Part Two

Moral and Political Philosophy
Happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action. — Aristotle

Morality is not properly the doctrine how we should make ourselves happy, but how we should become worthy of happiness. — Immanuel Kant

Advice is something you never stop getting, although good, sound advice is perhaps not too common.

Most advice you get—and give—is of a practical nature: “If you want to live longer,” someone will say, “you should stop smoking.” Or: “If I were you, I would buy life insurance now while you are young.”

But advice is not always intended to be merely practical. Sometimes it is moral advice. Someone—a friend, your minister, a relative—may suggest that you should do something not because it will be in your own best interest to do it but because doing it is morally right. “You should donate money to a charity,” the person might say. Or: “You should be kind to animals.” These suggestions express moral judgments.

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is the philosophical study of moral judgments—value judgments about what is virtuous or base, just or unjust, morally right or wrong, morally good or bad or evil, morally proper or improper. We say morally right and morally good and so on because terms like right and good and proper (and their negative correlates, wrong and bad and improper) can be used in nonmoral value judgments, as when someone speaks of a bad wine or of the right or proper way to throw a pass.

Many questions can be asked about moral judgments, so ethical philosophers discuss a wide array of issues. One basic question they ask is, What is a moral judgment? In other words, exactly what does it mean to describe something as
morally right or wrong, good or evil? What is it to say that one thing ought to be done and another thing ought not be done? Or they might ask, What makes a moral judgment a moral judgment? How do moral judgments differ from other value judgments, factual assertions, and pieces of practical advice? What distinguishes reasoning about moral issues from reasoning about other things (from reasoning about the structure of matter, say, or about the qualities of good art)? These are some of the questions ethical philosophers ask.

The most important question of ethics, however, is simply, Which moral judgments are correct? That is, what is good and just and the morally right thing to do? What is the “moral law,” anyway? This question is important because the answer to it tells us how we should conduct our affairs. Perhaps it is the most important question not of ethics but of philosophy. Perhaps it is the most important question, period.

A less obvious question of ethics, though logically more fundamental, is whether there is a moral law in the first place. In other words, do moral obligations even exist? Are there really such things as good and bad, right and wrong? And if there are, what is it that makes one thing right and another wrong? That is, what is the ultimate justification of moral standards?

In what follows, we will examine some of these issues and related questions as they have been treated throughout the history of philosophy. However, before we begin, we need to discuss several concepts that have been important throughout the history of moral philosophy.

**SKEPTICISM, RELATIVISM, AND SUBJECTIVISM**

Many beginning students in philosophy accept one or more of three important ideas about morals. The first, ethical skepticism, is the doctrine that moral knowledge is not possible. According to the skeptic, whether there are moral standards is not knowable, or, alternatively, if there are any moral standards, we cannot know what they are.
You should be aware that the beliefs that there is no right or wrong and that “everything is permissible” (which we encountered in the previous chapter) are not skeptical beliefs. A person who makes either of these claims implies that he or she does have moral knowledge.

Another popular idea about ethics is called descriptive relativism, according to which the moral standards people subscribe to are different from culture to culture. This idea might seem obviously true, but you must remember that different practices do not necessarily entail different standards. For example, it might seem that the pro-choice “culture” and the pro-life “culture” obviously have different moral standards, and perhaps they do. On the other hand, they might both accept the standard that it is wrong to kill a living person but just disagree about whether a fetus counts as a living person.

In any case, descriptive relativism is not an ethical doctrine. It says merely that people in different cultures have different beliefs about what is morally right and wrong. It says nothing about what is morally right and morally wrong. The idea that what a culture believes is morally right or wrong is morally right or wrong for people in that culture is known as cultural relativism, and it is a popular idea among beginning philosophy students. Many tend to think, for example, that whether or not you should act selfishly is entirely determined by whether or not your culture thinks you should act selfishly. Beginning philosophy students who are cultural relativists sometimes also advocate being accepting toward the practices of other cultures. However, it would be inconsistent for a cultural relativist to advocate being accepting toward another culture’s practice if her or his own culture thought that practice was wrong.

Another relativist doctrine is known as individual relativism, according to which what is right or wrong is what each individual believes is right or wrong. If you hold this view, then you would have to say that nobody ever acts wrongly, provided he or she is doing what he or she thinks is right. Both individual relativism and cultural relativism are sometimes spoken of as subjectivist ethical philosophies, in that what is right or wrong depends entirely on what a person (i.e., a “subject”) or a culture (i.e., a group of “subjects”) thinks is right or wrong.

**EGOISM**

Egoism is another popular ethical doctrine, but there are two types of egoism. First, there is descriptive egoism, the doctrine that in all conscious action you seek to promote your self-interest above all else. Then there is prescriptive egoism, the doctrine that in all conscious action you ought to seek your self-interest above all else. The Epicurean ethical philosophy, for example, was a version of prescriptive egoism.

Often, beginning philosophy students accept descriptive egoism as almost self-evidently true. Many also favor prescriptive egoism as an ethical philosophy. Of course we always act to further our own ends! And that is exactly what we ought to do, right?
But some philosophers see a difficulty in accepting both prescriptive and descriptive egoism in that it seems trivial or pointless to tell people they ought to do what you think they are going to do anyway. That is like advising someone that she or he has a moral obligation to obey the laws of physics or to remain visible at all times or to occupy space, these philosophers say.

A further comment: If you find yourself subscribing to prescriptive egoism (one ought to seek one’s self-interest above all else), as many do, then you should consider this: Does it make sense for you to advocate your own egoistic philosophy? If you ought to seek your own self-interest above all else (as prescriptive egoism says), then should you really go around telling others to seek their self-interest above all else? Is telling them that in your best interests? Might it not be better for your interests to urge others to promote the common good?

**HEDONISM**

Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure. Philosophers distinguish between the descriptive doctrine known as psychological hedonism, according to which the ultimate object of a person’s desire is always pleasure, and the ethical doctrine known as ethical hedonism, according to which a person ought to seek pleasure over other things. You should remember these doctrines.

The descriptive doctrine may be plausible at first glance, but on closer inspection it appears somewhat doubtful. We do seem to seek things beside pleasure—for example, food, good health, relaxation, rest, rightness in our actions, success, friends, and many other things too. As the British moralist and clergyman Bishop Joseph Butler (1692–1752) observed, we could not seek pleasure at all unless we had desires for something other than pleasure, because pleasure consists in satisfying these desires. And then, too, “the pleasure of virtue,” as Irish historian W. E. H. Lecky wrote, “is one which can only be obtained on the express condition...
of its not being the object sought.” In other words, if your motive in acting virtuously is to obtain the pleasure that accompanies virtuous acts, then you are not being virtuous and will not get that pleasure.

As for ethical hedonism, there are two kinds: egoistic ethical hedonism, according to which one ought to seek his or her own pleasure over other things, and universalistic ethical hedonism, otherwise known as utilitarianism, according to which one ought to seek the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people over other things.

One difficulty utilitarians face is in explaining why pleasure for others is something one should seek. One common answer is that only by seeking others’ pleasure can you experience a full allotment of pleasure for yourself. But this answer seems to assume that one’s primary ethical duty is to oneself after all.

### THE FIVE MAIN ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

Moral philosophers these days often regard ethical or moral theories as falling into one of the five following ethical frameworks or perspectives as to what one fundamentally ought to do. We list them in no particular order and mention philosophers who provide good examples of each category, to help you understand those philosophers when you read about them in this chapter.

- **First, divine-command ethics:** What ought I to do? What God ordains, I ought to do. Augustine and Aquinas are good examples.
- **Second, consequentialism:** What ought I to do? Whatever has the most desirable consequences. The Epicureans, Stoics, and utilitarians are good examples.
- **Third, deontological ethics:** What ought I to do? Whatever it is my moral duty to do (in at least some cases, regardless of consequences). Kant is a good example.
- **Fourth, virtue ethics:** What ought I to do? What the virtuous person would do. (For virtue ethics, the primary question is not, What ought I to do? but rather, What kind of person ought I to be?) Plato and Aristotle are good examples.
- **Fifth, relativism:** What ought I to do? What my culture or society thinks I ought to do. None of the philosophers covered in this chapter are relativists (though many students are).

Sometimes contractarianism (or contractualism) is mentioned as a basic ethical theory. However, more often it is treated as a theory of social justice, the theory that principles of justice are best constructed through negotiations among impartial, informed, and rational agents. We’ll discuss this idea in Chapter 11, which deals with political philosophy.

Let’s now take a closer look at these five various ethical perspectives as they debuted in the history of moral philosophy.
THE EARLY GREEKS

That moral judgments must be supported by reasons is an idea we owe to the Sophists, those professional teachers of fifth-century B.C.E. Greece, and to Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.E.). The Sophists, who attacked the traditional moral values of the Greek aristocracy, demanded rational justification for rules of conduct, as did Socrates. Their demands, together with Socrates’ skillful deployment of the dialectical method in moral discussions, mark the beginning of philosophical reasoning about moral issues.

Maybe it was not inevitable that a time would come when someone insisted that moral claims be defended by reasons. When children ask why they should do something their parents think is right, they may be content to receive, and their parents content to give, the simple answer, “Because that is what is done.” In some societies, evidently, values are accepted without much question, and demands for justification of moral claims are not issued. In our society it is frequently otherwise, and this is the legacy of the Sophists and Socrates.

It was Socrates especially who championed the use of reason in moral deliberation and with it raised good questions about some still-popular ideas about morality, such as that good is what pleases, that might makes right, and that happiness comes only to the ruthless.

Socrates was also concerned with the meanings of words that signify moral virtues, words like justice, piety, and courage. Because a moral term can be correctly applied to various specific acts—many different types of deeds count as courageous deeds, for example—Socrates believed that all acts characterized by a given moral term must have something in common. He therefore sought to determine (without notable success, we are sorry to report) what the essential commonality is. Socrates’ assumption that a virtue has an essential nature, an essence that may be disclosed through rational inquiry, is still made by many philosophers and is central to several famous ethical theories, including Plato’s, as you will see shortly.

Socrates also assumed that any sane person who possessed knowledge of the essence of virtue could not fail to act virtuously. He thus believed that ignoble behavior, if not the result of utter insanity, is always the product of ignorance. This is also a view that Plato shared, and it has its adherents today.

Plato

Plato accepted the Socratic idea that all things named by a given term, including any given moral term, share a common essential or “defining” feature. For example, what is common to all things called chairs (yes, we know chair is not a moral term, but it will illustrate the point) is that feature by virtue of which a thing qualifies as a chair. What is common to all brave deeds is that feature that qualifies them all as brave. This essential or defining characteristic Plato referred to as the Form of the things in question; and, for various plausible reasons, he regarded this Form as possessing more reality than the particular things that exemplified it.
We talked about this in Chapter 3, but let’s look into Plato’s reasoning again, for this bears closely on Plato’s ethics.

For a thing to be a chair, we think you must agree, it must possess that feature that qualifies a thing as a chair. That feature—let’s call it *chairness*—is what Plato called the Form. And so, for a thing to qualify as a chair, it must possess chairness. Thus, the Form *chairness* must exist if anything at all is to qualify as a chair. So the Form is more fundamental and “real” than even the chair you are sitting on or any other chair.

Forms, Plato held, are not perceptible to the senses, for what the senses perceive are individual things: particular chairs, particular people, particular brave deeds, and so forth. We do not perceive the Forms through the senses. We cannot see chairness, and we cannot reach out and grasp bravery or humanity. Thus, Forms, he maintained, are known only through reason.

Further, according to Plato, the individual things that we perceive by sense are forever changing. Some things—rocks, for example—change very slowly. Other things, such as people, change a good bit more rapidly. That means that knowledge by sense perception is uncertain and unstable. Not so knowledge of the Forms. Knowledge of the Forms is certain and stable, for the objects known—the Forms—are eternal and unchanging.

Now the various Forms, Plato maintained (and here we will see what all of this has to do with ethics), constitute a *hierarchy* in terms of their inherent value or worth. It is easy enough to understand his point. For example, does not the Form
beauty (i.e., the essence of beautiful things) seem to you to be inherently of more worth than the Form wartness (i.e., the essence of warts)?

At the apex of all Forms, Plato said, is the Form goodness, or (as it is often expressed) the Good, because it is the Form of highest value. Thus, for Plato, because

a. the Forms define true reality, and because
b. the Form of the Good is the uppermost of all Forms, it follows that
c. individual things are real only insofar as they partake of or exemplify this ultimate Form.

A corollary of (c) is that things are less “real” the less they partake of the Good. Another corollary is that evil is unreal. Make a mental note of this second idea. You will come across it again.

Because the Form of the Good is the source of all value and reality, Plato believed, we must strive to obtain knowledge and understanding of it. Therefore, he maintained, because (remember) Forms can be apprehended only by reason, we should govern ourselves by reason. Similarly, the state should be ruled by intellectuals, he said, but more of this in Chapter 11.

So, to summarize to this point, according to Plato, the true reality of individual things consists in the Forms they exemplify, Forms that are apprehended by reason and not by the senses; and the Form highest in value is the Form of the Good. One should, therefore, strive for knowledge of the Good and be ruled by reason.

But now consider this moral edict that Plato has in effect laid down: “Be governed by reason!” Is this not a little too abstract? Does it not fail to enjoin anything specific about what the individual should or should not do?

Plato would have answered “no” to both questions. The human soul, he said (a couple of thousand years before Freud proposed his analogous theory of the id, the ego, and the superego), has three different elements: an element consisting of raw appetites, an element consisting of drives (like anger and ambition), and an intellectual element (i.e., an element of thought or reason). For each of these elements, there is an excellence or virtue that obtains when reason is in charge of that element, as is the case when you govern yourself by reason. When our appetites are ruled by reason, we exhibit the virtue of temperance; when our drives are governed by reason, we exhibit courage; and when the intellect itself is governed by reason, we exhibit wisdom.

Thus, Plato held, the well-governed person, the person ruled by reason, exhibits the four cardinal virtues of temperance, courage, wisdom, and “justice.” How did justice get in the list? Justice is the virtue that obtains when all elements of the soul function as they should in obedience to reason.

Given Plato’s understanding of the soul, the principle “Be governed by reason,” which follows from the theory of Forms, dictates that you be temperate, courageous, wise, and just. And what, in turn, these dictates mean more specifically was much discussed by Plato, though we will not go into the details. Further, he said, only by being virtuous—that is, by possessing these four virtues—can you have a well-ordered soul and thus have the psychological well-being that is true happiness. In this way Plato connected virtue with happiness, a connection we still acknowledge by saying, “Virtue is its own reward.”
Plato and Divine-Command Ethics

Plato examined the idea that what is morally right and good is determined by divine command, that is, by the edict or decree of God—a popular idea today in Western (and other) societies—and the result of that examination was a question: Is something right or good because the gods (or God) decree that it is, or is it decreed by the gods (or God) as right or good because it is right or good? (If the question interests you, you might wish to read Plato’s very short dialogue, *Euthyphro*.)

Some critics of “divine-command” theories of ethics argue that Plato’s question puts the adherents of these theories in an awkward position. If you say that God decrees that something is good because it *is* good, then you seem to imply that God is not the ultimate authority or the ultimate source of goodness: you seem to imply that there is something beyond God that makes good things good things. But if you say that something is good because God decrees that it is good, you seem to imply that God’s decrees are arbitrary; he could just as well have decreed that the thing was not good.

In short, the question implies—so it is argued—that God’s moral prescriptions are arbitrary or that God is not the ultimate source of goodness.

But is a well-ordered or just or virtuous soul really required for happiness? Plato did not merely assert that it is and expect us to close our eyes and blindly swallow the assertion. He knew as well as anyone that exactly the opposite seems to be true: that the people who seem to be the best off often seem to be very unscrupulous. So Plato examined the matter rather carefully, especially in the *Republic*. In that dialogue, Plato has various characters explain and defend the view that the life of the person who cleverly and subtly promotes his own ends at the expense of other people is preferable to the life of the virtuous person. Plato (in the person of his Socrates character) does think that this view is mistaken and attempts (at considerable length) to explain what is wrong with it—this attempt actually is the main theme of the *Republic*. Whether he succeeds you may wish to consider for yourself at some point. In any case, a more powerful defense of being *unjust* and *unvirtuous* than the one Plato sets forth (and tries to refute) in the *Republic* has never been devised.

Sometimes beginning philosophy students have difficulty seeing how Plato’s theories apply to their own lives. Here, though, there seems to be direct applicability. Chances are that from time to time you find yourself in situations in which, apparently, the right or proper or just or virtuous thing to do seems to conflict with the course of action you think would benefit you the most or make you the happiest. In such situations you may not be sure what to do. But Plato would say, if you think there is a conflict, you have not thought these situations through carefully enough. For Plato asserts that the virtuous course of action is the one most apt to produce your own well-being.

Of course, you may agree with Plato’s conclusion, that the virtuous course of action is the one most apt to produce your own well-being, because you believe that God will reward you in an afterlife if you are virtuous here and now and punish you if you are not. Notice, though, what you are assuming if you accept this belief, namely, that virtuous activity does *not* promote its own reward (i.e., happiness) in...
Chapter 10 • Moral Philosophy 279

The Go-for-It Philosophy of Aristippus

At about the time Plato lived in Athens, another Greek, Aristippus (435–366 B.C.E.), who lived in Cyrene, espoused an ethical doctrine quite different from Plato’s. Aristippus said our lives should always be dedicated to the acquisition of as many pleasures, preferably as intense as possible, as we can possibly obtain. Even when intense pleasures lead to subsequent pain, they should still be sought, he said, for a life without pleasure or pain would be unredeemingly boring. Pleasures are best obtained, according to Aristippus, when one takes control of a situation and other people and uses them to one’s own advantage.

Perhaps you know people who agree with Aristippus. **Cyrenaicism**, which is the name of this hedonistic (pleasure-seeking) philosophy, was the historical antecedent of Epicureanism. As you can see from the text, Epicurus’ pleasure-oriented philosophy is considerably more moderate than Aristippus’. Epicurus recommended avoiding intense pleasure as producing too much pain and disappointment over the long run.

*This* life. Plato, though, believed that your well-being in *this* life is best promoted by virtuous activity. (See the box, “Plato and Divine-Command Ethics.”)

Plato’s moral philosophy is applicable in other ways. He was also very interested in such popular views (popular both then and now and perhaps forevermore) as that goodness is the same thing as pleasure, that self-control is not the best way to get happiness, and that it is better to exploit others than to be exploited by them. He found, when he considered these ideas carefully, that they are mistaken. So if you are tempted to agree with any of these ideas, we recommend that you read the *Republic* and another famous Platonic dialogue, the *Gorgias*, before arranging your affairs in the belief that they are true. You should also read the box “The Go-for-It Philosophy of Aristippus.” We present a brief excerpt from the *Gorgias* at the end of the chapter.

A Complete Ethical Theory

Plato’s moral philosophy is often cited as a complete ethical theory because it does the following:

- Identifies an ultimate source of all value (the Form of the Good).
- Sets forth a metaphysical justification for accepting this source as ultimate (the theory of Forms).
- Stipulates a fundamental moral principle (“Be governed by reason!”).
- Provides a rationale for accepting the principle as universally binding (the Form of the Good is the source of all that is real).
- Specifies how knowledge of the supreme intrinsic good is obtained (only through reasoning).

---

1 For the concept of a complete ethical theory and this analysis of Plato’s ethics as a complete ethical theory, we are indebted to Professor Rollin Workman.
Finally, holds that **obedience to the moral principle is motivated**, for in being governed by reason, you meet the conditions that are necessary and sufficient for the well-being of the soul and thus for true happiness. An additional motivation to accept the governance of reason, according to Plato, is that in doing so you may obtain knowledge of the Forms. This knowledge is desirable because the Forms are unchanging and hence eternal, which means that, when you come to know them, you gain access to immortality.

For these reasons, then, Plato’s ethics is said to have provided philosophers with a standard of completeness. Measure your own ethics by this standard. While you are doing so, you might wish to read the box “Is the Objective World Value Neutral?”

---

**Is the Objective World Value Neutral?**

According to Plato, the Form of the Good is the source of all that is real. It is itself real, of course (according to Plato), and, moreover, has a reality independent of our minds. In other words, it has **objective reality**.

Many people these days are inclined to think of **objective reality**—reality as it exists outside our minds and perceptions—as morally neutral. So far as they have considered the issue at all, they regard values as subjective creations of the mind that the mind superimposes on events and objects, which things are themselves neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. It is very, very likely that this is your view.

Still, if it is a fact that the universe “as it is in itself” is value neutral, this is not a fact that we **discovered** in the same way that we discovered the principles of physics, chemistry, and biology. Rather, it seems to be something we just **believe**. Is this belief more correct than the view of Plato, who thought that what is good does not depend on our opinions but is set by, and is inherent in, a reality external to our minds?

If you think Plato is wrong, how would you establish that?

---

A strong echo of Platonic ethical themes may be found in the work of **Aesara** [ai-SAH-ruh], a Greek philosopher from Lucania (in southern Italy), who probably lived around 350 B.C.E. Only a fragment of her original work survives. Aesara has been mentioned only rarely in textbooks in philosophy, perhaps because of the scanty remains of her work, perhaps due to other reasons. But she is interesting and worth reading.

Like Plato, Aesara was concerned with the nature of human well-being, or the good life. And like Plato, she saw the key to this to be the well-ordered or virtuous or “just” soul—the balanced and harmoniously functioning psyche. Also like Plato, she saw that the well-functioning state replicates the balance and order that exists in the well-functioning soul.

Aesara’s analysis of the human psyche or soul was very similar to Plato’s. She thought the soul has three parts: the mind, spiritedness, and desire. The **mind** analyzes ideas and reaches decisions. **Spiritedness** is the part of the soul that gives a
person the ability to carry out decisions; we might call it the will. The element of desire contains moral emotions such as love.

It is worth noting that the role of women in ancient Greek society was to stay at home and raise virtuous, rational offspring, the male versions of whom would run the world of government and the marketplace—the world outside the home. As a woman, Aesara was keenly aware that men, even men philosophers, sometimes tended to think that justice applies only to the world outside the home. Are two different approaches to moral philosophy needed, one for inside the home and another for dealings with people outside the family and for public institutions? We will encounter this question again in the twentieth century, but it seems clear that Aesara’s answer would be “no.” All morally significant decisions, whether regarding our families or the state, should reflect the appropriate proportions of reason, will power, and such positive affective emotions as love.

Only a fragment of Aesara’s original work remains. Even though Aesara’s influence on the history of philosophy was less than that of, say, Plato or Aristotle, we remain convinced of the value of including Aesara’s thoughts here. A more elegant statement than Aesara’s cannot be found for two ancient Greek ideas—the idea that from the well-ordered soul, the soul characterized by the harmonious functioning and proper proportioning of its elements, springs virtue, and the idea that the human soul is the model for society. “Human nature,” she said, “provides the standard for law and justice for both the home and the city.” If you understand the nature of the soul, you understand how society and social justice ought to be.

Aristotle

The ultimate source of all value for Plato was the Form of the Good, an entity that is distinct from the particular things that populate the natural world, the world we perceive through our senses. This Platonic idea, that all value is grounded in a non-natural source, is an element of Plato’s philosophy that is found in many ethical systems and is quite recognizable in Christian ethics. But not every ethical system postulates a nonnatural source of value.

Those systems that do not are called naturalistic ethical systems. According to ethical naturalism, moral judgments are really judgments of fact about the natural world. Thus, Aristotle, for instance, who was the first great ethical naturalist, believed that the good for us is defined by our natural objective.

Now, what would you say is our principal or highest objective by nature? According to Aristotle, it is the attainment of happiness, for it is that alone that we seek for its own sake. And because the attainment of happiness is naturally our highest objective, it follows that happiness is our highest good.

In what does happiness, our highest good, consist? According to Aristotle, to answer we must consider the human being’s function. To discover what goodness is for an ax or a chisel or anything whatsoever, we must consider its function, what it actually does. And when we consider what the human animal does, as a human animal, we see that, most essentially, it (a) lives and (b) reasons.

Thus, happiness consists of two things, Aristotle concluded: enjoyment (pleasure) and the exercise and development of the capacity to reason. It consists in part of
enjoyment because the human being, as a living thing, has biological needs and impulses the satisfaction of which is pleasurable. And it consists in part of developing and exercising the capacity to reason, because only the human being, as distinct from other living things, has that capacity. Because this capacity differentiates humans from other living things, its exercise is stressed by Aristotle as the most important component of happiness. Pleasure alone does not constitute happiness, he insists.

The exercise of our unique and distinctive capacity to reason is termed by Aristotle *virtue*—thus Aristotle’s famous phrase that happiness is activity in accordance with virtue. There are two different kinds of virtues. To exercise actively our reasoning abilities, as when we study nature or cogitate about something, is to be *intellectually* virtuous. But we also exercise our rational capacity by moderating our impulses and appetites, and when we do this, we are said by Aristotle to be *morally* virtuous.

The largest part of Aristotle’s major ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is devoted to analysis of specific moral virtues, which Aristotle held to be the *mean between extremes* (e.g., courage is the mean between fearing everything and fearing nothing). He emphasized as well that virtue is a matter of *habit*: just as an ax that is only occasionally sharp does not fulfill its function well, the human who exercises his rational capacities only occasionally does not fulfill his function, that is, is not virtuous.

Aristotle also had the important insight that a person’s pleasures reveal his true moral character. “He who faces danger with pleasure, or, at any rate, without pain, is courageous,” he observed, “but he to whom this is painful is a coward.” Of course, we might object that he who is willing to face danger *despite* the pain it brings him is the most courageous, but this is a quibble.

Another distinction made by Aristotle is that between instrumental ends and intrinsic ends. An *instrumental end* is an act performed as a means to other ends. An *intrinsic end* is an act performed for its own sake.

For example, when we, Bruder and Moore, sat down to write this book, our end was to finish it. But that end was merely instrumental to another end—to provide our readers with a better understanding of philosophy.

But now notice that the last goal, the goal of providing our readers with a better understanding of philosophy, is instrumental to a further end, namely, an enlightened society.

Notice, too, that when your teacher grades you and the other students in the class, that act is instrumental to your learning, and that end also is instrumental to an enlightened society.

As a matter of fact, all the activities in the university are aimed at producing an enlightened society. For example, your teacher may recently have received a promotion. Promotions are instrumental to effective teaching in your university, and effective teaching also is instrumental to an enlightened society.

But notice that that end, an enlightened society, is merely instrumental to another end, at least according to Aristotle, for why have an enlightened society? An enlightened society is good, Aristotle would say, because in such a society people will be able to fulfill their natural function as human beings. And therefore, he would say, when we understand what the natural function of people is, then we
finally will know what is intrinsically good, good for its own sake. Then we will know what the “Good of Man” is.

So to sum up the main points, Aristotle’s ethics were basically naturalistic: human good is defined by human nature. Plato’s were nonnaturalistic: goodness in all its manifestations is defined by the Form of the Good. Despite these differences, Aristotle and Plato would doubtless have agreed to a great extent in their praise and condemnation of the activities of other people. Aristotle, too, deemed the cardinal moral virtues to be courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, and both he and Plato advocated the intellectual life.

Notice, too, that Plato and Aristotle both conceive of ethics as focusing on good character traits of individuals—virtues—rather than on a set of rules for actions (such as “treat others as you would have others treat you”). In the last quarter of the twentieth century (as we shall see in Chapter 12), there was considerable interest among Anglo-American philosophers in this type of ethical theory, which is known as virtue ethics. From the point of view of virtue ethics, the fundamental ethical question is not so much, What ought one do? but rather, What kind of person ought one to be?

Despite these similarities, it must be kept in mind that the ultimate source of all moral value—that is, the Good—was for Plato a nonnatural “Form,” whereas Aristotle sought to define the good for humans in terms of what the human organism in fact naturally seeks, namely, happiness.

Ever since Aristotle’s time, ethical systems have tended to fall into one of two categories: those that find the supreme moral good as something that transcends nature and thus follow the lead of Plato, and those that follow Aristotle by grounding morality in human nature.

**EPICUREANISM AND STOICISM**

In the Greek and Roman periods following Aristotle, there were four main “schools” of philosophy: the Epicureans, the Stoics, the Skeptics, and the Neoplatonists. The Neoplatonists and the Skeptics were discussed in Part One.

The Skeptics denied the possibility of all knowledge, and this denial included moral knowledge. They said that no judgments can be established and that it does not matter if the judgments are factual judgments or value judgments (a value judgment assigns a value to something). Accordingly, they advocated tolerance toward others, detachment from the concerns of others, and caution in your own actions. Whether the Skeptics were consistent in advocating toleration, detachment, and caution while maintaining that no moral judgment can be established, you might consider for yourself.

Epicureanism and Stoicism, which mainly concern us in this chapter, were both naturalistic ethical philosophies, and both had a lasting effect on philosophy and ethics. To this day, “taking things philosophically” means responding to disappointments as a Stoic would, and the word *epicure* has its own place in the everyday English found outside the philosophy classroom.
Epicureanism

Epicureanism, the theory that personal pleasure is the highest good, began with Epicurus (ep-uh-KYUR-us) (341–270 B.C.E.), flourished in the second and first centuries B.C.E., spread to Rome, and survived as a school until almost the third century C.E. Though few today would call themselves Epicureans, there is no question that many people still subscribe to some of the central tenets of this philosophy. You may do so yourself. We do.

According to Epicurus, it is natural for us to seek a pleasant life above all other things; it follows, he reasoned (as perhaps you will, too), that we ought to seek a pleasant life above all other things. In this sense, Epicurus was a naturalist in ethics.

The pleasant life, Epicurus said, comes to you when your desires are satisfied. And there are three kinds of desires, he maintained:

- Those that are natural and must be satisfied for one to have a pleasant life (such as the desire for food and shelter)
- Those that, though natural, need not necessarily be satisfied for a pleasant life (including, for example, the desire for sexual gratification)
- Those that are neither natural nor necessary to satisfy (such as the desire for wealth or fame)

The pleasant life is best achieved, Epicurus believed, by neglecting the third kind of desire and satisfying only desires of the first kind, although desires of the second kind may also be satisfied, he said, when doing so does not lead to discomfort or pain. It is never prudent to try to satisfy unnecessary/unnatural desires, he said, for in the long run trying to do so will produce disappointment, dissatisfaction, discomfort, or poor health. There is, surely, much that is reasonable in this philosophy, even though many people spend a good bit of time and energy trying to satisfy precisely those desires that, according to Epicurus, are both unnecessary and unnatural.

As is evident, Epicurus favored the pleasant life over momentary pleasures and attached great importance to the avoidance of pain as the prime ingredient in the pleasant life. It is one of the ironies of philosophy that the word epicure is often used to denote a fastidious person excessively fond of refined tastes—a snob. Epicurus was certainly not an epicure in this sense, for he recommended a life of relaxation, repose, and moderation, as well as avoidance of the pleasures of the flesh and passions. He would not have been fond of expensive champagne or caviar.

The Stoics

If Epicurus was not exactly an epicure (at least in one meaning of the word), were the Stoics stoical? A stoic is a person who maintains a calm indifference to pain and suffering, and yes, the Stoics were stoical.

The school was founded by Zeno (c. 335–c. 263 B.C.E.; not the same Zeno mentioned in Chapter 2), who met his students on the stoa (Greek for “porch”). Stoicism spread to Rome and survived as a school until almost the
third century C.E. Its most famous adherents, other than Zeno, were Epictetus [ep-ik-TEET-us] (c. 55–c. 135 C.E.), the Roman statesman Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), and Marcus Aurelius (121–180 C.E.), the Roman emperor.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics believed that it is only natural for a person to seek a pleasant life and that therefore a person ought to seek such a life. But the Stoics were much influenced by the Cynics (see the box on Diogenes), who went out of their way to find hardship. The Stoics saw that the Cynics, by actively pursuing hardship, acquired the ability to remain untroubled by the pains and disappointments of life. The Stoics thought there was some sense in this. It occurred to them that untroubledness or serenity is a desirable state indeed.

The Stoics, however, more than the Cynics, had a metaphysical justification for their ethics. All that occurs, the Stoics believed, occurs in accordance with natural law, which they equated with reason. Natural law, they said, is the vital force that activates or (as we might say) energizes all things. It follows that

1. Whatever happens is the inevitable outcome of the logic of the universe.
2. Whatever happens, happens with a reason and therefore is for the best.

So, according to the Stoic philosophy, you can do nothing to alter the course of events, because they have been fixed by the law of nature. Do not struggle against the inevitable, the Stoics said. Instead, understand that what is happening is for the best, and accept it.

If you are wise, according to the Stoics, you will approach life as an actor approaches his or her part. You will realize that you have no control over the plot or assignment of roles, and therefore you will distance yourself psychologically from
all that happens to the character you play. Does the character you play grow ill in the play? Well, you will act the part to the best of your ability, but you certainly will not permit yourself to suffer. Do your friends die in the play? Do you die? It is all for the best because it is dictated by the plot.

Now, perhaps you are thinking, Well, if I cannot control what happens to me, then how on earth can I control my attitude about what happens? If what happens is inevitable, then what happens to my attitudes is inevitable, too, right? Nevertheless, this was the Stoics’ doctrine: You can control your attitude. Remain uninvolved emotionally in your fate, and your life will be untroubled.

The Stoic philosophy also had a political ethic according to which the Stoic had a duty to serve other people and respect their inherent worth as equals under natural law. So the Stoics thought that, although you should seek the untroubled life for yourself, your ethical concerns are not limited to your own welfare. Whether this social component of Stoicism is consistent with a philosophy of emotional noninvolvement, acceptance of the natural order, and seeking tranquility for yourself may be questioned, of course. In fact, whether a philosophy of self-interest is compatible with concern for the common good is one of the most important questions of ethics, and you know quite well that this is a very live issue even today.

Let’s summarize this section: According to the Epicureans, one’s ultimate ethical objective is to lead the pleasant life through moderate living. According to the

Diogenes the Cynic

According to the Cynics, who were fiercely individualistic, the wise person avoids even the most basic comforts and seeks total self-reliance by reducing all wants to a minimum and by forgoing any convenience or benefit offered by society. The most famous Cynic, the fourth-century B.C.E. philosopher Diogenes [dy-AH-juh-neez], is said to have dressed in rags and lived in an empty tub and even to have thrown out his drinking cup when he observed a child drinking from his hands. Alexander the Great, who admired Diogenes, is said to have made his way to the latter and announced that he would fill Diogenes’ greatest need. Diogenes replied that he had a great need for Alexander to stop blocking his sunlight.

Diogenes is also reported to have masturbated in public while observing that it was too bad that hunger could not be relieved in similar fashion merely by rubbing your stomach. His point in part was simply to flout conventions, but it was apparently also to contrast sexual needs with the need for food.

According to another story, Diogenes visited the home of a wealthy man. The man asked Diogenes to avoid spitting on the floor or furnishings because the home was expensively appointed. Diogenes responded by spitting in the man’s face and commented that it was the only worthless thing in the room.

Whether these stories are true or not, the indifference to material things that they portray was appreciated by the Stoics. Yet even though the Stoics saw the advantages to scaling back needs in the manner of the Cynics, they were not nearly so flamboyant in what they said and did. The Cynics were often willing to do or say something just to shock people.

Incidentally, as the word is most commonly used today, a cynic is one who sneers at sincerity, helpfulness, and other virtuous activity as inspired by ulterior motives. It is clear how the word acquired this meaning, given the contempt the Cynics had for traditional institutions and practices.
Stoics, the objective is to obtain the serene or untroubled life through acceptance of the rational or natural order of things while remembering that one is obligated to be of service to one’s fellow creatures. Stoicism in particular had an impact on Christian thought, primarily through the philosophy of St. Augustine, to whom we shall turn next.

One of the selections at the end of this chapter is from Epictetus, among the most famous of Stoics. Epictetus also is unusual among philosophers in that he was sold as a slave when a child but was given an education and later freed, thereafter becoming an influential teacher of philosophy. As you might expect from what we have said about Stoicism and Epicureanism, the two philosophies are very similar (even though Epictetus thought he was recommending a way of life quite different from that of the Epicureans).

CHRISTIANIZING ETHICS

Let us next turn to the way the Christian religion shaped the ancient idea of ethics and to the figure most responsible for that transformation.

St. Augustine

St. Augustine (354–430 C.E.) is one of the towering figures of Christian philosophy. It is he who first gave Christianity philosophical weight and substance.

Augustine found philosophical justification for Christianity in the metaphysics of Plato, as reinterpreted by the Neoplatonist Plotinus (205–270 C.E.). Christianity rests on the belief in a transcendent God, and with the assistance of Platonic metaphysics, St. Augustine was able to make philosophically intelligible to himself the concept of a transcendent realm, a realm of being beyond the spatiotemporal universe that contains (or is) the source of all that is real and good. He also saw in Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines the solution to the problem of evil. This problem can be expressed in a very simple question: How could evil have arisen in a world created by a perfectly good God?

One solution to this problem that Augustine considered was that evil is the result of a creative force other than God, a force of darkness, so to speak. But isn’t there supposed to be just one and only one Creator? That is what Augustine believed, so this solution was not acceptable.

For Plato, remember, the Form of the Good was the source of all reality, and from this principle it follows that all that is real is good. Thus, given Plato’s principle, evil is not real. St. Augustine found this approach to the problem of evil entirely satisfactory. Because evil is not something, it was not created by God.

This theory of evil is plausible enough as long as you are thinking of certain “physical” evils, such as blindness or droughts (though others, such as pain, seem as real as can be). Blindness, after all, is the absence of sight, and droughts are the absence of water.
Unfortunately, however, the absence theory does not plausibly explain moral evil, the evil that is the wrongdoing of men and women. How did Augustine account for moral evil? His explanation of moral evil was a variation of another idea of Plato’s, the idea that a person never knowingly does wrong, that evil actions are the result of ignorance of the good, of misdirected education, so to say. But Augustine added a new twist to this idea. Moral evil, he said, is not exactly a case of misdirected education but, instead, a case of misdirected love. This brings us to the heart of Augustine’s ethics.

For Augustine, as for the Stoics, a natural law governs all morality, and human behavior must conform to it. But for Augustine this is not an impersonal rational principle that shapes the destiny of the cosmos. The Augustinian natural law is, rather, the eternal law of God as it is written in the heart of man and woman and is apprehended by them in their conscience; and the eternal law is the “reason and will of God.”

Thus, the ultimate source of all that is good, for Augustine, is God, and God alone is intrinsically good. Our overriding moral imperative is therefore to love God. The individual virtues are simply different aspects of the love of God.

Augustine did not mean that you must love only God. He meant that, although there is nothing wrong with loving things other than God, you must not love them as if they were good in and of themselves, for only God is intrinsically good. To love things other than God as if they were inherently good—for example, to love money or success as if these things were good in and of themselves—is disordered love: it is to turn away from God, and moral evil consists in just this disordered love.

Now, do not let any of this make you think that Augustine was unconcerned with happiness, for as a matter of fact he did indeed think we should seek happiness. But happiness, he argued, consists in having all you want and wanting no evil. This may seem to be an odd notion at first, but when you think about it, it is by no means absurd. In any event, the only conceivable way to have all you want and to want no evil, Augustine thought, is to make God the supreme object of your love.

So, for Augustine, moral evil arises when man or woman turns away from God. Thus, God is not the creator of moral evil; it is we who create evil. But does it not then follow that we can create good? No, for God, remember, is the source of all that is good. We can do good only through God, Augustine said.

In sum, Augustine borrowed a theme from Plato by maintaining that physical evil can always be explained as the absence of something, and his concept of moral evil as arising from misdirected love can be viewed as a variation of Plato’s idea of moral evil as ignorance of the good. In this way, Augustine thought he had solved the problem of evil without doing damage to principles of Christian faith.

One other aspect of Augustine’s moral philosophy must be emphasized. According to Augustine, our highest good, or virtue, consists in loving and having God. By contrast, sin is distorted or misdirected or disordered love. So virtue and sin, according to Augustine, are conditions of the soul. What counts, for Augustine, is living out of love for God; doing supposedly good deeds is of secondary importance. When it comes to appraising a person’s moral worth, therefore, what matters is not the person’s accomplishments but, rather, the state of mind from which the person acts. We shall see that this idea—that a person’s intent is what matters morally—came to play an important role in moral philosophy.
Augustine was the last of the great late ancient philosophers. Between the sixth century and the eleventh, Europe went through the Dark Ages, as we discussed in Chapter 5. **Hildegard** (1098–1179) was a light at the end of the tunnel. Her ethical writings typify the beginning of a period of religious mysticism that never came to a complete end: religious mysticism just went out of fashion with the onslaught of rationalism that began with Descartes (see Chapter 6). Mysticism, we perhaps should mention, is belief in (or experience of) a form of higher, spiritual, mystical realm often found in trances or dreams.

Hildegard was unquestionably an important figure in the history of philosophy (see the Profile). It is true that she and other religious mystical philosophers are usually called “theologians,” but what they have to say is important for both ethics and moral epistemology. They provided theories of the nature of moral knowledge.

For mystical philosophers, mystical experience provides as certain a form of knowledge as pure rational introspection ever could. Their mystical experiences often take the form of visions and sometimes take the form of ideas, thoughts, and even whole books that seemingly are dictated directly by some divine source during these experiences. We are not going to assess the validity of such claims here; we are just going to reproduce and talk about their contents.

In one of her books, Hildegard listed thirty-five vices and their opposite virtues. This kind of list of opposites is a traditional format for talking about virtue and vice and dates back to Pythagoras. One vice, *Immoderation* (lack of moderate desires), is opposed to the virtue *Discretion* (keeping things within appropriate bounds). Hildegard describes Immoderation in the following allegory:

This one is just like a wolf. She is furiously cunning, in hot pursuit of all evils, without distinction. With flexed legs, she crouches, looking in all directions, in such a way that she would devour anything she could snatch. She has a tendency to anything low-grade, following the worst habits of her peculiar mind. She considers every empty, worthless thing.

Now, before you jump to conclusions about this medieval Benedictine nun, before you dismiss her views on virtue and vice as narrow and constricted, take a look at her accounts of human sexuality. In these excerpts from her philosophy of medicine in *Causa et Curae* (*Causes and Cures*), she gives the following accounts of what she considered to be healthy male and female sexuality:

There are some men showing much virility, and they have strong and solid brains. The wind also which is in their loins has two tents to its command, in which it blows as if into a chimney. And these tents surround the stem of all manly powers, and are helpers to it, just like small buildings placed next to a tower which they defend. Therefore, there are two, surrounding the stem, and they strengthen and direct it so that the more brave and allied, they would attract the wind and release it again, just like two bellows which blow into a fire. When likewise they erect the stem in its manliness, they hold it bravely and thus at a later time the stem blossoms into a fruit.
And:

Pleasure in a woman is compared to the sun which caressingly, gently, and continuously fills the earth with its heat, so that it can bear fruits, since if it would heat the earth more harshly in its constancy, it would hurt the fruits more than it would produce them. And so pleasure in a woman caressingly and gently, but nevertheless continuously, would have heat so that she can conceive and produce fruit. For when pleasure surges forth in a woman, it is lighter in her than it is in a man.

Clearly, sexual pleasure is not on this nun’s list of vices.
An important thinker who lived at the same time as Hildegard was the French abbess Heloise [HEL-oh-eez] (1098–1164). Heloise, like Hildegard, was concerned with virtue and vice, although Heloise was especially concerned with a specific virtue.

For Heloise, philosophy was life. If you believed in the truth of a theory of morality, you lived according to its principles. End of story. Heloise’s writings on moral philosophy are found in her Problemata (Problems) and Epistolae (Letters), written when Heloise was in her thirties and all addressed to Peter Abelard (1079–1144), another major figure in the history of ethical philosophy and the most important logician of his time. The famous love story of Abelard and Heloise is explained in the box “The Truth about Heloise and Abelard.”

The ethics of Heloise has two primary components. The first component, adapted from the Roman Stoic philosopher Cicero, places high value on the virtue Disinterested Love. True love for another, whether or not sexual, is completely unfish and asks nothing, Heloise believed. The lover loves the beloved for who the beloved is. A true lover supports the beloved in achieving his goals and realizing his highest moral potential. In an ideal loving relationship, the beloved has reciprocal feelings for the lover. He loves her for herself, for who she is. He aspires to help her realize her highest moral potential and the fulfillment of her goals. He has no selfish desires.

The other major component of Heloise’s moral philosophy concerns the morality of intent, which she derived basically from Abelard’s own teachings. Think back to the Augustinian theory: it is not what you do that matters but rather the state of mind with which you do it (virtue is essentially a matter of having a mind that is disposed to do right). This theory was accepted throughout the Dark Ages and into the Middle Ages. The one who explored this theory most carefully prior to St. Thomas Aquinas was Abelard.

Abelard drew a distinction between moral defects or imperfections and other defects or imperfections of the mind, such as being stupid or having a bad memory. Moral defects dispose you to do what you should not do—or not do what you should do. He also drew a distinction between moral defects and sin. Sin is “contempt of God”—failing to do or renounce what we should.

Armed with these distinctions, Abelard argued that sin does not consist in acting on evil desires. In fact, it does not even consist in having evil desires. Sin consists instead in consenting to act on evil desires. Further, a wrongful act—an act that ought not be done, such as killing someone—can be committed without an evil will, in which case, although the act is wrong, the person who acts is not morally reprehensible.

Thus, Abelard’s position is that virtue consists not in having no evil desires but in not consenting to act on them. And “the evil will itself, when restrained, though it may not be quenched, procures the palmwreath for those who resist it.”

Heloise, too, accepted this theory: “In a wicked deed, rectitude of action depends not on the effect of the thing but on the affections of the agent, not on what is done but with what dispositions it is done.”

This conception of ethics certainly played an important role in the relationship between Abelard and Heloise. Heloise argued that, by voluntarily marrying
Heloise (1098–1164) was a French philosopher and poet who received an early education at the Benedictine convent of Argenteuil. By the time she was sixteen years old, she was known as the most learned woman in France. Heloise’s uncle Fulbert, who was her guardian and also a canon at Notre Dame, hired an unordained cleric named Pierre Abelard (1079–1144) to teach Heloise philosophy.

The traditional literature tends to describe Heloise and Abelard’s relationship as one of the great love affairs of all time, right up there with Romeo and Juliet. Now, that is true to a certain extent. Heloise certainly fell in love with her philosophy teacher—but she refused to have sex with him.

Abelard acknowledged that Heloise verbally refused to have sex and physically fought him off. In his words, “I frequently forced your consent (for after all you were the weaker) by threats and blows.” Or, as we might say today if he were brought up on charges: on some occasions he beat her and raped her, and on other occasions he threatened to beat her again if she did not stop resisting.

Heloise became pregnant. Abelard offered to marry her. Heloise refused. As usual, Abelard would not take no for an answer. As her due date came near, he took her to his sister’s farm in the country, where she gave birth. They named their son Astrolabe (after an astronomical instrument). Abelard convinced Heloise to marry him so that their son would not be a bastard. You see, illegitimate children could not be baptized back then, so if Heloise had not married Abelard, she would have been condemning their son to an eternity in limbo.

Fulbert, though, was no fool. He figured things out and announced that Abelard had gotten married. Heloise thought it would be a waste of Abelard’s talents for him to miss out on this new experiment in education: a university. Worse, Heloise would feel responsible for keeping Abelard from fulfilling his ambitions.

Abelard taught, was turning into the University of Paris. It would be the first institution of higher learning in France (the second in Europe) to accept students who were not studying to be priests.

Heloise thought it would be a waste of Abelard’s talents for him to miss out on this new experiment in education: a university. Worse, Heloise would feel responsible for keeping Abelard from fulfilling his ambitions.

Fulbert, though, was no fool. He figured things out and announced that Abelard had gotten married. Heloise tried to protect Abelard by denying the marriage, so Uncle Fulbert started mistreating Heloise (who was living at his house). To make it appear as if Heloise were not lying, Abelard ordered her to return to the convent and become a nun, which she did. At this point, Uncle Fulbert, who evidently was not given to halfway measures, hired thugs to castrate Abelard. (Heloise, who was in Argenteuil at the convent, did not hear about this for years.) But now that having sex with Heloise was permanently out of the question, Abelard sought final ordination as a priest. He set up a convent called the Paraclete and made Heloise its abbess. For decades, she never knew why.
Abelard, she would have been the cause of Abelard’s being barred from final ordination to the priesthood. She did not want to be morally responsible for that outcome. She felt he forced and tricked her into marrying him and that this was a consequence of her pregnancy, for which she was not morally responsible. Abelard’s *Historica Calamitatum* (*Story of My Calamities*), as well as Heloise’s letters to Abelard, insists that she never agreed to have sex with him: he beat and raped her. She would not accept moral responsibility for the pregnancy because she had no evil intent to seduce him.

But because they actually were married, Abelard could order Heloise to enter a convent. After she did so, Abelard had almost no contact with her. Heloise did not understand why Abelard ignored her letters nor why he ignored the physical and spiritual welfare of her nuns. Decades later, she read his book and learned about his castration. She put two and two together.

Heloise might have loved Abelard in this ideal, disinterested type of love, but it was a one-way street. Although she loved him for himself and expressed that love by helping him achieve his goals (priesthood and a job as a philosopher at the emerging university), his love for her was predominantly sexual. After he was no longer able to have sex, she realized, Abelard had made her head of her own convent. Heloise had obeyed Abelard (who was both her husband and her religious superior), running the convent and teaching the nuns. All those years, Heloise had lived according to the moral theory she thought Abelard shared, loving him unselfishly, for himself.

**St. Thomas Aquinas**

Augustine fashioned a philosophical framework for Christian thought that was essentially Platonic. He found many Platonic and Neoplatonic themes that could be given a Christian interpretation and thus is sometimes said to have Christianized Plato. Eight centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas [uh-QUINE-nuss] (1225–1274), in a somewhat different sense, Christianized the philosophy of Aristotle. Aquinas’s task was perhaps the more difficult of the two, for the philosophy of Aristotle, with its this-worldly approach to things, was less congenial to a Christian interpretation. Thus, it is customary to speak of Aquinas as having reconciled Aristotelianism with Christianity. In Aquinas’s ethical philosophy, this amounted by and large to accepting both Christianity and the philosophy of Aristotle wherever that could be done without absurdity.

Aristotle said that the good for each kind of thing is defined with reference to the function or the nature of that kind of thing and is in fact the goal or purpose of that kind of thing. In the case of humans, goodness is happiness. Aquinas agreed. The natural (moral) law, which is God’s eternal law as it is applied to man on earth, is apprehended by us in the dictates of our conscience and practical reasoning, which guide us to our natural goal, happiness on earth.

But there is also, according to Aquinas, an eternal, atemporal good—namely, happiness everlasting. The law that directs us to that end is God’s divine law, which the Creator reveals to us through his grace.

Thus, the natural law of Aquinas is the law of reason, which leads us to our natural end insofar as we follow it. The divine law is God’s gift to us, revealed
through his grace. Therefore, according to Aquinas, there are two sets of virtues: the “higher” virtues of faith, love, and hope; and the natural virtues, such as fortitude and prudence, which are achieved when the will, directed by the intellect, moderates our natural drives, impulses, and inclinations. And Aquinas, like Aristotle, thought of the virtues as matters of character or habit—in Aquinas’s view, the habit of acting according to the provisions of natural law.

Although Aquinas’s ethics are thus a type of virtue-ethics, he does treat the moral goodness of actions. When evaluating an act, and only voluntary acts are subject to moral evaluation, we must consider not only what was done but also why it was done and the circumstances under which it was done.

Now, suppose someone does something, or refrains from doing it, because the person’s conscience tells him or her that this would be the morally proper thing to do or refrain from doing. And suppose, further, that in this case the individual’s conscience is mistaken. Yes, an erring conscience is possible, according to Aquinas, despite the fact that it is through conscience that we become aware of natural law. In such a case, if the person acts as he or she honestly thinks is morally right, and the mistake in thinking is due to involuntary ignorance on the person’s part, the person has not really sinned, according to Aquinas.

Aquinas’s ethical system is complete (in the sense explained earlier in this chapter with regard to Plato), detailed, and systematic, and it is difficult to convey this in this brief summary. Aquinas treats highly general and abstract principles such as the ultimate objective of human existence, the nature of goodness, and the sources of action and also applies these principles to specific and concrete moral questions.

### HOBBES AND HUME

You have seen that the naturalism found in Aristotle’s ethics and the nonnaturalistic ethics of Plato, with its conception of a transcendent source of ultimate value, flowed in separate streams through the philosophy of the centuries until the time of Aquinas. If it is not quite true to say that Aquinas channeled the waters from each of these two streams into a common bed, it may at least be said that he contrived to have them flow side by side, though in separate channels.

But the next philosopher we wish to discuss, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), drew exclusively from the Aristotelian channel. This is not surprising, for Hobbes was one of the first philosophers of the modern period in philosophy, a period marked by the emergence of experimental science, in which once again nature itself was an object of study, just as it had been for Aristotle. (You should be aware, nevertheless, that Hobbes, reacting to the Aristotelianism of his Oxford tutors, had harsh things to say about Aristotle.)

#### Hobbes

Hobbes’s metaphysics was a relentless materialism. All that exists, he said, are material things in motion. Immaterial substance does not exist. There is no such thing as the nonphysical soul. Thoughts, emotions, feelings—all are motions of the
matter within the brain, caused by moving things outside the brain. Even our rea-
soning and volition are purely physical processes.

As for values, according to Hobbes the words *good* and *evil* simply denote that
which a person desires or hates. And Hobbes, like Aristotle, the Epicureans, the
Stoics, and Aquinas, believed that one has a natural “end” or objective toward
which all activity is directed. Hobbes specified this object of desire as the preserva-
tion of one’s life. One seeks personal survival above all other things, he held.
Hobbes also said that one has a “natural right” to use all means necessary to defend
oneself or otherwise ensure one’s survival.

Thus, Hobbes was a descriptive egoist, in the sense we explained earlier in this
chapter. That is, he believed that, in all conscious action, one seeks to promote
one’s self-interest (for Hobbes this meant seeking survival) above all else. A story
is reported in the box “Hobbes and the Beggar” that Hobbes was asked by a cler-
gyman why he was giving alms to a beggar; Hobbes reportedly said he did so to
end his own discomfort at seeing the beggar’s discomfort. Beginning students in
philosophy often are tempted to give a similar “selfish” analysis of even the most
apparently altruistic actions; a difficulty in that idea is explained in the box.

Was Hobbes also a prescriptive egoist? That is, did he also think that one *ought*
to seek to promote one’s self-interest above all else? In general, Hobbes did not
attempt to determine how people ought to behave in some absolute sense; he
seems intent on describing how they ought to behave if they want best to secure
their natural objective. A question he left for subsequent philosophers, and one that
has not been resolved to this day, is this: If the universe is material, can there really
be absolute values? Do good and evil, justice and injustice, exist in some *absolute*
sense, or must they be regarded, as Hobbes so regarded them, as expressions of
desires or the products of human agreements?

---

**Hobbes and the Beggar**

The story is told of Hobbes that he was asked by a
clergyman why he was giving alms to a beggar.
“Is it because Jesus has commanded you to do
so?” the latter asked.
“No,” came Hobbes’s answer.
“Then why?”
“The reason I help the man,” said Hobbes, “is that
by doing so I end my discomfort at seeing his dis-
comfort.”

One moral that might be drawn from the story is
that even the most altruistic and benevolent actions
can be given an egoistic interpretation. Why did
Hobbes help the beggar? To relieve his own discom-
fort. Why do saints devote their lives to relieving
the suffering of others? Because it brings them pleasure
to do so. Why did the soldier sacrifice his life to save
his comrades? To end the distress he felt at thinking
of his friends’ dying—or maybe even because it
pleased him to think of others praising him after his
demise.

In short, because those who act to relieve their
own discomfort or to bring pleasure to themselves
are acting for their own self-interest, all of these
seemingly altruistic actions can be interpreted
egoistically.

Are you convinced?

Well, if you are, you should know that many
philosophers are uncomfortable with this egoistic
analysis of altruistic behavior. After all (they argue),
it brings the saint pleasure to help others only if the
saint is genuinely motivated to help others, right?
Thus, if egoism is equated with the doctrine that we
are never motivated to help others, it is false. If it is
equated with the doctrine that we only act as we are
motivated to act, it is true, but not particularly
interesting.
Hobbes’s major work, *Leviathan*, is a classic in moral and political philosophy and encompasses as well metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and psychology. It secured for Hobbes a prime-time place in all histories of Western thought.

**Hume**

Hobbes maintained that the idea of incorporeal or immaterial substance was a contradiction in terms, but he denied being an atheist. Nevertheless, he certainly did not rest his ethics on the authority of the Church. And although most of the major philosophers of the modern period shrank from Hobbes’s extreme materialism, they, too—most of them—sought to discover the basic principles of morality elsewhere than in scripture. Some, such as Locke, though believing that these principles are decreed by God, held, like Hobbes, that they are discoverable—and provable—by reason.

But in the eighteenth century, **David Hume** (1711–1776) argued with some force that moral principles are neither divine edicts nor discoverable by reason. Hume’s general position regarding God, as we shall see in Part Three, was that the order in the universe does offer some slight evidence that the universe has or had a creative force remotely analogous to human intelligence. But we certainly cannot affirm anything about the moral qualities of the creator, he held; and we cannot derive guidelines for our own actions from speculating about his (its) nature. Christianity Hume regarded as superstition.

**Value Judgments Are Based on Emotion, Not Reason**

Hume held likewise that moral judgments are not the “offspring of reason.” Scrutinize an act of murder as closely as you can, he said. Do you find anything in the *facts of the case* that reveal the act is morally wrong? The *facts*, he said, are simply that one person has terminated the life of another in a certain way at a particular time and place. Reasoning can disclose how long it took for death to occur, whether the victim suffered great pain, what the motives of the killer were, as well as the answers to many other factual questions such as these. But it will not show the *moral wrongfulness* of the act. The judgment that an act is immoral, Hume maintained, comes not from reason but from *emotion*. Perhaps this idea has occurred to you as well. For an example, see the box “Cold-Blooded Murder.”

It is the same, Hume believed, with all value judgments. Is the judgment that a portrait is beautiful founded on reason? Of course not. Reason can disclose the chemical composition of the paints and canvas, the monetary value of the work, and many similar factual things. But whether the portrait is beautiful is an issue that cannot be settled by reason.

Thus, for Hume, moral judgments, and all value judgments, are based on *emotion*. Actions that we find morally praiseworthy or blameworthy create within us feelings of pleasure or displeasure, respectively. Now, obviously, these feelings are different in kind from aesthetic pleasures and pleasures of the palate. Humans clearly have a capacity for moral pleasure as well as for other types of pleasure: we
are morally sensitive creatures. Behavior that pleases our moral sensibilities elicits our approval and is deemed good, right, just, virtuous, and noble. Behavior that offends our moral sense is deemed bad, wrong, unjust, base, and ignoble.

**Benevolence**

But just what is it about behavior that elicits our moral approval? What do virtuous, good, right, and noble acts have in common? Hume’s answer was that the type of act we deem morally praiseworthy is one taken by an agent out of concern for others. The act that pleases our moral sensibilities is one that reflects a benevolent character on the part of the agent, he said. By “agent,” philosophers mean the person who did the act.

Why does benevolence bring pleasure to us when we witness, read about, or contemplate it? A cynical answer is that we imagine ourselves benefiting from the benevolent activity, and imagining this is pleasant. Do you get a warm glow when you read about someone coming to the aid of a fellow person? Well, according to the cynical view, that is because you picture yourself on the receiving end of the exchange.

But this cynical theory is unnecessarily complex, said Hume. The reason you get that pleasant feeling when you read about or see someone helping someone else is that you sympathize with others. It just plainly upsets a normal person to see others suffering, and it pleases a normal person to see others happy. True, there are people who suffer from the emotional equivalent of color blindness and lack the capacity to sympathize with others. But these people are not the norm. The normal human being is a sympathetic creature, maintained Hume.

This aspect of Hume’s moral philosophy may well have some significance for us today. On one hand, we tend to believe that you should care for others but, on the other hand, that you must also certainly look out for yourself. And we are inclined to think that there is a problem in this because self-concern and other-concern seem mutually exclusive. But if Hume is correct, they are not. Looking out for your own interests includes doing what brings you pleasure. And if Hume is correct, caring for others will bring you an important kind of pleasure. Indeed, if Hume is correct, when you praise an action as good, it is precisely because it brings you this kind of pleasure.
It is important to notice, finally, the emphasis Hume placed on character. As we said, according to Hume, the act that pleases our moral sensibilities is one that reflects a benevolent character on the part of the agent. Hume believed that when we morally praise (or condemn) someone, it is the person's character we praise (or condemn) primarily: his or her actions we find praiseworthy (or condemnatory) mainly as an indication of character. This idea—that we apply moral attributes primarily to a person's character and secondarily to the person's actions—is common in the virtue-ethics tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. In this respect, Hume is part of that tradition.

Can There Be Ethics after Hume?

“Morality,” Hume said, “is more properly felt than judged of.” Ethical standards are not fixed by reason, he held; further, even if there is a God, he maintained, it is impossible for us to gain moral guidance from him.

Loosely speaking, therefore, ethics after Hume seems generally to have had these options. First, it might seek to establish that, despite Hume, morality can be grounded on reason or God. As we shall see next, this was the option taken by Kant, who favored reason as the ultimate ground of morality. Second, ethics might try to find objective sources of moral standards other than reason and God. This is what the utilitarians tried to do, as we shall see shortly. Third, it might try to determine how one should conduct one's affairs given the absence of objective moral standards. This is a primary concern of contemporary existentialists, as we saw in Chapter 8. Fourth, ethics might abandon the search for moral standards altogether and concentrate instead on such factual questions as, What do people believe is good and right? What does it mean to say that something is good or right? How do moral judgments differ from other kinds of judgments? What leads us to praise certain actions as moral and condemn others as immoral? These are some of the issues that have captured the attention of many twentieth-century philosophers, such as G. E. Moore and R. M. Hare, who we will encounter in Chapter 12.

KANT

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) disagreed entirely with Hume's discounting of the possibility that reason can settle whether an act is morally right. In Kant's opinion, reason and reason alone can settle this. Kant's argument, paraphrased and distilled, went like this:

1. Scientific inquiry can never reveal to us principles that we know hold without exception. Scientific inquiry is based on experience, and in the final analysis experience can show only how things have been to this point, not how they must be. For example, science reveals to us physical “laws” that hold true of the universe as it is now, but it cannot provide absolutely conclusive
guarantees that these laws will forever hold true. (If you have difficulty understanding this point, rereading the section on Kant in Chapter 7 will help.)

2. Moral principles, however, hold without exception. For example, if it is wrong to torture helpless animals, then it would be wrong for anyone, at any time, to do so.

Breaking Promises

According to Kant, if a universal law allowed breach of promise, then there would be no such thing as a promise. Thus, if the maxim “Break promises!” were to become a universal law, it would “destroy itself.”

But hold on. Suppose I promise to return your car at 4 o’clock. And suppose that shortly before 4 my wife becomes ill and must be rushed to the hospital—and the only transportation available is your car! Should I break my promise to you to save my wife’s life? And if I did, which maxim would I be acting on, breaking promises or saving lives?

Perhaps a reasonable answer would be that the maxim I acted on is “Break promises when doing so is required to save lives.” And perhaps there is no inconsistency in willing this maxim to be a universal law.

Perhaps, then, the maxim “Break promises!” cannot be universalized. But that may not mean that, on Kantian principles, you should never break a promise.
Thus, from these two premises—that moral principles hold without exception and that scientific investigations cannot reveal what holds without exception—it follows that

3. Moral principles cannot be revealed through scientific investigation. Because Kant believed that any principle that holds without exception is knowable only through reason, he maintained that reason alone can ascertain principles of morality. For an example of how reason can ascertain universal laws of morality, see the box “Breaking Promises” on page 299.

The Supreme Principle of Morality

Further, according to Kant, because a moral rule is something that holds without exception—that is, holds universally—you should act only on principles that could hold universally. For example, if you think you must cheat to pass an exam, then the principle on which you would act (if you were to cheat) would be this: To obtain a passing grade, it is acceptable to cheat. But now consider: If this principle were a universal law, then a passing grade would be meaningless, right? And in that case the principle itself would be meaningless. In short, the principle logically could not hold universally, and (this comes to the same thing) it would be irrational for anyone to want it to hold universally.

Now, if it would be irrational for you to want the principle on which you act to be a universal law, then that principle is morally improper, and the act should not be done. Thus, for Kant, the supreme prescription of morality, which he calls the supreme categorical imperative, is to act always in such a way that you could, rationally, will the principle on which you act to be a universal law. In Kant’s words, “Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

Because, in Kant’s view, a universal law would in effect be a sort of law of nature, he offers a second formulation of the categorical imperative: “Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a Universal Law of Nature.”

Why You Should Do What You Should Do

Moral principles, Kant observed, may always be expressed in the imperative form: Do not steal! Be kind to others! Further, because moral imperatives must hold without exception, they are different from hypothetical imperatives, which state, in effect, that one ought to do something if such-and-such an end is desired.

For example, the imperatives “If you wish to be healthy, then live moderately!” and “If you wish to secure your own survival, then surrender your rights to a sovereign power!” are both hypothetical imperatives. Neither is a moral imperative, for a moral imperative holds unconditionally, or categorically. This means that a moral imperative commands obedience for the sake of no other end than its ownrightness.

Thus, for Kant, what I should do, I should do because it is right. Doing something for any other purpose—for the sake of happiness or the welfare of
humankind, for example—is not to act morally. It is to act under the command of a hypothetical imperative, which is not unconditional, as a moral imperative must be. According to Kant, you should do your moral duty simply because it is your moral duty. You should be aware that duty-based ethical systems, like Kant’s, are known as deontological ethical systems.

Furthermore, according to Kant, it’s not the effects or consequences of your act that determine whether your act is good, for these are not totally within your control. What is within your control is the intent with which you act. Thus, what determines whether your act is good or bad is the intent with which it is undertaken. He wrote, “Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will.”

And because a morally good will is one that acts solely for the sake of doing what is right, it follows, in Kant’s opinion, that there is no moral worth in, say, helping others because you are sympathetic or inclined to do so. There is moral worth in helping others only because it is right to do so.

Because to violate the supreme principle of morality, the supreme categorical imperative, is to be irrational, rationality may be said to be the source of all value. Hence, the rational will alone is deemed inherently good by Kant. Accordingly, Kant offers yet another formulation of the supreme categorical imperative: Treat rational beings (i.e., humans) in every instance as ends and never just as means!

That this is an alternative formulation of the same principle may be seen in the fact that, if you were to violate the categorical imperative and do something that you could not rationally will to be a law for all, then in effect you would be treating the interests of others as subordinate to your own; that is, you would be treating others as means and not as ends. Kant, it is often said (for obvious reasons), was the first philosopher to provide a rational basis for the golden rule found in many religions: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Did Kant provide a viable response to Hume’s idea that reason cannot determine whether an act is morally right? You decide.

THE UTILITARIANS

Kant, we have seen, may well have offered a sound refutation of Hume’s idea that moral principles are not determined by reason. It is therefore perhaps strange that two of the most celebrated ethical philosophers of the nineteenth century, the Englishmen Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), largely ignored the rationalistic ethics of Kant, Bentham perhaps more so than Mill. Bentham and Mill did not, however, ignore Hume. Instead, they developed further Hume’s idea that traits and actions that are virtuous promote the welfare of people, the “general happiness.”

Bentham and Mill were utilitarians, which means they believed that the rightness of an action is identical with the happiness it produces as its consequence. What is new or exciting about this? Didn’t Aristotle and the Epicureans and Augustine and Aquinas also advocate pursuing happiness? The difference is that, according to those earlier philosophers, it is your own happiness that you should strive for.
By contrast, the utilitarians said that the morally best act is the one that produces the greatest amount of happiness with everyone considered. But this is ambiguous: should we aim at increasing the average happiness or the total happiness—even if this would reduce the happiness per person? Usually the utilitarians are interpreted as favoring increasing the average happiness. In any case, they believed that, when you are trying to produce happiness, it is not just your own happiness you should aim for but rather the happiness of people in general.

It is common to attribute to the utilitarians the view that the right act is the one that produces “the greatest happiness for the greatest number.” That phrase—the greatest happiness for the greatest number—is unfortunate, because it tells us to maximize two different things. (Just try to plot the greatest happiness for the greatest number as a single line on a graph, with happiness as one variable and number as a second variable!) You can say, “The more people who have a given amount of happiness, the better,” and you can say, “The more happiness a given number of people have, the better.” But it is not clear what you could mean by saying, “The more happiness the greater number of people have, the better.”

We will interpret the utilitarians as favoring the view that the more happiness a given number of people have, the better (i.e., the higher the average happiness, the better). And again, according to this philosophy, your own happiness is not more important morally than that of others.

Notice, too, that for the utilitarians it is the consequences of an act that determine its rightness, a position that contrasts strongly with Kant’s idea that the moral worth of an act depends on the will or motive with which it is taken.

Bentham, the earlier of the two utilitarians, equated happiness with pleasure. “Nature,” he wrote, “has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do.”

The words ought, right, good, and the like have meaning only when defined in terms of pleasure, Bentham said. This fact is evident, he argued, in that all other intelligible moral standards either must be interpreted in terms of the pleasure standard or are simply disguised versions of the pleasure standard in the first place.

For example, suppose you maintain that the right act is the one that is preferred by God. Well, said Bentham, unless we know God’s preferences—that is, unless we know what, exactly, pleases God—what you maintain is pretty meaningless, is it not? And the only way “to know what is His pleasure,” he said, is by “observing what is our own pleasure and pronouncing it to be His.”

Or consider the theory that a moral obligation to obey the law stems from a “social contract” among members of society. That theory, said Bentham, is unnecessarily complicated. For when we have a moral obligation to obey the law, he said, that obligation is more simply explained by the fact that obedience to the law would result in more pleasure for more people than disobedience would.

Bentham believed that the pain and pleasure an act produces can be evaluated solely with reference to quantitative criteria. Which of two or more courses of action you should take should be determined by considering the probable
consequences of each possible act with respect to the certainty, intensity, duration, immediacy, and extent (the number of persons affected) of the pleasure or pain it produces, and with respect to the other kinds of sensations it is likely to have as a result over the long run. This “calculus” of pleasure, as it is often called, represents a distinctive feature of Bentham’s ethics. Bentham believed that, by using these criteria, one could and should calculate which of alternative courses of action would produce the greatest amount of pleasure and which, therefore, ought morally to be taken.

Through all of this you should be asking: But why ought I seek the general happiness and not give higher priority to my own? Bentham’s answer was that your own happiness coincides with the general happiness: what brings pleasure to you and what brings pleasure to others fortunately go together.

You may wish to consider whether this answer is fully satisfactory.

**Mill**

John Stuart Mill, who claimed to have discovered in Bentham’s ethical theory what he needed to give purpose to his own life, was also concerned with providing a philosophical justification for the utilitarian doctrine that it is the general happiness...
that one should aim to promote. The justification, according to Mill, lies in the fact that a moral principle by its very nature singles out no one for preferential treatment. Thus, Mill wrote, “as between his own happiness and that of others,” the utilitarian is required “to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator.” Compare Mill’s justification with that of Bentham. Mill’s justification is sounder, is it not?

Probably the most important difference between Mill and Bentham is that Mill believed that some pleasures are inherently better than others and are to be preferred even over a greater amount of pleasure of an inferior grade.

That some pleasures are better than others can be seen, Mill argued, in the fact that few people would be willing to trade places with an animal or even with a more ignorant person than themselves, even if the exchange guaranteed their having the fullest measure of an animal’s or an ignoramus’s pleasure. Here is what he meant. Would you trade places with a pig or a lunkhead? Would you do it even if you knew that as a pig or a lunkhead you would have more pig or lunkhead pleasures than you now have pleasure as an intelligent human being?

Thus, for Mill, in determining the pleasure for which we should strive, we must consider the quality of the pleasure as well as the quantity. Choose the pleasure of the highest quality.

Now, this is all very well, but what settles which of two pleasures is of higher quality? Mill’s answer is quite simple: Of two pleasures, if there is one to which most who have experienced both give a decided preference, that is the more desirable pleasure.
Notice what this answer seems to entail. It seems to entail that the pleasures preferred by the intellectual will be found to be of superior quality, for nonintellectuals “only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides,” said Mill.

According to Mill, then, it is not simply the quantity of pleasure an act produces that determines its moral worth; the quality of the pleasure produced must also be taken into account. Mill is thus said to have recognized implicitly (though not in so many words) a factor other than pleasure by which the moral worth of actions should be compared: the factor of quality. In other words, he is said to have proposed, in effect, a standard of moral worth other than pleasure, a standard of “quality” by means of which pleasure itself is to be evaluated. So he sometimes is said not to be a “pure” utilitarian, if a utilitarian is one who believes that the pleasure an act produces is the only standard of good.

It is not unusual, therefore, to find philosophers who think of Bentham’s philosophy as more consistently utilitarian than Mill’s, though everyone refers to both Mill and Bentham as “the” utilitarians.

There is one other, sort of fuzzy, difference between Bentham and Mill. Bentham’s utilitarianism is what today is called act utilitarianism: the rightness of an act is determined by its effect on the general happiness. Mill also subscribed to act utilitarianism in some passages, but in other places he seems to have advocated what is called rule utilitarianism. According to this version of utilitarianism, we are to evaluate the moral correctness of an action not with reference to its impact on the general happiness but rather with respect to the impact on the general happiness of the rule or principle the action exemplifies.

Take this case, for example: Suppose that by murdering us you would increase the general happiness (maybe unknown to anyone, we harbor some awful contagious disease). Act utilitarianism would say that you should murder us. But a rule utilitarian, as Mill in some places seems to be, would say that if society accepted murder as a rule of conduct, ultimately the general happiness would be diminished, so you should not murder us. Rule utilitarianism is, in a way, much more Kantian than is act utilitarianism.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Another important nineteenth-century philosopher, one who believed that all previous moral philosophy was tedious and soporific and who had no use at all for the utilitarians, was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In Nietzsche’s view, moralities are social institutions, and basically there are just two moralities: master morality and slave morality, the morality of the masses. Slave morality—for Nietzsche, epitomized by Christian ethics—emphasizes such virtues as compassion, humility, patience, warmheartedness, and turning the other cheek. These “virtues” glorify weakness. Master morality, by contrast, is the morality of noble individuals, who are egoistic, hard, intolerant, but bound by a code of honor to their peers. Noble individuals define harm entirely in terms of what is harmful to themselves and despise altruism and humility.
According to Nietzsche, the enhancement of the species is always the result of aristocratic societies, which, he held, are the ultimate justification of human social existence. The primal life force, for Nietzsche, is the will-to-power, whose essence is the overpowering and suppression of what is alien and weaker and which finds its highest expression in the noble man, or Übermensch ("Superman" in German). The principle by which the Übermensch lives is "There is no god or human over me." He is the source of ethical truth.

Nietzsche followed the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (Chapter 2) in holding that life is quintessentially strife or warfare. It is only within the dark eye of battle that human energies are truly stretched and fruit-bearing actions become possible. Battles make heroes, he thought; peace renders us weak and ineffectual. One of Nietzsche's most famous proverbs was, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger."

The paradox of hedonism. The British moralist Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) noted the curious fact, which he called the paradox of hedonism, that the desire for pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim. (Sidgwick also observed that "the pleasures of thought and study can only be enjoyed in the highest degree by those who have an ardour of curiosity which carries the mind temporarily away from self and its sensations.")

According to Nietzsche, the enhancement of the species is always the result of aristocratic societies, which, he held, are the ultimate justification of human social existence. The primal life force, for Nietzsche, is the will-to-power, whose essence is the overpowering and suppression of what is alien and weaker and which finds its highest expression in the noble man, or Übermensch ("Superman" in German). The principle by which the Übermensch lives is “There is no god or human over me.” He is the source of ethical truth.

Nietzsche followed the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (Chapter 2) in holding that life is quintessentially strife or warfare. It is only within the dark eye of battle that human energies are truly stretched and fruit-bearing actions become possible. Battles make heroes, he thought; peace renders us weak and ineffectual. One of Nietzsche's most famous proverbs was, “What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.”

The ultimate battle, Nietzsche thought, takes place within the human frame and is the battle between two forces, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Greek god Apollo represents the force of measure, order, and harmony. The Greek god Dionysius (or Bacchus in the Roman world) represents the counterforce of excess, destruction, and creative power, the ecstatic rush and rave of the original, formless will. In the human soul, these two forces contest each other for ascendancy. While both are necessary if one is to be fully and creatively alive, the creative Dionysian force has been lost almost entirely in the slave mentality, with its emphasis on humility, meekness, mediocrity, and the denial of life.

The selection from Nietzsche at the end of the chapter conveys many of these themes clearly and will make it obvious why attempts often are made to censor Nietzsche from schools and libraries.
You may know someone—or may be someone—who thinks that one should fully indulge one’s appetites, or that pleasure, whatever its nature, is the key to happiness. In this excerpt from the Dialogue Gorgias, Plato has the character Callicles advancing this view and Socrates rebutting it.

Socrates: You make a brave attack, Callicles, with so frank an outburst, for clearly you are now saying what others may think but are reluctant to express. I entreat you therefore on no account to weaken, in order that it may really be made plain how life should be lived. And tell me. You say we should not curb our appetites, if we are to be what we should be, but should allow them the fullest possible growth and procure satisfaction for them from whatever source, and this, you say, is virtue.

Callicles: That is what I say...

S: Consider whether you would say this of each type of life, the temperate and the undisciplined. Imagine that each of the two men has several jars, in the one case in sound condition and filled, one with wine, another with honey, another with milk, and many others with a variety of liquids, but that the sources of these liquids are scanty and hard to come by, procured only with much hard labor. Imagine then that the one after filling his vessels does not trouble himself to draw in further supplies but as far as the jars are concerned is free from worry; in the case of the other man the sources, as in the first instance are procurable but difficult to come by, but his vessels are perforated and unsound and he is ever compelled to spend day and night in replenishing them, if he is not to suffer the greatest agony. If this is the character of each of the lives, do you still insist that the life of the uncontrolled man is happier than that of the orderly? Do I or do I not persuade you with this image that the disciplined life is better than the intemperate?

C: You do not, Socrates. The man who has filled his vessels can no longer find any pleasure, but this is what I just now described as living the life of a stone. Once the vessels are filled, there is neither pleasure nor pain any more. But a life of pleasure demands the largest possible influx.

S: Then if there is a big influx, must there not also be a great outflow, and must not the holes for the outflow be large?

C: Certainly.

S: It is the life of a plover you mean, not that of a corpse or a stone. And now tell me. You are thinking of some such thing as being hungry and, when hungry, eating?

C: I am.

S: And being thirsty and, when thirsty, drinking?

C: Yes, and experiencing all the other appetites and being able to satisfy them and living happily in the enjoyment of them.

S: Good, my worthy friend, just continue as you began, and mind you do not falter through shame. And I too, it seems, must throw all shame aside. First of all then, tell me whether one who suffers from the itch and longs to scratch himself, if he can scratch himself to his heart’s content and continue scratching all his life, can be said to live happily.

C: How absurd you are, Socrates, a regular mob orator!

S: That, Callicles, is why I frightened Polus and Gorgias and put them to shame, but you surely will not be dismayed or abashed, for you have courage. Only give me your answer.

C: Well then, I say that even one who scratches himself would live pleasantly.

S: And if pleasantly, happily?
C: Certainly.
S: If it was only his head that he wanted to scratch—or can I push the question further? Think what you will answer, Callicles, if anyone should ask all the questions that naturally follow. And as a climax of all such cases, the life of a catamite—is not that shocking and shameful and miserable? Will you dare to say that such people are happy, if they have what they desire in abundance?
C: Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to drag our discussion into such topics?
S: Is it I who do this, my noble friend, or the man who says so unequivocally that pleasure, whatever its nature, is the key to happiness, and does not distinguish between pleasures good and evil? But enlighten me further as to whether you say that the pleasant and the good are identical, or that there are some pleasures which are not good.
C: To avoid inconsistency if I say they are different, I assert that they are the same....
S: Tell me, do you not think that those who fare well experience the opposite of those who fare ill?
C: I do.
S: Then if these things are opposites, the same must hold true of them as of health and sickness. A man cannot be both in health and sick at the same time, nor be rid of both conditions at the same time.
C: How do you mean?
S: Take, for example, any part of the body separately and consider it. A man perhaps has trouble with his eyes, which is called ophthalmia.
C: Of course.
S: Then his eyes are not at the same time sound.
C: By no means.
S: And what of when he is rid of ophthalmia? Does he then get rid of the health of his eyes, and is he finally quit of both conditions?
C: Certainly not.
S: For that would be miraculous and irrational, would it not?
C: Very much so.
S: But, I suppose, he acquires and gets rid of each in turn.
C: I agree.
S: And is it not the same with strength and weakness?
C: Yes.
S: And swiftness and slowness?
C: Certainly.
S: And good things and happiness, and their opposites, evils and wretchedness—does he possess and get rid of each of these in turn?
C: Assuredly, I think.
S: Then if we discover certain things which a man possesses and gets rid of simultaneously, it is obvious that these cannot be the good and the evil. Do we agree on this? Do not answer until you have considered it carefully.
C: I am in the most complete possible accord.
S: Back then to our previous admissions. Did you say hunger was pleasant or painful? Actual hunger, I mean.
C: Painful, but to satisfy hunger by eating is pleasant.
S: I understand. But hunger itself at least is painful, is it not?
C: I agree.
S: And thirst too?
C: Most certainly.
S: Am I to ask any further then, or do you admit that every deficiency and desire is painful?
C: I admit it; you need not ask.
S: Very well then, but to drink when thirsty you say is pleasant?
C: I do.
S: Now in this statement the word ‘thirsty’ implies pain, I presume.
C: Yes.
S: And drinking is a satisfaction of the deficiency and a pleasure?
C: Yes.
S: Then you say that in drinking there is pleasure?
C: Certainly.
S: When one is thirsty?
C: I agree.
S: That is, when in pain?
C: Yes.
S: Then do you realize the result—that you say a man enjoys pleasure simultaneously with pain, when you say that he drinks when thirsty? Does not this happen at the same time and the same place, whether in body or soul? For I fancy it makes no difference. Is this so or not?
C: It is.
S: Yes, but you say also that when one is faring well it is impossible for him at the same time to fare ill.
C: I do.
S: But you have agreed it is possible to experience pleasure at the same time as pain.
C: Apparently.
S: Then pleasure is not the same as faring well, nor pain as faring ill, and so the pleasant is different from the good.
C: I do not understand what your quibbles mean, Socrates.
S: You understand, Callicles, but you are playing coy. But push on a little further, that you may realize how cunning you are, you who admonish me. Does not each one of us cease at the same time from thirsting and from his pleasure in drinking?
C: I do not know what you mean.
S: Do not behave so, Callicles, but answer for our sakes too, that the arguments may be concluded.
C: But Socrates is always the same, Gorgias. He asks these trivial and useless questions and then refutes.
S: What difference does that make to you? In any case you do not have to pay the price, Callicles, but suffer Socrates to cross-examine you as he will.
C: Well then, ask these petty little questions, since Gorgias so wishes.
S: You are lucky, Callicles, in having been initiated in the Great Mysteries before the Little; I did not think it was permitted. Answer then from where you left off, whether thirst and the pleasure of drinking do not cease for each of us at the same time.
C: I agree.
S: And does not one cease from hunger and other desires, and from pleasures at the same time?
C: That is so.
S: Does he not then cease from pains and pleasures at the same time?
C: Yes.
S: Yes, but he does not cease from experiencing the good and the ill simultaneously, as you yourself agreed. Do you not agree now?
C: I do. What of it?
S: Only this, that the good is not the same as the pleasant, my friend, nor the evil as the painful. For we cease from the one pair at the same time, but not from the other, because they are distinct. How then could the pleasant be the same as the good, or the painful as the evil? Let us look at it in a different way, if you like, for I think that even here you do not agree. But just consider. Do you not call good people by that name because of the presence in them of things good, just as you call beautiful those in whom beauty is present?
This is an excerpt from one of the classics of Western philosophy. In it, Aristotle provides a “rough outline” of the good.

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 (e.g. 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 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 any 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 one, the other in the sense of possessing one 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 ‘a so-and-so’ and ‘a good so-and-so’ have a function which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre-player 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.

Let this serve as an outline of the good; for we must presumably first sketch it roughly, and then later fill in the details.

---

**SELECTION 10.3**

*Epicurus to Menoeceus*

---

[Epicurus, like Callicles in the preceding selection, advocates living a life devoted to acquiring pleasure. But when you read this selection, you will see that Epicurus’s concept of pleasure is much more sophisticated than Callicles’.

The things which I [unceasingly] commend to you, these do and practice, considering them to be the first principles of the good life. . . .

Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not

---

repose of the body, and others for very life. The right understanding of these facts enables us to refer all choices and avoidance to the health of the body and the soul’s freedom from disturbance, since this is the aim of the life of blessedness. For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely, to avoid pain and fear. And when this is once secured for us, all the tempest of the soul is dispersed, since the living creature has not to wander as though in search of something that is missing, and to look for some other thing by which he can fulfill the good of the soul and the good of the body. For it is then that we have need of pleasure, when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure; but when we do not feel pain, we no longer need pleasure. And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accurs to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgement on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.

And again independence of desire we think a great good—not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips. To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune.

When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensualness, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind. For it is not continuous drinkings and revellings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.

Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy: for from prudence are sprung all the other virtues; and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honourably and justly, not, again, to live a life of prudence, honour and justice without living pleasantly. For the virtues are by nature bound up with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them. For indeed who, think you, is a better man than he who holds reverent opinions concerning the gods, and is at all times free from fear of death, and has reasoned out the end ordained by nature?
[Epictetus, like Epicurus and Callicles, advocates a life of pleasure. Epictetus advises us to get straight on what things are under our control and what things aren’t. What happens isn’t under our control, but our attitudes are. Therefore, the key to happiness is, when something bad happens, to take a stoical attitude.]

1. Some things are under our control, while others are not under our control. Under our control are conception, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, office, and in a word, everything that is not our own doing. Furthermore, things under our control are by nature free, unhindered, and unimpeded; while the things not under our control are weak, servile, subject to hindrance, and not our own. Remember, therefore, that if what is naturally slavish you think to be free, and what is not your own to be your own, you will be hampered, will grieve, will be in turmoil, and will blame both gods and men; while if you think only what is your own to be your own, and what is not your own to be, as it really is, not your own, then no one will ever be able to exert compulsion upon you, no one will hinder you, you will have no personal enemy, no one will harm you, for neither is there any harm that can touch you. . . .

Make it, therefore, your study at the very outset to say to every harsh external impression, “You are an external impression and not at all what you appear to be.” After that examine it and test it by these rules which you have, the first and most important of which is this: Whether the impression has to do with the things which are under our control, or with those which are not under our control; and, if it has to do with some one of the things not under our control, have ready to hand the answer, “It is nothing to me.”

2. Remember that the promise of desire is the attainment of what you desire, that of aversion is not to fall into what is avoided, and that he who fails in his desire is unfortunate, while he who falls into what he would avoid experiences misfortune. If, then, you avoid only what is unnatural among those things which are under your control, you will fall into none of the things which you avoid; but if you try to avoid disease, or death, or poverty, you will experience misfortune. Withdraw, therefore, your aversion from all the matters that are not under our control, and transfer it to what is unnatural among those which are under our control. But for the time being remove utterly your desire; for if you desire some one of the things that are not under our control you are bound to be unfortunate; and, at the same time, not one of the things that are under our control, which it would be excellent for you to desire, is within your grasp. But employ only choice and refusal, and these too but lightly, and with reservations, and without straining. . . .

5. It is not the things themselves that disturb men, but their judgments about these things. For example, death is nothing dreadful, or else Socrates too would have thought so, but the judgment that death is dreadful, this is the dreadful thing. When, therefore, we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never blame anyone but ourselves, that means, our own judgments. It is the part of an uneducated person to blame others where he himself fares ill; to blame himself is the part of one whose education has begun; to blame neither another nor his own self is the part of one whose education is already complete. . . .

8. Do not seek to have everything that happens happen as you wish, but wish for everything to
happen as it actually does happen, and your life will be serene. . . .

11. Never say about anything, “I have lost it,” but only “I have given it back.” Is your child dead? It has been given back. Is your wife dead? She has been given back. “I have had my farm taken away.” Very well, this too has been given back. “Yet it was a rascal who took it away.” But what concern is it of yours by whose instrumentality the Giver called for its return? So long as He gives it to you, take care of it as of a thing that is not your own, as travellers treat their inn. . . .

15. Remember that you ought to behave in life as you would at a banquet. As something is being passed around it comes to you; stretch out your hand and take a portion of it politely. It passes on; do not detain it. Or it has not come to you yet; do not project your desire to meet it, but wait until it comes in front of you. So act toward children, so toward a wife, so toward office, so toward wealth; and then some day you will be worthy of the banquets of the gods. But if you do not take these things even when they are set before you, but despise them, then you will not only share the banquet of the gods, but share also their rule. For it was by so doing that Diogenes and Heraclitus, and men like them, were deservedly divine and deservedly so called.

16. When you see someone weeping in sorrow, either because a child has gone on a journey, or because he has lost his property, beware that you be not carried away by the impression that the man is in the midst of external ills, but straightway keep before you this thought: “It is not what has happened that distresses this man (for it does not distress another), but his judgment about it.” Do not, however, hesitate to sympathize with him so far as words go, and, if occasion offers, even to groan with him; but be careful not to groan also in the centre of your being.

17. Remember that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the Playwright; if He wishes the play to be short, it is short; if long, it is long; if He wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to act even this role adroitly; and so if your role be that of a cripple, an official, or a layman. For this is your business, to play admirably the role assigned you; but the selection of that role is Another’s. . . .

20. Bear in mind that it is not the man who reviles or strikes you that insults you, but it is your judgment that these men are insulting you. Therefore, when someone irritates you, be assured that it is your own opinion which has irritated you. And so make it your first endeavour not to be carried away by the external impression; for if once you gain time and delay, you will more easily become master of yourself.

21. Keep before your eyes by day death and exile, and everything that seems terrible, but most of all death; and then you will never have any abject thought, nor will you yearn for anything beyond measure. . . .

33. Lay down for yourself, at the outset, a certain stamp and type of character for yourself, which you are to maintain whether you are by yourself or are meeting with people. And be silent for the most part, or else make only the most necessary remarks, and express these in few words. But rarely, and when occasion requires you to talk, talk indeed, but about no ordinary topics. Do not talk about gladiators, or horse-races, or athletes, or things to eat or drink—topics that arise on all occasions; but above all, do not talk about people, either blaming, or praising, or comparing them. If, then, you can, by your own conversation bring over that of your companions to what is seemly. But if you happen to be left alone in the presence of aliens, keep silence.

Do not laugh much, nor at many things, nor boisterously.

Refuse, if you can, to take an oath at all, but if that is impossible, refuse as far as circumstances allow. . . .

In things that pertain to the body take only as much as your bare need requires, I mean such things as food, drink, clothing, shelter, and household slaves; but cut down everything which is for outward show or luxury.

In your sex-life preserve purity, as far as you can, before marriage, and if you indulge, take only those privileges which are lawful. However, do not make yourself offensive, or censorious, to those who do indulge, and do not make frequent mention of the fact that you do not yourself indulge.

If someone brings you word that So-and-so is speaking ill of you, do not defend yourself against
what has been said; but answer: “Yes, indeed, for he did not know the rest of the faults that attach to me; if he had, these would not have been the only ones he mentioned.”

41. It is a mark of an ungifted man to spend a great deal of time in what concerns his body, as in much exercise, much eating, much drinking, much evacuating of the bowels, much copulating. But these things are to be done in passing; and let your whole attention be devoted to the mind.

44. The following statements constitute a non-sequitur: “I am richer than you are, therefore I am superior to you”; or, “I am more eloquent than you are, therefore I am superior to you.” But the following conclusions are better: “I am richer than you are, therefore my property is superior to yours”; or “I am more eloquent than you are, therefore my elocution is superior to yours.” But you are neither property nor elocution.

46. On no occasion call yourself a philosopher, and do not, for the most part, talk among laymen about your philosophic principles, but do what follows from your own principles.

---

**SELECTION 10.5**

**Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals**

*Immanuel Kant*

*In the first paragraph Kant states the “categorical imperative,” the supreme principle of morality. He then illustrates the principle by examining four concrete and specific examples.*

There is, therefore, only one categorical imperative. It is: Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Now if all imperatives of duty can be derived from this one imperative as a principle, we can at least show what we understand by the concept of duty and what it means, even though it remains undecided whether that which is called duty is an empty concept or not.

The universality of law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form), i.e., the existence of things so far as it is determined by universal laws. [By analogy], then, the universal imperative of duty can be expressed as follows: Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.

We shall now enumerate some duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and to others and into perfect and imperfect duties.

1. A man who is reduced to despair by a series of evils feels a weariness with life but is still in possession of his reason sufficiently to ask whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he asks whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim, however, is: For love of myself, I make it my principle to shorten my life when by a longer duration it threatens more evil than satisfaction. But it is questionable whether this principle of self-love stands as only an arbitrary one (chosen in order to arrange my examples). For the rest, by a perfect duty I here understand a duty which permits no exception in the interest of inclination; thus I have not merely outer but also inner perfect duties. This runs contrary to the usage adopted in the schools, but I am not disposed to defend it here because it is all one to my purpose whether this is conceded or not.
could become a universal law of nature. One immediately sees a contradiction in a system of nature whose law would be to destroy life by the feeling whose special office is to impel the improvement of life. In this case it would not exist as nature; hence that maxim cannot obtain as a law of nature, and thus it wholly contradicts the supreme principle of all duty.

2. Another man finds himself forced by need to borrow money. He well knows that he will not be able to repay it, but he also sees that nothing will be loaned him if he does not firmly promise to repay it at a certain time. He desires to make such a promise, but he has enough conscience to ask himself whether it is not improper and opposed to duty to relieve his distress in such a way. Now, assuming he does decide to do so, the maxim of his action would be as follows: When I believe myself to be in need of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know I shall never do so. Now this principle of self-love or of his own benefit may very well be compatible with his whole future welfare, but the question is whether it is right. He changes the pretension of self-love into a universal law and then puts the question: How would it be if my maxim became a universal law? He immediately sees that it could never hold as a universal law of nature and be consistent with itself; rather, it must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law which says that anyone who believes himself to be in need could promise what he pleased with the intention of not fulfilling it would make the promise itself and the end to be accomplished by it impossible; no one would believe what was promised to him but would only laugh at any such assertion as vain pretense.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which could, by means of some cultivation, make him in many respects a useful . . . man. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers indulgence in pleasure to troubling himself with broadening and improving his fortunate natural gifts. Now, however, let him ask whether his maxim of neglecting his gifts, besides agreeing with his propensity to idle amusement, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees that a system of nature could indeed exist in accordance with such a law, even though man (like the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands) should let his talents rust and resolve to devote his life merely to idleness, indulgence, and propagation—in a word, to pleasure. But he cannot possibly will that this should become a universal law of nature or that it should be implanted in us by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that all his faculties should be developed, inasmuch as they are given to him for all sorts of possible purposes.

4. A fourth man, for whom things are going well, sees that others (whom he could help) have to struggle with great hardships, and he asks, “What concern of mine is it? Let each one be as happy as heaven wills, or as he can make himself; I will not take anything from him or even envy him; but to his welfare or to his assistance in time of need I have no desire to contribute.” If such a way of thinking were a universal law of nature, certainly the human race could exist, and without doubt even better than in a state where everyone talks of sympathy and good will, or even exerts himself occasionally to practice them while, on the other hand, he cheats when he can and betrays or otherwise violates the rights of man. Now although it is possible that a universal law of nature according to that maxim could exist, it is nevertheless impossible to will that such a principle should hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would conflict with itself, since instances can often arise in which he would need the love and sympathy of others, and in which he would have robbed himself, by such a law of nature springing from his own will, of all hope of the aid he desires.

The foregoing are a few of the many actual duties, or at least of duties we hold to be actual, whose derivation from the one stated principle is clear. We must be able to will that . . . a maxim of our action become a universal law; this is the canon of the moral estimation of our action generally. Some actions are of such a nature that their maxim cannot even be thought as a universal law of nature without contradiction, far from it being possible that one could will that it should be such. In others this internal impossibility is not found, though it is still impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself. We easily see that the former maxim conflicts with the stricter or narrower (imprescriptible) duty, the latter with broader (meritorious) duty. Thus all duties, so far as the kind of obligation (not the object of their action) is concerned, have been completely exhibited by these examples in their dependence on the one principle.
What Utilitarianism Is

. . . The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals “utility” or the “greatest happiness principle” holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure, and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

Now such a theory of life excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and groveling, as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants.

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light, since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast’s pleasures do not satisfy a human being’s conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and, when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in their 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 pleasure 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 of who have experience of
both give a decided preference, irrespective of any
feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the
more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by
those who are competently acquainted with both,
placed so far above the other that they prefer it,
even though knowing it to be attended with a
greater amount of discontent, and would not resign
it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their
nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to
the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so
far outweighing quantity as to render it, in compar-
sion, of small amount.

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 in-
structed 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 re
sign 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 exis-
tence. We may give what explanation we please of
this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a
name which is given indiscriminately to some of
the most and to some of the least estimable feelings
of which mankind are capable; we may refer it to
the love of liberty and personal independence, an
appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most
effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love
of power or to the love of excitement, both of which
do really enter into and contribute to it; but its most
appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which
all human beings possess in one form or other, and
in some, though by no means in exact, proportion
to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a
part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong
that nothing which conflicts with it could be other-
wise 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 indis-
putable that the being whose capacities of enjoy-
ment 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 imper-
fections, 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 satis
ded; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool
satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a differ-
ent opinion, it is because they only know their own
side of the question. The other party to the com-
parison knows both sides.

It may be objected that many who are capable of
the higher pleasures occasionally, under the in-
fuence of temptation, postpone them to the lower.
But this is quite compatible with a full apprecia-
tion of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men
often, from infirmity of character, make their elec-
tion for the nearer good, though they know it to be
the less valuable; and this is no less when the choice
is between two bodily pleasures than when it is be-
 tween bodily and mental. They pursue sensual in-
dulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly
aware that health is the greater good. It may be fur
ther objected that many who begin with youthful
enthusiasm for everything noble, as they advance in
years, sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do
not believe that those who undergo this very com-
mon change voluntarily choose the lower descrip-
tion of pleasures in preference to the higher. I
believe that, before they devote themselves exclu-
sively to the one, they have already become inca-
pable of the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings
is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed,
not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of
sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it
speedily dies away if the occupations to which their
position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not the time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying. It may be questioned whether anyone who has remained equally susceptible to both classes of pleasures ever knowingly and calmly preferred the lower, though many, in all ages, have broken down in an ineffectual attempt to combine both.

From this verdict of the only competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final. And there needs to be the less hesitation to accept this judgment respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgment of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgment declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable in kind, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.

I have dwelt on this point as being a necessary part of a perfectly just conception of utility or happiness considered as the directive rule of human conduct. But it is by no means an indispensable condition to the acceptance of the utilitarian standard; for that standard is not the agent’s own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether; and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it. Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness of others, and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit. But the bare enunciation of such an absurdity as this last renders refutation superfluous.

According to the greatest happiness principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable—whether we are considering our own good or that of other people—is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality and the rule for measuring it against quantity being the preference felt by those who, in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison. This, being according to the utilitarian opinion the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality, which may accordingly be defined “the rules and precepts for human conduct,” by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation.

. . . The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice itself is a good. A sacrifice which does not increase or tend to increase the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted. The only self-renunciation which it applauds is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others, either of mankind collectively or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind.

I must again repeat what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent’s own happiness but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the
complete spirit of the ethics of utility. “To do as you would be done by,” and “to love your neighbor as yourself,” constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as, speaking practically, it may be called) the interest of every individual as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and, secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual as indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole, especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that of a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being’s sentient existence. If the impugners of the utilitarian morality represented it to their own minds in this its true character, I know not what recommendation possessed by any other morality they could possibly affirm to be wanting to it; what more beautiful or more exalted developments of human nature any other ethical system can be supposed to foster, or what springs of action, not accessible to the utilitarian, such systems rely on for giving effect to their mandates.

SELECTION 10.7

_Beyond Good and Evil_*

_Friedrich Nietzsche_

[This passage contains a succinct, orderly, and easy-to-read statement by Friedrich Nietzsche of his conception of morality and the two types of morality (master morality and slave morality).]

Every enhancement of the type “man” has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other. . . Let us admit to ourselves, without trying to be considerate, how every higher culture on earth so far has begun. Human beings whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey who were still in possession of unbroken strength of will and lust for power, hurled themselves upon weaker, more civilized, more peaceful races, perhaps traders or cattle raisers, or upon mellow old cultures whose last vitality was even then flaring up in splendid fireworks of spirit and corruption. In the beginning, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their predominance did not lie mainly in physical strength or in strength of the soul—they were more whole human beings (which also means, at every level, “more whole beasts”).

. . . The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy, however, is that it experiences itself _not_ as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their _meaning_ and highest justification—that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, _for its sake_, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments. Their fundamental faith simply has to be that society must _not_ exist for society’s sake but only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of _being_—comparable to those sun-seeking vines of Java—they called _Sipo Mataro_—that so long and so often enclasp an oak tree with their tendrils until eventually, high above it but

*From Beyond Good and Evil by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated by Walter Kaufmann, copyright © 1966 by Random House, Inc. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.*
supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and display their happiness.

Refraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation and placing one's will on a par with that of someone else—this may become, in a certain rough sense, good manners among individuals if the appropriate conditions are present (namely, if these men are actually similar in strength and value standards and belong together in one body). But as soon as this principle is extended, and possibly even accepted as the fundamental principle of society, it immediately proves to be what it really is—a will to the denial of life, a principle of disintegration and decay.

Here we must beware of superficiality and get to the bottom of the matter, resisting all sentimental weakness: life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation—but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages?

Even the body within which individuals treat each other as equals, as suggested before—and this happens in every healthy aristocracy—if it is a living and not a dying body, has to do to other bodies what the individuals within it refrain from doing to each other: it will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is living and because life simply is will to power. But there is no point on which the ordinary consciousness of Europeans resists instruction as on this: everywhere people are now raving, even under scientific disguises, about coming conditions of society in which the exploitative aspect will be removed—which sounds to me as if they promised to invent a way of life that would dispense with all organic functions. “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and ordinary consciousness of Europeans resists in-struction as on this: everywhere people are now raving, even under scientific disguises, about coming conditions of society in which the exploitative aspect will be removed—which sounds to me as if they promised to invent a way of life that would dispense with all organic functions. “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life. . .

Wandering through the many subtler and coarser moralities which have so far been prevalent on earth, or still are prevalent, I found that certain features recurred regularly together and were closely associated—until I finally discovered two basic types and one basic difference.

There are master morality and slave morality—I add immediately that in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other—even in the same human being, with a single soul. The moral discrimination of values has originated either among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight—or among the ruled, the slaves and dependents of every degree.

In the first case, when the ruling group determines what is “good,” the exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank. The noble human being separates from himself those in whom the opposite of such exalted, proud states finds expression: he despises them. It should be noted immediately that in this first type of morality the opposition of “good” and “bad” means approximately the same as “noble” and “contemptible.” (The opposition of “good” and “evil” has a different origin.) One feels contempt for the cowardly, the anxious, the petty, those intent on narrow utility; also for the suspicious with their unfree glances, those who humble themselves, the doglike people who allow themselves to be maltreated, the begging flatterers, above all the liars; it is part of the fundamental faith of all aristocrats that the common people lie. “We truthful ones”—thus the nobility of ancient Greece referred to itself.

It is obvious that moral designations were everywhere first applied to human beings and only later, derivatively, to actions. Therefore it is a gross mistake when historians of morality start from such questions as: why was the compassionate act praised? The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, “what is harmful to me is harmful in itself”; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating. Everything it knows as part of itself it honors: such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power. The noble human
being honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness. . . . Noble and courageous human beings who think that way are furthest removed from that morality which finds the distinction of morality precisely in pity, or in acting for others . . . faith in oneself, pride in oneself, a fundamental hostility and irony against “selflessness” belong just as definitely to noble morality as does a slight disdain and caution regarding compassionate feelings and a “warm heart.” . . .

A morality of the ruling group, however, is most alien and embarrassing to the present taste in the severity of its principle that one has duties only to one’s peers; that against beings of a lower rank, against everything alien, one may behave as one pleases or “as the heart desires,” and in any case “beyond good and evil.” . . .

It is different with the second type of morality, slave morality. Suppose the violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary, moralize: what will their moral valuations have in common? Probably, a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition. The slave’s eye is not favorable to the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and suspicious, subtly suspicious, of all the “good” that is honored there—he would like to persuade himself that even their happiness is not genuine. Conversely, those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored—for these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.

Here is the place for the origin of that famous opposition of “good” and “evil”: into evil one’s feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terribleness, subtlety, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According to slave morality, those who are “evil” thus inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely those who are “good” that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the “bad” are felt to be contemptible.

The opposition reaches its climax when, as a logical consequence of slave morality, a touch of disdain is associated also with the “good” of this morality—this may be slight and benevolent—because the good human being has to be undangerous in the slaves’ way of thinking: he is good-natured, easy to deceive, a little stupid perhaps, un bonhomme [a “good person”]. Wherever slave morality becomes preponderant, language tends to bring the words “good” and “stupid” closer together.

One last fundamental difference: the longing for freedom, the instinct for happiness and the subtleties of the feeling of freedom belong just as necessarily to slave morality and morals as art and enthusiastic reverence and devotion are the regular symptom of an aristocratic way of thinking and evaluating. . . .

A species comes to be, a type becomes fixed and strong, through the long fight with essentially constant unfavorable conditions. Conversely, we know from the experience of breeders that species accorded superabundant nourishment and quite generally extra protection and care soon tend most strongly toward variations of the type and become rich in marvels and monstrosities (including monstrous vices).

Now look for once at an aristocratic commonwealth—say, an ancient Greek polis, or Venice—as an arrangement, whether voluntary or involuntary, for breeding: human beings are together there who are dependent on themselves and want their species to prevail, most often because they have to prevail or run the terrible risk of being exterminated. Here that boon, that excess, and that protection which favor variations are lacking; the species needs itself as a species, as something that can prevail and make itself durable by virtue of its very hardness, uniformity, and simplicity of form, in a constant fight with its neighbors or with the oppressed who are rebellious or threaten rebellion. Manifold experience teaches them to which qualities above all they owe the fact that, despite all gods and men, they are still there, that they have always triumphed: these qualities they call virtues, these virtues alone they cultivate. They do this with hardness, indeed they want hardness; ever aristocratic morality is intolerant—in the education of youth, in their arrangements for women, in their marriage customs, in the relations of old and young, in their penal laws (which take into account deviants only)—they consider intolerance itself a virtue, calling it “justice.”

In this way a type with few but very strong traits, a species of severe, warlike, prudently taciturn men, closemouthed and closely linked (and as such
possessed of the subtlest feeling for the charms and nuances of association), is fixed beyond the changing generations; the continual fight against ever constant unfavorable conditions is, as mentioned previously, the cause that fixes and hardens a type.

Eventually, however, a day arrives when conditions become more fortunate and the tremendous tension decreases; perhaps there are no longer any enemies among one’s neighbors, and the means of life, even for the enjoyment of life, are superabundant. At one stroke the bond and constraint of the old discipline are torn: it no longer seems necessary, a condition of existence—if it persisted it would only be a form of luxury, an archaizing taste. Variation, whether as deviation (to something higher, subtler, rarer) or as degeneration and monstrosity, suddenly appears on the scene in the greatest abundance and magnificence; the individual dares to be individual and different.

At these turning points of history we behold beside one another, and often mutually involved and entangled, a splendid, manifold, jungelike growth and upward striving, a kind of tropical tempo in the competition to grow, and a tremendous ruin and self-ruination, as the savage egoisms that have turned, almost exploded, against one another wrestle “for sun and light” and can no longer derive any limit, restraint, or consideration from their previous morality. It was this morality itself that dammed up such enormous strength and bent the bow in such a threatening manner; now it is “outlived.” The dangerous and uncanny point has been reached where the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life transcends and lives beyond the old morality; the “individual” appears, obliged to give himself laws and to develop his own arts and wiles for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption.

All sorts of new what-fors and wherewithals; no shared formulas any longer; misunderstanding allied with disrespect; decay, corruption, and the highest desires gruesomely entangled; the genius of the race overflowing from all cornucopias of good and bad; a calamitous simultaneity of spring and fall, full of new charms and veils that characterize young, still unexhausted, still unwearied corruption. Again danger is there, the mother of morals, great danger, this time transposed into the individual, into the neighbor and friend, into the alley [sic], into one’s own child, into one’s own heart, into the most personal and secret recesses of wish and will: what may the moral philosophers emerging in this age have to preach now?

These acute observers and loiterers discover that the end is approaching fast, that everything around them is corrupted and corrupts, that nothing will stand the day after tomorrow, except one type of man, the incurably mediocre. The mediocre alone have a chance of continuing their type and propagating—they are the men of the future, the only survivors: “Be like them! Become mediocre!” is now the only morality that still makes sense, that still gets a hearing.

But this morality of mediocrity is hard to preach: after all, it may never admit what it is and what it wants. It must speak of measure and dignity and duty and neighbor love—it will find it difficult to conceal its irony.

---

**CHECKLIST**

To help you review, here is a checklist of the key philosophers and terms and concepts of this chapter. The brief descriptive sentences summarize the philosophers’ leading ideas. Keep in mind that some of these summary statements are oversimplifications of complex positions.

**Philosophers**

- **Peter Abelard** set forth one of medieval philosophy’s most careful analyses of the morality of intent. 291

- **Aesara of Lucania** was a Pythagorean philosopher from southern Italy who held that, by introspecting about the nature and structure of the human soul, we can identify a standard of personal and public morality. 280

- **St. Thomas Aquinas** reconciled Aristotelian ethical naturalism with Christianity. 293

- **Aristotle** was an ethical naturalist who held that moral judgments are judgments of fact about the natural world. He said that happiness is our highest good. 281
• **St. Augustine** used Platonic concepts to solve “the problem of evil,” held moral evil to be misdirected love, and identified God as the supreme moral authority and source of all goodness. 287

• **Jeremy Bentham**, a utilitarian, held that the rightness of an action is identical with the pleasure it produces as its consequence and said that pleasure can be evaluated quantitatively. 301

• **Diogenes** was the most famous Cynic, who taught by shocking example that the wise person reduces all wants and avoids all comforts. 286

• **Epictetus**, a leading Stoic, held that one’s highest objective is to find a serene or untroubled life through acceptance of the rational natural order of things. 285

• **Epicurus**, an ethical egoist, held that one’s highest objective is to lead the pleasant life through moderate living. 284

• **Heloise** was a medieval French philosopher who held that the morality or immorality of an action is determined by the intention with which it is done. 291

• **St. Hildegard of Bingen** was a medieval German mystic philosopher who held that the moral powers of the soul come from its three faculties: understanding, insight, and execution. 289

• **Thomas Hobbes** held that “good” and “evil” denote what a person desires or hates; he maintained that our natural end is preservation of self. 294

• **David Hume** held that moral principles are neither divine edicts nor discoverable by reason and that value judgments are based on emotion. He said that the act that pleases our moral sensibilities is one that reflects the agent’s benevolent character. 296

• **Immanuel Kant** held that the supreme prescription of morality is to act always in such a way that you could rationally will the principle on which you act to be a universal law. He believed that what you should do, you should do, not because it promotes some end but simply because it is right. 298

• **John Stuart Mill**, a utilitarian, held that the rightness of an action is identical with the happiness that it produces as its consequence and said that pleasure—a part of happiness—must be measured in terms of quality as well as quantity. 301

• **Friedrich Nietzsche** distinguished between slave morality (the morality of the masses) and master morality (the morality of the nobleman). The former represents the denial of life; the latter represents the will-to-power. 305

• **Plato** also sought the essences of moral virtues, identifying these with the unchanging Forms, the highest of which he held to be the Form of the Good, the ultimate source of all value and reality. 275

• **Socrates** sought to discover the essences of moral virtues and championed the use of reason in moral deliberation. 275

• **Sophists** were professional teachers of fifth-century B.C.E. Greece whose attack on traditional moral values marks the beginnings of ethical philosophy. 275

• **Zeno** was the founder of Stoicism. 284

**Key Terms and Concepts**

- act utilitarianism 305
- categorical imperative 300
- consequentialism 274
- cultural relativism 272
- Cynicism 286
- Cyrenaicism 279
- deontological ethics 274
- descriptive egoism 272
- descriptive relativism 272
- divine law 293
- divine-command ethics 274
- egoistic ethical hedonism 274
- egoism 272
- Epicureanism 284
- ethical hedonism 273
- ethical naturalism 281
- ethical skepticism 271
- ethics 270
- Form 275
- hedonism 273
- hypothetical imperative 300
- individual relativism 272
- instrumental versus intrinsic ends 282
- mean between extremes 282
- moral imperative 300
- morality of intent 291
- natural law 285
- objective reality 280
- paradox of hedonism 306
- prescriptive egoism 272
- psychological hedonism 273
- relativism 274
- rule utilitarianism 305
- Stoicism 284
- subjectivism 272
- universalistic ethical hedonism 274
- virtue ethics 274
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Is there some single thing that all morally good actions have in common? Defend your view.
2. “What is right is what you yourself believe is right.” Critically evaluate this statement.
3. What is the connection between virtue and happiness in the philosophy of Plato?
4. Explain how Plato’s theory may be regarded as “complete.”
5. What is the connection among the structure of the soul, personal morality, and justice, according to Aesara of Lucania?
6. In what does happiness consist, according to Aristotle? When can we be said to be virtuous?
7. What is the connection between habit and moral character, for Aristotle?
8. Compare and contrast the ethical philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism. Which do you think is the superior philosophy, and why?
9. Is it a sound policy to reduce all wants to a minimum and to achieve utter self-reliance by avoiding all the comforts of society?
10. Can you control your attitude if you cannot control your fate?
11. What is Hildegard’s concept of the structure and faculties of the soul? How does it compare to Aesara of Lucania’s views on the soul?
12. Explain Heloise’s view of the morality of intent and her view of the nature of disinterested love.
13. Explain Augustine’s solution to the problem of evil, and determine whether it is sound.
14. Explain and evaluate Aquinas’s reasons for believing that ultimate human happiness does not consist in wealth, worldly power, or anything in this life.
15. Do we seek personal survival above all other things?
17. Explain and critically evaluate prescriptive egoism.
18. Does it make sense for a (prescriptive) egoist to advocate egoism?
19. Is altruism really disguised egoism?
20. Can reasoning disclose the moral wrongfulness of an act of murder?
21. Is Hume correct in saying that the type of act we deem morally praiseworthy is one done out of concern for others?
22. Is it abnormal not to have sympathy for others? Are selfish people really admired in today’s society?
23. Is it true that moral principles hold without exception? Explain.
24. Is it true that moral principles cannot be revealed through scientific investigation?
25. Suppose you stole something that did not belong to you. Could you rationally will the principle on which you acted to be a universal law? Explain.
26. Explain the difference between a hypothetical imperative and a categorical imperative.
27. Which is it: Does the nature of an act or its consequences determine whether it is good, or is it the intent with which the act has been undertaken? Or is it something else altogether?
28. Kant held that there is no moral worth in helping others out of sympathy for them. What reasons are there for holding this view? Are they sound?
29. What does it mean to say that rational beings should be treated as ends and not as means? Give an example of treating another as a means.
30. Is your own happiness more important morally than that of others? (“It is to me” does not count as an answer.)
31. Was Bentham correct in saying that ought, right, good, and the like have meaning only when defined in terms of pleasure?
32. Explain the difference between psychological hedonism and ethical hedonism.
33. Is it true that the ultimate object of a person’s desire is always pleasure? Explain.
34. Was Mill correct in saying that some pleasures are inherently better than others?
35. How does Mill propose to establish which of two pleasures is qualitatively better? Can you think of a better way of establishing this?
36. Leslie, who is in the Peace Corps, volunteers to aid starving Ethiopians. She travels to Ethiopia and, risking her own health and safety, works herself nearly to exhaustion for two years, caring for as many people as she can. Meanwhile, her father, Harold, dashes off a huge check for the Ethiopian relief fund. In fact, his check helps more people than Leslie’s actions do. But, morally speaking, is Harold more praiseworthy than Leslie? What would Bentham say? Mill? You?

37. Explain the paradox of hedonism.

38. What does Nietzsche mean when he says life is the will to power?

39. “There cannot be moral values if there is no God.” Critically evaluate this assertion.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS


Robert Crisp and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Some of the most significant work done on virtue ethics over the past forty years.


Steven Estes, *History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001). A history of the development of sport is complemented by an exploration of up-to-date issues such as the impact of politics and technology on sport.


E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1961). This, as we said before, is what you need to acquaint yourself firsthand with Plato’s dialogues. Be sure to read *The Republic*. The other dialogues especially relevant to ethics are *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Philebus*.

W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). There are several reliable books on Aristotle’s ethics. This is one of the most popular.


R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are especially relevant to our discussion here.


Louis P. Pojman, ed., *The Moral Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Key moral issues are examined by both figures from the literary and philosophical worlds.


University Press, 2000). Lectures on the history of moral philosophy by one of the leading philosophers of our times.


Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (Boston: Beacon, 1960) and *The Methods of Ethics* (New York: Dover, 1974). These are classic works in ethics. Many standard ethical concepts, principles, and distinctions originated with Sidgwick, and his treatment of utilitarianism is complete and penetrating.
