing verbal games?

There is another line of attack frequently made against the ontological argument, and it too has its origins in Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. One of the features of analytic statements is that their truth can be determined completely *a priori,* and such true statements are *necessarily true*. The truth of such statements cannot be disproved by experience because the truth (or falsity) of analytic statements is a function of the terms in the statement. Some philosophers have argued that, although we can perfectly well understand what it means to speak of a statement as being necessarily true, it makes no sense to speak of a *being* as necessarily existing. In other words, necessity is a property not of beings but of statements. Failure to see this leads us to think that we can go from making necessarily true statements about God to the conclusion that God necessarily exists.

We can summarize the foregoing attacks on the ontological argument as follows:

1. Existence is not a perfection or real predicate that adds to the concept of a thing.
2. All claims about existence are synthetic and are derived only from sense experience.
3. Necessity is a property of statements, not of beings.

One other common worry about the ontological argument alleges that the concept of God may not be internally consistent. Perhaps, this opponent of the ontological argument reasons, we wind up in absurdities when we attempt to deny God's existence because the idea itself is incoherent. After all, we are finite and limited beings with finite and limited intellects; therefore, it would not be that surprising if it turned out that we had fallen prey to some confusion or incoherence in attempting to formulate the idea of a nature that is infinitely and supremely perfect.

Think back to Gaunilo's perfect island. At first, it might not be entirely clear why Anselm's second version of the argument—the one that emphasizes God's necessary existence—is thought capable of handling Gaunilo's objection. Why, a critic of the argument might ask, couldn't Gaunilo modify his argument by simply listing "necessary existence" as one of the perfections of his perfect island and thereby prove that it would be absurd to assert the island's non-existence. The answer to this challenge given by many proponents of the ontological argument is that necessary existence is inconsistent with other properties that an island—even a perfect one—must have. Descartes, for instance, argues that any material thing is metaphysically complex—that is, is composed of parts—thus, it is possible to coherently conceive of it perishing via a rearrangement or dissolution of its parts. This, however, means that the non-existence of any material thing is a logical possibility; thus, it would be contradictory to conceive of any material thing—including Gaunilo's perfect island—as having the perfection of necessary existence. Therefore, in the case of Gaunilo's island, the argument would be attempting to prove the existence of that which does not really succeed in describing any determinate thing.

As a reason for dismissing an ontological argument for the existence of a perfect island, this seems legitimate; however, it might well prompt opponents of the ontological argument to wonder whether the idea of God is no less incoherent than the idea of a perfect, necessarily existing island. In the final section of this chapter, we will approach this issue by way of a consideration of a second *a priori* argument for God's existence. It is an argument in which the coherence of our understanding of God's nature plays a central role.

SPINOZA AND THE INEXPLICABILITY OF GOD'S NON-EXISTENCE

Like Plato, Anselm, and René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) believed that the ultimate nature of reality could be known on the basis of concepts and principles neither derived from nor grounded in sensory experience. This included, for Spinoza, the possibility of proving that God exists. Early in his most influential work, *The Ethics,* Spinoza declares, "God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists."[1] In defense of this claim, Spinoza first offers a version of the ontological argument very much like that offered by Anselm. Having done so, however, he proceeds to offer a second *a priori* proof for God's existence that rests upon a version of what philosophers call the principle of sufficient reason. Though philosophers who accept this principle have formulated it in different ways, the basic belief common to all forms of the principle is that reality is fully intelligible; that is, there is nothing true of the universe for which a full, rational explanation is not, in principle, possible. We often may not figure out what the explanation or reason is for some fact or truth; however, those committed to the principle do believe that a full explanation exists. And though it may

BARUCH SPINOZA (1632–1677): A Dutch philosopher whose parents fled Spain to escape the persecution of the Jews under the inquisition. A lens grinder by trade, Spinoza wrote several highly influential philosophical works. Foremost among these was *The Ethics,* a work laid out according to a geometric format—with axioms, definitions, propositions, and demonstrations—that begins with metaphysics and culminates with an account of the good human life. Most striking among Spinoza's metaphysical theses were his pantheism (the belief that God is the only substance and all other things are mere modes of God), his determinism, and his denial of personal immortality. It is also likely these theses that caused Spinoza to be excommunicated by the Jewish community in Holland. Courtesy of the Dutch School, (17th century)/Bridgeman Art Library.

sound like an overly grand statement put in such general terms, it is a principle frequently reflected in our practices. When there is, for instance, a commercial plane crash, we don't simply shrug our shoulders and announce, "Too bad, we lost another one." Instead, experts sift through the wreckage and study the flight data recorders in order to discern the reason for the crash. When a car doesn't start, we wonder whether the battery is dead or the solenoid is shot or the gas tank is empty. And even if we can't figure out why it won't start, even with the help of a mechanic, we don't believe that there is no reason it didn't start; rather, we conclude that we simply couldn't figure out why. This attitude, reflected in our behavior, reveals our commitment to something like the principle of sufficient reason.

While philosophers prior to Spinoza had used the principle of sufficient reason in their proofs for God's existence, there is a noteworthy difference between these proofs and Spinoza's. The difference is that earlier attempts to prove God's existence on the basis of the principle of sufficient reason focused on the principle's requirement that there be an explanation for the present existence of the universe. The contention was that the present existence of the universe would lack sufficient reason, and thus be unintelligible, unless there were a necessarily existing creator who was ultimately the source of the world's existence. Moreover, given that the present existence of the universe is known by experience, these arguments for God's existence were *a posteriori* in nature. By contrast, what is striking about Spinoza's version of the principle of sufficient reason is his explicit recognition of the fact that the principle requires that there be a full explanation for something's *non-existence* as well as its existence. He writes, "For every thing a cause or reason must be assigned either for its existence or for its non-existence."[2] With this metaphysical principle in place, which Spinoza believes is known *a priori,* he proceeds to argue for God's existence by considering whether God's *non-existence* would be intelligible; that is, Spinoza asks whether there could be a full and rational explanation for God's non-existence were God not to exist. In the end, he concludes that there could not be an adequate explanation for God's non-existence and that the principle of sufficient reason therefore requires that God exist. Spinoza, thus, is not using the principle of sufficient reason to argue that God is the only satisfactory explanation for something known to exist on the basis of experience. Rather, he is using the principle of sufficient reason to show that the atheist's contention that God does not exist ultimately violates the principle

of sufficient reason in that there could not be an adequate explanation for God's not existing if that were the case. Let us turn to the details of his argument.

Spinoza begins by noting that there are only two possible explanations for a thing's non-existence. The first is that the thing is prevented from existing by something external to it. (Ice doesn't exist on the pond in the backyard because it was prevented from existing by the warmth in the surrounding air.) The other possible explanation is that something doesn't exist because its nature is internally inconsistent. This would apply, Spinoza notes, to the case of the non-existence of a square-circle—that is, a geometric figure having all and only the properties of a square and a circle. The non-existence of such a thing is explained by the fact that such a thing's nature would be self-contradictory. Since reason, by its very nature, excludes the possibility of contradictions, this is a full rational explanation for the non-existence of a square-circle.

With respect to something external to God causing God's non-existence, Spinoza considers two scenarios: God might have been prevented from existing by something of the same nature, or God might have been prevented from existing by something of a different nature. If it were something of the same nature, Spinoza reasons, then we would be admitting that there was something with God's nature in existence. We would, that is, be admitting that God exists. If God were prevented from existing by something external, then, it would have to be something of a different nature from God. But the notion that a cause might have a different nature from its effect, according to Spinoza, would render the relation between a cause and its effect ultimately unintelligible. But this would mean that the alleged "explanation" of God's non-existence would really not explain God's non-existence; thus, the explanation for God's non-existence can't be that God's non-existence is explained by something of a different nature. But because these are the only two conceivable sorts of external things that might prevent God's existence, we know that nothing external to God could possibly explain God's non-existence.

Turning then to the possibility that God's non-existence might be explained by the fact that God's nature is internally inconsistent, Spinoza moves quickly:

> Since therefore there cannot be external to God's nature a reason or cause that would annul God's existence, then if indeed he does not exist, the reason or cause must necessarily be in God's nature, which would therefore involve a contradiction. But to affirm this of a Being absolutely infinite and in the highest degree perfect is absurd. Therefore neither in God nor external to God is there any cause or reason which would annul his existence. Therefore, God necessarily exists.[3]

For Spinoza, the worry that God might not exist because God's nature is internally inconsistent is as ridiculous as the worry that an unblemished apple might have a bruise. If it is unblemished, it has no bruise. If it has a bruise, it is not unblemished. And just as the apple's not being blemished excludes the possibility of its having a bruise, so too the infinite perfection of God excludes the possibility of God's nature having the imperfection of being internally contradictory.

Thus, it is, according to Spinoza, that there are neither external nor internal reasons that could possibly explain God's non-existence. Because these arguments exhaust the possible explanations for God's non-existence, it follows that God's non-existence is unintelligible and that God, therefore, must exist.

THE COHERENCE OF THE IDEA OF AN INFINITELY PERFECT BEING

There are, of course, a number of points at which one might object to Spinoza's argument. One might question, for instance, Spinoza's commitment to the principle of sufficient reason. This might be especially true today, given the widely held belief among physicists that events at the quantum level admit of only probabilistic explanation and thus don't satisfy the demand for the thorough intelligibility of what is. (That indeterministic accounts of quantum theory seemed to have this implication was one reason Albert Einstein was deeply resistant to accepting them, as captured by his remark, "God does not play dice.") Or, one might wonder whether the principle of sufficient reason also requires that causes and effects have similar natures. A person might, for instance, wonder whether the mere fact that two things or events always occur together is sufficient to make the connection between them intelligible, even if they have different natures. These are both legitimate concerns and promising avenues of philosophical analysis, but the aspect of Spinoza's proof on which we will focus and the one of greatest relevance to all *a priori* attempts to prove God's existence is, of course, Spinoza's quick dismissal of the possibility that God might not exist because His nature is inconsistent.

Interpreted one way, Spinoza's argument on this point might be thought guilty of begging the question. If there is, actually existing, an absolutely infinite and supremely perfect being, it is certainly correct to conclude that this being does not have the imperfection of a contradictory nature; however, the consistency of God's nature is being used to justify the belief that God must exist. Therefore, we can't appeal to God's existence to justify the consistency of God's nature without assuming the very thing the proof is supposed to establish.

This, however, is certainly not the most charitable interpretation of Spinoza's argument, for it is unlikely that such a talented philosopher would be guilty of so obvious a case of begging the question. A more plausible interpretation might hold that when Spinoza talks of the absurdity of affirming an internal contradiction of "a Being absolutely infinite and in the highest degree perfect," what he means is that it would be absurd to include the predicate "has a contradictory nature" in our idea of God. Since we are now talking about the content of the idea and not the actual being, the argument is no longer a case of begging the question. Moreover, it is hard to argue with Spinoza's point. Were one listing those attributes that would apply to a supremely perfect being, one would be acting absurdly to include the imperfection of "having a contradictory nature" in that list.

Still, even though this interpretation of Spinoza's argument avoids the charge of circularity, it is not particularly satisfying. The problem is that a critic might well concede Spinoza's point about the absurdity of explicitly including "having a contradictory nature" in the list of predicates applied to an absolutely infinite and supremely perfect being but then point out that ideas can be contradictory for reasons not evident merely from attending to their explicit and basic contents. Perhaps, that is, there is an inconsistency in the idea of an absolutely infinite and supremely perfect being; however, it is an inconsistency that reveals itself only upon analysis.

A riddle sometimes posed to small children is the following: a scientist claims to have a bottle filled with a liquid that will instantaneously dissolve any substance. How do you know that the scientist's claim is false? The answer, of course, is that the state of affairs described is inconsistent in that a liquid that instantaneously dissolves any substance could not be held by any bottle. While the solution to the puzzle is fairly

obvious, it takes a moment or two to work out and to see the inconsistency embedded in what seems on the surface to be a logically possible state of affairs. The worry about Spinoza's argument is that there may be a similar, though much more deeply hidden, inconsistency in the idea of God. For Spinoza's argument to work, then, what we need is not simply the point that it would be absurd to include "contradictory nature" among the predicates we use to define God; rather, we need a positive reason for believing that the concept of an absolutely infinite and supremely perfect being does not entail any contradictions that might be revealed upon deeper analysis of the concepts involved.

Though Spinoza himself does not say explicitly how this might be done, a close contemporary and fellow rationalist, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), takes up the challenge. An adherent of the ontological argument himself, Leibniz recognized that proving the coherence or logical possibility of God's nature is crucial to the success of *a priori* attempts to prove God's existence. As the following passage from his correspondence with Duchess Sophia shows, however, Leibniz also realized that one can't achieve this goal by simply pointing to the explicit definition given of God.

> There is assuredly reason to doubt whether the idea of the greatest of all beings is not uncertain, and whether it does not involve some contradiction. For I quite understand, for instance, the nature of motion and velocity, and what "the greatest" is. But I do not combine them into the one idea of the greatest velocity of which motion is capable. In the same way, although I know what "being" is, and what the "greatest" and the "most perfect" are, nevertheless I do not therefore know that there is not a hidden contradiction involved in combining these together, as there actually is in the instances I have just given. . . . [4]

Elsewhere Leibniz explains the hidden contradiction involved in the concept of the swiftest possible motion, by asking the reader to "suppose a wheel to revolve with the swiftest possible motion" and then asks:

> Is it not evident, that if any spoke of the wheel be made longer its extremity will move more swiftly than a nail on the circumference of the wheel; wherefore the motion of the circumference is not the swiftest possible, as was supposed by the hypothesis. Yet at first sight it may appear that we have an idea of the swiftest possible motion; for we seem to understand what we are saying, and nevertheless we have no idea of impossible things.[5]

Leibniz thus realized that showing that the idea of God was not similarly inconsistent was crucial to the success of *a priori* attempts to prove God's existence. It is a task he returned to numerous times throughout his career, offering proofs of varying degrees of complexity; however, the general tenor of these attempts can be discerned from the following very concise formulation found in his *Monadology:*

> Thus God alone (or the necessary being) has this privilege, that he must exist if he is possible. And since nothing can prevent the possibility of what is without limits, without negation, and consequently without contradiction, this by itself is sufficient for us to know the existence of God *a priori*.[6]

After reiterating that showing that God necessarily exists depends only on showing that God is possible, Leibniz then focuses on the fact that his idea of God is that of a being whose properties include only infinite perfections. As such, each of God's properties contains no negation; thus, there can be no contradiction in God's nature inasmuch as a contradiction would involve an idea expressing both a property and a negation of the property. Because God's nature includes only infinite perfection and no negation whatsoever, it is not possible that God's nature would be internally contradictory.

THE NATURE OF GOD'S NATURE

Expressed so abstractly, Leibniz's argument for the coherence of our idea of God appears fairly compelling. Nonetheless, it is important to note that there is still work to be done before one concludes that the above reasoning shows the internal coherence of the idea of God as an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent creator. Each of these characteristics—infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness—further specifies the content of the more abstract notion of infinite perfection on which Leibniz's proof of God's possibility rests. Leibniz himself was aware of this and attempted to argue that these traits were legitimate explications of the infinite perfections of God's nature. Other philosophers have not been so confident that finite human intellects are capable of grasping the notion of an infinitely powerful, wise, and good being with sufficient depth and accuracy

to see that it is internally coherent and that necessary existence therefore is part of it. It is a worry shared by theists, as well as atheists and agnostics. This was, in fact, the view of one of the great medieval theistic philosophers, Thomas Aquinas, who maintained that God's existence was necessary, but insisted that this fact was not self-evident to us; that is, Aquinas said it is not possible for human beings to see this simply by analyzing their idea of God. And this is why Aquinas confined his attempts to demonstrate God's existence to those that relied on evidence provided by sense experience. In doing so, Aquinas constructed five highly influential *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence. In Chapter 28, we will consider Aquinas' "Five Ways" that attempt to prove God's existence *a posteriori*.

Questions for Discussion

1. A common objection to the ontological argument is that the fact that we can think of something is not proof that it exists. What would be Anselm's response to this objection?

2. Do you agree with Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate? Why or why not?

3. Is there a difference between viewing God as the *supreme being* and the *greatest conceivable being?* Give reasons for your answer.

4. The ontological argument has had a continuing attraction for philosophers since its inception in the eleventh century. To what do you attribute philosophers' fascination with it?

5. Do you find the ontological argument convincing? Why or why not?

6. What are the two possible reasons, according to Spinoza, that something might not exist? Do you think that Spinoza's two reasons exhaust the possible reasons something might not exist? If not, what other reason might there be?

7. Why does Leibniz conclude that the idea of "the swiftest motion" is internally incoherent?

8. Explain Leibniz's argument to show that the idea of an infinitely perfect being is internally consistent. Do you accept the argument? Why or why not?

Endnotes

1. Ethics, Ip11 from Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics, TIE, and Selected Letters*, translated by Samuel Shirley. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).
2. *Ibid*., Ip11d.
3. *Ibid*.
4. *G.W. Leibniz's Monadology: An Edition for Students*. Nicholas Rescher (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), p. 154.
5. *Ibid*.
6. G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, edited and translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), p. 218.

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A *Posteriori* Arguments for God's Existence: Aquinas' Five Ways

The trouble many people have with the ontological argument is that it seems to be spinning proofs out of thin air. It is abstract, removed from the reality of everyday life, and seems to be nothing other than a philosopher's trick. Since the ontological argument is an attempt to prove God's existence completely *a priori* and absolutely separate from any knowledge we have through the senses, it turns on definitions and distinctions that we have to accept before feeling the force of the argument. But there is another way. Jews and Christians have always believed that the world is the result of God's creative activity. If that is the case, then is there not some feature of the world that points to God as its creator? Those who think the answer to this question is "yes" are proponents of *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence.

NATURE: A COSMOS, NOT A CHAOS

The Greeks were the first Western thinkers to label nature a *cosmos,* an ordered system rather than a random chaos. The term *cosmos* itself comes from a Greek word that means order or structure. Some of the ancient Greek philosophers thought that the transition from chaos to order was due to something like chance; as particles of matter moved through the void, they eventually began to move in a spiral motion—like the spiral nebulae, had the Greeks been able to see them. From this motion there arose greater and greater order until eventually the world and all life on it arose. Other Greeks rejected sheer chance as the source of the world's order, arguing instead that the cause of the world is something more like mind or reason than anything else we can imagine it to be. This principle of ultimate order they referred to as God, though they did not conceive God in the same manner as did Jews and, later, as did Christians. For them, it was because all reality is permeated with rationality that we can search for and find rational explanations for nature's behavior.

On the side of chance were such Greek philosophers as Democritus, Leucippus, and the Epicurean philosophers. On the side of reason and God were such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The debate over whether the world order has a rational cause or is due merely to chance combination of eternal bits of matter is older than the debate over God's existence. But as Christianity moved outward from its Palestinian origins to the world permeated by Greek philosophy and culture, it turned to categories of Greek philosophy to express the basic tenets of Christian doctrine. One area in which Greek thought had a direct impact was the construction of arguments for God's existence.

◉ Watch the **video:** *Carl Sagan—Cosmos—Democritus* on **MySearchLab.com**

In neither the Jewish nor the Christian Bibles is there any argument for God's existence. For the biblical writers, proving God's existence would be as pointless as trying to prove the existence of the air we breathe. The "fool" of Psalms 14:1 ("The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'") is the practical, not theoretical, atheist. The fool lives life as though there is no God, knowing full well that God exists. The religious problem reflected in Old Testament narratives is not atheism but polytheism, not the denial of God but the worship of too many gods. Likewise, in the New Testament, the reality of God is unquestioned due to the conviction that in Jesus of Nazareth the eternal God became flesh and dwelt among human beings. In its earliest missionary endeavors, Christians directed their preaching to Jews who accepted the reality of God. It was only later when Christian missionaries confronted a variety of naturalistic philosophies that they felt the need to argue philosophically for the existence of God. But even then, the task was not considered too formidable, for the basic structure of the arguments was already present in the writings of the Greek philosophers.

For the first thousand years of the existence of the faith, Christian writers found the most useful philosophical framework within the philosophy of Plato. Indeed, the ontological argument is highly compatible with the Platonic view of reality. Most of the works of Aristotle, in contrast, had been lost to Western scholars, and what was known of his philosophy was through the work of such Arabic commentators as Avicenna and Averoës. In the thirteenth century,

Plato was considered to be the Christian philosopher; Aristotle was the pagan philosopher. In such a climate of opinion, Thomas Aquinas nonetheless found in Aristotle a better set of categories for communicating the Christian faith to the world. He was so successful in his use of Aristotelian thought that Thomistic thought became the official doctrinal framework of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries.

THOMAS AQUINAS (1225–1274): Dominican Monk, who was born in Aquino in Italy and studied at the University of Naples. He entered the Dominican College in Paris and later became a teacher there. In the days of handwritten books, his writings were voluminous, numbering over twenty-five volumes in modern editions. During his time, Aristotle's philosophy was associated with Islam, due to Arabic scholars' extensive use of his work. Aquinas' most astounding intellectual feat was to adapt the philosophy of Aristotle as a vehicle for the expression of Christian theology. His major philosophical works are *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles.* Courtesy of The Bettmann Archive. © DeAgostini/SuperStock.

THE DISPUTED QUESTION

The form adopted by Aquinas in his presentation of the arguments for God's existence is known as the *disputed question*. It was a traditional pedagogical device in the Middle Ages. In this exercise, a student was expected to give objections to the thesis being presented, then present arguments for the thesis, and finally give answers to the initial objections.

The arguments for God's existence that Aquinas offered are found in his two voluminous works: *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*. The first was a handbook of Christian theology for theologians, offering arguments for most points of doctrine. The latter was a handbook for missionaries to the pagan world, offering arguments for the conversion of those who would not accept the dictates of scripture. The arguments presented here are from the *Summa Theologiae*. Though a "handbook," it comprises over a dozen volumes, even in modern editions.

An approach to religious questions of the form presented here by Aquinas' arguments is often called *natural theology*. One way of defining natural theology is to see it as a way of using what we know about nature to discover truths about God. Can we legitimately infer from certain aspects of the natural order that the most satisfactory explanation for these features of nature is that God exists? Aquinas clearly thinks the answer to that question is "yes." Whereas the ontological argument is an argument completely *a priori,* Aquinas' "Five Ways" are *a posteriori,* based on knowledge we first gain from the senses.

Before turning to the arguments proper, Aquinas considers two objections (again, using standard disputed-question format). The first objection to any argument for God is the presence of evil in the world. If there exists an all-powerful, all-good God, then there should not be evil in the world. But there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist. You will recognize this as a standard *modus tollens* argument. The second objection to arguments for the existence of God is that we can account for the world on its own without appealing to God as its cause. Therefore, any need for God to explain the world is superfluous. Aquinas will return to these objections at the end of his proofs.

In order to give you the full flavor of the disputed-question format and allow you to encounter the arguments undisturbed by additional commentary, we will present the text from Aquinas first and then follow it with our own exposition.

St. Thomas Aquinas: The Five Ways

Whether God Exists?

We proceed thus to the Third Article:

> **Objection 1.** It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite the other would be altogether destroyed. But the name God means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

From Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Question 2, Article 3, in *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Anton C. Pegis. New York: The Modern Library, 1948. Used by permission.

Objection 2. Further it is superfluous to suppose that what can be accounted for by a few principles has been produced by many. But it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle, which is nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle, which is human reason, or will. Therefore, there is no need to suppose God's existence.

On the contrary, it is said in the person of God: *I am Who I am* (Exodus 3:14). . . .

The Existence of God can be proved in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is moved is moved by another, for nothing can be moved except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is moved; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, that is, that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by another. If that by which it is moved be itself moved, then this also must needs be moved by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover, as the staff moves only because it is moved by the hand. Therefore, it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

The second way is from the nature of efficient cause. In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the immediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be

generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore, we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But *more* and *less* are predicated of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is most being, for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being. . . . Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things. . . . Therefore, there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

> **Reply Objection 1.** As Augustine says: Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good men even out of evil. This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

> **Reply Objection 2.** Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must be traced back to God as to its first cause. So likewise whatever is done voluntarily must be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason and will, since these can change and fail; for all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle, as has been shown.

THE ARGUMENT FROM CHANGE

The ancient Greeks were fascinated by change, for it seemed to them an intricate puzzle. If something changed from *A* to *B,* it was *not-B* during the time it was *A* (else it would not be changing). But for *A* to become *B,* it first had to cease being *A.* But if it ceased to be *A,* how would it ever become *B?*

Let's restate this using "acorn" for *A* and "oak tree" for *B.* When an acorn becomes an oak tree, it first ceases to be an acorn. But if while an acorn it is not yet an oak tree, how, then, does it ever become an oak tree? If it were already an oak tree, it would not be an acorn and would, in fact, not have changed at all. Aristotle dealt with these puzzles by distinguishing between two modes of being.

The acorn is *actually* an acorn but is *potentially* an oak. When it ceases to be an acorn and becomes an oak, it changes in that its potential to be an oak becomes an actuality. It is now an oak. But an oak has other potentialities. It can become lumber that is used to make a house. So we can say that the oak is actually an oak but potentially a house. It actually becomes a house when someone acts on it to bring forth its potentialities.

We can generalize by saying that change is the movement from a thing's potentiality to its actuality. In the argument, the translator used the term *motion* to mean the same as *change,* since Aristotle defined *change* as movement from potentiality to actuality. In our experience, how do we account for something's potentiality? The answer is that it comes from some prior actuality. We get acorns from oaks. Aristotle, perhaps inadvertently, supplied the answer to the question "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?" The chicken, of course; that is the prior actuality.

Thus, it is, according to Aquinas, that we experience things being moved from potentiality to actuality. This, however, is not something that a thing can do on its own, according to Aquinas. A thing that is actually cold is also potentially hot; however, it cannot move itself from a state of being potentially hot to a state of being actually hot; rather, a source of heat (something actually hot) is required to move that which is potentially hot to the state of being actually hot. A pot of cold water, for instance, becomes hot and begins to boil only because of the agency of some external source of heat, such as the flames of a burner on a stove top. A thing cannot, therefore, move itself from potentiality to actuality on its own; rather, something external to it that has the actuality it lacks must be responsible for the actualization of its potential. For this reason, any actualization always requires two things: the thing being actualized and the agent causing the actualization. It is, of course, possible that the thing doing the actualizing is itself actualized by yet another thing; however, it is not possible, according to Aquinas, that such a chain of actualization should be infinitely long. If it were infinitely long, Aquinas reasoned, there would be no first or ultimate source of actualization. And if there were no first or ultimate source of actualization, there could be no actualizations whatsoever, as all intermediate and present cases of actualization depend upon those that precede. Experience shows us, however, that there are present actualizations; thus, there must be a first or ultimate source of actualization.

Moreover, because—as we've already noted—Aquinas believes that nothing can bring itself from potentiality to actuality, this ultimate source of actualization must itself be and have always been full and pure actuality. (If it were at some point in a state of potentiality, it would require an external source of actualization and thus not be ultimate.)

For these reasons, Aquinas concludes that there must be a being of pure actuality that is the ultimate source of all chains of actualization in the universe, and this fully actualized ultimate source of actualizations is God. That God is this being of full and pure actuality is, by the way, what Aquinas takes to be the significance of God identifying himself to Moses as "I am Who am."

Most modern interpreters of the argument do not understand this argument to be pointing to an infinite series of changes and sources of changes stretching backward in time to a primordial big bang. They see it rather as a statement of the way the world is at every moment. Aquinas is arguing that if the observable fact of change is to make sense to us, there must be some ultimate source for change outside the system of changes itself. And this is God.

THE ARGUMENT FROM EFFICIENT CAUSALITY

If you followed carefully the argument from change, you will recognize in Aquinas' second argument—the argument from causality—the same basic structure. There is a certain fact about the world. We can account for this fact either by referring to God as its source, or we can assume that there is no satisfactory explanation. The fact to be explained: cause and effect.

Before looking at the argument in detail, we need to clarify Aquinas' terminology. Again borrowing from Aristotle, Aquinas used terms for causality that have pretty much dropped out of our philosophical vocabulary. When we say that *X causes Y,* we mean a relationship such that *Y* is dependent upon *X* in that *X* is the source of *Y*'s existence or *Y*'s being in some state. Aristotle called this kind of causality the *efficient cause.* One thing it is important to note about Aristotle's concept of efficient causality is that he believed that some efficient causes preceded their effects in time, while others were simultaneous with their effects. To see what he has in mind here, consider some object, a coffee cup perhaps, that you placed on a table in front of you. It has the property of resting three feet above the floor of the room in which the table is located. Notice that there are two different sorts of efficient causes we might point to in explaining why the cup is in this state. First, we might point to your act of placing the cup on the table as the efficient cause of its presently having the property of being three feet off the floor. This, of course, would be an example of an efficient cause that precedes its effect in time. (Medieval philosophers, like Aquinas, called this sort of efficient cause a cause *in fieri,* or "cause of becoming.") Second, to explain the cup's present possession of the property of being three feet off the floor, we might point to the table that resists the cup's tendency to move down. This, for Aristotle and Aquinas, is an example of an efficient cause that is simultaneous with its effect. The cup depends on the table as the source of its property of being three feet off the floor; yet, the table's supporting the cup in this position is not an event that temporally precedes the cup's having the property. (Aquinas and other medieval philosophers called this sort of efficient cause a *cause in esse,* or "cause of being.")

But Aristotle also used the term *cause* to refer to explanatory principles other than efficient causes. For example, *Y* may be related to *Z* as a future goal it will achieve. Aristotle referred to this kind of causality as the *final cause.* We can illustrate these two kinds of causality using the acorn–oak tree example cited previously. The efficient cause of the acorn is an oak tree. The final cause of the acorn is the oak tree the acorn will become. But these two causes do not exhaust the causal analysis we could perform. An acorn is

an acorn because it is composed of a certain kind of matter; let's call this *acorn stuff*. Aristotle would refer to acorn stuff as the *material cause*. But there is more to an acorn than just being made of certain kinds of matter. There is also its form or structure that makes it an acorn and not a walnut. This structural differentiation Aristotle referred to as the *formal cause.*

Let's use another example. You are asked to write a paper for class. You are the efficient cause of your paper. The grade you hope for, or the knowledge you want to attain, is the final cause of the paper. The content is the material cause, and the structure you impose upon the words is the formal cause of the paper. Two different students may have the same material and final causes but not the same formal cause. Or at least they had better not if they want to avoid charges of plagiarism.

Now, among this set of causes, the efficient cause is the fact about the world that needs to be explained in Aquinas's second way. Our experience of the world tells us that nothing causes itself, at least nothing within our experience is its own cause. Everything seems to depend upon something else as its cause. That cause, in turn, depends upon another cause, and so on. How far does this series of causes extend? Is it an endless chain of causes and effects? Or is there a first cause, something that is not caused by anything else? How do we choose between these two possibilities?

Aquinas, of course, chooses the uncaused cause. His argument is as follows (and it is an argument of the *reductio ad absurdum* form). Suppose we assume that there is no first cause. We would then have to conclude that all other causes in the series are intermediate. But if we deny the first cause, then there would be no intermediate causes and thus no present effect; however, experience reveals to us that there is a present effect. This means that there must be some first efficient cause of all present effects, and that is what we mean by God.

We might depart from Aquinas' form of the argument slightly but still be within its spirit by pointing out the following argument. Because the argument is *a posteriori,* based on our experience of the world, we can note that it would be unsatisfying from an empirical perspective to deny that every event has a cause. Suppose your television set quits working. You immediately assume something caused it to quit—some part failed, the TV station went off the air, the electricity was cut off. *Something* caused the TV set to quit. But let's suppose your roommate has a particularly stubborn frame of mind. She argues (having had a philosophy class) that there is no proof that every event has a cause; maybe your TV set failed for no reason at all. "But," you say, "things do not happen for no reason at all. You must mean that you don't know the reason the set doesn't work."

"Not at all," she replies. "I meant exactly what I said. You are foolish to seek the cause of your TV set's failure, for there isn't any cause."

"That's not a rational explanation," you say. "Things *always* have a cause. I don't have to take a philosophy course to know *that*."

Who is right in this philosophical debate? In a sense, both are. Can we prove that every event has a cause? Probably not. No one has yet come up with a proof. But we do assume that every event has a cause. Without this assumption the world just would not make sense to us. Is this assumption a psychological fact about our makeup? Or is it an insight into the way the world is? We really do not know. And, worse, we cannot know. If we assume that the series of causes and effects is infinite, that there is no first cause, then we have accepted a principle that leads to the view that the world cannot

be fully understood. The retort to this is to say, as Bertrand Russell said, that when we find causes, we are satisfied. But when we look for them, sometimes we find them, sometimes we do not. The argument for the existence of God does not present us with an irrefutable proof. For consider this counterargument: even though every member of a series of objects has a certain characteristic, the set as a whole may not share that same characteristic. Every human being has a mother, but this fact does not lead to the conclusion that the human race has a mother.

Again, as in the case of the first argument, most modern interpreters do not understand the chain of causes to be a series of causes *in fieri* (of becoming), one stretching back in time. Rather, they interpret it as claiming that at every moment of time there is a series of dependencies, causes *in esse* (of being), such that all aspects of nature are caused, in the sense of being dependent upon something else.

THE ARGUMENT FROM POSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY

Critical for understanding the third argument is the notion of *contingency*. A contingent being is a dependent being. The opposite of a contingent being is a necessary being. We saw in our discussion of the ontological argument that many thinkers have trouble with the notion of a necessary *being*. Statements can be necessary (that is, analytically true), but what does it mean to say that a being is necessary?

One reason we have trouble conceptualizing the notion of a necessary being is that we never encounter such a being in experience. Nothing in the world is necessary; everything is contingent, dependent upon something else. The relation between an effect and its efficient cause is a relationship of dependency. If X causes $Y,$ then Y is dependent upon X. In a sense, the notion of contingency makes explicit at least one aspect of the relationship between cause and effect.

But the third argument is not just a restatement of the second argument. Aquinas makes an interesting new argument. It turns on the notion of contingency. A contingent being is not only dependent, it is also merely *possible*. To say that something is merely possible is to say that it could exist, or it could not exist. But a merely possible being has no necessity for its existence. There is nothing logically contradictory about supposing its non-existence; thus, even though it exists now, among its possibilities is the possibility of not existing.

If the universe is infinitely old, all possibilities would have been realized. Remember that among the possibilities of a merely contingent being is that of non-existence. In an infinite past, all possibilities would have occurred, among which is the possibility of non-existence. Therefore, one possibility is that nothing would exist if all beings are merely contingent. But something does exist; therefore not all beings are contingent. There must be one being that is necessary and that is the ultimate source of the existence of all contingent beings. And this is what we mean by God.

By this point it is clear what God's characteristics are. God is the unchanged source of change, the uncaused cause, the necessary being. To be necessary is to be radically nondependent. The term *aseity* is used to refer to this characteristic whereby God does not depend on anything else. The third argument, therefore, brings us back to the notion of God as a necessary being, and we have already seen the objections that have been lodged against the notion of a necessary *being*.

Aquinas, however, gives us two additional arguments, neither of which depends upon this notion of a necessary being.

THE ARGUMENT FROM GRADATIONS OF BEING

Just as we describe degrees of heat and cold, good and bad, more and less according to some standard, so also there must be a standard of being by which all things *are*. Think of the argument in this way: we could make a catalog of existing things arranged in the order of their degree of reality. At the bottom of the list would be nonbeing or nothingness. Next in order of reality would be dreams and mental images. They have some reality but are not as real as the people who have them. Perhaps next in our catalog we would list fictional persons: Hamlet, Santa Claus, Mr. Pickwick. Next we would perhaps want to list physical objects. Then persons. Perhaps next would be principles that outlast any human being's knowledge of them—the principles of physics, mathematics, mechanics, and so on. We could discuss and argue about the proper order of our list, but however we constructed it, we could in principle arrange it so that we are going from those things with less being to those with more being or reality. If we are to construct such a list, there must be a first member of it, some being which is ultimate in reality in terms of which we judge all lesser things to be less real. That being we call God.

The fourth argument may be more difficult for us to understand than the others because we are no longer used to structuring the world in terms of a hierarchy of reality. Our natural tendency is to divide things into the categories of the real and the unreal. One can argue for a view presupposed by the fourth argument, but the problem with the argument is that one first has to be convinced that there are gradations of being before the argument has any force. The argument does, however, point out one of the important ways of thinking about God. The argument assumes that being is a perfection; things with more being are more perfect than things with less being. If we equate existence with being, then we are back to one of the contentious points on which the ontological argument turns.

In Thomistic thought, again following Aristotle, anything that *is* must possess certain qualities common to all other beings. Sometimes these were called perfections; other times they were called *transcendental* perfections, transcendental because they are found in all realities. The list of transcendental perfections varied, but it usually contained the following: truth, goodness, beauty, and being. To say that these are perfections implies that they are positive attributes. Their opposites have no real existence. Evil is not a reality; it is rather the absence of goodness. Ugliness likewise is the absence of beauty. Nonbeing is the lack of being. Falsehood is the absence of truth. God, according to this view, is the highest instance of all these transcendental perfections. God is Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Being. Not only is God the highest instance of all these perfections, they come together in God in perfect unity. One definition of God would be the *unity of all transcendental perfections.*

Today one does not often encounter an argument for God's existence structured like Aquinas' fourth argument. This is largely due to the changed way we view reality. It is no longer in fashion to construct what Arthur Lovejoy called the "great chain of being." So the fourth argument receives very little attention these days. But the fifth argument is probably the most popular argument ever constructed for the existence of God, and even today it is one of the most widely supported attempts to prove God's existence.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

The last of Aquinas' arguments is based on the observance of order and apparent purpose in the world. We observe natural things lacking knowledge that appear to be working toward an end. Acorns grow into oak trees. Flowers reorient themselves throughout the day to regulate their intake of sunlight. The eye is designed to enable its possessor to see. What is more reasonable, to believe that the apparent design in the world is due to chance, or to accept the view that design is the result of the activity of an intelligent designer? That it is almost certainly due to the work of an intelligent designer is, according to Aquinas, evident from the fact that moving toward an end requires being able to grasp the connection between some means and the end. An acorn, for instance, utilizes certain nutrients in the soil and not others; however, if its behavior were due to chance, then its intake of materials would be indiscriminate and frequently not conducive to the acorn's development into an oak tree. If the acorn were an intelligent being, we might appeal to its intelligence as a way to explain its ability to discriminate those materials that will be means to its development from those that will not. The fact that it is not an intelligent being and yet exhibits a discrimination characteristic of intelligence gives us good reason to suppose that there is some intelligent being who designed the acorn so that it exhibits goal-directed behavior. Even if one does not accept the interpretation that nature exhibits purposes, there is still the incredible complexity of the world to be explained. The fifth argument directs us to God as the most adequate explanation for such complexity.

Given that the theory of evolution was not known in Aquinas' day, he was not in position to respond to the suggestion that nature's apparent design can be explained as the result of nonpurposive and unintelligent causes. Though the theory of evolution poses an important challenge to Aquinas' version of the argument from design,

WILLIAM PALEY (1743–1805): English clergyman and philosopher who taught at Cambridge University and whose writings were widely read and used as textbooks. In addition to *Natural Theology,* he wrote *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* and *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy.* Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

advocates of the argument from design do not see it as conclusively refuting all versions of the argument. One reason is that, at least at present, evolutionary theory can explain only the origin of apparent purpose in *living* things; thus, it is irrelevant to arguments from design that appeal to the order of inanimate matter in the universe, such as the motions of celestial bodies. Moreover, evolution can take place only in a natural environment characterized by an inanimate order conducive to the initial production of living organisms; thus, evolution is evidence for an underlying order of nature that evolution can't explain. Indeed, for this very reason, some supporters of the argument from design use evolution as a proof rather than a disproof of the existence of God, seeing evolution simply as the means of divine creation. The nineteenth-century French philosopher, Henri Bergson, argues precisely that in his book *Creative Evolution*.

The design argument reached its height of popularity in the eighteenth century. Its most famous proponent was William Paley, whose book *Natural Theology* devoted a great deal of attention to the design argument. Even Kant, who attacked most of the arguments for God's existence, thought the design argument was the best of the traditional arguments, although he pointed out that it did not lead to the God of traditional religious belief. At most, the design argument points toward an architect, a designer of the world, not necessarily the God of traditional Jewish and Christian belief. Nor does it inevitably point to a God of unlimited power and might, or to the conception of God as a necessary being. The argument supports the view of God as a being of great, but perhaps limited, power, intelligence, or goodness. Although a limited God may not be the traditional God of Jewish and Christian faith, this view of God does offer a solution to the problem of evil. There is evil in the world because God is incapable of preventing it. The American philosopher, William James, found the notion of a limited God attractive precisely because it provided a rational response to the problem of evil. A similar view of God is supported by a movement known as *process theology*. According to this view, God is not identified as the principle of being but rather as the principle of value. God is good but not necessarily all-powerful. We are called on to carry on God's work of bringing about as much goodness in the world as possible. By so doing, we share in God's nature and in the process of extending goodness in the world. Such a view of God, though perhaps popular to modern sensibilities, was most decidedly not the concept of God Aquinas was supporting.

Questions for Discussion

1. Aquinas' arguments from change and causality are based on the absurdity of there being an infinite chain of dependence. Explain how this notion is vital to the success of the arguments.

2. It is sometimes said that Aquinas' Five Ways make a cumulative case for the existence of a God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good. Evaluate this claim by specifying the characteristics of God one can derive from each of the Five Ways.

3. Does the theory of evolution undercut the argument from design? Why or why not?

4. Does the argument from design lead to the same conception of God as does the ontological argument? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Of the arguments for God's existence we have surveyed, which do you find most convincing? Least convincing?

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CHAPTER 29

The Problem of Evil

All the arguments *for* belief in God have to confront a major argument *against* belief in God: the problem of evil. The problem can be stated in many ways, but perhaps the clearest was the form in which Epicurus stated it: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"

Put in its simplest form, the problem of evil comes down to this: the evil that exists in the universe makes it irrational to believe in a creator who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. Depending on how strong the charge of irrationality is thought to be, versions of the problem of evil have traditionally been divided into two main sorts. Those who defend "logical" versions of the problem level a very strong charge of irrationality, maintaining that it is contradictory to believe both in the existence of evil and the existence of the omninatured God described above. Advocates of evidential or inductive versions, on the other hand, do not claim that it is contradictory to believe in God's existence given the evil in the world. Instead, they claim that the evil in the universe (or some specific aspect of it) renders God's non-existence more likely than God's existence. Largely because it is very difficult to prove that a set of propositions are logically contradictory, most works on the problem of evil today focus on evidential versions of the problem; however, the theistic responses to the problem of evil considered in the following section, "The Free Will Defense," have been suggested as possible responses to both versions of the problem. For this reason, the distinction between logical and evidential versions of the problem will not be emphasized in the following discussion. Nonetheless, readers sympathetic to the problem of evil as a justification for denying God's existence should attempt to be clear about the strength of the conclusion they take the argument to establish. By the same token, readers sympathetic to one or more theistic responses to the problem of evil should be sensitive to the fact that advocates of the problem assert conclusions of varying degrees of strength and that a complete solution to the problem of evil would need to answer even the charge that the evil in the universe raises the likelihood of God's non-existence only to fifty-one percent.

THE FREE WILL DEFENSE

As a way of approaching possible answers to the problem of evil, first look at the nature of evil itself. Evil is that which causes pain, destruction, and other human suffering. Much of the evil present in the world results from human beings doing terrible things to one

another: war; use of famine as a political weapon; neglect of diseases which have known cures; inattention to poverty, ignorance, and injustice; failure to improve the welfare of the unfortunate; and resistance to changes in the social order that would redirect human productive capacities into making the world better and eliminate the production of weap-ons and instruments of destruction. The list could go on and on, for as you review the catalog of human evils, ask yourself just how much better the world could be if everyone acted according to even mini-mal standards of human decency. Then ask yourself to estimate what percentage of evil in the world is due to human beings. Fifty percent? Sixty percent? Perhaps an even higher percentage?

Calculations such as these are important to the free will defense, a major tactic used by those who defend both the power and love of God. According to this line of argu-ment, in order for human beings to be truly free to do good, they must also be free to do evil. We can therefore explain much of the evil in the world as due to the exercise of this free will. If human beings were not free, if we were robotlike automatons, then we could be programmed to do only the right thing, thereby eliminating much of the evil in the world. The free will defense comes up against a problem: the existence of natural evil. Natural evil is that evil not due to human action but to the operation and functioning of the world. Even if all people in the world did all in their power to eliminate pain and suf-fering, there would still be earthquakes that cause death and suffering, floods that dev-astate, droughts that ravage, volcanoes, typhoons, tornadoes, and other natural disasters that destroy and ruin. Then there is disease: the racking pain of cancer, the heartbreak of ailments for which there is no known cure, the death of children from disease or trauma, the debilitating diseases of the aged, epidemics, and plagues. Again, the list could go on. These instances of evil are not due to human freedom but to the way the world is. Why does a God of love and might allow these things to happen?

One way advocates of the free will defense attempt to handle the problem of natu-ral evil is by noting that more is required for meaningful freedom than simply the ability to have done otherwise. In order to have meaningful freedom—that is, freedom that can shape one's own life, other human lives, and the course of the world in significant ways—that freedom must be exercised in an environment that has predictable consequences. If one's decision to point a loaded gun at another human being and pull the trigger were as likely to produce a rainbow or a daisy or a conga line of crickets as to produce a hardened projectile traveling with lethal velocity, the free act of choosing to fire the gun would lose the great significance it has. To use our freedom to meaningfully interact with one another and the world, that freedom must be exercised in an environment in which our actions have predictable consequences, and this means that meaningful free actions require an environment that operates according to natural laws and thus is predictable. But once one recognizes that a natural order is required for meaningful human freedom, the possibility emerges that human beings might inadvertently get caught in the gears of nature's mechanism. Fire, for example, occurs under predictable circumstances (sufficient fuel, oxygen, and heat) and also has predictable effects on material things. Because its generation and effects are predictable, human beings can put it to both good and evil uses. We use it for good when we use it to cook food or sterilize implements or heat a home; an arsonist uses it for evil when he wantonly destroys property or takes innocent life. These good and evil uses are only possible given fire's stable and predictable nature. But given the requirement that fire have a stable nature, this nature will impose itself no

less when we encounter it by chance than when we are using it by design. The same stable nature of fire that allows us to heat a home will also result in tragic consequences should we inadvertently cross the path of a forest fire we are unable to escape.

While many of the points made in the argument from freedom's requirement of a natural order are legitimate, it is not capable—on its own—of solving the problem of natural evil. The most obvious question that still remains is the following: Why couldn't God have created a natural order that lacked the capacity to inflict such significant harm on human beings? Alternatively, one might wonder why human beings and other sentient creatures might not have been created so as to be impervious to natural onslaughts. There is nothing in the idea of order itself requiring that humans be so frail or nature so fierce.

While this last point is difficult to dispute, many theists are quick to note that there are other reasons, which are consistent with God's existence, that might explain the fact that human beings often suffer from the workings of the natural order. Some of the most influential such reasons approach the problem posed by natural evil by way of the consideration of the nature of true human fulfillment. In the next section, we consider two such approaches to the problem posed by natural evil.

THE CULTIVATION OF MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

Though at first glance it might seem that a world with the rough edges polished off would be superior to the actual world as an environment in which human beings can live fulfilled and satisfied lives, it becomes less clear that this is so when one considers in greater depth the nature of a fulfilled human life. If our ultimate end were nothing other than achieving as much pleasure and avoiding as much pain as possible, it might be that a kinder and gentler world would be superior to the actual world. Most theists, however, maintain that there are deeper values than pleasure and avoidance of pain defining a successful human life. For them, the most important source of fulfillment in a human life is the cultivation of a proper relationship with God. And while they maintain that the perfect relationship with the creator that awaits a human being in the afterlife will, in fact, be accompanied by unblemished pleasure, such theists often note that the unblemished pleasure is not the ultimate source of the deeper value that is a perfect loving relationship with God. Moreover, and more to the point with respect to the problem of evil, these same theists also maintain that creating the conditions for this loving relationship begins in this life and that the job of laying the groundwork for this perfect relationship in this life may well require the real possibility of encountering hardship and suffering. Though this response to the problem of natural evil takes many forms, two versions are particularly prominent in theistic responses to the problem of natural evil. These are St. Augustine's redemptive response and St. Irenaeus' theory of soul-making.

Augustine (354–430 A.D.) believed that as a result of the inheritance of original sin, each human being's relationship with God was mortally wounded. It was, in fact, a mortal wound that could be healed only by God's atoning for our sinfulness via the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. Christ's suffering, however, only reopened the possibility of a person's enjoying a perfect relationship with God in the afterlife. At a minimum, to make this possibility a reality for a particular human being, that human being must seek to love God above all else. But this means that the individual will need to recognize that her ultimate end is not found in pursuing the bodily pleasures of this world, and this, in turn, points to the role that hardship and suffering

imposed by the natural order can play in a person's spiritual redemption. Such suffering and hardship help people see that their ultimate end is not to be found in the material world. In this, the hardships imposed by the natural order play the role of calling human beings back to their true home, a home from which they were alienated by original sin, but a home that holds their deepest and most lasting fulfillment.

Irenaeus (125–202 A.D.), on the other hand, did not think that human beings had fallen from a prior state of moral and spiritual perfection. Instead, Irenaeus maintained that even an omnipotent God could not directly create free beings that already had the degree of moral and spiritual maturity needed to enter into true loving relationships. One's moral and spiritual character, Irenaeus maintained, can be established only by making free choices to do what is morally correct, even in the face of personal risk and loss. One can become courageous only by facing danger for the sake of what is right. One can become charitable only by giving up some good so that another might benefit from it. And one can, most generally, become a loving individual by pursuing the welfare of another or others, even when doing so imposes significant loss on oneself. For all these reasons, according to Irenaeus, a natural order with rough edges can play an important role in providing an opportunity to cultivate all such moral and spiritual traits needed to enter into mature, loving relationships with one another and, most importantly, God. Given that God, in the end, created us so that He could enter into loving relationships with us, Irenaeus believed that God had a reason for not making a kinder and gentler natural order.

Though the Augustinian account has dominated the history of Christian apologetics, the Irenaean approach received renewed interest in the twentieth century as a result of the work of John Hick. In *Evil and the God of Love,* Hick develops and defends the Irenaean response to the problem of evil. Adopting a phrase from the poet John Keats which refers to the present world as a "vale of soul-making," Hick points out that the view of the divine–human relationship supposed by some is not that of a loving parent but that of a zookeeper. "They think of God's relation to the earth on the model of a human being building a cage for a pet animal to dwell in. If he is humane he will naturally make his pet's quarters as pleasant and healthful as he can." Instead of this, Hick argues for a view of human life as developmental; the world is the kind of place where adversity can bring about moral fortitude and pain can bring about spiritual maturity. "The picture with which we are working," Hick says, "is thus developmental and teleological. Man is in the process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create. However, this is not taking place—it is important to add—by a natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom." Rather than think of God as a keeper of pet animals in a cage, it is better to think of God's relationship to human beings as analogous to that of a loving parent. Hick adds that "to most parents it seems more important to try to foster quality and strength of character in their children than to fill their lives at all times with the utmost possible degree of pleasure. If, then, there is any true analogy between God's purpose for his human creatures, and the purpose of loving and wise parents for their children, we have to recognize that the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain cannot be the supreme and overriding end for which the world exists. Rather, this world must be a place of soul-making."[1]

As noted earlier, the Irenaean tradition has never been as dominant as the Augustinian tradition in the history of philosophical responses to the problem of evil; nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the spirit of this response to the problem of evil is expressed in the widely read fairy tale, "Pinocchio." When the fairy initially visits Pinnochio, she is

explicit about the fact that she can only give him life but cannot make him a "real boy." If we look at the fairy's own explanation of the reasons for her inability to use magic to make Pinnochio a real boy, we find the core of the Irenaean response to the problem of evil:

> And when the wand touched him Pinocchio came to life! First he blinked his eyes, then he raised his wooden arm and wiggled his jointed fingers. "I can move!" he cried. "I can talk!" "Yes, Pinocchio," the blue fairy smiled. "Geppetto needs a little son. So tonight I give you life." "Then I'm a real boy!" cried Pinocchio joyfully. "No," said the Fairy sadly. "There is no magic that can make us real. I have given you life—the rest is up to you." "Tell me what I must do," begged Pinocchio. "I want to be a real boy." "Prove yourself brave, truthful, and unselfish," said the Blue Fairy.[2]

THE PROBLEM OF INSCRUTABLE EVIL

Though the contention that hardship can prompt an individual to experience a moral or spiritual transformation is very likely something most of us believe in one form or another, it is important to note that the Augustinian and Irenaean responses to the problem of evil given thus far do not seem capable of handling all cases of evil. That this is so is particularly evident when one considers tragedies befalling creatures that are not moral or spiritual agents and thus seem in no position to benefit from either the potential redemptive or transformative effects of a free being's struggle with hardship. Contemporary philosopher William Rowe is one who has advanced this charge with particular force and clarity. To illustrate this point, Rowe draws our attention to the examples of Sue and Bambi.[3] Sue is a five-year-old girl who has been raped and murdered by her mother's boyfriend, and Bambi is a fawn, burned horribly in a forest fire, that lingers for several days in agony and then dies. With respect to cases such as these, Rowe argues, we are aware of no goods that could possibly justify God in allowing them. Attending just to the case of Sue, a brief survey of the theistic responses offered thus far reveals their implausibility as explanations for why God might have allowed such a horrendous deed. Because Sue is not yet a competent and developed rational agent, she is in no position to benefit morally and spiritually from the suffering she endured before her tragic murder. Moreover, any suggestion that her suffering contributes to the moral or spiritual development of others strikes us as obscene and an instance of treating a human being as a mere means to the promotion of some good for another. Finally, worries that God would be eliminating the great gift of free will by intervening seem to fall flat. First, while we may have free will, our free will is not absolute; that is, there are limitations imposed by the laws of nature on what we can and cannot do. Second, and more importantly, were we in position to restrain Sue's would-be murderer in advance, we would undoubtedly think we would be morally obliged to do so and would not give the slightest thought to the fact that we would be interfering with a human being's exercise of his freedom. Because there are no goods of which we are aware that would justify God in allowing such evils and they are thus, to us, inscrutable, this gives us good reason for concluding that such evils are gratuitous in that they are evils God would have no good reason to allow. But if we have good reason to believe that there are gratuitous evils, we also have good reason to believe that there is no God.

In the following selection, James Petrik takes up the problem of inscrutable evil. While he concedes that there are evils we can see no plausible reason for God to allow, Petrik argues that an infinitely wise being would likely have access to reasons we are not in position to know and that such reasons might be behind God's allowance of evils that appear gratuitous to human beings. He begins his response with a discussion of the Mann Gulch fire of 1949, a tragedy in which thirteen firefighters lost their lives. He uses the tragedy both as a way to pose the problem of evil and as suggesting a possible line of response to the problem of inscrutable evil.

James Petrik: Inscrutable Evil and an Infinite God

It was late afternoon on August 15, 1949, in the Bitterroot Mountains of western Montana. Two young men raced toward the top of the northern ridge overlooking Mann Gulch. They were seventeen-year-old Robert Sallee and eighteen-year-old Walter Rumsey. Just below the crest of the ridge Rumsey collapsed in a juniper bush and was prepared to stay there, spent of energy and will to continue to climb. Sallee stopped too, looking down at his friend, waiting for Rumsey to get up before he would press on. Prodded by Sallee's gaze, Rumsey freed himself from the snarl of branches, and the two resumed their scrambling ascent. It was a simple gesture, Sallee's stopping for Rumsey. Under normal circumstances it would have been nothing more than an act of courtesy, a bit of fair play between young men, each measuring the other's endurance. But these were not normal circumstances and it was not each other they raced. "I guess I would be dead if he hadn't stopped," Rumsey would later recall. "Funny thing, though, he never said a word to me. He just stood there until I said it to myself, but I don't think he said anything. He made me say it." By pausing to wait for his friend, Sallee saved Rumsey's life. He also risked his own. On the heels of Rumsey and Sallee that day was a raging forest fire, the kind that smoke jumpers call a "blowup," the kind they fear most. The same fire claimed the lives of twelve of their fellow smoke jumpers and a park ranger who had hiked to the scene to lend a hand. Tragically, these others lost their lives precious seconds from escape. Seconds were precious that day, and the firefighters knew it. The heat searing their lungs as they fled up the face of the northern ridge of Mann Gulch made sure they knew it. Sallee knew, and yet he stopped to wait for Rumsey. He stopped to wait with a raging blowup mere seconds behind.

Thirteen firefighters lost their lives in the Mann Gulch fire of 1949. A fourteenth would likely have joined them had it not been for one man's heroic pause. And it is in this, the heroism of Robert Sallee, that the story of the Mann Gulch tragedy intersects our discussion of the problem of evil. In reflecting on Robert Sallee's act we have occasion to wonder: If a human being is capable of risking so much to prevent evil, what possible excuse could God have for not doing the same?

Minutes after Sallee and Rumsey took refuge on a shale slope on the other side of the ridge and watched the fire pass mercifully around them, they heard a voice from above calling out. It was Bill Hellman. He hadn't been as lucky. He'd found no shale

Petrik, James; *Evil Beyond Belief*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000.

patch in which to take refuge. Rumsey and Sallee went to him and helped him to a flat boulder where he was able to stretch out; then Sallee took off down the mountain in search of help. Rumsey stayed with Hellman and the two men prayed together silently. Though help finally came, Hellman's deliverance was short-lived. So severe were his burns that he died in a hospital in Helena the next day. Rumsey and Sallee did all that they could to help their fellow smoke jumper. They likely cursed their inablility to do more. Rumsey even prayed, turning for help to a being that could do more, but the only thing that happened was the inevitable natural consequence of being burned as severely as Hellman had been. Rumsey and Sallee pushed the limits of human endurance in their efforts to save Hellman, and for that we rightly praise them. This praise stands in stark contrast to what we are inclined to say of a being that had the power to intervene, knew what was at stake, was asked to intervene, and yet did nothing.

If an imperfect and vulnerable human being is capable of risking his very life to prevent evil, how can we possibly excuse a being without any vulnerabilities for not intervening? The answer, according to many philosophers, is that we cannot. That is why, they would continue, belief in God simply cannot be reconciled with the existence of any evil whatsoever. Given that God is all good, God would do whatever He could to prevent evil, for a good being—witness Robert Sallee—would prevent whatever evil it could prevent. Given that God is omnipotent and that evils are one and all contingent—their non-existence can be supposed without contradiction—it follows that there is no evil that God could not prevent. Given that God is omniscient, it cannot be supposed that God failed to prevent some evil because he did not know about it or did not know how to prevent it. God's will is directly efficacious and God's vision is all-penetrating. All God would have to do is say the word, will that it be so, and any evil you want would have been prevented. And this means that if there were a God, there would be no evil. God's existence and the existence of evil simply cannot both be the case. Since we know that there is evil, we cannot escape the conclusion that there is no God. It would, so the opponent of theism alleges, be irrational to say otherwise.

Having used the Sallee/Rumsey incident to set up the problem of evil, Petrik uses another incident in the Mann Gulch tragedy to set up a possible solution to the problem of inscrutable evil.

One of the most heartrending aspects of the Mann Gulch fire of 1949 is the story of the third survivor. You have already heard the story of Rumsey and Sallee's flight to safety, but no mention was made of how a third man escaped with his life. On that day, as the thirteen smoke jumpers were beginning their race from the blowup, their leader—a man named Dodge—did something puzzling. Out in front of his men he stopped, knelt down, and lit another fire, a fire that began to consume the dry brush in front of him. Because of Dodge, whose job it was to direct and look out for the smoke jumpers under his charge, the plight of those very smoke jumpers seemed to have been compounded. In addition to the fire pursuing

Dodge's men, they now, thanks to him, had a fire in front of them and around which they'd have to navigate to escape from the blowup that was rapidly closing. Sallee remembers well his puzzlement over Dodge's behavior. "I saw him bend over and light a fire with a match. I thought, 'With the fire almost on our back, what the hell is the boss doing lighting another fire in front of us?'" What the hell, indeed. The dry brush at Dodge's feet crackled and then blazed. Soon it was an impressive fire in its own right. Granted, it was no blowup, but in a matter of seconds it was substantial enough that, as Sallee recalls it, the men thought their boss "must have gone nuts," when he walked into the center of the burning patch he had just ignited and began motioning and calling for them to do the same. The men, who either couldn't fathom their leader's actions or did fathom his plan but didn't believe it would work, would have none of it. Dodge recalls matters thus:

> After walking around to the north side of the fire I started as an avenue of escape, I heard someone comment with these words, "To hell with that, I'm getting out of here!" and for all my hollering, I could not direct anyone into the burned area. I then walked through the flames toward the head of the fire into the inside and continued to holler at everyone who went by, but all failed to heed my instructions; and within seconds after the last man had passed, the main fire hit the area I was in.
>
> And as soon as they made their decision not to follow Dodge's lead, all the men but Rumsey and Sallee sealed their fate. All that was left for Dodge was to lie down in the smoldering ash of his escape fire and wait as the blowup passed around him.[1]

We can easily understand why Dodge's men did not follow his lead. Dodge's coming up with something as outrageous as an escape fire under the circumstances was a moment of stunning clarity in the midst of catastrophic conditions. Dodge calculated that he and the majority of his men would never make the top of the ridge. Their only option was to create an oasis of embers in which to take refuge, and that is exactly what Dodge did. But the men either did not understand their boss's plan or simply did not believe that lying down in the middle of the fire was a better plan than trusting their teen and twenty-year-old legs. Except for Rumsey and Sallee, they all judged wrongly, for there seems no reason to suppose that the men would not have survived if they had only followed their leader's directions. We can, of course, see why they didn't follow their boss. In their training no mention had ever been made of lighting an escape fire. Indeed, even Dodge did not recall having been schooled to take such action. "It just seemed," he would later recall, "the logical thing to do." His men, tragically, did not see the logic.

For the reasons already stated, it would be silly to fault Dodge's crew for not following his lead. With only seconds in which to make a decision, they couldn't be expected to both comprehend and assess his plan; nonetheless, Dodge's ill-fated attempt to save his men does illustrate the fact that our inability to come up with a satisfactory explanation of another's behavior does not always mean that it is plausible to believe that there is none. And this is especially true if the behavior is exhibited by one whose knowledge and experience is greater than one's own. If Dodge's men

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[1]This account of the events of the Mann Gulch Fire is based on that found in Norman Maclean's, *Young Men and Fire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 92–101

had only trusted their boss's knowledge and cool head instead of their legs, they may well have all survived.

So it is that the Mann Gulch tragedy intersects our discussion of the problem of evil at yet another point. Where the difference in knowledge and experience between Dodge and his men was significant by human standards, it is utterly insignificant when compared to the difference between human understanding and divine. And if it can happen that one human being can sometimes fail to fathom the reasonableness of another's behavior because he or she lacks the latter's wisdom, we should count it as highly likely that there are reasons available to an omniscient being of which we have utterly no comprehension. And if this is so, as careful as we should be in concluding that a Dodge in our life has no good reason for what he is doing simply because we can see no good reason, we should be extremely slow to conclude that God can have no reason for allowing some state of affairs simply because we can see no reason. Thus it is that cases of inscrutable evil do not necessarily make it clear that the theist should reverse course. We have good reason to believe that there are reasons for many of God's actions that we simply cannot grasp.[2] In what follows, I will discuss two respects in which God might have reasons that are simply beyond the grasp of human cognitive powers. I will call the first of these *moral modesty*, and the second *modal modesty*. The basic idea behind both is that God's knowledge of moral and modal issues so outstrips ours that it is not reasonable to infer that there is no reason for God's allowing something to happen simply because we are aware of no reason that would justify God's permitting the state of affairs in question. Indeed, once we take seriously the suggestion that God's is all-knowing, what would truly be surprising is if none of God's doings were puzzling to us. If you were reading a bit of science fiction about an alien of vastly greater intelligence than any human being, you would not give the story high marks for plausibility if all of the alien's actions were easily comprehended by the intellectually inferior earthlings. What you would expect in such a story is that some of the alien's behavior would be incomprehensible to human beings. And why should our expectations be any different with respect to a being of supreme wisdom? Looked at in this way, far from being troubled by inscrutable facts, theism would seem to positively predict that such facts there would be. And surely we cannot fault theism if one of the things it would lead us to expect turns out to be the case.

Moral Modesty

Near the beginning of the summer of 1975, when I was fourteen, my brother Mark and I discussed the possibility of driving out to Colorado in order to go backpacking in the Rocky Mountains. A few weeks later his interest in the plan began to waver.

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[2]In the last two decades, this approach to responding to evidential versions of the problem of evil has enjoyed quite a bit of popularity. Some of the recent essays that advocate some version of this approach can be found in Daniel Howard-Snyder's *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. See especially the articles by Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, Peter Van Inwagen, and Stephen Wykstra. To get a sense of the critical response that this approach has encountered, see the articles by William Rowe, Paul Draper, and Richard Gale, also in the Howard-Snyder volume.

He had just graduated from high school, and his high school sweetheart was sched-
uled to be away for most of the summer. As bad luck would have it, the only chance
they would have to spend time together was during the two weeks in which we had
our window of opportunity to go camping. After that they would be parting again to
attend different colleges. And so it was that there was to be no backpacking trip in
the summer of 1975. I could see that the trip was no rival for my brother's interest in
spending time with his girlfriend, but I could not appreciate the weighting of values
that led him to make this decision. The reason, of course, was that romance—at that
time—registered only very faintly on my evaluative radar. It was not that I was still
at an age where it was utterly valueless; however, I still could not understand how
spending time with one's girlfriend could possibly compete with a weeklong adven-
ture in the mountains of Colorado. On the one hand there were evenings in which
we would open our brotherly hearts under star-strewn skies and days of filling our
lungs with the thin mountain air and of discovering hidden pools in high mountain
streams that were thick with native trout; perhaps we would even see a bear. On
the other hand there was, well, spending time with one's sweetheart, an activity that
I could appreciate wanting to devote an evening to provided there was not much
else to do, but two weeks? When the trout and the bears and the stars lost out in my
brother's decision, the conclusion he had reached was one that I was largely at a loss
to understand.

Now, the point of the story is not that my brother's decision was the correct
one. In fact, given that he later fell in love with and married an entirely different
woman, a woman of whom I whole-heartedly approve, I think it manifestly clear
that he made the wrong decision at the time. (I have yet to forgive him for it.) None-
theless, having fallen in love and gotten married myself in the interim, I now have to
concede that I have come to appreciate the value of romantic love in a way that was
beyond me at the age of fourteen.

What this bit of autobiography illustrates is that our moral or evaluative perspec-
tives are capable of maturing, and part of the process of maturation is coming to recog-
nize either entirely new values—things of value that had never occurred to one or had
never occurred to one as being valuable—or values that one was already aware of but
had accorded far too little or far too much weight. I have little doubt that as I get older,
I will encounter yet more cases of what might be called normative epiphanies, cases in
which a new value enters my moral horizon or a value already recognized undergoes
either a dramatic increase or decrease in significance. Indeed, I feel so confident that
this should be the case, that if it does not happen, I will take it to reflect not that there
are no more normative epiphanies to be had; rather, I will take it as evidence that
I have failed to make significant progress in wisdom on matters moral.

Now it is important to note what underwrites this conviction that increased
wisdom and experience ought to be accompanied by an expanding of one's moral
horizon. What underwrites our confidence in this regard is two things: (*a*) most of us
have experienced normative epiphanies as we have matured, and (*b*) as beings with
finite and highly imperfect minds, it would be silly to believe that we had reached
a point in our understanding of values such that there was nothing significant left
to learn in this area. So if it is reasonable to conclude that we do not have a perfect
grasp on the full range or proper prioritization of values at any point in our lives,

then it is equally reasonable to expect that as long as we continue to grow in wisdom, we will continue to grow in our knowledge of the nature of values.

But if this is true, then it seems all the more reasonable to conclude that there must be values recognized by God of which human beings have no understanding. Given that the disparity between the understanding of the wisest human being and God is vastly greater than the disparity that would obtain between any two points in the development of a human being's life, anyone who accepts the foregoing claim about the reasonableness of expecting normative epiphanies as we mature should be even more strongly committed to the reasonableness of believing that there are goods that God must reckon that have never occurred to the human heart. And this, of course, is one reason why an evil's being inscrutable to us is not sufficient grounds for concluding that God would not have a sufficient reason for having allowed the evil in question.

Modal Modesty

A modal claim is a claim about whether something is possible or impossible, necessary or contingent. Philosophers have long been in the habit of taking the constraints upon the human powers of conception as revealing modal truths. So, for instance, it might be said that if we can conceive of something consistently, then it follows that the state of affairs being conceived or imagined is possible. On the other hand, it would also be held that if our attempt to conceive something involves a contradiction so that we really cannot conceive it, this means that the state of affairs we are trying to conceive is impossible. Finally, if our attempt to conceive of something not being the case leads to a contradiction, this would mean that the thing must, of necessity, exist.

There are at least two reasons that one might want to question this procedure. First, one might question its reliability in principle. For example, one might argue that we have no good reason for thinking that what can be established in thought is a reliable guide to what can be in reality. If one were to go this route, one might be willing to say the following: (*a*) it is true that a square-circle is a contradictory thought that cannot be coherently conceived, and (*b*) there might really be square circles. If one did this, then one would have very good reason to be modest about our modal intuitions and one would, consequently, also have good reason not to take cases of inscrutable evil as evidence against God's existence for the simple reason that our ability to consistently conceive of God as eliminating a certain evil in no way indicates that it is really possible for God to do so. Having said this, however, I must observe that I have no desire to question whether something that was clearly inconsistent in thought might really be possible. If we cannot rely on our well-formed modal intuitions, then it is unclear upon what we can rely in identifying modal truths.

One might, however, concede the reliability in principle of the use of our powers of conception for identifying modal truths, but then proceed to question the reliability of the procedure as it is actually put into practice. Here, one would grant, for instance, that the ability to conceive a state of affairs without contradiction is a reliable touchstone for identifying possible states of affairs, but then one would proceed

to complain that the claim to have conceived of something consistently is often made with troubling haste. It is from this standpoint that I wish to cast doubt on many of our modal intuitions.

One might wonder why God had not made human infants so as to be impervious to the onslaughts of both nature and other human beings. Here we might imagine babies floating peacefully belly up on the surface of any water into which they happen to fall and hard objects being reduced to fluff when they encounter the baby's tender skin. All germs, moreover, would wither and die before they could penetrate a baby's immune system. It seems, in short, easy enough to tell a story about invulnerable babies that is logically consistent—a consistency that is revealed by our ability to imagine "invulnerable" babies.

Now it seems to me that this last claim is true: We can give content to the supposition of invulnerable babies by imagining something that looks very much like a human baby and yet is impervious in the ways described. However, this should not be taken as conclusive evidence that there could be such invulnerable human babies, and this for the simple reason that there may well be reasons buried in human nature or the connection of human beings to their histories that make the supposition of real human babies that are invulnerable an incoherent notion. To insist that there is nothing inconsistent about the supposition, we'd have to have a clear and complete grasp of that which constitutes the essence of a human being. When we're talking about the impossibility of a square circle, it seems reasonable enough to claim that we grasp the nature of squareness and circularity in enough depth to see that they are really inconsistent. Or when we are talking about whether we could reverse the order of the cards in a deck, we have experience enough of their having been in different orders that we have good evidence to believe it is possible. But what, on the other hand, is supposed to ground our confidence that there could be invulnerable human babies. Unlike the varying order of cards in a deck, we have never experienced the state of affairs to which we now refer. And to trust our judgment merely on the basis of the fact that we can *imagine* it to be so is really too hasty. Here are some of the questions I should want answered before I could conclude that there could be invulnerable human babies. At what age would the babies cease being vulnerable? At what age would the babies begin to be able to inflict harm on others? Is having once been utterly dependent on others an essential trait of adult human beings? How would the attitudes of human parents to their babies differ if those babies were invulnerable? Is an invulnerable being an appropriate object of love? And if not, could a being be a baby without it being an appropriate object of love? I, for one, do not have the first idea of how to answer such questions. And even if I did, I suspect that I would still wonder whether being vulnerable is part of what it is to be a baby.

Avoiding Moral Skepticism

There is, however, a danger involved in the theist's riding modal and moral modesty too hard. The danger is that it may force the theist to eventually wind up in a position of moral skepticism. When I see you suffering through some difficulty that

I have the power to alleviate, should I not be reluctant to intervene for fear that I might disrupt some important good that God was pursuing in allowing the evil to occur. If I have no good reason to conclude that such is not the case, then it would seem that I have just as much reason to intervene as I do to stay out of the situation and let God do His work.

Imagine that a person you know well has fallen into a life of dissipation and dissolution and that despite your repeated attempts to help him, he only continues to sink further in his ways. Realizing that your "help" has only served to prop him up, you decide that the best thing for him is to cut him off, let him hit rock bottom, and then hope that the shock of falling so far will cause him to shake off his corruption. There is, you well see, no guarantee that this will happen; however, you have correctly estimated the situation in judging that it stands the best and perhaps only chance of success. Now having adopted this course, you would find it troublesome if some acquaintance begins—perhaps out of sympathy—to prop this person up in precisely the way that you discovered to be so destructive. It is with good reason that you would be irritated. Perhaps you would not fault the other person for the damage done, for they did not know all that you do about the dispositions of your corrupt friend; nonetheless, the fact would remain that a person acting out of ignorance would have thwarted the sound plan of action that you had adopted. It would have been better had the stranger not interfered. This scenario is relevant to the viability of moral and modal modesty in that the epistemic modesty advocated therein might lead one to worry that we, as creatures, might be doing precisely this sort of damage whenever we meddle in the sufferings of others, for we may well be interfering with divinely laid plans that are grounded in reasons that are hidden from us.

The concern that modal and moral modesty pose for the theist is thus the following: If the foregoing contention that we have no reason to suppose that God might not be allowing some evils for reasons beyond our ken is sound, then it would seem to be equally plausible to suppose that the occurrence of any evil is such that God might be allowing it for reasons beyond our ken. But if that is so, then it would seem to follow that for any instance of evil that we could prevent, we have as much reason to allow it as we do to prevent it. After all, if we have as much reason to believe that the evil is being allowed for some reason beyond our ken as we do to believe that it would be better for the evil to be prevented, then we would seem to have no more reason to intervene when we can do so than we would to refrain from intervening.

The flaw in this reasoning is that it is perfectly consistent to believe the following propositions: (*a*) God gave human beings a moral law to follow because that set of laws would be a reliable guide to human action and would enable human beings to most efficiently contribute to God's overall plan, and (*b*) God's overall plan for the welfare of the universe and its inhabitants involves factors of which human beings have no awareness. So it might be the case that God allows some evils to occur for reasons beyond our ken and that it is right for us to always prevent evil when we can do so without forfeiting some greater good of which we know. Our acting, that is, on a set of moral rules that God has revealed to us may be part of God's plan for promoting some more comprehensive set of values of which we have only a partial picture.

Questions for Discussion

1. Human free will is at the center of many responses to the problem of evil. Implicit in such responses is the assumption that only a certain kind of world is compatible with morally free beings. What might some of the characteristics of such a world be?

2. Do you find the "Vale of Soul-Making" approach persuasive? Give reasons for your answer.

3. How does Petrik defend the claim that it is likely that there are values of which human beings are ignorant? Do you find this defense plausible?

4. The history of science includes numerous cases in which scientists have uncovered new realities; however, the history of humanity's study of ethics does not include a similar success story in terms of the discovery of new values. Does this fact cast doubt on Petrik's contention that there are likely numerous values beyond our ken? If not, what other explanation might there be for this difference between science and ethics?

Endnotes

1. All the quotations in this paragraph are from John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, revised edition. (New York: HarperCollins. Copyright 1966, 1977).

2. "Pinocchio," an adaptation of C. Collodi's tale by Dick Kelsey in *Walt Disney's Treasury* (New York: Golden Press, 1953), p. 70.

3. William Rowe discusses both of these cases in "Evil and Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* (1988)16: 119–32; however, the example of the five-year-old girl is based on a real example introduced by Bruce Russell in 1989. "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* (1989), 6: 121–39, and the names Bambi and Sue for these two cases were introduced by William Alston in "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," *Philosophical Perspectives* (1991), 5: 29–67.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Describing the current trends for investigation and topics for discussion in a field as vast and complex as religion is a challenge, but here are some of the major themes that are currently getting attention from philosophers of religion. Surprisingly, one of the most vibrant areas of philosophical discussion still concerns arguments for and against the existence of God. One might think that the arguments supporting the existence of God, and the counterarguments against them, are issues about which everything that can be said has already been said. Recent publications show this is definitely not the case.

Arguments Against God's Existence

Over the past thirty years, philosophers have devoted their attention largely to attempts to formulate or respond to evidential versions of the problem of evil, with both the formulations and responses growing ever more technically sophisticated. Of particular note is the increasing use of Bayes's theorem—a theorem designed to handle certain sorts of conditional probabilities—to both express and respond to the problem. Bayes's theorem allows one to calculate the probability of a hypothesis, given a particular piece of evidence and some background information. Expressed formally, Bayes's theorem is P (A/B & C) = P (A/C) × P (B/A & C)/P (B/C), where A is the hypothesis in question, B the evidence in question, C the set of all other claims that are relevant and believed to be true (the background information), and P the probability. Approaching the problem of evil from the standpoint of Bayes's theorem amounts to making an estimate of the overall likelihood of theism in light of some fact about evil. While this trend toward formalization in terms of the probability calculus has been prevalent on both sides of the contemporary debate, some philosophers maintain that the use of Bayes's theorem is not a particularly illuminating way to approach the

problem in that its application to the problem rests on already having answered the most contentious points in the debate.

Arguments For God's Existence

An old argument for God's existence that has received new attention in recent years is a cosmological form of the argument similar to the argument from efficient causality discussed in Chapter 26, *A Posteriori* Arguments for god's Existence." Basic to that argument was the notion that there must have been a first efficient cause of the series of causes exhibited by the universe. Arabic philosophers in the early part of the second millennium C.E. formulated an argument that also uses these concepts, but in a somewhat different and highly creative way. Called the Kalām argument from a form of dialectical reasoning developed by Arabic philosophers, this argument was most forcefully championed by the Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali (1058–1111). Before discussing the argument, a few words are in order about the importance of medieval Arabic thought to the Western intellectual tradition.

While Europe was still in the midst of its own Dark Ages, Islamic philosophers were keeping alive the study of Greek science and philosophy. In fact the best universities and largest libraries were in the Arabic world, and in those libraries was a wealth of material from Greek philosophers, mathematicians and scientists copied into Arabic from Greek and Syriac texts. The vast translation project began around 800 under the direction of Caliph al-Ma'mun and lasted for two hundred years. The collection of scientific and philosophical works was called the House of Wisdom and provided the basis for advances by Islamic scholars in science and mathematics. To underscore this fact remember that our counting numbers are still called Arabic numbers. It was from the Arabic translations of Greek philosophers that Thomas Aquinas later (thirteenth century C.E.) derived his knowledge of Aristotle.

Though contemporary discussions of the Kalām cosmological argument are very sophisticated and quickly involve both its advocates and critics in abstract mathematics and cosmology, the core argument can be stated very simply, as follows:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.

Therefore,

3. The universe has a cause.

Perhaps the best-known contemporary advocate of the argument, William Lane Craig, defends the first premise by noting that (a) it is repeatedly confirmed in experience and (b) it is a version of the self-evident principle that something can't come from nothing. Craig adopts a twofold strategy in defending the second premise as well, arguing both that (a) Big Bang cosmology confirms that the world had a beginning and (b) the supposition that the world is infinitely old has absurd implications, such as the implication that the number of minutes and seconds in the world's age are the same, because both are infinite.

The argument has been subject to attack on several fronts; however, the most persistent is that attempts to derive a personal God from the first cause suggested by the argument are unconvincing. That is, there are no compelling arguments to show that the first cause must be a personal, free, and loving being, let alone one who is all-knowing and all-powerful.

Reformed Epistemology

As is evident from the preceding chapters, much work in philosophy of religion focuses on constructing and evaluating arguments for God's existence. For many philosophers, the rationality of belief in God's existence hinges on at least one of these arguments working. Within this group, there are those philosophers—such as René Descartes—who believe that there are successful arguments for God's existence and thus that belief in God is rational. For others—such as nineteenth-century mathematician and philosopher W.K. Clifford—there are no successful arguments for God's existence and thus belief in God's existence is irrational. The view shared by both of these groups of philosophers is sometimes called *evidentialism* because it maintains that the rationality of belief in God's existence turns on the presence of evidence adequate to at least make God's existence more likely than God's non-existence. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, a number of theistic philosophers challenged evidentialism by disputing the claim that the rationality of religious belief was dependent upon there being at least one adequate argument on its

behalf. Alvin Plantinga, for instance, maintained that a theist's belief in God may be "properly basic" in that it can be warranted and count as rational even though it is not inferred from any other, independent evidence. Since several of the advocates of this position saw it as a continuation and development of a line of thought that could be found in certain philosophers and theologians of the Protestant Reformation, it has come to be known as *Reformed Epistemology.* A common strategy used by the contemporary reformed epistemologists was to show that there are many non-theistic beliefs that we accept as warranted and rational even though they are not known by being validly inferred from other evidence. In *God and Other Minds,* for instance, Alvin Plantinga maintains that this is the case for our belief that other human beings are conscious (have minds). Thus, according to Plantinga, belief in God is on a similar epistemic footing with the belief in other minds. William Alston, another prominent twentieth-century epistemologist and theist, argues that there is no non-circular justification for the reliability of sense experience; yet, it is nonetheless rational to believe one's senses. Similarly, he maintained, though there is no non-circular justification for religious experience, it is nonetheless rational for those having such experience to believe it. Reformed epistemologists are thus inclined to the following sort of observation: just as we know that there are other minds and know that our sense experiences are generally reliable even though we don't have independent arguments for these beliefs, so a theist may know that God exists even in the absence of independent arguments on behalf of this belief.

Feminist Theology

No area of philosophy or the social sciences has escaped the—at times searing—feminist criticism of the male-dominated approaches to many of the issues and problems of philosophy, literature, psychology, history, sociology, and religion. In a way similar to the feminist approach to ethics, female theologians similarly find that the very way the questions in religion have been framed reveals a not-so-subtle bias against gender equality and supports the continuation of male dominance. This point is made forcibly by Daphne Hamson (*Theology and Feminism*) who began her career as a historian and later turned to theology, a field she pursued as a professor at the University of St. Andrews. The problem is not that women are absent from Western religious texts; it is rather that men have largely determined how the feminine is expressed and how women are understood. This presents women with what Hamson calls a "double task": first, to insure that women are present in religion, and second, to overcome the false understanding of women and the feminine, a false understanding that "has meant that particular roles have been given to women, limiting them in what they might be." These are bold claims but ones that should not easily be dismissed.

The list of offending pracstices is long: the use of predominately male images such as God the Father, the denial by some churches of admissions of women to the priesthood or clergy, the identification of the female in some religious stories as the source of evil (Eve in the Garden of Eden, Pandora and her box), the practice of suttee in India in which widows are burned on the funeral pyre of husbands (now illegal but still practiced in some places with religious justification). Other denials of women's equality done with religious sanction include female genital mutilation, demands for certain styles of dress and conduct designed to prevent them from tempting men, the control of women's reproductive rights by males, the practice of some cultures of allowing women to be divorced and thrown out of the family with no right of appeal, and the general subordination of women to the needs, interests, and concerns of the males in her life.

Not all religious scholars accept the feminist critique. They respond that many of the objectionable features are the terms and symbols used in religious language and that the essential teaching of the religious tradition lies behind that language. Some feminist writers, such as the American scholar Mary Daly (*Beyond God the Father: Towards*

a Philosophy of Women's Liberation), claim just the opposite, that it is precisely the language that creates the difficulty, as she claims in the chapter she provocatively entitles "After the Death of God the Father." The use of patriarchal images in religious texts has had profound cultural influence, Daly claims. It has even defined the stereotypical images created by the terms *masculine* and *feminine.* Not

just the Western religious tradition has come in for criticism. The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum ("Religion and Women's Human Rights," *Criterion* 36 Winter, 1997) points out the liberal's dilemma in supporting religious freedom even when religion is oppressive of women's rights. Examples she gives include religious leaders who threatened women with reprisals if they participated in a literacy project that takes them outside the home; a young woman in Pakistan who was unable to provide four male eyewitnesses to her allegation of rape and was punished by imprisonment for bringing unproved charges; and in a case in India where a woman was divorced by her husband after forty-four years of marriage and, because religious law took precedence over civil law, was denied a minimum maintenance allowance from the state.

Defenders of religion against these kinds of feminist charges point out that although authorities may try to justify civil rights violations by an appeal to religion, those violations are equally condemned by those same religions. It is the interpretation of the religion, not the religion itself, that is at the root of the problem. Religious language in which predominantly masculine images prevail is not the whole story; even the language of the Bible contains female images, such as God portrayed as a nurturing mother. Many of the religions of the ancient Near East featured female deities, and the biblical writers avoided female metaphors principally to distinguish themselves from those pagan deities. Rosemary Radford Ruether ("The Female Nature of God" *Concilium* 144, 1981) argues that a more inclusive language emphasizing God as parent in a sense that is beyond male or female is perfectly compatible with an understanding of the biblical tradition. Other critics charge that what is at issue here is a feminist agenda which is imposed on religion and religious language. What is needed, they say, is a reading of scripture that recognizes that most religious imagery is metaphorical and not to be taken literally. The two poles in this debate are represented in the following books. The first is highly critical of the proposed feminist changes in religious language: *The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism,* edited by Alvin F. Kimel. A defense of a feminist theological approach, or what some of the writers call "theology" is found in *Religion and Gender,* edited by Ursula King.

The Globalization of Religious Studies

As the world enters a third millennium, as measured by the Western, Christian calendar, the peoples and economies of the world are more closely linked than ever. In this global marketplace there is also increasing contact among the world's great religions. No longer can a religious tradition find itself isolated by national boundaries or cultural traditions. Given this intermingling of faiths, there will inevitably be misunderstandings. For example, followers of one of the great monotheistic religions of the world (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) may be put off by Hinduism's apparent belief in many gods. Yet there are Hindus who claim that Hinduism champions belief in one supreme reality, Brahman, who is just as ultimate as the God of Christian and Jewish belief. They point out that Brahman has many manifestations, and these in the popular religious imagination may be thought of as gods, but in reality there is but one supreme power.

Other questions that arise from this confluence of religions involve issues of exclusivity and inclusivity. Most religions claim to have a unique understanding of the divine, one not shared by other traditions. The philosopher John Hick (*A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*) takes on the question of how religions with such claims to exclusivity can coexist with other religions having equal claims to special knowledge of God. Is the only alternative a kind of religious relativism whereby any religious view is as acceptable as any other? Or are there transreligious principles that can be applied to all religions. In short, is religious pluralism possible, and if so, how?

Issues such as these force adherents of these religions to look squarely at what aspects of the religion are essential and what aspects simply reflect a cultural diversity that is not central to the expression of the religious faith itself. There is also a concern for articulating religious beliefs and commitments that are common to most religions in an attempt to discover points of commonality and a basis for dialogue.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Alston, William, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. This work presents a detailed argument to show that religious experience has roughly the same epistemic standing as ordinary sense experience.

Baggini, Julian. *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Argues that atheism is a positive view and that a life without religious belief can be meaningful.

Craig, William Lane, and J. P. Moreland. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003.

Craig, William Lane, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. *God? A Debate Between a Christian and an Atheist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Argues the case for and against theism.

Gale, Richard M. *On the Nature and Existence of God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. This work presents extended criticism of a wide range of arguments for God's existence.

Haught, John F. *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000. Argues that Darwin's explanation for the origins of life are not *per se* hostile to religion.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel. *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. This collection of essays includes both detailed defenses of evidential versions of the problem of evil as well as theistic responses to these various versions.

Mackie, J.L. *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. This classic work in analytic philosophy of religion develops an extended argument that religious belief is irrational.

Morris, Thomas V. *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Twenty philosophers give accounts of their own personal journeys to religious belief.

Plantinga, Alvin. *God, Freedom and Evil*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974. This concise work presents a response to the problem of evil and a defense of a version of the ontological argument for God's existence.

Polkinghorne, John. *Belief in God in an Age of Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Reflections on the compatibility of religion and science by an internationally known physicist and theologian.

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    📖— **Read** the **profile:** *Thomas Aquinas* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. What was Mary Daly threatened with after she published her first feminist book?

    📖— **Read** the **profile:** *Mary Daly* on **MySearchLab.com**

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CHAPTER **30**

Introduction to the Philosophy of Art

Throughout the book we have been emphasizing that philosophy is a critical and reflective activity aimed at a wide variety of subject matter areas outside of philosophy. Thus, we have invited you to look at philosophy as a series of "philosophies of": philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, and so on. In the same sense, we shall look at esthetics (sometimes spelled *aesthetics*) in this chapter as the philosophy of art. Esthetics is concerned with all the philosophical questions surrounding art. First there are important normative questions: What is art? What is the essence of artistic creativity and appreciation? Is art primarily a source of pleasure, or does it provide a kind of religious or metaphysical knowledge? Does art help in articulating the aspirations of a particular social group, thus serving as a means of social unification and cohesion? Is there any one thing which all the arts have in common?

Consider a number of works of art: an opera, a painting, a Greek temple, an abstract bronze sculpture, a poem, a piece of modern dance, a play, and a novel. What do all these have in common? If we try to be specific, our description will not apply to everything on the list. Some, for example, are objects of visual and perceptual delight, but others, such as the novel, are not. Some are representational, but what about the temple, or the abstract sculpture? If we look for more general features (significant form, expression of implicit meaning), our account is apt to be too vague. But if there is nothing they share in common, how can we possibly come up with an adequate definition, and without a definition, how can we construct a general theory of art?

The difficulty of defining art is similar to the problem we encountered in Part 6 "Philosophy Of Religion." Just as we found it difficult to discover one single activity or belief common to all religions, it is similarly difficult to find one sort of creation or a single activity that is common to all forms of art. One approach, as we saw in our discussion of religion, would be to group various kinds of artistic activities by their family resemblances and speak of families of art objects or activities. While an interesting activity in itself, it is not one that we shall occupy ourselves with in this section. Instead, we shall focus on other philosophical issues that arise from the activity of artists.

THE PROBLEMS OF ESTHETICS

There is a host of philosophical problems arising out of confusions and misunderstandings concerning the vocabulary of art. Artists produce art and their audiences enjoy it, often without the need for a great deal of intellectual thought or talk. But other people

such as art critics, art instructors, art historians, and sometimes artists themselves like to think and talk about art, in addition to producing and enjoying it. The problem these people face is that a special vocabulary for talking about the arts has never emerged, and we are forced to borrow words from other areas of discourse and transpose them into art in order to talk about it. Therefore, what often happens is that these words and concepts carry connotations into the discussion of art that really belong to a totally different kind of activity.

Take, for example, the so-called problem of expression. It seems very natural to say that art expresses the artist's emotions or feelings. But as soon as we put it in these terms we may be tempted to think of artistic expression in the way we think of other sorts of expression, and this may lead to trouble. Suppose in repairing my front porch I hammer my thumb instead of the nail. I will certainly express myself by uttering some appropriate remark. But is this what we think artistic expression is like? There are similar problems associated with other concepts used in art criticism: symbolism (which we shall look at later in this chapter), the artist's intention, imagination, and so on.

Difficult metaphysical problems also occur in esthetics. What, for example, is a work of art? Is it a physical object? What about a piece of music? Is that a physical object? There is the sheet music, and there are the sound waves produced from a particular performance or recording of that piece of music, but are these what you mean by *music?* What if we burn the sheet music and cancel the performance; have we destroyed the music? If not, does it follow that music exists, as one philosopher said, "in one's head"? Or is it somehow a combination of mental and physical components? If so, how are they joined together (recall a similar difficulty in the mind–body problem, in Part 3), "What Is Real? (Metaphysics)."

Finally, there are epistemological problems associated with esthetics. Do we have reliable knowledge concerning art? Are judgments about works of art objective judgments, or are they purely personal and subjective? At first you may think this is rather easy to answer; after all, art is whatever you think it is. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Or at least that is the view of a good many people. If this expresses a view you hold, you would not be alone, for perhaps the most widely held view about the nature of art is that there are no *objective* standards to judge one work of art from another, and that each person is the best judge of what art is. If you think that there are no objective standards by which to judge a work of art, you would hold the view that art is entirely subjective; art is whatever pleases you.

What can be said in favor of an objectivist view of art, the view that there are objective standards of *some kind* in terms of which art can be judged? After all, people do make judgments about art and decide that some works of art are better than others. Museum directors and acquisitions committees have to decide which paintings to purchase for their permanent collections. Music directors have to determine whether a new symphony is worthy of being performed. Art critics make judgments about the artistic merit of various kinds of art work and attempt to give reasons for their judgments. And this presupposes standards of some sort. Any time we are put in a position of offering reasons for our conclusions, we are in the process of moving away from a purely subjectivist view to a more objectivist position. Of course, we can still argue over different *standards,* but appealing to standards does mark a step away from "I choose it because I like it." We could say, if we are committed to a thoroughgoing subjectivism, that museum

directors, acquisitions committees, art critics, and so on are really doing nothing but (notice that troublesome phrase again) foisting off on a gullible public their own subjective reactions to art. But at least the art critics believe that they are responding to something in the art work itself when they judge it, and this is a belief we should examine.

THE ROLE OF ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The foregoing are some of the kinds of questions which arise when we look at esthetics as the philosophy of art. In this sense esthetics will be concerned with a number of separate, individual questions, which may *not* therefore produce any coherent, all-embracing theory of the underlying nature or essence of art. But there is another tradition in esthetics which tries to do just that—give us a general theory of art. Historically (roughly since the eighteenth century) esthetics has been more narrowly defined as the investigation of the nature of our esthetic *experience,* whether of art works or of objects of natural beauty, such as the Rocky Mountains, a sunset, or a lake. Is there any distinguishing feature of all such esthetic experiences, something which they all have but is not shared by any other kind of experience? Philosophers in the eighteenth century thought they had an answer. What distinguishes esthetic experience from every other kind of experience is something variously described as *detachment, disinterestedness,* and *distance.* And this theory of esthetic experience was very widely held by estheticians until quite recently, when it has come under sharp attack.

What do these expressions mean—*detachment, disinterestedness,* and *distance?* They all sound rather negative. Let us consider an example. Suppose a person is looking at a tree. Let us say that it is an old, well-formed oak tree standing on a hilltop. Is this person's experience an esthetic experience? Remember that philosophy is primarily a reflective rather than a dogmatic enterprise. That means that you can answer this question as well as anyone, simply by philosophically reflecting on it. What would you say? To help you, suppose we fill in the context a little more. Suppose that it is winter and the person, whose home is heated with a wood-burning stove, is wondering, while looking at the tree, whether it will produce enough firewood to last through the winter. Or imagine that the tree stands next to the person's house and that the tree has a large dead branch which stretches out over the roof of the house, and our observer is concerned mainly about whether the dead branch might fall on the house in a bad windstorm. Finally, suppose this person has the day off and has stopped to look at the tree on a walk through the fields.

Which of these would you call an esthetic experience? Surely the last, but why? Putting it negatively, it is because the individual was not looking at the tree for its utilitarian value as firewood, or as a possible threat. Putting it more positively, it was because the viewer was looking at the tree for its own sake and for the pleasure one gets simply by looking at it. This is the distinction that words like *detachment* and *disinterestedness* try to capture. In the last example, the observer was *detached* from the usual everyday, practical attitude and was not an *interested* party, *interested* in what could be done with the tree (displaying the kind of disinterestedness which a judge ought to have in a court case), and we might say that the observer has established a certain *distance* or perspective from the usual utilitarian attitude toward the world. Implied here is a certain view of human psychology: that our ordinary view of the world is self-interested, pragmatic, and

utilitarian; that we generally look at things from the standpoint of how they will help or hurt us; and that the esthetic attitude is the exception to this rule, the relatively rare moments when we relax our strong survival mechanism and experience objects simply for the joy of experiencing them.

When we ask what art is or what esthetic experience is, we expect these phenomena to be examined in and of themselves. And we expect resulting theories to tell us what *they* are and not what *something else* is to which they might be related in some way. It is like the student who wrote on the final exam, "The question reminds me of another, even more interesting question which I would like to answer." Historically many theories of art have been extrinsic, defining art in terms of its function in aiding other, nonart activities—that art is a form of communication, or self-expression, a way of representing the world, a source of relaxation or stimulation, and so on. And the complaint against all such theories is that they fail to define what art is in its own right—that they are *not intrinsic* definitions.

Those theories which look to the intrinsic, internal character of art works are called *formalist,* since they pay attention only to the arrangement, pattern, or *form* of elements (line, color, shape, and so on) *within* the art work. Extrinsic theories stress the representational and expressive *content* which the art work *refers* to, and so the debate between intrinsic and extrinsic theories is often expressed as the battle over form and content.

On the one hand, the theory of the esthetic attitude, in its emphasis on the distance and detachment from the rest of the world, seems to stress the *intrinsic* character of art for art's sake. On the other hand, however, esthetic distance and detachment can be seen as the detachment and distance which a symbol has from what it symbolizes, and in *this* sense art stands apart from life, not in the sense that it is unrelated to life but in the sense that it is *about* life. A history book on the Civil War is not, of course, the same as the Civil War itself. There is a clear and sharp distinction between the two; one is a bloody war and the other is a book. But the two are clearly related insofar as the book is a book-*about* the Civil War. The same is generally true of anything which has human meaning or significance; there are always two things in the meaning relation, the symbol and the thing symbolized, and they are related to one another in the sense that the first is about, or refers to, the second.

To recapitulate, the modern theory of esthetic experience is a further analysis and reflection on what has become our ordinary intuitions. But these common sense intuitions may be so deeply ingrained and internalized within us, so much a part of our normal outlook, assumed and taken for granted, that it is difficult for us to see them. How can we see what appears most obvious to us? Perhaps only by way of a contrast. Without a contrast, our own way of seeing things will always seem "normal" and obviously "right," perhaps the *only* way to see things, and therefore invisible to us. With that in mind, let us consider for a moment a contrasting point of view.

Most big city art museums have rooms devoted to African art and pre-Columbian American Indian art. Many people collect, buy, and sell these objects as art works, and beautifully illustrated art books have been written on them. But consider for a moment where these objects came from and how they were originally used by the people who made them. Many of the ceramic pieces from Mexico and Central America are grave goods made to accompany the dead into an afterlife. Much the same is true in ancient China and Egypt. Everything we need in this life is made available to the dead for their use in an afterlife, except that they are now in the form of miniature ceramic or wooden

replicas or effigies—small figurines of musicians, guards, servants, and horses, for example. The only people to ever see these objects were the people who made them, the family members who purchased them, and the priests who cast whatever magical spells are required to make them come to life and perform in the "land of the dead" (that is, make these little ceramic and wooden figurines play music or serve food). As recently as forty or fifty years ago West African farmers could not begin their annual planting until the high priests had initiated a ceremonial dance in the fields by masked performers reenacting the original farming techniques given the people by their gods. The first Europeans who saw the masks in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw them as false religious idols and accordingly destroyed as many of them as they could. Only later, beginning around 1904, did European artists, including Picasso, begin thinking of these same objects as works of fine art, and even started imitating them in their own art. Today art museums display these same wooden masks, art books describe them, and galleries in Europe and North America sell them as works of art.

But what *are* these wooden and ceramic objects, really? Are they works of art? Were they made by artists? Were they meant to be esthetically appreciated? Even though we look today at these objects as works of "fine art," the people who originally made and used them did not; at least this was not their primary purpose. These objects were not used "esthetically," but for ceremonial purposes; they did not have to be enjoyable to look at, only sufficiently representational (of a musician, for example) to perform its ritual function (to play music beyond the grave, to call forth the agricultural gods, or chase away the evil spirits). The people who made them were not expressing their own individual feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, but conforming to the traditional pattern

ANCIENT CHINESE HAN DYNASTY (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) miniature (16 × 25 inch) terra cotta horse-drawn carriage placed in the tomb of a deceased official for use in the afterlife. Photo courtesy of H. Gene Blocker.

required by the religious traditions of that particular society. The objects certainly were not made to be admired, as is obvious in the case of the grave goods. Neither were African masks made to be looked at continuously, since they were stored away out of sight most of the time and only brought out once a year to be seen during the planting ceremony.

These examples provide an idea, by way of contrast, of what is meant by the esthetic attitude toward works of "fine art" made by "artists." These are objects made for the main purpose of being viewed esthetically, that is, to be enjoyed just for the pleasure and satisfaction of looking at and listening to them. The esthetic experience of works of art, in other words, is non-utilitarian, where "utilitarian" means making and using something for some non-esthetic reason. You don't make a sandwich just to look at but to eat. If someone has made a burglar alarm, we don't set it off just to hear how it sounds—in fact, we hope it won't go off.

In contrast, why do you listen to music? You probably do not listen to music with any expectation of personal gain beyond the pleasure of the experience itself, as opposed, for example, to listening to an accounting class lecture (from which you expect something—a good grade on the next test, leading to a good grade in the class, leading to a degree, and a job, a house in the "burbs" with a BMW in the garage, perhaps). But then you go home and listen to music only for its own sake. The people who make "works of art" are not just skilled craftspersons. We think of them as "artists" who have something important to say or express. Artists who just say the same things over and over again, or those who just say what other artists have already been saying for a long time are not considered as good as artists who have something new to say and new ways of saying it.

What are they "saying" and "telling" us? A moment's reflection shows how hard the answer is to put in words. Somehow the people we think of as artists, or at least as great artists, are expressing or saying something that cannot be said in some more ordinary way through the ordinary use of language. The musicians we love are expressing how things feel to them and how things in general seem to be. They are relating a kind of mood or a point of view. What is this overall mood or point of view? To find out you just have to listen to the music. The artist has expressed this unique perspective in and only in music. The meaning or message is there for anyone who bothers to listen from an esthetic point of view. It is all there in the music; just listen.

But now going back to the contrast with pre-Columbian American Indian ceramic grave goods and the masks used earlier in West African planting ceremonies, we can see that people have not always looked at things in this "esthetic," "fine art" kind of way. As natural as the esthetic attitude may seem to us, it is not universal, not a permanent part of human nature. It appears at a point in the history of certain cultures and may just as easily disappear later and be replaced by another way of looking at things. Being able to recognize that these views are subjective shows that contexts do indeed shift and change over time and from culture to culture.

These ideas of esthetic enjoyment, fine art, and artist arose in what we call the modern period—roughly from the end of the seventeenth century through the middle of the twentieth century. The period before that we can conveniently refer to as "premodern," followed by "the modern," and the period we are now in, often referred to as the "postmodern" period.

If, as we said earlier, philosophy is a reflection on our ordinary, common sense intuitions, then we can easily formulate from our analysis above the main points about the modern conception of esthetic experience:

1. Esthetic experience is non-utilitarian.
2. Esthetic experience is detached from ordinary self-interested pursuits (it is disinterested).
3. Works of art are made to be viewed esthetically and just to be enjoyed for no other purpose.
4. Everyone can appreciate art just by adopting the esthetic point of view (it is universal in all human beings).
5. Artists see things in a unique way and creatively find innovative ways of communicating that to us.
6. Artists, or at least the great artists, show us how to look at the world, how to understand ourselves, who we are, and what our world is like.
7. Works of art (or at least great works of art) express these unusual ideas of artists.
8. Great works of art must be innovative, be creative, and express new ideas in new ways.
9. The history of art is the history of great innovations by great artists (the first one to do this, the first one to do that, etc.).
10. Art is not hard to understand. It just requires our adopting the esthetic point of view.

In the chapters that follow we will focus on an important issue in contemporary esthetics, namely the question of whether art should be censored because it is offensive or causes violence, especially toward women. This is an especially interesting subject because of the very different ways art works have traditionally depicted the female body. In

A Gelede mask from the Yoruba, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and Benin, used to attract and lead evil spirits out of a village. Photo courtesy of H. Gene Blocker.

much archaic art from around the world, nude female figures are thought to represent or symbolize principles of fertility—of crops, animals, as well as the human population, and

were probably used in religious practices to magically ensure this highly desired fertility. In Classical Greek and Renaissance European art the nude figure is considered part of "high humanistic art," representing or symbolizing the essence of human nature—whereby the human body represents or symbolizes the divine, godlike quality of human beings at their most noble and sublime. But from Roman times there has also been a more popular art depicting the nude human body in ways which were obviously meant to stimulate sexual arousal or to make fun of sexuality—a kind of visual "dirty joke."

Consider for a moment the vast range of uses of pictures of nude women we find today—a painting by Rubens in the city art museum, a pinup in the garage mechanic's office, a centerfold in *Playboy,* an African or pre-Columbian Central American Indian fertility figure in the anthropology museum, a sex manual, an illustration for a biology or medical textbook, and finally an advertisement for a hard-core pornographic movie or video.

Debate on this question shows the growing split between traditional modernist estheticians and more contemporary theorists. Traditional modernist estheticians tend to defend art against all forms of censorship on the grounds that properly understood, art ("real art," the Rubens, not the mechanic's pinup) is too detached from real life to have much immediate impact on it, while some contemporary theorists reject the boundaries separating art and life, high art and popular culture, and tend to regard art simply as part of the social, economic, and political real world in which racism, sexism, and violence flourish.

In Chapter 31, "The Value of Art," the contemporary American esthetician H. Gene Blocker shows the relation of the traditional esthetic attitude to the detachment of art from life, except symbolically. In Chapter 32, "Art as Ideal," the art historian Kenneth Clark argues that the idea that art can create a predetermined emotional or behavioral effect, such as erotic stimulation or a demeaning attitude toward women, is a confusion of the *esthetic* enjoyment of art proper with various non-esthetic notions. Finally, in Chapter 33, "Esthetics and Ideology," contemporary literary theorist Jennifer Jeffers argues that art is far too deeply embedded in the context of real life to be detached or disengaged from everyday social reality, which constantly spawns racist and sexist attitudes and behavior.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you give examples from our own time of objects that were originally made for utilitarian purposes but are now considered to be works of art?

2. The point was made in the discussion that the esthetic attitude may be particular to specific cultures at specific times. Do you think that everyone even in our own time and in our own culture has this attitude? Explain.

3. You and a friend go to an exhibit of local artisans. Your friend says, "These are crafts, not art." What considerations would you bring to bear on the discussion of whether you were looking at crafts or fine art?

4. Some of the modern art sections of museums present ordinary objects as fine art. What considerations do you think led the museum to agree to this designation?

5. This is difficult to express, but what do you think artists are trying to *say?* Are they expressing emotions? Some deeper truth? Some new way of looking at the world?

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   Read the **profile:** *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Kant* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Why did Plato advocate censorship of art?

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The Value of Art

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries esthetic theories spoke of art in terms of its distance as it provides a perspective from which to view the world, and this was the prevailing theory about art during the modern period described in the previous chapter. The way this point was made was to refer to the experience of a work of art as a special kind of experience different from, say, the experience of eating a good meal or solving a mathematical problem. Esthetic theories principally dealt with the issue of how works of art affect us differently than do other objects within our experience such as the utilitarian objects mentioned in the previous chapter.

The term used to describe the unique features of experiencing a work of art was *the esthetic attitude,* and esthetic theories looked for the unique features of this attitude as contrasted with, for example, the moral and religious points of view. An important aspect of the esthetic attitude, according to these theories, was the removal of the art work from any practical interest such as whether the work inflamed passion, incited to riot, or even had an economic value on the art market. Art was viewed as intrinsically important, art for its own sake, and the quarrel among art theorists was over how art accomplished its unique role. On the one hand were those who argued that art's principal role was to express emotion. Other theorists argued that whereas emotion was important in art, the real issue was whether, and how, art *communicates* emotion.

Closely related to the theory that the role of art is to communicate emotion is the view that art is just another vehicle for conveying *meaning*. Just as words are symbolic vehicles for expressing meaning—*chair* refers to the construction on which we sit, *bed* refers to the object on which we sleep, *house* refers to the structure in which we live—so art works are symbolic expressions that refer to things in the real world. And this theoretical approach gets even more complex. There can be multiple meanings in a work of art. *Moby Dick* is not just a tale about a large albino whale; Melville's story has multiple, deeper meanings. The questions that estheticians ponder are not only what these meanings are but how a work of art conveys meaning, as in John Ciardi's famous essay "How Does a Poem Mean?"

This quarrel was engaged in also by artists, who are cautious about attempts to assign meanings to their works. When someone asked Picasso if his painting of a red bull's head represented the rise of fascism in Europe, Picasso is said to have replied, "No, it represents the head of a red bull." Robert Frost similarly denied repeatedly that the last lines of his poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" were about death. It is, he would always say, about a man stopping his carriage to view a field newly filled with

snow. Artists frequently deny that there is any deeper meaning beyond the surface content of their works, or that their works have any meaning at all. But if art works have no meaning, or if they do not convey complex emotions, what point do they have? No point, say still other art critics. The role of art is not to communicate, not to mean anything, not even to stir emotions, but just to be. Art in this view is just another object in the world that elicits certain kinds of responses from the viewer or reader or listener, depending on what kind of art it is. Instead of theories about the meaning of works of art, or the proper ways to interpret art, what we should be doing is simply enjoying art. In the words of art critic Susan Sontag, ". . . in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."

These are some of the issues that H. Gene Blocker, a contemporary esthetician, explores in the following reading dealing with the esthetic attitude. He contrasts the eighteenth-century view that art has distance and detachment from the "real" world with the postmodern claim that all art is political. Along the way he also deals with the question of whether art is an elitist undertaking or whether the category "art" should include what is commonly referred to as popular culture. Beavis and Butthead as cultural and artistic icons? Maybe this is a bit hard to take, but some contemporary art theorists would argue that, like it or not, the distinction between "high" and "low" art has disappeared, and the real issue is not what is art and what is not but who is in control.

H. Gene Blocker: The Esthetic Attitude

To begin with, what exactly is meant by the esthetic attitude around which so much Western esthetics since the eighteenth century has been established? The word "esthetics," as a noun and in the plural form (with a final "s"), refers to a philosophical investigation of art and natural beauty, that is, a branch of philosophy which is concerned with art and questions of beauty. But, as an adjective and in the singular (without the final "s"), it refers to a kind of experience that people have, the so-called "esthetic experience," or "esthetic attitude." *Esthetics* and *esthetic attitude* are related in the sense that defining esthetic experience was the main task of esthetics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues to be an important task of esthetics today, despite the argument of some contemporary philosophers, such as George Dickie, that there is no such thing as esthetic experience. Today the subject-matter of esthetics has greatly expanded to include many areas of interest besides the experience of the audience, for example artistic creativity, the social and political aspects of the art world, and so on. Nonetheless, the quality and character of the viewer's enjoyment of art and objects of natural beauty (that is, esthetic experience) continues to occupy the attentions of estheticians.

The main assumption underlying this investigation is that a person may be interested in an object for different reasons and that this level and type of interest will determine the viewer's point of view or "attitude," which in turn will determine, or at least influence, what and how the viewer sees it. Suppose that during the night someone's house burns to the ground. Different people will be concerned with this

incident in different ways which will be reflected in the way they experience and describe that event. The owner of the house is obviously concerned by the loss of personal property. The owner's parents living in another town are mainly concerned about the family's safety. The neighbors, if they do not know the family very well, will be primarily interested in the danger to their own adjacent homes. The police are primarily interested in keeping traffic flowing smoothly and safely along the road in front of the burning house, maintaining easy access for the fire trucks (and later to prevent looting). Firefighters are absorbed in the purely practical matter of getting the fire put out, while the fire safety inspector is concerned with how the fire started. The insurance agent wants to know the extent of damage and also whether it is the result of arson. Finally, passersby will mainly be curious and excited by a vicarious sense of danger and adventure, while the newspaper reporter will see the fire simply as a newsworthy local event. We can easily imagine how these different orientations will result in very different perceptions and descriptions of the fire.

Assuming that this psychological theory about attitudes and perspectives is sound, we can go on to try to group the various attitudes into broader types and to ask more generally, what is the *moral* point of view or the *religious* point of view, or, finally, the *esthetic* point of view? In this last case, we are asking whether there is any distinctive or essential feature which uniquely defines the experience which people have in the enjoyment of art works and objects of natural beauty which qualifies that experience to be called esthetic, and if so what that feature is. Or, to put the point differently, under what conditions is a man looking at a tree or a woman or a mountain an esthetic, as opposed to some other kind of experience? The answer which has been offered, though in widely different forms, over the past 200 years, is that an esthetic experience is characterized by the "three D's"—disinterestedness, detachment, and emotional distance. In more ordinary terms, the experience is esthetic if the person views the object for no ulterior, practical, or immediately selfish or utilitarian motive. A viewer looks at it, we say, for its own sake, or simply for the joy of looking at it. Because of the primarily practical concern with a house burning, the esthetic point of view toward the fire in our example above might seem callous. But it could occur. That is, one of the bystanders, seeing there is nothing more to be done, may simply be fascinated by the sight of this huge flame, leaping up into the night sky—beautiful and terrifying (though of no personal danger to the bystander).

To say that an esthetic experience is not enjoyed for what it subsequently leads to is not to say that there are no good reasons for wanting to have that experience. The reason we treasure esthetic experiences is precisely for their intrinsic value, for the value they have in and of themselves—not for later experiences they may lead to. We get up early in the morning in order to get to work on time; we want to get to work on time in order to keep our job; we want to keep our job so we will continue receiving a regular weekly paycheck; we want this paycheck in order to buy a new car; we want the new car . . . and so on. These are all "extrinsically" valuable experiences or activities—valuable not for their own sakes but for the sake of something else. But what if *every* experience and activity had only extrinsic value—then we would always be doing everything for the sake of something else. In the end, we might wonder, what is it all for? In the end, isn't there something which we want for its own sake—perhaps to be successful, powerful, loved, needed, or

accepted? These are intrinsically valuable activities and experiences, those for the sake of which we do everything else—get up in the morning, go to work, save our money, buy the car, and so on. In this sense, esthetic experiences are one of the most important sorts of intrinsically valuable experiences available to human beings.

Looked at in this way, an esthetic experience is a rather *unusual* kind of experience. Most of our looking at the world is practically oriented, as a result of which we do not usually *look* at things at all; we merely *see* them, as the English esthetician, Roger Fry, once said. For most practical purposes I do not need to see more of an object than is necessary to correctly classify that object. I see at a glance that it is a taxi which I need to take me to town. But if you were to ask me later what make of car it was, or to describe its design, or trim, I would surely be unable to answer. I was not visually exploring every aspect of the car, but only that tiny fraction which sufficed to tell me that it was in fact a taxi—the fact that it is a car, rather than a van or a truck, its characteristic yellow color, the "taxi" decal on the top is probably all I need to know that it is a taxi and therefore all I really noticed. But in an esthetic experience all those potentially visible aspects of an object which are usually ignored become available for visual inspection and enjoyment. But then we do not just see the thing; we *look* at it. "Seeing" is sometimes called a "success verb"; you either see it or you don't. It is all or nothing, and all at once. But in looking at something which we enjoy looking at, we take our time, savoring each detail, going back over certain parts again and again, and perhaps returning time after time for another look at this same object.

This attitude is most prominently displayed in the art museum, the music hall, and the theater, places which have been explicitly designed to encourage the adoption of the esthetic attitude and to help in the training of members of the audience in the proper attitude to adopt in the presence of works of art, that is, to behave as mere spectators who have come to look and to listen, but not to comment on or interact with the art object. The lighting, the arrangement of the seats, the picture frame, the stage all help us to focus on the art object and to blot out, except marginally or peripherally, other distracting, nonesthetic elements (such as the people in front of you, the changing of the scene sets, the falling and rising of the curtain, and so on).

The immediate consequence of the impersonal and non-utilitarian posture of the esthetic attitude is to isolate the object of this esthetic attention from its mundane, physical surroundings, transforming it into a self-contained whole, unconnected with the rest of the world, except symbolically. This is what the twentieth-century French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, calls the "unrealizing" function of esthetic experience and what is often referred to as the "willing suspension of disbelief." In order to experience the novel, painting, or play esthetically, one must realize that the events represented in these art works are fictional, that is, that they are not contiguous with ordinary space-time physical reality. The unrealizing function of esthetic experience is closely related to its disinterestedness. To say esthetic perception is not concerned with practical consequences is just to say that in esthetic experience we do not perceive the object as a real object with real consequences for us. It is the function of the arena, the stage, the picture frame, and the pedestal to transform and elevate the object from its ordinary space-time. This also ensures the adoption of the esthetic attitude on the part of the audience, who

((•—[**Listen** to the **program:** *Jean-Paul Sartre* on **MySearchLab.com**

are trained to interact with and participate in the esthetic "fiction" or "semblance," but only in esthetically appropriate ways, whether as merely spectators, passively contemplating the esthetic object, or more actively participating but within carefully defined esthetic boundaries, separating fiction from reality.

One may weep for the hero's mortal wounds, but one must not call the doctor; one may hiss and boo the villain, but one must not rush onto the stage to disarm him. (In the film *The Piano* there is a scene of the performance of a British Christmas pantomime, including a typical shadow play in which a man appears to attack a woman with an axe. The British are shocked when the indigenous Maoris in the audience rush onto the stage to stop the "axe murder." The British had been socialized into adopting the esthetic attitude in certain appropriate settings, while the native Maoris had no such esthetic distancing traditions in their traditional society.)

As a result of the attitude of detachment and disinterestedness, the esthetic attitude is generally more reflective or contemplative in orientation, and as a result of *that,* the object of esthetic attention is generally understood symbolically to refer to meanings and significant content of a quite general though undefined sort. When I look at a tree from a practical point of view, to see how much firewood it will yield, I see that object simply as an instance of the category "tree." It is just a particular instance of a tree. But when I disengage myself from such practical concerns and look at the tree for its own sake, then my attention may be drawn to the general symbolic significance of the tree as the link, for example, between heaven and earth, or the monumentality, quiet dignity, strength, and stability of the tree, or its protective aspect. It is no longer simply a member of the category "tree," but an object which seems to partake of quite general and far-ranging meaning and significance.

Only by the "unrealizing" act of psychic distance, in which beliefs are temporarily suspended, can one object come to represent something which it is not, especially where the object is concrete and what it represents is something quite general, such as rebirth and renewal, or the dialectical tension between creative and destructive forces. The paradox of the esthetic attitude is that one is simultaneously aware of both the symbol and of what it symbolizes. The mystery of artistic representation and impersonation is the simultaneous belief and disbelief in their identity and distinction. Those lines on paper become a generalized human face, but only if I know full well that they are not a face but only lines drawn on paper. The actor becomes Hamlet only if I know he is an actor playing the part of Hamlet.

Though removed from everyday life, the emotional interest in an object at this symbolic level can be intense, especially since it involves an ordering of experience which is quite impossible in the chaos and confusion of everyday life. This symbolic meaning also transcends the concerns of a particular regional or ethnic group. Although we no longer worship Dionysus, we can still enjoy the plays of Sophocles and Euripides which were once a part of that worship. We continue to appreciate the tragedy because our esthetic attitude has detached it from its religious context and transformed it into a potent, cross-cultural symbol which it was not for its original audience. Once the esthetic dimension has emerged as an independent entity, it becomes possible to deliberately, self-consciously create symbolic meaning in art.

Once we see that from within the gaze of the esthetic attitude ordinary physical objects from everyday life take on symbolic meaning, it becomes possible to isolate, select, reorganize, and manipulate such symbolic content in deliberately constructed patterns which possess far greater esthetic intensity than objects of natural beauty which are less tightly organized and unified.

The distancing effect of the traditional esthetic attitude has a direct bearing on the current controversy whether art should be censored because it leads to violence, especially toward women. Today many women object to the treatment of women in works of art. There are at least two problems here. First, is the pornographic portrayal of women in a way which seems likely to incite violence toward women. Of course, if what we said above about the esthetic attitude is correct, representations of women viewed esthetically cannot have this immediate, overt effect. The second problem is perhaps more serious; it concerns what women have come to *represent* or *symbolize* in art. Many art works represent women as symbols of fertility, emotion, intuition, nurturing, passivity, weakness. Of course, one reason women have become symbols of such generalized meaning is that, even outside art, many people in the past thought that women were actually like that—that they really were more emotional, caring, weaker, more passive, and so on. As a result, artists have found it convenient to use representations of women to symbolize these ideas.

It is also true that by representing women in this light, artists themselves have *contributed* to these stereotypes of women. And so today, when the facts about women no longer support these stereotypes, women nonetheless continue to symbolize such ideas, and this encourages many people in our society to continue to think of women in the old clichéd ways. The objection to such stereotyped representations of women is not only that they are false and demeaning, but that they indirectly influence behavior toward women—stereotypes influence attitudes which, in turn, influence behavior.

Does looking at a painting of a female nude cause sexual desire or arousal? Does hearing a story of a wolf eating a little girl's grandmother shock or traumatize us? If not, why not? Esthetic attitude theorists say no, and the reason is that the esthetic attitude of esthetic experience distances us from any such immediately practical outcomes. The "unrealizing" aspect, as Sartre put it, of the esthetic attitude makes it more contemplative and reflective and therefore the art work has a more symbolic relation to reality, rather than a direct, practical relationship to reality.

Of course, we have to admit that in all representational art there is a reference to the real world—the point of view created in the art work sheds light on the real world which it is in some sense "about." In this sense art can challenge, create, alter, modify perspectives, attitudes, points of view about things in general. The artist often utilizes the symbolic meaning already associated in society with the female body; but by placing this representation of the woman within the created, fictionalized context of a particular work of art, the artist also creates a perspective or point of view through which the audience is invited to view the female subject, not only in this art work, but *in general*. And this generalized attitude or perspective might lead to action, but only in the indirect way attitudes influence action, creating at most a tendency to act in certain ways. But

even so, the effect on the audience of the attitude created by the art work is generally only partial and temporary, competing as it is with many other appealing, attractive perspectives.

We must not exaggerate the power of artists; at most they may succeed in drawing the viewer temporarily into the artist's point of view, sharing the artist's attitude toward women, for example, but generally only for a little while. When the movie is over and we walk outside the mood is generally gone (though it may have a more subtle effect on our general attitude, or general way of looking at things). Sometimes the artist would *like* to change people's attitudes and behavior but is usually frustrated precisely because the effect of the art work is only temporary—it generally lasts only so long as the audience is viewing the work. Afterwards most people slip right back into their customary attitudes.

Most people are also capable of entertaining a number of different alien points of view—trying them on for size, as it were, without permanently adopting them. I can hear the vegetarian, or the religious fundamentalist, or the "new age" point of view, for example. I understand these perspectives; I can imagine what it would be like to live within and see the world from those points of view, but I don't have to *adopt* them. That is, most of us can entertain but finally *resist* many different perspectives. This is one of the ways we learn about other people and other cultures, by seeing how other people see the world.

The modernist tradition of the esthetic attitude trains and develops that flexibility to enjoy temporarily trying on different perspectives without having to adopt any one of them. Those who support censorship, on the other hand, argue that we

Yoruba effigy bowl. For over 10,000 years the female body has been used to represent or symbolize fertility. Compare the use of the female body in this African carving with the nude in European painting and also with pornographic and erotic pictures. Photo courtesy of H. Gene Blocker.

are not capable of this flexibility and sophistication—that some works of art cause an immediate reaction (seeing the film I go out and "act out" the beating, the rape), or less extremely, that we are not able to resist being drawn permanently into points of view that we do not choose for ourselves but which are insidiously forced upon us by our exposure to art (making us racists, sexists, xenophobes, and so on).

Part of the postmodern support of censorship springs from a rejection of any distinction between fine art and popular culture. Whereas modernist estheticians agree that we are less able to resist the influence of *popular* culture than we are able to resist the influence of fine art, postmodernist estheticians deny there is any meaningful distinction in this regard and argue that we are *equally* vulnerable to *all* art forms. Of course, there are some very general social conditions which do indeed cause us to adopt those attitudes which are most prevalent in the particular society in which we happen to have been raised. From parents, teachers, radio, TV, and what we might call in very general terms "popular culture," there is indeed a very strong influence on us from which most of us can never escape or resist, or indeed are even aware of. By the time we enter the first grade we have been acculturated ("brainwashed") into the mores of our particular society. But that is not due to art, at least not what modernist estheticians mean by art. According to the modernist esthetic tradition, art makes us reflect on our society, makes us conscious of these background mores and traditions and often calls them into question. In the modernist tradition we are trained to be aware of the point of view through which a particular artist deliberately sets out to portray a certain situation, and so we are perfectly aware of the difference, for example, between Thomas Hardy's pessimistic attitude toward the world and that of the average person. For this reason modernism insists that we are not "brainwashed" by Hardy's perspective, but merely see it for what it is—one person's point of view which we allow ourselves to entertain temporarily while enjoying the novel, but then set aside when we have finished the book.

Postmodern theorists discount the distinction between "fine art" and "popular culture." What we call art is just a somewhat more elitist form of general culture and is therefore equally influential in the formation of cultural values. The postmodernist also denies that artists are as aware and in control of their product as they may think (and as modernist art critics and estheticians have generally given them credit for). Historically, we think of Tolstoy as deliberately setting out to create a point of view from which he intends we should view the world—the world according to Tolstoy. But really, say the postmodernists, Tolstoy is no more in charge, or acting alone, than the person who produces comic books, Saturday morning cartoons, TV advertising. Nor are we any more aware of the intentions of the fine artist than we are aware of the intentions of the sophisticated advertiser or politician. The idea of the artist's deliberate intention which we are fully aware of is simply an illusion, say the postmodernists. Neither, by the same token, are we any more able to distance ourselves esthetically from the point of view of a work of fine art than we are to TV ads or sitcoms. In every case, say the postmodernists, it is the whole structure of society which determines values and attitudes, and the idea that individuals can consciously detach themselves, much less disagree or resist, is simply an illusion.

It comes down to who is in control. The modernist position emphasizes the control of the individual artist to deliberately create a work which is meant to draw

the viewer temporarily into the artist's point of view, as well as the control of the viewing audience to try on different perspectives, knowing they are alien perspectives, much as we might try on different hats, before finally buying one (or perhaps not buying any of them). The postmodernist position emphasizes a kind of all-encompassing social climate of thought-control in which we are subconsciously manipulated, not by unscrupulous individual artists who know what they're doing, but by more amorphous social forces, institutions—by "society." In some ways this difference may be due more to changes in art and society than to different interpretations of the same art and society. TV channel-surfing is a more widespread activity today than reading a "serious" novel. Perhaps the modernist esthetic attitude was appropriate for reading a novel, but not for channel-surfing.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does Blocker mean by the "esthetic attitude"? Are there really experiences which are "esthetic" in nature? If so, give some examples from your own experience in which you first look at an object in a nonesthetic way and then in an esthetic way.

2. How much "in control" are we to accept or reject the point of view portrayed in movies, pictures, music, and television? Do you think there is any difference in this regard between "fine art" and "popular culture" (our being more in control in the case of fine art than in the case of popular culture)?

3. What influence do you think art has on life? Do you agree with Blocker's claim that the esthetic attitude distances art from life, except "symbolically"?

4. Can art change the way we look at the world? Can you think of examples from history or from your own experience? Would Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* be an example (or would Blocker argue this was not an example of "high" art)?

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CHAPTER 32

Art as Ideal

Imagine a ninth-grade class of students on an outing. It is perfectly appropriate for their teacher to take them to the Museum of Art, where they will see, among other things, famous paintings of nude women. Yet the teacher wouldn't dare take the class to an adult book store, where they could see even more pictures of naked women. Why is this? What is the difference between these pictures of unclothed women? At first, we might say that the difference is that the first is *art,* while the second is *erotic* and *pornographic.* But this just shows that the word *art* has flattering, praiseworthy connotations, whereas words like *pornographic* have shameful, dirty, immoral connotations. But it does not tell us *why* some pictures of naked women are given the high-minded, praiseworthy label of *art* while others are given the shameful label of *pornography.*

The difference lies partly in the way (or style) in which the female figures have been done and partly in the use to which they are put. The first is something one could tell just from looking at the pictures themselves, apart from anything else. The second could only be detected by knowing something about the background reasons for which and the context in which the pictures were made. And, of course, these two tend to go together. Advertisers use pictures to get people to buy certain products; war propagandists use pictures to get people willingly to sacrifice for the war effort, and to accomplish these ends certain subjects must be selected, and more important, they must be portrayed in a certain way—an ad portraying attractive young people enjoying themselves using the product, and so on. Erotic pictures are used to arouse and stimulate sexual desire and pornographic pictures to ridicule, humiliate, and facilitate fantasies of power over women—all are rendered in a style designed to accomplish such ends. In the art of the classical nude, on the other hand, the unclothed female body is *not* used to instigate any direct action, like going out to buy the product, have sex, or beat someone up, but rather to depict an ideal conception of beauty, perfection, spiritual harmony, and the highest humanistic ideals. Of course, the *proper* use of such pictures does not prevent someone from misusing them in *other* ways—an adolescent boy may find magazine advertisements of women modeling underwear or illustrations from an anatomy textbook or even nude paintings in the Museum of Art erotically stimulating. But this is a clear misuse of such pictures and contrary to the style in which they were done. And just as those who advertise women's underwear and those who publish anatomy textbooks would strenuously object to demands from antipornography groups to ban such illustrations because some people have abused their intended use, so artists and museum curators strongly object to the censorship of nude paintings on similar grounds.

Recently, women's groups have challenged the distinction between the esthetic use and style of the artistic nude, on the one hand, and the erotic and pornographic use and style of naked women on the other. While these lines of demarcation may have held true in the past, they argue, they no longer hold today. Today's art, they claim, has broken down the boundaries which once existed between art and pornography. Today's art, they say, is meant to shock, stimulate, hurt, shake us up; and what used to be called pornographic and erotic is now simply part of mainstream art. And even in the "good old days" when high art was separated from trash, they ask, why was it that only *women's* bodies were shown nude and not *men's*? Of course, there are male nudes in art, especially in ancient Greek art, but it is true that the great majority of nude figures in modern European art are female. Does this art really represent spiritual and humanistic ideals, or isn't it simply a more subtle form of men enjoying looking at women? And, even though of a more refined, genteel sort, doesn't this still demean and humiliate women, putting them in the role of objects to be stared at, rather than autonomous human beings in their own right?

In his classic study of the nude, Sir Kenneth Clark offers a highly influential defense of the traditional notion of the nude as the highest subject matter of art. Of course, he insists, we must acknowledge that there are subtle erotic overtones in most nude art, but he argues that this is not a "call to action," and moreover, that it is balanced by the search for a kind of perfection we do not find in everyday life, for formal beauty of line and contour, and the attempt to embody abstract spiritual values in physical, human form.

Kenneth Clark: The Naked and the Nude

The English language, with its elaborate generosity, distinguishes between the naked and the nude. To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word "nude," on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed. In fact, the word was forced into our vocabulary by critics of the early eighteenth century to persuade the artless islanders that, in countries where painting and sculpture were practiced and valued as they should be, the naked human body was the central object of art.

For this belief there is a quantity of evidence. In the greatest age of painting, the nude inspired the greatest works: and even when it ceased to be a compulsive subject it held its position as an academic exercise and a demonstration of mastery. . . . It may have suffered some curious transformations, but it remains our chief link with the

classic disciplines. When we wish to prove to the Philistine that our great revolution-aries are really respectable artists in the tradition of European painting, we point to their drawings of the nude. . . .

These comparisons suggest a short answer to the question, "What is the nude?" It is an art form invented by the Greeks in the fifth century, just as opera is an art form invented in seventeenth-century Italy. The conclusion is certainly too abrupt, but it has the merit of emphasizing that the nude is not the subject of art, but a form of art.

It is widely supposed that the naked human body is in itself an object upon which the eye dwells with pleasure and which we are glad to see depicted. But any-one who has frequented art schools and seen the shapeless, pitiful model that the students are industriously drawing will know this is an illusion. The body is not one of those subjects which can be made into art by direct transcriptions—like a tiger or a snowy landscape. Often in looking at the natural and animal world we joyfully identify ourselves with what we see and from this happy union create a work of art. This is the process students of aesthetics call empathy, and it is at the opposite pole of creative activity to the state of mind that has produced the nude. A mass of naked figures does not move us to empathy, but to disillusion and dismay. We do not wish to imitate; we wish to perfect. We become, in the physical sphere, like Dio-genes with his lantern looking for an honest man, and, like him, we may never be rewarded. Photographers of the nude are presumably engaged in this search, with every advantage; and having found a model who pleases them, they are free to pose and light her in conformity with their notions of beauty; finally, they can tone down and accentuate by retouching. But in spite of all their taste and skill, the result is hardly ever satisfactory to those whose eyes have grown accustomed to the harmoni-ous simplifications of antiquity. We are immediately disturbed by wrinkles, pouches, and other small imperfections, which, in the classical scheme, are eliminated. By long habit we do not judge it as a living organism, but as a design; and we discover that the transitions are inconclusive, the outline is faltering. We are bothered because the various parts of the body cannot be perceived as simple units and have no clear relationship to one another. In almost every detail the body is not the shape that art had led us to believe it should be. Yet we can look with pleasure at photographs of trees and animals, where the canon of perfection is less strict. Consciously or uncon-sciously, photographers have usually recognized that in a photograph of the nude their real object is not to reproduce the naked body, but to imitate some artist's view of what the naked body should be. . . .

So that although the naked body is no more than the point of departure for a work of art, it is a pretext of great importance. In the history of art, the subjects that men have chosen as nuclei, so to say, of their sense of order have often been in themselves unimportant. For hundreds of years, and over an area stretching from Ireland to China, the most vital expression of order was an imaginary animal biting its own tail. In the Middle Ages drapery took on a life of its own, the same life that had inhabited the twisting animal, and became the vital pattern of Ro-manesque art. In neither case had the subject any independent existence. But the human body, as a nucleus, is rich in associations, and when it is turned into art

these associations are not entirely lost. For this reason it seldom achieves the concentrated aesthetic shock of animal ornament, but it can be made expressive of a far wider and more civilizing experience. It is ourselves and arouses memories of all the things we wish to do with ourselves; and first of all we wish to perpetuate ourselves.

This is an aspect of the subject so obvious that I need hardly dwell on it; and yet some wise men have tried to close their eyes to it. "If the nude," says Professor [Samuel] Alexander, "is so treated that it raises in the spectator ideas or desires appropriate to the material subject, it is false art, and bad morals." This high-minded theory is contrary to experience. In the mixture of memories and sensations aroused by Rubens' *Andromeda* or Renoir's *Bather* are many that are "appropriate to the material subject." And since these words of a famous philosopher are often quoted, it is necessary to labor the obvious and say that no nude, however abstract, should fail to arouse in the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling, even though it be only the faintest shadow—and if it does not do so, it is bad art and false morals. The desire to grasp and be united with another human body is so fundamental a part of our nature that our judgment of what is known as "pure form" is inevitably influenced by it; and one of the difficulties of the nude as a subject for art is that these instincts cannot lie hidden, as they do, for example, in our enjoyment of a piece of pottery, thereby gaining the force of sublimation, but are dragged into the foreground, where they risk upsetting the unity of responses from which a work of art derives its independent life. Even so, the amount of erotic content a work of art can hold in solution is very high. The temple sculptures of tenth-century India are an undisguised exaltation of physical desire; yet they are great works of art because their eroticism is part of their whole philosophy.

Apart from biological needs there are other branches of human experiences of which the naked body provides a vivid reminder—harmony, energy, ecstasy, humility, pathos; and when we see the beautiful results of such embodiments, it must seem as if the nude as a means of expression is of universal and eternal value. But this we know historically to be untrue. It has been limited both in place and in time. There are naked figures in the paintings of the Far East, but only by an extension of the term can they be called nudes. In Japanese prints they are part of *ukioye,* the passing show of life, which includes, without comment, certain intimate scenes usually allowed to pass unrecorded. The idea of offering the body for its own sake, as a serious subject of contemplation, simply did not occur to the Chinese or Japanese mind, and to this day raises a slight barrier of misunderstanding. In the Gothic North the position was fundamentally very similar. It is true that German painters in the Renaissance, finding that the naked body was a respected subject in Italy, adapted it to their needs, and evolved a remarkable convention of their own. But Dürer's struggles show how artificial this creation was. His instinctive responses were curiosity and horror, and he had to draw a great many circles and other diagrams before he could brace himself to turn the unfortunate body into the nude.

Only in countries touching on the Mediterranean has the nude been at home, and even there its meaning was often forgotten. . . .

As I have said, in our Diogenes search for physical beauty our instinctive desire is not to imitate but to perfect. This is part of our Greek inheritance, and it was formulated by Aristotle with his usual deceptive simplicity. "Art," he says, "completes what nature cannot bring to a finish. The artist gives us knowledge of nature's unrealized ends." A great many assumptions underlie this statement, the chief of which is that everything has an ideal form of which the phenomena of experience are more or less corrupted replicas. This beautiful fancy has teased the minds of philosophers and writers on aesthetics for over 2000 years, and although we need not plunge into a sea of speculation, we cannot discuss the nude without considering its practical application, because every time we criticize a figure, saying that a neck is too long, hips are too wide or breasts too small, we are admitting, in quite concrete terms, the existence of ideal beauty. Critical opinion has varied between two interpretations of the ideal, one unsatisfactory because it is too prosaic, the other because it is too mystical. The former begins with the belief that although no individual body is satisfactory as a whole, the artist can choose the perfect parts from a number of figures and then combine them into a perfect whole. Such, we are told by Pliny, was the procedure of Zeuxis when he constructed his *Aphrodite* out of the five beautiful maidens of Kroton. . . . Naturally the theory was a popular one with artists: but it satisfied neither logic nor experience. Logically, it simply transfers the problem from the whole to the parts, and we are left asking by what ideal pattern Zeuxis accepted or rejected the arms, necks, bosoms, and so forth of his five maidens. And even admitting that we do find certain individual limbs or features that, for some mysterious reason, seem to us perfectly beautiful, experience shows us that we cannot often recombine them. They are right in their setting, organically, and to abstract them is to deprive them of that rhythmic vitality on which their beauty depends.

To meet this difficulty the classic theorists of art invented what they called "the middle form." They based this notion on Aristotle's definition of nature, and in the stately language of Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* it seems to carry some conviction. But what does it amount to, translated into plain speech? Simply that the ideal is composed of the average and the habitual. It is an inspiring proposition, and we are not surprised that Blake was provoked into replying, "All Forms are Perfect in the Poet's Mind but these are not Abstracted or compounded from Nature, but are from the Imagination." Of course he is right. Beauty is precious and rare, and if it were like a mechanical toy, made up of parts of average size that could be put together at will, we should not value it as we do. But we must admit that Blake's interjection is more a believer's cry of triumph than an argument, and we must ask what meaning can be attached to it. Perhaps the question is best answered in Crocean terms. The ideal is like a myth, in which the finished form can be understood only as the end of a long process of accretion. In the beginning, no doubt, there is the coincidence of widely diffused desires and the personal tastes of a few individuals endowed with the gift of simplifying their visual experiences into easily comprehensible shapes. Once this fusion has taken place, the resulting image, while still in a plastic state, may be enriched or refined upon by succeeding generations. Or, to change the metaphor, it is like a receptacle into which more and more experience can be poured. Then, at a certain point, it is full. It sets. And, partly

The Three Graces, *Roman Painting, Pompeii.*
Courtesy of Peter Paul Rubens/Corbis Images.

because it seems to be completely satisfying, partly because the mythopoeic faculty has declined, it is accepted as true. What both Reynolds and Blake meant by ideal beauty was really the diffused memory of that peculiar physical type developed in Greece between the years 480 and 440 B.C., which in varying degrees of intensity and consciousness furnished the mind of Western man with a pattern of perfection from the Renaissance until the present century.

Once more we have returned to Greece, and it is now time to consider some peculiarities of the Greek mind that may have contributed to the formation of this indestructible image.

The most distinctive is the Greek passion for mathematics. In every branch of Hellenic thought we encounter a belief in measurable proportion that, in the last analysis, amounts to a mystical religion, and as early as Pythagoras it had been given the visible form of geometry. All art is founded on faith, and inevitably the Greek faith in harmonious numbers found expression in their

painting and sculpture, but precisely how we do not know. The so-called canon of Polykleitos is not recorded, and the rules of proportion that have come down to us through Pliny and other ancient writers are of the most elementary kind. Probably the Greek sculptors were familiar with a system as subtle and elaborate as that of their architects, but we have scarcely any indication as to what it was. There is, however, one short and obscure statement in Vitruvius that, whatever it meant

in antiquity, had a decisive influence on the Renaissance. At the beginning of the third book, in which he sets out to give the rules for sacred edifices, he suddenly announced that these buildings should have the proportions of a man. He gives some indication of correct human proportions and then throws in a statement that man's body is a model of proportion because with arms or legs extended it fits into those "perfect" geometrical forms, the square and the circle. It is impossible to exaggerate what this simple-looking proposition meant to the men of the Renaissance. To them it was far more than a convenient rule: it was the foundation of a whole philosophy. Taken together with the musical scale of Pythagoras, it seemed to offer exactly that link between sensation and order, between an organic and a geometric basis of beauty, which was (and perhaps remains) the philosopher's stone of aesthetics. Hence the many diagrams of figures standing in squares or circles that illustrate the treatises on architecture or aesthetics from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. . . .

Francis Bacon, as we all know, said, "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion. A man cannot tell whether Apelles or Albert Dürer were the more trifler; where of the one would make a personage by geometrical proportions: the other by taking the best part out of divers faces to make one excellent." This very intelligent observation is unfair to Dürer; and suggests that Bacon, like the rest of us, had not read his book on human proportions, only looked at the plates. For, after 1597, Dürer abandoned the idea of imposing a geometrical scheme on the body, and set about deducing ideal measurements from nature, with a result, as may be imagined, somewhat different from his analyses of the antique; and in his introduction he forcefully denies the claim that he is providing a standard of absolute perfection. "There lives no man upon earth," he says, "who can give a final judgment upon what the most beautiful shape of a man may be; God only knows that . . . 'Good' and 'better' in respect of beauty are not easy to discern, for it would be quite possible to make two different figures, neither conforming with the other; one stouter, the other thinner, and yet we might scarce be able to judge which of the two excelled in beauty."

So the most indefatigable and masterly constructor of ideal proportions abandoned them halfway through his career; and his work, from the *Nemesis* onward, is a proof that the idea of the nude does not depend on analyzable proportions alone. And yet when we look at the splendidly schematized bodies of Greek sculpture, we cannot resist the conviction that some system did exist. Almost every artist or writer on art who has thought seriously about the nude has concluded that it must have some basis of construction that can be stated in terms of measurement: and I myself, when trying to explain that a photograph did not satisfy me, said that I missed the sense of simple units clearly related to one another. Although the artist cannot construct a beautiful nude by mathematical rules, any more than the musician can compose a beautiful fugue, he cannot ignore them. They must be lodged somewhere at the back of his mind or in the movements of his fingers. Ultimately he is as dependent on them as an architect.

Art Versus Pornography

In 1972, sixteen years after he had written his book on the nude, Sir Kenneth Clark was called to speak before a British government investigative panel on pornography to differentiate as best he could the art of the nude from pornography. As we see from this excerpt, Clark bases his defense of nude art on the modern esthetic distinction between fine art as essentially nonutilitarian from other utilitarian uses of pictures. Even if we agree with Clark, we might still favor the ban on pornography. That is, we might agree with Clark that nude art is not pornography and should therefore not be censored, but still insist that because pornography is socially dangerous it should be banned or at least severely restricted. Those who support pornography, not as art but as pornography, do so in the name of free speech and freedom of the press. Nonetheless, Clark's argument is important since, assuming we decided to ban or restrict pornography, we would need to know exactly what pornography is, and especially how it differs from other superficially similar forms of fine art.

To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation, and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is my objection to painting with a communist programme, and it would also apply to pornography. In a picture like Correggio's *Danäe* the sexual feelings have been transformed, and although we undoubtedly enjoy it all the more because of its sensuality, we are still in the realm of contemplation. The pornographic wall-paintings in Pompeii are documentaries and have nothing to do with art. There are one or two doubtful cases—a small picture of copulation by Géricault and a Rodin bronze of the same subject. Although each of these is a true work of art, I personally feel that the subject comes between me and complete aesthetic enjoyment. It is like too strong a flavor added to a dish. There remains the extraordinary example of Rembrandt's etching of a couple on a bed, where I do not find the subject at all disturbing because it is seen entirely in human terms and is not intended to promote action. But it is, I believe, unique, and only Rembrandt could have done it.

Source: *Pornography: The Longford Report*. London: Coronet, 1972, pp. 99–100.

Dipendenza: that is the word used by Michelangelo, supreme as a draftsman of the nude and as an architect, to express his sense of the relationship between these two forms of order. And in the pages that follow I often make use of architectural analogies. Like a building, the nude represents a balance between an ideal scheme and functional necessities. The figure artist cannot forget the components of the human body, any more than the architect can fail to support his roof or forget his doors and windows. But the variations of shape and disposition are surprisingly wide. . . .

So our surmise that the discovery of the nude as a form of art is connected with idealism and faith in measurable proportions seems to be true, but it is only half the truth. What other peculiarities of the Greek mind are involved? One obvious answer is their belief that the body was something to be proud of, and should be kept in perfect trim.

We need not suppose that many Greeks looked like the *Hermes* of Praxiteles, but we can be sure that in fifth-century Attica a majority of the young men had the nimble, well-balanced bodies depicted on the early red-figured vases.

The Greeks attached great importance to their nakedness. Thucydides, in recording the stages by which they distinguished themselves from the barbarians, gives

prominence to the date at which it became the rule in the Olympic games, and we know from vase paintings that the competitors at the Panathenaic festival had been naked ever since the early sixth century. Although the presence or absence of a loin-cloth does not greatly affect questions of form, and in this study I shall include figures that are lightly draped, psychologically the Greek cult of nakedness is of great importance. It implies the conquest of an inhibition that oppresses all but the most backward people; it is like a denial of original sin. This is not, as is sometimes supposed, simply a part of paganism: for the Romans were shocked by the nakedness of Greek athletes, and Ennius attacked it as a sign of decadence. Needless to say, he was wide of the mark, for even the most determined nudists of all were the Spartans, who scandalized even the Athenians by allowing women to compete, lightly clad, in their games. He and subsequent moralists considered the matter in purely physical terms; but, in fact, Greek confidence in the body can be understood only in relation to their philosophy. It expresses above all their sense of human wholeness. Nothing that related to the whole man could be isolated or evaded; and this serious awareness of how much was implied in physical beauty saved them from the two evils of sensuality and aestheticism.

At the same party where Kritobalos brags about his beauty Xenophon describes the youth Autolykos, victor of the Pankration, in whose honor the feast was given. "Noting the scene," he says, "the first idea to strike the mind is that beauty has about it something regal; and the more so if it chance to be combined (as now in the person of Autolykos) with modesty and self-respect. Even as when a splendid object

blazes forth at night, the eyes of men are riveted, so now the beauty of Autolykos drew on him the gaze of all; nor was there one of those on-lookers but was stirred to his soul's depth by him who sat there. Some fell into unwonted silence, while the gestures of the rest were equally significant."

This feeling, that the spirit and body are one, which is the most familiar of all Greek characteristics, manifests itself in their gift of giving to abstract ideas a sensuous, tangible, and, for the most part, human form. Their logic is conducted in the form of dialogues between real men. Their gods take visible shape, and on their appearance are usually mistaken for half-familiar human beings—a maid-servant, a shepherd, or a distant cousin. Woods, rivers, even echoes are shown in painting as bodily presences, solid as the living protagonists, and often more prominent. Here we reach what I take to be the central point of our subject: "Greek statues," said Blake, in his *Descriptive Catalogue,* "are all of them representations of spiritual existences, of gods immortal, to the mortal, perishing organ of sight; and yet they are embodied and organized in solid marble." The bodies were there, the belief in the gods was there, the love of rational proportion was there. It was the unifying grasp of the Greek imagination that brought them together. And the nude gains its enduring value from the fact that it reconciles several contrary states. It takes the most sensual and immediately interesting object, the human body, and puts it out of reach of time and desire; it takes the most purely rational concept of which mankind is capable, mathematical order, and makes it a delight to the senses; and it takes the vague fears of the unknown and sweetens them by showing that the gods are like men and may be worshipped for their life-giving beauty rather than their death-dealing powers.

To recognize how completely the value of these spiritual existences depends on their nudity, we have only to think of them as they appear, fully clothed, in the Middle Ages or early Renaissance. They have lost all their meaning. . . . The academic nudes of the nineteenth century are lifeless because they no longer embodied real human needs and experiences. They were among the hundreds of devalued symbols that encumbered the art and architecture of the utilitarian century.

The nude had flourished most exuberantly during the first hundred years of the classical Renaissance, when the new appetite for antique imagery overlapped the medieval habits of symbolism and personification. It seems then that there was no concept, however sublime, that could not be expressed by the naked body, and no object of use, however trivial, that would not be the better for having been given human shape. . . .

Such an insatiable appetite for the nude is unlikely to recur. It arose from a fusion of beliefs, traditions, and impulses very remote from our age of essence and specialization. Yet even in the new self-governing kingdom of the aesthetic sensation the nude is enthroned. The intensive application of great artists has made it into a sort of pattern for all formal constructions, and it is still a means

of affirming the belief in ultimate perfection. "For soule is forme; and doth the bodie make," wrote Spenser in his *Hymne in Honour of Beautie,* echoing the words of the Florentine Neoplatonists, and although in life the evidence for the doctrine is inconclusive, it is perfectly applicable to art. The nude remains the most complete example of the transmutation of matter into form.

Nor are we likely once more to cut ourselves off from the body, as in the ascetic experiment of medieval Christianity. We may no longer worship it, but we have come to terms with it. We are reconciled to the fact that it is our lifelong companion, and since art is concerned with sensory images the scale and rhythm of the body is not easily ignored. Our continuous effort, made in defiance of the pull of gravity, to keep ourselves balanced upright on our legs affects every judgment on design, even our conception of which angle shall be called "right." The rhythm of our breathing and the beat of our hearts are part of the experience by which we measure a work of art. The relation of head to body determines the standard by which we assess all other proportions in nature. The disposition of areas in the torso is related to our most vivid experiences, so that, abstract shapes, the square and the circle, seem to us male and female; and the old endeavor of magical mathematics to square the circle is like the symbol of physical union. The starfish diagrams of Renaissance theorists may be ridiculous, but the Vitruvian principle rules our spirits, and it is no accident that the formalized body of the "perfect man" became the supreme symbol of European belief. Before the *Crucifixion* of Michelangelo we remember that the nude is, after all, the most serious of all subjects in art; and that it was not an advocate of paganism who wrote, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth."

Questions for Discussion

1. Although he plays it down, what role does Clark give eroticism in "high art" nude painting?
2. Why does Clark prefer Italian to German nude painting?
3. According to Clark, what does the female nude represent in European art?
4. What, according to Clark, is the difference between "the nude" and "the naked"?
5. How would you use the distinctions Clark makes to counteract charges that an exhibition featuring nudes is pornographic?

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Esthetics and Ideology

In different ways Clark and Blocker have tried to defend the modernist theory of the elevated stature of "high" art, detached from the hurly-burly and often emotionally overheated practical reality of everyday life, through the distancing effect of the "esthetic attitude" in "esthetic experience." According to this tradition, art, or at least "high" art, when correctly, that is, "esthetically," enjoyed, does not and cannot lead to overt, violent, racist, or sexist behavior. Of course, there are pornographic movies, politically propagandistic paintings and plays, erotically stimulating pictures, but these are not works of "fine art"—they are not examples of "high" art. In the reading which follows, the contemporary literary theorist, Jennifer Jeffers, challenges this modernist tradition and introduces a postmodern reading, or interpretation of the role of the female nude in Western culture.

Jeffers argues that from the beginning of the modernist tradition, even in the "high art" tradition of European painting which Clark discusses, women are portrayed as men like to see them, or more accurately, stare, gape, or "gaze" at them. From Rubens to the latest *Sports Illustrated* annual swimsuit edition, the female nude (or near nude) is portrayed as an object of male consumption—whether as coy, fertile, titillating, or more overtly as a "sex kitten," naughtily eager to give men sexual pleasure. Because these images are so pervasive in our culture, Jeffers argues, this is not only how *men* like women to be and look, but how many *women* think they ought to look and act. From endless visual advertisements portraying flawless, healthy, unusually beautiful young women smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, or soft drinks, we all grow up in this society to think this is how women should look and act. So pervasive is this standardized model of female beauty and social role that we are seldom even aware of it. Whether as men or women, we unconsciously and completely accept the image.

In an interesting and ironic way, some contemporary female artists attempt to make us more aware of this socially constructed image by parodying, lampooning, and making fun of this male image of women. Of course, very few real women can fit this idealized model, but this just provides an opportunity for people to make money advertising the latest diet, exercise equipment, and even surgical corrections, adding or subtracting where appropriate—not just to be physically fit or healthy, but to look the way men expect women to look. What is perhaps most troubling and controversial in Jeffers' discussion is the way in which she traces this social, predominantly male, construction of the image of the female body to the modern Renaissance "high art" tradition which Kenneth Clark portrays as an idealistic quest for perfection, particularly as this "high art" tradition

evolves in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries into our middleclass mass media culture.

Blocker called attention to the vicious cycle of widespread sexist attitudes toward women leading to the artistic use of the female nude as an artistic *symbol* of all that is nurturing, fertile, weak, passive, and so on, which in turn further perpetuates such gender stereotypes, which, coming now full circle, encourages their further use as artistic symbols, and so on and on and on. The problem remains how to break this vicious cycle—whether through artistic lampooning of the stereotype, gender education, the steady erosion of the stereotype through more appropriate female role models, or through censorship of sexist, erotic, and pornographic art.

Jennifer Jeffers: The Politics of Representation

The Role of the Gaze in Pornography

The Politics of Representation

The primary purpose of this article is to chart the coordinates of a dominant ideological perspective on the map of Western culture and society. The dominant ideological perspective I shall call, borrowing from contemporary French philosophy, the gaze. The gaze is motivated by a desire to control and attain the object of its desire. Practically speaking, the gaze is the code, a chain of signifiers or an image or group of images, that perceives, mediates and manages the world from a certain vantage point. I am interested in the code of representation in Western painting and the modern photographic image. In particular, I explore the assumptions and meanings overt and covert in the way Western culture has read the female nude in art and/or the female body according to a code of representation. As the French linguist de Saussure states, "every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on collective behavior or—what amounts to the same thing—convention." From art to media and advertisements to pornographic images of women, the culturally constructed gaze determines how we "see" these images through our inherited "convention"—which can be and often is for the female in our society quite different from actual experience. The gaze, therefore, is a powerful instrument in its ability to discount experience in favor of an accepted ideology. Indeed, the gaze is more than a system or manner of viewing representations of people; the gaze is an entire ideology that governs our behavior: attitude, thinking and, from a larger societal view, our economy and institutions.

I. The Nude, the Naked and the Gaze

In *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Form,* Kenneth Clark is careful to separate the cultured artistic, painterly female nude from the non-cultured, potentially obscene naked woman represented in painting. In his study, Clark privileges the nudes by Rubens and Raphael, for instance, because they represent an "unself-conscious piety as the sheaves

of corn and piled-up pumpkins that decorate a village church at harvest festival." In
terms of iconic meaning the female form embodies nature as goodness, represents
bounty and fecundity and in her posture a passive availability that assures the male
gaze access to, ability to "penetrate," her "secrets." While Rubens' *Three Graces* is
prized by Clark, Dürer's *Women's Bath* provokes his wrath as the only good points
of Dürer's vision are those taken from past masters: "Gothic curiosity and horror. . . .
The figure on the left is almost Michelangelesque, the woman combing her hair in the
center is taken from a Venus Andyomene. . . . The fat monster on the right confirms
his feeling of the obscenity of the whole situation and must have been observed from
nature. . . ." Hence, for Clark, there is a difference between the female nude in art and
the naked woman drawn from nature. Aesthetically speaking, we may even agree with
Clark that the Rubens is more "pleasant" to behold than the Dürer—but in that agree-
ment we would only be displaying the acculturated attitude that I wish to expose in
this article.

In the history of Western art the female nude has a privileged position as an
icon for patriarchal society. The female represented by the male artist is not only
beauty idealized, she is also beauty defined, controlled, contained and possessed. An
object of the male perspective, both painter and viewer, the female nude becomes a
constructed figure produced and consumed by a genderized gaze. This gaze is not
strictly confined to art but becomes an entire mode of perception for our culture; the
male gaze, historically speaking, is that which perceives. We have a cultural myth
which states that this perception is constituted by the rational or the logical, is accul-
turated and has the ability to act upon the world in a meaningful manner. Whereas
the female perspective reflects, quite literally as a mirror reflects, the male gaze; the
female is constituted by irrationality or that which is not governed by logic, nature
and is passive in that the world acts upon it and is given its very existence as object
to be perceived. The myth of the West states that "Woman" is constituted by the ir-
rational, uncontrolled and unkempt forces, including sexuality, that keep "Man" from
establishing a rational and coherent hold on the world. As Clark emphasizes, the
female nude is to be contrasted from a naked woman. If the female, by nature, em-
bodies that which is uncontrollable and potentially transgressive, then art, the very
embodiment of Western culture, will "clean her up," will re-present the female in art
so that all that is transgressive is ordered, rational and beautiful.

The boundary between the female nude in so-called high art and the naked
woman in, perhaps, a less elevated art, is essential to understanding what constitutes
art, even erotic art, and what comprises the obscene. In contemplative or high art
the sexuality is latent. According to Clark, with overt sexuality sublimated, the (male)
artist uses that rechanneled energy for a "higher" purpose—to create an image or
icon to represent, to stand in for, that original impulse of sexuality for the purpose
of aesthetic contemplation. The success of the artist's sublimation is measured in the
viewer's reaction to the painting. If the viewer becomes sexually aroused by Rubens'
Three Graces, then Rubens did not successfully sublimate his feeling and did not
successfully produce a painting worthy of contemplation. In general, according to
Clark, should the viewer become aroused by the content of the painting (nymphs
bathing, for example) then that painting has crossed the boundary from high art to
"low" art. This boundary, of course, is a construction produced by the male gaze.

What is ironic is that the boundary exists as a ruse for titillation; art historians, curators and artists themselves derive pleasure from playing on, around and just across the boundary of the obscene, a boundary that is endlessly reconstituted.

Art depends on the boundary between art and obscenity; likewise, pornography depends on maintaining the same distinction. Those interested in art are usually put off by obscenity, whereas those looking for pornography are put off by art. This basic differentiation is illustrated by an apt recounting of a story from a French author by the early twentieth-century Freudian, Hanns Sachs:

> He tells that one evening strolling along the streets of Paris he noticed a row of slot machines which for a small coin showed pictures of women in full or partial undress. He observed the leering interest with which men of all kind and description, well dressed and shabby, boys and old men, enjoyed the peep show. He remarked that they all avoided one of these machines, and wondering what uninteresting pictures it might show, he put his penny in the slot. To his great astonishment the generally shunned picture turned out to be the Venus of Medici. Now he begins to ponder: Why does nobody get excited about her? She is decidedly feminine and not less naked than the others which hold such strong fascination for everybody. Finally he finds a satisfactory answer: They fight shy of her because she is beautiful.

The Venus of Medici is "beautiful" because she has been placed into a high art context, she is presented as an autonomous body and she is an ideal representation of woman consisting of paint pigment on a flat surface. The women in the pictures that were of interest to the Parisian men are representations of "real" women captured, most likely, in poses that suggest the photographer's intrusion into their intimate moments. The photographs crossover the boundary from the nudity of the Venus of Medici to the nakedness of woman. These photographs constituted, it would seem, turn of the century pornography. The contemporary definition of pornography is interesting because it, too, keeps art and life separate: "obscene writings, drawings, photographs, or the like, especially those having little or no artistic merit" (*Random House Dictionary, Unabridged*). The etymology of the word pornography goes back to Greece: "pórne" meant harlot and "-graphos" as a suffix was a combining form meaning drawn or written. In ancient Greece, females were kept as sexual slaves, and so, the drawing, etching and writing about these women is the etymological origin of the word: representations of harlots or sex slaves. Little has changed in three millennia. While we may be able to grasp the fundamental distinction between that which constitutes nudity in high art and comprises nakedness in "low" art, the problematic area—the boundary—is defining that which constitutes the obscene. The dictionary offers three different definitions: one, "offensive to morality or decency; indecent; depraved;" two, "causing uncontrolled sexual desire;" three, "abominable; disgusting; repulsive." To be sure, the raging issues in the contemporary debate concerning pornography center around the naming of the indecent, policing sexual desire and drawing the line between sex and violence. These issues I will discuss in section three, **Pornography and the Invisible**.

Returning to the female nude in art, the male gaze goes through a transition in the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. While there are many social, political and economic factors that render this change, I would like to point out

Venus of Medici. Courtesy of The Bettman Archive/Corbis Images.

two in direct reference to our discussion concerning the female nude and the gaze. First, at the turn of the twentieth century artists began painting the female nude from fetishized perspectives; male artists began focusing on the breasts, buttocks, barely concealed genitals, torso, nape of the neck, the body draped as if dead, headless or in compromising positions. Art critic Carol Duncan in *The Aesthetics of Power* finds the new middle-class male artists' depictions of women disturbing: "What distinguishes these pictures and others in this period from most previous nudes is the compulsion with which women are reduced to objects of pure flesh, and the lengths to which the artist goes in denying their humanity." An example of the draping female nude which Duncan finds especially "brutal" is *Reclining Nude* by Kees Van Dongen. In the Dongen is the disturbing, if not perverse, attitude of the new reigning "high" art: "The erotic imaginations of modern male artists . . . re-enact in hundreds of particular variations a remarkably limited set of fantasies . . . the male confronts the female nude as an adversary whose independent existence as a physical or spiritual being must be assimilated to male needs, converted to abstractions, enfeebled or destroyed." The results were that the early Moderns painted their female nudes from incommodious, contorted, and fetishized perspectives which resulted in female bodies represented in pieces and fragments. What is significant concerning the new "high" art representation of the female nude at the turn of the century and in relation to pornography is that this new attitude coincides with the mass produced photographic image. The concurrence produces the second alteration in the perception and rendering of the female form. What occurs is that the respectable, high art images of the female nude are transferred to the photographer's studio where this "limited set of fantasies" is played out in front of the camera lens. From an economic point of view, photographic images are relatively inexpensive, can be mass produced and, therefore, widely available: witness the Parisian men from Sachs story.

Pornography was fully realized with the advent of moving pictures; now the male gaze had less imaginative work to do in order to satisfy its fantasy; unfortunately for women, "real life" females were required to "stage" the male gaze fantasy.

II. Desire and the Gaze

What it means to be an object of a male gaze must be understood in the larger context of our contemporary culture and society because the gaze permeates all aspects of our late Capitalist lives. First of all, when we look at something that we like, or at something that we wish to have, we look at the object with desire. Desire initially creates the gaze. Capitalism seizes our desire and translates it into a means of exchange and commodity. Through this commodification of desire, Capitalism gains control, "deterritorializes" desire by subverting traditional codes and then "reterritorializes" desire by directing our desire toward the equivalent standard of exchange and commodity. Contemporary philosophers and psychoanalysts have pointed to the Freudian construction of the Oedipal triangle (mommy, daddy, me) as a primary means of channeling desire in order to control the consumer masses in the Capitalist society; all desire is concentrated, spent and bound in the

configuration of the nuclear family. The problem with the Oedipal triangle and psychoanalysis is that they preserve and sustain the Platonic notion of desire as lack. In the *Symposium* Socrates asks Agathon: "Then isn't it probable or isn't it certain that everything longs for what it lacks, and that nothing longs for what it doesn't lack?" Agathon and the entire Western tradition of philosophers and psychoanalysts agree with Socrates. It is the nineteenth century philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, who calls into question the Platonic notion of desire as a negative attribute. Borrowing from Nietzsche, contemporary philosophers have constructed desire along the lines of production or activity and not through the pursuit of an object or through the lack of an object. The epistemological, moral and political stakes are quite high in this game of desire, as Capitalist society, playing on desire as lack, has thoroughly circumscribed our lives and infiltrated our desires, not only at the level of commodity and exchange, but also at the level of our bodies, our ideas, our actions, our knowledge, science and technology and, of course, our fantasies. We are manipulated, we recognize that fact, and yet we want more.

In late twentieth-century culture, we recognize that the gaze is construction for our manipulation, yet we "buy into" that construction through our support of the media, commodification and our manifest desire for what Capitalists sell us. What is interesting, if not ironic, about the construction of the gaze in the past and especially in contemporary times is that the object of the gaze, or those who are being manipulated by the image that sells the object, refuse to, or simply cannot, understand themselves as manipulated. In other words, women try to imitate the images that the gaze constructs in the media, advertisements and other forms of commodification; in this way, women support and affirm their own manipulation. Men, too, are manipulated by the culture that affirms a certain way of looking and a certain ideology; though few would question its origin or its practice.

Indeed, what emerges from this manipulation is an ideology that constitutes the female through *representation* based on a constructed male ideology which, if

Asherah, Tree Root Goddess by David Hostetler.

anything, consciously departs from the experience of being female. The most obvious result of this construction is the domination, the sheer power, of one half of the population to manage and moderate the other half of the population through a controlling iconic image. Because the ordered image is attractive to men, and because women believe in the ideal that is projected for them, women strive to attain in reality this constructed image. Our culture of the 1990s sustains and perpetuates this ideology, despite the feminist movement and the fact that increasing numbers of women hold positions of power in the market place. These aspects do not change the fact that women are haunted by an *image* of an ideal; no one in late-Capitalist society is immune to the constant barrage of television, magazine and film images that assail us. The struggle to achieve an image is manifest in our obsession to alter our bodies evidenced, especially for young women, in eating disorders, the preoccupation with exercise, not for health reasons but appearance alteration, and cosmetic surgery. Everyday we, both male and female, are bombarded by ubiquitous advertisements which produce a feeling of inadequacy in terms of our bodies, our lifestyle, our bank accounts and our own self-image. No one in our society is immune to the desire to look/be like someone else or change enough of who/what we are to feel "okay." Interestingly, those ideals produced by a traditional high art male gaze have infiltrated late Capitalism's metaphors to sell you a new image and/or a new body: exercise equipment promises "The Image You Want," diet supplements promise "a sculptured physique," and liposuction hands you the chisel with "Facial & Body sculpturing." Capitalism creates the ideal, the desire, then it *sells* you the means to attain it. As long as Capitalism can generate a feeling of lack in consumers,

perpetuating a desire for the "object" that they lack, the system will continue to manipulate, probably with increased efficiency, society.

A clue to this seemingly mysterious gaze of manipulation is found in the way that our culture and society is structured. The contemporary philosopher, Michel Foucault, theorizes that a "binary division," emerges as an institution gains authority in a society: "Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)" (*Discipline and Punish*). Another contemporary philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, comments on this division and extends Foucault's thought, "the great dualities" stem from the binary nature of our society and create unbridgeable differences "between different classes, or the governing and the governed, or the public and the private" (*Foucault*). With the gaze this binary is evident: the one who sees and the one who is seen. Yet, what is not evident in this binary configuration is that which is *not* seen. In terms of the representation of nude and naked women what is seen are bodies, what is not seen is the condition or set of conditions that puts the female into the place of object. The role of the gaze, one who sees and one who is seen, is to protect the ideology that renders the female invisible as a person and visible as an object.

III. Pornography and the Invisible

The gaze that constructs images of women in art is the same gaze that constructs images of women in pornography. From seemingly innocuous representations of women prized by Kenneth Clark, to the early Moderns' aggressive perversion of the female body, to late twentieth-century abstract paintings of women such as De Kooning's *Woman I,* the female body is a represented object of the male gaze. Art of the early Moderns is often referred to as "erotic art" and the work of the late twentieth-century painters, like that of De Kooning's, slips out of the category of representation into the category of "abstraction." Yet, what is clear is that the female form is being presented in new, literally form-altering ways; where the female form was once idealized now the female form is truncated, contorted, fetishized and "abstracted" into inhuman or subhuman shapes. The desire that constructs the gaze of the fragmented woman, or the contorted orgasmic or dying woman, desires submission on the part of the object—on the part of the female. The code of submission makes visible the body or body part in a manner that discounts the actual person in the representation: the body is for sale, anyone with an attractive body part will do. Representing the fragmented female body has become the forte of Capitalism, the product is sold on the basis of the expectation of the gaze. The consumer knows the game: if I buy this product I will gain the object I lack, which is not the object for sale, but the body that is selling the product. A recent advertisement for moisture cream presents in a dramatic black and white photograph of a fragmented woman: one breast fading into the shadow, one hand, the nape of the neck and lips.

As we discovered in section one, the boundary between art and pornography is demarcated by the ambiguous, in terms of application, definition of the obscene. Yet, the definitions of obscenity are not ambiguous: "depraved," that which "causes uncontrolled sexual desire," and "abominable, disgusting, repulsive." Perhaps

pornographers would say that it is the second definition of the obscene to which their products cater: "uncontrolled sexual desire." Indeed, "good" pornography on the part of the gaze would be that which does not lead the person to "contemplation," as in art, but to excitation at both a mental and physical level. But the obscene in pornography, especially since the 1960s, is no longer confined to erotic titillation geared to the sexually naive but basically "nice guy." This depiction of the "nice guy" who reads and views pornography is also a myth; the "nice guy" who reads *Playboy* or *Penthouse* is being manipulated by Capitalist "pornocrats," though the "nice guy" will be the last to admit it. Pornography, the writing or representation of "harlots," is a seven billion dollar a year industry in the United States. Its economic power and political sanctification are legion. This power has opened new doors on to the gaze's "desire"; now for one's pleasure there is: sadism, torture, rape, gang rape, child molestation and so-called "snuff" films where women experience most of the above then are actually killed—all for the gaze's viewing pleasure.

Those who are invisible are the women (and now children) whose bodies and body parts are used for the staging of the gaze's pleasure. While we may be quick to point out that the pornography that would qualify as "depraved" and "abominable, disgusting and repulsive" is "hardcore" and relatively few partake of it, the gaze that constructs hardcore porn constructs also the so-called "soft" porn, and, in turn, the ideology and political power that sustains this gaze maintains the objectification of women at all levels of society. The success of the mainstream pornographic magazine industry is built upon the respectable, even acculturated, male gaze "contemplating" the (fragmented) female form; suddenly Hugh Heffner and Kenneth Clark seem to be "talking" the same language. From *Making Violence Sexy* Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon explain *Playboy's* marketing strategy:

> The format of *Playboy* was developed to protect the magazine from prosecution under obscenity law. Writing from recognized writers was published to meet a standard of worth that would get the magazine First Amendment protection. The First Amendment was then used by *Playboy* to protect its sexual exploitation of women. *Playboy* sells women.
>
> The use of women as objects in *Playboy* is part of how *Playboy* helps to create second-class status for women. Women in *Playboy* are dehumanized by being used as sexual objects and commodities, their bodies fetishized and sold. The term "bunny" is used to characterize the woman as less than human—little animals that want sex all the time, animals that are kept in hutches.
>
> The women in *Playboy* are presented in postures of submission and sexual servility. Constant access to the throat, the anus, and the vagina is the purpose of the ways in which the women are posed. . . .
>
> Underlying all of *Playboy's* pictorials is the basic theme of all pornography: that all women are whores by nature, born wanting to be sexually accessible to all men at all times. *Playboy* particularly centers on sexual display as what women naturally do to demonstrate this nature.

The male gaze constructs an ideal sexual partner in terms of physical form, desire, submission and, perhaps most uncannily, in terms of the female always already "knowing" what it is the male desires sexually. This latter aspect is uncanny because it seems dubious that, biologically speaking, being female a woman will "intuitively

know" that which is erotically and sexually pleasing for a male body. The woman who knows a man's erotic desire and who is always available is the ideal woman in every man's fantasy. It is exactly this mythical creation of the ideal woman that dominates pornography; the male gaze constructs the "sex kitten" image for the consumption of an entire culture. The seemingly sophisticated magazine *Playboy,* for example, has succeeded in projecting this male fantasy for generations, presenting a false "norm" for women, all women, to live up to as a test of femininity—which has absolutely nothing to do with being female.

Women in magazines, in porn films and in shaving cream television commercials are visible from the male gaze perspective. Despite the extraordinary number of images of women in art, media and communication, women are invisible as subjective equal members in society and will continue to be mere objects as long as the ideology that sustains the male gaze controls our desire. Yet, we resist seeing ourselves, both female and male, as somehow manipulated by representations and a constructed gaze. Women, no less than men, resent the coming to terms with the underlying social constructs that this ideology divulges about the nature of our desire:

> Now I think that all of the incredibly upset and passionate and disturbed and angry responses to pornography when feminists address the issues have to do with the fact that we are finally getting down to the raw nerves, which is: what this sexual system is; how male sexuality does in fact colonize us, set our limits, how in fact we are defined by this male sexuality. And we don't like it. We resent it and very often the way we express that resentment is by expressing resentment towards those who make us aware of it. But it also raises terrifying questions—about the nature of our own sexuality, about the ways in which we are complicit in our own degradation. None of this is pleasant. All of it is terrible, and yet without facing this, what are we to do? We have to face it.
>
> "Interview with Andrea Dworkin"
> *Feminist Review*, No. 11, 1982

From the high art ideal of the female nude to the fetishized female body in late twentieth-century Capitalism, the gaze has and continues to "colonize" our sexuality, limit our choices and make invisible the conditions that perpetuate and sustain the gaze's power. The politics of representation constructs an ideology that governs, not only the way we see, but also what we see and even if we see certain aspects and people that the gaze wishes to render invisible.

Questions For Discussion

1. What does Jeffers mean by "the gaze"? Do you agree with her analysis? Why or why not?

2. Contrary to Clark, Jeffers argues that the boundary separating the female nude of high art and the obscene picture of a naked woman is ironically a ruse for titillation. What are Jeffers' reasons for holding this position? How sound do you find this argument?

3. What is the difference, according to Jeffers, between the "high art" nudes of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and those of an earlier period? How does this affect the "high art"–"low art" boundary?

4. In what sense, if any, are women said to be "invisible"? Do you agree with this claim? Why or why not?

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ESTHETICS

In other sections of this book the point has been made that philosophy is both timeless yet constantly changing. To resolve this apparent contradiction with reference to esthetics we can say that philosophers have always raised questions about beauty and artistic taste. However, in the modern period (beginning in the early-eighteenth century, first in England and then in Germany), esthetics came to be designated as a separate discipline within philosophy. Today we are seeing another major change within the practice and thinking about art. These changes challenge traditional, modernist assumptions and call for new approaches, though it is too early to say precisely what direction these new movements will take.

Traditional esthetics, which arose in the eighteenth century to answer questions about the nature of esthetic experience, is part of a larger social and cultural phenomenon known as modernism. This is now widely perceived as maybe coming to an end, or at least entering a period of major readjustment under the banner of *postmodernism*. If traditional esthetics is a part of modernism, what sort of esthetics, if any, goes along with postmodernism?

Art, as well as theories of art, is being affected by postmodernism. Traditional views are challenged by the greatly increased variety of art forms and movements and by the simultaneous existence of theories and attitudes that would previously have been thought incompatible. Additional pressures come from various kinds of protests and alternative voices wanting to redefine our concepts of art and artists. Postmodernism, however, is not a single theory but a loose collection of some of these different views and movements. First, however, we need to see how esthetics is related to modernism in order to understand the postmodern challenges. The epistemological claims of postmodernism were reviewed in the closing section of Part 4, "How Do We Know? (Epistemology)" and a re-reading of that discussion might prove helpful in understanding how this new mode of thinking affects esthetics.

Modernism in Art

Modernism is a label that covers many tendencies and takes different forms when applied to the various arts. Broadly speaking, however, we can say that modernism contains a set of assumptions about art that achieved dominance roughly between 1870 and 1970. One of the most important of these is that modernism assumes an evolving art tradition in which each generation of artists builds on and improves on the work of its predecessors. This implies that art history moves in a single clearly defined direction. The significance of individual works and artists is very much tied up with their places in art history. Picasso, for example, was an important artist because he pointed the way toward cubism and represents an historical advance. Painted earlier, his works would have been meaningless; painted later, they would have been trivial. Modernist critics and theorists tried to anticipate the direction of the artistic tradition and to identify the point that current work has reached.

Modernism also assumes that art has an important role to play in the evolution of society generally. Social change consists of development in material culture and also alterations in social norms and values. The role of art, according to modernist thinking, is to articulate the evolution of social norms. Wassily Kandinsky (*From the Spiritual in Art*) expressed this idea clearly in his famous image of the triangle. Before social norms and values can be stated or recognized by the majority they must be intuitively explored by one or two gifted artists. In Kandinsky's image of the triangle the artist is first alone at the apex of the triangle developing a personal vision of the changing society. If successful the artist's work is gradually accepted, first by artists and critics and then by others in the art world. This creates a wider base of the triangle. If the art continues to be successful it is accepted by a wider and wider audience until it comes to influence virtually the whole of society. By that time some other artist is already developing the personal vision that will lead to new art forms and new social understanding.

A corollary of this is that there is a group of widely acclaimed art works, or masterpieces, that have been most influential in shaping our social norms and that have determined the direction of art history. Together they form a canon that is familiar to all educated modernists. It is largely by studying

this canon that the new generation of artists, as well as the generally educated public, develop their sense of the direction of history and the needs of the times.

Modernism also assumes that interpretations of art works can be objective and that the art work itself remains the same regardless of who is looking at it. Even if interpretations of the work vary with different viewers the work itself does not. The notion of objectivity of interpretations assumes that we can judge the adequacy of different interpretations by comparing them with the work itself.

Postmodernism

None of these assumptions about art is immune from the attack of postmodernism. Postmodernism denies that we can make sense of art history by attributing a direction to it. It assumes instead that there are many kinds and traditions of art, each existing in its own cultural context. Each has its own history to tell, so the very idea that there is one art history is misleading. Moreover, these many kinds of art can exist side by side in the same society, especially in a society as complex as ours. The question of which is more advanced, avant-garde, or relevant to the future is not one that makes much sense because there is no reason to prefer one art history over another. This means that distinctions of value between kinds of art also make little sense. In particular the distinction between high or mainstream art and folk art is to be distrusted. There is no good reason to think that contemporary art in New York is any better than folk art in the Appalachian mountains. Comparisons between art traditions are equally meaningless. It is nonsense to ask which of the many art histories are the truest. They do not compete with or deny each other; they coexist. Postmodernism substitutes simultaneity for direction in art history.

How, then, can we account for the success that the dominant view of our art history and art tradition has had? Postmodernism interprets that success politically. Successful interpretations of art history are not truer than others; they are simply more persuasive. They are the ones that have been accepted by a particular group at a particular time. Of course, one can ask why one view of art history is accepted and another is not. The postmodern answer is not that it is truer or closer to the facts but that it satisfies the interests of the dominant group. This account of art history supports the beliefs and upholds the social values of the dominant social group. This dominance is usually achieved at the expense of other social groups. Our standard Eurocentric art history supports the group that has been in power so long—wealthy, white males—and suppresses the interests of other, marginalized, groups.

The Political Implications of Art

One need not accept the postmodern claims to see the political impact of art. Artistic expression has been rigorously suppressed by various tyrannies in recent history, and only certain forms of art were allowed as expressing politically acceptable ideals. The heroic struggle of workers combining forces to create greater material prosperity was one of the few acceptable themes of "social realism" in certain Marxist states. Similarly, art has been used to excite patriotism, stir nationalistic expectations, or even encourage enlisting in the armed

forces by governments that found themselves needing to use the persuasiveness of artistic expression to further their aims. Picasso's *Guernica* became a powerful statement against the slaughters of the Spanish civil war. Art also becomes political when government grants support artists whose works are thought by some to be sacrilegious, pornographic, demeaning to women or ethnic groups, or mocking of patriotic values. In such controversies, the question arises as to who decides the difference between good art and bad art, or even between art and non-art.

Postmodernism weighs in on this topic too. It holds that the modernist idea of a canon of masterpieces by which all other artistic expressions may be judged is just a part of the dominant ideology. It also claims that the traditional canon symbolizes the values of a Eurocentric male elite, which is especially evident in those obvious cases mentioned earlier where the ruling elite limit artistic expression to a few acceptable forms.

In contrast to the modernist idea of a canon, postmodernism argues that there are many alternative canons one could construct and that we should get rid of the idea of masterpieces altogether. This is the political and revolutionary side of postmodernism. It encourages all the omitted, "marginalized," groups to demand a greater share of cultural attention. All the traditional distinctions are politicized—high and low

art, masterpiece and minor work, classical and folk, art and craft, great and popular.

One way to understand this is to see postmodernism as removing the conceptual boundaries we have developed to keep art separate from other aspects of society, such as economics, politics, religion, and social class. The old ideal of modernism was to be able to interpret an art work in itself without regard to context or history. Recent developments in art criticism have increasingly insisted on the importance of context and history and have gradually enlarged the scope of the context in which art should be understood.

Underlying these issues are still more fundamental ones about objectivity in art. Basic to modernism is the idea that there is, in principle, a way to secure agreement about the truth of a claim about art or art history. Postmodernism asserts that this is an illusion. On this view we cannot compare a claim about the way things are with the things themselves; we cannot see how far the claim corresponds with reality. The reason is that we can never get outside of our language in order to see whether the language matches reality. There is no direct access to reality independent of language. The way we describe the world determines the way we experience it. We have only experience to rely on, and that experience is linguistically shaped. It follows that there is no way to make our judgments any more objective than they are now.

Related to postmodernism's rejection of esthetic objectivity is its rejection of the modernist idea of the art work as an independently existing reality.

If we cannot judge the merits of different interpretations by comparing them with the art work, then each interpretation, in effect, creates a different art work. Postmodernism thus gives much greater importance to the viewer. In one sense it makes the viewer the creator of the work of art rather than the artist; we could say that it makes the viewer an artist. Modernism, by contrast, tried to identify an ideal viewer, one educated in the art traditions, socialized in the adoption of the proper esthetic attitude, who would see what the artist intended within the rules laid down by the art traditions. In postmodernism there is no ideal viewer, and all interpretations of actual viewers have equal merit.

It is always hard to judge the outcome of the period of history we are actually living in. It may be too soon to tell whether all these counterclaims against modernist esthetics will be widely accepted or be viewed as a fad that soon vanishes. There is already some evidence that the latter is happening. Nonetheless, postmodernism will have affected esthetics by moving art theorists away from the detached esthetic gaze of "art for art's sake" and toward an understanding of art as embedded in a broader social context. Whether or not postmodernism survives as a separate theory, it has, over the past few years, prompted an awareness that art and literature should be understood not as isolated from but as integral parts of the larger political, economic, and technological context in which we find ourselves.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981. The best introduction to esthetics by a well-known defender of traditional esthetics against recent criticisms.

Blocker, H. Gene, and Jennifer Jeffers, eds. *Contextualizing Aesthetics: From Plato to Lyotard*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999. A reader with lengthy introductions that covers the history of esthetics from ancient to contemporary times. One of the co-editors is an author of this book.

Danto, Arthur. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981. A modern classic by a leading esthetician defending the definability of art as understood by the "art world."

Dickie, George. *An Introduction to Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. The latest introductory book by America's leading esthetician defending his analytic revision and reformulation of traditional esthetics.

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CHAPTER **34**

Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy

Social and political philosophy is that branch of philosophy concerned with the social relationships among people, the relationships between individuals and the state in which they reside, and the relationships between and among different sovereign states. Parallel with other areas of philosophy, the social-political philosopher does not try to determine empirically what kinds of societies actually exist and how they in fact differ from one another. This is the task of the social scientist or the political scientist. The social-political philosopher is rather concerned with normative questions surrounding the nature of the state and its justification, evaluative questions concerning the ideal kind of social arrangements within the state, and normative questions relating to how states ought to interact with one another. Let us look at a representative sampling of such questions.

First, is there any good reason why we ought to have a state at all? What would be wrong with people doing as they please and cooperating when and if they wish? Assuming, however, that we ought to have a state, what kind should it be: a monarchy, a military dictatorship, a democracy, or what? If we decide on democracy, should there be a division of powers between different branches (executive, legislative, judicial), and if so, what relationships should there be between the various branches of government? Then, too, how much and what sort of power should the state have over the individual? Should the state adopt a minimal role, a kind of night watchman, organizing the military in time of war, a police force for domestic problems, perhaps building a major system of roads, for example, but no more? Or should the state enter fully into the life of the society, directing education, establishing national goals, running the economy, directly or indirectly, channeling individuals into employment most needed by the society at a particular time, and so on?

A second way of looking at those questions would be from the viewpoint of the individuals who make up a state. Does the ordinary citizen have any duty or responsibility to obey the authority of the state, and if so, why, and to what extent? Assuming the citizens have an obligation in general to obey duly established laws of the state, are they obliged to obey any and all laws? Is civil disobedience or rebellion ever justified? And if so, how, and on what grounds? How much freedom from governmental restraint should the individual have, and on what basis? Where, if at all, should we place limits on the rights of people to lead their own lives as they see fit?

With respect to relations among states, social-political philosophers investigate the principles governing how states *ought*—there's that normative component again!—to

interact with one another; including the important question of when, if ever, it is permissible for one state to interfere directly in the affairs of another state without that state's permission. The most dramatic case of such interference is, of course, a declaration of war by one state against another. Social-political philosophers consider whether any waging of war by one state upon another can be just, and, if so, what are the circumstances under which such military intervention is morally justified. Is it only justified if one state is defending itself against the unjust aggression of another state? Or can one state legitimately wage war against another in order to protect the people of the other state from the oppression of their own government? There are also questions about the extent to which states are morally obligated to help one another. When one state suffers disproportionately as the result of a natural or human-made disaster, for instance, are other states which have the resources to provide assistance morally obligated to do so? Or is this merely something that is nice for states to do, but not something that is morally required of them?

In the process of answering these questions, the social-political philosopher also, as we will see later, tries to clarify persistently ambiguous terms of political language: *equality, freedom, human rights, punishment,* to mention some of the most troubling. When we speak of equality do we mean that everyone should have the same share of society's goods, such as land and money, or only that they should have an equal opportunity to compete for those goods? What do we mean when we say that everyone should be "free"? Do we mean that everyone should be free to do as he or she pleases, or that people should be free to get their fair share of what most people consider valuable, such as income, medical care, a good job, an adequate retirement program, and so on? Assuming we can answer the question of society's right to punish those who break the law, what exactly do we mean by *punishment?* Avenging the wrong the criminal has done? Preventing the law-breaker from further crimes? Discouraging others from breaking the law? Rehabilitating the criminal? Or what? The different goals of punishment often oppose and contradict one another and lead to radically different and opposed social policies.

There is perhaps no area of human activity other than politics where the influence of philosophers is more evident. The philosophies of John Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, even such ancient thinkers as Plato and Aristotle, had a profound influence on the development of the governmental institutions of the United States. The Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights borrow heavily from the social philosophy of John Locke. John Stuart Mill, along with his father James Mill and their friend Jeremy Bentham, exerted enormous influence on the social reforms enacted by the

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British Parliament in the nineteenth century. Other thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith also influenced the development of the constitutional monarchy in Great Britain and the emergence of capitalism, at least in part. Any historical or political reality as complex as capitalistic economies cannot be attributed to a single cause or even a few causes. Nonetheless, the change from feudalism to capitalism was aided by the shift in thinking that was led by philosophers.

A complete comparison of social philosophies is a topic so broad that we must settle on a more limited task. We will look at a single question: the relationship between the individual and the society as a whole. Should the individual's rights be limited for the good of society, or should society's welfare be subordinated to the good of the individual (does the part exist for the sake of the whole, or the other way around)? To illustrate the

tension between the individual and the society, consider the debate between champions of economic justice and supporters of political liberty.

EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The most obvious and dramatic arena for the debate about the relationship of the individual and the state was the cold war debate between the democracies of the West led by the USA and the Eastern Communist-bloc countries led by the USSR. The cold war is now over, but the end of the cold war is by no means the end of the debate between the underlying ideals of the libertarian capitalist right and the egalitarian socialist left, for the essentials of that debate continue to take place where they have always taken place, though in a quieter and less dramatic form—*within* each of the countries of the East and West and indeed in every country in every part of the world today. This is and remains the central and single most important social and political debate of our times. It is not, any longer, simply the cold war debate between East and West as to which form of government is better: the free-market democracies of the West or the controlled economies of the East; that seems to have been decisively answered now in favor of the free-market democracies. Today the debate is rather how to combine and balance in one social system individual liberties with a more equal distribution of social goods that require governmental regulation of the marketplace. The debate has also expanded to include the question of the proper relationship between individual countries and multi-national bodies which claim the right to regulate the practices of these countries.

At first it might appear that the Western democracies and the Communist-bloc countries had radically and irreconcilably different notions of freedom, rights, equality, and justice which could never be combined into one system. In theory, at least, the Western democracies arose from an eighteenth-century libertarian notion of the freedom of individuals to pursue their goals largely free from governmental restraint, while the socialist countries arose from the nineteenth-century Marxist ideal of an equal distribution of all social goods. The libertarian model advocates what is sometimes called "negative" freedom (or negative rights), that is, freedom *from* governmental restraint (or the right to be free from governmental restraint). These are the freedoms (and rights) guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. The socialist model, on the other hand, advocates freedom (and rights) in what is often called a "positive" sense, that is, the freedom (and right) *to have* adequate housing, health care, a job, education, retirement income, paid vacations, and so on.

The first view of the state's role sees freedom (and the guarantee of rights) as the removal of societal restrictions on the individual; the other sees freedom (and the securing of rights) as a kind of societal structure that paternalistically encourages and nourishes the full development of the individual's potential into a complete social human being. Obviously, these two views may conflict. You may not *want* to do those things that society considers good for you and your full social development. By the same token, if you are allowed to do pretty much as you please, you may not develop your full potential as a human being, and so you may *not* be free to create and enjoy art, for example, just as the child who is free to quit piano lessons will not be free (that is, not be able) later in life to play the piano. And these two conceptions of freedom (and rights) have obvious political ramifications.

According to the libertarian model, everyone is said to be equal in the sense that everyone has a right to equal opportunity. Imagine a foot race. If everyone starts at the same time and from the same place and if no one is allowed to take a short cut or is artificially handicapped in some way, then we say that everyone has an equal chance. This is what is meant by equality of opportunity. But, of course, they can't all win, and that is what is meant by the inequality of outcome, that is, of the result. You are free to compete for a place in the best university or professional school, for a job, for election to public office, or fame as a rock star, but you are *not* guaranteed you will get what you are competing for. As a result, equality of opportunity is compatible with great inequality of outcome in terms of wealth, power, and other social goods. Of course, many inequalities of opportunity remain in all libertarian societies due to discrimination and nepotism, but even if all inequalities of opportunity could be removed, there would still be winners and losers, the haves and the have-nots. Because of the possibilities of being a winner, the traditional libertarian model encourages greater initiative. The socialist ideal, on the other hand, favors a more equal distribution of society's goods to everyone. This is why the socialist ideal is often referred to as *egalitarianism,* from the French egalité, meaning "equality." According to the socialist or egalitarian ideal, everyone will earn more or less the same, a physician and a bus driver, everyone will have more or less the same quality of housing and education, the government leader and the street sweeper. This is what is meant by equality of outcome. In such a system, the security of a guaranteed comfortable life is offset by the lack of initiative in getting ahead.

If everyone is free in the traditional libertarian sense, then because of inequalities among people in their various abilities, and, more important, because of the freedom of the rich and powerful to pass their wealth on to their children (whether of superior ability or not), the result is that although all are free to do what they would like, most people do not have the means of actually achieving this. In nineteenth-century England, for example, a Welsh coal miner was "free" to own a wealthy house, send his children to the private schools from where they could enter the most prestigious and lucrative jobs in science, industry, and government, but was at the same time utterly incapable of doing so. He was free in the sense that there were no explicit restrictions against his owning land or capital, but at the same time he was incapable of carrying out this desire for severe lack of funds, and of acquiring the funds for lack of adequate education, and so on. But how is he to achieve these things or at least an equal chance of obtaining them? Only by possessing the proper education and training. But who is to pay for this? Certainly the Welsh coal miner could not. The funds must come from those who have more money, the wealthy. But why should they voluntarily agree to help him? They are not in any way restricting his rights. "You are free, my good man," they will tell him, "to go out and earn your way just as we did a hundred years ago. Take an extra job, save, send your children to a good school, gradually work your way up; there's nothing stopping you but your own lack of initiative." But, if not by voluntary agreement, then how are we to get the money from these wealthy people except by forcing them to relinquish it against their will (either through taxation or direct expropriation)? If we do this, are we not violating their traditional rights to get and keep wealth, and to pass it on to their children?

It looks as though we can only achieve the egalitarian goal at the expense of libertarian principles. The major political debate in all democracies today continues to be how to combine these two apparently irreconcilable goals.

The Parthenon, which dominates the acropolis in Athens, was built in the fifth century B.C.E. and was the symbol of Athenian glory when the Greeks gave us the first example of democratic government. The word *democracy* derives from the two Greek words that mean "rule of the people." Photo by David Stewart.

But notice—if the egalitarian freedom, or right, cannot be achieved by the poor miner, or voluntarily by the wealthy owner of the mines, then it will never be achieved except by government interference. Left to itself, the free marketplace will always result in a division of haves and have-nots. So in order to achieve the egalitarian human rights, we have to alter our conception of the role of government—away from the ideal of minimal government simply protecting the rights of the individual to get on with his or her own life, and toward the ideal of government as providing minimal guarantees to all of its citizens on a more equitable basis. And this is the connection between different concepts of freedom and differences in the relation of the individual to the society as a whole. The traditional libertarian freedoms demand a minimal watchdog government to keep others from interfering in the freedom of each individual to get on with life as each sees fit. The ideal of egalitarian freedom demands just the opposite, a strong centralized government entering into every phase of life—from wages, to education, to health care—to ensure that everyone has a decent life.

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WHAT IS JUSTICE?

But what *is* fair and just? Libertarians look at their ideal and say that it is a fair and just distribution of the social goods (money, housing, education, jobs, and so on) because of the equality of opportunity and the individual liberties in their system. If you and I are salespersons for the same company, working on the same commission basis, then if you earned more last month than I did because you are smarter, more aggressive, more

hard-working, or for any other honest and legal reasons, then you *deserve* to earn more than I did and it is perfectly fair and just that you should. "Equal pay for equal . . ." what? The libertarians say equal pay for *equal ability* or *productivity*. The socialist, egalitarian ideal, on the other hand, regards this sort of result of the libertarian system as terribly *un*just, while they regard their own system as far more just since everything there is more evenly divided, and everyone is free to enjoy equally the wealth and other benefits which their society has to offer. "Equal pay for equal human need and equal worth as a human being." Is it fair and just, the egalitarian asks, for one person to have more than another just because of the accidents of heredity which genetically favor some fortunate individuals with superior intelligence, good looks, and a dynamic personality? And is it fair that some should have more because their wealthy and powerful parents were able to give them a head start in life through private schools, private lessons, travel opportunities, books, intelligent discussion at home, and so on? And, by the same token, is it fair or just, the egalitarian continues, that a person born with few of either genetic or environmental advantages should suffer through life as a result? In fact, the egalitarian asks, can we really separate equality of opportunity from equality of outcome? Do the children of poor parents really have the same chance of success as the children of wealthy parents?

THE CONTEMPORARY REALITY

Unrestricted libertarianism is largely a thing of the past, just as the socialist ideal is just that, an ideal. In the relatively pure libertarianism of the nineteenth century, individuals were almost completely free to dispose of whatever money they earned legally and almost completely free to run their business in the most efficient means possible consistent with free market realities. If children were willing to do the work for less than anyone else, then the factory owners were free to employ them. Since they owned the factory and the land on which it sat, they were also free to run the factory in the most economical way possible, including dumping toxic materials into the streams or into the air or maintaining an uncomfortable and unhealthy work environment if this would help cut costs and boost profits. Today, by contrast, those same factory owners must obey dozens of regulations concerning taxes, social security benefits, and waste disposal, all of which greatly reduce their personal freedom to dispose of their own property. Similarly, the idealistic egalitarian vision wherein all share equally in all social goods is a fading ideal. Today, individuals in some socialist countries are encouraged to work hard by being allowed to keep a larger share of social goods, resulting each year in greater and greater income differentials in these countries.

Nonetheless, the debate between libertarian and egalitarian ideals continues because the two are hard to reconcile and there is no complete consensus as to which should be given greater priority. Much as we might like to have a measure of both, they seem to pull in opposite directions, and so, like oil and water, are extremely hard to mix. If we want to more evenly distribute the nation's wealth in order to achieve more equal educational and health benefits for all, how is that to be achieved? In particular, who is going to pay for it? And how is that money to be obtained? It can only come from the more wealthy members of society, including wealthy corporations, and they are certainly not going to give it up voluntarily. It must be taken from them by force of law, that is, through an accelerated income tax scheme, and inheritance tax, and other measures actually practiced in most of the Western democracies today. And how can you prevent

wealthier and better educated families from giving their children a head start on the children of poorer and less educated families except by forcing children of more advantaged families to attend the same schools, busing them, if necessary, to different school districts, or restricting the money their parents can spend on their curricular and extracurricular education? But then you are necessarily diminishing their individual freedom and right to keep whatever they fairly earn and to pass that on to their children when they die, and, while alive, to raise their family and help their children as they see fit. Only in a relatively more centralized, planned state in which individual liberties are somewhat diminished can social welfare programs be implemented. By the same token, individual liberties and free enterprise incentives can never take place in socialist countries unless and until the state relaxes its control of the economy and allows a more uneven distribution of wealth.

The problem we face, whether libertarian-leaning or egalitarian-leaning, is how to reconcile these opposed conceptions of social justice. The intense debates in the United States today over employment quotas, affirmative-action programs, welfare rights, the rights of the homeless, the constitutionality of supporting schools through local community property taxes, and countless other questions of a just distribution of social goods all turn on the more fundamental issue of the conflict between the freedom of individuals to dispose of what they have fairly earned as they wish, and the right of everyone to a more equal share of social goods.

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Which system is really more fair or just? Our intuitions seem to pull us in both directions, and so are not very helpful. If you ask your friends what they think, you will probably get a variety of opinions ranging from the libertarian to the egalitarian ideal. We are morally and politically torn between the two. The great challenge is their reconciliation.

Because of its economic implications, the libertarian-egalitarian debate outlined above is probably the most politically intense aspect of the larger question of the relationship of the individual and the state. In its most extreme form, the question comes down to this: does the individual exist to serve the state, or does the state exist to serve the individual?

Questions for Discussion

1. Although the social and political issues change, the underlying debate remains the same. What recent news reports show the ongoing debate between the ideals of greater individual liberty and greater governmental control?

2. What is your own view in this debate between the libertarian ideal and the egalitarian goal? What reasons can you give to support your position?

3. This question anticipates some of the subsequent discussion: What issues can you identify as being

part of the debate both within democracies and among nations?

4. What are some of the attempts within our own national life of reconciling the ideals of libertarianism and egalitarianism?

5. The debate between libertarianism and egalitarianism always seems to be tilted toward one of the poles of this duality. At the current moment, which tendency seems to be dominant in national life? Give examples to illustrate your answer.

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1. According to John Stuart Mill, what are the limits of individual freedom?

   ((•— **Listen** to the **program:** *Richard Reeves on Mill On Liberty* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. How might the egalitarian ideals of human rights and freedom conflict?

   ((•— **Listen** to the **program:** *Will Kymlicka on Minority Rights* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. How have philosophers contributed to current political debates?

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The Liberal, Secular State

I n this society, freethinking (that is, anything that doesn't follow the prevailing religious leader's thinking) is forbidden and punished as criminal. Dancing and singing secular songs is forbidden. A man is put in jail because he named his son Claude instead of Abraham. Women are punished for their dress and hairstyles. Most public amusements are banned except for public executions, which, according to one observer, is "one of the few means of entertainment officially sanctioned."[1]

In another case, a young man stands accused of blasphemy. He repents and asks for mercy. The magistrate, however, refuses to accept his plea and finds him guilty of the charge and tells him, "You ought to be punished with death, and the confiscation of your movables, to the example and terror of others."[2]

If you think these events happened in one of the theocratic countries of the Middle East, you would be wrong. The events outlined in the first paragraph occurred in the authoritarian state established in Geneva at the end of the sixteenth century. The religious leader there was John Calvin. The account in the previous paragraph is of an event that took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the seventeenth century. The young man accused of blasphemy was named Thomas Aikenhead, and to him the Lord Advocate, James Stewart, made the following speech: "It is of verity, that you Thomas Aikenhead, shaking off all fear of God and regard to his majesties laws, have now for more than a twelve-month . . . made it as it were your endeavor and work to vent your wicked blasphemies against God and our Savior Jesus Christ." The Lord Advocate then goes on to claim authority, as a representative of the state, to enforce God's laws. "We by our very beings . . . are bound to obey, submit, and subject ourselves to his will and pleasure who made us."[3] As a magistrate it was his solemn duty, Stewart claims, to ensure obedience to the laws of God and to use the instruments of the state to enforce compliance to them.

What is wrong with this picture? From our point of view, lots. First, it assumes that everybody in a country has to have the same religion and that the claims of religion take precedence over the claims of government. It is fair to say that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries most people thought that a nation would not be governable if it

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[1]This paragraph closely follows the language of Stuart Isacoff from *Temperament* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), p. 123.

[2]Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), p. 5.

[3]*How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, pp. 5 and 6.

tolerated many religions. Recall that those who fled to the shores of the New World at Plymouth Rock were doing so in order to have the freedom to worship in their own way. They first went to Holland where their dissenting views were tolerated, and subsequently on to the New World.[4] Even then the pilgrims had difficulty accepting diversity of belief; they came to find religious freedom for their views, not the views of others. Religious tolerance grew slowly, and the religiously pluralistic society we take for granted did not happen overnight.

A second dislocation for our modern, Western, attitudes is the assumption, prevalent in the seventeenth century, that the governing authorities have not only the right but also the *duty* to enforce religious laws. For us it is clear in the abstract that government is one thing, religion another, and the two are separate. Nonetheless, even for us, matters are not that clear when it comes to applying this abstract division to specific cases. Although we subscribe to the principle of separation of church and state, there is still no agreement on such things as the legality of posting the Ten Commandments in a public building, keeping the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, allowing prayer in public schools, making religion-based opposition to abortion a matter of law, just to mention a few of the issues that create what some observers refer to as the "culture wars." There are other issues, too: Should churches and religious institutions be exempted from taxes? Should the clergy be given special exemptions from military service? How are we to distinguish between legitimate religions and phony religions claimed by those who use the religious exemption to escape taxation? Should public events be opened with prayer?

Although we are a long way from gaining agreement on the issues listed earlier, Western nations have largely agreed that political authorities have no responsibility for enforcing religious dictates. Some of the Western democracies, however, still have established churches, that is, churches supported by tax dollars. The Church of England in Britain and the Lutheran Church in Denmark are two examples. Germany has two: the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches. Even with established churches, however, the governing powers do not enforce religious edicts.

The separation of church from state occurred as part of the philosophical revolt against the view that governments derive their authority from God. The divine right of kings was the prevailing view until philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in England, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in France, argued for the view that the authority of the state arises out of the consent of the governed. These philosophers are known as the social contract theorists, and they express a major change in political thought concerning the nature of the state. The aim of these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social philosophers was to determine the justification for the state's authority over its citizens. What right does one group have to enact laws which others are forced to obey? And, turning the question around, what obligation does the individual have to obey those laws? In short, why should we obey the law? It is not a question of empirically

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[4]The Netherlands has long enjoyed the reputation of tolerance. It sheltered such philosophers as Descartes and Spinoza, whose views ran counter to the prevailing wisdom. It also accepted religious dissenters of all stripes, including our Pilgrim forefathers and foremothers. A glance at the paintings by the Dutch artists Vermeer and Rembrandt in the Reichsmuseum in Amsterdam is a visual reminder that the Pilgrims bought their clothes in Holland; hence the tall hats, wide collars, buckled shoes, and belted tunics for the men and the long dresses and bonnets for the women that elementary-school children learn to recognize and draw. Today Dutch tolerance extends to things that make us nervous, including marijuana use and prostitution, but it is consistent with their past. The first thing you learn upon visiting Amsterdam today is that coffee houses are not places to buy coffee.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778): One of the eighteenth century's most important political philosophers. Though born in Switzerland, Rousseau spent most of his working life in France. Known for his view that human beings are born innocent but are corrupted by civilization, Rousseau also defended the claim in his book *Social Contract* that government receives its right to govern from the governed. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

discovering what power governments actually do have, or the psychological motives which citizens have (fear, conformity) for following social rules, but rather the normative question: What, if anything, gives governments the legitimate right to make and enforce laws, and what moral obligation or duty, if any, do we have to obey those laws?

This is an important question for its answer will also tell us what a legitimate, rightful government is like and how it differs from illegitimate governments which have no right to command loyalty or obedience. And this will tell us what types of governments we are obligated to support.

John Locke (1632–1704): Founder of political liberalism and British empiricism. Locke formulated a metaphysics underlying the natural science of Boyle and Newton. He is the author of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises on Government*. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The consequences that follow from the social contract view are obvious. Government exists only by the consent of the people governed. There is no other legitimate reason at all. It follows that, although people agreeing to the social contract could choose a monarchy or oligarchy, it is much more likely that they would select a democratic form of government in which they not only choose the form of government but also have a say in the formation of laws and the selection of rulers. The social contract position, therefore, presents a good argument for selecting democracy as the best form of government.

It also follows that governments which do not serve to protect the interests of the governed and which do not operate with their consent are not legitimate and can thereby be ignored or overthrown. In his book, *The Second Treatise of Government,* Locke lays out his arguments for this social contract theory of government. The writings of Locke influenced the framers of our own Constitution as well as contributing language to the Declaration of Independence. Though hardly a household word today, John Locke is a thinker whose arguments should not be forgotten. It was this basis for revolution that was appealed to by Thomas Jefferson when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. And if there has ever been a government formed with something like a social contract document, the United States of America would seem to qualify for this distinction. Such governments are *liberal* in two senses: they liberate citizens from the arbitrary rule of an individual who claims to be the sovereign (king, queen, or whatever the title might be), and they are also liberal in that they provide for the maximum amount of individual liberty.

Locke: Concerning Civil Government

Men being . . . 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, which is done by agreeing with other men to join 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, . . . it being only with an intention in everyone the better to preserve himself, his liberty and property. . . . *Whensoever*, therefore, the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society, and . . . endeavor to grasp . . . an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands . . . and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and by the establishment of the new legislative . . . provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society.

Source: From *The Second Treatise of Government.*

Jefferson: Declaration of Independence

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

The Constitution of the United States was the first founding document of a modern state to exemplify Locke's ideal of a society brought into being by a social contract. Courtesy of The Bettman Archive/Corbis.

It is all well and good to argue that the people are sovereign and that the authority of the government arises out of the consent of the governed. Historically, however, it proved to be the case that even in representative governments there was no freedom from the authority of the majority religion, as the introductory examples show. It was therefore philosophically necessary for the social contract philosophers to take the next step and argue for the view that liberal governments should also be *secular,* that is freed from the dictates of the majority religion. If the state frees itself from the demands of the majority religion, it follows that it has no obligation to enforce that religion's rules. It further follows that no one religion is given a privileged position in the state. The implications of this view are that all religious views should be tolerated and that citizens should be free to have any religion they like or even no religion at all.

The separation of the religious from the secular and the adoption of the political doctrine of popular sovereignty created great personal freedom and unleashed human creativity on a scale not seen before in human history. It brought about advances in all areas of science and industry. Technological advances and rising prosperity were two effects of this revolution in political thought. Contemporary societies that have yet to adopt the Western, secular-state model have, as a result, lagged behind the technological achievements of the West. Bernard Lewis argues for this claim in his book *What Went Wrong?*[5]

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[5]Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

In the selection that follows Locke gives his arguments for a secular state in which the government has no authority to enforce religious edicts. He builds on the arguments he has used for his doctrine of popular sovereignty. The state derives its authority from the consent of the governed and therefore has no obligation to enforce one set of religious beliefs over another. Why? Because religious beliefs cannot be proved but can only be believed or not believed. There is, therefore, an important distinction to be made between a sin and a crime. What may be a sin from a religious point of view (blasphemy, for example) is not a crime to be punished by the state. Further, true religion is a matter of inward piety and voluntary compliance. Its dictates cannot be enforced by rules of law or by coercion.

Locke wrote *A Letter Concerning Toleration* in Latin in 1689. It was first published—where else?—in Holland, that island of toleration in the midst of a sea of sectarian intolerance. Later that year, an English translation by William Popple made the work available to English readers. The following extracts are from Popple's translation but with some modernization of spelling and punctuation.

John Locke: A Letter Concerning Toleration

The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own civil interests.

Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.

It is the duty of the civil magistrate, by the impartial execution of equal laws, to secure unto all the people in general, and to every one of his subjects in particular, the just possession of these things belonging to this life. If anyone presume to violate the laws of public justice and equity, established for the preservation of those things, his presumption is to be checked by the fear of punishment consisting of the deprivation or diminution of those civil interests or goods which otherwise he might and ought to enjoy. . . .

Now that the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concernments; and that all civil power, right, and dominion is bounded and confined only to the care and promotion of these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls, these following considerations seem unto me abundantly to demonstrate.

First, the care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate any more than to other men. It is not committed unto him, I say, by God; because it appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another, as to compel anyone to his religion. Nor can any such power be vested in the magistrate by the consent of the people, because no man can so far abandon the care of his own salvation

A Letter Concerning Toleration is available in many editions. The complete text can be found in the edition of the Library of Liberal Arts. Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.

as blindly to leave to the choice of any other, whether prince or subject, to prescribe to him what faith or worship he shall embrace. For no man can, if he would, conform his faith to the dictates of another. All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without believing. Whatever profession we make, to whatever outward worship we conform, if we are not fully satisfied in our own mind that the one is true, and the other well pleasing unto God, such profession and such practice, far from being any furtherance, are indeed great obstacles to our salvation. For in this manner, instead of expiating other sins by the exercise of religion, I say, in offering thus unto God Almighty such a worship as we esteem to be displeasing unto Him, we add unto the number of our other sins those also of hypocrisy and contempt of His Divine Majesty.

In the second place, the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate because his power consists only in outward force; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force. Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments, nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgment that they have framed of things.

It may indeed be alleged that the magistrate may make use of arguments, and thereby draw the heterodox into the way of truth and procure their salvation. I grant it; but this is common to him with other men. In teaching, instructing, and redressing the erroneous by reason, he may certainly do what becomes any good man to do. Magistracy does not oblige him to put off either humanity or Christianity; but it is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties. This civil power alone has a right to do; to the other, goodwill is authority enough. . . .

In the third place, the care of the salvation of men's souls cannot belong to the magistrate; because, though the rigor of laws and the force of penalties were capable to convince and change men's minds, yet would not that help at all to the salvation of their souls. For there being but one truth, one way to heaven, what hope is there that more men would be led into it if they had no rule but the religion of the court, and were put under the necessity to quit the light of their own reason, and oppose the dictates of their own consciences, and blindly to resign themselves up to the will of their governors and to the religious which either ignorance, ambition, or superstition had chanced to establish in the countries where they were born? In the variety and contradiction of opinions in religion, wherein the princes of the world are as much divided as in their secular interests, the narrow way would be much straightened; one country alone would be in the right, and all the rest of the world put under an obligation of following their princes in the ways that lead to destruction; and that which heightens the absurdity, and very ill suits the notion of a Deity, men would owe their eternal happiness or misery to the places of their nativity. . . .

Let us now consider what a church is. A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshiping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls.

I say it is a free and voluntary society. Nobody is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and everyone would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands, than which nothing can be imagined more absurd. Thus, therefore, that matter stands. No man by nature is bound unto any particular church or sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God. . . .

These things being thus explained, it is easy to understand to what end the legislative power ought to be directed, and by what measures regulated; and that is the temporal good and outward prosperity of the society, which is the sole reason of men's entering into society, and the only thing they seek and aim at in it. And it is also evident what liberty remains to men in reference to their eternal salvation, and that is, that everyone should do what he in his conscience is persuaded to be acceptable to the Almighty, on whose good pleasure and acceptance depends their eternal happiness. For obedience is due, in the first place, to God, and afterward to the laws.

But some may ask, What if the magistrate should enjoin anything by his authority that appears unlawful to the conscience of a private person? I answer that if government be faithfully administered and the counsels of the magistrates be indeed directed to the public good, this will seldom happen. But if, perhaps, it do so fall out, I say that such a private person is to abstain from the action that he judges unlawful, and he is to undergo the punishment which it is not unlawful for him to bear. For the private judgment of any person concerning a law enacted in political matters, for the public good, does not take away the obligation of that law, nor deserve a dispensation. But if the law indeed be concerning things that lie not within the verge of the magistrate's authority (as, for example, that the people, or any party amongst them, should be compelled to embrace a strange religion and join in the worship and ceremonies of another church), men are not in these cases obliged by that law, against their consciences. For the political society is instituted for no other end, but only to secure every man's possession of the things of this life. The case of each man's soul, and of the things of heaven, which neither does belong to the commonwealth nor can be subjected to it, is left entirely to every man's self. Thus the safeguard of men's lives and of the things that belong unto this life is the business of the commonwealth; and the preserving of those things unto their owners is the duty of the magistrate. And therefore the magistrate cannot take away these worldly things from this man or party and give them to that, nor change propriety amongst fellow subjects (no, not even by a law), for a cause that has no relation to the end of civil government, I mean for their religion, which whether it be true or false does no prejudice to the worldly concerns of their fellow subjects, which are the things that only belong unto the care of the commonwealth. . . .

It remains that I say something concerning those assemblies which being vulgarly called, and perhaps having sometimes been conventicles[*] and nurseries of factions and seditions, are thought to afford the strongest matter of objection against

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[*]An obsolete English word referring to religious assemblies. By Locke's time it referred to illegal religious meetings, such as those held by Dissenters. (ed)

this doctrine of toleration. But this has not happened by anything peculiar unto the genius of such assemblies, but by the unhappy circumstances of an oppressed or ill-settled liberty. These accusations would soon cease if the law of toleration were once so settled that all churches were obliged to lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty, and teach that liberty of conscience is every man's natural right, equally belonging to dissenters as to themselves; and that nobody ought to be compelled in matters of religion either by law or force. The establishment of this one thing would take away all ground of complaints and tumults upon account of conscience; and these causes of discontents and animosities being once removed, there would remain nothing in these assemblies that were not more peaceable and less apt to produce disturbance of state than in any other meetings whatsoever. But let us examine particularly the heads of these accusations.

You will say that assemblies and meetings endanger the public peace and threaten the commonwealth. I answer, if this be so, why are there daily such numerous meetings in markets and courts of judicature? Why are crowds upon the Exchange and a concourse of people in cities suffered? You will reply, those are civil assemblies, but these we object against are ecclesiastical. I answer, it is a likely thing indeed that such assemblies as are altogether remote from civil affairs should be most apt to embroil them. Oh, but civil assemblies are composed of men that differ from one another in matters of religion, but these ecclesiastical meetings are of persons that are all of one opinion. As if an agreement in matters of religion were in effect a conspiracy against the commonwealth; or as if men would not be so much the more warmly unanimous in religion the less liberty they had of assembling. But it will be urged still that civil assemblies are open and free for anyone to enter into, whereas religious conventicles are more private, and hereby give opportunity to clandestine machinations. I answer that this is not strictly true, for many civil assemblies are not open to everyone. And if some religious meetings be private, who are they (I beseech you) that are to be blamed for it, those that desire or those that forbid their being public? Again, you will say that religious communion does exceedingly unite men's minds and affections to one another, and is therefore the more dangerous. But if this be so, why is not the magistrate afraid of his own church, and why does he not forbid their assemblies as things dangerous to his government? You will say because he himself is a part and even the head of them. As if he were not also a part of the commonwealth and the head of the whole people!

Let us therefore deal plainly. The magistrate is afraid of other churches, but not of his own, because he is kind and favorable to the one, but severe and cruel to the other. These he treats like children and indulges them even to wantonness. Those he uses as slaves, and how blamelessly so ever they demean themselves, recompenses them no otherwise than by galleys, prisons, confiscations, and death. These he cherishes and defends; those he continually scourges and oppresses. Let him turn the tables. Or let those dissenters enjoy but the same privileges in civils as his other subjects, and he will quickly find that these religious meetings will be no longer dangerous. For if men enter into seditious conspiracies, it is not religion inspires them to it in their meetings, but their sufferings and oppressions that make them willing to ease themselves. Just and moderate governments are everywhere quiet, everywhere safe; but oppression raises ferments and makes men struggle to cast off an uneasy

and tyrannical yoke. I know that seditions are very frequently raised upon pretense of religion, but it is as true that for religion subjects are frequently ill treated and live miserably. Believe me, the stirs that are made proceed not from any peculiar temper of this or that church or religious society, but from the common dispositions of all mankind, who when they groan under any heavy burden endeavor naturally to shake off the yoke that galls their necks. Suppose this business of religion were let alone, and that there were some other distinction made between men and men upon account of their different complexions, shapes, and features, so that those who have black hair (for example) or gray eyes should not enjoy the same privileges as other citizens; that they should not be permitted either to buy or sell, or live by their callings; that parents should not have the government and education of their own children; that all should either be excluded form the benefit of the laws or meet with partial judges—can it be doubted but these persons, thus distinguished from others by the color of their hair and eyes, and united together by one common persecution, would be as dangerous to the magistrate as any others that had associated themselves merely upon the account of religion? Some enter into company for trade and profit, others for want of business have their clubs for claret.[**] Neighborhood joins some, and religion others. But there is only one thing which gathers people into seditious commotions, and that is oppression. . . .

　　Ecclesiastical assemblies and sermons are justified by daily experience and public allowance. These are allowed to people of some one persuasion, why not to all? If anything pass in a religious meeting seditious and contrary to the public peace, it is to be punished in the same manner, and no otherwise than as if it had happened in a fair or market. These meetings ought not to be sanctuaries for factious and flagitious fellows. Nor ought it to be less lawful for men to meet in churches than in halls; nor are one part of the subjects to be esteemed more blamable for their meeting together than others. Everyone is to be accountable for his own actions, and no man is to be laid under a suspicion or odium for the fault of another. Those that are seditious, murderers, thieves, robbers, adulterers, slanderers, etc., of whatsoever church, whether national or not, ought to be punished and suppressed. But those whose doctrine is peaceable, and whose manners are pure and blameless, ought to be upon equal terms with their fellow subjects. Thus if solemn assemblies, observations of festivals, public worship be permission to any one sort of professor, all these things ought to be permitted to the Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, Arminians, Quakers, and others, with the same liberty.[†] Nay, if we may openly speak the truth, and as becomes one man to another, neither pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of

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[**]A wine-tasting club. Claret is what the English call wine from the Bordeaux region of France. (ed)

[†]Professor here refers to one professing a religious belief. Locke provides a list of Christian groups who were persecuted for their particular beliefs. Presbyterians were Scottish Christians who rejected the authority of English bishops; Independents did not accept the practices or teachings of the Church of England; Anabaptists taught that baptism is for believers, not for infants; Arminians rejected the doctrine of original sin; Quakers cultivated the inner life without benefit of clergy or sacraments. Each of these traditions is more complex than this summary, but it serves to show the diversity of Christian belief already present in the England of Locke's time. (ed)

the commonwealth because of his religion. The Gospel commands no such thing. The church which "Judgeth not those that are without" [1 Cor. 5:12, 13] wants it not. And the commonwealth, which embraces indifferently all men that are honest, peaceable, and industrious, requires it not. . . .

We must therefore seek another cause of those evils that are charged upon religion. And if we consider right, we shall find it to consist wholly in the subject that I am treating of. It is not the diversity of opinions (which cannot be avoided), but the refusal of toleration to those that are of different opinions (which might have been granted), that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world upon account of religion. . . . It cannot, indeed, be otherwise so long as the principle of persecution for religion shall prevail, as it has done hitherto, with magistrate and people, and so long as those that ought to be the preachers of peace and concord shall continue with all their art and strength to excite men to arms and sound the trumpet of war. But that magistrates should thus suffer these incendiaries and disturbers of the public peace might justly be wondered at if it did not appear that they have been invited by them unto a participation of the spoil, and have therefore thought fit to make use of their covetousness and pride as means whereby to increase their own power. For who does not see that these good men are indeed more ministers of the government than ministers of the Gospel, and that by flattering the ambition and favoring the dominion of princes and men in authority, they endeavor with all their might to promote that tyranny in the commonwealth which otherwise they should not be able to establish in the church? This is the unhappy agreement that we see between the church and state. Whereas if each of them would contain itself within its own bounds—the one attending to the worldly welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls—it is impossible that any discord should ever have happened between them.

Questions for Discussion

1. It seems to be the case that even in the United States, which is a secular society, there are actions that some people insist on even though they are religious in nature. What are some of these? Why are they important to their supporters?

2. One of Locke's arguments in support of religious toleration is that it reduces the threat posed by religious minorities. Do you agree? Why, or why not?

3. Some contemporary observers have asserted that the immediate future will be dominated by the struggle between those nations that want purely secular states and those that insist on religion-based societies. Can you give examples? Do you agree that this struggle is inevitable?

4. Have events since Locke's time proved or disproved his claim that a society can be a stable one even if it accepts the diversity of religions?

5. What evidence can you present to support the view that secular states are stronger than religious ones? What does "stronger" mean in this context?

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2. Why did Locke move to Holland?

   Read the **profile:** *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry for John Locke* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. According to Locke, how is social justice achieved?

   Read the **profile:** *John Locke* on **MySearchLab.com**

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The Individual and the State

John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* is one of the founding documents of political liberalism. As the term implies, nineteenth-century liberalism viewed the liberty of the individual as paramount. The threat faced by citizens, then as now, was the encroachment of government on personal liberty. Whether the liberty involved was political, economic, or religious, the history of governments had been to restrain individual freedom for the sake of a greater good, often using draconian means of enforcing government's edicts. Today the term is, with an ironic twist, applied mainly to those points of view that favor an expanded role of government in bringing about greater social and economic justice.

The remaining readings in this part will explore this notion of liberalism by looking at both sides of the issue of the relation of the individual to the state—on the one hand, the freedom of the individual from restrictions by the state, and on the other hand, the responsibility of the individual to the community and the state.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was the great spokesperson for the maximum freedom for the individual. Mill was an English philosopher identified with the social movement known as *utilitarianism,* an ethical view that originated with the writings of Jeremy Bentham. With Bentham, Mill rejects the notion of inherent natural rights and argues on utilitarian grounds for the social utility of individuals' freedom as a justification for a government that acts to protect and not to abridge those freedoms.

Read the *profile: Jeremy Bentham* on *MySearchLab.com*

The selection that follows is from Mill's classic work *On Liberty,* which remains a classic in Western political philosophy. In the essay, Mill argues that it is socially useful for individuals to be free to do as they please as long as they do not harm others. He also argues that the state should not intervene paternalistically even to prevent people from harming themselves either physically or morally. In this treatise Mill traces the history of various attempts to limit the political power of the ruling elite from the Magna Carta, which limited the power of the king, to the view that political power resides in the people themselves. He argues that the one remaining threat to liberty is the possibility that majority rule could impose a tyranny over nonconforming individuals. This can be avoided, he argues, by limiting majority rule to those cases where an individual's behavior actually harms others.

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As you read Mill, ask yourself whether you would go as far as he does in rejecting laws that paternalistically protect you. Do you favor seat belt laws, for instance? Would you favor laws outlawing all smoking? Would you support laws that enable the use of drugs within one's home? Should the government protect us from ourselves? You might also wonder what exactly is meant by "harm to others." What about someone who is brain dead and has no hope of recovering from a coma because she had a motorcycle accident and was not wearing a helmet. Her behavior caused psychological harm to her parents, siblings, and her own children—not to mention the enormous medical expenses, much of which must be borne by ordinary taxpayers. Can the same sort of argument be made regarding harm to others caused by smoking? In addition to the dangers of second-hand smoke, should we include the costs of health care for smokers, the loss of productivity caused by the habit, and the psychological loss to friends and family when a loved one is dying from a smoking-related disease?

Although Mill's essay dates from the nineteenth century, the issues he raises are still very much with us, and the ongoing debate about the proper role of government in regulating the lives of its citizens will likely continue.

Will the Real Liberal Please Stand Up?

Liberalism begins with a defense of the freedom of the individual from undue governmental interference. Its most fundamental tenet is that there are limits on what a government can ask of an individual. The debate centers on what can be asked of the individual and, on its flip side, what restraints should be placed on majority rule.

Nothing is more contentious than resolving the disagreement about what should be done when promoting the interests of one individual or group involves abridging the freedom of others. Consider "hate speech." Do free speech rights include the right to verbally abuse those who differ from us? And what about economic issues? People may have free speech but be homeless and destitute, so what about their right to a decent living? One can be fully endowed with the right to religion, free speech, the right to vote, but what does all this mean to a street person, for whom having a right to hold elective office means little.

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There are two different philosophical responses to this. Some argue that in addition to the rights listed above, we should also have the right to adequate social and economic goods. They argue that society as a whole will benefit, and the welfare of everyone will be enhanced if we adopt policies that provide a more equitable distribution of social and economic goods. But these views clash with those who put a primary value on the right to own and privately dispose of one's own property, since they believe a more equal distribution of social and economic good can be achieved only by taking away from those who have more to give to those who have less.

Who are the real liberals—those who argue for maximum individual freedom from government intervention in their lives (nineteenth-century liberalism) or those who think government should work for a more equitable distribution of society's economic and social benefits (twentieth-century liberalism)? Since liberals have long been pulled in both directions, two forms of liberalism have emerged today: "libertarian liberals," who emphasize property rights, and "egalitarian liberals," who emphasize the right of every individual to equal respect and dignity.

John Stuart Mill: On Liberty

The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warranty. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him, must be calculated to produce evil to someone else. The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. We are not speaking of children, or of young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood. Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury.

It is proper to state that I forgo any advantage which could be derived to my argument from the idea of abstract right, as a thing independent of utility. I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being. Those interests, I contend, authorize the subjection of individual spontaneity to external control, only in respect to those actions of each, which concern the interest of other people. If anyone does an act hurtful to others, there is a *prima facie* case for punishing him, by law, or, where legal penalties are not safely applicable, by general disapprobation. There are also many positive acts for the benefit of others, which he may rightfully be compelled to perform; such as, to give evidence in a court of justice; to bear his fair share in the common defence, or in any other joint work necessary to the interest of the society of which he enjoys the protection; and to perform certain acts of individual beneficence, such as saving a fellow creature's life, or interposing to protect the defenceless against ill usage, things which whenever it is obviously a man's duty to do, he may rightfully be made responsible to society for not doing. A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury. The latter case, it is true, requires a much more cautious exercise of compulsion than the former. To

make anyone answerable for doing evil to others, is the rule; to make him answerable for not preventing evil, is, comparatively speaking, the exception. Yet there are many cases clear enough and grave enough to justify that exception. In all things which regard the external relations of the individual, he is *de jure* amenable to those whose interests are concerned, and if need be, to society as their protector. There are often good reasons for not holding him to the responsibility; but these reasons must arise from the special expediencies of the case: either because it is a kind of case in which he is on the whole likely to act better, when left to his own discretion, than when controlled in any way in which society have it in their power to control him; or because the attempt to exercise control would produce other evils, greater than those which it would prevent. When such reasons as these preclude the enforcement of responsibility, the conscience of the agent himself should step into the vacant judgment seat, and protect those interests of others which have no external protection; judging himself all the more rigidly, because the case does not admit of his being made accountable to the judgment of his fellow creatures.

But there is a sphere of action in which society, as distinguished from the individual, has, if any, only an indirect interest; comprehending all that portion of a person's life and conduct which affects only himself, or if it also affects others, only with their free, voluntary, and undeceived consent and participation. When I say only himself, I mean directly, and in the first instance: for whatever affects himself, may affect others *through* himself; and the objection which may be grounded on this contingency, will receive consideration in the sequel. This, then, is the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological. The liberty of expressing and publishing opinions may seem to fall under a different principle, since it belongs to that part of the conduct of an individual which concerns other people; but, being almost of as much importance as the liberty of thought itself, and resting in great part on the same reasons, is practically inseparable from it. Secondly, the principle requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived.

No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected, is free, whatever may be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified. The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it. Each is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily, or mental and spiritual. Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest. . . .

Apart from the peculiar tenets of individual thinkers, there is also in the world at large an increasing inclination to stretch unduly the powers of society over the individual, both by the force of opinion and even by that of legislation: and as the tendency of all changes taking place in the world is to strengthen society, and diminish the power of the individual, this encroachment is not one of the evils which tend spontaneously to disappear, but, on the contrary, to grow more and more formidable. The disposition of mankind, whether as rulers or as fellow citizens, to impose their own opinions and inclinations as a rule of conduct on others, is so energetically supported by some of the best and by some of the worst feeling incident to human nature, that it is hardly ever kept under restraint by anything but want of power; and as the power is not declining, but growing, unless a strong barrier of moral conviction can be raised against the mischief, we must expect, in the present circumstances of the world, to see it increase. . . .

The time, it is to be hoped, is gone by, when any defense would be necessary of the "liberty of the press" as one of the securities against corrupt or tyrannical government. No argument, we may suppose, can now be needed, against permitting a legislature or an executive, not identified in interest with the people, to prescribe opinions to them, and determine what doctrines or what arguments they shall be allowed to hear. This aspect of the question, besides, has been so often and so triumphantly enforced by preceding writers, that it needs not be specially insisted on in this place. . . .

In politics, again, it is almost a commonplace, that a party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life; until the one or the other shall have so enlarged its mental grasp as to be a party equally of order and of progress, knowing and distinguishing what is fit to be preserved from what ought to be swept away. Each of these modes of thinking derives its utility from the deficiencies of the other; but it is in a great measure the opposition of the other that keeps each within the limits of reason and sanity. Unless opinions favourable to democracy and to aristocracy, to property and to equality, to co-operation and to competition, to luxury and to abstinence, to sociality and individuality, to liberty and discipline, and all the other standing antagonisms of practical life, are expressed with equal freedom, and enforced and defended with equal talent and energy, there is no chance of both elements obtaining their due; one scale is sure to go up, and the other down. Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites, that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners. On any of the great open questions just enumerated, if either of the two opinions has a better claim than the other, not merely to be tolerated, but to be encouraged and countenanced, it is the one which happens at the particular time and place to be in a minority. . . .

We have now recognized the necessity to the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends) of freedom of opinion, and freedom of the expression of opinion, on four distinct grounds: which we will now briefly recapitulate.

First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.

Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.

Thirdly, even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but, fourthly, the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct: the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience. . . .

A further question is, whether the State, while it permits, should nevertheless indirectly discourage conduct which it deems contrary to the best interests of the agent; whether, for example, it should take measures to render the means of drunkenness more costly, or add to the difficulty of procuring them, by limiting the number of the places of sale. On this as on most other practical questions, many distinctions require to be made. To tax stimulants for the sole purpose of making them more difficult to be obtained, is a measure differing only in degree from their entire prohibition; and would be justifiable only if that were justifiable. Every increase of cost is a prohibition, to those whose means do not come up to the augmented price; and to those who do, it is a penalty laid on them for gratifying a particular taste. Their choice of pleasures, and their mode of expending their income, after satisfying their legal and moral obligations to the State and to individuals, are their own concern, and must rest with their own judgment. These considerations may seem at first sight to condemn the selection of stimulants as special subjects of taxation for purposes of revenue. But it must be remembered that taxation for fiscal purposes is absolutely inevitable; that in most countries it is necessary that a considerable part of that taxation should be indirect; that the State, therefore, cannot help imposing penalties, which to some persons may be prohibitory, on the use of some articles of consumption. It is hence the duty of the State to consider, in the imposition of taxes, what commodities the consumers can best spare; and *a fortiori* to select in preference those of which it deems the use, beyond a very moderate quantity, to be positively injurious. Taxation, therefore, of stimulants, up to the point which produces the largest amount of revenue (supposing that the State needs all the revenue which it yields) is not only admissible, but to be approved of.

The question of making the sale of these commodities a more or less exclusive privilege, must be answered differently, according to the purposes to which the restriction is intended to be subservient. All places of public resort require the restraint of a police, and places of this kind peculiarly, because offences against society are especially apt to originate there. It is, therefore, fit to confine the power of selling these commodities (at least for consumption on the spot) to persons of known or vouched-for respectability of conduct; to make such regulations respecting hours of opening and closing as may be requisite for public surveillance, and to withdraw the licence if breaches of the peace repeatedly take place through the connivance or incapacity of the keeper of the house, or if it becomes a rendezvous for concocting

and preparing offences against the law. Any further restriction I do not conceive to be, in principle, justifiable. . . .

I have reserved for the last place a large class of questions respecting the limits of government interference, which, though closely connected with the subject of this essay, do not, in strictness, belong to it. These are cases in which the reasons against interference do not turn upon the principle of liberty; the question is not about restraining the actions of individuals, but about helping them: it is asked whether the government should do, or cause to be done, something for their benefit, instead of leaving it to be done by themselves, individually, or in voluntary combination.

The objections to government interference, when it is not such as to involve infringement of liberty, may be of three kinds.

The first is, when the thing to be done is likely to be better done by individuals than by the government. Speaking generally, there is no one so fit to conduct any business, or to determine how or by whom it shall be conducted, as those who are personally interested in it. This principle condemns the interferences, once so common, of the legislature, or the officers of government, with the ordinary processes of industry. . . .

In many cases, though individuals may not do the particular thing so well, on the average, as the officers of government, it is nevertheless desirable that it should be done by them, rather than by the government, as a means to their own mental education, a mode of strengthening their active faculties, exercising their judgment, and giving them a familiar knowledge of the subjects with which they are thus left to deal. This is a principal, though not the sole, recommendation of jury trial (in cases not political); of free and popular local and municipal institutions; of the conduct of industrial and philanthropic enterprises by voluntary associations. These are not questions of liberty, and are connected with that subject only by remote tendencies; but they are questions of development . . . as parts of national education; as being, in truth, the peculiar training of a citizen, the practical part of the political education of a free people, taking them out of the narrow circle of personal and family selfishness, and accustoming them to the comprehension of joint interests, the management of joint concerns, habituating them to act from public or semi-public motives, and guide their conduct by aims which unite instead of isolating them from one another. Without these habits and powers, a free constitution can neither be worked nor preserved, as is exemplified by the too often transitory nature of political freedom in countries where it does not rest upon a sufficient basis of local liberties. The management of purely local business by the localities, and of the great enterprises of industry by the union of those who voluntarily supply the pecuniary means, is further recommended by all the advantages which have been set forth in this essay as belonging to individuality of development, and diversity of modes of action. Government operations tend to be everywhere alike. With individuals and voluntary associations, on the contrary, there are varied experiments, and endless diversity of experience. What the State can usefully do, is to make itself a central depository, and active circulator and diffuser, of the experience resulting from many trials. Its business is to enable each experimentalist to benefit by the experiments of others, instead of tolerating no experiments but its own.

The third, and most cogent reason for restricting the interference of government, is the great evil of adding unnecessarily to its power. Every function superadded to those already exercised by the government, causes its influence over hopes and fears to be more widely diffused, and converts, more and more, the active and ambitious part of the public into hangers-on of the government, or of some party which aims at becoming the government. If the roads, the railways, the banks, the insurance offices, the great joint-stock companies, the universities, and the public charities, were all of them branches of the government; if, in addition, the municipal corporations and local boards, with all that now devolves on them, became departments of the central administration; if the employees of all these different enterprises were appointed and paid by the government, and looked to the government for every rise in life; not all the freedom of the press and popular constitution of the legislature would make this or any other country free otherwise than in name. And the evil would be greater, the more efficiently and scientifically the administrative machinery was constructed, the more skilful the arrangements for obtaining the best qualified hands and heads with which to work it. . . .

If every part of the business of society which required organized concert, or large and comprehensive views, were in the hands of the government, and if government offices were universally filled by the ablest men, all the enlarged culture and practiced intelligence in the country, except the purely speculative, would be concentrated in a numerous bureaucracy, to whom alone the rest of the community would look for all things: the multitude for direction and dictation in all they had to do; the able and aspiring for personal advancement. To be admitted into the ranks of this bureaucracy, and when admitted, to rise therein, would be the sole objects of ambition. Under this regime, not only is the outside public ill-qualified, for want of practical experience, to criticize or check the mode of operation of the bureaucracy, but even if the accidents of despotic or the natural working of popular institutions occasionally raise to the summit a ruler or rulers of reforming inclinations, no reform can be effected which is contrary to the interest of the bureaucracy. . . .

A government cannot have too much of the kind of activity which does not impede, but aids and stimulates, individual exertion and development. The mischief begins when, instead of calling forth the activity and powers of individuals and bodies, it substitutes its own activity for theirs; when, instead of informing, advising, and, upon occasion, denouncing, it makes them work in fetters, or bids them stand aside and does their work instead of them. The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it; and a State which postpones the interests of *their* mental expansion and elevation, to a little more of administrative skill, or of that semblance of it which practice gives, in the details of business; a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished; and that the perfection of machinery to which it has sacrificed everything, will in the end avail it nothing, for want of the vital power which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish.

Questions for Discussion

1. Pick an item from today's newspaper that reports a dispute between groups or between a group and the government. Which side of the issue do you think Mill would defend?
2. We previously encountered Mill in the section of this book on ethics. Do you think his political and social philosophy is consistent with his ethical views? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Discuss the evolution of the term *liberal*. How would you account for this change?

4. Mill wrote in the nineteenth century. Would he have expressed any of his views differently were he writing in the twenty-first century? Explain.
5. An American president declared that "the age of big government is over." In many democracies around the world, the role of government is being reduced. How would you account for this in light of Mill's essay?

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1. For Bentham, what two primary components do social justice depend on?

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2. According to Mill, what are the acceptable limits of individual freedom?

    Listen to the **program:** *Richard Reeves on Mill On Liberty* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Can an egalitarian be rich without being guilty of hypocrisy?

    Listen to the **podcast:** *G.A. Cohen on Inequality of Wealth* on **MySearchLab.com**

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Human Rights

At the end of World War II (1949), when the full extent of the Nazi atrocities had come to light, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, creating, in effect, an international law against human rights abuses. Since the end of the Cold War in the 1980s there has been an increasing use of international force to enforce this international law in combating human rights abuses—in the former Yugoslavia, the Albanian conflict, the "first Gulf War," the Rwandan and Sierra Leone crises in West Africa, and most recently the Darfur region of Sudan. In 2002 Slobodan Milosevic was tried; like Saddam Hussein, he was the head of a sovereign nation-state accused of "crimes against humanity," including genocide and the more recent crime of ethnic cleansing. In 2008 the International Criminal Court in The Hague indicted the president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in Darfur. Examples of these abuses include ethnic cleansing, genocide, and slavery.

On balance, it appears that, for the first time, there is a united front, a broad international consensus, on forcibly preventing certain universally condemned actions considered to violate certain basic and universal human rights. In the reading that follows, Gene Blocker traces the evolution of this idea of a universal moral and legal standard from its philosophical roots to its current status as a de facto international law.

Nazi officers, Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, and Charles Taylor have been charged with "crimes against humanity." Where did a law prohibiting such crimes come from? This is not, nor was it ever, a law adopted by a nation-state, whether in Nazi Germany, Serbia, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Sudan. Indeed, according to Iraqi law at the time of Hussein's rule, the president of Iraq was immune from prosecution for any crime whatsoever! Did Hussein break some international laws? If so, which ones? Do these international laws trump the laws of a sovereign nation? The Nuremberg war crimes tribunals occurred after the final defeat of Nazi Germany in a series of ad hoc trials set up by the victors. The United Nations military action known as the "no-fly zone" in Operation Provide Comfort beginning in 1991 to prevent a sovereign nation-state (Iraq) from perpetrating human rights abuses against its own (Kurdish) citizens is an example of something new and different.

In his article, Blocker examines, historically and critically, the source of this international law and the international willingness and ability to enforce it. As Blocker points out, the search for a universal, cross-cultural, international moral and legal standard has been going on for a long time—for millennia—at first (fifth to fourth centuries B.C.E.) in the philosophical search for universal standards of ethics and later (seventeen and

eighteenth centuries) in the theory of human or natural rights, particularly in Europe and the emerging new republic of the United States.

There are really two issues here: one very old and the other relatively new. The first is the old question of whether there are any universal, cross-cultural moral and legal standards (or, alternatively, whether everything is culturally relative). The second is the much newer question of whether there is any practical way to police such international standards of behavior.

H. Gene Blocker: Human Rights

In this paper we will trace the development of the seventeenth- to eighteenth-centuries doctrine of universal human rights from the ancient Greek conception of a universal moral standard based on a common human nature. While the Greeks did not develop

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the notion of "natural" or "human" rights, they did lay the foundation for this important modern conception. Of course, the idea of having a right generally to something is much older than the modern doctrine of "human rights," which can be understood as an extension of the ordinary notion of a right.

Let's begin by asking "What is a right?" generally and then proceed to narrow this down to "What is a natural, or human, right?" Generally speaking, a right is a justifiable claim or entitlement that one has or can lay claim to against others to have or do something. Anyone with a valid university parking permit has the right to (is entitled to) park in a university parking lot. If the lot is full because people are parking there without valid parking permits, and you have a permit; you can claim your right against them, and the university authorities would have to defend your right to park there by requiring them to leave. This right is not universal (because not everyone has the right to park there), nor is it permanent (you can purchase a new parking permit or you can give yours up when you leave the university). Natural, or human, rights, by contrast, are universal and permanent; they are rights that human beings have at all times, from birth to death, simply by virtue of being human beings. They are thus universal and "unalienable" rights—everyone has them, and they can't be acquired or disposed of.

Although the theory of universal human, or natural, rights did not become widespread until the eighteenth century—forming toward the end of that century the theoretical justification for both the American and the French revolutions—the theory has roots in the ancient past and has undergone considerable modification since. Plato and Aristotle did not discuss human rights as such and, indeed, did not believe that all persons were created equal or enjoyed the same basic rights and privileges as free-born Greek adult males whom they thought formed a natural aristocracy. Nonetheless, the closely related notion of "natural law" that developed in Roman times provided an important theoretical underpinning for the much later doctrine of universal human, or natural, rights.

By the time of the Roman rhetorician and statesman Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), a new political force was found in Rome that in time would unite into one political entity, under Roman domination, the entire Western world from Asia to Great Britain. The extension of government from relatively small communities (such as the Athens city-state of Plato's day) to vast continental areas during Alexander's empire and continuing into the Roman Empire leads to the question of how to justify governing different peoples and societies by one set of laws and institutions. Certainly reliance on old feudal loyalties and traditional customs will no longer work. Cicero provided an answer by extending the early Greek view of Plato and Aristotle that all people are basically alike, sharing a common human nature based on human reason, and that one set of standards therefore pertains to everyone. These standards he called "natural law," and he argued that because the foundation of a universal human nature is that all human beings share a common reason or rationality, these universal moral standards can therefore be discovered through reason by anyone (that is, anyone using his or her human reason would come to the same conclusions about what are just laws) and that they therefore provide the basis of a just state.

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In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) extended the Roman conception of natural law and distinguished it from other kinds of law (specifically, civil law and divine law). Like Cicero, Aquinas argued that policies that are inconsistent with natural law are unjust and hence natural law becomes a test for the validity of civil law. This notion of natural law later formed part of Thomas Hobbes' and John Locke's theories (seventeenth century) of human, or natural, rights and still later formed the legal basis of the Nazi war crimes tribunals at the end of World War II. The Nazi SS officers, while breaking none of the laws of Hitler's Germany, had nonetheless broken natural laws, committing crimes against humanity. The same natural law argument was later cited at the trials before the World Court in The Hague, involving leaders from the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. At the same time, the notion of legal "rights" was undergoing a gradual expansion, from limited legal rights that some individuals have in relation to others to a doctrine of class rights (that one class of people has rights in relation to other classes of people) to the final doctrine of universal human, or natural, rights, which everyone has in relation to everyone else. In the feudal period, for example, the lord had the right to demand military services of his knights and certain farming produce from his peasants, while his peasants had the right to demand of the lord protection from foreign invasion. This is the ordinary sense of rights as justifiable entitlements, whereby one person is justified in demanding certain treatment from others who, in turn, are obligated (that is, justifiably required) to obey. It was in this sense that English barons in 1215 forced King John (in the *Magna Carta*) to agree that they had rights that could not be overridden by the king. And extending this notion of legal rights provided a second avenue in the doctrine of universal human, or natural, rights as it finally evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There was a gradual breakdown of the feudal system, in which individuals were limited to precise functions or roles in society, depending on heredity—families of rulers, peasant-farmers, craftspersons, and so on. Most people were either nobles, clergy, or peasant-farmers. But gradually the small class of craftspeople escaped to

cities (London or Paris, for example), where they were free from their feudal obligations to the nobility to pursue their own business interests. Many of these people became very wealthy, creating a new "middle class" that eventually became the dominant class, overpowering even the nobility. These monumental changes necessitated changes in forms of government and social organization and therefore new ways of thinking about government and social organization.

Much of the new political thinking defended the rights and privileges of the new middle class, both against their aristocratic rivals and against the claims of the poor worker-peasant class. Members of the new middle class claimed certain rights (to property, to live where they chose, to educate themselves, to engage in whatever business they preferred, to determine their own government democratically, and so on), and the justification for government came increasingly to be seen as designed to serve the interests of the new middle class. As this occurred, people began to identify themselves as full and equal members of a wider political community rather than the small feudal community, as before. This was a step in the direction of modern nationalism and provided the basis for the emerging nation-states.

Finally, the Enlightenment doctrine of universal human, or natural, rights evolved to justify the creation of democratic nation-states (for example, the United States, France) at the end of the eighteenth century, in which power was to be transferred from the nobility of a nation-state (the kings, queens, dukes, earls, lords, etc.) to the property-owning middle class. The American Declaration of Independence, which Thomas Jefferson wrote on the model of John Locke's social and political philosophy, speaks of the universal, unalienable rights of all men, all of whom are said to be politically equal—but of course in practice that did not include African slaves or Native Americans (Indians), or, as Abigail Adams reminded her husband John (second president of the United States), the female half of the population. In the early years of the American republic, only free adult males who owned considerable property (land) were allowed to vote or hold office. "We the people," therefore, referred rhetorically to all human beings, although in practice only free, wealthy middle-class males were actually intended. Throughout the nineteenth century this group was gradually expanded to include all free adult males, and later freed African slaves, and finally, in the twentieth century, women.

In principle, then, all human beings, and only human beings, have certain unalienable rights, from birth, just by virtue of being human beings. But why do we tend to think that only human beings have these natural rights? What is so special or different about human beings that gives them these absolute entitlements? If we say, as many philosophers have said, that it is because all human beings are rational, we have to wonder if that includes very young children or those who are severely retarded. Similarly, if we say, as some philosophers have, that human beings are unique in being autonomous (that is, in their capacity to adopt and operate on a long-term life plan) and in that sense to have interests, it is not immediately clear whether this applies to all human beings (for example, those who are catatonic, autistic, severely retarded, very young, in irreversible "brain dead" comas, and so on). Nor is it entirely clear why nonhuman animals (especially the higher mammals) cannot meet these criteria and so also have rights.

Assuming that there are natural, as well as legal, rights and that all and only human beings have them, what are these rights? At first (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) the list of human rights was very small—three or four, though different philosophers proposed different lists (Jefferson cagily says "among these [rights] are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and John Locke spoke primarily of "life, liberty, and property"). The U.S. Bill of Rights includes many more (rights to free speech, assembly, and so on), and the 1947 United Nations list has swelled to more than thirty! Assuming that we have rights, what are they? On what basis can we decide which list is the right one? And even if we could make up our minds that all and only human beings possess humans rights and could decide what those rights included, there is still the vexing question of what exactly is a right? Is it a power to back up a claim (as Hobbes thought), or an entitlement (as other philosophers held)?

Not all eighteenth-century European philosophers accepted the idea of universal human, or natural, rights. The utilitarians in general and Jeremy Bentham in particular rejected the idea of natural law and natural, or human, rights, referring to the latter as "nonsense on stilts"—not just nonsense but pretentious nonsense. Did an African slave on a Georgia plantation in 1800 have the right to be free ("liberty" in "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness")? Did women have the right to vote in 1800 when Bentham was writing? They certainly didn't have the *legal* right to be free and to vote, and if they didn't possess these legal or civil rights, what good are their supposed natural rights? Of course, defenders of natural, or human, rights could continue to talk the language of human rights if they like—yes, they may say that the slaves were born with the natural rights to be free and women with the inalienable right to vote but that, unfortunately, these natural rights were at the time being violated. Even so, Bentham argued, they will not be able to *enjoy* these so-called natural rights until the laws of the countries in which they reside are changed—until slavery is abolished in the United States (as it was in 1865) and women are given the vote (as they were by 1920). Besides, Bentham continued, what evidence is there that human beings actually possess these rights? After all, it is not like claiming that all or most human beings are born with two arms, legs, eyes, etc.

Empirically, scientifically, there is no evidence that human beings have these natural rights (or that they do not). It is therefore a useless metaphysical debate that can never be proved one way or the other. Moreover, if there is no empirical, scientific way to determine whether people have natural rights and what they are, then, Bentham worried, anyone can claim and demand anything he or she thinks they have a right to, and if those demands are not met, they would have, according to Locke and others, the right to rebel against and attempt to overthrow their government. Suppose I think I have the natural and unalienable right to be recognized and rewarded as a talented individual. It can't be proved one way or the other whether I have this human right or not, and because I think this right of mine is not being protected by my government, I am justified, according to Locke and Jefferson, in concluding that the government has no justifiable basis, and so I begin smuggling guns for an armed revolution. (One reason Thomas Paine was no longer welcomed in the United States after the Revolution was that he continued to talk about citizens'

rights to rebel against the newly formed American constitutional government if they felt their rights were being violated—and some farmers took Paine at his word in the Whiskey Rebellion, which President Washington had to personally lead an army to put down. After the Revolution all the former revolutionaries except Paine ceased all revolutionary talk!) More recently (2004), Bosnian Serb Prime Minister Dragan Mikerevic complained to a delegation of the Council of Europe that NATO was violating the human rights of Serb officials by sacking those officials found aiding and hiding fugitive war crimes suspects, including Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic. (At the end of 2004, Mikerevic resigned in protest.)

Nonetheless, in general the doctrine of universal human rights became well established and was considerably expanded in the nineteenth century to include many universal human rights never considered in the eighteenth century. Many thoughtful people became concerned by the great disparities of wealth of the middle class and the staggering poverty of the newly emerging "working class" (those who left country farming to work for wages in new industries in big cities as a result of the Industrial Revolution) and began to extend the list of universal human, or natural, rights to include the more "positive" rights to an adequate standard of living, food, housing, health care, education, and so on. These are not just the "negative" rights to be free from governmental interference, to be left alone to pursue one's interests, but the "positive" right to acquire certain things one may not have, such as food and housing and medical care, which may require government interference. These more "positive" rights are often described as the most basic in the sense that without them, no other rights can be enjoyed. (For example, freedom of the press will mean little to someone starving to death.)

Thus by the end of nineteenth century, two quite different types of rights had emerged—the eighteenth century Bill of Rights sort of "negative" individual rights and the nineteenth century "positive" social welfare rights. At the end of World War II this distinction in human rights became an essential part of the Cold War debate between the Western capitalist democracies and the Communist bloc countries. For the capitalist West, an individual was said to be "free" from government interference, while for the Communist bloc, a person was "free" to enjoy free housing, medical care, education, etc. To those in the Western democracies, an individual enjoyed an "equal" opportunity to compete fairly in the open market, depending on his or her talents and abilities; to those in the Eastern socialist countries, a person ideally should enjoy "equal" pay, equal housing, and so on, regardless of talent or ability. According to the West, an unequal distribution of wealth was just if it was the result of a fair competition, while to the East, any unequal distribution of wealth was considered unjust. Finally, for the capitalist West, an individual had the right to be free from undue interference in his or her private affairs, while for the communist East, a person had the right to equal education, housing, salary, medical care, and so on. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the late President Franklin Roosevelt, was asked to negotiate and reconcile these two different versions of human rights in order to forge a new United Nations statement on human rights. As a result, the United Nations 1947 Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains both sorts of rights—the eighteenth century individual liberties kind of "negative" rights to be free of government interference, dear to the developed Western democracies, and the nineteenth century

social welfare sort of "positive" rights to have enough to eat, shelter, health care, and so on, favored by underdeveloped socialist nations. As examples of the first, we see, for example, Article 3, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person," and Article 17, "Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property." An example of the second sort of right is Article 25, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

Obviously these two notions of rights are bound to clash. To provide everyone with adequate food, shelter, education, and health care, we must take more from the wealthy members of the society (who are not likely to give large sums of money voluntarily) in order to meet the needs of those less well off. But this means that social welfare rights are always at the expense of individual rights. Because one of the chief individual rights is the right to accumulate private property, any system of taxation for the purpose of economic redistribution will seem unfair and unjust from the point of view of eighteenth-century individual rights. Do individuals have a right to and are they entitled to keep as much wealth as they are able to acquire by honest means? Or do individuals have a right to and are they entitled to receive a more equal share of the basic necessities of life (such as food, shelter, medical care, etc.) in order to develop as human beings? If the answer is yes to both, how are we to balance the two? In recent years this has resulted in a spirited debate between those who favor "freedom" over "equality"—that is, the right to individual freedom over the right to enjoy equal pay, medical attention, housing, and so on, versus the reverse, that positive "equality" rights take precedence over negative "freedom" rights. Suppose I belong to an all-white country club. Does this violate the right of African Americans to equal opportunity? And does the government forcing the club to allow black members violate my individual right to free association? Does my right to be free to associate with whomever I please, free from government pressure to associate with those I don't like, trump or take precedence (priority) over the right of African Americans and other minorities living in my community to equal opportunity (to all the admitted political and economic benefits that spring from membership in the country club)?

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the question who or what has these rights has been greatly extended to the possibility of animals, future generations, and even plants, mountains, and rivers. The problem in attempting to justify the claim that all and only human beings have equal rights lies in determining the criteria on which that claim is based. The problem with most proposed criteria for grounding such rights is that they tend to be either too narrow or too wide, excluding some human beings and including some nonhumans. For example, if the ability to reason is cited as the basis for having human rights, then, as we saw earlier, what do we say about infants or those who are mentally retarded? Don't our intuitions tell us that these are the very ones who most need the concept of human rights as a protection? But on the other hand, are there not other animals who exercise reasoning abilities, and why should they not be considered to be right-bearers? At first it may not seem to make any sense to speak of the rights of anything other than human beings,

because only humans can assert their rights and fight against their violation. But we do talk about the rights of such nonhuman entities as corporations and nations, and we speak of the state's claiming rights on behalf of entities, such as an infant or a comatose patient, which they themselves cannot assert. How far can we (and should we) extend the list of nonhumans that have rights?

And why would anyone *want* to extend the list of rights-bearers so broadly? That brings us to the "politics" of right. Those who think that the need for sweeping legislation protecting animals or the environment is terribly urgent will argue that refusal to act on such legislation not only leads to undesirable consequences but is also a violation of fundamental rights, while those who think that obvious mistreatment of animals is wrong but who nonetheless put primary value on promoting the immediate needs and interests of human beings will urge a more gradual approach. This is because rights are by definition entitlements, legitimate claims that must be met immediately and unconditionally. If you are caught breaking into my house, I don't *ask* you to return my stolen goods; I *demand* it. Nor are you in a position to negotiate with me when to return the stolen goods, pleading for instance that you need my iPod more than I do over the next few days, after which you promise to return it. I might be unusually kind and generous and allow this, but you are not in a position to demand it. You have violated my rights and must immediately desist. This is why it is often said that "rights imply duties." If I have the right to private property, then you have a duty not to violate that right. And the state has the duty to protect that right. Therefore, if I have a right to adequate medical care, then the state has the duty to provide it, and that means coming up with the money if I don't have it, either for the cost of the medical care or for the health insurance. And, of course, that money will ultimately have to come from those who have more money than I do, and because they will not voluntarily give it to me, the state will have to force it from them through a system of taxation, for example, and that means employing a large number of civil servants to make sure that this enforced tax is actually collected. What this means in practical terms is that if "pro life" advocates can convince legislators that abortion is a violation of a fetus's "right to life," then all of us have a duty not to engage in abortions, and the state has the duty to prevent them—completely and immediately. If, on the other hand, "pro life" advocates are not successful in this effort and are only able to get legislation passed which discourages or delays or makes abortion more difficult, then abortions will continue, though perhaps gradually decreasing over many years.

Another interesting and important contemporary debate concerns the question of group rights—that is, the rights of groups of people against other groups of people. Is discrimination against African Americans, Native Americans, or women a violation of their individual rights to be treated equally or a violation of their rights as African Americans, Native Americans, or women? The idea of human rights as it finally evolved in the eighteenth century implies the equality of all persons and therefore lays stress on the individual rights of each person, equal in every way to every other individual person. From this it seems to follow that unequal treatment of people because of group characteristics—by race, gender, religion—is a clear violation of human rights (usually referred to as "discrimination"). But today some philosophers claim

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that because individuals are often discriminated against simply because of their membership in a group (because they are black, Indian, or female, for example), these are group rights and not just individual rights that are being violated and that must therefore be protected. Is pornography a violation of women's right to equal dignity and freedom from assault or an individual right to free speech? Is "affirmative action" or "preferential treatment" a protection of African American rights or a violation of the rights of other individuals to equal treatment? How can it be a violation of women's rights to be excluded from an all-male school and yet be a protection of women's rights to exclude men from an all-female school? If, as an African American, I have successfully fought for inclusion of blacks in university fraternities and sororities, can I now exclude whites from all-black fraternities and sororities in the name of protecting the group rights of African Americans?

A different, though related, concern is the supposed right of groups to preserve their group identity. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Native American children were encouraged to assimilate into mainstream American culture—they were not allowed to speak their Native American languages or to practice their tribal customs in school, in hopes that their children would cease to identify themselves and to be identified by others as Native Americans. Was this a violation of the group rights of Native Americans to remain identifiably Native American, to preserve their cultural identity? Toward the end of 2004 the Eskimo, or Inuit, announced their plan to seek a ruling from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that the U.S. contribution to global warming was threatening their right to exist. As the Inuit spokesperson, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, said, the biggest fear was not that warming would kill individuals but that it would be the final blow to the Inuit culture. Today many African Americans protest the adoption of black infants by white families because they fear this will make the children assimilate into white America and forget their African American roots. In addition to their rights as individuals, do the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq have the right to their own Kurdish nation-state? And is it a violation of their group rights as Kurds that the Turkish government works to assimilate them into mainstream Turkish society? Is the fact that most Scottish people cannot speak their original Gaelic language an indication that they were robbed by the English of their group rights—their rights as a Gaelic people—regardless of whether they want to speak or learn Gaelic?

Finally, now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and despite all the problems we have been at pains to enumerate (first in the theory of universal moral standards based on a universal human nature and second in the theory of universal human rights), the language of, if not the belief in, universal human rights has become the *de facto* international standard to which all heads of state at least pay lip service. Enshrined as it is in the United Nations charter, every country in the world that wants to belong to the UN must promise to protect the human rights of its citizens and to support other nations in condemning fellow members who violate those rights. Some intellectuals from non-Western countries argue that this whole doctrine of universal human rights is a Western invention that does not apply to them and should not be forced upon them. Perhaps in their own ancient cultural traditions, men and women are *not* equal, perhaps their religious beliefs *prohibit* the practice of all but one religion and therefore *forbid* religious tolerance

of the right of heretics to engage in false religious practices. Even today women may neither vote nor run for office in Saudi Arabia and other Islamic nations. Nonetheless, they have signed on to the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has become an international standard of proper behavior. Whatever we philosophically believe about the existence or extent of human rights, it is the case that trial without jury or use of a lawyer, imprisonment for political beliefs, and violations of freedom of the press or religion or assembly or movement have become taboo in the international community. And, since the fall of the Soviet Union, the will and ability of the international community to police this *de facto* international standard is steadily increasing, with both military might and criminal trials at the World Court.

But however naïve or flawed the ancient, medieval, and early modern ideas may now seem to some, subsequent generations have used this evolving philosophical tradition to construct an established set of ideas more appropriate to their particular time and place. This frequently happens in the history of ideas. When early modern scientists looked around for concepts to express their new empirical findings, they naturally turned to the Greek atomists, astronomers, and mathematicians. They did so not because they believed theses armchair Greek philosophers had gotten it right but because the latter provided an extremely useful foundation on which to construct the new science. The ancient atomists had defined the real entities of the world as the smallest, unbreakable (the literal meaning of "atom") bits of matter. Nothing existed, they maintained, except atoms and empty space (a receptacle for the atoms to move about). Plato challenged his students to come up with a model of the planetary system. "Planets" in Greek means those wanderers that, unlike all the other visible heavenly bodies, move about in irregular patterns relative to the otherwise fixed pattern of stars. Plato's assignment was to construct a system in which the planets moved in separate perfect concentric circles (orbits) around a fixed point, from which the actual planetary observations could be predicted. Pythagoras apparently held that numbers, and not atoms, were the real constituents of the universe and developed complex mathematical theories in pursuit of this metaphysical dream. Whether true or not, these philosophical ideas certainly proved useful tools for early modern scientists to work with.

Similarly, after some rather heated debate the decision was made to utilize the pre-Christian doctrines of the philosophers wherever possible (accepting as new information doctrines not discussed in the Bible and rejecting only that which directly contradicted the biblical account). Socrates was the first to hold that a human being is a combination of a physical body and an immaterial soul. Because the Greeks believed that anything really real must be eternal—never born and never dying (and indeed never changing in any way whatsoever)—the soul in Socrates' account was eternal both before birth and after death. Because the eternity of the soul before birth contradicted the biblical account (which held that God had created everything), Socrates' idea had to be rejected by the early church fathers. But the concept of a person as a physical body and an immaterial soul that eternally survives the destruction of the body was something early Christians were happy to make use of. (Similarly, if the ancient atomists held that because the atoms were really real, they had always existed and always would, this, too, had to be amended.

God created the atoms, after which they were permanent until God decided to end the world.) And Christian theologians, searching for ways to define God, used the ancient Greek notion of the really real as a way to define God as the only necessarily existing being (which could never not have existed and could never cease to exist) in the universe.

Similarly in the case of the doctrine of universal human rights based on a common (rational) human nature. When the emerging middle classes were looking for ways to express their demands for political and economic freedom, they (or their spokespersons) naturally turned to the ancient and medieval notions of natural law and natural, or human, rights. And much later, when the lawyers involved in the Nuremburg war crimes tribunal at the end of World War II looked for legal precedent (after all, what laws had Hitler's subordinates broken?), they naturally turned to the medieval-Roman-Greek philosophical concept of universal human rights to formulate the now-famous charge "crimes against humanity." Many difficulties have been faced at each stage of this long and constantly evolving tradition: Is there really a common human nature? How could we ever verify or falsify such a thing? Does it really apply exclusively to human beings and, if so, why? Precisely what are these natural, human, rights? (Do they include the "positive" right to adequate housing and medical care as well as the "negative" Bill of Rights to free speech and the like?) Despite all these enormous problems, the resulting *de facto* international standard that exists today is, perhaps by sheer accident and extraordinary good luck, rather good, capturing as it does the modern notions of the fundamental value, worth, dignity, and political equality of every person and the right of each person to pursue his or her own dreams (limited only by the qualification that this does not unduly limit the equal freedoms and rights of other individuals).

Even if we continue to dispute the philosophical (and scientific) justification of most or all of the long list of these rather audacious philosophical claims—that there is a common human nature, that it is based on reason, that it is the defining trait of human beings that elevates them well above the other animals, that based on this there are "natural laws" and universal "human rights"—don't we agree that, however we came by it, the current notion of human rights provides as good a *de facto* international moral and legal standard as any we could come up with today? If Jeremy Bentham were alive today, would he actively argue against the doctrine of human rights, or would he feel, as a good utilitarian, that more good would come of allowing this "useful fiction" than of abandoning it?

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think there are universal human rights? Why or why not?
2. Do you think animals have natural rights? Why or why not?
3. What is the best defense of humane treatment of animals—the doctrine of natural rights, utilitarianism, or the biblical notion that people are the rightful custodians of plants and animals?
4. Is the theory of human rights a Western invention, and if so, why should non-Western cultures respect it?

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2. What might be needed for groups with conflicting values to live alongside each other?

   ((•‒ **Listen** to the **podcast:** *Anthony Appiah on Cosmopolitanism* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Is there enough in common between all human beings to warrant a universal ethical system?

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Individual Happiness
and Social Responsibility

Before leaving the issue of the rights of the individual and the limits of government, it is important to look at a question about human nature itself. An area of tension in Western liberal thought focuses on the extent to which the individual can be conceived as and identified as an atomic entity independent of the community in which the individual is embedded. Some versions of liberalism start with fully formed individuals having values and rights and then use this concept as a basis for constructing a social order. Others argue that this is distorted thinking, since individuals really exist only as persons with values and rights within an already existing community.

There are two old traditions in Western thought on this issue. The ancient Greek philosophers viewed human beings as unavoidably social creatures who required a social framework in which to realize their full humanness. A person who withdraws from society to seek only private goods was perceived to be an anomaly, an aberration. From the Greek term for "one's own" (*idios*) came the word *idiot* to describe such a person. Aristotle in both his writings on ethics and politics argues that the individual can achieve full potential only through cultivating the proper human relationships. Home, family, friends, and finally the civic unit (for Greeks, the *polis,* or city-state) provide the context in which one develops the full human potential. In the following article the contemporary American philosopher Mark Holowchak argues that we have gone too far toward liberal individualism, and that a shift is urgently needed back toward the ancient Greek model of communitarianism.

Holowchak makes the case that by our very nature we human beings are so constructed that true happiness requires an integration, not only of all aspects of one's personality, but "an integration within a social and political unit." As he points out, this view is diametrically opposed to the currently popular view, which he refers to as liberalism, or liberal morality, according to which human beings are completely autonomous and self-contained individuals. According to contemporary liberal morality, any social coercion of individuals is warranted only insofar as it promotes still greater individual freedom. So long as my desires do not conflict with yours then each of us should be left alone to pursue our individual wants.

Holowchak traces this extreme individualism of liberal morality to modern thinkers, especially the empiricist philosophers, Hobbes, Hume, and Mill, who stressed the priority of emotions over reason in morality—"X is good" means "I like it," or "it gives me pleasure." There is no rational or objective way to determine what is really right or wrong, according to this empiricist liberalism, and since different people and different societies

like, want, and desire different things, there is no objective right or wrong. All is relative to subjective likes and dislikes.

But Holowchak claims this is a terribly mistaken reading of human nature. According to Holowchak, people are social creatures. Development of true independence and autonomy can occur only, he argues, within a social setting. To develop your full potential as an individual you must be able to function comfortably within a social order. In the end liberal morality contradicts itself and therefore makes no sense. Happiness can be found only in the integration within social and political institutions.

This means a return to the more balanced view of the ancient Greeks, in which we not only demand our individual rights but also assume our duties and responsibilities toward others, where we not only seek to satisfy our personal wants and desires but also strive for a reasoned social ideal which binds people together for the common good, however difficult that may be to achieve in actual practice.

M. Andrew Holowchak: Happiness and Justice in "Liberal" Society: Autonomy as Political Integration

I. Happiness as Integration

The topic, "happiness," has traditionally been and continues to be the focal point of and most seductive issue in philosophical discussions in ethics. While many, such as Aristotle and Mill, take it to be the end of all human activity, almost all (if not all) philosophers acknowledge that it is a valuable, if not essential, component of a good life.

The notion that happiness is, in some sense, a type of integration is nothing new. This is unquestionably mainstream in philosophical accounts of happiness as well as most non-philosophical accounts. In early Greek culture, for instance, the very walls at the famous sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi contained the words, "Know yourself" (*gnothi seauton*) and "Nothing in excess" (*meden agan*), which suggest that good living, for the Greeks, was a matter of self-integration as well as integration with one's environment. In *Republic,* Plato takes himself, through Socrates, to have answered the challenge of Thrasymachus (that justice and happiness are nothing but the advantage of the stronger) in Book I by an argument in Book IV that is designed to show that justice and happiness are a harmony of the soul. In our own day, Bertrand Russell says that happiness is, in part, rationality and rationality is a type of "internal harmony."[1] He elaborates:

> [T]he greatest happiness comes with the most complete possession of one's faculties. It is in the moments when the mind is most active and the fewest things are forgotten that the most intense joys are experienced. This indeed is one of the best touchstones of happiness.[2]

That happiness involves some sort of personal integration—that is, getting to know oneself or attaining a sort of inner harmony between the discordant parts of one's

mental apparatus—is non-controversial. What is relatively controversial, however, is the thesis that a necessary condition for happiness is integration within a social and political unit. To show this, I must first make a case against what I take to be the received view of morality today: liberalism. For it is through the miscarriage of liberal morality that we can best see why personal integration cannot occur without a political body.

II. Liberalism

The received view of happiness today is liberalism. At the political level, liberalism states that individuals are fundamental units of political analysis and, thereby, prior to their communities and institutions. Liberalism asserts that people are autonomous and self-contained individuals, whose rights precede those of any collection of individuals or those of any institution. According to this view, any coercion by institutions is warranted only when it advances individuals' liberty.

As moral policy, liberal philosophy asserts that as long as my values, based on my desires or wants, do not conflict with yours, then I ought to be free to do what I want (while you ought to be free to do the same)—what is sometimes called the "principle of maximum liberty." My desires are what enable me to be an individual; and freely acting upon them, in concert with or without reason, is the purest expression of both my autonomy and my happiness. In other words, openly following my desires in my own unique way is what makes me an individual.

Liberalism has its roots in the empiricist philosophers such as Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, and Hume—each of whom tied moral assertions to will, appetites, desires, and/or affections. When empiricists turned to morality, most found little warrant for any account underpinned by reason.[3] For instance, Hume, in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* argues that the rules of morality are not derived from reason. They are left to our passions. He states: "And as reasoning is not the source, whence either disputant derives his tenets; it is vain to expect, that any logic, which speaks not to the affections, will engage him to embrace sounder principles."[4] Morality is for Hume merely a matter of descriptive psychology. The various manifestations of liberal morality today—descriptivism, naturalism, emotivism, and postmodernism—in reducing morality to wanting or desiring, have by fiat degraded morality to one form or another of hedonism.

There is perhaps no more celebrated expression of liberal thinking than Mill's *On Liberty.* Here Mill states that the principle of maximal liberty is a principle of individuation. Mill says, "If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode."[5] Individuality allows humans to express themselves fully—that is, to give full vent to their desires. Thus it leads to progress and happiness:

> It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where not the person's own character but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principle ingredients of human happiness and the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.[6]

Through individual expression, people find happiness, and society is the ultimate benefactor.[7]

It is not difficult to see why liberalism has taken root so firmly today, both morally and politically. The notions that (1) we as individuals are prior to and more fundamental than our communities while (2) we are different from other persons seem intuitively sensible. Concerning the first, institutions comprise individuals and, of these, only individual people are living, breathing things. How can an institution have rights or any properties whatsoever that are independent of its inhabitants at a given time? Second, what is more obvious than the inherent differences among people? Liberalism, through pivoting on individuals, captures both of these intuitions.

III. The Case Against Liberalism

In spite of its lure, liberalism is wrong. It is wrong, first and foremost, because individuals are not privileged in political analysis. People are social creatures. We live in societies, not because of need, but because we overwhelmingly prefer to live in societies. This is no smug, *a priori* claim about the essence of human beings, but instead a guarded and correct observation about how people do in fact actually live. Even the earliest expositor of liberal thinking, John Locke, in *The Second Treatise of Government,* concedes that humans are naturally disposed toward communal living, though he calls such state-of-nature societies "pre-political" insofar as they lack a common superior to handle disputes.[8]

Liberals insist, through due regard for freedom of individuals, that we are essentially autonomous and wanting individuals, and only incidentally social creatures. In a recent attack on liberal morality, Bob Brecher writes concerning liberals' failure to embed individuals in a society and their vacuous notion of "autonomy":

> Just as the alleged incorrigibility of what we want serves finally to undermine moral justification, so its allegedly value-free conception of harm in the end obscures and even makes paradoxical the liberal insistence that interference with individual autonomy is justified only 'to prevent harm to others'. For in failing to see individuals as embedded within the society and various sub-groups in which they live, it cannot deal adequately with those harms that are morality-dependent, harms which cannot be recognized from a value-neutral vantage-point.[9]

One may sensibly object, nonetheless, that choosing a political existence, through the numerous rules and regulations of any society, puts constraints on our autonomy and capacity for individuation. In choosing a political existence, however, we do not sacrifice individuality, but rather we optimize the occasions for realizing it. There are countless opportunities for creative, human expression within any given society—except, perhaps, the most oppressive ones. Diversity of people means diversity of wants, and the latter means numerous and different opportunities for originality and human happiness. That these *seem to be* offset by other instances where we cannot get what we want is no sufficient rejoinder. Social institutions, especially those that are democratically diverse, offer us many more opportunities for happiness than they take away.

In short, the social or political nature of human beings—the fact that true autonomy of individuals only occurs within a non-oppressive social setting—shows that individuals are not prior to communities, but coextensive with them. It is not the "individual *qua* individual," but the "individual *qua* social being" or the "social individual" that is the fundamental unit of political analysis. Liberals, then, irresponsibly hide behind the buzzword, "autonomy," while they fail to realize that there can be no coherent notion of the word in an asocial context. Consequently, the liberal notion of happiness as freedom for self-expression and self-determination lacks content and, therefore, is empty.

The most pernicious and vapid form of liberalism today is postmodernism. Postmodernism thrives in certain fashionable philosophical sects, in the sociological literature, and in most "democratic" societies. This view is difficult to put into words. There are as many different formulations as there are advocates, and even advocates often admit to this confusion.[10] Whatever their differences, postmodernists, to a person, all agree that philosophy has come to a turning point, where it must be either discontinued or, at least, radically transformed. Strictly speaking, postmodernists reject any meaningful, traditional notion of rationality and offer, instead, a happy anti-authoritarianism which takes as its basis freedom and desire as embedded within the ever-changing conventions and constructions of society. It rails against any meaningful sense of philosophy as it has been traditionally done and offers nothing substantive in its place. Brecher has this to say concerning postmodernist confusion:

> Postmodernism is the outcome of the destructive dialectic between the twin peaks of empiricism and liberalism: their squeamishness about reason and their misconceivedly atomized—because deracinated—conception of the individual.[11]

A postmodernist morality, then, is liberalism taken to its chaotic extreme. Individuals as irrational beings follow the various currents of antagonistic impulses that swirl about helter-skelter within themselves and their vacillating society. With postmodernism, there is absolutely no room for any sensible conception of morality. Thus we are compelled to return to the larger notion of ethics—that is, the notion of living a good life—where "good" can only be construed as a going with the flow of one's impulses.

If I am correct in insisting that liberalism is the received view today, then we have moved away from the provinciality of morality and its emphasis on rightness or wrongness of actions, back to full-fledged ethics. With liberalism as moral policy, however, we have not done so from any richer or more complete notion of human agency and culpability. We have done so merely because the notion of a right or wrong action makes no sense when basing morality *exclusively* upon desires. We have fallen back upon the self-service morality of egoistic hedonism and there is no longer room for reason to intercede, except in an instrumental fashion.[12]

A final criticism of liberalism is that it bases morality and political theory on what is most bestial and least praiseworthy in humans: human selfishness. In criticizing the "egalitarian" political institutions of recent times, Gandhi had this to say:

> Socialism and Communism of the West are based on certain conceptions which are fundamentally different from ours. One such conception is their belief in the essential selfishness of human nature. I do not subscribe to it, for I know that the essential

difference between man and brute is that the former can respond to the call of spirit in him and can rise superior to the passions that he owns in common with the brute and therefore superior to selfishness and violence which belong to brute nature and not to the immortal spirit of man.[13]

As Gandhi fully knew, no political institution, based on individuals as egoistic wanting entities, is capable of thriving.

What I have aimed to show previously is not that the liberal moral and political platforms are inherently putrefied and debased, but that the moral-political pendulum, from ultra-conservatism, has swung too far to *ultra*-liberalism. In embracing autonomy as its highest good, liberalism has gone too far, so much so that it is without meaning—at least, if it is the case, as observation strongly suggests, that humans are inherently social creatures.

If this argument is compelling, there can be no conception of individuals' happiness that divorces these individuals from their social context. Therefore, for an adequate notion of happiness, we must look within the various social and political institutions in which people live. It is in these institutions that we achieve our fullest autonomy and the most diverse and fulfilling means of human expression. It is through integrating ourselves in these institutions that we find happiness. Thus, to be happy, one must be politically integrated—that is, rationally responsive not only to one's own desires and wants, but also to those of others in one's community and the needs of the community itself.

IV. Political Integration and Social Responsibility

Modern times do require an escape from the provinciality of liberal moral and political theory to an expanded notion of what it means to be happy. Here, I suggest, we can learn something from the ancient Greeks in our attempt to reevaluate what it means to live a good life today.

Overall, Greeks regarded happiness (*eudaimonia,* literally, "being blessed with a good god within") as the development of a certain type of virtuous character. "Ethics," Aristotle himself tells us, comes from the Greek words, (*ethos,* short 'e') and (*èthos,* long 'e')—the former meaning roughly "habit," the latter, "character." Living the right kind of life, then, mostly comprises developing a stable, moral character through a proper mode of habituation from childhood as well as the cultivation of our rational faculty at the appropriate age.[14]

For the Greeks, then, living a good life was much more than egoistic pleasure seeking or having a moral perspective. Happiness was a way of life and the Greek way of life, especially during the time of Plato and Aristotle, was essentially political (centered on the *polis* or city-state) in nature. Individuals served under and considered themselves subordinate to the *polis*.[15] After all, the good of the *polis* depended crucially on a sense of duty to it and a just division of labor to ensure that all citizens could be as happy as possible—in other words, that no citizens would be outstandingly happy at the expense of others who might suffer inordinately.[16]

What ensured this sense of duty and willingness to cooperate for the "good of the whole"? Classical Greeks bought into a sense of communitarianism. For Socrates, Plato states, it is plain mindfulness, first, that the polis is more divine than its inhabitants

and, second, that it gives to its citizens much more than they can ever hope to give in return.[17] For Plato, it is an external sense of justice. Justice, he says, is something to be valued for its own sake as much as for the sake of its beneficial consequences.[18] For Aristotle, it is *filia*—here, to be understood not so much as "friendship" but rather as communal ties of genuine affection within a *polis* (for utility, pleasure, or goodness).[19]

Classical Greek notions of communitarianism were certainly sociological reflections of their times. Clearly there were stark defects in Greek political thought and moral theory, most of which reflected their societal ills. The most striking defect was their incurably elitist and aristocratic slant. Regard for the rights and autonomy of all individuals in a community, with the possible exception of Epicureans, was something foreign to Classical Greek thinking. But my aim here is philosophical, not sociological. Autonomy, which is part of the very fabric of democratic societies today, does seem to have as much right to be regarded as a virtue as does any other traditional virtue.

If we judge by the works of ancient Greek moral and political thinkers, the Greek view of life and justice, in spite of its failings, was certainly more robust than is ours. There is little sense of rightness or justice with today's liberal morality and policy, and these merely protect individuals' rights to pursue their own ends through the gratification of their own impulses. Morality and constitutions based chiefly on gratification of impulses have no true foundation and cannot endure. Today we delight in disagreement, not for the sake of serving as a springboard for consensus or truth in the future, but as an end itself. We tolerate differences of opinion, however absurd and unfounded, with bubbling enthusiasm. Our wisdom consists of a kind of "perplexed" poise with a touch of buoyant grace in the face of adversity.

Toleration of divergent opinion is, of course, a very good thing—especially in matters unsettled by rational dispute—but it is not and ought not to be an end in itself. As humans, we want answers to the questions we ask. It may be that many of these questions do not presently admit of answers. Others may never admit of answers. Still, level-headed dispute will serve provisionally, at least, to help us differentiate sensible from senseless questions.

With a focus on cultivating and maintaining excellence of character and evaluating the justness of an act by the goodness of the person committing that act, Greek ethics and politics placed a premium on responsibility and justice, in spite of the fact that there was no sense of "individual" in Greek political thought as there is in modern-day democracies. "Individual" took meaning only insofar as people took part in their community and developed communal ties. Today, regardless of ethical perspective, we call *actions* just or unjust, not the agents performing them, as did the Greeks. This change of perspective is significant for culpability. We do not want to blame ourselves when what we do goes wrong, if we can blame the action itself.

The received moral view today leaves no place for responsibility squarely on the shoulders of an agent. After all, liberal morality is a matter of autonomous agents fulfilling personal desires. Reason in not judgmental of but instrumental for wants. Communities are meant only to serve individuals. Duty to others, to community, and to anything other than self is ignored. Constitutions undergirded by liberal policy are thus decadent.

The picture that I draw, many will say, is grossly exaggerated. If we could travel back to ancient Greece, we would see as much (perhaps even more) lust,

greed, indulgence, and selfishness as we do in modern "democratic" societies. I do not challenge this objection at all, for this is not chiefly what is at issue here. My aim, as I mention above, is philosophical and not sociological. What is at issue here are the philosophic visions of their time and ours.

The great men of ancient Greece had a broader and grander philosophic vision than our politicians and philosophers, both men and women, have today. Theirs was a *rational* ideal of binding people together for the common good. Our predominant ideal today is individuation with scant regard for reason. We would do well to remember what Aristotle often said: We are, by nature, political animals.[20] Our good is thus to be had principally in political institutions. Autonomy, if is it expressed as an asocial ideal or even if it is just expressed indifferently to institutionalization, is an unhappy and ephemeral ideal. We need to be reminded that, as communities are founded to serve individuals, they only work well when individuals work together for the good of their communities.

V. Concluding Remarks

In summary, the received moral and political view, liberalism, is disappointing not in its recognition of autonomy as an important value, but in its insistence that autonomy is our one or, at least, chief value. Moreover, liberalism refuses to acknowledge that true autonomy is to be found only within political institutions—especially those that are democratically diverse. Last, liberalism elevates as a fixed natural disposition what is perhaps least worthy of promotion, human selfishness, and wholly neglects human self*less*ness of spirit, which has an equally good claim to be considered as a human tendency. Realizing this, liberalism as a guide to happiness can do no other than disappoint. In a word, the liberal view of happiness, at any level, is a matter of *dis*integration, not integration.

Nonetheless, if my account of happiness as both personal and political integration is correct, it explains why true happiness is so slippery. Just like the acquisition of any skill, procuring happiness takes planning, focus, discipline, and persistence. Only those persons who devote themselves to a lifetime of personal discovery and growth *and* who place themselves within and at the service of both their community and others can find the equanimity and can achieve the stability of character that is distinctive of all happy people.

Endnotes

1. 1996, pp. 85–87 (*Conquest of Happiness,* New York: Liveright Publishing Company).
2. Ibid, p. 87.
3. Locke being an exception.
4. Hume 1998, p. 3 (*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Oxford University Press).
5. 1985, p. 132–133 (*On Liberty,* New York: Penguin Books).
6. Ibid, p. 120. It is interesting that Mill links happiness with progress here.
7. For Mill, the many benefit indirectly, because only in a free society is genius allowed to flourish and, when genius flourishes, society flourishes. This is the main argument in Chapter 3 of *On Liberty* and it shows that his intentions are anything but straightforwardly egalitarian.

8. Our preference for political life is merely rationally chosen regard for security of interests (Chapter 19).
9. 1998, p. 155 (*Getting What You Want: A Critique of Liberal Morality,* New York: Routledge).
10. Baynes et al. 1989, p. 3 (*After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press).
11. Brecher 1998, p. 4.
12. That is, devising strategies that enable one to overcome obstacles in order to pursue one's desires. Compare Freud's ego and id.
13. 1996, p. 133 (*Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings,* Indianapolis: Hackett).
14. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9 (1179b5–19).
15. For example, one of the underlying themes of Plato's *Crito.*
16. Plato's *Republic,* IV (420b–421c).
17. *Crito,* p. 50c–51.
18. *Republic,* II.358a.
19. Though it is listed as just one of the many political virtues in Book II (1108a27–28), *filia* was so crucial for Aristotle's notion of community that he devotes two of his ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Books VIII and IX, to it.
20. *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1162a16–19 & 1169b16–22, *Eudemian Ethics,* 1242a19–28, and *Politics,* 1253a7–18 & 1278b15–30.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the positive values of liberal morality? How are they sometimes distorted when taken in isolation?
2. Give some additional examples of how extreme liberalism produces unwanted side effects in our culture.
3. Connect the discussion of classical liberalism from Chapter 35 with the discussion in this chapter of contemporary forms of liberalism.
4. What is the connection between empiricism and liberalism? How does this relate to ethical subjectivism and relativism?
5. Is it possible in a society as racially, religiously, and ethnically diverse as the United States to rationally strive for a social ideal of the common good to which we are all committed?

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

One of the themes in this section is the ongoing tension in Western political thought over the proper relationship between the individual and the larger community, which is, generally speaking, the state. Nineteenth-century liberalism advocated the maximum amount of individual liberty and minimal interference from the state. This liberal ideal of minimal government interference in the lives of individuals was dominant, at least in the United States, until the next century, when the eruption of two world wars, a worldwide economic depression, and frequent destabilization of national currencies called for the creation of new models for social behavior. Liberalism took on the meaning of liberating the individual from blind market forces and freeing individuals from want and privation. Hence the liberal became the one advocating government involvement in society in order to bring about greater social good. Now the question is what the proper relationship should be between the individual and the larger community when that community is global.

Emergence of Global Issues

Today social and political philosophers have to consider the greater economic integration taking place in Europe and North America. Multinational bodies offer economic assistance to developing countries and countries in crisis—with strings attached, to be sure—and organizations developed as mutual defense structures take on the role of world police to bring a halt to tribal wars and ethnic cleansing. The savage behaviors of sovereign nations toward their own citizens are both condemned by international opinion and in some cases restrained by the use, or threatened use, of force. A nineteenth-century person looking at the dominant issues now would probably be shocked to see the same issues of the relation between the individual and the state transmuted into questions of the proper relationship among nations. Should there be transnational and multinational organizations that restrain the actions of individual states? Should such organizations try to redress the imbalance among the world's have and have-not nations? Should there be restraints on the economic activities of some countries in order to benefit others? Is the duty of international bodies to ensure basic health for the world's poorest peoples, especially children, by providing vaccinations and generally working to improve public health? Just where should the rights of individual countries be limited for the sake of a greater, though international good?

This is not an abstract issue but comes down to a host of allied questions. Here are just a few. Should a majority of people in a particular country be forced, against their will and the will of their duly elected government, to consume genetically altered plants and animals? Should a country be forced, against the will of a majority of its citizens, to admit cheaper but less tasty foods from larger, more industrialized countries that are more competitive? Should the workers in the United States be protected from job loss because the government is required to lower trade barriers to cheaper imports of shoes, clothing, and furniture from poorer countries with a lower standard of living? Should trade agreements force poorer nations to abide by the stricter and more expensive clean air and pollution standards of wealthier nations? Do international

bodies have the right to enforce child labor laws found in highly developed countries on poorer countries which traditionally and routinely practice a form of industrial child slavery? Even where we feel our standards are correct, do we, as members of the more developed and therefore more powerful country, have the right to force our standards on other countries which may have quite different traditions? Many developing countries have long time-honored traditions, in some cases religiously rooted, which uphold the inequality of different castes and genders. Should they be compelled by an alliance of richer and more developed nations to practice equality of opportunity for women and low-caste persons?

Finally, and perhaps more important, should we want the wishes and interests of our government overturned by the United Nations? Or do our own interests take precedence over those of any international body?

A New Social Contract

Many of the traditional concerns of social philosophers are still far from resolved and continue to occupy the attention of scholars. Issues such as those just mentioned weigh heavily on matters of economic equity and social justice. Much

of the discussion of these issues is framed by the astute analysis offered by the philosopher John Rawls (*A Theory of Justice*). Rawls continues in the tradition of the social contract philosophers, but with a difference. He uses the theoretical device of an imaginary contract—not to reconstruct the origin of the state or the rationale of its justification but as a way of deciding on the best system of social justice.

If we could imagine a group of individuals who are free, equal, and without bias who must decide by unanimous decision which system they and their families will henceforth live under, would not this system be the fairest? This is Rawls's strategy for discovering and defending principles of justice that should be applied to questions of economic and social policy. The group of free and equal individuals is placed in what Rawls calls the "original position" to decide on matters of justice. They

are by hypothesis rational, of average intelligence, and to ensure that they do not vote in a purely self-interested way, Rawls specifies that they must operate under a "veil of ignorance" which prevents them from knowing who or what they will become in the new instituted society.

This imaginative exercise provides the context for discussing a wide variety of social and political issues. Rawls argues, and many agree with him, that in such an original situation and under the veil of ignorance, rational persons would choose the "best worst" outcome: look at the worst possible outcomes and choose the best among these. This would mean encouraging creativity and individual initiative and rewarding people accordingly, but at the same time setting up arrangements so that those less favored by the economic system are not made destitute.

In other words, Rawls thinks the group would insist on two principles of justice. The first he calls the principle of *equal basic liberty for all*. Under the veil of ignorance no one would take a chance on being enslaved or being a member of a persecuted minority; so those in the "original position" would insist on individual freedom. Such a principle is absolute and cannot be traded or bargained away.

The second principle is the *difference principle*. As one of the original participants, would you allow any inequalities in wealth or power? Rawls says *yes,* providing that these inequalities are open to all and if it can be shown that these inequalities benefit the least well-off in society. The restatement of the social contract view by Rawls has provided the basis for a great deal of debate and has been used as a framework for discussing a wide range of social issues other than just economic policy.

As discussion of issues goes on, no one would say that Rawls has been completely successful in his attempt to develop a new formulation of the social contract doctrine that began with Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. It is fair to say, however, that his writings are immensely influential and will likely continue to be. As long as people live together in societies, there will be issues of social and political policy calling for the best thinking of which philosophers are capable. Only by sustained and rational discussion of these sometimes vexing issues can policies supporting national, as well as international, justice be addressed with the goal of creating a more just and stable society.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Beitz, Charles R. *Political Equality.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989. Discusses theory and application of the principles of political equality in contemporary democracy.

Berlin, Isaiah. *Four Essays on Liberty.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969. A classic work analyzing different notions of political freedom.

Nielsen, Kai. *Equality and Liberty.* Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allenhead, 1985. A defense of radical socialist egalitarianism.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State and Utopia.* New York: Basic Books, 1977. A clear defense of radical libertarianism.

Rawls, John. *The Law of Peoples.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. Rawls applies his theory of justice as fairness to issues in democratic liberalism.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970. One of the most widely read and discussed philosophy books by a contemporary philosopher that develops a compromise between egalitarianism and libertarianism.

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Here are a few questions and activities to help you understand this chapter:

1. According to Thrasymachus, is there social justice?

   Read the **profile:** *Thrasymachus* on **MySearchLab.com**

2. How is Hume's ethical view derived from his empiricism?

   Read the **profile:** *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry for David Hume* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Why did Rawls turn down the opportunity to become an officer in the U.S. Army?

   Read the **profile:** *John Rawls* on **MySearchLab.com**

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CHAPTER **39**

Philosophy East and West

"East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet." So wrote Rudyard Kipling after many years of service in the British colonial government in India. Certainly the culture of the East (primarily India, China, and Japan, which are by no means identical with one another) is very different from that of the West (primarily Europe and North America), but that does not mean each culture is incapable of understanding certain features of the other. It does not mean the two cannot be compared. However different Eastern and Western cultures are, precise points of similarity and difference can be constructively brought out in a comparative study.

As the world becomes "smaller" year by year, it is increasingly important to develop an understanding of culture centers around the globe which are very different from our own. One way to compare cultures is to compare and contrast the different religions, art forms, educational systems, family practices, governmental institutions—assuming that all cultures have *some* form of religion, art, government, education, and so on. But what about philosophy? Does every culture have a philosophy, however different it may be from the philosophies of other cultures? It all depends on what we mean by the term *philosophy*. This brings us back to some of the same issues we explored in the beginning of this book. As we saw in Part 1, "What Is Philosophy?" there is in ordinary English an everyday sense of the word *philosophy* in which we say that every person has his or her own "philosophy" (his or her "philosophy of life," as we say). The same could be said of whole societies or cultures. Insofar as each society or culture has its own idea of itself, its own conception of what is important in life, and its own notions of what the world is like in general terms, there is a sense in which each society or culture can be said to have its own "philosophy" (or world view). This is one of the things sociologists and anthropologists study when they examine different societies and cultures—what was (or is) the "philosophy" of the Native Americans, or what was their "philosophy of life" (world view) and how did (or does) that differ from, say, the ancient Egyptians' "philosophy," or "philosophy of life" (world view)?

MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF PHILOSOPHY

As we saw in Part 1, the word *philosophy* is also used in a more technical sense to indicate a particular methodology—a specialized way of investigating and organizing ideas—one which is critical, logical, analytical, systematic, and so on. And in *that* sense, *not* everyone is a philosopher or has a philosophy. In this second sense European

philosophy arose at a particular point in Greek history. Greeks before Thales did not have philosophy in this second sense. And if the Greeks before Thales had no philosophy or philosophers, it is possible that other societies and cultures had no philosophy

or philosophers. Of course, just as philosophy arose in European culture at a particular time and place, so it is possible that philosophy arose at various points in time in other, non-European cultures. In this second sense of *philosophy,* it may turn out that some cultures have philosophy and some do not, and we cannot dogmatically assert before examining the facts either that *all* cultures must have philosophy or that *none* do except European cultures. We must patiently and empirically look at each culture to see whether it does or does not have a philosophy, and, of course, if it does, then we will naturally want to study it either alongside European philosophy or perhaps by incorporating all the different regional philosophies into a more comprehensive "world philosophy."

Suppose now we take the word *philosophy* as defined in our second sense (where philosophy is understood as a critical, reflective, rational, and systematic approach to questions of very general interest) and apply that definition to different thought systems around the world. Are any of these non-Western thought systems "philosophy" in this sense, and if so, which ones? But even if we accept this second sense of philosophy as the most appropriate for our purposes, it will not be easy to apply our new standard to different thought systems, for we must still decide what exactly we *mean* by words such as *critical* and *rational,* and *how* critical and rational a thought system must be to count as philosophy.

For this reason, opinion is divided among philosophers whether there is any non-Western philosophy, and if there is, how many distinct kinds of philosophy there are. Many philosophers hold that there are three great original centers of philosophy in the world—Greek (or Western), Indian, and Chinese. All three arose at approximately the same time (roughly 600 B.C.E.), though, so far as we know, quite independently of one another. All three arose as critical reflections on their own cultural traditions. Cultures which are *not* philosophical are those which tend to accept their own mythological world view simply on the authority of tradition. "We believe this because it is our ancient belief; our people have always believed this." Philosophy, by contrast, arises precisely at that point in the history of a culture when, for various reasons, that traditional outlook is called into question. "We have always been taught to see the world in this way, but how can we be sure that this is really correct?" At this point, individual philosophers come forward with the boldness and audacity, and we might even say the conceit, to begin at the beginning, asking fundamental questions, confident they can come up with the right answers! No longer do we say, "This is how our people see the world," but rather, "Anaximander asserts this theory; Thales held another view; Aristotle disagreed with both and developed a radically different position," and so on. Far from a traditional uniformity of opinion, the onset of philosophy is generally marked by a proliferation of many different, competing views, whose proponents engage in endless debates, arguing for their favorite doctrines and against all the others. But why should we believe any of these philosophers with their radically different ideas? Certainly not from any traditional authority, but only from the weight of rational evidence which they adduce. In this sense early Greek, Indian, and Chinese thinkers tried to *prove* their individual theories by carefully defining their terms, drawing distinctions, and by constructing arguments for their positions and counterarguments against the positions of their opponents.

Nonetheless, logic and analysis were *not* as developed among early Indian and Chinese thinkers as they were among the Greeks, especially beginning with Plato and Aristotle, and by stressing the *degree* of logical and analytical development, some philosophers conclude that Indian and Chinese thought systems are *not* sufficiently philosophical to be considered philosophy, but are more properly called "religion" or "mythology," and so conclude that the *only* philosophy in the world is Western philosophy. Still other philosophers, though a much smaller group, would extend considerably the list of cultures which have produced philosophy to include African philosophy, American Indian philosophy, and other oral traditions. Probably most philosophers would agree that Western philosophy sets the standard for philosophy and that of all the world's cultures, besides Western culture, the ones that come closest to that philosophical standard are those of India and China. Since both Indian and Chinese thought systems are generally classified as "Eastern," there is at least a *prima facie* case for an "Eastern philosophy."

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

One of the problems related to the question of non-Western philosophy is the relation of philosophy and religion. Many Western philosophers think of non-Western thought systems as primarily religious rather than philosophical. As we have pointed out earlier, although philosophy arises out of an earlier religious and mythological orientation to the world, it does not replace religion, which continues to exist alongside philosophy, influencing and being influenced by it. Much of what we would want to include as Indian or Chinese philosophy is also classified as "religion"—that is, as "religious" writing, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, but also Taoism and even Confucianism.

But this is a problem that arises in the study of all the philosophical traditions. Most Western philosophy during the medieval period in Europe (A.D. 500–1500) is Christian philosophy, just as much, though by no means all, Indian and Chinese philosophy is Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist. And here we must acknowledge that there is no firm consensus among scholars. Some Chinese experts exclude Buddhist writings from the catalogue of Chinese philosophy, while others include some (but not all) Buddhist texts within Chinese philosophy. Similarly, Indian scholars cannot agree on whether some parts of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism qualify as philosophy or whether all such writing should be considered religion.

Let's look at the argument in support of a distinction between religious and philosophical writings within Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity. Within these religious traditions, how do we separate the religion from the philosophy? This is a very large and difficult question, but let us begin by saying that religion is primarily a combination of personal faith (felt inner experience) and communal ritual activity, while the philosophy associated with religion is the attempt to intellectually explain, criticize, justify, and systematize religious beliefs, to resolve problems that arise in interpreting and defending religious texts, and to systematize many apparently different and even conflicting doctrines within a single all-embracing intelligible whole.

Watch the **video:** *Faith and Philosophy* on **MySearchLab.com**

Religious texts speak, for example, of life after death, but do not bother to explain exactly what this involves. The Old Testament sometimes mentions the "resurrection of the body" (that at the end of the world the bodies of long-dead people would rise from their graves), while Hellenistic (that is, late Greek) accounts around the time of the New

Testament writing more often speak of the immortality of the soul (which is separate from the body and at death leaves the body for an immaterial eternal life). In addition, there are scattered throughout religious texts statements that, taken together, appear contradictory. The "problem of evil," for example, is the problem of how to reconcile the religious beliefs that God is all-powerful and all-good and that evil, nonetheless, exists. If God is all-good and all-powerful, how could God allow evil to exist in our world? Any two of these three beliefs are logically consistent, but the three together seem contradictory. Perhaps God is all-good and all-powerful and there really is no evil (but only the illusion of evil). Or, maybe God is all-good but not all-powerful (or all-powerful and not completely good), and so there is no problem explaining how evil is possible. But how can evil exist if God is all-good and all-powerful?

Similarly, there is the problem of intellectually reconciling in Buddhism how the soul can be born into a different body after death when, according to Buddhism, the soul does not exist. Or, within Christian religious doctrine, how can God be said to be eternal, supreme, and perfect and still be worried and concerned about human beings? (If God is absolutely perfect, needing and wanting nothing, wouldn't He be serenely indifferent? Or if, on the other hand, God worries about us, doesn't this indicate that He wants something He doesn't have and so is not absolutely perfect and self-contained?) Indian Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist schools all accepted the doctrine of karmic causality (that what you do in this life affects what you will be in your next life), but this opened up philosophical debate concerning precisely what is meant by "causality," and in particular, whether causality produces something new or whether the effect already exists in some sense in the cause. Finally, there is the intellectual problem of the meaning of religious language. If God is so completely different from us, how can we apply to God words such as "loving," "caring," "knowing," "making" (which are normally applied to ordinary creatures, like ourselves)? And if we do not use words of ordinary language, then how can we talk about God at all?

These are not religious problems, not problems for religious belief. But they can become problems for intellectuals, creating stumbling blocks to religious belief. They are intellectual problems that must be resolved before these intellectuals can continue their religious progress. And of course it is precisely these intellectual (philosophical) problems associated with religious texts and religious beliefs that the critics of any religion will focus on in attacking that religion. So defenders of a particular religion will have to be prepared to answer such attacks, not those from the inside, so to speak, but attacks from the outside seeking to undermine the religion and supplant it with another.

Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism made an early decision that however different philosophy and religion were, and however much more important, from their point of view, religion was than philosophy, nonetheless philosophy was necessary to remove intellectual obstacles to religious progress, to justify faith to skeptics, to defend the religion against attack, and to systematize and unify religious belief. In that sense, Nagarjuna, Seng Zhau, Hui Neng, and Kukai are Buddhist philosophers; Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva are Hindu philosophers; and Augustine and Aquinas are Christian philosophers.

Buddhists and Jains developed philosophy to attack and refute traditional Hinduism (and to demonstrate the truth of Buddhism and Jainism), and Hindus were forced, in response, to develop their own philosophical weapons to defend themselves and to attack the rival Buddhists and Jains. Sometimes in the midst of defending itself against competing religions, a religion will absorb elements of the alien religion. (In general,

the best way to defeat your opponent is to claim that his or her position is no different from your own!) Thus, for example (as we will see later), Buddhists broke with Hinduism over the issue of the eternal existence of the self, or soul (atman). Hinduism supports the idea of an eternal atman being reborn again and again in many lives, depending on how well one has lived in one's previous life (karma). Buddhists rejected this notion, arguing against the idea that the self is a permanent entity (anatman— literally, "no atman," "no self or soul"). But this just raised the philosophical question of what it means to say that something exists, or is real. Obviously we all possess a self in some sense or other. If Buddhists argue that there is no real self (atman), what exactly do they mean? As we will see shortly, Buddhist and Hindu philosophers sought to clarify this metaphysical notion.

In defending Hinduism against Buddhism, Shankara developed the notion of God (Brahman) as an impersonal totality encompassing and absorbing into itself everything in the world. According to Shankara's interpretation of the ancient Hindu texts, there is only one real thing in the world, and that is God, or Brahman; everything else, including humans and all the plants and animals and mountains and rivers and so on, does not exist as separate, individual entities but are really just parts of God, or Brahman. This undermined the Buddhist argument against the mainstream Hindu conception of independently existing things in the world by claiming that this Buddhist conception was really Hindu! And by co-opting a large part of Buddhism, Shankara was able to halt the spread of Buddhism, that is, the conversion of Hindus to Buddhism. But other Hindu philosophers, such as Ramanuja and Madhva, thought Shankara had conceded too much to Buddhism. They argued instead for the more traditional and popular Hindu view that God and individual selves, like you and me, and all other things in the physical world are individual entities, separately existing in their own right.

However we finally decide the question of whether Eastern thought is "philosophy" or not, it is certainly very interesting in its own right and might be usefully compared on similar issues with Western philosophy. Such a comparison can be very useful, for example, in showing alternative ways of looking at things which philosophers may have failed to notice by working within only one system of thought. Every system of thought has built

into it fundamental assumptions which are typically not examined but which are more or less taken for granted. To become aware of these assumptions it is often useful and even necessary to compare them with something different but similar from another thought system.

Part 9 focuses on three issues: Confucian theories of human nature, the Hindu debate over theistic and non-theistic interpretations of sacred scripture, and Buddhist explanations of anatman. Chapter 40, "Confucian Theories of Human Nature," deals with the issue of human nature, which Chinese thinkers, especially the followers of Confucius, have dealt with extensively. We will examine this topic in the writings of three major early Confucianists: Mencius, Xun Zi, and Dong Zhongshu. Chapter 41, "Hindu Debate on Monism," deals with competing Indian philosophical interpretations of the Hindu sacred books, known as the *Upanishads*. We will look at three such interpretations— those of Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva. Chapter 42, "Buddhist Theory of Emptiness," discusses the Buddhist attempt of Nagarjuna to explain and justify the Buddhist doctrine that the self, or soul, does not exist.

Questions for Discussion

1. Based on your knowledge of what the term *philosophy* means, do you think it should be used to refer to non-Western thought systems? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the safeguards we can adopt to keep our discussion of the thought systems of other cultures from becoming ethnocentric?
3. One of the ongoing debates in Asian countries is whether they can adopt Western technology without also having to accept Western attitudes that accompany that technology. What is your response to this issue?
4. What are some of the reasons it is important to study the thought systems of other cultures?

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2. What elements do faith and philosophy have in common?

   Watch the **video:** *Faith and Philosophy* on **MySearchLab.com**

3. Which Western philosophers influenced Keiji Nishitani's approach to Buddhism?

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Confucian Theories of Human Nature

Like Western philosophers, Eastern philosophers, especially Chinese philosophers, have been interested in human nature. Of course, people are different from one another—each person is different from all others, and the people of one part of the world often seem very different from the people in other parts of the world. But philosophers wonder how much of this difference is due to conditioning, socialization, environment, and education, and how much, if any, are we born with? Are there any respects in which *all* human beings are fundamentally alike at birth? How much of the way we are is due to "nature" and how much to "nurture"? How much of a person's success or failure in life is due to inherited, genetic factors and how much is due to the influence of family, education, socialization? This is the central question of human nature.

HUMAN NATURE AND NURTURE

At first we might think this question could be settled empirically—just look and see whether human beings from different countries, social backgrounds, and historical periods are all alike in some ways, and if so, in what ways, exactly. A little reflection will reveal that this is not nearly as easy as it first appears. As a matter of fact, people are very

*dis*similar, but it is hard to tell whether this is due to the fact that there *is* no human nature or simply due to the effects of education and socialization on a fundamentally similar human nature. Aristotle said that human beings were by nature rational. But if we look to see for ourselves, we see that most people behave irrationally much of the time. Does this mean that Aristotle was wrong? Or does it simply mean that although human beings are born with the capacity to think and behave rationally, this disposition is frequently offset by other factors—their emotions, their "animal instincts," lack of training and discipline of their rational capacity?

How can we tell which of these hypotheses is true? Perhaps we could examine young children of two or three years of age. However, even they have probably been influenced in some ways by their culture. Some tests indicate that very young boys respond to identical situations very differently from young girls, boys being more aggressive, girls more submissive. But does this prove that boys are naturally more aggressive and girls more submissive? Many feminists would say, no; all this shows, they say, is that even by the age of two or three, boys have already been acculturated to behave more

aggressively and girls more passively. Similarly, when Freudians claim that human beings are by nature selfish and aggressive, and followers of Erich Fromm say that people are by nature more loving and social, there is clear counterevidence against *both* theories. Against Freud's view is the evidence of many loving, social people; against Fromm's position is the fact that there exist many selfish, aggressive individuals.

Claims about human nature are therefore *normative* and not entirely empirical. When Aristotle says human beings are rational by nature, he means that people are more truly human when they display their rationality and that they abandon their human nature when they behave irrationally. This normative claim implies that human beings *ought* to behave rationally, not that they actually do. Part of this normative claim is that in general it is good to follow one's nature. If you are a chipmunk, you ought to follow your chipmunk nature—be the best you can be as a chipmunk. But if you happen to be a human being, you should follow your human nature—be the most you can be as a human being; fulfill your human potential. But that will make sense only if our human nature is something good and positive—being rational, loving, and so on, and not something evil and negative—being aggressive, selfish, greedy, and so on. Most, though not all, human nature theorists therefore attribute some *positive* capacity to human nature and claim that people are inherently rational and loving. After all, what is the use of a theory which claims human nature is fundamentally evil? (As we will see shortly, some human nature theories claim that human beings are by nature selfish and anti-social, and such theories have been used to support intrusive and repressive governmental measures to *control* our inherently wicked tendencies.) Otherwise, most human nature theorists would like to encourage all of us to follow our basic nature. In general, it is good to follow one's nature, and if that nature is said to be something positive, like being rational or loving, then it is socially constructive and educationally sound to encourage young people to follow their basic human nature.

OUGHT IMPLIES CAN

To say that people *ought* to do something implies that they *can* do it. In this sense, "ought" implies "can." Thus, claims about human nature are also claims about capacities, potentialities, and not simply empirical generalizations about actual behavior. Again, when Aristotle says human nature is rational, he means that this is what human beings are capable of, in ways that other life forms are not, that thinking and behaving rationally is a uniquely human potential. But human beings have many capacities, the potential to be and do many different things. If human nature theories are claiming no more than the fact that people are *capable* of this or that, the claim is far too weak, for people are capable of anything: murder, altruism, hard work, laziness, creativity, conformism. But if that is all that is being claimed, it is tantamount to *denying* that there is a human nature. Claims about human nature must assert more than a mere capacity or potentiality; they must claim that there is a *tendency* of people to be or act a certain way along with the normative injunction that, since it is generally good to follow one's nature, this is how people therefore *ought* to behave. All other things being equal, and in the absence of defeating conditions, the claim now is that people will generally tend to be rational, loving, or whatever and, knowing that this is our true nature, we ought to follow our nature as much as possible.

STRONG AND WEAK CLAIMS

Claiming that all people do in fact actually exhibit all the time what is claimed to be their "human nature" is much too strong a claim (because it is too easily falsified). On the other hand, merely claiming that all people have this capacity or potentiality is far too weak a claim (because this is too easy to prove; that is, it is not falsifiable). What needs to be shown is that there is a tendency to behave one way over others, and that is how people will in fact behave in the absence of defeating conditions. All theories of human nature must therefore have an "escape clause" by which to explain counterexamples. If people are by nature rational, why do they so often behave so irrationally? If people are by nature loving, why do they so often act so selfishly? Human nature theories are claiming that this is how people would behave were it not for certain defeating conditions. What are some of these defeating conditions? Perhaps their emotions overwhelm their fundamentally rational nature. Or we could say that their physical, animal instincts (of aggression, sex, fear, food, power) clash with an underlying loving human nature. Finally, we could be saying that a basically aggressive and selfish human nature is offset and curbed by socialization and education and a system of rewards and punishments.

THREE CONFUCIAN THEORIES OF HUMAN NATURE

In the reading for this chapter we will look at three Confucian theories of human nature. Confucianism is the most important philosophy of China. It traces back to the man Confucius in the sixth century B.C.E. Actually this name, Confucius, is a Latinized version of Kong Zi, where Kong is the family name and Zi (*or* Tzu) is a title, like "master," a title attached to all the ancient Chinese philosophers—Mo Zi, Lao Zi, Hanfei Zi, and so on. Confucius himself did not have a theory of human nature but said only that at birth all people are "close" to one another while through education they become "far" apart. This suggests that Confucius thought there *was* a human nature, but he never said what it was. All people are born alike, he said, but he never said *how* they were alike at birth, that is, whether they were good, evil, rational, loving, or whatever.

The two main followers of Confucius, Mencius (another Latinized version of Meng Zi, "Master Meng") and Xun Zi, speculated on what human nature was but came up with opposite conclusions. Mencius held that human nature was basically good, whereas Xun Zi said human nature was basically evil. Later, another Confucianist, Dong Zhongshu, developed a more sophisticated theory of the conflict within each person between the individual's human nature and instinctual feelings as a kind of compromise between Mencius and Xun Zi.

According to Mencius, all human beings have the "beginnings" of goodness within them. That is, all people are born with the potential and tendency to be kind-hearted and virtuous, though Mencius also said that this potential can either be nourished and be developed so that the individual becomes a good person or else neglected, thwarted, and perverted so that the individual becomes a bad person. Mencius is not saying, then, that children are moral beings from birth. He realizes that they must be trained, taught, and learn by practice and experience. He also agrees that children who are neglected or mistreated will usually turn out badly. Nonetheless, his theory holds that in either case there is an innate tendency or disposition to be good. In the right environment an acorn will

1929–40–212d Chinese—Scenes from the Life of Confucius in his forty-second year. *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased: Museum Funds, 1929.*

grow into an oak tree, that is its nature to do so. If the acorn is robbed of water, sunlight, and proper soil, it will be stunted and shriveled. In Mencius' most famous example, he asks, what is the immediate and spontaneous response of any person upon seeing a child about to fall into a well? Mencius does not want us to imagine someone thinking this over for five or ten minutes, but right now, at this very moment, you suddenly glimpse a child on the verge of falling into a well. What would you feel? What would you do? Mencius says everyone naturally and spontaneously wants to rush to save the child. This does not mean that everyone is a morally good person but only that everyone is born with the "beginning" of the Confucian virtue of *ren,* or "human heartedness."

MENCIUS ON HUMAN NATURE

In Mencius' debate with Kao Zi, Kao Zi argues in effect that there *is* no human nature, that there is no greater tendency for people to be good than to be evil or indifferent. In other words, Kao Zi argues that human beings are infinitely pliable or malleable and can be made to become anything whatever, and there is no greater disposition or tendency to become one thing rather than another. Kao Zi's analogy is with the flow of water. Water, Kao Zi argues, can be made to flow east, west, south, or north. All you have to do is dig a channel from a lake in an eastwardly direction to get the water to flow east. But if someone blocks that channel and digs another southward, then the water will just as easily flow toward the south. The water itself, Kao Zi insists, has no built-in tendency to flow in any given direction, and in that sense, by analogy, human beings have no inherent nature. In the "nature/nurture" debate, it is all nurture, according to Kao Zi. Mencius' reply is that although water can be made to flow with equal ease north, south, east, or west, it nonetheless does tend to flow downwards, and that indeed the only reason it can

be made to flow westward, for example, is that it naturally flows down. In other words, to make the water flow to the west, you must dig the westward channel deeper than the other channels. The water will always flow down; if the lowest level is the westward channel, then and only then will the water flow westward.

Of course, we can also force the water to flow upwards, as when we splash water, but this can happen only if we constantly work at it. As soon as we relax, even for a moment, and leave matters alone, the water naturally flows downward once more. What Mencius is saying, by analogy, is that while it is certainly true and important that we can shape and mold human behavior through education, we can do this successfully only where we work with an existing tendency of human nature. Only by modifying an already existing human nature can we modify human behavior. Every human society has rules for regulating human sexuality, for example, but how easily could we enforce upon everyone in the society total lifelong abstinence? Or imagine trying to institute sexual codes among creatures who had absolutely no sexual drives. Only if there is already a sex drive can we hope to regulate, modify, shape, channel, and thereby alter human behavior. Just as we can splash water upwards, so we can attempt to stifle human nature. But the question is, how easy is it? Which is easier, restricting a teenager's food intake to one cup of watery soup a day or to two meals a day of low-fat balanced nutrition? Both are difficult, but if the first is *more* difficult, doesn't this show that it is going against the grain of our inherent nature? (To be fair, Kao Zi sometimes seems to argue that even if benevolence (ren) were innate and "internal," righteousness, or right behavior (yi), especially the respect and deference we accord age and social position, is learned and "external" and not innate.)

Mencius: The Book of Mencius

Mencius said, "All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others.

"My meaning may be illustrated this way: if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress—not so they may gain the favor of the child's parents, nor to seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from fear of a reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing.

"From this case, we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man.

"The feeling of commiseration is the principle [beginning, or sprouting] of benevolence [the virtue ren]. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle [beginning, or sprouting] of righteousness [the virtue yi]. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle [beginning, or sprouting] of propriety [the virtue li]. The

From *The Mencius,* James Legge, trans. Hurd and Houghton, 1870.

Mong-Tzee le plus célèbre des philosophes chinois après confucius

MENCIUS, originally Mengzi or Men-Tse, c. 371–c. 289 B.C.E. Philosopher and sage, born in Shantung, China. He founded a school modeled on that of Confucius and travelled China for some twenty years searching for a ruler to implement Confucian moral and political ideals. The search was unsuccessful, but his conversations with rulers, disciples, and others are recorded in a book of sayings (*Book of Mengzi*). His ethical system was based on the belief that human beings are innately and instinctively good. Third century B.C.E. line drawing. © Iberfoto/The Image Works.

feeling of approving and disapproving is the [beginning, or sprouting] principle of knowledge [the virtue zhi].

"Men have these four principles [the beginnings, or sproutings, of the virtues] just as they have their four limbs. When men having these four principles, yet say of themselves that they cannot develop them, they play the thief with themselves; and he who says of his leader that he cannot develop them, plays the thief with his leader.

"Since all men had these four principles in themselves, let them know to give them their full development and completion, and the result will be like a fire which has begun to burn, or a spring which has begun flow. Let them have their complete development, and they will suffice to love and protect all. Let them be denied that development, and they will not suffice for a man to serve his parents with."

Mencius said, "That whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small. The mass of people cast it away, while superior men preserve it.

"There must be the constant practice of this righteousness, but without the object of thereby nourishing the passion-nature. Let not the mind forget its work, but let there be no assisting the growth of that nature. Let us not be like the man of Sung. There was a man of Sung, who was grieved that his growing corn was not longer, and so he pulled [up on it to make it taller]. Having done this, he returned home, looking very stupid, and said to his people, "I am tired to-day. I have been helping the corn to grow long." His son ran to look at it, and found the corn all withered. There are few in the world who do not deal with their passion-nature, as if they were assisting the corn to grow long. Some indeed consider it of no benefit to them, and let it alone—they do not weed their corn. They who assist it to grow

long, pull out their corn. What they do is not only of no benefit to the nature, but it also injures it."

The philosopher Kâo [Kao Tzu, or Gaozi] said, "Man's nature is like the willow [tree wood] and righteousness is like a cup or a bowl. The fashioning benevolence and righteousness out of man's nature is like the making cups and bowls from the willow [tree wood]."

Mencius replied, "Can you, leaving untouched the nature of the willow, make with it cups and bowls? You must do violence and injury to the willow, before you can make cups and bowls with it. If you must do violence and injury to the willow in order to make cups and bowls with it, on your principles you must in the same way do violence and injury to humanity in order to fashion from it benevolence and righteousness! Your words, alas! would certainly lead all men on to reckon benevolence and righteousness to be calamities."

The philosopher Kâo [Kao Tzu, or Gaozi] said, "Man's nature is like water whirling round in a corner. Open a passage for it to the east, and it will flow to the east; open a passage for it to the west, and it will flow to the west. Man's nature is indifferent to good and evil, just as the water is indifferent to the east and west."

Mencius replied, "Water indeed will flow indifferently to the east or west, but will it flow indifferently up or down? The tendency of man's nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. There are none but have this tendency to good, just as all water flows downwards.

"Now by striking water and causing it to leap up, you may make it go over your forehead, and, by damming and leading it you may force it up a hill:—but are such movements according to the nature of water? It is the force applied which causes them. When men are made to do what is not good, their nature is dealt with in this way."

The philosopher Kâo [Kao Tzu, or Gaozi] said, "Life is what we call nature!" [literally, xing is sheng, your nature is what you are born with]

Mencius asked him, "Do you say that by nature [xing] you mean life [sheng], just as you say that white is white?" "Yes, I do," was the reply. Mencius added, "Is the whiteness of a white feather like that of white snow, and the whiteness of white snow like that of white jade? Kâo again said "Yes."

"Very well," pursued Mencius. "Is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox like the nature of a man?"

The philosopher Kâo said, "To enjoy food and delight in colors is nature [innate]. Benevolence [ren] is internal [innate] and not external [learned]; righteousness [yi] is external [learned] and not internal [innate]."

Mencius asked him, "What is the ground of your saying that benevolence is internal [innate] and righteousness external [learned]?" He replied, "There is a man older than I, and I give honor to his age. It is not that there is first in me a principle of such reverence to age. It is just as when there is a white man, and I consider him white; according as he is so externally to me. On this account, I pronounce of righteousness that it is external."

Mencius said, "There is no difference between our pronouncing a white horse to be white and our pronouncing a white man to be white. But is there no difference between the regard with which we acknowledge the age of an old horse and

that with which we acknowledge the age of an old man? And what is it which is called righteousness?—the fact of a man's being old? or the fact of our giving honor to his age?"

Kâo said, "There is my younger brother;— I love him. But the younger brother of a man of [the state of] Ch'in I do not love: that is, the feeling is determined by myself [innate], and therefore I say that benevolence is internal. On the other hand, I give honor to an old man of [the state of] Ch'û, and I also give honor to an old man of my own people: that is, the feeling is determined by the age, and therefore I say that righteousness is external."

Mencius answered him, "Our enjoyment of meat roasted by a man of Ch'in does not differ from our enjoyment of meat roasted by ourselves. Thus, what you insist on takes place also in the case of such things, and will you say likewise that our enjoyment of a roast is external?"

The disciple Mang Chî asked Kung-tû, saying, "On what ground is it said that righteousness is internal?"

Kung-tû replied, "We therein act out our feeling of respect, and therefore it is said to be internal."

The other objected, "Suppose the case of a villager older than your elder brother by one year, to which of them would you show the greater respect?" "To my brother," was the reply. "But for which of them would you first pour out wine at a feast?" "For the villager." Mang Chî argued, "Now your feeling of reverence rests on the one, and now the honor due to age is rendered to the other;—this is certainly determined by what is without, and does not proceed from within."

Kung-tû was unable to reply, and told the conversation to Mencius. Mencius said, "You should ask him, 'Which do you respect most,—your uncle, or your younger brother?' He will answer, 'My uncle.' Ask him again, 'If your younger brother be personating a dead ancestor, to which do you show the greater respect,—to him or to your uncle?' He will say, 'To my younger brother.' You can go on, 'But where is the respect due, as you said, to your uncle?' He will reply to this, 'I show the respect to my younger brother, because of the position which he occupies,' and you can likewise say, 'So my respect to the villager is because of the position which he occupies. Ordinarily, my respect is rendered to my elder brother; for a brief season, on occasion, it is rendered to the villager.'"

Mang Chî heard this and observed, "When respect is due to my uncle, I respect him, and when respect is due to my younger brother, I respect him;—the thing is certainly determined by what is without, and does not proceed from within." Kung-tû replied, "In winter we drink things hot, in summer we drink things cold; and so, on your principle, eating and drinking also depend on what is external!"

The disciple Kung-tû said, "The philosopher Kâo says, 'Man's nature is neither good nor bad.'

"Some say, 'Man's nature may be made to practice good, and it may be made to practice evil, and accordingly, under [good kings] Wan and Wû, the people loved what was good, while under [bad kings] Yû and Lî, they loved what was cruel.'

"Some say, 'The nature of some is good, and the nature of others is bad.'

"And now you say, 'The nature is good.' Then are all those wrong?"

Mencius said, "From the feelings proper to it, it is constituted for the practice of what is good. This is what I mean in saying that the nature is good.

"If men do what is not good, the blame cannot be imputed to their natural powers.

"The feeling of commiseration belongs to all men; so does that of shame and dislike; and that of reverence and respect; and that of approving and disapproving. The feeling of commiseration implies the principle of benevolence [ren]; that of shame and dislike, the principle of righteousness [li]; that of reverence and respect, the principle of propriety [li]; and that of approving and disapproving, the principle of knowledge [zhi]. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge are not infused into us from without. We are certainly furnished with them. And a different view is simply owing to want of reflection. Hence it is said, 'Seek and you will find them. Neglect and you will lose them.' Men differ from one another because they cannot carry out fully their natural powers."

Mencius said, "The trees of the Niû mountain were once beautiful. Being situated, however, in the borders of a large state, they were hewn down with axes and bills;—and could they retain their beauty? Still through the activity of the vegetative life day and night, and the nourishing influence of the rain and dew, they were not without buds and sprouts springing forth, but then came the cattle and goats and browsed upon them. To these things is owing the bare and stripped appearance of the mountain, and when people now see it, they think it was never finely wooded. But is this the nature of the mountain?

"And so also of what properly belongs to man;—shall it be said that the mind of any man was without benevolence and righteousness? The way in which a man loses his proper goodness of mind is like the way in which the trees are denuded by axes and bills. Hewn down day after day, can it—the mind—retain its beauty? But there is a development of its life day and night, and in the calm air of the morning, just between night and day, the mind feels in a degree those desires and aversions which are proper to humanity, but the feeling is not strong, and it is fettered and destroyed by what takes place during the day. This fettering taking place again and again, the restorative influence of the night is not sufficient to preserve the proper goodness of the mind; and when this proves insufficient for that purpose, the nature becomes not much different from that of the irrational animals, and when people now see it, they think that it never had those powers which I assert. But does this condition represent the feelings proper to humanity?

"Therefore, if it receives its proper nourishment, there is nothing which will not grow. If it lose its proper nourishment, there is nothing which will not decay away.

"In good years the children of the people are most of them good, while in bad years the most of them abandon themselves to evil. It is not owing to any difference of their natural powers conferred by Heaven that they are thus different. The abandonment is owing to the circumstances through which they allow their minds to be ensnared and drowned in evil.

"Confucius said, 'Hold it fast, and it remains with you. Let it go, and you lose it.'"

XUN ZI ON HUMAN NATURE

Xun Zi argues, against Mencius, that human nature is essentially evil, by which he means selfish and aggressively antisocial. It is only through education, training, discipline, and the threat of punishment, Xun Zi argues, that people become socially cooperative. Somewhat like Hobbes' social contract theory, Xun Zi speculates that originally people were free to follow their own selfish bent without fear of recrimination or punishment. But when they realized that they were as often the victims of aggressive abuse as its perpetrators, that they were getting stolen from as often as they were taking what they liked from others, they willingly accepted the authority of a ruler capable of maintaining order and punishing transgressions.

Like Hobbes, Xun Zi argues from his view that human nature is essentially evil to the need for a strong central governmental authority to control human behavior by education and a system of rewards and punishments. What do you suppose would happen, Xun Zi asks, if this governmental authority were removed? Can anyone doubt that chaos would result as the strong rode roughshod over the weak with no law enforcement to prevent and punish them?

One major difference between Mencius' and Xun Zi's theories of human nature is that Mencius, like Aristotle, defines human nature as that which is uniquely and distinctively human, whereas Xun Zi defines human nature as that which all people possess, even if that is also shared by the lower animals. If we define human nature as Xun Zi does (as what all people have in common), then we will point to the tendencies people do actually have to be greedy, selfish, and aggressive, but if we define human nature as Mencius does (as that which is unique to people) then we tend to discount greedy behavior, since that is shared by lower animals, and to emphasize instead the capacity of human beings to develop virtuous behavior, to become moral creatures, loving and caring for one another, concerned with the other's welfare. The reason Mencius, like Socrates, would rather die than act immorally is that to act immorally is to destroy the most precious thing in the world—one's humanity.

Xun Zi: The Nature of Man Is Evil

Human nature is bad. Good is a human product. Human nature is such that people are born with a love of profit. If they follow these inclinations, they will struggle and snatch from each other, and inclinations to defer or yield will die. They are born with fears and hatreds. If they follow them, they will become violent and tendencies toward good faith will die. They are born with sensory desires for pleasing sounds and sights. If they indulge them, the disorder of sexual license will result and ritual and moral principles will be lost. In other words, if people accord with human nature and follow their desires, they inevitably end up struggling, snatching, violating norms, and acting with violent abandon. Consequently, only after men are

From Patricia Ebrey, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp. 24–26.

transformed by teachers and by ritual and moral principles do they defer, conform to culture, and abide in good order. Viewed this way, it is obvious that human nature is bad and good is a human product.

A warped piece of wood must be steamed and forced before it is made straight; a metal blade must be put to the whetstone before it becomes sharp. Since the nature of people is bad, to become corrected they must be taught by teachers and to be orderly they must acquire ritual and moral principles. When people lack teachers, their tendencies are not corrected; when they do not have ritual and moral principles, then their lawlessness is not controlled. In antiquity the sage kings recognized that men's nature is bad and that their tendencies were not being corrected and their lawlessness controlled. Consequently, they created rituals and moral principles and instituted laws and limitations to give shape to people's feelings while correcting them, to transform people's emotional nature while guiding it. Thus all became orderly and conformed to the Way. Those people today who are transformed by teachers, accumulate learning, and follow ritual and moral principles are gentlemen. Those who indulge their instincts, act impulsively, and violate ritual and moral principles are inferior people. Seen from this perspective, it is obvious that human nature is bad, and good is a human product.

Mencius said that people's capacity to learn is evidence that their nature is good. I disagree. His statement shows he does not know what human nature is and has not pondered the distinction between what is human nature and what is created by man. Human nature is what Heaven supplies. It cannot be learned or worked at. Ritual and moral principles were produced by the sages; they are things people can master by study and effort. Human nature refers to what is in people but which they cannot study or work at achieving. Human products refers to what people acquire through study and effort.

Now it is human nature to want to eat to one's fill when hungry, to want to warm up when cold, to want to rest when tired. These all are a part of people's emotional nature. When a man is hungry and yet on seeing an elder lets him eat first it is because he knows he should yield. When he is tired but does not dare rest, it is because he knows it is his turn. When a son yields to his father, or a younger brother yields to his elder brother, or when a son takes on the work for his father or a younger brother for his elder brother, their actions go against their natures and run counter to their feelings. And yet these are the way of the filial son and the principles of ritual and morality. Thus, if people followed their feelings and nature, they would not defer or yield, for deferring and yielding run counter to their emotional nature. Viewed from this perspective, it is obvious that man's nature is bad and good is a human product.

Fanruo and Jushu were great bows of ancient times, but they could not on their own have become accurate without being pressed and straightened. The great swords of ancient times—Duke Huan's Cong, King Wen's Lu, Lord Zhuang's Hu, and King Helii's Ganjiang, Moyeh, Juque and Bilüi—would never have become sharp without being put to the grindstone. Nor could they have cut without men using their strength. The great horses of ancient times—Hualiu, Qiji, Xianli, and Luer—could never have run a thousand li in a day if they had not first been restrained by

the bit and bridle, taught to respond to the whip, and driven by someone like Zaofu. Similarly, a man may have a fine temperament and a discriminating mind, but he must first seek a wise teacher to study under and good friends to associate with. If he studies with a wise teacher, what he hears will concern the way of Yao, Shun, Yii, and Tang. If he finds good friends to associate with, what he observes will be loyalty, good faith, respect, and deference. Each day he will come closer to humanity and morality without realizing it, all because of their influence. But if he lives with bad people, what he will hear will be deceit and lies and what he will observe will be wild, undisciplined, greedy behavior. Without knowing it, he will end up a criminal, all because of their indifference. It has been said, "If you do not know the man, observe his friends. If you do not know the lord, look at his attendants." Influence affects everyone.

Where does ritual come from? I say, people have desires from the time they are born. When they want something they do not get, they inevitably try to get it. When there are no limits imposed on how they can try to get it, they inevitably struggle for it. Struggles lead to disorder, disorder to exhaustion. The ancient kings detested disorder and so instituted ritual and moral principles to set shares, thus satisfying people's desires and supplying their wants. They saw to it that desires and the supply of goods were kept in balance. This is how ritual began. . . .

Sacrifices are concerned with the feelings of devotion and longing. Feelings of depression and melancholy cannot be prevented from occasionally arising. Thus, even when enjoying himself in pleasant company, a loyal official or a filial son will occasionally be overcome by grief. If he is greatly moved by his feelings, but he restrains himself and does not express them, he will be incomplete in ritual. Therefore the ancient kings established ways to fulfill the principle of honoring those deserving honor and expressing closeness to relatives. Hence, sacrifices are concerned with the feeling of devotion and longing. They fulfill loyalty, faith, love, and respect. Ritual conduct is the perfection of decorum. Only sages can fully understand this. Sages comprehend it, gentlemen comfortably carry them out, officials preserve them, and the common people consider them to be the custom. Gentlemen consider them to be art of the way of man; common people think they have something to do with ghosts.

Constant principles underlie Heaven's behavior. Heaven does not prevail because you are the sage Yao or disappear because you are the tyrant Jie. Blessings result when you respond to Heaven by creating order; misfortune results when you respond to it with disorder. When you concentrate on agriculture and industry and are frugal in expenditures, Heaven cannot impoverish your state. When you store provisions and act quickly in emergencies, Heaven cannot inflict illness on your people. When you are single-minded in your cultivation of the Way, Heaven cannot send disasters. Thus, even if they come, droughts and floods will not bring starvation, extremes of temperature will not bring illness, uncanny phenomena will not prove unlucky.

On the other hand, if you ignore agriculture and industry and spend extravagantly, then Heaven cannot make your country rich. If you are negligent concerning provisions and slow to respond to crises, Heaven cannot keep your country whole. If you renounce the Way and act recklessly, Heaven cannot make you lucky. In such

a case, starvation will result even without flood or drought; illness will occur even without severe weather; misfortunes will occur without any uncanny phenomena. Even though the seasons are identical to those of an orderly age, the resulting fortune or misfortune is different. But you should not resent Heaven. It is your Way that is responsible. Thus those who can distinguish what is in the realm of Heaven from what is in the realm of man are men of the highest order. . . .

Are order and disorder the product of Heaven? I say, the sun and moon, the stars and the constellations are the same as they were in the time of Yu and Jie. Yu brought order, Jie created disorder, so order and disorder do not come from Heaven. Are they a product of the seasons? I say, plants sprout and grow in spring and summer, and are harvested and stored in fall and winter, just the way they were during the reigns of Yu and Jie. Yet Yu brought order, Jie disorder, so order and disorder are not the product of seasons. Is it land then? I say, obtaining land leads to life, losing it leads to death, just as in the time of Yu and Jie. Yet Yu brought order, Jie disorder, so order and disorder are not a product of land. . . .

Why does it rain after a prayer for rain? I say, for no reason. It is the same as raining when you had not prayed. When there is an eclipse of the sun or moon, you "save" it; when there is a drought, you pray for rain; when an important decision is to be made, you divine. It is not that you can get anything by doing so. It is just decoration. Hence, the gentleman considers them ornament, but the common people think spirits are involved. To consider them ornament is auspicious; to consider them as spiritual acts is inauspicious.

DONG ZHONGSHU ON HUMAN NATURE

Dong Zhongshu finds a middle ground between the views of Mencius and Xun Zi.

Dong Zhongshu agrees with Mencius that in a sense human nature contains the "seeds" of goodness, but he disagrees with Mencius that this is enough to say that human beings are by nature good.

The "seed" of goodness is not actually good any more than a tomato seed is a tomato. In order to become good that "seed" must be nurtured, cultivated, thus agreeing more with Xun Zi's emphasis on the necessary role of government to educate and train people to become good citizens.

Another analogy Dong uses is the capacity of the eye to see. The ability of the eye to see is obviously a dispositional property. Dong asks an interesting question: Can a person see when asleep? Well, in one sense we would have to say no. People who are asleep are unable to see something in front of their eyes. But in another sense sleeping persons *can* see. All we have to do is wake them up! Can you speak Swedish? Again, the answer is yes (in a sense) and no (in a different sense). Most of us cannot here and now carry on a conversation in Swedish; and in that sense we can't speak Swedish. But if you were offered a billion dollars to learn Swedish in the next five years, you probably could—and in that sense you can (learn to) speak Swedish.

Dong Zhongshu also develops a theory, somewhat like Plato's, that human nature must compete with a person's innate tendencies to greed and selfishness. Like Plato, Dong has a model of human psychology in which opposing forces are in constant conflict

with one another. There is an innate part of us which wants to be socially cooperative, giving, and caring; but there is another innate part of us which wants it all for ourselves.

Of course, one could ask, if both these tendencies are innate, then aren't they both parts of human nature? And here the answer probably has to do with what we said earlier about human nature being a "normative" concept. Like Mencius, Dong would like to say that human nature is the higher and better part of human beings, that morally good part which human beings alone are capable of. The instinctive, emotional, physical part which we all have but which we also share with the lower animals is just as innate but doesn't have the "normative" quality of the morally good potential of human nature. Dong Zhongshu says that when Mencius claims that people are good, he is comparing them with the lower animals. Compared to animals people at least have the capacity for moral goodness. But that is not what we *ought* to be comparing people to, Dong Zhongshu continues; we should be comparing people to the moral ideal we demand of people.

More like Xun Zi, Dong Zhongshu argues that we should hold people up to a higher standard, in terms of which we don't want to say that people are *good* but that they are *not* good. Compared with animals people are good; compared with the philosophical sage, they are not good.

In one way the difference between Dong Zhongshu and Mencius is a matter of degree. Mencius does not say that people are born as morally good individuals. He insists that this requires cultivation and training. He calls the innate goodness the "beginnings" of goodness. Nonetheless, he differs from Dong Zhongshu in seeing more good in people than does Dong Zhongshu. For Mencius the "beginnings" of goodness are really good, though on a small scale which must be further encouraged and developed; for Dong Zhongshu the "seeds" of goodness are not themselves good at all but only have the potential to become so. Both the tomato seed and the ripe tomato have the potential to become tomato juice, for example. But while Mencius wants to claim that the tomato actually has within it some of the qualities of tomato juice, Dong insists that the tomato seed isn't at all like tomato juice.

The main difference between Mencius and Dong Zhongshu is in their view of the role of government in fostering moral goodness. Mencius would have government take a far less intrusive role, merely encouraging, cultivating the beginnings of moral goodness which already exist. Dong Zhongshu, like Xun Zi, on the contrary, believes that government must mold and shape human beings who have the capacity for goodness but cannot become good without the intervention of the state. For Mencius, government leaders *encourage* people to be moral by setting a good example for all to follow. For Dong Zhongshu, government leaders *force* people to be moral by establishing a system of rewards and punishments.

A similar "nature/nurture" debate goes on today concerning the capacity of human beings to learn language. Of course, people are capable of learning a language, but how much of this is innate and how much is taught? Do parents teach children to speak or do children just pick it up? Mencius' theory is like those who say today that children are not taught to speak a language but just pick it up in a favorable environment. Dong's view comes out if we ask whether American students will learn Swedish by just picking it up or only by hard study and rigorous practice? For Dong becoming a morally good person is like an American learning Swedish—it can be done but only with a great deal of training, practice, and discipline.

Dong Zhongshu: Human Nature Is Both Good and Evil[1]

In his real character man has both humanity (*jen ren*) and greed. The material forces responsible for both humanity and greed are found in his person. What is called the person is received from Heaven (*Tien*, Nature). Heaven has its dual operation of yin and yang (passive and active cosmic forces), and the person also has his dual nature of humanity and greed. There are cases when Heaven restricts the operation of yin and yang, and there are cases when the person weakens his feelings and desires. [The way of man] and the Way of Heaven are the same. . . .

Someone [Mencius] says, "Since nature contains the beginning of goodness and since the mind possesses the basic substance of goodness, how can nature not be regarded as good?"

I reply, "You are wrong. The silk cocoon contains [potential] silk but it is not yet silk, and the egg contains the [potential] chicken but it is not yet a chicken. If we follow these analogies, what doubt can there be?

The activity of Heaven extends to a certain point and then stops. What stops within the operation of Heaven is called human nature endowed by Heaven, and what stops outside the operation of Heaven is called human activity. . . . The nature of man is like a silk cocoon or an egg. An egg has to be hatched to become a chicken, and a silk cocoon has to be unravelled to make silk. It is the true character of Heaven that nature needs to be trained before becoming good. The people receive from Heaven a nature which cannot be good [by itself], and they turn to the king to receive the training which completes their nature.

Man's nature may be compared to the eyes. In sleep they are shut and there is darkness. They must await the awakening before they can see. Before the awakening it may be said that they possess the basic substance (quality) to see, but it cannot be said that they see. Now the nature of all people possesses this basic substance but it is not yet awakened; it is like people in sleep waiting to be awakened. It has to be trained before it becomes good.

It is not simply because we are better than animals that we may be called good. If merely activating the beginning and being better than animals may be called goodness, why is it not evident [from the beginning]? That being better than animals is not sufficient to be called goodness is the same as being wiser than plants is not sufficient to be called wisdom. If evaluated in comparison with the nature of animals, the nature of man is of course good. But if evaluated in comparison with the goodness according to the way of man [as it should be], man's nature falls short.

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[1]All quotations from Wing-Tsit Chan, trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 1963).

OTHER CHINESE THEORIES OF HUMAN NATURE

Although Confucianists pursued the topic of human nature more than other Chinese writers, there were other, competing theories. In opposition to the legalist theory (Fa Jia), which borrowed Xun Zi's theory that human beings are basically evil and need to be controlled by laws which mete out strict rewards and punishments, the Taoist theory supports the view that human nature should not be controlled or modified in any way, not even to

strengthen or improve upon it, as the Confucianists urged. In the most widely translated and read Chinese book by Westerners, the *Daodejing (Tao de Ching)*, Laozi (Lao Tzu) argues that we should just be natural (*wu wei*). The term *wu wei* literally means non-action, but the context makes it clear that what is meant is that we should not act in too deliberate

a manner but rather go with the flow, letting things happen of their own accord. We accomplish more by doing less ("if it ain't broke, don't fix it"), and the need to improve our character and behavior just shows that we have lost our natural and spontaneous tendency to do the right thing. Yet another group, the Mohists (followers of Mozi, or Mo Ti), following Gaozi's (Kao Tzu) lead, argued that there was no innate human nature but that human behavior was molded and shaped by society. If people had been acculturated in the past to love their fellow tribal and clan members and where tribes and clans clashed to hate those from other tribes and clans, they could, and should, now be acculturated to love all people equally (discarding "partial love" and embracing "impartial love").

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think the writings of Mencius, Dong Zhongshu, and Xun Zi are religious or philosophical? Why is it so difficult to classify their writings?
2. Do you think human beings can ever be completely "natural"? Why or why not?
3. What arguments are given in the readings to support the view that human beings are inherently evil and must be trained to become virtuous? Do you find these arguments compelling?
4. What arguments can you assemble to support your view, whether you think that nature is more important than nurture in human development or vice versa?
5. As you read Mencius, did you find any common ground with Aristotle's view of moral development? Explain.

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3. What are some of the difficulties in interpreting Confucian thought?

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Hindu Debate on Monism

We are often told that Eastern thought has a very different concept of knowledge from that which we find in Western philosophy. Unlike Western theories of knowledge which draw a sharp distinction between the knower and the known, that is, between the person who knows and the objects which that person knows, as well as distinctions among the *kinds* of objects which can be known (horses, fire, etc.), there are no such distinctions, we are told, in Eastern theories of knowledge. In Eastern thought, it is said, the knower becomes one with the known, and the reality we thereby come to know is one in which all distinctions disappear; all is one.

Although Indian thinkers do indeed espouse a kind of knowledge of an absolute undifferentiated "Reality" which transcends ordinary experience, they also recognize a more ordinary kind of knowledge in everyday, mundane situations, a commonsense knowledge in which the subject seeks to know a distinct object compartmentalized by limiting categories (a book and not a tuna fish sandwich; a horse and not a cow).

As philosophers, it is difficult to see how we can discuss anything but the more ordinary kind of knowledge. Why? Because that is the only way to establish objective rules of evidence and logical validity. In other words, this is the only way reason appears to operate in human beings, and philosophy, as we have been saying, is only a reflection on our most common, everyday experience. Few human beings have had the kind of mystical experiences in which the knower becomes one with the known and distinctions among the objects and kinds of objects known disappear, but everyone can appreciate the ancient Indian argument that the hill must be on fire because of the smoke we see. If there is some other kind of knowledge, it cannot be known by ordinary sense experience and reason and would therefore seem to lie outside philosophy. It appears we cannot philosophically transcend reason. We may, like Kant, use reason to philosophically recognize the limits of reason, but can we use reason to go beyond reason?

How, then, if indeed it is at all possible, *can* we go beyond reason? Only by a kind of intuitive religious or mystical experience, available on rare occasions to a few individuals. But, as legitimate as this may be, it is hard to see how this can form part of philosophy. Think of different human approaches to reality—science, religion, philosophy, and art. Each is different; each has its particular strengths and weaknesses. There is no need to choose one over the others; most of us will want to utilize *all* of them in our lives.

Finally, it is simply not true that the distinction between a mystical intuitive knowledge and an ordinary sort of knowledge is a distinction between *Eastern* and *Western*

theories of knowledge, since both sorts of knowledge occur in *both* East *and* West. That is, there are Western as well as Eastern religious mystics who claim intuitive insight into a unified reality in which all is one, and there are Eastern as well as Western philosophers who analyze ordinary knowledge of everyday life. So the supposed difference between Eastern and Western theories of knowledge is really just the difference between a *philosophical* account of knowledge based on universal principles of human reason and the possibility of a *religious* knowledge transcending those limits (and thereby stepping beyond philosophy itself).

It is true that since the rise of modern science in Europe in the seventeenth century, Western philosophers have become *less* interested than they once were in mystical claims to knowledge and more interested in the everyday sorts of knowledge which can lead to science, while this is less true of Eastern philosophers who continue to be interested in both sorts of knowledge. Indeed, reacting to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial domination by the Western powers, Eastern thinkers have tended to defend their cultures by exaggerating differences between their culture and those of the West. Instead of feeling inferior because they did not develop science and technology and a capitalist market economy, Eastern cultures toward the end of the colonial era (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) began to criticize the violent, wasteful, crass materialism of the West and, by contrast, to praise their own more spiritual, balanced, holistic culture.

Because many of us in the West are equally critical of the excesses of our own culture, especially during the past hundred years or so, we tend to agree with our Eastern critics! Nonetheless, a closer look at both Eastern and Western cultures reveals a more complex picture lacking in such stark black-and-white contrasts, a grayer picture in which both Eastern and Western cultures over the past 2,000 years have sought both ordinary, scientific, and technical knowledge and also mystical religious knowledge.

Because of differences in the rate of scientific and technological development, the *cultures* of East and West have today become somewhat different—though that is rapidly changing, as we can see especially in the case of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan. Of course, cultural differences remain, just as they also remain between America and Europe, and between Germany and Italy (and between India and China and between China and Japan). As India and China take their place in the modern technological "information age," the contrasts between Eastern and Western culture become less pronounced and obvious.

To illustrate this point let us look at a very interesting debate within Indian philosophy between Ramanuja and Madhva on one side and Shankara on the other about what we can and cannot know. All three men were devout Hindus, and each of them offered different interpretations of Hindu sacred texts known as the *Upanishads*.

Hinduism is an ancient and extraordinarily complex religion. To the outsider it is difficult to see what common elements hold this diversity of religious beliefs and practices together as a single religion. Perhaps the only thing all Hindus uphold is the god-given authority of the sacred texts, the ancient vedas, such as the *Rig Veda* and the *Upanishads,* which all Hindus regard as absolute and eternal (other religious texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Puranas* are revered but not held to be sacred in this sense). Nonetheless, what we know as Hinduism today has evolved. In its earliest stage, three- to-four thousand years ago, it was centered, in the *Rig Veda* and other ancient religious texts, on sacrifices to various anthropomorphic gods (Indra, the god of war and thunder, and Agni, the god of fire, among others), not unlike the ancient Greek gods,

Zeus, Apollo, and the rest of the pantheon. Later (800–300 B.C.E.) the ancient vedic literature was reinterpreted (in the *Upanishads*) by a long line of forest hermits, the rishis, as an internalized search through quiet meditation for the inner self, Atman (which, in some of the later Upanishads, is said to be identical with Brahman, the whole universe). Still later (1000–1500 B.C.E.) Hinduism shifted once again, this time toward devotion (bhakti) to personal savior gods, like the beloved Krishna, as we see him in the *Puranas* and *Bhagavad Gita*.

The sacred texts known as the vedas vary widely from one another in style and content, lending themselves to radically different interpretations. This is especially true of the *Upanishads*.

If the *Upanishads* are sacred god-given texts, we would expect them to contain a unified, consistent message. But on the surface, at any rate, they appear to contain very different messages. The *Upanishads* can be read as a kind of non-theistic monism in which everything is part of an impersonal One known as Brahman; and they can also be read as a kind of theism in which a personal God is distinct from individual human souls and from the material world.

According to the first (non-theistic monism) interpretation of the *Upanishads,* all distinctions are ultimately illusory; there is no difference between the person who knows and the object which that person knows, and no differences among the objects known, that is, no differences between trees, mountains, cows, and horses (or between oak trees and maple trees or between this horse and that horse, this oak tree and that oak tree); and finally no difference between the thinking, knowing person and God and the world—all is one undifferentiated whole, known as Brahman.

According to the second (theistic pluralism) interpretation of the *Upanishads,* there are sharp and clear distinctions between the knower and the known, between God and the world, and between things in the world and between types of things in the world (trees, mountains, cows, and horses).

Shankara (ninth century) interprets the Hindu texts in the first way, known as *advaita,* which means non-duality, while Ramanuja (twelfth century) and Madhva (thirteenth century) interpret these same texts in the second, theistic, and pluralistic way. Let us first look at Shankara's interpretation:[1]

> Brahman, the non-differentiated pure Consciousness, is the only reality, and all this manifoldness [we see about us in everyday life] is simply imagined. . . and is false. . . . The texts [the Upanishads] show that Brahman is bereft of all differences; . . . that Its nature is essentially opposite to what we generally experience in this world. . . . This illusion [of the diversity of things in everyday life] disappears when the identity of the individual soul and Brahman is realized. . . . It might be said [on the contrary] that since direct perception, which is the best of all proofs, affirms this world of manifoldness, it cannot be overturned by scriptural knowledge of unity. . . . [But] scriptural knowledge of unity *can* overturn the knowledge of manifoldness based

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[1]All Shankara and Ramanuja citations are from *The Vedanta Sutras*. Trans. George Thibaut. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904. Vols. 34, 38, and 48.

Shankara (788–822 b.c.e.), a Hindu philosopher known for his advaita interpretation of Brahman, that he held was identical with the soul (atman) and the physical world. Courtesy of The Image Works.

on direct perception, because scriptures which are eternal and of divine origin are free from all defects while direct perception is defective [and can lead to error]. . . . It has been shown already that when there is a conflict between direct perception or other means of knowledge and the scriptures, that the latter are of greater force. But actually no such contradiction exists between direct perception and scriptures, for it is only the non-differentiated Brahman, which is Existence Itself, that is directly perceived in all objects of perception. . . . Consciousness which persists in all our cognitions is real and therefore identical with Existence. . . . And because it is consciousness, it is self-evident . . . and eternal, for it cannot have a beginning or end. . . . Therefore consciousness is devoid of all plurality, and, as a result, it cannot have any "knower" (self) behind it that is different from itself. (*Commentaries on the Vedanta [Brahman] Sutra*)

And now let us look at Ramanuja's refutation of Shankara:

Brahman cannot be, as the Advaitins [Shankara] say, non-differentiated pure Consciousness, for no proof can be adduced to establish non-differentiated objects. All sources of knowledge prove the existence only of objects qualified by difference. Nondifferentiated objects cannot be established by one's experience either, for such experience is only of objects qualified by some characteristic difference, as is shown by statements like "I saw this," where "I" and "this" are both differentiated objects. . . . It is certain qualities of the object that exclude other qualities and thus

help us to distinguish it from other objects, and so a non-differentiated thing [such as Brahman] cannot be established. Consciousness or knowledge is by nature such that it reveals an object to a knower. . . therefore, consciousness always involves the cognition of difference [between knower and known]. . . . Scriptures, too, cannot prove a non-differentiated entity. A word consists of different roots and endings, and so all words denote difference. . . . Scriptures, therefore, which consist of words and sentences, cannot denote a non-differentiated entity. Direct perception, too, cannot denote non-differentiated things. . . . In determinate perceptions we experience objects qualified by attributes like generic character, as for example, when we see a cow we see the object as qualified by the generic character of a cow. . . . In [so-called] non-determinate perceptions the determining attributes are not experienced and the subject and object are [supposedly] merged into each other. Such knowledge, it is said, is beyond sense-perception. . . . [But all such perceptions] are denied by experience and are impossible. All our experience is of the kind—"this is such and such," that is, as qualified by difference. . . . Inference also denotes only objects qualified by difference, for inference depends upon the invariable relation between two things [for example, fire and smoke in the inference, "we know the hill over there is on fire because we can see the smoke rising from the hill"] which are objects of perception [for example, hills and fire and smoke], and perception deals only with objects qualified by difference. . . . Therefore, no proof—whether from scriptures, direct perception, or inference—can be adduced to establish a non-differentiated object. . . . It is not true, as the Advaitins say, that being alone is experienced through perception, for, as shown already, perception has for its objects only things qualified by differences . . . common to all things of a class . . ., if we experience only Existence in all perceptions, then statements like "there is a pot," "the cloth exists" will be meaningless. Moreover, why does one who goes to buy a horse not return with a buffalo? Again, if we do not experience difference, why do we not use the word "elephant" or "cow" when we see a horse, since all words would have the same object, viz., Existence, and therefore these words would be synonymous, referring to the same object? Moreover, when we see in sequence a horse and then an elephant, the latter knowledge (about the elephant) would only be a remembrance [the horse again, and not the perception of a second, different object, the elephant]. . . . And finally, if Existence alone is perceived in all perceptions, then blindness, deafness, etc. will not be handicaps, for a single perception by any one sense alone will suffice to experience everything, since there is no difference among objects. . . consciousness cannot be Existence, for the latter is an object of consciousness, and as such the difference between the two is quite palpable. (*Commentaries on the Vedanta [Brahman] Sutra*)

Like Ramanuja, Madhva supports the popular theism of late Hinduism. God, whether Shiva or Vishnu, created and controls the world and cannot therefore be identical with it. For Ramanuja and Madhva, as for Descartes, the world is made up of God, physical objects, and individual selves, who long to be *with God* but not to *become God*. When Indian scholars began to reconstruct Indian philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they tended to compare Indian thought with the dominant

European philosophy of the time, Hegelianism, in which everything in the world is part of one all-encompassing impersonal mind, which Hegel called the Absolute—something which seemed very similar to Shankara's notion of Brahman. Thus, they tended to favor

and privilege the more philosophical, metaphysical, and less theological view of Shankara over that of the more popular religious and traditional theists, Ramanuja and Madhva. But today those of us standing philosophically "on the outside looking in" should not prejudge the issue and should leave open the possibility that India supported talented and able philosophers of many different perspectives and persuasions. Specifically, while Shankara was undoubtedly a great philosopher, so were Ramanuja and Madhva.

Madhva holds that individual selves and physical objects exist eternally as separate entities, although they are, as Descartes also held, dependent on God for their existence. It makes no sense, according to Madhva, to say that individual selves and physical objects are *identical* with God, that is, just the same thing as God.

Let's take a look at Madhva's arguments. First Madhva argues—somewhat like Richard Taylor in Part 3, "What Is Real? (Metaphysics)"—that if two things are identical then we must be able to meaningfully and truthfully say the same things about them, which we cannot do in the case of God and individual selves, like you or me. If George Washington is identical with the first president of the United States, then whatever we meaningfully and truthfully say of George Washington we should be able to meaningfully and truthfully say of the first president of the United States— "both" were married to Martha and commanded the Continental Army, so these "two" things are really only one. But in the case of God and individual selves what we say of the one we cannot say of the other—God, but not the individual self, is omnipresent, all-knowing, all-powerful; and by the same token, the individual self, but not God, responds to the physical condition of one and only one particular body, feeling its pains, suffering its fatigue, and knowing its excitement. Therefore, the two are different.[2]

> God is not the embodied self, as it is quite impossible to predicate omnipresence of the embodied self. That is, it is impossible and against fact and reason that one and the same individual self could be in all the bodies at the same time. . . . This is also said in the *Garuda Purana*, "There is no equality in experience between the Lord and the self; for the Lord is all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolute; while the self is of limited understanding and power and absolutely dependent." (*Commentaries on the Brahman [Vedanta] Sutra*)

Neither can the physical world simply be an imaginary idea in the mind (and therefore *part of* the mind, whether an individual mind or the all-embracing Mind of Brahman), as Shankara held. As European phenomenologists have maintained, the fact that we are conscious *of* objects indicates a distinction between the two—the seer and what is seen. Also, we easily discriminate between dreams and reality. And finally, there is

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[2]All Madhva citations from *Vedanta Sutras*, S. Suba Rao. Trans. Tirupat Sr. Vyuasa Press, 1936.

the objection also raised against Berkeley, that mental ideas momentarily come and go as we briefly entertain one idea before turning to other ideas, whereas physical objects continue to exist even after everyone has stopped thinking of them:

> The ignorant say that the world is unreal, for they are really ignorant of the supreme power of God, who, boundless in wisdom, having created such a world of real existence, has become the author of a real world. . . . The non-existence of external things cannot be maintained, on account of our being conscious of them. . . . It cannot be said that as the creatures of a dream are, so also the world is a non-entity; for, unlike the world, the creatures of a dream are perceived differently from real objects, as when we say, "This is a mere dream, this is not a real snake." . . . The world is not vijnana (consciousness) for it is not so perceived. The world is not a mere mode of the mind; for nobody has perceived it as such in his experience. . . . Vijnana or consciousness is only of a moment's duration, whereas physical objects we perceive are permanent. Hence, too, the mind and the world outside cannot be said to be identical. (*Commentaries on the Vedanta [Brahma] Sutra*)

This is an excellent example of the distinction between philosophical and religious knowledge. Insofar as philosophy reflects upon and analyzes our ordinary, commonsense experience, it is hard to see how philosophy can justify the kind of knowledge we find in Shankara, which radically contradicts all commonsense experience of daily life. Philosophy, as we have been saying, is a reflection on our ordinary, commonsense intuitions, and absolutely central to these commonsense intuitions is the intuition that the knower is distinct from the object known, that there are many different things in the world, that these different things belong to different categories which define what these individual objects are and what they can do, that there are larger categories encompassing smaller categories, and so on. This is the way the world appears to us as human beings; this is where philosophy starts and it is difficult to see how philosophy can go beyond this.

Philosophically, therefore, in many ways Ramanuja and Madhva would seem to win the debate, since logic and all our forms of objective reasoning spring from a base in commonsense. But this does not mean that Shankara is wrong. The way the world appears to God may be very different from the way it appears to us, and since God is by definition unlimited and human beings are limited in our outlook, this means that in that case God's view is correct and our view is incorrect. But so long as we are human beings (and not God or gods), it is hard to see how we can know this—and so we are stuck, at least for now, with the human perspective (and the philosophical articulation of that human perspective). So, to say that Ramanuja and Madhva win the philosophical debate does not mean that they are right and Shankara is wrong (perhaps Shankara has caught a glimpse of the world much closer to a "god's-eye view"). It only means that Shankara must look beyond philosophy to prove his claim. The proof he needs will lie in mystical intuition, guided by the discipline of meditation and religious devotion (and perhaps revealed scriptures, the vedas).

Questions for Discussion

1. What aspects of Eastern thought do you find appealing? Unappealing?
2. Some interpreters of Eastern texts have concluded that it is best to take them on their own terms and not try to understand them using Western categories. Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. Hindu texts speak of many gods. Yet Brahman is one and undifferentiated. How is this to be understood?

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Buddhist Theory of Emptiness

The Buddhist religious texts, the sutras, claim that escape from suffering comes from the realization (enlightenment) that all is "empty" (*sunyata*)—no souls, no gods, no real physical objects. To the ordinary person, whether European, American, or Asian, this sounds crazy. Nor are the religious texts themselves very helpful in explaining what is meant by this emptiness. As we've noted before, this is precisely where the philosophers step in. In this case, the second-century Buddhist philosopher, Nagarjuna, sets out in the following reading to explain what emptiness means and to logically prove that it is true.

In the *Seventy Verses on Emptiness,* Nagarjuna says that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence and are therefore empty. The only reason he offers is that ordinary objects of daily life (which we normally take to be real) are dependent on other objects and conditions and so cannot be absolutely unchanging, independent, and permanent. If they are permanent, then they wouldn't have ever changed or evolved into their present form.

The world is "empty," then, in the sense that there is nothing that meets the definition of reality as something completely independent of everything else. That doesn't mean there are no ordinary physical objects (trees, houses, etc.) but only that none of these things are completely independent of other things. The tree depends on water and sunlight, and the house depends on the materials it is made of. What Nagarjuna is claiming is that ordinary objects of our everyday experience do not meet the definition of "reality"—it is not so much a theory of what there is or is not in the world, as it is a theory about the ability of words to describe reality. The world is "empty," he claims, in the sense that it is "empty" of all our linguistic descriptions—none of our words capture or exhaust reality. Things are neither existing nor non-existing, because *existing* and *non-existing* are just humanly created words that are useful in daily life but which can never pin down reality. The main idea (or definition) of reality—namely, that for a thing to be real it must be uncaused, unchanging, and therefore completely independent and permanent—is presented as obvious and beyond question. All Nagarjuna does is work out the logical implications of that definition of reality for ordinary physical objects. If that is your definition of reality, he seems to be saying, then you will have to admit that ordinary physical objects cannot be real in this sense because they are obviously changing and dependent on other objects.

The idea that an object might be constantly changing and dependent on other objects and yet be real is never even considered. Even Nagarjuna's critic Vaibhasika actually

NAGARJUNA (C. 150–250), founder of the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism. Often called the "second Buddha," he argued that all is empty (Sunyata) in the sense that nothing exists "inherently," that is, completely independently. Courtesy of Chris Leachman/Alamy.

assumes this very definition in his objection: "If you assert that phenomena don't exist inherently then you are asserting that they don't exist at all." Nagarjuna easily turns this argument on his opponent: "When you claim that phenomena exist inherently you are saying that they do not originate in dependence on causes and conditions and therefore don't exist. For if they didn't depend on causes and conditions, then they would exist and would have existed forever."

This exchange is particularly telling. Vaibhasika seems to be saying that existing inherently is a necessary or defining condition for anything existing at all. If it doesn't exist inherently, he seems to be saying, then it doesn't exist at all. Vaibhasika clearly intends this statement as a kind of *argumentum ad absurdum,* that because Nagarjuna claims that nothing exists inherently, it follows that nothing exists, and that is patently absurd—at least to common sense. Perhaps, like Plato and the atomists of ancient Western philosophy, Vaibhasika assumes that there must be *something* that meets this demanding definition of reality. If ordinary physical objects are unreal in this sense, then perhaps some underlying, more fundamental entities (atoms, for instance) will meet that definition. What Vaibhasika doesn't allow (any more than Nagarjuna) is that something could exist and yet exist dependently on other things.

It doesn't seem to occur to anyone, even Nagarjuna's opponents, that something could exist and be real and yet be dependent, changing, and impermanent. As Parmenides said, this just doesn't make sense. Despite what our five senses seem to tell us, reason tells us that any talk of change involves talk about nonbeing and any talk about nonbeing, of things not existing, is just plain nonsense. It makes no sense, in other words, to talk about something that is not ("What are you talking about? There *is* no such thing!"); and if something is, then it can never *not* be—which means it can never change, and *that* means it can never affect or be affected by another entity—change is simply an illusion.

So, the definition of reality as something unchanging and independent is not a claim put forward and defended by Nagarjuna but is merely presented as the ordinary, commonsense criterion or definition of reality whose disastrous implications for ordinary phenomenal objects Nagarjuna carefully and mercilessly analyzes. Indeed, he assumes that this is the only logically possible position and so the only one that common sense *can* accept, upon reflection.

It is hard to imagine that the ordinary person consciously holds such a theory or would be able to state, much less defend, it. Nonetheless, Nagarjuna and other anti-realist philosophers seem to imply that this is the commonly accepted, unchallenged, standard criterion of reality implicitly or tacitly held by everyone.

But is the realist criterion a background assumption of ordinary people, or is this only the philosopher's supposition? One reason for thinking that this may indeed be what most of us ordinarily assume is the extreme ease with which ordinary people fall into the philosopher's trap. That is, when shown that the object under consideration changes and may not exist just as we perceive it, most people tend to agree that it is therefore not real or not fully real. Now, unless we attribute an extreme gullibility to ordinary people, this does seem to indicate that the ordinary person does in fact embrace, however unconsciously, the realist criterion.

Even today most people will tend to think that if their mind is completely dependent on their body (that is, that it cannot exist apart from their body) or that there is nothing within the mind that remains the same from birth to old age (that is, no single strand of memory or feeling or thought), then in that case, they will conclude that the soul or mind does not exist as a real, independent entity. (They will say that in that case, they don't believe in the soul—if the mind/soul only exists as a by-product of the body, then most people are prepared to conclude that therefore the mind/soul does not exist, meaning that it does not exist as an independent, unchanging entity.) Similarly, we tend to think that if everything in the world is made of atoms and that atoms remain the same while the physical objects made up of atoms come and go, then atoms are therefore "more real" than ordinary physical objects—simply because they are "more" permanent, unchanging, and independent.

Nagarjuna: Seventy Verses on Emptiness

Duration, origination, destruction, existence, non-existence, inferiority, mediocrity and superiority were taught by the Buddha in accord with conventional usage, not by the power of the real.

There is nothing which corresponds to the expressions: not-self, not not-self, both self and not-self, because all factors which can be spoken of are—like Nirvana—empty in their intrinsic being.

Since the intrinsic being of all entities does not exist in their causes and conditions, either together or separately, or in any way at all, they are empty.

This version of *Seventy Verses on Emptiness* was edited by **David Quinn**, based on a translation by Peter Della Santina.

The existent does not originate because it is existent. The non-existent does not originate because it is non-existent. The existent and non-existent also does not originate because they are heterogeneous. Because there is no origination, there is no duration and no destruction.

The originated is not the object to be originated. The unoriginated is also not the object to be originated. The object at the time of origination is also not the object to be originated, because it would be originated and unoriginated.

If the effect is existent, the cause will possess the effect. If nonexistent, the cause will be equal to a non-cause. If neither existent nor non-existent, it is contradictory. Nor again is a cause justified in the three times [past, present and future].

Without one, many does not occur. Without many, one does not occur. Therefore, interdependently originated entities are without form and attributes.

How can what is not established in its own intrinsic being produce another? A condition which is not established cannot cause the origination of another.

The father is not the son, nor is the son the father, nor do they exist without mutual dependence, nor are they identical. The same is true for the twelve constituents.

Neither the happiness and suffering which depend upon an object in a dream, nor that object itself, are existent. Similarly, neither that which originates dependently, nor that upon which it depends, are existent.

If entities are not existent in their intrinsic being, then neither inferiority, mediocrity nor superiority, nor the manifold objects of experience as such, are existent.

If neither origination nor cessation are existent, then Nirvana is the cessation of what exactly? What neither originates nor ceases—is this not liberation?

If Nirvana were cessation, it would be annihilation. If it were otherwise, it would be permanence. Therefore, Nirvana is neither being nor non-being. It neither originates, nor ceases.

The characteristic is established by the substratum of the characteristic. The substratum of the characteristic is established by the characteristic, but they are not established independently, nor are they established by one another. What is not established is not that which establishes another which is not established.

By this analysis, cause and effect, experience and the subject of experience, as well as the subject and object of vision, hearing, etc.—indeed, whatever may exist—are all explained without exception.

The three times [past, present, and future] are non-existent and are mere imagination. They are non-enduring, reciprocally established, disordered, not established independently and thus, like all entities, non-existent.

Because the three characteristics of the compounded object—origination, duration and destruction—are non-existent, the compounded and the uncompounded are also non-existent.

The compounded and the uncompounded are neither manifold nor unitary, neither existent nor non-existent, nor both existent and non-existent. Within this perimeter, all possibilities are included.

The Blessed One [the Buddha] proclaimed the enduring nature of actions. He proclaimed actions and their effects. He proclaimed that the sentient being is the agent of actions and that actions are not lost.

Because it has been demonstrated that they are without intrinsic being, actions do not originate, so they cannot be destroyed. Actions originate from self-clinging. That clinging which produces actions also originates from imagination.

If actions existed in their intrinsic being, then the body originated from them would be permanent. They would not be endowed with the maturing effect of suffering. Therefore, actions would also be substantial.

Actions originated from conditions are not in the least existent, nor are actions originated without conditions existent. Compounded objects and events are like an illusion, a fairy city and a mirage.

Afflictions are the cause of actions. Volition consists of actions and afflictions. Actions are the cause of the body, therefore all three are empty in their intrinsic being.

Without actions, there is no agent. Without those two, there is no effect. Without an effect, there is consequently no subject of experience. Hence, they are all empty.

If one knows very well actions to be empty, actions will not originate, simply because of this perception of reality. Without actions, that which originates from actions will not originate.

As the Blessed One, the Tathagata [the Buddha] creates an illusory creation by means of illusory emanation, that illusory creation creates another illusory creation.

Among them, the illusory creation that is the Tathagata is also empty. What need is there to say anything about the illusory creation of an illusory creation? They are both existent insofar as anything which is mere imagination.

Similarly, the agent is like the illusory creation, and actions are like the illusory creation of an illusory creation. They are empty in their intrinsic being and exist insofar as anything which is mere imagination.

If actions existed in their intrinsic being, there would be no Nirvana and no agent of actions. If they were non-existent, there would be no attractive and unattractive effects originated from actions.

There exists the statement of existence and also the statement of non-existence and again the statement of both existence and non-existence. The intentional proclamations of the Buddhas are not easily penetrated.

If awareness apprehended form, it would be apprehended as the very intrinsic being of awareness. How could non-existent awareness originated from conditions apprehend non-existent form?

When the originated momentary awareness does not apprehend the originated momentary form, how could it comprehend past and future form?

While colour and shape never exist separately, the separate are not apprehended as one, because the two are known as form.

Eye awareness is not existent in the eye. It is not existent in form, nor in the space in between. What is constructed dependent upon the eye and form is erroneous.

If the eye does not see itself, how can it see form? Therefore, the eye and form are insubstantial. The remaining sense spheres are also similar.

The eye is empty of its own substantiality. It is empty of another's substantiality. Similarly, form is also empty, and also the remaining sense spheres.

Consciousness originates dependent upon an object of consciousness, therefore it is non-existent. Without cognition and an object of consciousness, there is consequently no consciousness at all.

All is impermanent, but impermanence or permanence never existed. If an entity existed, it would be impermanent or permanent, but how can it exist in the first place?

Born from the conditions of attraction, repulsion and error, attachment, aversion and delusion originate. Therefore, attachment, aversion and delusion are non-existent in their intrinsic being.

The object of imagination is not existent. Without the object of imagination, how is imagination existent? Therefore, since they are originated from conditions, the object of imagination, and imagination itself, are empty.

When there is perception of the real, no ignorance originates from the four erroneous views. Since that ignorance is non-existent, volitions do not originate.

Whatever originates dependent upon that, originates from that. Without that, it does not originate. Entities and non-entities as well as compounded factors and uncompounded factors are peace and Nirvana.

Entities originated from causes and conditions are imputed by ordinary people to be real. That is proclaimed to be ignorance by the Buddha.

When there is perception of the real, of entities as empty, ignorance does not originate. Just that is the cessation of ignorance. When that happens, the twelve constituents cease.

Compounded objects and events are like a fairy city, an illusion, a mirage, a bubble of water, foam and like a dream and the circle of the whirling fire-brand.

No entity whatsoever is existent in its intrinsic being. Entities and non-entities originated from causes and conditions are empty.

Since all entities are empty in their intrinsic being, the Interdependent Origination of entities is demonstrated by the incomparable Tathagata.

The ultimate is none other than this Emptiness. The Blessed Buddha, relying upon conventional usage, imagined all possibilities.

The doctrine of the world is not destroyed. In reality, no factor at all is demonstrated. Not comprehending the proclamation of the Tathagata, ordinary people are consequently afraid of the unsupported and unimaginable truth.

The way of the world, "dependent upon this, that originates", is not negated. What is interdependently originated is without intrinsic being, so how does it exist? This is perfect certitude.

One who has faith, who diligently seeks the ultimate, not relying upon any demonstrated factor, inclined to subject the way of the world to reason, abandoning being and non-being attains peace.

Having comprehended apparent conditionality, the net of false views is swept aside. Consequently, abandoning attachment, delusion and anger, without stain, one surely reaches Nirvana.

Nagarjuna: How Phenomena Are Empty
of Inherent Existence

"Arising," "enduring," and "disintegrating"; "existing" and "non-existing". . .; do not have true existence. These terms are used by the Buddha to accommodate worldly conventions.

All phenomena must have either self-existence or non-self-existence. There is no phenomenon which is other than these two. . . . All phenomena which are subject of this treatise are like nirvana in that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence.

What is the reason for this? It is because the inherent existence of all phenomena is not to be found in causes, conditions, aggregations or individualities. Thus all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence and are empty.

Some [Samkyas] assert that an effect already exists inherently in the nature of its cause; but if so then it cannot arise because it already exists. . . Others assert that an effect both does and does not exist inherently in its cause; but then they are asserting contradictory views about an object since an object cannot simultaneously both exist and not exist. Because phenomena do not arise inherently so also they do not endure or cease inherently.

Whatsoever has already arisen will not be able to arise. Whatsoever has not arisen will not arise. Either a phenomenon has already arisen or else it will arise; there is no other possibility beyond these two. . . .

Without one there cannot be many and without many it is not possible to refer to one. Therefore one and many arise dependently and such phenomena do not have the sign of inherent existence. . . .

Ignorance cannot originate as a cause except in dependence on the karmic formations. Also, the karmic formations cannot originate except in dependence on their cause, which is ignorance. Because ignorance and karmic formations are inter-related as cause and effect so these two are known by a valid cognizer not to exist inherently. . . .

Just as in a dream, happiness and suffering depend on dream objects and upon awakening these objects are known not to actually exist, likewise any phenomenon which arises in dependence on another dependent phenomenon would be known not to exist in the manner of its appearance.

Vaibhasika: If you assert that phenomena don't exist inherently then you are asserting that they don't exist at all. . . .

Response: When you assert that phenomena exist inherently you are asserting that they do not originate in dependence on causes and conditions and thus that phenomena actually do not exist. For if phenomena do not depend on causes and conditions, then they should have independent existence throughout all time. Therefore there cannot be any inherent existence for functional [ordinary] phenomena which arise from causes and conditions or non-functional [eternal, unchanging] phenomena which do not arise from causes and conditions, and there cannot be any third mode of existence for phenomena.

Opponent: If phenomena do not exist inherently, how can you use terms to refer to their own characteristics or their characteristics in relation to other phenomena or eternal, unchanging phenomena? Response: Although phenomena lack inherent existence, still we can use terms…for although these are unfindable upon analysis, still, like the objects of a dream they appear to have existence to ordinary perception. So the way they exist and the way they appear are different and these conventional existences are called distortions or false.

Hinayanist: If phenomena are devoid of inherent existence they are completely non-existent like the horns of a rabbit, and so there can be no occurrence of their arising or their cessation. Since Buddha has spoken about arising and cessation, they must exist, so how can things be devoid of inherent existence?

Response: If there is no arising and enduring. . . , then there can be no disintegration or cessation. . . . If a phenomenon were to exist inherently it must have arisen from its own nature or from some other nature, but it cannot arise from its own nature and because a phenomenon cannot have a different nature than its cause, so it cannot arise from some other nature which has inherent existence. . . .

If a phenomenon were to exist inherently it should be permanent. If a phenomenon were to disintegrate completely then you must accept the annihilationist view. If a phenomenon were to exist inherently it would either exist permanently or else undergo complete disintegration: it cannot occur in a way which is different than these two. Therefore one should not assert that a phenomenon has inherent existence. . . .

Opponent: If arising and disintegration do not exist then suffering cannot exist, so what cessation will bring forth nirvana? But because nirvana can be attained that means there is suffering which has inherent existence and therefore there is arising with inherent existence and disintegration with inherent existence. Response: Nirvana refers to that state where suffering does not arise with inherent existence and does not cease with inherent existence. Don't we call that state the naturally abiding nirvana? Therefore arising and disintegration do not exist inherently.

You have accepted that the extinction of the continuation of suffering is nirvana, in which case you have held an annihilationist view. And if you modify your position and assert that nirvana is a state where suffering has inherent existence and has not been extinguished, then you accept permanent suffering which even includes the state of nirvana, which is an eternalist view. . . . Therefore nirvana refers to that state where suffering does not arise with inherent existence and does not cease with inherent existence. . . .

Following the logic of this explanation of mutually dependent origination one cannot use the cause of a result to prove that the result has inherent existence because the cause of the result originates in dependence on the result and so is devoid of inherent existence. The same applies to all the pairs such as feeling and the one who feels or seeing and the seer, and so forth. Taking these as examples one should understand how all the pairs are explained as being devoid of inherent existence because they originate in mutual dependence.

Time does not exist inherently because the three periods of time, past, present and future, do not maintain continuity by themselves, but are dependent on each other. If the three times were to have inherent existence in a mutually dependent

way, then we could not make distinctions be-
tween them, but because we can make dis-
tinctions so time itself cannot be established as having inherent existence, so therefore
the three times do not have inherent existence and are merely imputed by concepts.

Following the reasoning just given, the three characteristics of a composite
phenomenon which are arising, enduring and ceasing are unfindable upon ulti-
mate analysis even for you, so then an ordinary object which is characterized by these
three attributes is also unfindable, in which case the functional basis of a composite
phenomenon becomes unfindable. So when a composite phenomenon cannot exist
inherently, how can a non-composite phenomenon which depends on a composite
phenomenon have inherent existence?

At the point of its complete disintegration does a phenomenon disin-
tegrate which has already disintegrated or at that point does a phenomenon
disintegrate which has not yet disintegrated? In the first case the process of
disintegration is complete, so this cannot be accepted. In the second case it is free
from the function of disintegration, so this cannot be accepted. The same applies
to enduring and arising. If a phenomenon were to endure at that point when it has
already endured then the process of enduring is complete and we cannot say that
it is enduring at that point. And a phenomenon which has not endured cannot be
accepted as enduring at that point because it is free from the function of endur-
ing. If a phenomenon were to arise at the point of arising which has already arisen
then the process of arising is already complete, so this cannot be accepted. And if a
phenomenon were to arise at that point which has not arisen then that case is not
acceptable, because it is non-existent.

If we examine composite phenomena and non-composite phenomena then
we cannot find them as one, because then we cannot differentiate between these
two types of phenomena, and we cannot find them as many, because then these
two would be completely unrelated. If a composite phenomenon is asserted to ex-
ist, then it cannot arise because it is already existent and if it is asserted not to exist,
then it cannot arise because it is non-existent. If it is asserted to be both existent and
non-existent, this is not possible because such a state is contradictory. Every different
type of phenomenon is included within this criterion of non-inherent existence.

Opponent: [The Buddha] has taught that there is continuity in the flow of ac-
tions. Likewise, he has taught about the nature of actions and their results. He has
also taught that the results of actions performed by an individual sentient being must
be experienced by him and that whatever actions are performed are certain to bear
fruit. For these four reasons actions have inherent existence.

Reply: Buddha taught that actions do not exist inherently and so they cannot
arise inherently. Although actions do not exist inherently, they will not be wasted but
is certain that they will bear fruit. From these actions arise consciousness, name and
form, and all the rest of dependent origination. Conception of self is generated through
focusing on the person who is merely imputed upon these dependent entities. Also, it
arises from the preconception which takes improper objects and overestimates them.

If actions were to have inherent existence then they would not be impermanent
but would have the nature of permanence, and then the body which results from
those actions would also be permanent. If actions were to be permanent then they

could not give rise to suffering, which is the ripening of actions. If actions were non-changing they would have the nature of permanence and then they would have self-existence. But then Buddha would not have taught about the lack of self-nature. . . .

Actions are caused by delusions. Our body arises from the nature of delusions and actions. Because the cause of the body is actions, and actions arise from delusions, so therefore these three are devoid of inherent existence.

When actions do not have inherent existence there will be no person to perform actions. Because both of them do not exist, results do not exist. When there are no results there will be no person to experience those results physically and mentally. Because of that reason that actions do not exist inherently, so all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence.

If one understands how actions are devoid of inherent existence, then he sees the suchness of actions. When he has seen suchness he will have eliminated ignorance and when there is no ignorance then the actions which are caused by ignorance cannot arise in him, and so the results of actions such as consciousness and so forth up to aging and death will not be experienced by him. When consciousness ceases to exist the dependent phenomena of aging and death cannot occur; thus he will attain the state of liberation free from aging and death. . . .

If actions were to have the nature of inherent existence, then they would be permanent. But if actions were permanent then they would not depend on a person, and if there were no person to perform actions, then actions would not exist. In that case, nirvana, which is the state of cessation, of delusions and actions, could not be attained. If actions did not exist through mere terms and concepts then their ripening results such as happiness and suffering could not arise.

Whatever is said by the Buddha has the two truths; its chief underlying thought; it is hard to understand and must be interpreted in this light. When the Buddha says "existence" his chief underlying thought is conventional existence; when he says "non-existence" his chief underlying thought is non-inherent existence; when he says "existence-and-non-existence" his chief underlying thought is conventional-existence-and -non-inherent-existence as a mere object of examination.

Neither does inherently existent form, having the nature of elements, arise from elements nor from itself and not even from others. Therefore, it does not exist, does it?. . .

Questions for Discussion

1. How well do you think Nagarjuna explains what Buddhists mean by *sunyata?* Does his explanation make emptiness seem less strange, crazy, or scary?

2. Do you think Nagarjuna has articulated your assumptions about what makes something real?

3. Which parts of Nagarjuna's writing do you see as primarily religious, and which parts do you see as primarily philosophical?

4. Assuming that you have been studying Parts 3 (**What Is Real? [Metaphysics]**) and 6 (**Philosophy of Religion**), how would you compare Nagarjuna to Western philosophers such as Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz, and Descartes?

5. If you had to choose one central insight from the readings in Part 9, what would it be?

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

As we mentioned in Chapter 39, "Philosophy East and West," an important recent development in philosophy has been to open the question whether there are any philosophies besides Western philosophy. Any cross-cultural description is of necessity comparative—that is, it requires describing another culture in our language and therefore comparing that culture to ours. When we talk about Indian or Chinese philosophy, whose conception or definition of philosophy are we using when we ask whether these non-Western thought systems count as philosophy? If we are writing or talking in English or some other European language, then we are obviously thinking of the European conception of philosophy (the narrow, technical, analytic sense we defined in Chapter 1, "The Activity of Philosophy"), not because that is the best of many conceptions or definitions of the word philosophy available to us but simply because that is all we have—that is what the word means. *Philosophy* is an English word that arose within, and whose meaning was determined by Western, European thought. When we talk about non-Western philosophy, we are applying a Western concept to non-Western thought systems.

Part of the problem of comparative philosophy is simply the problem of linguistic translation. In India the word which we translate as philosophy is *darshana* (written in Sanskrit script, of course, not in the letters of the Roman alphabet), a word whose roots mean *to see,* as in insight or viewpoint. As written texts, the darshanas were originally (from the sixth century B.C.E.) commentaries on the *sutras,* which were highly abbreviated written outlines of memorized oral traditions, so truncated and abbreviated, in fact, that by themselves (without the commentaries) they are virtually unintelligible (like your own class notes may seem to you ten years from now). Yet within these darshanas are developed very sophisticated debates on topics we know in the West as philosophy.

Searching for a Definition

When English-speaking scholars who can read Sanskrit read the darshanas, they must ask themselves what these texts are all about, what they are like. Is it like what we call poetry, or is it more like what we call history, or a prayer, or a diary, or a shopping list? English-speaking scholars working in Sanskrit agree that the darshanas most closely resemble what we call in English, philosophy, though not *exactly* like it.

A similar problem of translation occurs in the study of Chinese texts. The first reference to any Chinese writing as philosophy was in 1687, in a book written in Latin by Roman Catholic Jesuit missionaries under Matteo Ricci trying to understand the Chinese whom they were trying to convert to Christianity. Kongzi, latinized for the first time as Confucius, was said to be a philosopher (as that word appears in Latin). Shortly thereafter, Mengzi, latinized as Mencius, was similarly designated by the Jesuits as a philosopher. But what is the word in Chinese these Jesuits translated as philosopher? As already indicated, Confucius and Mencius are called in Chinese Kongzi and Mengzi (written, of course, in Chinese characters, not in letters of the Roman alphabet), in which the Chinese word *zi* means something like *master,* so that Kongzi is Master Kong and Mengzi is Master Meng. By the first century C.E., Chinese also used the word *jia,* which literally means "house," to refer to different schools of thought; thus there was the *ru jia* (the Confucianists), the *Mo jia* (the Mohists, followers of Mo Ti, or Mozi), the *dao jia* (the Daoist, or Taoist, thinkers) and the *ming jia* (literally *the school of names,* often referred to in English as the logicians).

English-speaking scholars who can read Chinese and who read these texts of the Mohists and the Ming Jia say that while they are not *exactly* like anything in the West, they most closely resemble what Westerners call philosophy. And indeed when those of us who do not read Chinese read these texts in translation we feel we can relate to them as philosophical texts.

Initially there is no alternative but for the culture initiating the investigation to use its own concepts to judge the culture under investigation. Because of European military, economic, scientific, and technological dominance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was Europeans who judged Chinese and Indian cultures by comparing

them to their own European standards. As Europeans learn enough about Chinese or Indian culture to recognize significant similarities between their own thought systems and those of China and India, and begin to consider them together, it is likely that European concepts will be influenced by Chinese and Indian concepts and that all these will undergo a gradual modification and mutual accommodation toward the others.

An example of this can be found in Japan. As the Japanese toward the end of the nineteenth century set up Western-style universities, at first hiring American and European professors but gradually training their own Japanese professors, they had first to find a way to translate into their own Japanese language the names of all the Western sciences—physics, chemistry, engineering, zoology—and so they needed a word for philosophy.

Because the Japanese use about 2,000 Chinese characters (*kanji*) as part of their written script, they used pairs of kanji (Chinese words, or characters) to translate these European sciences or disciplines, and they accordingly selected a pair of Chinese characters to refer to philosophy. Because the Chinese used the same characters, though the Chinese and Japanese pronounced them very differently, the Chinese adopted the Japanese convention for translating philosophy, and so, around 1900 the Japanese and Chinese used the same written words to translate philosophy, pronounced *tetsugaku* in Japanese and *zhushway* in Chinese.

Around 1920 the Chinese decided that some of their own traditional writing (Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Ming Jia) should also be called zhushway (philosophy), as well as some Indian texts, so that by 1923 the Chinese said there were three major philosophical traditions: Chinese, Indian, and Western. To some extent the Chinese were influenced in this regard by two Western philosophers, the Englishman Bertrand Russell and the American John Dewey, who visited China just after World War I (that is, around 1920). Russell and Dewey told Chinese scholars that philosophy was *not* one of the sciences, as they and the Japanese had supposed, because it was speculative, rather than empirical, and normative (that is, evaluative), rather than factual and objective (that is, value-neutral). As such, Russell and Dewey said, it is more similar to ancient Chinese thought systems of the Confucianists,

Taoists, or Mohists, than it is to Western sciences like physics and chemistry. The Japanese, however, did not accept this reasoning and went in the opposite direction, saying that *tetsugaku* should be used only to refer to Western philosophy, not to any non-Western writings, and that there was only one *tetsugaku,* namely, Western philosophy. The Japanese have since abandoned this narrow view and now say that a Western-inspired Japanese philosophy began to flourish just after World War II, that is, around 1950, and continues today.

What did Indian scholars have to say about this? Around the same time, 1920, British-trained Indian scholars, such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, argued that the Indian darshanas should be included within what Indian scholars had come to recognize from the British as philosophy and should include, as well, the Chinese *zi* or *jia,* agreeing with the Chinese (against the Japanese) that there were three major traditions of philosophy, Indian, Western, and Chinese.

Tough-Minded and Tender-Hearted Approaches

Significant differences exist not only between but also *within* each of these philosophical systems (Western, Chinese, and Indian), in each case ranging from the more tender-hearted and mystical to the more tough-minded and logical perspectives (to use the distinction introduced by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American philosopher and psychologist, William James[1]). Whereas it may be true that on the whole Eastern philosophy is more tender-hearted and Western philosophy is more tough-minded, Eastern philosophy nonetheless has its more tough-minded side and Western philosophy its more tender-hearted side. Interestingly, Eastern philosophers have tended to ignore their own more tough-minded philosophers, just as Western philosophers have tended to ignore their own more tender-hearted philosophers, creating the illusion that *all* Eastern philosophy is tender-hearted and *all* Western philosophy is tough-minded. But this is not true. Nonetheless, given these stereotypes, comparing Chinese or Indian thought with Western philosophy might shift the European sense of philosophy away from the more rigorous, scientific, and

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[1]"The Present Dilemma in Philosophy," *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.*

analytic (that is, tough-minded) regions of Western philosophy (Aristotle, Descartes, or Kant) to the more mystical, practical and wisdom-oriented (that is, tender-hearted) Western philosophers (Plotinus, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche), who more closely resemble stereotypical Indian and Chinese thinkers. By the same token, as Indian and Chinese scholars compare their traditional thinkers with Western philosophers, they may begin to think more highly of those traditionally marginalized Indian and Chinese thinkers who resemble rigorous analytic Western philosophers, that is, Indian and Chinese materialists, skeptics, egoists, and logicians.

By studying each other's philosophies, Western philosophers may gradually come to do philosophy more like their colleagues in China and India. Similarly, Indian and Chinese philosophers, as they study Western philosophy, will gradually begin to do their own philosophy more and more like their Western counterparts.

Philosophy and Religion

But what exactly do we Westerners mean by philosophy? Previously, we said philosophy can be defined in different ways: either more analytically or more constructively, either in a more technical, professional sense or in a more popular everyday sense. If we stress the analytic side, then we will tend to think that non-Western thought which is *not* so analytical is not philosophy, in which case perhaps only a small portion of Chinese and Indian thought will be considered philosophical. The rest may be more religious, poetic, spiritual, but not philosophical. To say a thought system is *not* philosophy is not to make a negative judgment about it. Perhaps it is *better* to be poetic, or spiritual, or religious than to be philosophical, if philosophical means to be cerebral and logocentric.

For example, should we consider the deeply spiritual Hindu *Upanishads* as part of Indian philosophy or not? How much of Chinese I Jing, Daoism, or Buddhism is philosophy, and how much is religion? Everyone agrees that the Upanishads represent the best of the Indian literary tradition. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan distinguishes *speculative* philosophy from *critical* philosophy, somewhat like our earlier distinction of constructive and analytic, so that he can put the Upanishads into the speculative philosophy slot. It is philosophy but not analytical philosophy.

Because philosophy arose gradually out of an earlier religious, mythological age, another problem we face in defining what is philosophy is in trying to differentiate philosophical from religious writing. Much of what we would probably want to include as Indian or Chinese philosophy is also classified as religious writing. This is especially the case with Hinduism and Buddhism, but also Taoism and even Confucianism.

Assuming that we try to differentiate religion from philosophy, how exactly do we separate them, whether within Christianity, Hinduism, or Buddhism? As we suggested at the beginning of Part 9, the philosophy associated with religion, that is, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist philosophy, is an attempt to rationally explain, justify, and systematize religious beliefs—the nature of God, the soul, the distinction of creator and creation, causality, the meaning of religious language, and so on.

In the end, the decision whether to call any non-Western thought philosophy becomes more pragmatic than factual. As increased trade and communication continues across national boundaries, and interest grows in understanding the cultures and traditions of our trading partners, the kind of problems outlined here will assume greater importance. The effects on both Eastern and Western cultures will probably not be one-sided, however. The comparative study of other thought systems will not only generate greater understanding of other cultures, it may transform our understanding of our own culture as well.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963. The best translations of the major works of Chinese philosophy.

Fung, Yu-lan. *A History of Chinese Philosophy,* trans. Derk Bodde. Two vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. The first and still most influential attempt to explain Chinese thought to a Western audience as "philosophy."

Fung, Yu-lan. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan, 1966. A shorter, more

accessible version of Fung's two-volume *History*. Written in English by Fung.

Hanson, Chad. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. A major new interpretation of Chinese philosophy from a Taoist (Daoist) rather than Confucian perspective.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli. *Indian Philosophy*. Two vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. Influential attempt by India's best-known philosopher to introduce Indian thought to a Western audience.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli, and Charles A. Moore, eds. *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. The best translation of original sources of Indian philosophy.

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3. According to Proust, how do we perceive time?

   Listen to the **program:** *Time, Memory and Proust* on **MySearchLab.com**

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Absurdism: The view that the world is intrinsically unreasonable and meaningless, often expressed in works of fiction, especially prominent in the 1950s. Absurdists frequently define absurdity as the separation or alienation of thought from reality.

Act utilitarianism: A version of utilitarianism which maintains that one ought to always perform that particular action which will produce the greatest good or happiness. In contrast with rule utilitarianism, act utilitarianism maintains that no action which fails to maximize net happiness can be the morally right action to perform.

Agnosticism: The view that it is impossible to attain certain kinds of knowledge. In religion it is used to refer to the view that we cannot know either that God does or does not exist.

Analects (Lun Yu): The collected sayings of Confucius.

Analogical language: A way of speaking about an object by comparing it to something else. Analogical language has been defended by some philosophers as the only way we can speak of God.

Analytic statement: A statement is analytic if its truth or falsity can be determined by analysis of the terms in the statement alone. Statements that are analytically true are said to be true by definition, or logically true.

Anatman: Literally, "no soul," the Buddhist denial of the Hindu notion of the eternal atman or soul. *See* Atman.

Applied ethics: The study of specific moral issues that arise within specific fields and practices. Some important areas of applied ethics are medical ethics, business ethics, and military ethics.

***A posteriori*:** Refers to knowledge that is derived from the senses.

***A priori*:** Refers to knowledge that is derived solely from reason independently of the senses. The truth of *a priori* knowledge is claimed to be both necessary and universal.

Argument: A series of statements that are related in such a way that some of the statements, called premises, are said to provide proof for another statement, referred to as the conclusion.

Atheism: The assertion that God does not exist.

Atman: Hindu term for the ultimate Self; which is held to be identical with Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Atomism: Metaphysical view, originated by the ancient Greek philosophers Democritus and Leucippus, which held that all reality is ultimately composed of small bits of stuff called atoms. Atoms are not further divisible; the term *atom* means uncuttable. The theory was popularized by the writings of the Greek philosopher Epicurus.

Autonomy: The term literally means "self-legislated." For Kant, autonomy was a key notion for morality, since an act can have moral significance only if it is willed freely and without compulsion by a rational being.

Axiomatic: Something basic or fundamental; in a system such as geometry, axioms are the statements from which other parts of the system of thought are derived.

Bayes's theorem: A theorem of the probability calculus for calculating the likelihood of some hypothesis, given a piece of evidence and relevant background information. Formally, Bayes's theorem can be expressed as $P(A/B \ \& \ C) = P(A/C) \times [P(B/A \ \& \ C)]/[P(B/C)]$, where A is the hypothesis in question, B is the evidence in question, C is the set of all other claims that are

relevant and believed to be true (the background information), and P is the probability. If A is the hypothesis that a person has measles, and B is the evidence of the person showing red blemishes on the skin, and C is the number of cases of measles across a population as a whole in a given time frame, Bayes's theorem allows one to calculate the likelihood that a patient has measles given the fact that he or she is displaying the symptom of red blemishes.

***Bhagavad Gita*:**   Literally, "Song of the Lord," a long devotional poem, constituting part of the *Mahabharata,* in which Krishna teaches the secret of nonattached action.

Brahman: Literally, "that which makes great," the Vedic and Hindu term for the ultimate reality.

Buddha: An enlightened being; also used to refer to the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama.

Buddhism: A way of thought and practice that emphasizes moral practice, meditation, and enlightenment. Founded by Siddhartha Guatama, the Buddha, in India, in sixth century B.C.E.

Capitalism: An economic system in which the means of production are privately owned and government does not interfere with the "free market forces" of "supply and demand."

Categorical imperative: For Kant, the unconditional moral law that can be expressed as the rule that we should act on that principle that we could make a universal law. If we cannot universalize our principle without contradiction, the action resulting from the principle is immoral.

***Cogito ergo sum*:**   "I think, therefore I am." A principle taken by René Descartes to be self-evident and irrefutable.

Coherence theory: The theory that truth consists in the coherence or interdependence of beliefs within a system of thought, rather than the correspondence of those beliefs with an external reality.

Compatibilism (or soft determinism):   The theory that one and the same action can be both free and fully causally determined.

Confucianism: Chinese tradition based on the teachings of Confucius and his followers, particularly Mencius and Xun Zi.

Consequentialism: Any normative ethical theory in which the rightness and wrongness of an action is ultimately a function of the consequences that the action produces. Utilitarianism is one example of a consequentialist moral theory.

Contingent being: A being, the non-existence of which is logically possible.

Copernican revolution: The views of the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, who showed that the sun, not the earth, is the stationary body around which the planets move (thereby reversing the prevailing views concerning the relationship of the sun and the earth). Kant referred to his views as a (second) Copernican revolution because they reversed the prevailing views in epistemology by emphasizing the *active* role of the mind in generating knowledge, in contrast to the mind's passive role in the empirical philosophies of Locke and Hume.

Correspondence theory: The theory that truth consists in the correspondence or matching of a belief or statement to the real world. The statement "the cat is on the mat" is true, according to this theory of truth, if and only if the cat is indeed on the mat.

Cosmological: Derived from the Greek word meaning *order* and used to refer to the natural world as an ordered system. Applied to a type of argument for the existence of God, it refers to that kind of reasoning which proceeds from the apparent order and regularity of the world to God as the best explanation for this order.

Deduction: An argument whose conclusion is claimed to follow necessarily from the premises of the argument.

Deontological: Derived from the Greek word for "ought" and referring to any ethical system which makes the morality of an action depend on one's acting out of a sense of duty. Kant's ethical system is deontological.

Dependent origination: The Buddhist teaching that existence is of the nature of process and totally interconnected.

Detachment: In esthetics, detachment is the defining characteristic of esthetic experience. The proper way to view works of art or natural beauty, according to this view, is to disengage from our usual utilitarian, practical orientation to the world and begin looking at things simply for the sake of looking at them.

Determinism: The theory that the entire state of the universe in any given moment plus the laws of nature fully determine all future states of the universe.

Dialectic: The process of critically examining a theory to see if it contains unacceptable consequences, in which case it is refined and corrected, subjected to the same test, further refined and amended, and so on.

Dilemma: The problem that occurs when a theory or belief leads to one of two unacceptable consequences.

Disinterestedness: One of several closely related proposed criteria for defining esthetic experience. According to this characterization, an esthetic experience differs from other types of experiences in that it is not motivated by a desire for personal gain.

Distance: One of several closely related attempts to define the differentiating characteristic of esthetic experience. According to this view, esthetic experience differs from other kinds of experience in terms of the psychological space or distance we establish between ourselves and the object we are viewing.

Distributive justice: The fairest way to divide the total amount of social goods among all the citizens.

Divine command theory: The theory that human morality is ultimately dependent upon the commands of God.

Dogmatism: A term used by Immanuel Kant to refer to philosophical views, and especially

metaphysical theories, offering *a priori* principles that are not rationally grounded.

Dualism: The metaphysical theory that reality is ultimately composed of two essentially distinct kinds of substances.

Egalitarian: Political doctrine that no one has a right to a greater share of social goods than another, that individuals do not deserve the results of superior or innate talents and abilities.

Egoism: The ethical theory that holds that self-interest is the rule of conduct. Psychological egoism is the claim that people in fact only act out of self-interest. Ethical egoism is the view that people *ought* to act out of self-interest, not that they necessarily do so act.

Empiricism: The view that all human knowledge is derived from the senses.

Emptiness (*sunyata*):   The Mahayana teaching that everything lacks permanent and independent reality.

Enlightenment: In Mahayana Buddhism, the direct seeing of the truth that liberates.

Epistemology: The philosophical discipline that inquires into the nature, origins, and limits of human knowledge; theory of knowledge.

Epistemic holism: Theory that individual beliefs are not directly falsified or verified merely on the basis of experience or on the basis of the meanings of terms.

Esthetic experience: According to many philosophers of art since the eighteenth century, esthetic experience is a fundamental type of human experience, and the main task of a philosophy of art, according to these estheticians, is to correctly define the nature of the experience of art works and objects of natural beauty.

Esthetics: Philosophy of art; the philosophical inquiry into the nature of art and beauty. Sometimes spelled *aesthetics*.

Ethical absolutism: The view that there are absolutes in ethics, that is, moral standards that are independent of the personal preferences of individuals. *See* Objectivism.

Ethical relativism: The view that there are no objective moral standards, and that the principles for conduct are relative to individuals or societies.

Ethics: The philosophical investigation of the principles governing human actions in terms of their goodness, badness, rightness, and wrongness.

Ethnocentrism: The willingness to judge the actions and principles of other societies by the standards of one's own society.

Eudaemonism: Normative ethical theory that takes the ultimate aim of human life to be the fulfillment of a human being's natural capacities.

Existentialism: A philosophical movement that takes the central question of philosophy to be that of the meaning of human existence. Although it has roots in the thought of such nineteenth-century philosophers as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, existentialism emerged as a distinctive philosophical movement in Europe after World War II and is associated with the work of such thinkers as Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel in France and Martin Heidegger in Germany.

Expressionism: The theory of art which holds that art is primarily the expression of human emotions and feelings. Expressionism thus defines art in terms of its relationship to the human *experience* of art, both in creating and in enjoying it.

Extrinsic criteria: In esthetics, judging an art work by standards external to and therefore presumably irrelevant to art itself; such as moral considerations, educational interest, or economic attractiveness. In general, extrinsic criteria are criteria external to that which is being judged by them.

Fallibilism: The theory that seeks to justify holding epistemologically reliable beliefs which are nonetheless uncertain and liable to error.

Feminism: In philosophical discussion, feminism is the view that traditional philosophical theories and approaches are male-centered and need to be balanced by a woman's point of view.

Feminist ethics: The view that traditional ethical theories are male-slanted toward impartial justice and need to be balanced by a feminist emphasis on care for a unique individual in a specific context.

Feminist theology: A movement to reinterpret the traditions, practices, and scriptures of a religion from a feminist perspective.

Filial piety (*xiao*):   The love that exists naturally within a family; one of the grounds of respect and virtue in Confucianism.

Form: *See* Idea.

Formalism: In esthetics, the theory that only intrinsic factors within the art work are relevant for viewing, interpreting, or criticizing the work. These factors usually include the relationship, pattern, or form existing among the parts of the art work, such as line, color, and shape.

Hard determinism: The theory that all events, including all human actions, are fully causally necessitated and that there is, therefore, no free action. *See* Determinism, Incompatibilism.

Hedonism: Derived from the Greek word for pleasure, hedonism is the ethical philosophy that holds the view that pleasure is the goal of life. Most philosophical hedonists have held, however, that intellectual pleasures are superior to sensual pleasures.

Hermeneutics: A theory of interpretation. Originally the term was used to refer to rules for interpreting written texts, especially sacred ones. In more recent years the term has been expanded to refer to the principles of understanding other human activities as well, including art and the artifacts of a culture.

Hypothetical imperative: Kant's term for a command that is conditional; a command of the if-then form would be a hypothetical imperative.

Hypothetico-deductive: A method of scientific discovery, claimed to be superior to enumerative induction, whereby one deduces some testable consequence from a scientific theory which can then be empirically tested, resulting in either falsification or corroboration of the theory.

Idea: Derived from the Greek word for "form," the term *idea* was used by Plato not to

refer to something mental but to those eternal realities that exist apart from our knowing them.

Idealism: The metaphysical view that explains reality as consisting entirely of immaterial minds and their ideas; according to idealists, all reality is mind-dependent. Often postulated as an absolute mind, as in Hegel's idealism; or God, as in Berkeley's idealism. *See Esse est percipi.*

Imitation: In esthetics, the view that art is essentially the attempt to provide either an idealized copy or replica of objects in the external world.

Incompatibilism: The theory that one and the same human action cannot be both free and fully causally determined. Both hard determinism and libertarianism are incompatibilist theories. The hard determinist maintains that all actions are fully causally necessitated and thus none are free. The libertarian maintains that some human actions are free and thus are not fully causally determined.

Induction: Both a method of learning about the world by examining empirical reality and a kind of argument demonstrating such knowledge, in which the premises strengthen but do not completely demonstrate the truth of the conclusion. *See* Deduction.

Inductive inference: Using evidence gathered by direct observation to draw a conclusion about a state of affairs not directly observed. Claims about the future based upon observations of past regularities form a particularly important category of inductive inferences.

Innate ideas: An idea, according to Plato and others, with which a person is born, such as the idea of God, and various mathematical, logical, and moral ideas.

Intrinsic being: Being is traditionally divided into necessary (inherent or intrinsic) and contingent. A necessary being cannot not exist. It cannot change and is completely independent of any other being. A contingent being is one which could conceivably not exist, which can change and is dependent on other beings. *See* Inherent being.

Intrinsic criteria: In esthetics, standards for appreciating, interpreting, and criticizing a work of art which arise solely within the art work itself; such as the interrelationships among the parts of the art work. In general, criteria that are derived from that which is to be judged by them.

Intuitionism: The theory that human beings have a special sensory or intellectual faculty for knowing non-natural moral properties.

Karma: Action, including the results of action, that inevitably accrue to the agent, producing bondage.

Krishna: The God who teaches Arjuna the path to liberation in the *Bhagavad Gita.*

Liberal: Political doctrine that individuals should be free from governmental restraint, especially in matters which do not harm others: freedom of speech, conscience, association, religion. Liberalism differs from libertarianism primarily in the libertarian emphasis on the right of an individual to accumulate an unequal share of wealth through native talent and ability, which the liberal opposes as a harm to others.

Libertarianism (metaphysical):   The theory that human beings possess free will and that this freedom consists in the ability to make choices that are not the result of causal determinism. It should not be confused with the political theory of the same name.

Libertarianism (political):   Political doctrine that each individual should be maximally free from governmental restraint, especially in regard to freedom of the individual to accumulate and dispose of an unequal share of social goods through superior intelligence or other talents and abilities. It should not be confused with the metaphysical theory of the same name.

Logical positivism: The view that philosophy has no method independent of that of science and that philosophy's only task is logical analysis. According to the principle of verifiability, which was defended by logical positivists as a way of distinguishing meaningful statements from nonsense, a statement is meaningful if and only if it is analytic or can be verified empirically.

Materialism: The view that all reality is matter. Anything that is real is to be explained in terms of matter and the motion of matter.

Metaethics: A philosophical investigation of the terms and principles used in an ethical system, as opposed to an attempt to deal with an actual ethical problem. An example of metaethical analysis is the attempt to analyze how the term *right* functions in discourse or in an ethical theory.

Metaphysics: The philosophical inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality. In contemporary usage, the term includes the analysis of fundamental philosophical principles.

Middle Way: Name given to Buddhism because it lies in the middle between indulgence and asceticism, between being and nonbeing, and between determinism and indeterminism.

Modal skepticism: The theory that human judgments about impossibility, necessity, and impossibility are wholly unreliable.

***Modus ponens*:**   The traditional name, from the Latin, meaning "the affirming mode," for the basic argument form:

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{P}$$
$$\therefore Q$$

***Modus tollens*:**   The traditional name, from the Latin, meaning "the denying mode," for the basic argument form:

$$P \rightarrow Q$$
$$\underline{-Q}$$
$$\therefore -P$$

Monism: A metaphysical theory that explains reality in terms of a single substance or principle. Both materialism and idealism are monistic views.

Moral evil: Evil inflicted by the deliberate action of a free being. (Murder, betrayal, deception, theft, and child abuse are examples of moral evil.)

Moral skepticism: The metaethical theory that there is no moral knowledge.

Mysticism: The view that ultimate reality can be directly experienced even though it cannot be known objectively.

Natural evil: Evil that results from natural forces. (Diseases and natural disasters are examples of natural evil.)

Natural theology: That which can be known about God purely by the power of human reason unaided by revelation. Natural theology claims to be able to provide proofs of God's existence either completely *a priori,* and therefore independent of the senses, or completely *a posteriori,* that is, based on certain facts about nature.

Naturalistic fallacy: The mistake in reasoning that occurs when one derives a normative conclusion (a statement about what ought to be the case) from premises including only descriptive claims (statements about what is the case). Whether this type of inference is always mistaken remains a matter of some controversy among philosophers.

Necessary being: A being, the non-existence of which is logically impossible. It cannot change and is completely independent of any other being. A contingent being is one that could conceivably not exist, that can change, and that is dependent on other beings.

Necessary conditions: Necessary conditions for something are those factors without which that thing cannot exist, as breathing is a necessary condition for human life.

Nirvana: (In Pali, *nibbana*.) Elimination of all forms and conditions of suffering.

Nonattachment: Nonattachment to the fruits of action as the key to fulfilling one's duties without accumulating karmic bondage according to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Normative: That function of philosophy concerned with establishing standards for distinguishing the correct from the incorrect, whether in ways of reasoning, believing, esthetic judgments, or acting.

Normative ethics: The attempt to formulate systems of values and principles used to distinguish between morally correct and incorrect behavior.

Nothingness: The experience of Nothing, a metaphysical term that is the opposite of Being,

raising paradoxical issues whether it is possible to think or talk about, or experience, Nothing.

Objectivism: In ethics, the view that ethical assertions can be true or false and that there are objective principles of ethics independent of personal preferences.

Ontological: Derived from the Greek word for *being,* the term relates to the question of the being of anything. The ontological argument is an argument for God's existence based solely on an analysis of the concept of the being of God. Ontology is the metaphysical inquiry into the nature of being in general.

Open question argument: An argumentative strategy developed by G.E. Moore to show that no set of natural properties can provide a full account of the moral property of goodness. Moore contended that the inadequacy of any naturalistic account of goodness is shown by the fact that it is always an *open question* whether the natural properties in question are good.

Pantheism: A philosophical view which identifies God with the universe; derived from two Greek words, *theos* ("God") and *pan* ("all").

Paradigm shift: Thomas Kuhn's theory that scientific theories do not change gradually, systematically, and rationally based on preponderance of evidence, but as abrupt revolutions overthrowing older theories by a completely different conceptual framework.

Phenomenology: A twentieth-century movement that insisted upon immediate experience, undistorted by previous theories and assumptions as the only proper point of departure for philosophy. Phenomenologists believed that anything of which we can be conscious is a legitimate field for philosophical inquiry.

Pluralism: The view that an acceptable theory can be based on more than one ultimate principle, as opposed to monistic theories, which insist on only one major principle. *See* Monism.

Possible worlds: A development within modal logic, though traceable to Leibniz, to interpret theories of necessity and necessary being,

such as God, according to which something is necessary if it occurs in all possible worlds.

Pragmatism: The epistemological theory that the principal aim of inquiry and value of knowledge is the promotion of effective action as opposed to the representation of the true nature of reality.

Premise: A reason offered in an argument in support of a conclusion. *See* Argument.

Problem of evil: The claim that the evil in the universe renders it irrational to believe in a God who is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing. (Logical versions of the problem allege that it is logically contradictory to believe in such a God and evil. Evidential or inductive versions of the problem allege that the evil in the universe renders God's existence less likely than God's non-existence.)

Problem of induction: First formulated by David Hume in the eighteenth century, the problem of induction is the charge that it is not possible to provide a rational justification for inductive inferences.

Rationalism: The view that appeals to reason, not the senses, as the source of knowledge. In its most extreme form, rationalism insists that *all* knowledge is derived from reason.

Reliabilism: Epistemological theory that a belief qualifies as knowledge if it is a reliable guide to truth.

Representation: In esthetics, the reference that something in an art work has to an object existing outside the art work, which arises not by imitating or copying that object, but by standing for it as a symbol that stands for what it symbolizes.

***Rig Veda*:**   Oldest of the Vedas, the sacred texts that form the foundation of Hinduism, compiled between the twelfth and tenth centuries B.C.E.

Right: In social/political philosophy, used as a noun, the basis of a legitimate claim which one person has or can make on another, whether that claim is based on innate, universal human characteristics ("unalienable rights"), morality, or social legislation.

Rule utilitarianism: A version of utilitarianism maintaining that an action is morally correct if it conforms to a general moral rule that picks out a type of action that tends to maximize utility. In contrast with Act Utilitarianism, Rule Utilitarianism holds that it is possible for a particular action to be morally correct even though it does not produce the greatest net happiness on a given occasion.

Semantic holism: The theory that terms and propositions do not have meaning independently of the entire language in which they are expressed.

Soft determinism: *See* Compatibilism.

Sovereignty: The supreme and independent government power and authority as possessed and claimed by a state or community, usually a nation-state.

Synthetic statement: A statement is synthetic if its truth or falsity cannot be determined by analysis of the terms in the statement alone.

Tabula rasa: Latin for "blank tablet"; a phrase used by John Locke to refer to the human mind before it has received information from the senses. Locke thought that the mind is like a blank slate until the senses impress upon it information about the external world.

Tao: The way or path of enlightenment, used in both Taoism and Confucianism.

Taoism: Chinese tradition based on following the natural way (Tao) as taught by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

Teleological: Relating to purposes or goals. The term is derived from the Greek word *telos,* which means "end" or "purpose."

Theocracy: A form of government run by religious authorities, one in which there is no separation of church and state.

Theodicy: An account, claimed to be true, which reconciles belief in the existence of God with the presence of some evil in the universe. (A theodicy is contrasted with a defense, which is an account that reconciles belief in the existence of God with the presence of some evil in the universe where the account is only claimed to be possible.)

Upanishads: Concluding portion of the Vedas containing sacred knowledge of reality.

Utilitarianism: The ethical theory associated with the work of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century. Utilitarians hold that actions are moral if they aim at the general good, or the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

Utility principle: The principle of utilitarianism that says that we ought to do what will produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Sometimes it is referred to as "the greatest happiness principle."

Validity: A feature of arguments in which the relation between premises and conclusion is such that if the premises are true, the conclusion could not be false.

Verification principle: A principle suggested by A. J. Ayer by means of which it is possible to distinguish meaningful statements from nonsense. According to the verification principle, a statement is meaningful if and only if it is analytic or can in principle be verified empirically.

Virtue epistemology: A theory of knowledge, traceable to Plato's *Theaetetus,* that emphasizes the believer's credentials (who should be rational, critical, diligent in pursuing relevant information), rather than those of the belief itself (for example, that it is certain).

Virtue ethics: A recent ethical theory, traceable to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, that emphasizes the moral perfectibility of the agent, rather than the moral correctness of his or her actions.

Zen: A form of Mahayana Buddhism that flourished in Japan, emphasizing direct meditative insight.

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