Philosophy for the Masses: Ethics

By David Bruce

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Preface

This book consists of a number of philosophical arguments that I find interesting and that I think that some other people may find interesting.

May you be struck by philosophical lightning.

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My series of books on interesting philosophical arguments mainly consist of notes in essay form that I have made on the various books that I have used as textbooks in the philosophy courses that I have taught at Ohio University. These textbooks include various editions of the following:

• *Exploring Ethics*, by Donald M. Borchert and David Stewart

• *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, by David Stewart

• *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, by David Stewart and H. Gene Blocker

• *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, by Alburey Castell, Donald M. Borchert, and Arthur Zucker

I hope that other people find these notes in essay form useful.

Chapter 1: Challenges to Ethics

Chapter 1.1: Brand Blanshard (1892-1987): A Determinist

Brand Blanshard is a determinist. Of the two kinds of determinists, he is a soft determinist. According to the determinists, everything is caused, with no exceptions. Hard determinists will not allow us to speak of free will; however, soft determinists take some of the causes working on us and call them free will.

Key Definitions

At the beginning of his essay ("The Case for Determinism," in *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, edited by Sidney Hook), Blanshard does what many good philosophers do: He defines his terms.

The simple definition of determinism is "All things are caused," while a precise definition of determinism states, "Every event A is so connected with a later event B, that given A, B must occur."

On the other hand, the precise definition of indeterminism is "There is some event B that is not so connected with any previous event A that, given A, it must occur."

In simpler words, determinism means "If A, then B," while indeterminism means "If A, then not necessarily B."

Three Objections to Determinism

Blanshard then does what many good philosophers do: He outlines the objections to his position and replies to them. Indeterminists frequently make three objections to determinism. Blanshard states each objection, then criticizes it.

The First Objection: We have stubborn feelings of freedom.

There is no doubt that human beings have stubborn feelings of freedom. When we have an important decision, often we wrestle with it. We don't ask, What are my heredity and environment determining that I must do? Instead, we ask, What ought I to do? Very often, we must make important decisions, and we believe that what we decide is up to us, not up to our heredity and environment.

Blanshard believes that if we examine our decisions later, we will see why we were caused to make that particular decision. For example, my students often must decide which university they will attend. This is an important decision, and making the decision is frequently agonizing. However, Blanshard says that if these students examine their decision later, they will see why they were caused to make whatever decision they made. For example, let's say that one student decides to attend a university close to home. That student may later examine that decision and discover that he is not yet sufficiently independent of his parents to move far from home. He still needs the security of being able to come home on the weekends.

I am not convinced by Blanshard's reasoning. What about our less important decisions? Determinism states that every event is caused, but suppose that I need to decide whether to walk down this street or another street to reach a destination. Both streets are about the same, and both streets will get me to my destination, so what causes me to choose to walk on this street rather than another street?

The Second Objection: Science has embraced indeterminism.

One interpretation of quantum physics states that quantum particles behave randomly; that is, they are not caused to

act as they do. Since determinism claims that all events are caused, all the indeterminists need in order to refute determinism is one uncaused event. This the indeterminists claim to have discovered with quantum physics.

Blanshard's reply to this criticism is that the scientific debate is still on. Scientists such as Einstein believe that "God does not play dice with the universe" — that is, God has made the universe deterministic and orderly. Other scientists disagree. When scientists have not made up their mind, philosophers should not encroach on their territory.

In addition, Blanshard says, even if indeterminism exists on the micro-level (that is, the quantum level), this does not necessarily mean that indeterminism exists on the macro-level (that is, on the level of human beings). In other words, quantum particles could behave randomly, yet human beings could still be determined.

In my opinion, if quantum particles do indeed behave randomly, then determinism (which says that everything is caused) has been refuted. However, we would still need to investigate whether human beings are capable of free will.

The Third Objection: Determinism makes a mess of morality.

The third objection is that determinism makes a mess of morality. After all, one of the assumptions behind morality is that we are free to chose between acts and that we ought to choose to do the act that is good. But if we have no choice in what we do, we are incapable of acting morally.

By the way, this is an assumption of our legal system. If we are not free to choose our actions (say because of insanity), then we will be found not guilty even if we did in fact perform a criminal act.

Blanshard says that this objection has already been answered by other philosophers (but he doesn't tell us *which* philosophers). He also says that the real objection is to a view of Humankind as a kind of mechanical puppet, blindly following the forces acting on him. Blanshard says that he also objects to this view of Humankind.

In this case, Blanshard has sidestepped the question, and indeed has substituted a different question. This is not fair on Blanshard's part.

Causality in the Psychological Domain

Blanshard states that more than one level of causality is working on human beings.

Law of Association

In the first level, we have a law of association. For example, we step on a tack and we feel pain. We go without food for a long time and we feel hungry. This first level is very basic and is mechanistic.

Causality of the Highest Level

But things are different at the highest level, where we are under constraint by an ideal. This ideal can be aesthetic, logical, or moral. When we surrender ourselves to that aesthetic, logical, or moral ideal, then we are shaped by that ideal. We are determined, but Blanshard says that being determined by an ideal is what we call "freedom." (As a soft determinist, Blanshard allows us to talk about freedom, but that "freedom" has been determined.)

When we follow an ideal, we are not free to do anything we want. If someone follows an aesthetic ideal — for example, an artist attempts to paint a masterpiece — the artist is not free to slap paint any which way on the canvas. Instead, the artist may add a daub of yellow to one corner of the

painting because it is needed to create a harmony in the painting.

Similarly, if someone follows a logical ideal — for example, a logician attempts to create a new logic system — that logician is not free to create any logic he wants. Instead, he will create his assumptions, but then he must follow the rules he has created and apply them systematically.

Again, if someone follows a moral ideal — for example, a utilitarian tries to bring about the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people — that person is not free to do whatever she wants, Instead, she has a rule she must follow; she must do what will bring about the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. For example, this may lead her to become active in civil rights.

I think we can criticize Blanshard on his view of causality of the highest level. Blanshard believes constraint by an ideal is determined; however, I don't believe that it fits the deterministic model of "If A, then B."

Instead, I believe that the ideal is a future possibility that we can choose or not choose to attempt to make actual. The painter may choose to try to make his conception of a masterpiece an actual work of art; the logician may choose to try to create a new logic; the utilitarian may choose to try to create a society in which all are happy. However, in each case, the person may choose not to attempt to do these things.

To me, constraint by an ideal fits the indeterministic model of "If A, then not necessarily B." Yes, I do have an idea of a masterpiece, but it is up to me whether I try to actually create a masterpiece. Yes, I do have an idea of a new logic, but it is up to me whether I try to actually create a new

logic. Yes, I do have an idea of a happy society, but it is up to me whether I try to actually create a happy society.

By the way, according to many religions, human beings have free will. According to the Babylonian Niddah 16b, whenever a baby is to be conceived, the Lailah (angel in charge of contraception) takes the drop of semen that will result in the conception and asks God, "Sovereign of the Universe, what is going to be the fate of this drop? Will it develop into a robust or into a weak person? An intelligent or a stupid person? A wealthy or a poor person?" The Lailah asks all these questions, but it does not ask, "Will it develop into a righteous or a wicked person?" The answer to that question lies in the decisions to be freely made by the human being that is the result of the conception. (Source: Jakob J. Petuchowski, translator and editor, *Our Masters Taught* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 19.)

Note: The quotations by Brand Blanshard that appear in this essay are from his essay "The Case for Determinism," which appears in *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science* (New York: New York University Press, 1958), edited by Sidney Hook.

Chapter 1.2: C.A. Campbell (1897-1974): An Indeterminist

C.A. Campbell is an indeterminist; that is, he believes that some acts are free. True, he believes that we can do a free act only in the situation of moral temptation, but it is still possible that we do a free act.

Campbell begins by discussing the two conditions that are necessary for a free act: 1) the act must be self-caused, self-determined; that is, the agent must be the sole cause of the act, and 2) an alternative action must have been really possible for the agent. When these two conditions are met, says Campbell, then you have a free act.

The Situation of Moral Temptation

In the situation of moral temptation, says Campbell, a free act is possible. By the situation of moral temptation, Campbell means that we are faced with two choices. One choice (Choice A) is what is morally right, what the call of duty says we ought to do. The second choice (Choice B) is what is wrong, incompatible with Choice A, but is what our formed character (the result largely of our heredity and environment) leads us to greatly desire. Because our formed character leads us to greatly desire Choice B and ignore the faint call of duty that says we ought to make Choice A, we have the possibility of a free act if through an act of the will, we choose to do Choice A — the morally correct act.

Here's an example — thanks to Dr. Donald Borchert, who used it during his lectures in Phil 130 (Ethics) at Ohio University. G.I. Bob is in Paris, where he meets a beautiful French woman who wants to have an affair with him. The French woman even asks G.I. Bob to her apartment. When they arrive, she goes into her bedroom to put on "something more comfortable." (G.I. Bob is luckier than I

am — when my date goes into her bedroom to put on "something more comfortable" she always comes back dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt.) Since the French woman is beautiful, and since G.I. Bob's formed character cries out for him to have an affair (in our society, it seems that if a guy has a chance for a one-night stand, he almost always will take it), the line of least resistance is for him to have the affair.

However, G.I. Bob has a fiancée back in Athens, Ohio, and there is a faint call of duty telling him he ought to be faithful to his fiancée. Now, please realize that in this example, G.I. Bob's hormones are screaming for him to sleep with the beautiful French woman. G.I. Bob also realizes that his affair will make a great story to tell in locker room bull sessions. But opposed to all the desire G.I. Bob has to have the affair, there is still the faint call of duty telling him that he ought to be faithful to his fiancée. However, in this situation, G.I. Bob's formed character clearly is in favor of him having the affair as opposed to any other choice.

In a situation like this, there are two ways for G.I. Bob to choose to not have the affair. One, through discovering new information, G.I. Bob's formed character could lead him to desire to choose Choice A (the morally right act) rather than to choose Choice B (to have the affair). For example, G.I. Bob could accidentally see a medicine bottle in the French woman's apartment and realize that the medicine is used to treat a venereal disease. In a case such as that, G.I. Bob's formed character would tell him not to have the affair. However, in a case such as that, G.I. Bob is not performing a free act because he is simply following the line of least resistance. He now desires strongly not to have the affair and so he doesn't.

Or, G.I. Bob, *through an effort of the will*, could decide to go against his formed character and do the morally right act. In a case such as this, according to Campbell, G.I. Bob is performing a free act. According to Campbell, the pursuit of the faint call of duty in the situation of moral temptation is a free act.

Campbell Contra the Critics

Next, Campbell responds to two criticisms commonly made against indeterminism:

> 1) "If libertarianism (that is, indeterminism) is true, prediction is impossible. Prediction is possible. Therefore, libertarianism is untrue."
>
> Campbell's response to this criticism is that prediction and libertarianism are compatible. After all, having free will does not mean that we are free to do anything whatsoever. Indeed, according to Campbell, the only time it is possible to do a free act is in the situation of moral temptation. Most of the time we do what our character as formed by heredity and environment wants us to do.
>
> 2) "Is not the talk of free-will confusing and unintelligible? What sense does it make to talk about a self-determination by something other than the self's character? Is not talk of 'two' selves in conflict confusing?"
>
> Campbell's response is that talk of two selves in conflict makes perfect sense to those who have experienced it. All of us have been in the situation of moral temptation, and therefore all of us have been of two minds about something. All of us have felt the self of formed character urging us to do the wrong thing, and all of us have felt the self of

> decision urging us to listen to the faint call of duty and do the right thing.

In addition, there is a third criticism which could possibly be made against Campbell, but which he does not address:

> 3) Could not one say that the Situation of Moral Temptation is a situation of homeostasis (a situation in which there are balanced forces), for example, the balanced forces of duty versus temptation?
>
> Campbell's possible response could be that no, it is not a situation of homeostasis. In the situation of moral temptation, one is more strongly tempted to do the wrong thing than to do the right thing. It is only by an effort of the will that one is able to listen to the faint call of duty and do the right thing.

Finally, the strategy of refutation that Campbell has used is that of counterexample. He has given an example that the determinists are supposed to be able to explain, but which Campbell feels they cannot explain.

Note: The quotations by C.A. Campbell that appear in this essay are from his essay "In Defense of Free Will," which appears in *An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977), edited by Robrt E. Dewey and Robert H. Hurlbutt III.

Chapter 1.3: Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789): A Determinist

and

William James (1842-1910): A Defender of Free Will

Baron d'Holbach: A Determinist

Baron d'Holbach is a Naturalist. As such, he is a complete Naturalist and propagated the Naturalistic outlook in several books, including the *System of Nature.* Like many others, he was impressed with the discoveries of Isaac Newton — so impressed that he believed that since Nature followed deterministic laws, it must be the case that humans follow deterministic laws as well.

Holbach doesn't use arguments to present his case; however, he is a vivid writer who uses metaphors to get his point across. One piece of evidence he uses is that we are born without our permission. Other than that, he simply states his main thesis time after time. He says a man's life is like a line that Nature commands him to describe upon the earth — wherever Nature draws the lines, no matter how they swerve or how straight they are, there the man must go. In another metaphor, man is compared to a swimmer caught in a current. Sometimes he struggles against the current, sometimes he consents to the current's carrying him along. But whether he consents or not, the current carries him along.

In a series of testimonies, Holbach illustrates his thesis that each decision we make is not a free choice, but is shaped by our heredity and our environment. In one of his testimonies, a choleric or angry man testifies that he desires revenge because that is what he has been taught by his society. Other testimonies are given by a voluptuary and a miser, as well as others.

One characteristic of Holbach's theory is that it is not falsifiable. No matter what illustration you give of a man freely acting, Holbach will say that the man's action is determined. In no single case does a man act freely, according to Holbach. In every case, a person's actions are determined.

Some philosophers have suggested that if a theory or a statement is not falsifiable, then it is nonsense. For example, let's suppose I have a very special philosophy textbook. Under this textbook lives a shy little elf. No one has ever seen this shy little elf because it disappears whenever someone tries to look at it. Even if you bring in special equipment to sense the shy little elf, the equipment won't work because the shy little elf has the power to elude the sensory functions of the equipment.

Who believes that the shy little elf exists? Probably no one. We can't prove that the shy little elf does not exist, but we do judge as nonsense the theory that the shy little elf exists. If you can't falsify a theory, then that theory may be nonsense.

William James: Defender of Free Will

The American philosopher William James is a strong foe of determinism. He is a pragmatist and believes that we can judge whether statements are true or false on the basis of their consequences — as long as no other way of judging exists. If the evidence favors one theory over another, then we must believe the evidence and conclude that the theory the evidence favors is true — no matter how much we dislike its consequences. But if the evidence is not conclusive, then we are justified in making a choice between theories on the basis of their consequences.

How is it possible to prove that man is determined? How is it possible to prove that man has free will? If neither theory

can be proven by evidence, we need another method of choosing between theories. James' pragmatism provides that method.

In his essay "The Dilemma of Determinism," James draws out the consequences of determinism and says that they are such as to make people pause. He admits that he can't prove that the theory of determinism is false, but points out that the consequences are undesirable.

To draw out these consequences, James points out that we all make regret judgments. A regret judgment occurs when we regret that something happens and wish that something else could have occurred in its place.

James says that we regret that murders occur and tells the story of the Brockton murder: A man grew tired of his wife, took her to a deserted spot, then shot her five times. As she lay bleeding on the ground, she said, "You didn't do it on purpose, did you, dear?" The man replied, "No," as he raised a rock and smashed her skull.

All of us must regret that such a murder should take place. The evil here is pre-meditated and self-assured. What happens when a determinist looks at such a murder? According to the determinist, the murder had to take place. The universe is set up in such a way that the murder was caused, and nothing else could have happened in its place.

This is a very pessimistic view of life and of the universe. Nothing could have happened in the place of the murder, so no one could have acted to stop the murder.

The determinist could bite the bullet at this point and accept this consequence of his philosophy. It's open to the determinist to say, "It's too bad that the universe is set up in this way, but that's the way the universe is. We can't change reality; all we can do is to accept it."

James does leave an escape route — or so it seems. If you are a determinist who does not want to be a pessimist, James says that you should abandon your judgments of regret. You should ignore your judgments of regret and instead realize that "on every hand, in a small way, we find a certain amount of evil is a condition by which a higher form of good is brought." Thus, you ought to abandon your judgments of regret.

However, you have already made your judgments of regret. Even if you abandon your judgments of regret, you have already made them. Because you are a determinist, you have to believe that you couldn't have done anything but make those judgments of regret at the time you made them. The universe has been set up in such a way that you must make those judgments of regret, even though you decide now there is nothing to regret. You couldn't have done anything different. The universe has been set up in such a way that it makes a fool of you.

But don't you have to regret that the universe made a fool of you? Don't you have to regret that you made your regret judgments in the first place? Therefore, the apparent escape from pessimism to optimism doesn't work. You fall right back into pessimism.

James does leave a real escape hatch for the determinist who wants to escape from pessimism. The way out is through subjectivism. When you look at what happens, including evils, in the world, you could look at them as a "contrivance for deepening the theoretical consciousness of what goodness and evil in their intrinsic natures are." Thus, "Life is one long eating of the tree of *knowledge*" — that is, knowledge of good and evil.

If you are a subjectivist, you are concerned with yourself as subject, as opposed to an objectivist, who is concerned with things as being objectively knowable by all rational beings.

The major positions in ethics are those of the objectivist and the subjectivist. The objectivist believes moral principles such as “Do not murder” are objective and are knowable by all rational beings.

On the other hand, the subjectivist believes all moral principles are subjective; that is, they can vary according to the person who holds them. The subjectivist believes that what is morally right for one person may not be morally right for another person. Thus, the same act may be both right and wrong at the same time — right when one person does it, wrong when another person does it.

So, the determinist can escape from pessimism by taking up subjectivism. The subjectivist can celebrate everything, including his mistaken regret judgments, because they show how wrong he can be — and he can even celebrate the Holocaust, because it shows the evils the human race is capable of and thus deepens his knowledge of good and evil.

Subjectivism has negative consequences, just as does pessimism. A pessimistic life can lead to quietism, in which a person simply gives up trying to change the world because in a deterministic universe, whatever will be, will be. Subjectivism is even worse. If we give up objective moral principles and let people decide for themselves what’s right and what’s wrong, the result will be chaos. Give up objectivism, and how will we be able to tell whose theoretical consciousness is most highly developed, if that has any meaning in a subjectivistic universe?

James has not been concerned with refuting determinism. He has been concerned simply with showing the consequences of determinism. These consequences are bad, no matter which way you go. First the determinist falls into pessimism, then if the determinist tries to escape from pessimism, the determinist falls into subjectivism.

Of course, an alternative to determinism (and its consequences of pessimism and subjectivism) is free will. If we have free will, we can choose to do good or choose to do evil.

As a pragmatist, James believes that if you need to choose between two alternative positions, and the available evidence is not sufficient to show which of the two positions is the true position, then you are justified in choosing between positions on the basis of their consequences. If sufficient evidence is available to choose positions, then you must decide on the basis of the evidence; however, if sufficient evidence is not available, you are justified in choosing on the basis of the consequences of the positions. As you would expect, James chooses the position of free will.

Note: The quotations by William James that appear in this essay are from his essay "The Dilemma of Determinism," which appears in his book *Essays in Pragmatism* (New York: Hafner Pub. Co., 1948).

Chapter 1.4: Walter T. Stace (1886-1967): I am Determined and Free

Walter T. Stace (1886-1967) is an admirably clear writer. In his book *Religion and the Modern Mind* (1952), he addresses the issue of free will versus determinism. Although I believe that his argument is incorrect, nonetheless I can admire the way he presents his argument.

In the debate between free will and determinism, Stace attempts to hold a position in the middle. He believes that we are determined — but that nonetheless we have free will. Such a position is known as soft determinism and is distinct from hard (or extreme) determinism.

Baron d'Holbach is a hard determinist. He believes that all events are caused and that therefore there is no room for free will — not even for human beings. Stace, however, believes that we can call some of the causes that exist free will; thus, human beings are *both* determined *and* free.

Stace begins by writing about morality. Truly, free will is necessary for morality. Morality is concerned with what we ought to do. It makes no sense to tell someone that they ought to have done something different if what they did "was under compulsion." Besides, ordinarily we assume that free will exists. After all, at the dinner table we ask our dining partners if they would like some of this or of that.

So whence does the controversy between free will and determinism arise? Stace answers that it arises from an incorrect definition of free will. People have assumed that free will means indeterminism; that is, an action is done from free will if that action is not caused. As we will see, Stace rejects that definition.

Since free will has been incorrectly defined, Stace writes, we need to come up with the correct definition of free will. Stace has a strategy for correctly defining free will.

According to Stace, "… *common usage is the criterion for determining whether a definition is correct or not*."

As an example, Stace asks us to imagine that someone has incorrectly defined Man as a five-legged animal. This person looks around the World, does not see any five-legged animals, and so concludes that Man does not exist. This conclusion is obviously false — all as a result of using an incorrect definition of Man. To reach a correct definition of Man, this person should ask other people what they mean when they use the word "Man."

Stace proposes to use this strategy to discover the correct meaning of free will. He begins by collecting a number of free acts and a number of unfree acts, and he arranges them in the following table:

Free Acts

- Gandhi fasting because he wanted to free India.
- Stealing because one is hungry.
- Signing a confession because one wanted to tell the truth.
- Leaving the office because one wanted one's lunch.

Unfree Acts

- Fasting in the desert because there was no food.
- Stealing bread because one's employer threatened to beat one.
- Signing because the police beat one.
- Leaving the office because forcibly removed.

In order to arrive at a correct definition of free will, Stace writes, we need to find out what characteristic the free acts have in common that the unfree acts do not. Once we have that particular characteristic, we will know what characteristic makes a free act free.

That characteristic is not that free acts are uncaused, Stace says. After all, one may go out to lunch because one is hungry, but one's hunger is caused. As for Gandhi, Stace says, his desire to free India is caused by more complex causes than simple hunger. However, both one's hunger and Gandhi's desire to free India are caused by heredity and environment.

Instead, the characteristic that the free acts have that the unfree acts do not is that the immediate cause of the free acts is a psychological state in the agent (the doer). For example, a psychological state leads Gandhi to fast to make India free. As a result of this analysis, Stace arrives at the following definitions of free acts and unfree acts:

> *Acts freely done are those whose immediate causes are psychological states in the agent.*
>
> *Acts not freely done are those whose immediate causes are states of affairs external to the agent.*

As a result of his analysis, Stace believes that the problem of free will versus determinism has been solved — or, rather, dissolved. It arose because of an incorrect definition of free will. Now that free will has been correctly defined, we can see that there is no problem.

Stace next attempts to answer three problems that his "deterministic free will" might encounter. First, he investigates acts whose immediate cause is a psychological state, but whose penultimate (next to the last) cause is an event in the external environment. For example, a criminal points a gun at you and tells you, "Your money or your

life." You take out your wallet and hand it to the criminal. Is this act free or unfree?

According to Stace's definitions, this is a free act because the immediate cause is a psychological state within you. You hand over your wallet because of your fear of death. However, most people would say that this is not a free act. Stace calls this a "borderline case." Occasionally, in real life things don't always fit neatly into categories that we have defined; however, we should not let this upset us.

Second, since, according to Stace, acts of free will are predictable, isn't this mixing of free will and predictability a futile effort to mix incompatibles? Stace's answer is no. According to Stace, acts of free will are compatible with prediction. We may know a man's character, and on the basis of this knowledge, predict that the man will act honorably. However, this does not take away from the man's free will. The man could have acted differently *if* he had wanted to. However, then the causes acting on him would have different, and so he would have acted differently.

Third and finally, some people believe that Stace's notion of a deterministic free will does away with moral responsibility. Stace denies that, as he believes that punishment is justified by determinism. According to Stace, there are two reasons for punishing someone, and both of them require determinism.

The first reason to punish someone is rehabilitation. A child tells lies, so to make the child stop telling lies, you spank the child. You have given the child a cause that will make the child stop telling lies. The second reason to punish someone is deterrence. If you want people to stop committing burglary, you can catch some burglars and throw them into prison. Other people who may want to

burgle will realize that they could be caught and punished and so they will decide not to commit a burglary.

However, isn't there a third reason to punish someone? Don't we punish someone because he or she deserves to be punished? This person could have done the right thing or the wrong thing. This person decided to do the wrong thing, and so this person *deserves* the punishment he or she receives. For someone to deserve his or her punishment, that person's actions must not be determined.

Now let us ask, Is Stace's blend of determinism and free will successful? Can Stace avoid "hard" determinism? The answer to these questions must be, No. Stace defines free acts as "*Acts freely done are those whose immediate causes are psychological states in the agent.*" However, Stace admits that these psychological states are caused by heredity and environment. Because of this, Stace's soft determinism collapses into hard determinism. There is no difference between Baron d'Holbach and Stace except that Stace calls some caused acts, acts of free will. But both philosophers believe that all acts are caused, and that whatever we do, we could not have done otherwise, because of heredity and environment.

Stace has apparently made an error in his definition of free will. Perhaps he has only part of the definition. After all, I can define a human being as a two-legged animal, but there is more to the definition of a human being than that. In common usage, we speak of a person deserving to be punished or to be praised. In order to be deserving, one must have had the freedom to do either the right thing or the wrong thing. So perhaps free acts are preceded by psychological states in the agent; however, perhaps another characteristic of free acts is that we are capable of acting differently than we did.

Chapter 1.5: Richard Taylor (1919-2003): Freedom and Determinism

One philosophical problem that has personally given me fits is that of freedom and determinism. One way to define determinism is that according to determinism, all events are caused. The American philosopher Brand Blanshard defines it more precisely as saying that every "event is so connected with some preceding event that unless the latter had occurred the former would not have occurred." In other words, the deterministic model is this, "If A, then B." For every event B, there is a preceding event A that caused it.

Initially, determinism is a very plausible theory. We are all aware of events that fit the deterministic model. Every event involving the movement of astronomical bodies such as the sun, the moon, and the planet Earth fit the deterministic model. That's why we can predict solar and lunar eclipses. Certainly, many events involving human bodies also fit the deterministic model. I was born a male. Why? Because the sperm cell that united with my mother's egg contained a Y chromosome. And whenever I get a cavity in a tooth, I believe that the cavity was caused — perhaps by inadequate brushing and flossing.

Of course, the theory of determinism does have problems. If determinism is true, then morality is an illusion. To behave in a way that is morally praiseworthy or morally blameworthy, human beings must have freedom to choose between two acts, both of which are really possible. According to determinism, the only events that happen are those that are caused, and one can trace the series of causes that resulted in them back to the beginning of the universe, if it had a beginning. If the universe does not have a beginning, then the series of causes forms an infinite chain.

Another problem with determinism is that it is not in accord with our lived experience. I have a feeling of freedom, but

determinism states that this feeling of freedom is illusory. However, plausible theories in general should agree with lived experience. A theorist ought not to ignore data that does not fit his theory. Instead, the best theory is one that accounts for all the available data.

Richard Taylor

One very good philosopher who starts with the available data, then comes up with a theory that is consistent with that data is Richard Taylor, author of *Metaphysics*. Mr. Taylor starts by writing about two things that are very common in the experience of Humankind:

> The first is that I sometimes deliberate, with the view to making a decision; a decision, namely, to do this thing or that. The first is that I sometimes deliberate, with the view to making a decision; a decision, namely, to do this thing or that. And the second is that whether or not I deliberate about what to do, it is sometimes up to me what I do. This might all be an illusion, of course; but so also any philosophical theory, such as the theory of determinism, might be false. The point remains that it is far more difficult for me to doubt that I sometimes deliberate, and that it is sometimes up to me what to do, than to doubt any philosophical theory whatever, including the theory of determinism. We must, accordingly, if we ever hope to be wiser, adjust our theories to our data and not try to adjust our data to our theories.

1. Deliberation

About deliberation, the first datum, Mr. Taylor points out that we make certain assumptions — assumptions without which it is impossible to deliberate:

1) I deliberate about my own behavior and not about the behavior of another person. Deliberation involves my making up my own mind. I may wonder, guess, or speculate what another person will do, but I deliberate about what I will do.

2) I can deliberate only about what I will do in the future; I cannot deliberate about events that are in the past.

3) When I deliberate, I assume that it is up to me what I will do. For example, if a mad scientist kidnaps me and implants an electrode in my brain, thus turning me into a body that must obey his bidding, I cannot deliberate about what I ought to do — I can only wait and see what the mad scientist will make me do.

2. "It is Up to Me"

The second datum is the feeling that it is up to me what I will do. For example, I feel that at this moment I can move my finger in various ways. I can move it to the right and I can move it to the left. I feel that however I choose to move my finger, it is up to me what I will do. I can choose to move my finger to the left, if I wish, and I can choose to move my finger to the right, if I wish. It is up to me.

Is the Theory of Determinism Consistent with These Data?

The next thing to ask is whether the theory of determinism is consistent with these data: 1) "my behavior is sometimes the outcome of my deliberation," and 2) "in these and other cases it is sometimes up to me what I do." Of course, the theory of determinism is not consistent with these data. According to determinism, all my behavior is caused by a chain of events that started long before I was born. In such a case, all I can do is to wait and see what I will be forced

to do; thus, deliberation is impossible. Determinism is also not consistent with the second datum, because in everything that I do, that is the only thing I could have done. In order for me for decide what I will do, I must have at least two possible alternatives to choose from.

Simple Indeterminism

So should we simply deny determinism and advocate a theory known as simple indeterminism? According to simple indeterminism, many things that we do happen at random. However, this has the effect of reducing Humankind to a puppet. For example, if the things you do happen at random, you could go up to a friend and either pat him on the shoulder or hit him in the face — and you wouldn't know what you were going to do until it happened. Of course, simple indeterminism is not consistent with our two data either. I cannot deliberate about actions that are not caused by anything and thus are not caused by me. And if I don't cause an action, that action is not up to me.

The Theory of Agency

So, if determinism and simple indeterminism are not consistent with our data, what kind of theory will be? According to Taylor, "The only conception of action that accords with our data is one according to which people — and perhaps some other things too — are sometimes, but of course not always, self-determining beings; that is, beings that are sometimes the causes of their own behavior."

The strength of this theory of agency is that it is consistent with our two data, something that determinism and simple indeterminism are not. Mr. Taylor continues, "Now, this conception fits what people take themselves to be; namely, beings who act, or who are agents, rather than beings that are merely acted upon, and whose behavior is simply the

causal consequence of conditions that they have not wrought."

Mr. Taylor's theory of agency is different from the theory of simple indeterminism, of course, because our actions do not occur at random. Instead, we deliberate about which action to do and then decide what to do. Mr. Taylor's theory is also different from the theory of determinism in that when we deliberate and then decide what to do, the chain of causes that results originates with us only. For example, if you pick up a stone and throw it through the window, you are originating a chain of causes that results in the window being broken and the stone falling to the ground outside. In contrast to the theory of determinism, however, the theory of agency says that the chain of causes originated with you — the chain of causes cannot be traced back to events that occurred well before you were born.

Two Metaphysical Notions

Mr. Taylor's theory of agency involves two "metaphysical notions that are never applied elsewhere in nature." The first metaphysical notion is of "a *self* or *person* — for example, a man — who is not merely a collection of things or events, but a self-moving being." This metaphysical notion is required if we are to have a being that is "the cause of his own activity."

The other metaphysical notion required by the data is a "conception of causation according to which an agent, which is a substance and not an event, can nevertheless be the cause of an event. Indeed, if he is a free agent then he can on this conception, cause an event to occur — namely, some act of his own — without anything else causing him to do so."

So, we have a being that is a self or person who can originate events. This self or person is not itself caused to

originate these events. Instead, this self or person is able to deliberate about future events, then choose to perform one action among several possible actions. In addition, this self or person is not subject, when it acts freely, to the causation that occurs elsewhere in the universe. When a self or person originates an action, it is not like a deterministic cause (an antecedent sufficient condition fitting the model "If A, then B") because under the condition A, the self or person can choose to do B, or choose to do an event other than B.

Mr. Taylor writes, "This conception of the causation of events by things that are not events [that is, by a self or person] is, in fact, so different from the usual philosophic conception of a cause that it should not even bear the same name, for 'being a cause' ordinarily just means 'being an antecedent sufficient condition or set of conditions.' Instead, then, of speaking of agents as *causing* their own acts, it would perhaps be better to use another word entirely, and say, for instance, that they *originate* them, *initiate* them, or simply that they *perform* them."

In conclusion, Mr. Taylor's theory of agency provides a way to avoid both the randomness of simple indeterminism and the lack of freedom of determinism. In addition, Mr. Taylor's theory accounts for two data — deliberation, and the feeling that sometimes it's up to me what I do — that the other two theories cannot account for. Therefore, since Mr. Taylor's theory accounts for all the available data, it appears to be the best choice among these three theories.

Note: The quotations by Richard Taylor that appear in this essay are from his book *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1992). 4th edition.

Chapter 1.6: Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980): I Am Free

Jean-Paul Sartre is a strong advocate of human freedom. He is influenced by Descartes in that the starting point of his philosophy is Humankind as thinking, existing beings. The importance of existence to Sartre can be seen in the name by which his philosophy is known: Existentialism. To Sartre, we must always begin with existence, not with any a priori (prior to experience) theory. For Sartre, we must keep in mind what it means to be an existing human being.

In his famous essay "Existentialism is a Humanism" (1945), Sartre attempts to defend his philosophy from four reproaches that have been leveled against it. These reproaches include: 1) Existentialism leads to quietism of despair, 2) Existentialism emphasizes all that is shameful in the human condition, 3) Existentialism ignores the solidarity of Humankind, and 4) Existentialism denies the seriousness of human affairs.

However, before making a defense of Existentialism, Sartre first tells us what Existentialism is because people have misunderstood it. The main characteristic of Existentialism is its emphasis on human freedom. In fact, this is what is most alarming to most people about Existentialism, according to Sartre.

Some people do not want to accept responsibility for who they are. If their life has not been good, they wish to blame their heredity and environment. Such people may say, "Poor, poor pitiful me. I should have been a Kennedy. If my parents had been John and Jackie Kennedy, I would have lived an interesting life. Instead, my life is boring." Sartre would tell these people that they are responsible for their life. If they wish to have a great love affair or a great friendship, it is up to them to go out and have one. It's not fair to blame their parents ("I have to take care of my aged parents") or the town in which they were born ("I should

have been born in Paris, not in a small town in Ohio") for their lack of a lover or a friend. Even (very) short, fat, balding Danny DeVito (Louie DePalma on TV's *Taxi*) has a wife and family (he married Rhea Perlman, the actress who played a waitress on TV's *Cheers*).

In explaining Existentialism, Sartre explains why it matters whether existence precedes essence. First let's take essence preceding existence. An example of an object of which this is true is a paperknife. Let's say a person wants to start a business, and he or she decides to build a factory that manufactures paperknives. In such a case, the businessperson will hire someone to design a paperknife, then he or she will set up a factory for manufacturing the paperknives. In this case, the essence of the paperknife (what makes the paperknife a paperknife) was created before the paperknife came into existence. Things whose essences are created before they came into existence are not free. They are created according to a preconceived essence.

Humankind is different from a paperknife. According to Sartre, Humankind exists without being created according to a preconceived essence. For example, Humankind came into existence by evolving from the life that was first a slime in the ocean. Sartre rejects the Adam and Eve story, according to which God first created the essence of Humankind in His mind, then created Humankind in accordance with that preconceived essence. The Adam and Eve story detracts from human freedom, according to Sartre.

Let me point out here that Sartre is very much an atheistic Existentialist. However, some Existentialists were theists, including several Catholics. Sartre's emphasis on atheism comes about from his insistence on freedom. However, in my opinion the existence of God and His creation of Humankind need not detract from human freedom. If God

gave Humankind free will, then Humankind creates its essence. God may have given Humankind a certain kind of body, but the existence of a body does not make Humankind distinct from other animals. Instead, what makes Humankind distinct (its essence) is reason and free will. Through Humankind's actions (which may or may not be rational), it creates its own essence.

Sartre makes many interesting points about Humankind's ability to define its essence. According to Sartre, "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself." If you think that you are capable of writing a great novel, but you in fact do not write a great novel, then you cannot take credit for what you have in fact not done. You get credit only for what you have accomplished in life.

Sartre also says that "man is responsible for what he is." We are free within a situation. Two people may be born into a poverty-stricken ghetto, but it is still up to the two people what they will become. One person may become a criminal; the other may become a police officer. Neither person can blame their environment for what they become. They are responsible for the career they choose to pursue.

In addition, Sartre points out responsibility to other human beings. What we do affects not only our own essence, but also the essence of Humankind as a whole. Sartre believes that we are "responsible for all men" and that "in choosing for himself," a man chooses for all men. He also says that "in fashioning myself I fashion man."

By these sentences, Sartre means that since Humankind does not have a preconceived essence, that we are therefore creating the essence of Humankind by our actions. After World War II and Hiroshima and the Nazi death camps, we know about the great evil that Humankind is capable of doing. These have become a part of Humankind's essence at this time — we have proof that Humankind is capable of

great evil because Humankind has done great evil. However, because of such people as Mother Teresa, we know that Humankind is capable of doing great good. Humankind's essence is still being created, and time will tell whether Humankind will follow the model of Adolf Hitler or the model of Mother Teresa.

In his essay, Sartre also points out three characteristics of Existentialists. According to Sartre, Existentialists feel anguish, feel abandoned, and feel despair. Existentialists feel anguish because of their heavy responsibility in creating the essence of Humankind. Humankind's essence is formed by the actions of human beings, and so each action I perform helps to determine the essence of Humankind. This is a heavy responsibility because I am responsible not only for creating my own essence but also for my part in creating the essence of Humankind as a whole. This means that I cannot make exceptions for my own behavior. I cannot say that I don't want other people to cheat on exams (I don't want Humankind to be a bunch of cheaters), but just this one time I will cheat on an exam. If I cheat on an exam, then part of the essence of Humankind is that human beings consist — at least in part — of cheaters.

In addition, the Existentialist feels abandoned because he or she does not believe that God exists. The atheistic Existentialist is alone in the universe. However, as I pointed out above, not all Existentialists are atheists.

Sartre also points out that Existentialists feel despair. Through my actions, I create a model of the essence of Humankind. I hope that others will follow my model, but will they? A philosopher who teaches creates a model of Humankind: Part of the essence of Humankind is that Humankind pursues an examined life, seeking the answers to such questions as, What is the meaning of life? However, not all of the students in the philosopher's class will

respond positively to the philosopher's model. (The philosopher hopes that students will engage in a heated discussion about truth and beauty during class, but many students are more likely to say things such as, "Will this be on the test?") Probably every philosophy teacher has read student evaluations that say philosophy is worthless and that the student is outraged that he or she has to take courses in the humanities when the only reason the student is attending college is to prepare him- or herself to make lots of money after graduation.

Some people have charged Existentialism with leading people to quietism and pessimism, but Sartre points out the importance of action in existentialism. We define our essence through our actions; therefore, our actions are important. You are what you do — not what you would have done if only … [add whatever excuses you wish here]. As for pessimism, you can change your life immediately by acting differently. To become a hero, act like a hero and do things the way a hero would do them.

Evaluation

From Sartre, I believe that we ought to take his idea of freedom. However, I do not believe that we ought to accept his idea that God does not exist. In my opinion, the existence of God is not a restraint on our freedom. If God gave us free will, then it is still up to us to create our own essence.

Sartre does have a problem in his version of Existentialism. He believes that objective moral standards, if they existed, would be a restraint on human freedom. I deny this. I believe that objective moral standards exist (e.g., rape is morally wrong); however, we are still free to follow the objective moral standards or to ignore them. The same thing applies to human-created laws. For example, the state of Ohio has laws against the consumption of alcohol by

people under the age of 21; however, very few college freshmen under the age of 21 in Ohio have not tasted alcohol.

In my opinion, Sartre's advocacy of human freedom can be meaningfully combined with a belief in God and a belief in objective moral standards. In reading philosophers, we need not accept or reject all their beliefs. We can pick out those insights that seem to be true and believe them while rejecting any opinions that seem to be false.

Chapter 1.7: M. J. Herskovits (1895-1963): An Ethical Relativist

Melville Jean Herskovits is an anthropologist who was born in Bellefontaine, Ohio, in 1895, and who died in 1963. He believed in cultural relativism; that is, he believed that good and bad, right and wrong, are relative according to the culture that you live in. What a culture believes is right is in fact right for that culture; also, the same thing can be both right and wrong at the same time — right for one culture, but wrong for another culture. Cultural relativism is compatible with ethical relativism.

Ethical relativism is the opposite of objectivism (aka absolutism), which believes that right and wrong do not vary and are not a matter of opinion. According to objectivism, if one culture believes that an act is right and another culture believes that the same act is wrong, one of the cultures is mistaken.

As an anthropologist, Herskovits was aware of the existence of cultural diversity. No one can deny that cultures are very different; certainly the Inuit (Eskimo) culture is very different from the culture of middle-class people in the United States. However, this by itself is not enough to establish ethical relativism. So, what is Herskovits' argument for cultural relativism?

Evaluations Vary with Different Definitions

Herskovits begins his argument by stating that "evaluations are *relative* to the cultural background out of which they arise." For example, different cultures will evaluate polygamy very differently. People in the United States are monogamous, meaning they have no more than one wife or one husband. However, in the West African culture of Dahomey, a single man can have many wives. Many Americans will evaluate this polygamy as morally wrong;

however, the Africans evaluate this polygamy as morally right.

One point made by Herskovits is that such a polygamous arrangement has some advantages not apparent at first to outsiders. For one thing, it is a successful arrangement. Children are born and raised in these polygamous relationships, which is certainly a main goal of the family. Also, the women do have some measure of freedom, since each woman has her own house, moving into the husband's house for a few days only when it is her turn. These women also gain prestige according to the size of the collective, and so a woman will often provide money or gifts to help her husband acquire another wife.

Herskovits writes, "Thus polygamy, when looked at from the point of view of those who practise it, is seen to hold values that are not apparent from the outside. A similar case can be made for monogamy, however, when it is attacked by those who are enculturated to a different kind of family structure. And what is true of a particular phase of culture such as this, is also true of others. Evaluations are *relative* to the cultural background out of which they arise."

Attitudes Result from Enculturation

So where do our attitudes toward such things as monogamy and polygamy arise? According to Herskovits, our attitudes come from our culture. These attitudes are instilled in us by the culture in which we live. For example, why do Americans believe that polygamy is morally wrong? They learned it from the people around them — in Sunday school, for example, or from their parents. All of us are enculturated, meaning that, according to Herskovits, all of us acquire our ethical beliefs from the culture in which we live. Enculturation is cultural conditioning.

Norms and Normality Vary

What is considered normal varies from culture to culture. Herskovits has done much research among blacks in Africa and has discovered that "possession" — having a god enter and take over your body — is considered normal in some African cultures. In these cultures, the most well-adjusted citizens are those who are occasionally possessed by a god; if you do not occasionally become possessed by a god, then you are less well adjusted than those who do.

A Defense of Relativism

If ethical relativism is correct, then what happens to morality? Does it become meaningless? After all, cultures vary considerably in what they consider right, so if there is no objective right and wrong, why bother trying to be moral? Herskovits attempts to respond to this charge.

First, Herskovits points out that values do exist in each culture. In addition, he points out that the anthropologist attempts to understand each culture's values. An advantage of this approach is that it leads to tolerance.

We can object to this, however, because isn't there a limit to tolerance? Just how much are we willing to tolerate? Are we willing to tolerate slavery in a culture which believes in it? Are we willing to tolerate genocide by Nazi Germany if the Nazis sincerely believe that the "final solution" is morally right because they sincerely believe the Jews are inferior? Are we willing to tolerate rape by males of a culture that believes rape is a sign of manhood? Understanding and dialogue are virtues; however, tolerance can sometimes be a vice.

Second, Herskovits draws a distinction between absolutes and universals. He writes, "*Absolutes* are fixed, and, in so far as convention is concerned, are not admitted to have variation, to differ from culture to culture, from epoch to

epoch. *Universals*, on the other hand, are those least common denominators to be extracted, inductively, from comprehension of the range of variation which all phenomena of the natural or cultural world manifest."

An absolute would be a moral law that is not relative according to culture, place, or time. For example, an example of an absolute moral law would be, "Rape is wrong" or "Human life is valuable" or "Genocide is wrong." Herskovits denies the existence of absolutes. However, he does believe in universals. For example, Herskovits believes that each culture has a morality, enjoyment of beauty, and some standard for truth. Law and education are also universals of each culture. However, what is considered moral, beautiful, true, lawful, and a good education will vary from culture to culture.

We can object to this, however, because doesn't the existence of universals reveal the existence of absolutes? If every culture has a morality, enjoyment of beauty, some standard for truth, laws, and education, doesn't each culture believe in the absolutes that morality is good, beauty is good, truth is good, law is good, and education is good? Variations in such things as what is considered moral may mean that not every culture has discovered the truth about morality yet. After all, cultures vary in what they have discovered about science, yet we don't consider science to be relative.

Third, Herskovits makes a distinction between cultural relativism and individual relativism. If each individual decided what is right and wrong, good and bad, then the result would be social chaos. However, Herskovits believes that each culture decides what is right and wrong, good and bad, thus giving each culture a measure of stability.

We can object to this, however, because Herskovits doesn't give his reasons for accepting cultural relativism and

rejecting individual relativism. Is his reason that cultural relativism has a measure of stability, while belief in individual relativism would lead to instability? If so, what would Herskovits say about reformers such as Martin Luther King? Wouldn't he have to say that Martin Luther King was a radical who was upsetting things and ought to have stayed quiet and accepted the values of racist, Jim Crow America?

Walter T. Stace makes an excellent, pragmatic attack against relativism.

Note: The quotations by M. J. Herskovits that appear in this essay are from his book *The Science of Cultural Anthropology* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1947, 1948).

Chapter 1.8: Walter T. Stace (1886-1967): A Critic of Ethical Relativism

The Ethical Question

The ethical question that all of us ask is, What ought I to do? This question assumes that "good" and "bad" are objective — that is, "good" and "bad" are not a matter of personal opinion or the opinion of society. In other words, a person or a society can be mistaken about what is ethically right. For example, we criticize slaveowners in the pre-Civil War South for acting immorally. This means that even though slavery was legal, and even though many people felt it was justified in the pre-Civil War South, these people and their society were wrong — slavery is immoral now, and it was then, and it will always be immoral.

Ethical Relativism

One philosophical position that attacks ethics is ethical relativism. According to ethical relativism, there are no universal norms, such as "slavery is immortal." Instead, say the ethical relativists, "right" and "wrong" are what our society says are right and wrong. Thus, if our society says that slavery is morally good, then slavery is morally good for our society. And if another society says that slavery is morally evil, then slavery is morally evil for that society.

Ethical relativism is popular today. In the social sciences, advocates of ethical relativism try to refrain from masking "value" judgments about the people they serve or study. However, if ethical relativism is correct, then we can give up asking the question "What ought we to do?" because we would know the answer is, "Do what your society wants you to do." So if your society wants you to accumulate as much wealth as possible before you die, then that is what you ought to do.

Cultural Diversity

One common argument given in support of ethical relativism is based on the existence of cultural diversity. Anthropologists have discovered many different societies throughout the world. In the United States, our society has been patriarchal — that is, with a male at the head of the family. However, anthropologists have discovered that other societies (for example, some Native American tribes) are matriarchal — that is, with a woman at the head of the family. And anthropologists have discovered many different customs throughout the world. For example, in the United States we tend to take care of our old people. However, the Inuit (Eskimo) used to take their old people in the icy wilderness, then abandon them to die. With so many different cultures, and so many different customs, some anthropologists have concluded that ethical relativism is the correct position and that we must give up absolutism (the belief in universal moral norms — that is, moral norms that ought to hold for all human beings).

Walter T. Stace: Critic of Ethical Relativism

One philosopher who has criticized ethical relativism is Walter T. Stace, author of *The Concept of Morals* (1937), from which the ideas in this essay are taken. Stace, as many good philosophers do, begins by defining his terms. He distinguishes among cultural relativism, ethical relativism, and ethical absolutism.

Three Important Definitions

Cultural relativism is purely descriptive and is based on facts. All of us agree with cultural relativism, which states simply that cultures vary widely in their beliefs and customs.

On the other hand, *ethical relativism*, which states that what a group of people thinks is right, is in fact right for them, is much more controversial.

And finally, there is the position Stace argues for, *ethical absolutism*, which clams that objective, universal moral norms exist, and that therefore what a group of people thinks is right, is not *necessarily right* for them.

Two Explanations of Cultural Diversity

Stace believes that the fact of cultural relativism can be explained by both ethical relativism and by ethical absolutism — that is, the facts of cultural diversity can be explained by both positions. According to the ethical relativists, customs and beliefs vary because there are no moral norms. However, according to the ethical absolutists, customs and beliefs vary because of human ignorance of what the absolute moral norms are.

In addition to what Stace writes, we can add two more comments. First, we can speculate that although customs and beliefs vary because of differing circumstances, all cultures follow the same ultimate ethical principles, such as "human life is precious." To go back to the example of old people in our society and in the Inuit society, we could say that both societies follow the principle that "human life is precious."

In the United States, we have adequate resources to take care of our old people, so we do so. However, in the Inuit society in past times, there weren't enough resources to take care of the old people, so when people grew too old to contribute to the acquisition of food, the decision was made to sacrifice the old people so that the young people would have a chance to live. If the Inuit had decided to try to keep the old people alive, that decision would have destroyed their entire culture (because of scarcity of food and other

resources) and everyone would have died. Thus both our society and the Inuit society are following the principle that "human life is precious" and both societies are doing their best to preserve human life.

Second, it may be the case that some societies know what is right but choose to ignore it.

Pragmatic Grounds

Since both positions can explain the available empirical data (data about customs and beliefs that we can gather in the world), we need an alternative way to decide between the two theories. One way to do so, when other evidence is not available to give us an adequate basis for our decision, is to decide on pragmatic grounds. According to this view, we should look at the consequences of both theories, then decide on the basis of those consequences. (Remember, we do this only when there isn't enough other evidence to give an adequate basis on which to decide.) Stave finds six problematic consequences of ethical relativism.

Six Problematic Consequences of Ethical Relativism

1. The first problematic consequence of ethical relativism is that cross-cultural references become meaningless. Thus, during World War II, we really can't criticize the Nazis (if we are ethical relativists). All we can say is that genocide and death camps for the Jews, homosexuals, and gypsies are right for Nazi society. To criticize the Nazis, we would have to be ethical absolutists.

2. The second problematic consequence of ethical relativism is that moral comparisons from different epochs within the same culture become inappropriate. Thus, if we are ethical relativists, we can't criticize the pre-Civil War South for believing slavery to be morally right. All we can say is, slavery was morally right for the pre-Civil War South.

3. Third, if ethical relativism is the correct theory, then the idea of moral progress is made meaningless. Thus, Jesus should have stayed a carpenter because his ideas really didn't lead to moral progress — they just led to change. After all, if there are no absolute, universal norms, then the concept of moral progress is meaningless.

4. Fourth, if ethical relativism is the correct position, then the seriousness of moral striving is undercut. Why should a relativist try to change anything if whatever a society believes to be morally correct is morally correct for that society? If ethical relativism is correct, Martin Luther King, Jr., shouldn't have tried to change society, because prejudice and segregation were right for his society.

5. Fifth, if relativism is the correct position, then moral anarchy is permitted. Ethical relativism says that what a society believes is right is in fact right, but which society is meant? The United States contains many societies. Which is the relevant social group within which one's conduct is to be judged? Is the relevant social group the homosexuals in San Francisco? The pornographers in Los Angeles? The drug addicts in New York? Your teachers in high school? All of us belong to many different social groups. Eventually, when it comes to determining what is ethically right and what is ethically wrong, each of us would become a society of one.

6. Finally, if ethical relativism is the correct position, then indifference to human affairs is engendered. If what is right for apartheid-era South Africa is what apartheid-era South Africa thinks is right, why should we try to change apartheid-era South Africa? Ethical relativism would lead to more tolerance, but we would have to tolerate slavery, widow burning, human sacrifice, cannibalism — whatever another society thinks is right.

Problematic Consequences for Absolutism?

However, ethical absolutism may have its problematic consequences, too. Ethical absolutism may lead to arrogance and intolerance. Of course, as Stace points out above, tolerance can be a vice. The ethical relativists would have to tolerate whatever another society thinks is right. Tolerance can be a vice. The First Amendment protects unpopular speech such as racist speech, but tolerance for the racist's right to free speech doesn't mean that we have to say, "Whatever a racist believes is right, is right for him." Instead, we can engage in dialogue and use free speech to defeat bad ideas. We can point out where a racist's thinking goes wrong. Dialogue is not necessarily arrogant and intolerant.

We can also ask whether ethical absolutism leads necessarily to cultural imperialism, strife, and even war. In the past, it certainly has. Christian missionaries are known for going into a culture and completely disrupting it. However, ethical absolutism can also lead to dialogue and openness.

To show respect for a society, we need to evaluate it for what we can learn from it; however, we must also criticize the society when criticism is called for.

Pragmatic Grounds Revisited

Appeal to facts will not help us make a decision between ethical relativism and ethical absolutism. In this case, we must make a decision based on pragmatic grounds.

Note: Walter T. Stace writes about his ideas in his book *The Concept of Morals* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965).

Chapter 1.9: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679): A Psychological Egoist

and

Joseph Butler (1692-1752): A Critic of Psychological Egoism

The Ethical Question

The ethical question that all of us ask is, What ought I to do?

When we ask that question, we assume two things. First, we assume that we are free. In other words, we assume that have a choice: We can choose to do the ethically right act, or we can choose to do the ethically wrong act.

We also assume that moral knowledge is possible. That is, we assume that we can come to know what is the ethically correct act in a certain situation.

Psychological Egoism

A philosophical theory that attacks both of these assumptions is psychological egoism. According to the proponents of this view, humans are *always* selfish and in fact always do what is best for themselves. Psychological egoists believe that no one ever acts benevolently. Even if you hold up the example of Mother Teresa, the nun who attended the sick and dying in Calcutta and all over the world, psychological egoists will say that Mother Teresa is doing what she really wants to do and so is acting selfishly.

Before I explain some of Hobbes' philosophy, allow me to quote a conversation used as an example of bad reasoning in Anthony Weston's *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992):

> A: Everybody is really just selfish!

> B: But what about John: look how he devotes himself to his children!
>
> A: He is only doing what he really wants to do: that's still selfish! (Weston 10).

As Mr. Weston points out, the above passage is guilty of the fallacy of equivocation (giving the same term two different meanings in the same argument). As Mr. Weston explains:

> Here the meaning of "selfish" changes from A's first claim to A's second. In the first claim, we understand "selfish" to mean something fairly specific: the grasping, self-centered behavior we ordinarily call "selfish." In A's response to B's objection, A expands the meaning of "selfish" to include apparently unselfish behavior too, by broadening the definition to just "doing what you really want to do." A saves only the *word*; it has lost its original, specific meaning. (Weston 10)

I feel that Hobbes is also using the term "selfish" in a manner that differs from the ordinary meaning of the term.

However, speaking of fallacies, we don't want to commit the error of making an *ad hominem* attack upon Hobbes. Often, I have read students' essays that stated that Hobbes was a bitter old man whose arguments should not be taken seriously for that reason. It doesn't matter who makes an argument; what is important is that we evaluate an argument fairly: that we determine whether the premises are true, whether the premises adequately support the conclusion, and whether a fallacy has been committed.

A Psychological Egoist: Thomas Hobbes

The major advocate of psychological egoism is Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), author of the important philosophical

work *Leviathan*. He believed that reality consists of matter in motion (an idea that probably came to him through the influence of the rise of modern science) and humans are fundamentally matter in motion.

Humans differ from other things merely in the kind of motion they have. According to Hobbes, if humans make a voluntary motion toward something, their attitude toward that thing is love, and the value they give that thing is good. Of course, humans do make motions away from some things, and they are neutral toward other things. This list summarizes the kind of voluntary motions Hobbes felt than humans make:

- When the Motion is Toward, the Attitude is Love, and the Value is Good.
- When the Motion is Fromward, the Attitude is Hate, and the Value is Evil.
- When the Motion is Neither, the Attitude is Contempt, and the Value is Vile.

For Hobbes, good and evil are relational terms. If you like something, it's good; if you dislike something, it's bad. Of course, I may like something you dislike, and so the same thing is both good and bad: good according to me, but bad according to you.

Hobbes' psychological egoism is very simple. All of us have particular passions (or desires), and all of us have love for ourselves (self-love). And, according to Hobbes, we show love for ourselves by satisfying our passions.

Critic of Psychological Egoism: Joseph Butler

However, Joseph Butler (1692-1752) came up with a better, more complex theory of human psychology that refuted Hobbes' theory. Instead of believing that Humankind is

matter in motion, as Hobbes believed, Butler thought of Humankind as being a system. In this system, we have particular passions: Some passions are directed toward some things, while other passions are directed away from other things.

Although Hobbes believed that we show love for ourselves by satisfying our passions, Butler believed quite differently. Butler believed that satisfying different passions would lead to different consequences. Some passions lead to happiness for the self, while other passions lead to misery for the self, or to happiness for others, or to misery for others. Hobbes believed that if we desire something, that thing is good; Butler knew that we sometimes desire things that bring misery to us. For example, a passion for cocaine can lead to addiction and much pain.

Three Rational Regulating Principles

Fortunately, Butler discovered that three rational regulating principles monitor our passions. The first of these is cool self-love, whose function is the happiness and well-being of the self.

1. Cool Self-Love

For example (this is Donald Borchert's example, which he told during classroom lectures), suppose I go to my classroom one day and start delivering what I consider to be a well-organized, very interesting lecture. But I see one student, whom I have been trying to help in my spare time (which I have little of), reading our campus newspaper. My face turns red, I start breathing heavily, and I consider walking over to the student, ripping the newspaper from his hands, and punching the student in the face. However, my cool self-love intervenes and says, "Wait! If you punch out that student, it might feel good for a little while, but you could lose your job!"

In this case, my cool self-love rationally regulates my particular passion to punch out the student.

2. Benevolence

A second rational regulating principle is benevolence, whose function is the happiness and well-being of others. For example, let's say I have $100, and I'm thinking of buying a new jacket for myself. Here my particular passion is to spend some money on something worthwhile, and my cool self-love could suggest that the jacket I'm wearing now is getting old and I really do need a new jacket. However, my sense of benevolence also could intervene and suggest that perhaps I ought to buy a new jacket for a nephew who needs a jacket and whose parents lack money. In this case, I have a conflict between my cool self-love and my sense of benevolence.

3. Conscience.

Fortunately, I also have a sense of conscience, whose function is to arbitrate conflicts between cool self-love and benevolence. In this case, what my sense of conscience leads me to decide would depend on how badly I need a new jacket. If I really, really need a new jacket, I would spend the $100 on a new jacket for me. On the other hand, if I decide that my nephew needs a new jacket more than I do, then I would spend the $100 on a new jacket for my nephew.

Of the two theories of human psychology, it seems to me that Butler's is a more accurate accounting of my experience than is Hobbes'. The weight of the evidence is against the theory of psychological egoism.

Three Kinds of Philosophical Arguing

However, we can criticize psychological egoism on three other grounds, each of which illustrates a form of philosophical argumentation.

1. Reduction to Absurdity

First, we can use the strategy of reduction to absurdity. In discussing benevolence, Hobbes makes the comment that benevolence is really nothing more than delight in the use of one's power. For example, if a person donates $1 million to Children's Hospital, we would probably consider that person to be benevolent. However, Hobbes would say that that person is really showing off his great wealth and the immense power he has as a result of that wealth. Thus, in being benevolent, that person is really delighting in the use of his power.

However, we can think of other people who delight in the use of their power — for example, sadists. The real-life person on whom Dracula is based crucified hundreds of people. He delighted in the use of his power and in doing so was very cruel. Thus, Hobbes' theory leads us to equate benevolence with cruelty, since both consist of delight in the use of one's power. Of course, it is absurd to say that benevolence equals cruelty, and so Hobbes' theory has been reduced to absurdity.

2. Counterexamples

We can also use the strategy of counterexamples to argue against Hobbes. Hobbes says that every act is selfish, so if we can find just one act that is not selfish, we have refuted his theory.

Let's suppose that you don't have much money, so you can't afford to give many presents. But your friends next door do have money and they give their children very nice

and very many presents indeed. If you feel happy for the children because they have nice presents and compliment them on their presents, you are acting benevolently toward them, yet you are not delighting in the use of your power (because you don't have the money that would allow you to give them these nice presents). Thus your act is not selfish.

3. Rejection on Pragmatic Grounds

Finally, there is the philosophical strategy of arguing on pragmatic grounds. One way to choose between theories when there is no other way to choose between them is on the basis of their consequences. If a theory leads to bad consequences if adopted, and if we have no compelling reason to adopt that theory over its rival, which has good consequences when it is adopted, we are justified in adopting the theory that has good consequences. (Of course, if the evidence is in favor of the theory with bad consequences, we must adopt that theory.)

What would happen if we adopted the theory of psychological egoism? One result is that might would make right. If psychological egoism is the correct theory, how could we ever judge which acts are right when people conflict over them? One group wants to build a dam because it will create jobs and electricity; another group is against building the dam because it will harm the environment. There's no way to tell which group is right, so the two groups will just have to fight it out.

Additional Notes on Thomas Hobbes and Joseph Butler

Hobbes was influenced by the new science (science was just beginning in his era) in that the new science was mechanistic. It regarded reality as consisting of matter in motion. Hobbes also regarded reality — including human beings — as consisting of matter in motion. Humans differ from other kinds of reality in the kind of motion they make.

For example, humans can make voluntary motions. Hobbes believed that if you move toward something, you love that thing. For example, on a beach you might move toward a radio playing music you like. However, you can also move away from something, which indicates that you hate it. For example, on a beach you might move away from a radio playing music you hate. Hobbes regarded human beings as essentially mechanistic. We seek to satisfy our own desires, and cannot do otherwise.

Butler was influenced by the new science's emphasis on systems and relationships. For example, astronomy reveals the universe as consisting of a number of systems of stars and planets in solar systems. In environmental science, we learn about the water cycle: how water runs through a cycle of being evaporated into the air, then returned to the earth in the form of dew, rain, hail, or snow, and then being evaporated again. Butler saw the human psychology as consisting of a number of different parts that interact with each other and decide how to act. (Which particular passions will you satisfy?) Butler's human system of decision-making includes cool self-love, benevolence, and conscience, all of which are related to each other.

Your particular passions are your desires.

An important function of Butler's cool self-love is that it evaluates your desires to see if satisfying them is likely to make you happy or miserable. Some desires, if satisfied, will make you happy. Other desires, if satisfied, will make you miserable.

Benevolence evaluates your desires to see if satisfying them will make other people happy or miserable.

The conscience arbitrates conflicts between cool self-love and benevolence. The conscience also passes judgment

upon persons, including yourself. Your conscience tells you whether you are a good or a bad person.

All of these things — the particular passions and the three rational regulating principles of cool self-love, benevolence, and conscience — work together in a system. You are virtuous if the things you do don't upset the system. For example, you give some money to charity, but not so much that you can't pay your bills. In this case, both your benevolence and cool self-love are working properly. You are guilty of vice if the things you do *do* upset the system. For example, you give *all* your money to charity and can't pay your bills. In this case, your cool self-love should have restrained your benevolence. (Of course, in the case of a conflict between cool self-love and benevolence, your conscience ought to step in and make the decision.)

To be virtuous, you need to make sure the various parts of the human system of decision-making are working properly together. Sometimes, being virtuous means that you will do something that will make you happy; for example, you decide to buy a much-needed new coat instead of giving money to charity. Other times, being virtuous means that you will do something that will make someone else happy; for example, you decide that your coat is still in good shape, so you decide to donate some money to charity. (Butler points out that usually cool self-love and benevolence are two sides of the same coin; for example, you decide to buy a new coat for yourself and donate your old but still-good coat to charity.)

An important part of Butler's concept of cool self-love is that it evaluates our desires to see if satisfying them will make us happy or sad. Butler believes that you show love for yourself by satisfying those desires that will make you happy. In contrast, Hobbes believes that you show love for yourself by satisfying your desires, whatever they be.

Here's my favorite example to illustrate the difference between Hobbes' self-love and Butler's cool self-love: Let's say that you have a particular passion (desire) for cocaine, and let's see how Hobbes and Butler would advise you.

Hobbes believes that you show love for yourself by satisfying your desires. Therefore, he would advise you to buy some cocaine and snort it.

Butler's cool self-love, on the other hand, would evaluate your desire for cocaine to see if satisfying it is likely to make you happy or miserable. Some people become addicted to cocaine and lead miserable lives. Other people have an allergic reaction to cocaine and die after taking it (e.g., Lenny Bias and River Phoenix). Therefore, Butler would advise you not to take cocaine.

This is how Butler's interpretation of self-love strikes at the heart of psychological egoism: Hobbes believes that we always look out for No. 1 (that's what psychological egoism means), but taking his advice can get you killed! Psychological egoism says people always look out for No. 1, but Hobbes' theory would lead you to self-destructive behavior.

One more point: According to Butler, we unfortunately don't always do what we should. I may have a desire for cocaine and unfortunately choose to satisfy my desire. In this case, my system of human decision-making is not functioning properly and I am engaging in vice.

Way of Criticizing Philosophically

Reduction to absurdity means showing that a philosophical position logically leads to something that is obviously false. Butler uses reduction to absurdity against Hobbes' theory of psychological egoism when Butler shows that Hobbes'

theory leads us to say that benevolence and cruelty are the same thing.

A counterexample is a specific example that a theory is supposed to be able to explain, but cannot. For example, Hobbes says that we always look out for No. 1. However, if that is true, then how can Hobbes explain the actions of people who harm themselves by taking drugs?

"Rejection on pragmatic grounds" means that if we do not have any way to tell whether a theory is true or false, then we can take a look at the theory's consequences and decide whether to accept or reject it. (Of course, if the evidence is sufficient to show whether a theory is true or false, then we need to believe the evidence.) However, psychological egoism leads to bad consequences (might makes right) and so we can reject psychological egoism on pragmatic grounds.

Chapter 1.10: David Bruce (born 1954): Three Kinds of Philosophical Arguing to Use Against Psychological Egoism

We can criticize psychological egoism on three grounds, each of which illustrates a form of philosophical argumentation.

1. Reductio ad Absurdam

Reductio ad absurdam is Latin for "reduction to absurdity." It is a method that the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (the teacher of Plato) invented to disprove a proposition. Basically, the method works likes this. First you start with an assumption. Then through a series of logical steps you show that the assumption leads to a contradiction. If an assumption logically leads to a contradiction, we know that the assumption must be incorrect and therefore we are justified in rejecting it.

In Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro*, we can see Socrates in action using *reductio ad absurdam* to show that Euthyphro, a reciter of poetry, has incorrect opinions. Socrates asks Euthyphro for a definition of piety, and after some wrangling, succeeds in getting this definition out of him: What is pious is pleasing to the gods, and what is impious is unpleasing to the gods. (For this example, one must remember that the ancient Greeks believed in many gods, unlike the Jews and Christians.)

Socrates then shows that this assumption logically leads to a contradiction by showing that what pleases some gods will not please other gods. For example, if you remember your Homer (you have read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, haven't you?), you know that the Trojan War was fought between two groups of people: the Greeks and the Trojans. Some of the gods favored the Greeks, while others favored

the Trojans. (Aphrodite, goddess of love, favored the Trojans, while Athena, goddess of wisdom, favored the Greeks.) Thus, a battle that the Trojans won would please Aphrodite but not Athena.

As you can see, Euthyphro's definition (his assumption) leads to a contradiction (all contradictions are absurd): the same action (the battle) is — at the same time — both pious (because pleasing to Aphrodite) and impious (because unpleasing to Athena). One fact of logic and of mathematics that cannot be disputed is that something cannot be what it is and, at the same time, not what it is. It is impossible for a triangle to be both a triangle and a square at the same time. It is impossible for a positive integer to be both a positive integer and a negative integer at the same time.

We can use *reductio ad absurdam* against Thomas Hobbes' belief in psychological egoism. According to Hobbes, everyone always acts selfishly with no exceptions. If you were to try to point out an example of benevolence in action, such as Mother Teresa tending the poor and ill in Calcutta, Hobbes would state that Mother Teresa is acting selfishly because she is doing what she wants to do — showing off how kind-hearted she is by taking care of the poor and ill (and, Hobbes might add, preparing a mansion for herself in heaven). Hobbes would say that Mother Teresa is really deriving personal satisfaction by using her power on behalf of the poor and ill.

In other words, Hobbes seems to be saying that demonstrating benevolence is really a delight in the use of power. For example, let's say that your best friend is getting married to a man whose wealthy parents shower gifts on them. Hobbes would say that that the man's parents are delighting in the use of their power — they are showing

off by saying, “Look how rich we are! We can afford to give a house to this young couple!”

But isn’t it odd to say that benevolence is really just a delight in the use of power? Because isn’t that what cruelty is? A boy pulling the wings off a butterfly is certainly delighting in his power over the helpless butterfly. Some feminists say that rape is not a crime of sex, but instead is a crime of power in which a man delights in overpowering a woman and forcing her to do things she would not otherwise do with him.

This is an argument we can use based on Hobbes’ assumption:

P1: Benevolence equals delight in the use of power.

P2: Cruelty equals delight in the use of power.

C: Therefore, benevolence equals cruelty.

But this conclusion is absurd because benevolence and cruelty are opposites. It is a contradiction to say that benevolence and cruelty are the same thing. If you behave cruelly toward a man, you are certainly not behaving benevolently toward him. If a man cruelly rapes a woman, he is certainly not behaving benevolently toward her.

Hobbes’ theory of psychologically egoism logically leads to a contradiction, and therefore we can reject Hobbes’ theory.

2. Counterexamples

Counterexamples are also used in philosophy. If someone states a theory you disagree with, you may choose to argue against it by using a counterexample. For example, let’s say that an acquaintance is a racist who says, “All blacks are lazy.” (The acquaintance would probably use a word different from “black,” but we’ll let that pass.) To argue

against the acquaintance, you could offer a counterexample. A counterexample is something that the theory is supposed to be able to explain, but cannot. In this case, the counterexample would be a black person who is not lazy. You might say, "But what about Joe and Carla Smith, who live next door. They're African-Americans, and they're not lazy." The theory under discussion purports to describe accurately every black person, but you have offered as counterexamples two black people who are different from the theory's description. (This is a good reason not to have segregation; if you know some black people, you will soon realize that not all black people are lazy. The same thing applies to whites.)

We can also use the strategy of counterexamples to argue against Hobbes. Hobbes says that every act is selfish, so if we can find just one act that is not selfish, we have refuted his theory.

This may be harder than it looks in the case of psychological egoism. After all, I would be tempted to use Mother Teresa as a counterexample here; in my opinion, she is not a selfish person. But as we saw above, Hobbes will simply say that she is delighting in the use of her power by showing off how kind-hearted she is. ("Look at how kind-hearted I am! I'm going to be a saint someday!") Hobbes will say that everyone, including Mother Teresa, is selfish.

So let's take a slightly different tack here. We know that Hobbes equates benevolence with "delight in the use of one's power," so let's find a counterexample in which someone is benevolent yet is *not* exercising power. Third-party benevolence will give us our counterexample.

Let's suppose that you don't have much money, so you can't afford to give many presents. But your friends next door do have money and they give their children very nice

and very many presents indeed. If you feel happy for the children because they have nice presents and compliment them on their presents, you are acting benevolently ("benevolence" means "good-wishing") toward them, yet you are not delighting in the use of your power (because you don't have the money — and thus you don't have the power — that would allow you to give them these nice presents). Thus your act is not selfish, according to Hobbes' theory.

Hobbes' theory cannot explain your counterexample, and so we have one more reason to reject Hobbes' theory.

3. Rejection on Pragmatic Grounds

Finally, there is the philosophical strategy of arguing on pragmatic grounds. One way to choose between theories when there is no other way to choose between them is on the basis of their consequences. If a theory leads to bad consequences if adopted, and if we have no compelling reason to adopt that theory over its rival, we are justified in adopting the other theory. (Of course, if the evidence is in favor of the theory with bad consequences, we must adopt that theory.)

We can ask what would happen if there were no such thing as ethics — if we were not able to distinguish between right and wrong, or if we were not free to choose to do good and to avoid doing evil. The consequences would likely be quite bad. For one thing, what would happen to our courts of law if there were no such thing as ethics? We punish people because they deserve to be punished. People who believe in ethics believe that a robber had the choice to work at a legitimate job or to work as a robber, the person chose to rob people, he was caught, and he deserves to be punished. But suppose there was no such thing as freedom (this is the theory of determinism). Would we be justified in punishing this person? (The way our law courts work

now, if someone does not have the freedom to control his actions — say because of insanity — that person will be found innocent by reason of insanity.)

What would happen if we adopted the theory of psychological egoism? One result is that might would make right. If psychological egoism is the correct theory, how could we ever judge which acts are right when people conflict over them? According to Hobbes, seeking to satisfy your desires is right, but he doesn't tell us what to do when people's desires conflict.

Let's say that one group wants to build a dam because it will create jobs and electricity; another group is against building the dam because it will harm the environment. Both groups are seeking to satisfy their desires, and according to Hobbes, if you desire something, it is good. Since both groups have desires, both groups are justified in trying to satisfy them. The two groups will just have to fight it out to find out whose desires get satisfied. The group with the most power will get its desires satisfied: might makes right, if psychological egoism is correct.

On the other hand, if good and bad, right and wrong, are objective, we could examine each group's arguments and discover which group is right; we could discover whether it's better to have the electrical power that can be generated by the dam, or the environmental beauty that can be preserved by not building the dam.

Because psychological egoism, if widely believed, will have bad consequences, we have yet another reason to reject psychological egoism.

Chapter 1.11: Ethical Emotivism: Historical Antecedents

A.J. Ayer was much influenced by the logical positivists, who analyzed sentences to determine what logical type they belonged to. We will analyze several sentences to see what the logical positivists were up to:

1. The person reading this page is six feet tall.

This sentence is meaningful. It is a cognitive sentence, which means it bears information. In addition, it is the kind of cognitive sentence that is known as synthetic, which means that it can be verified through the use of our senses. To verify the sentence, you would measure yourself and see if in fact you are six feet tall. If you are six feet tall, you have verified the sentence. If you are not six feet tall, you have falsified the sentence; that is, you have shown that the sentence is false.

2. Life forms exist on planets circling Alpha Centauri.

This sentence is also meaningful. It is also cognitive and synthetic. One thing to notice about this sentence, however, is that it is verifiable only in principle. (We can't verify the sentence right now.) If we go to Alpha Centauri and search for life on its planets, we will be able to verify the sentence if it is true and falsify it if it is false. Ayer and the logical positivists regard sentences that are check-up-able (that means, able to be checked up on to see whether they are true or false) as meaningful.

3. All squares have four sides.

This is another meaningful sentence. It is cognitive because it bears information. However, it is not synthetic because we have to verify it by means other than the use of our senses. In this case, we verify the sentence through an analysis of the terms used in the sentence. Sentences of this

type are called analytic sentences. Another example of an analytic sentence is “All bachelors are unmarried males.”

4. Oh, it’s wonderful to be in love!

5. Don’t slam the door!

6. What time is it?

None of the above sentences is cognitive because none of them bears information; nonetheless, all of them are very useful in real life. The first sentence is exclamatory (it makes an exclamation), the second is imperative (it gives an order), and the third is interrogative (it asks a question).

7. I have as a friend a shy little elf that disappears whenever anyone tries to check up on him.

Now we come to a very interesting sentence. Suppose I make the claim that I have as a friend a shy little elf that disappears whenever anyone tries to check up on him. If you try to see him, my shy little elf disappears. (As everyone knows, shy little elves have magical powers. After all, have you ever seen a shy little elf that didn’t have magical powers?) If you try to touch him, he moves out of your way. If you try to smell him, he quietly sprays the room with air freshener.

How many of you believe that I really have as a friend a shy little elf? Of course, none of you (except possibly a few people with bumper stickers reading, “I brake for Hobbits”). The reason you don’t believe the claim in this sentence is because the claim is un-check-up-able: There is no way to verify the claim if it is true, or to falsify it if it is false.

This, of course, leads to the logical positivists’ main point: Sentences that are un-check-up-able in principle are nonsense.

8. The Prime Minister of England is good.

Here we have another interesting sentence. This sentence certainly appears to be meaningful; however, verification of this sentence can be difficult because people's opinions of the goodness of the Prime Minister vary enormously.

9. God exists.

10. God loves us.

Here we have two more interesting sentences. Once again, it is difficult to see how these sentences can be verified. Philosophers — and other people — disagree about whether these sentences are true or false. They are not analytic sentences, although they do seem to be synthetic. However, the logical positivists believe that these sentences are not empirically verifiable and so they are not synthetic. Since in their opinion these sentences are neither analytic nor synthetic, they are not cognitive and therefore these sentences are as much nonsense as the sentence "I have as a friend a shy little elf that disappears whenever anyone tries to check up on him."

The logical positivists and Ayer wanted to do away with much traditional philosophy. The logical positivists and Ayer wanted to put much of ethics and religion on the scrap heap.

Ethical Intuitionism

G. E. Moore did believe in objective ethics; nonetheless, his theory of Ethical Intuitionism contributed to the development of Ethical Emotivism by criticizing one way in which ethical judgments could be synthetic. That way would be if the term "good" meant something that could be empirically verified. For example, if the term "good" meant "being charitable," we could easily check up on the truth of the sentence "The President of the United States is good."

All we would have to do is to check the President's income tax forms to see if, in fact, the President gives money to charity.

However, Moore denied that the word "good" stands for a property that can be empirically verified. According to Moore, goodness is a quality that is unique, simple, and indefinable. Indeed, Moore believed that you commit what he called the Naturalistic Fallacy if you identify goodness with a quality that can be empirically verified. Moore did believe that we can verify the sentence "The President of the United States is good." However, he believed that we verify ethical judgments through the use of our intuition. (Unfortunately, people's intuitions vary notoriously. For an example, look at people's opinions about our current President of the United States.)

In addition, Moore stated that if we identify goodness with a quality that is empirically verifiable, then even if we find someone who has that quality, it will be an open question whether that person is really good. This is known as Moore's Open Question Argument.

For example, let's suppose that we identify goodness with being charitable. This is something that we can easily verify. But suppose we do find a person who gives money to charity — that does not prove that the person is good. After all, the charitable person may be a rich politician who gives money to a hospital not out of a concern for poor people, but only because he hopes the favorable publicity resulting from a large donation will bring him votes.

A.J. Ayer

Ayer did not want to entirely do away with ethics: He did not want ethical judgments to be regarded as nonsense. Therefore, he proposed that ethical judgments are really

noncognitive sentences that only seem to be cognitive sentences.

After being influenced by the logical positivists and by G. E. Moore's Intuitionism, Ayer came up with a theory that stated that ethical judgments such as "The President of the United States is good" are nothing more than expressions of emotion. This theory is known as Ethical Emotivism. According to Ayer, a person who says, "The President of the United States is good," is evincing approval of the President of the United States. Of course, the person may not really approve of the President of the United States — the person expressing the approval may only be putting on an act for other people.

Chapter 1.12: A.J. Ayer (1910-1989): Advocate of Emotivism

Although A.J. Ayer may appear to be difficult reading because of the philosophical vocabulary he uses, his theory called Ethical Emotivism is actually easy to understand. According to Ethical Emotivism, moral judgments are noncognitive, emotive utterances.

What does this mean? (As I wrote above, Ayer uses much philosophical vocabulary.) If a statement is noncognitive, it is neither analytic nor synthetic; that is, it is not used to convey information. Analytic sentences are those such as "A bachelor is an unmarried male"; whether this sentence is tautologous or self-contradictory can be determined by analyzing the terms used in the sentence. Synthetic sentences are those such as "A tall stepladder is in that closet"; whether this statement is true or false can be determined by empirical investigation — by opening the door to the closet to see if a tall stepladder is there.

However, according to Ayer, ethical judgments such as "The President of the United States is good" are not definitions and do not bear information about the world; instead, according to Ayer, ethical judgments merely convey emotions. When I say, "Lying is bad," I am merely saying that I disapprove of lying, according to Ayer.

Ayer's major claim is that "all synthetic propositions [i.e. those that are true or false] are empirical hypotheses." According to Ayer, ethical judgments are not synthetic propositions — they are not true or false, but are only expressions of emotion.

Four Kinds of Moral Language

However, Ayer does not reject all kinds of moral language. He believes that moral language appears in four different kinds of sentences.

1) Definitions. An example would be a definition of "lying" or a definition of "promise": "The phrase 'to lie' means …" and "The term 'promise' means … ."

Ayer has no problems with definitions of ethical terms; they are analytic and can be evaluated as tautologous or self-contradictory. To check up on definitions, we can ask people what they mean when they use the terms "lie" or "promise."

2) Descriptions. Examples of descriptions include "People do not lie because they fear …" and "People keep their promises because they … ."

Ayer has no problems with descriptions of moral behavior; they are synthetic and can be evaluated as true or false. To check up on these descriptions, sociologists and psychologists can ask people why they don't lie and why they keep their promises.

3) Exhortations. Examples of exhortations include "Don't lie!" and "Keep your promises!"

Ayer has no problems with exhortations. They are noncognitive sentences, but they are useful in everyday life.

4) Moral Judgments. An example of a moral judgment is "It is wrong to lie."

Now Ayer has a problem. According to Ayer, this sentence is neither analytic nor synthetic, and so he proposes to investigate moral judgments to find out what kind of sentence they are.

Ayer's Investigation into Moral Judgments

How does Ayer explain moral judgments?

First, Ayer asks, Are they synthetic, factually significant? As an example, take the sentence "The President of the United States is good."

In this sentence, does "good" equal a fact? If so, there are two ways "good" could equal a fact. It could equal an empirical fact, or it could equal a nonempirical fact. (Don't worry; these will be explained in the next few paragraphs.)

Does "good" equal an empirical fact? There are two ways that "good" could equal an empirical fact. First, "good" could mean "approved by our group." This is what the relativists mean by "good." However, Ayer objects to this because it is not self-contradictory to say that something is approved of by our group, yet it is not good. For example, think of a group of teenagers who like to illegally drink beer on weekends. Drinking beer illegally is approved of by the group of teenagers, yet they know that they are doing wrong, and they would not want their preacher to find out what they are doing on the weekends.

Another way for "good" to equal an empirical fact is for "good" to equal "promoting the pleasure of humankind." This is what the utilitarians mean by "good." However, Ayer objects to this because it is not self-contradictory to say that something promotes the pleasure of humankind, yet it is not good. For example, I could promote the pleasure of humankind by selling grades to my students and donating the money to charity. My students would be happy, the charity would be happy, and I would be happy (because I would have fewer papers to grade). Yet selling grades is morally wrong.

Another way for the moral judgment "The President of the United States is good" to be synthetic would be for "good" to equal a nonempirical fact. This is the way that the philosopher G. E. Moore regards "good"; he said that we use our intuition to verify whether a person is good.

However, Ayer objects to this because our intuitions vary notoriously and so a person whom I think is good you may think is bad.

Ayer's Theory

Having argued that moral judgments are not synthetic, Ayer proposes his own view: Moral judgments are emotive. He makes three major points in his theory:

1) Fundamental ethical symbols (e.g. "good") are unanalyzable because the moral judgments in which they occur are un-check-up-able. Ayer has tried to show this by arguing that moral judgments are not synthetic.

2) Ethical symbols are pseudo-concepts: According to Ayer, they add no factual content to the proposition in which they occur. The moral judgment "You acted wrongly in stealing that money," according to Ayer, says exactly the same thing as "You stole that money!" when "You stole that money!" is spoken with a strong expression of disapproval. According to Ayer, the word "wrongly" adds no informational content other than evincing disapproval of stealing.

3) As expressions of emotion, your moral judgments:

- make no factual claim
- do not even claim something about your state of mind
- evince your feelings, and that does not necessarily mean that you have those feelings.

This is interesting. According to Ayer, moral judgments merely evince feelings. You may or may not actually have those feelings. For example, to teach your young son or daughter that you don't want him or her to steal, you could act shocked when he or she takes a quarter from your purse

or pants pocket without asking. But in real life, you may believe in stealing when there's a very good chance that you can get away with it.

Two final questions: Do so-called "moral disputes" present a problem for Ayer's view? Can Ayer give a plausible interpretation of moral disputes?

For example, let's say that there is a dispute about thrift. Person A says that "thrift is a virtue." However, person B says that "thrift is a vice." How does Ayer explain this moral dispute? According to Ayer, these two people are not arguing about morality at all. Instead, they are arguing about the facts of the case. Ayer believes that if you listen to the two people, you will learn that they are really arguing about facts.

Ayer's theory is interesting; however, Brand Blanshard will mount a hard-hitting attack against it. Blanshard believes that moral judgments are synthetic statements.

Note: The quotations by Ayer that appear in this essay come from his book *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

Chapter 1.13: Brand Blanshard (1892-1987): Critic of Emotivism

All of us are concerned about good and bad. Many of us believe that good and bad are objective — not dependent upon opinion, and incumbent upon all rational beings. According to objectivism, moral values and principles do not depend upon a particular person's opinions. According to objectivism, moral values and principles allow us to judge ethical statements as either true or false. According to objectivism, moral values and principles are norms.

Emotivism

One view that disagrees with this is emotivism. According to emotivism, whenever we say that something is good, all we are really saying is that we feel approvingly of that thing. And when we say that something is bad, all we are really saying is that we feel disapprovingly of that thing. Therefore, ethical language is nothing more than emotive language.

Of course, emotivism is a form of subjectivism. After all, I may feel approval of something that you feel disapproval of. If that is the case, then that thing is both good (to me) and bad (to you) at the same time. Also, we have no basis on which to say that one of us is right and the other wrong, because if ethical language is nothing more than emotive language, then both of us are correct, even if we do contradict each other.

Critic of Emotivism: Brand Blanshard

A philosopher who criticized emotivism is Brand Blanshard, who was born in Fredericksburg, Ohio. In his article "The New Subjectivism in Ethics" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (1948-49), 504-11), he provides six objections to emotivism.

In setting up his first few criticisms of emotivism, Blanshard engages his readers in a thought experiment. He asks them to imagine that they are walking in the woods when they come upon a rabbit whose leg has been caught in a trap. The rabbit struggled to get free and almost gnawed its leg off, but it died before it could escape. Blanshard believes that long and excruciating pain is bad in and of itself, and he wants the reader to agree that it was bad that the rabbit suffered in this way. Blanshard then sets about exploring and criticizing what the emotivist would have to say about this situation.

The First Criticism

Blanshard's first criticism is that the emotivist is committed to saying that until the person walking in the woods happened upon the rabbit, nothing bad had occurred.

After all, if good and bad are nothing more than expressions of emotion, then if no one is around to express emotion, to say, "It was a bad thing that the little rabbit should suffer so," then nothing bad can happen. Blanshard's point here, of course, is that most of us believe differently from the emotivist; we believe that it would be bad that the rabbit suffered even if no one had happened upon the scene.

The Second Criticism

Blanshard's second criticism is that the emotivist is committed to his original judgment that it is bad that the rabbit suffered so horridly even if later the emotivist discovers that he misjudged the situation and the rabbit really didn't suffer.

Let's suppose that someone is playing a practical joke on the emotivist. The practical joker has created this horrifying scene in the woods with the help of a realistic stuffed bunny and a bottle of ketchup. So just after the emotivist

says to himself, “It was a bad thing that the little animal should suffer so,” the practical joker jumps out behind a bush and yells, “Ha! Ha! I got you!” But if good and bad are nothing more than emotion, the emotivist is committed to saying that there was evil in the scene when he expressed dismay at the suffering of the (fake) rabbit. But that’s not the way an objectivist uses language. The objectivist can say, “I made a mistake — the rabbit really didn’t suffer and so nothing bad occurred (except for a rather tasteless practical joke).”

Please note: A common mistake that many students make is to say that the emotivist cannot change his or her mind about the situation. That’s not true. The emotivist can think on Monday the situation was a good situation, change his or her mind on Tuesday and think that it was a bad situation, and change his or her mind yet again on Wednesday and think once more that it was a good situation. However, the emotivist is committed to saying that the situation really was good on Monday and Wednesday, and it really was bad on Tuesday. On the other hand, the objectivist would say that the situation is either good or bad, and on at least one of those days the emotivist is mistaken about the nature of the situation.

The Third Criticism

Blanshard’s third criticism is that if we restate our original judgment after our emotions have cooled, our judgment would have no meaning.

Suppose we found the (real) rabbit in the woods a week ago and were overcome by pity when we said, “It was a bad thing that the little animal should suffer so.” That judgment has meaning because it expresses a real emotion. But suppose that we’ve been through a trying week and are completely drained of energy and so are completely incapable of feeling emotion. Further suppose that we

repeat our judgment that the suffering endured by the rabbit was bad. Since we feel no emotion when we make this judgment, the emotivist is committed to saying that there is nothing bad about the situation. However, that is not what the objectivist means when he makes that statement — the objectivist means that long and excruciating pain is bad in and of itself, no matter how he feels when he makes that judgment.

The Fourth Criticism

Blanshard's fourth criticism is that if emotivism is true, then we can no longer assess attitudes as fitting or unfitting.

In illustrating this criticism, Blanshard refers to Dostoevsky's novel *The House of the Dead.* In this novel, Dostoevsky writes about prisoners who gleefully tell stories of the murders they've committed. He writes, "I have heard stories of the most terrible, the most unnatural actions, of the most monstrous murders, told with the most spontaneously childishly merry laughter."

Of course, the objectivist regards the attitude of these criminals to their murders as unfitting. A fitting attitude would be remorse. But if emotivism is correct, then since badness resides only in emotion, the best way to get rid of badness is to change your emotion. So if you want to get rid of the evil of a horrifying murder, the best way to do so is to cry, "Hurrah for murder!" So the emotivist is committed to saying that these murderers have adopted the best attitude possible toward murder. Of course, the objectivist disagrees.

The Fifth Objection

Blanshard's fifth objection is that emotivism makes mistakes about values impossible.

Objectivists believe that we can make mistakes about values. We may do something that we feel is right; however, we may be mistaken about that act. So the act may feel subjectively right, yet be far from what is in fact objectively right. In such a case, the objectivists would say that we made a mistake about values, about what is right.

As an example, we can use cases of child abuse. Often, a child abuser uses the excuse, "Spare the rod, and spoil the child," to justify their actions. The most horrible cases of child abuse are sometimes justified by their perpetrators in that "it's for the child's own good," even when the child dies from the abuse. Objectivists definitely believe that these child abusers have made a mistake about values.

But the emotivist is committed to saying that these child abusers are right. If they believe that what they are doing is right, and if right and wrong reside solely in emotion, then the child abuser is doing the right thing as long as he or she feels it is the right thing.

The Sixth Objection

Blanshard's sixth objection is that if emotivism is widely believed, it will lead to international chaos.

This sixth objection is based on pragmatism. Blanshard points out that in dealing with other countries, the United Nations assumes that "there is such a thing as right and wrong in the conduct of a nation, a right and wrong that does not depend on how it happens to feel at the time." However, if emotivism is the correct philosophical position, then terrorists are doing the right thing as long as they feel terrorism is right.

Blanshard concludes his essay by referring to two famous Communists, who are widely regarded as evil: "So if our friends the subjectivists still hold their theory after I have applied my little ruler to their knuckles, which of course

they will, I have but one request to make of them: Do keep it from Mr. Molotov and Mr. Vishinsky."

Note: The quotations by Blanshard that appear in this essay are taken from his essay "The New Subjectivism in Ethics" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (1948-49), 504-11).

Chapter 2: Ethical Systems

Chapter 2.1: David Bruce (born 1954): Ethical Ways of Arguing

If you ever need to write an argument about something, you are likely to consider morality. Here are a few things to consider:

Argue on the Basis of Consequences

If something will have bad consequences, we probably ought not to do it. If something will have good consequences, we probably ought to do it. This seems obvious. If hitting yourself on the head with a hammer gives you headaches, I recommend that you stop hitting yourself on the head with a hammer. Ask yourself: What are the consequences of what you are arguing?

Argue on the Basis of the Golden Rule

Here are two formulations of the Golden Rule, one stated positively and the other stated negatively:

• Treat other people the way you want to be treated.

• Do not treat other people the way that you do not want to be treated.

Ask yourself: Is what you are arguing consistent with the Golden Rule?

Argue on the Basis of Reversibility

One way to find out if something is morally right is to ask if you want something done to you. You may be thinking that you would like other people to be forced to do something, but would you want to be forced to do that thing?

Argue on the Basis that Human Beings are Valuable

To be moral, we ought to treat human beings as valuable, and we ought not to treat other human beings badly. In philosophical language, we ought to treat other human beings and ourselves as ends (valuable in itself) rather than as means (something to be used, then tossed aside). Make sure that what you are arguing treats other people with respect.

Argue on the Basis of Happiness

Happiness is good. We have to do some things, such as make a living and pay our bills. We ought to do some things, such as exercise and eat healthily. We want to do some things, maybe even things that other people find silly. As long as the things we want to do don't conflict with the things we have to do and the things we ought to do, go ahead and do them. Ask yourself: Will what you are arguing bring happiness to people, including yourself?

Argue on the Basis of What Would Happen if Everybody Did It

If everybody pirates music, what would happen? Chances are, less new music will be written. If musicians can't make a living from their music, they will have to get money from other sources, including jobs that may not allow them enough time to write and perform good music.

A Few More Points

Here are a few more points to consider:

Use *Pathos*

Pathos is simply the human element. For example, how will a governmental policy affect a certain family? Putting a human face on a policy can be effective in arguments. Writing about a certain person or a certain family can make

politicians understand how a policy affects people. If you are writing about abortion, write about a person who had to decide whether to get an abortion. This is a way to make your paper more interesting and more persuasive.

Use *Logos*

Logos is reason, facts, and figures. Use good reasoning in your arguments, and support what you are arguing with facts and figures.

Use *Ethos*

Ethos is ethics and personal character. Avoid manipulating the facts in your argument papers. Argue fairly. Remember that you are not highly paid and sometimes highly stupid pundits who get paid to stir up controversy rather than solve problems.

Chapter 2.2: Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.): The Good Life

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) was an ancient Greek philosopher who is important in many areas of philosophical inquiry. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he explains his ethical theory.

Instrumental and Intrinsic Goods

Aristotle believed that a human being's chief good is happiness. In determining this, he makes a distinction between instrumental goods and intrinsic goods. An instrumental good is one that we desire for the sake of something else. For example, I may desire to be a millionaire, but for the sake of spending those millions of dollars — not for the millions of dollars themselves. (If I were alone on a deserted island with no stores nearby, those millions of dollars would do me no good whatsoever.) An intrinsic good, however, is one that we desire for its own sake. And, as Aristotle says (and I agree), happiness is an intrinsic good. All of us want to be happy, for the sake of happiness itself. According to Aristotle, the chief good of Humankind must be an intrinsic good.

Human Happiness

Of course, we then have to ask in what human happiness lies. We already know that happiness does not lie in wealth, because wealth is an instrumental good. Aristotle also said that happiness does not lie in honor from others, for that is something that relies on fickle human opinion. (Some of the best human beings have been reviled during their lifetimes. Jesus was crucified, Socrates was condemned to death, Lincoln and Kennedy were assassinated, Martin Luther King, Jr. was called a Communist and was also assassinated.) In addition, happiness does not lie in physical pleasures, for those are things animals can enjoy, and man

is above the animals. (Pigs move to the shade when they get hot, and they eat when they are hungry.)

According to Aristotle, human happiness consists in doing what is distinctively human. So we must analyze human beings to discover in what lies their *arete* (excellence). Aristotle believed that what is distinctively human is reason. But since one can have excellence without using it (you could have a talent for painting, but never do any painting), and that is bad, Aristotle believed that true human excellence lies in action in accordance with a rational principle. Happiness results when such action is performed with the appropriate excellence or virtue.

Moral Virtue, and the Mean Between Extremes

Aristotle thought that we can acquire two different kinds of virtues: moral and intellectual. The appetitive element (the desiring element) of the human soul can lead us to moral virtue, if we have desires toward worthy goals and these desires are subjected to the rational regulating principle known as the mean between extremes.

This theory of the mean between extremes is a famous part of Aristotle's thought. He believed in moderation — as most Greeks did. If you have too much or too little of something, you will suffer from an excess or a deficiency of that thing. What you need is exactly the right amount. Thus courage is the mean between the extremes of rashness (excess) and cowardice (deficiency). Applying Aristotle's ideas (but not always his names for the qualities listed), we can make a list illustrating some means between extremes:

1. Courage

Rashness (Excess); Courage (Virtue); Cowardice (Deficiency)

2. Liberality

Prodigality (Excess); Liberality (Mean/Virtue); Miserliness (Deficiency)

3. Charitable

Overly Generous (Excess); Charitable (Mean/Virtue); Cheap (Deficiency)

4. Weight

Obese (Excess); Normal Weight (Mean/Virtue); Anorexic (Deficiency)

5. Nobility

Vanity (Excess); Nobility (Mean/Virtue); Ignobility (Deficiency)

6. Good Temper

Hot Temper (Excess); Good Temper (Mean/Virtue); Indifference (Deficiency)

7. Truthfulness

Boastfulness (Excess); Truthfulness (Mean/Virtue); False Modesty (Deficiency)

Each row represents the excess, mean, and deficiency of a certain activity. The first row shows that courage is the mean between the excess of rashness and the deficiency of cowardice. Let's say that a person is walking down the street and sees a house on fire. A rash person would shout, "Don't worry, I'll save you," and rush inside the burning building without even bothering to find out whether anyone is inside to be rescued! A coward would ignore the fire and not even call the fire department. However, a courageous person would call the fire department, find out whether

anyone was trapped inside the burning building, and render whatever assistance he or she rationally can.

The second row shows that liberality is the mean between the excess of prodigality and the deficiency of miserliness. A prodigal person would leave a $100 tip after eating a $10 pizza (however, this can be a good deed when done by someone who can easily spare the money and wants to help the server. If I give a $100 tip for a $10 pizza, I am being prodigal. If Microsoft founder Bill Gates gives a $100 tip for a $10 pizza, he is doing a good deed / being charitable). A miser would not leave any tip at all. However, a person who is liberal with money would leave a 15 percent tip for good service.

The third row shows that being charitable is the mean between the excess of being overly generous and the deficiency of being cheap. An overly generous person will give away all of his or her money to charity, not saving enough to live on. A cheap person will never give money to charity. However, a charitable person will pay his or her bills, keep enough money to live on (and keep some to save), but also give a portion that he or she can afford to charity.

The fourth row shows that normal weight is the mean between the excess of obesity and the deficiency of anorexia. An obese person pigs out every night (and every morning, and every noon, and two or three other times a day). An anorexic person will do 100 situps after chewing a stick of sugarless gum. However, a person who maintains his or her normal weight will eat three square meals a day, and is willing to eat cake and ice cream at birthday parties (and salad for lunch the next day).

One point to notice is that not all activities have a mean between extremes. Some activities are already excessive in themselves. Thus, adultery is always wrong. You will never

be able to commit adultery with the right woman at the right time and in the right manner. (You should never say, "I don't want to commit too little adultery or too much adultery; I just want to commit exactly the right amount of adultery"!)

Also, the mean can vary among people (see liberality above). In determining how much food to eat, the mean for a 300-pound weightlifter will be much greater than the mean for a 100-pound secretary. Also, a wealthy person such as Microsoft founder Bill Gates can afford to give much more money to charity than a college student can.

The way we acquire moral virtue, according to Aristotle, is through imitation and acquiring good habits. If we act the way a brave person acts, we will become brave. If we act the way a truthful person acts, we will become truthful. If we act the way a noble person acts, we will become noble.

Intellectual Virtue

Aristotle gives as examples of intellectual virtue philosophic wisdom and practical wisdom. We acquire intellectual virtue through being taught and through studying. Examples of intellectual virtue include learning to speak French fluently, learning geometry, and learning to play the piano well.

A Complete Life

Aristotle believes that to be happy we must be virtuous throughout our life. He writes, "For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one sunny day; similarly, one day or a short time does not make a man blessed or happy."

Concluding Points

Some important points to note about Aristotle's ethics include these:

1) It is teleological — it is concerned with the purpose of Humankind, which is to use reason, and

2) It is an ethics of self-realization. Aristotle wanted us to realize our potential, to be all that we can be, and for Aristotle, that means to use our reason to acquire both moral and intellectual virtue.

Note: The quotations by Aristotle that appear in this essay are from his *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Martin Ostwald.

Chapter 2.3: Epicurus (341-270 B.C.E.): "Letter to Menoeceus"

Some philosophy is practical.

One philosopher concerned with a practical way of living is the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, who was a younger contemporary of Aristotle. Epicurus lived in interesting times; that is, a time of warfare, refugees, and great unhappiness. (An old Chinese curse is, "My you live in interesting times.")

Because of the upheavals of his time (Alexander the Great's generals were battling over Alexander's empire after he died), Epicurus was concerned with how one could lead a tranquil life. The situation seems to me to be similar to that at the end of Voltaire's *Candide*: Candide and his friends are on a small farm, enjoying the fruits of their labor, while in nearby Constantinople all kinds of violence are occurring. Candide tells his friends, "We must work in the garden," meaning that although much of the world is in a state of upheaval, yet if one works hard and is lucky, one can create small spots of peace and happiness.

In his "Letter to Menoeceus," Epicurus gives several practical pieces of advice on how to lead a tranquil life. We may not agree with everything that Epicurus says, but we will probably find some wisdom in at least some of his ideas.

I. Think Correctly About the Gods

Epicurus believed that the gods have been defamed by poets such as Homer, creator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, who portrayed the gods as full of petty jealousies and as concerned with the actions of human beings on Earth. Instead, according to Epicurus, the gods exist in tranquility and do not concern themselves with human beings at all. Therefore, we have nothing to fear from the gods. Today,

that means that we should not believe that AIDS has been sent to punish us, for God is not concerned enough about us to even want to punish us. Therefore, according to Epicurus, we need not fear the gods. They will neither reward us for good deeds, not punish us for bad deeds.

II. Think Correctly About Death

Many human beings are afraid of what awaits us after death. We have been brought up to believe that God punishes bad behavior and to believe that all human beings have sinned. According to Epicurus, we need not fear death. There is no afterlife in which we will be rewarded or punished; instead, death is nonexistence, and we shall feel nothing: neither pain nor pleasure. Thus, we need not worry about what God shall do to us after death. Not only does God not concern himself with us, but also there is no human afterlife for God to be concerned about.

III. Scrutinize Your Desires

Some desires are natural, while other desires are vain. We need to scrutinize our desires so that we can satisfy our natural desires. For example, we have a natural desire for food and drink. We can satisfy this desire with cheap, nourishing food such as bread, vegetables, fruits, cheese, and milk, or we can satisfy it with Lobster Newburg and Dom Perignon. According to Epicurus, we should satisfy our desire with cheap, nourishing food and drink. Of course, if a wealthy friend invites us to his mansion for a dinner of Lobster Newburg and Dom Perignon, we would accept (if we truly liked the friend), but we would be foolish if we were to feel bad because we cannot afford Lobster Newburg and Dom Perignon for dinner every night. (I don't think that Epicurus would drink Coke, which he would regard as expensive, colored, flavored sugar-water with bubbles in it.)

IV. Consider Consequences

In general, we wish to feel pleasure and to avoid pain, but this does not mean we should seek every pleasure available to us and avoid every pain. For example, snorting cocaine is supposed to be very pleasurable (at least at first), but we know the consequences of a cocaine habit can be very debilitating both to our finances and to our health. On the other hand, we may not want to exercise every day (at least at first), but the pain of doing so (until you get in shape and begin to enjoy exercising) will lead to better health and a stronger body. Also, the pain of chemotherapy may have very desirable consequences if it cures our cancer.

V. Distinguish Noble from Base Pleasures

Some pleasures are better than others, Epicurus believes. The noble pleasures are intellectual pleasures, while base pleasures titillate base emotions. A drunken revel is a base pleasure, while using philosophic reasoning to determine what you ought to do is a noble pleasure. The one leads to bad consequences, while the other leads to good consequences.

VI. Become Prudent

This advice condenses all the previous advice. The prudent person follows all of the above advice. The prudent person is a tranquil sage, a person who is at peace and is wise. Although the world may be in upheaval, the prudent person is still able to maintain his or her own tranquility.

Let me conclude this essay by quoting Epicurus on philosophy:

"Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul. … both when young and when old a man must study

philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessings through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come."

Note: The quotation from Epicurus is from *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*, translated by Cyril Bailey.

Chapter 2.4: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873): An Act is Right or Wrong According to Its Consequences

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832): The Father of Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham is the father of utilitarianism. He was aware of the bad results of the Industrial Revolution: child labor, sweat shops, poor wages, bad working conditions, long hours, crowded living quarters, and often an early death for the laborer. As a reformer, he wanted to correct these conditions and bring about human happiness. Because of his concern, he invented utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is a very interesting ethical theory. According to Bentham, an act is right or wrong according to the amount of happiness or misery it brings to Humankind. An act that causes much happiness for many people is right; an act that causes much misery for many people is wrong. (A strength of utilitarianism is that the happiness of everyone must be considered; it's not fair to consider only your own happiness and not the happiness of other people affected by your actions.)

Bentham is a hedonistic utilitarian. He made no qualitative ranking of pleasures; to him, only the quantity of pleasure mattered. If you receive much pleasure from reading Perry Mason books and none from reading Shakespeare, Bentham would say by all means to read Perry Mason books.

Bentham is also an act utilitarian, which means that he advocated calculating the amount of happiness or misery each act you are thinking of performing will bring into the world before you do it. To aid people in performing this calculation, Bentham invented what he called the hedonistic calculus.

In using the hedonistic calculus, one must calculate the happiness and misery likely to result from an act according to these seven factors:

1. Its intensity. Some pleasures and pains are very intense. On a scale of 10 to -10, a sexual orgasm might rank a 10 (if you're lucky), while an untreated toothache might rank a -10 (if you're unlucky).

2. Its duration. An orgasm doesn't last very long; an untreated toothache can last a very long time.

3. Its certainty or uncertainty. A pizza party with friends will almost certainly be pleasurable; a pizza party with a group mostly composed of people you don't know may or may not be pleasurable.

4. Its propinquity [nearness] or remoteness. Eating a pizza is immediately pleasurable; exercising so that you can lose five pounds requires waiting for pleasurable results.

5. Its fecundity. Education can be pleasurable. The more you learn about a subject, the easier it becomes to learn more, and the more pleasure you take in pursuing your education. On the other hand, a pizza party is over in a couple of hours and that's it. (However, you may meet your future husband or wife at a pizza party.)

6. Its purity. Sitting down and reading a good book will not result in any pain the next day. However, a drunken night on the town will probably result in a hangover the next morning.

7. Its extent. A pizza party can provide pleasure to many people; sitting at home alone and reading a good book will provide pleasure to only you.

After assigning a number for the pleasures and pains likely to be the result of the act you are contemplating, you can

add the figures and determine whether it is good or bad. For fun, use the hedonistic calculus to determine which of two acts you ought to do tonight.

Remember the following point: In determining what you ought to do, you have to perform the same calculation of pleasures and pains for each person likely to be affected by your act. Add all the results together, and then you will know which of two acts you ought to perform.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

This is John Stuart Mill's description of utilitarianism: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals *utility*, or the *greatest happiness principle*, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By 'happiness' is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by 'unhappiness,' pain, and the privation of pleasure."

Mill was very much influenced by Bentham; however, Mill did modify Bentham's version of utilitarianism.

For example, Bentham's hedonistic calculus does have a drawback: It takes a lot of time. (Can you imagine the President of the United States performing a hedonistic calculus to decide whether to veto a bill affecting millions of Americans?) Fortunately, Mill modified utilitarianism to include the use of rules. In an emergency situation, you may not have time to sit down and perform the hedonistic calculus. If you can follow a rule instead of performing the hedonistic calculus, you can act immediately.

After all, according to Mill, we have the whole history of Humankind behind us and so we don't need to perform a hedonistic calculus to determine whether murder and theft are likely to result in pain or pleasure. Our past experience says that these acts will result in pain. I am in agreement

with Mill here. I believe that the addition of rules is an improvement to utilitarianism.

Mill made another modification to utilitarianism; he introduced a qualitative ranking of pleasures. One problem with Bentham's hedonistic calculus is that it doesn't explain what to do in the event of a tie. Mill solved that problem by pointing out that some pleasures are better than others. In case of a tie, one would do the act resulting in a higher pleasure. In addition, simply recognizing that some pleasures are better than others is an improvement, in my opinion, on Bentham's version of utilitarianism.

In a famous passage, Mill wrote, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they know only their side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides."

This quotation alludes to Mill's way of determining which pleasures are best: We ask the competent judges — the people who have experienced both pleasures. If they are not in agreement, then we take a vote and let the majority decide.

In Mill's words, "Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure."

Mill's use of the qualified judges, however, points out a problem with Mill's ranking of pleasures: Sometimes the majority can be wrong. There is another problem with this ranking of pleasures: If we rank pleasures, then we are saying that something other than pleasure determines whether an act is right or wrong. However, utilitarianism stated that pleasure is the sole criterion.

By taking into account the quality of pleasures, Mill allows for ideals. You can decide to forsake an immediate pleasure in order to pursue an ideal. For example, you may decide to skip dessert for a few weeks in order to lose a few pounds. And you may decide to study philosophy tonight instead of watching TV.

Conclusion

Bentham and Mill have discovered part of the answer to our search for a good ethical system. Consequences are important in determining an act's moral worth; also, we must not consider only our own happiness — the happiness of other people must be considered as well as our own.

However, utilitarianism does have some bad consequences: It can approve as moral some actions that all of us would consider immoral. For example, utilitarianism was used to justify the enslavement of blacks in the pre-Civil War south. Slavery was bad for the blacks and resulted in much misery for them; however, utilitarians argued that the use of slaves made the economy viable and thus resulted in much happiness for the white majority. In other words, the happiness of the white majority outweighed the misery of the slaves and thus slavery was acceptable according to utilitarianism.

An ethical system that leads to such results must be rejected or further modified.

Bentham and Mill are the two major proponents of utilitarianism in history. Bentham was an act utilitarian and a hedonistic utilitarian. Mill modified Bentham's version of utilitarianism by introducing the use of rules and the recognition of qualitative distinctions in pleasures; Mill is a rule utilitarian and an ideal utilitarian.

Notes:

• The quotations by John Stuart Mill that appear in this essay are from his *Utilitarianism*.

• To learn more about Utilitarianism, read Jeremy Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*.

Chapter 2.5: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): Moral Duty

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was interested in duty above all else. He disagreed with the utilitarians, who believed the consequences of an act are what count most. He also disagreed that pleasure and happiness count in determining the moral worth of an act. Instead, morality depends on doing your duty.

A Good Will

Kant believed that the only thing that is good without qualification is a good will — that is, willing rightly, willing to do the right thing in every situation. According to Kant, having a good will is important even when one cannot accomplish anything. As you can see, this differs very much from utilitarianism, which states that unless an act has good consequences, it is not good.

According to Kant, even intelligence and courage are not good in themselves; they are good only when they are used in accordance with a good will. After all, a criminal with intelligence and courage is much more dangerous than a criminal who is a fool and a coward.

A famous quotation of Kant's is this: "Even if it should happen that, by a particularly unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should be wholly lacking in power to accomplish its purpose, and if even the greatest effort should not avail it to achieve anything of its end, and if there remained only the good will (not as a mere wish but as the summoning of all the means of our power), it would sparkle like a jewel in its own right, as something that had its full worth in itself." (Note that at this time stepmothers were sometimes regarded as behaving evilly to their stepchildren — remember the story of Cinderella?)

Actions Based on Impulse

Kant believed that Humankind performs many voluntary actions, only some of which have moral worth. We perform many actions based on impulse; for example, I walk by an ice cream shop, buy an ice cream cone and eat it, then remember that I am on a diet. (Unfortunately, this has really happened to me.)

Hypothetical Imperatives

Another kind of voluntary action is based on hypothetical imperatives. Kant used the word "imperative" to mean "command"; "hypothetical" is used here because the object of our action is something we may or may not desire. Hypothetical imperatives are expressed in the form of "if … then" statements. For example, if you wish to get an A on the philosophy midterm, then you ought to study now and let the pizza parties wait until the weekend. Unfortunately, not everyone is willing to do what is necessary to get an A.

The Categorical Imperative

The kind of imperative that is used to decide which actions are right and which actions are wrong is the categorical imperative. By "categorical imperative" Kant meant that this imperative is not dependent on varying conditions and that this imperative commands absolutely and with no exceptions. Kant believed that there is only one categorical imperative, although it can be expressed in three different ways.

The first formulation of the categorical imperative says that you should act only on that principle which you can will should become a universal law. To use the categorical imperative, think about the action you are considering whether to perform, think of a maxim for that action, then test the maxim to see if it is consistent with the categorical

imperative. By “maxim,” Kant meant the principle on which we act; as such, it is a candidate for a universal law.

For example, let’s suppose that you need money desperately and that the only way you can acquire that money is to borrow it and make a lying promise that you will pay the money back although you know that you will never be able to do so. The maxim would be this: “When you need money, it’s OK to make a lying promise that you will pay the money back although you know that you will never be able to do so.” Can we will that this maxim become a universal law?

Kant says we can’t. If it were made a universal law, it would contradict itself, because no one would be able to borrow money. If the maxim were made into a universal law and you then wished to borrow money and promised to pay it back, all the possible lenders would laugh in your face.

Universalizability and Reversibility

Kant believed that maxims ought to be tested for universalizability and for reversibility. By “universalizability,” Kant meant that the maxim would apply to everyone. As we have seen, there would be problems if we were to try to make this maxim a universal law. The other term, “reversibility,” means that what you want to do to another person, that person can also do to you. You may be willing to make a lying promise to obtain other people’s money, but are you willing to allow other people to make lying promises to you in order to obtain your money? Of course not.

This maxim did not pass the test for consistency with the categorical imperative and thus the action is immoral. If the maxim had passed the test, the action based on it would be moral.

Treating Other People as Ends, Not Means

Another formulation of the categorical imperative says that you should act in such a way that you treat humanity, including yourself as well as other people, always also as an end and never only as a means.

If you treat another person as a means, then you are using that person. For example, a guy unfortunately might be very nice to a woman, sleep with her, then never call her. In this example, the guy is treating the woman only as a sex object (a means to achieve an orgasm), not as an end (a person valuable in herself).

If you treat other people as ends, then you are treating them as valuable in themselves. For example, you can treat everybody you meet with common courtesy (which, as you probably know, is no longer common). If you see a parent teaching her young child how to cross the street, you can decide to refrain from jaywalking this one time and thus be a role model for the child. You can also refrain from demonstrating power by ordering around servers in a restaurant.

As you can see, our example of making a lying promise to borrow money fails this formulation of the categorical imperative. If you make a lying promise to borrow money, you are using the person you are borrowing from. You are not treating the person as an end; you are treating the person as a means.

Stressing that We are Free and Autonomous

The final formulation of the categorical imperative stresses the autonomy of Humankind. It says that you should act as if the principle of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.

"Autonomy" means "self-legislated." According to Kant, we use our reason to determine right from wrong. In this formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant states that we should act the way we want other people to act. To me, this is a variation of the Golden Rule.

Examples of Universalizability

When we argue on the basis of universalizability, we argue on the basis of what would happen if everybody did it.

Maxim: I will pirate music.

If everybody pirates music, what would happen? Chances are, less new music will be written. If musicians can't make a living from their music, they will have to get money from other sources, including jobs that may not allow them enough time to write and perform good music. We see a contradiction here. You make the maxim so that you can pirate music, but when the maxim is universalized, much less music will be created and so you will be able to pirate less music.

Maxim: I will always have an experienced surgeon when I need surgery.

If everyone insists on having an experienced surgeon when they need surgery, what would happen? People would be able to get surgery for a while, but as the experienced surgeons grow old and die, people will not be able to get surgery. We see a contradiction here. You make the maxim so that you can have an experienced surgeon when you need surgery, but when the maxim is universalized, soon you will not be able to have an experienced surgeon when you need surgery. (Fortunately, the first few times a doctor performs surgery, an experienced surgeon is on hand to make sure that everything goes well. That way, new surgeons are trained in a way that is safe for the patient.)

Maxim: I will always buy generic drugs.

If everyone always insists on buying generic rather than brand-name drugs, what would happen? Brand-name drug companies would not be making the profit that would allow them to do the research and development that is necessary to bring new drugs to market. We see a contradiction here. You make the maxim so that you can buy generic drugs, but when the maxim is universalized, you will not be able to buy new generic drugs because the drug companies do not have the money to develop them.

Maxim: I will watch only DVD boxed sets without commercials rather than watch the shows on TV with the commercials.

If everyone insists on watching DVD boxed sets without commercials rather than watching the shows on TV with the commercials, what would happen? Soon, fewer TV programs would be produced because the money from commercials that paid for the TV shows is no longer available. We see a contradiction here. You make the maxim so that you can watch TV shows without commercials, but when the maxim is universalized, fewer TV shows will be created and so there are fewer boxed sets of TV shows for you to watch.

Free Will, Immortality, and God

A final point to make about Kant's ethic is that he believed that it is rational to believe in free will, immortality, and God. According to Kant, we must have free will in order to be moral. Kant took the moral quest (the quest to always behave morally) seriously, and so he believed in free will.

We also can rationally postulate an afterlife, says Kant. Although we take the moral life seriously and do our best to always act morally, we often fail. In order to achieve the moral perfection we desire, we need more time. This

lifetime is not long enough for us to achieve the moral quest and so the time we need to achieve it is given to us in an afterlife.

Finally, Kant believed that the proper relationship between morality and happiness is that if you act morally, then you ought to be happy. Unfortunately, we know that life doesn't always turn out that way. Drug dealers in Miami make much more money than we do and are probably happier (not in the Aristotelian sense, but in the sense of being able to buy as many sensual pleasures as they desire). Therefore, we can postulate the existence of God, according to Kant. God will be the guarantor of happiness for the moral people in the afterlife.

Note: The quotations by Kant that appear in this essay are from his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Lewis White Beck.

Chapter 2.6: David Bruce (born 1954): Ethical Theories' Strengths and Weaknesses

One way to evaluate ethical theories is to list their strengths and weaknesses. Both utilitarianism and Kantian ethics have their strengths and weaknesses, which often mirror each other. (A weakness that exists in utilitarianism is often one of the strengths of Kantian ethics, and vice versa.)

Utilitarianism: Strengths

One strength of utilitarianism is that you must consider the effect of your actions upon everyone they affect. You can make no immoral exceptions for yourself.

Another strength of utilitarianism is its emphasis upon consequences. Certainly we must agree that consequences are important. It does matter when a person is killed — even if the person doing the killing has very good motives. We should not obey a rule such as "Don't lie" so stringently that an innocent person dies as a result of our telling the truth unless doing so will save the lives of many other innocent people.

Utilitarianism: Weaknesses

One weakness of utilitarianism is that it doesn't protect minority rights. According to utilitarianism, we should do those things that will result in the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Therefore, if it could be shown that slavery resulted in the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people, a utilitarian would — to be consistent with his or her ethical theory — have to advocate the establishment of slavery. In fact, in the pre-Civil War South, some people did justify slavery on the basis that it helped the economy of both the North and the South. (Southern raw goods were shipped to Northern factories.)

Another weakness of utilitarianism is that often it is difficult to correctly predict the consequences of our actions. This is especially true when our actions affect a large number of people.

Yet another weakness of utilitarianism is that it ignores motive. Certainly, motive is important. Our judicial system recognizes this when it makes distinctions between manslaughter (the illegal killing of a person without intent to kill that person) and first-degree murder (the intentional killing of another person).

Dr. Donald Borchert of Ohio University used a vivid example to show that motive is important in considering the morality of an act. In his example, it is Halloween, and a man is upset because the neighborhood kids run through his yard while they are playing. This man decides to get revenge by cooking a bunch of brownies. Actually, he cooks two batches of brownies: one for himself, and one for the neighborhood kids. The brownies he makes for himself are good, tasty brownies. The brownies he makes to give to the neighborhood kids on Halloween contain a secret ingredient: a strong laxative. Halloween comes, and the man gives brownies to all the neighborhood kids who knock on his door for trick and treat. Each time he gives a brownie to one of the neighborhood kids who have been running through his yard, he thinks, “Ha! Got you, you little SOB!” However, what the man does not realize is that he got the two batches of brownies mixed up, and he has been giving the neighborhood kids the good, tasty brownies that do not have the strong laxative. In this example, the neighborhood kids are happy and the man is happy. According to utilitarianism, this is a good act because it resulted in much happiness, but are we willing to call this act a good act?

(Mill could reply that consequences are important in determining whether an act is good or bad, but that motive is important in determining whether a person is good or bad. Therefore, the act is good because it has pleasurable consequences, but the man is bad because his motive was bad when he performed the act.)

Also, if an act is good because it makes people happy, then it would follow that some acts would be called good although they violate our ordinary ethical intuitions. For example, in Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," a person is chosen by lot, then stoned to death — this custom apparently originated as a way to choose a scapegoat to atone for the villagers' sins. This act makes the villagers happy, but few of us — if any — would call such an act good.

Kantian Ethics: Strengths

Like utilitarianism, Kantian ethics requires that everyone's interests be considered. Once again, you are not allowed to make an immoral exception for yourself. Universalizability and reversibility prevent you from making an immoral exception for yourself.

Another strength of Kantian ethics is that it recognizes the importance of motive. One ought always to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. It really does make a difference whether a driver intentionally runs a child over or accidentally runs a child over.

Kantian ethics also protects the rights of minorities. When Kant says that you should act in such a way that you treat humanity, including yourself as well as other people, always also as an end and never only as a means, he means that we should always respect the rights of other people, as well as our own rights. Kant also means that these rights

can never be taken away from a person. Therefore, slavery can never be justified by Kantian ethics.

Kantian Ethics Weaknesses

The major weakness of Kantian ethics is that it ignores consequences. Remarkable as it sounds, Kant actually said that one ought never to lie, no matter what the situation. Therefore, if the Gestapo knocks on your door, asking you where your friend, a member of the underground, is hiding (in fact, he is hiding in your closet), Kant would advise you to tell the Gestapo the truth, even if it results in the death of your friend. Few of us — if any — would call such an act good.

This brings up the problem of conflicting duties. Kant says that we should do our duty, but what if we have more than one duty and the duties conflict. In the case of the Gestapo asking you where your friend is hiding, we recognize the duty of telling the truth, but we also recognize the duty of protecting our friend's life. What ought we to do in that situation?

Conclusion

Both utilitarianism and Kantian ethics have strengths and weaknesses that often mirror each other. So what can a philosopher do who wishes to know how to answer the question "What ought I to do?"

One possibility is to accept mainly one theory, but to remain open to the insights provided by the other theory. For example, one may choose to be a Kantian and use the categorical imperative as a guide to moral actions in everyday life. However, although mainly a Kantian, that person could also remain open to the insights of utilitarianism. Thus, if the consequences of an action appear to be very important, that person may choose to be a

utilitarian when deciding what to do in that particular case, then go right back to being a Kantian again.

Also, of course, we could accept something that Mill says: Consequences are important in determining whether an act is good or bad, but motive is important in determining whether a person is good or bad. Therefore, an act is good if it has pleasurable consequences, and a man is good if his motive is good when he performed an act. Also, therefore, an act is bad if it has painful consequences, and a man is bad if his motive is bad when he performed an act. Of course, there is much more to Kantian ethics than just motive.

Chapter 2.7: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900): The Relativity of Morality

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is a figure of much interest to many people. He lived a life espousing ideas that were very radical ("God is dead"), and he died insane. Without a doubt, he was a brilliant — and controversial — man.

I. The Problem

Nietzsche was an ethical relativist. He did not believe in an objective ethics. Instead, he believed that right and wrong differ according to the society in which you live. Right and wrong vary according to the time and place and culture in which you live. What was right in the 1800s in the United States may not be right in the 1900s in the United States.

According to Nietzsche, moralists take for granted the existence of morality itself. They try to "give a basis for morality," but all they are really doing is giving a justification of the morality that is current in the time and place in which they write. Writers of morality merely attempt to justify the conventional morality they grew up with.

Therefore, Nietzsche writes, more work needs to be done:

> What is still necessary is the collection of material, the comprehensive survey and classification of sentiments of worth, distinctions of worth, which live, grow, propagate, and perish; and the attempt, perhaps, to give a clear idea of the recurring and more common forms of these living crystallizations. This is necessary as preparation for a theory of types of morality.

This is what Nietzsche attempted to do as a cultural historian.

II. A Genealogy of Morals

In Nietzsche's work as a cultural historian, he discovered what he calls a genealogy (a family history) of morals. Moral systems grow and develop according to a certain pattern. They start out as an aristocratic morality that elevates humanity. According to Nietzsche,

> Every elevation of the type 'man' has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society, and so it will always be: a society believing in a long gradation of rank and differences of worth among human beings, and requiring slavery in some form or other.

This is something that we have seen in many ancient cultures. The civilizations of Greece and Rome were ruled early by tyrants, whom the populace later threw out. In the Old Testament, we have many kings, as well as the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" type of morality. Such a morality is harsh:

> To be sure, one must cherish no humanitarian illusions about the origin of aristocratic societies. The truth is hard. Every higher civilization has originated in barbarism. Men, barbarians in every respect, men of prey, still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire of power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races, upon old mellow civilizations in which the final vital force was flickering out in brilliant fireworks of wit and depravity. In the beginnings, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste.

However, eventually the civilization achieves security, and a new morality comes into existence. This type of morality is a kinder and gentler morality. According to Nietzsche,

> Finally, however, a happy state of security results, and the enormous tension is relaxed. Perhaps there are no more enemies among neighboring peoples; perhaps the means of life and enjoyment are present in abundance. With one stroke the bond and constraint of the old discipline snaps. It is no longer regarded as a necessary condition of existence and survival. If it would continue, it can do so only as an archaizing 'taste'. Variations appear suddenly in the greatest exuberance and splendor. The individual dares to become individual and detach himself.

Now morality stresses cooperation, humility, and charity — not taking whatever you are strong enough to take. According to Nietzsche:

> The lofty, independent spirit, the will to stand alone, are felt to be dangers. Everything that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbor, is henceforth called evil. The tolerant, unassuming, self-adapting, self-equalizing disposition, the middle-of-the-road desires, attain to moral distinction and honor.

III. The Transvaluation of Values

The new morality represents a transvaluation of values. Suddenly, what was once valued is now hated, and what was once hated is now valued. Instead of "an eye for an eye" revengeful morality, we now have a morality that stresses "love your neighbor." We see this transvaluation of values not only in the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, but also in the ancient Greek tragedies.

Orestes killed his mother and her lover, and because of this he was condemned to be pursued by the Furies (the old,

aristocratic morality). However, in the last of three plays by Aeschylus, the goddess Athena (the new, democratic morality) grants him a respite from being pursued by the Furies, who become known as the Kindly Ones.

Although he was a relativist, Nietzsche much preferred the aristocratic morality to the new, democratic morality.

IV. Master Morality

According to Nietzsche, there are two major types of morality: master morality and slave morality. Nietzsche much preferred master morality, which is the morality of the aristocracy. These quotations show Nietzsche's thoughts about master morality:

> • "In the master morality, when it is the rulers who determine the notion of 'goodness', it is the exalted, proud type of character which is regarded as the distinguishing feature, as that which determines the order of rank. The noble man separates from himself the persons in whom these characters are absent; them he despises."
>
> • "In master morality the antithesis is between 'noble' and 'despicable'. The cowardly, the timid, the no-accounts, the narrowly utilitarian, the distrusting, the self-abasing, the doglike who submit to abuse, the mendicant flatterers, and above all the liars, are despised."
>
> • "A man who says, 'I like that, I take it for my own, I mean to guard it and protect it'; a man who can carry out a resolution, keep hold of a woman, punish and overthrow insolence; a man who has his indignation and his sword; a man whom the weak, the suffering, even the animals, willingly submit to and naturally belong to; such a man is a master by nature."

Master morality says “yes” to life, in Nietzsche’s opinion, because life is all about survival. Slave morality says “no” to life.

V. Slave Morality

Nietzsche believed that present-day morality is herding-animal morality: the morality of sheep, cows, and goats — and of slaves. This is the kind of morality that he despised — the kind of morality that stresses altruism, humility, and charity.

Nietzsche says these things aboutslave morality:

> [...] If the abused, the oppressed, the suffering, the unemancipated, the weary, the uncertain-of-themselves, should moralize, what will be the common element in their moral evaluations?
>
> The slave has an unfavorable eye for the virtues of the powerful. He has skepticism and distrust of everything which they honor. He would fain persuade himself that their happiness is not genuine.
>
> On the other hand, those qualities which serve to alleviate the existence of sufferers are brought into prominence and flooded with light. It is here sympathy, the kind helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, friendliness, attain to honor. For here are the most useful equalities, almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence.

Nietzsche despised this type of morality.

VI. The Emancipation of Women

In a number of areas, Nietzsche had very strong opinions. For example, he detested the idea of feminism and the emancipation of women. He believed that women ought to

fear men, and that the purpose of women was to rear healthy children. Nietzsche believed that no woman ought ever to attend a university:

> In their efforts to rise to the ideal woman, to the higher woman, they have really wished to lower the general level of women, and there are no more certain means to this end than university education, trousers, and the rights of voting like cattle. Fundamentally, the 'emancipated' and the 'emancipators' (for example, that typical old maid, Henrik Ibsen) are anarchists, misbegotten souls whose most deep-rooted instinct is revenge.

VII. Christianity

Nietzsche also hated Christianity, which he regarded as teaching a slave morality. Christianity says "no" to life:

> Christian morality is the most pernicious form of the will to falsehood, the denial of life. It is not error as error which infuriates me here. It is not the age-long lack of 'good will', of discipline, of decency, of spiritual courage, which betrays itself in the triumph of Christian morality. It is the ghastly fact that what was unnatural received the highest honors as morality, and remained suspended over man as the law of the categorical imperative. This is the great blundering. To teach contempt of the primal life instincts; to set up a 'soul', a spirit, in order to overthrow the body; to teach man to find impurity in sex; to look for the principle of evil in the need for expansion; to see a 'higher moral value' in 'self-lessness', in 'objectivity', in 'neighbor love'; these things are the will to nothingness, the denial of life, the great nay-saying.

In addition, Nietzsche wrote, "After coming in contact with a religious man, I have always to wash my hands."

VIII. The Übermensch (Superman, Overman)

What Nietzsche wanted to bring about was the production and expression of the Übermensch or Superman. To bring about the Superman, he proposed a new transvaluation of values. He wanted for us to go back to the old, aristocratic values. This, he believed, would bring about a new breed of Supermen:

> My life task is to prepare humanity for a moment of supreme self-consciousness, a great noontide, a transvaluation of all values, an emancipation from all moral values, a yea-saying, a confidence in all that has formerly been forbidden, despised, and damned; when it will gaze backwards and forwards, emerge from the tyranny of accident and priesthood, and for the first time, pose the question of the why and wherefore of humanity as a whole.

IX. Nietzsche on Himself

No one can deny Nietzsche's ability to write. About himself, he wrote this:

> He who would be a creator in good and evil must first be a destroyer, and break values into pieces. I am the most terrible man that has ever existed. But I shall be the most beneficent. I know the joy of annihilation. I am the first immoralist, I am thus the essential destroyer.

X. A Question

If we accept Nietzsche's theory, how ought we to live?

Chapter 2.8: William Paley (1743-1805): An Act is Right if It Conforms to the Will of God

William Paley (1743-1805) was a strong believer in God and in ethics. According to Paley, an act is right if it conforms to the will of God. Of course, this assumes that God exists; however, many philosophers have argued for the existence of God.

Once we accept that an act is right if it conforms to the will of God (we can at least assume it for the purposes of discussion), we need to ask, How can one know the will of God? According to Paley, ther we can come to know the will of God in two ways:

1) Scripture, and

2) Nature.

Scripture is the revealed Word of God. God has revealed part of His Nature to humans, who have then written down what they have learned. Given that this is the case, Paley believes it would be odd if we did not consult Scripture.

One thing that Scripture provides us with is a set of laws. For example, the Ten Commandments are just that: ten laws that God requires us to obey. This is known as legalism: Here are the laws, and you must obey them.

Of course, sometimes disputes arise about the meaning of one of the Commandments or about one of the other passages in the Bible. For example, which of these translations is correct? Thou shalt not kill, or Thou shalt not murder?

Fortunately, there is another way in which we can come to know the will of God, and that is through the Light of Nature. What can Nature teach us about the will of God? For one thing, Nature teaches us that God wants us to be

happy. After all, if omnipotent God had wanted to, He could have created a living hell for us on Earth. Every sound could have been made a screech, but instead God made many sounds that are pleasant, such as the sound of much music. Every sight could have been made ugly, but instead God made many sights pleasant, such as the sight of a beautiful woman or a handsome man. Also, if God had wanted to, He could made a virus that would cause your brain to itch — an itch that would be impossible to scratch.

This is not to say that Humankind does not suffer aches and pains; obviously, we do. However, the aches and pains are not created to make us miserable. For example, we may suffer from a toothache; however, this does not mean that God created teeth in order to make us miserable. It seems clear that the purpose of teeth is to grind food; the toothache is merely a sign that something is wrong (and a very strong hint that we should see a dentist immediately to get the problem taken care of).

Nature shows us that God is concerned with our happiness. This is not a law, but is rather something we should keep in mind when making decisions. For example, if I have a choice between two acts, and one act will make a great number of people happy, while the other act will make a great number of people miserable, the morally correct act is likely to be the one that makes people happy. In a case like this, we have situationalist ethics. What is right in this case cannot be determined by a law found in the Bible, but instead depends on the situation.

According to Paley, we are strongly motivated to obey God. After all, if we obey the will of God, we shall go to our eternal reward in Heaven, and if we disobey the will of God, we shall go to our eternal punishment in Hell. However, we can ask whether this is an adequate motivation. After all, it seems as if we are being bribed to

be good with the pleasure of Heaven, and threatened if we are not good with the pain of Hell. This is not a Heroic Ethic.

For example, let's say two children shoplift some candy from the corner grocery. One child is caught by his parents, who tell him, "If you return the candy to the store and confess your crime to the store owner, we'll give you $10; however, if you do not return the candy to the store and confess your crime to the store owner, we'll give you a spanking." The other child feels guilty, and returns on his own (without promises of rewards or threats of punishments) to return the candy to the store and confess his crime to the store owner. Which child has the better motivation? Which child's motivation is most similar to Paley's motivation to obey the will of God?

There is such a thing as a Heroic Ethic. With this you don't do things because of promises of rewards or threats of punishments. Instead, you do things because they are the right thing to do. Paley's motivation for us to obey the will of God appears to be severely lacking.

There is a story of a rabbi who offended God in some way. A voice was heard from Heaven telling the rabbi that he would be excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven. To the other people's astonishment, the rabbi danced for joy. "Why are you dancing?" they asked. "Don't you know that you have been excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven?" "Yes," replied the rabbi, "but this means that now I can serve God for Himself only and not because I hope for a reward."

Chapter 2.9: Kai Nielsen (born 1926): Ethics Without Religion

What is the relationship between religion and ethics? Do we need to have religion before we can have ethics?

Apparently not. Many countries that did not know about the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God of Judaism and Christianity were able to behave ethically and were able to originate systems of ethics that we still study today (e.g., ancient Greece and the ethics of Aristotle).

Kai Nielsen is a Canadian philosopher who believes that it is possible to have a rationally defensible system of ethics that has no basis whatsoever in religion or in a belief in God.

A Secular Morality

Nielsen believes that even if ethics has no religious basis, "we need not sink into either conventionalism or nihilism." Conventionalism means custom — doing what other people in your culture customarily do. In other words, this is a variety of relativism. If you are a conventionalist, then you believe that you should do what your neighbors do.

Nihilism, on the other hand, means that there are no established moral rules whatsoever. If everyone becomes convinced that nihilism is the correct philosophical theory, then anarchy will abound.

Some religious people believe that without religion, we will have no objective morality; instead, we will have either conventionalism or nihilism. Nielsen argues that this is not the case. Even if everyone agrees that God is dead, we can still have an objective ethics.

According to Nielsen, a secular ethics — which is objective — can be built on two moral principles, one of which

comes from Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), the other of which comes from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

According to both Aristotle and Nielsen, the goal of life is happiness. This is something that certainly seems plausible. Aristotle argues that all human beings want to be happy, and he argued that happiness is an intrinsic good — good in itself and not for the sake of something else.

The other moral principle is: Treat every person as an end and never as a means only. This is one of the formulations of Kant's categorical imperative. An end is something that is valuable in itself and worthy of respect. A means, on the other hand, is valued not for itself but for what it can get you. For example, a bad job (poorly paid, lots of hard work, low status) may simply be a means by which the employee can keep the bills paid.

Kant wants us to treat all human beings as worthy of dignity and respect. Of course, sometimes we do treat people as means. For example, I may order lunch from a waitress. However, it is possible for me — even while ordering food — to treat the waitress as an end also. I can do that by not wasting the waitress' time and by not harshly ordering the waitress around.

In other words, we treat a person as an end when we treat the person as being valuable in him- or herself. We treat the person as a means when we use that person in order to get something from him or her. An example: borrowing money by making a lying promise to pay the money back even though we have no intention of ever paying it back.

To sum up, according to Nielsen, secular morality could be built on these two moral principles:

1) Happiness is good.

> 2) Treat every person as an end and never as a means only.

Religious people, however, could argue that a religious morality could have just one moral principle:

> We ought to do what God wills.

These people are using the Law of Parsimony, which states that one should use the smallest number of assumptions possible when explaining something. Since a religious morality can be based on just one moral principle while Nielsen's secular morality is based on two moral principles, this is some evidence that the better morality is the religious morality.

However, Nielsen says that subscribing to this moral principle means believing two things that he thinks are obscure:

> 1) We are creatures of God.
>
> 2) We have infinite value.

It is better, Nielsen believes, simply to accept the two moral principles of the religionless ethics. According to Nielsen, doing this does not require "crucifixion of the intellect." According to Nielsen, accepting a religious morality does require "crucifixion of the intellect."

Happiness

An important point that Nielsen makes is that it is possible to be happy. Religion can possibly provide one big meaning of life; however, a happy life can also be made up of many smaller meanings. According to Nielsen:

> A man could be said to have lived a happy life if he had found lasting sources of satisfaction in his life and if he had been able to find certain goals

> worthwhile and to achieve at least some of them. He could indeed have suffered some pain and anxiety, but his life must, for the most part, have been free from pain, estrangement, and despair, and must, on balance, have been a life which he has liked and found worthwhile.

Nielsen also lists a number of things that are sources of human happiness:

- Freedom from pain and want.
- Security and emotional peace.
- Human love and companionship.
- "… some sort of creative employment or meaningful work to give our lives point, to save them from boredom, drudgery, and futility."
- Art, music, and the dance.

Meaningful work can involve relieving human suffering. Nielsen writes,

> It is not only happiness for ourselves that can give us something of value, but there is the need to do what we can to diminish the awful sum of human misery in the world. I have never understood those who say that they find contemporary life meaningless because they find nothing worthy of devoting their energies to. Throughout the world there is an immense amount of human suffering, suffering that can, through a variety of human efforts, be partially alleviated. Why can we not find a meaningful life in devoting ourselves, as did Doctor Rieux in Albert Camus's *The Plague*, to relieving somewhat the sum total of human suffering?

The Challenge of Egoism

If people believe there is no religious foundation for ethics, would the result be egoism? Such may be the belief of a religious person.

There are two kinds of egoism:

> 1) Psychological Egoism is the view that human beings are made in such a way that they always — without exception — act selfishly. This viewpoint is simply wrong, since many people act benevolently on occasion.
>
> 2) Ethical Egoism is the view that people ought to act selfishly. However, most rational people would say that you should obey the laws and act morally because it is in your own self-interest to do so.

Still, suppose that you are so powerful that you can literally get away with murder. Should you act benevolently or instead look out for No. 1? Nielsen points out that each person ultimately must decide what kind of person he or she wishes to be: We can choose to be moral, or we can choose to be evil. The choice is up to us.

Nielsen has made an excellent case for a secular morality. However, the theologian Paul Tillich will argue that religion offers more than just a set of moral rules (moralisms) for us to follow. Religion can be an experience that leads to regeneration — that makes you into a new person who acts morally by nature.

Note: The quotations by Kai Nielsen that appear in this essay are from his "Ethics Without Religion" in *The Ohio University Review* VI (1964).

Chapter 2.10: Paul Tillich (1886-1965): "Moralisms and Morality: Theonomous Ethics"

Does religion have anything to offer to ethics? Certainly, an atheist can behave very morally — many of the most moral people I have known have been atheists. Also, many countries and cultures that existed before the time of Abraham and Jesus were able to recognize the ethical principles that we follow today.

However, Paul Tillich argues that religion can contribute to ethics. Religion can change a person's life around and make that person into a new person who will act morally for the right reason — who will act the way a person of faith ought to act.

Therefore, religion offers something more than a set of moral rules of the kind that Kai Nielsen writes about. (Nielsen argues that an acceptable system of ethics could be based on two moral principles, neither of which is religious.) According to Tillich, religion offers a new way of life to the person of faith. Religion can result in a new orientation in a person's life — an orientation that would lead to acting morally in a way consistent with their faith.

Morality Unconditional; Moralisms Conditional

The first thing that we need to do is to define "moralisms." According to Tillich, moralisms are mere moral codes — lists of rules that we must follow. However, morality is something much greater, and much more important.

According to Tillich, moralisms are conditional; whereas morality is unconditional. This is actually a concept that comes from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who is famous for the categorical imperative. Kant believed that in determining whether an act is moral, we must consider the motive of the person doing the act and not the consequences. According to Kant, two people can do an act

that has exactly the same consequence and yet only one of the two people has acted morally.

For example, let's take two people who are charitable. Both people decide to give $1 million to a hospital. One person is a politician who donates the money in order to get favorable publicity. The other person is an anonymous donor who donates the money out of a moral duty to relieve human suffering.

The acts of the two people have exactly the same main consequence: $1 million is donated to a hospital. However, according to Kant, only one of the donors has acted morally. The moral person is the person who has acted unconditionally; that is, the moral person has acted only out of a sense of moral duty and not because he or she hoped to personally gain from the act.

The politician, in contrast, has not acted morally because he acted conditionally. The politician thought, "If I want to gain favorable publicity, then I ought to donate $1 million to a hospital." The politician donated the money on the condition that the donation would bring him favorable publicity.

The main point here is this: Morality is unconditional. Morality unconditionally demands that we do our duty, whatever our duty may be. That is why only the anonymous donor has done a moral act. This is something that Kant argued, and something that Tillich agrees with.

Another way to look at this issue is in terms of positive law and of natural law, a distinction made by medieval philosophers. Positive law is concerned with specific issues, while natural law is concerned with general principles.

An example of natural law is, Human life is precious and ought to be preserved. In following this natural law, states

may pass different kinds of traffic laws; for example, states in the sparsely populated Western areas may have higher speed limits than states in the densely populated Eastern areas because Western states realize that people can safely drive at higher speeds in the West than in the East. These traffic laws are examples of positive law. The point of all this is that moralisms are positive laws, whereas morality is natural law.

Essential and Actual Being

Another way to bring light on this issue is to consider the distinction between ideal being and actual being, which is illustrated in the table belows:

Our Ideal Being

(What we ought to be)

Morality

Our Actual Being

(What we actually are)

Moralism

This table points out a gulf between our two selves. Our actual being is what we actually are; in this kind of being, moral obligation is thought of as a list of rules to be followed (moralisms).

However, there is also our ideal being, which is what we ought to be. This ideal being is a moral being that is concerned with morality; the ideal being always does his or her duty — it does things not because a rule or law says to do them, but because those things are the right things to do.

It's important to note that merely following moralisms cannot make you moral. You can obey all the 10 Commandments all your life, but you will not be moral

unless you obey them for the right reason. If you obey the 10 Commandments simply because you wish to be a Very Important Politician and obeying the 10 Commandments helps you achieve that goal (political races nowadays focus largely on character; if you don't commit adultery and don't break any of the other commandments, your opponent will find it hard to dig up dirt on you), then you are not acting morally. To be moral, you have to obey the 10 Commandments for the right reason; because obeying them is your moral duty — obeying the 10 Commandments is the right thing to do.

Note well: There is an estrangement between our ideal being and our actual being. None of us is perfect, even though we may try every day to achieve our ideal being. In addition, moralisms can make this estrangement worse. When we realize that we sometimes break those moral rules that we ought to obey because they are the right things to do, then we become aware that we have not achieved our ideal self. This can lead to guilt and despair.

In addition, moralisms can estrange us from our ideal self in another way. Suppose that we do keep all the 10 Commandments. It is possible that we can become proud of this fact and think that we have achieved our ideal self when we have not. For example, a person may follow the rule of giving a certain percentage of his income to charity, but when a disaster occurs in his hometown, he could refuse to help his neighbors because "I have already given to charity." A truly charitable person would give more than his or usual amount to charity in times of emergency. Being proud of keeping the 10 Commandments can lead to self-complacency.

According to Tillich,

> Legalism drives either to self-complacency (I have kept *all* commandments) or to despair (I cannot

> keep *any* commandment). Moralism of law makes pharisees or cynics, or it produces in the majority of people an indifference which lowers the moral imperative to conventional behavior.

Forgiveness and Regeneration

So what can we do? Are we doomed forever to have a split between our actual being and our ideal being? No, because Tillich points out two important elements in religion that can help us overcome this split: forgiveness and regeneration. The word "forgiveness" means acceptance, including self-acceptance. The word "regeneration" means becoming a new being that moves toward what we ought to be.

Fortunately, the grace of God will give us forgiveness and regeneration. As Tillich points out, "Moralism necessarily ends in the quest for grace. … Grace unites two elements: the overcoming of guilt and the overcoming of estrangement."

Grace overcomes guilt through the forgiveness of sins. I have known people who are filled with guilt because they don't think that God can forgive their sins. This awareness of their sins keeps before them the split between their actual being and their ideal being. These people could benefit through realizing that God can forgive all sins.

According to Tillich, grace overcomes estrangement through regeneration or "the 'entering into the new being' which is above the split between what we are and what we ought to be." With regeneration, we become a new person — we become a person of faith who will act the way that a person of faith ought to act.

So, according to Tillich, religion does offer something different from mere moralisms. It offers a way of

overcoming the split between our actual self and our ideal self and of thus becoming truly moral.

Note: The quotations by Paul Tillich that appear in this essay are from *Ministry and Medicine in Human Relations*, edited by Iago Galdston (copyright 1955 by International Universities Press).

By the way, if you are wondering about the title "Moralisms and Morality: Theonomous Ethics," *theonomy* means "the state of being subject to divine rule or law," according to W. L. Reese's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*.

Chapter 2.11: Emil Brunner (1889-1966): Situationalist Ethics

Emil Brunner (1889-1966) was strongly against legalism. He believed that legalism boxes God in. For example, according to the Old Testament, the Jews are God's chosen people. A person who was a legalist before the New Testament was written could tell Jesus, "I'm very sorry to see you hanging around Gentiles. Don't you know that only the Jews are God's chosen people? It says it right here in the Torah."

In addition, legalism can blind us to the needs of others. For example, we are supposed to tithe, which many people believe means to give 10% of your income to charity. But let's say that a huge natural disaster occurs in your area and that much money is needed to help people. A person who is a legalist could say, "I've already done my share. The Bible says 10%, and I've given my 10%, and there's no way I'm giving the 30% I could afford this month."

Furthermore, legalism can violate our sense of freedom and autonomy. We believe that we can know right from wrong (although in some cases it can be difficult), and we believe that we are free to act. However, legalism can make morality very mechanical. For example, charity can be reduced to simply giving 10% of your income to the poor with no need to decide if you should give more money one particular month.

We see several examples of legalism in the New Testament. For example, some people criticized Jesus for healing sick and crippled people on the Sabbath. However, Jesus believed that healing a sick or crippled person was much more important than obeying the rule that says that you should not work on the Sabbath.

Brunner, like Paley, believed that what is right is that which is in conformity to the will of God. However, Brunner did not believe in natural theology (using the Light of Nature to determine God's will), although he did believe in revelation. However, Brunner believes that the Bible contains mistakes. According to Brunner, the Bible is witness (stories, testimonies) from people who have heard God in the past. Thus, the Bible is not an infallible book and it is not a bunch of rules that each of us must follow.

Brunner believed that God reveals Himself as a Person. We discover the will of God in what Brunner referred to as the Divine-Human Encounter. In this encounter, God reveals Himself as Free Sovereign Love. It's important to realize that, although God does not provide specific rules for us to follow, nevertheless, God does not remain silent. Instead, Brunner's ethic provides preparation for hearing the divine command.

According to Brunner, when we ask What ought I to do?, we are really asking two questions:

> 1) What is Free Sovereign Love beckoning me to do?, and
>
> 2) Is that consistent with God as Redeemer and God as Creator?

Brunner's situationalist ethics does have some problems. Brunner would have us assess the situation and determine what is the right thing to do in that situation. However, that takes time and in many emergency situations one does not have time to sit down and figure out what God is willing for us to do in that situation. It seems that if we could work out some rules ahead of time, they would help us decide what to do in emergency situations.

Brunner also seems to be on the slippery slope to emotionalism and subjectivism. "Emotionalism" means

being ruled by your emotions. It would be very easy to feel strongly about something and think that God is speaking to you, when really you are being ruled by your emotions.

In addition, there is the problem of knowing who is right when people conflict. Two people may both claim to know the will of God, but their interpretations conflict. In such a case, the result may be subjectivism.

Without rules, would people's intuitions about what God wills for us to do vary widely? This seems likely. Once again, it would be helpful if our reason were able to work out some rules that are based on past human-divine encounters. These rules could be looked at periodically to see that they are fair, and they could be changed if any changes seem necessary.

Note: For more information, see Emil Brunner's book *The Divine Imperative*, translated by Olive Wyon. Philladelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1947.

Chapter 2.12: Bernard Gert (1934-2011): Morality

•Bernard Gert was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1934. The source of this essay is a paper that Mr. Gert gave at Ohio University.

I. A Moral Theory

First, Mr. Gert gives his definition of a moral theory:

> A moral theory consists of the analysis of the concepts necessary to explain and, if possible, justify morality, viz., rationality, impartiality, and morality itself, together with an account of how they are related to each other.

In addition to this definition, Mr. Gert identifies the things that a moral theory must do:

> • It must provide an account of rationality.
>
> • It must provide an account of impartiality.
>
> • It must identify the "essential features of morality" — for example, a list of moral rules.
>
> • It must say why some actions are prohibited, other actions are required, and still other actions are encouraged.

II. Morality

Mr. Gert's definitions of morality and of a public system are as follows:

> Morality is a public system for guiding and judging the behavior of all rational persons. A public system is a system
>
> (1) that all persons to whom it applies, those whose behavior is to be guided and judged by that system,

> understand it, i.e., know what behavior the system prohibits, requires, allows, and encourages; and,
>
> (2) that it is not irrational for any of them to accept being guided or judged by.

His example of a public system is that of a game. A basketball player understands and accepts the rules, and he or she does not find it irrational if he or she or other players commit a foul and have to pay the penalty for it.

III. Rationality

To Mr. Gert, rationality is a central concept of morality. A moral system must be acceptable to rational persons. However, Mr. Gert takes irrationality to be a more basic concept than rationality. This is how Mr. Gert defines irrationality:

> A person with sufficient knowledge and intelligence to be a moral agent acts irrationally when he acts in a way that he knows, (justifiably believes), or should know, will significantly increase the probability that he will suffer death, pain, disability, loss of freedom or loss of pleasure, and he does not have an adequate reason for so acting.

For example, a person who sticks his or her hand in a blender and then turns the blender on just to see what it feels like is behaving irrationality. The reason for this action is not adequate considering the pain and disability the person will suffer. (I have known a mentally ill person who cut off the tips of his fingers just because he felt like it.)

IV. Impartiality

According to Mr. Gert, another central concept of morality is impartiality. Morality requires that we be impartial to

other people. (I can't give A's to a pretty student just because she's pretty.) Mr. Gert does stress that we must identify the group to whom we must be impartial. According to Mr. Gert,

> When discussing morality, the minimal group toward which one must be impartial consists of all moral agents, including oneself, and former moral agents who are still persons; and the respect in which one must be impartial toward this group is in using the moral rules to guide one's behavior and to make moral judgments.

Things such as race, sex, religion, and creed are not relevant considerations. (For example, we can't be impartial only toward white people.) What is relevant is rationality and being a person. A person who has lost his or her reason but who is still a person must also be considered impartially.

V. The Justified Moral Theory

According to Mr. Gert, "The moral theory that all impartial rational persons would choose as a public system that applies to all rational persons is the justified moral system." The rules of this system appear below:

A. Moral Rules that Prohibit Evils All Rational Persons Want to Avoid

"1. Don't kill.

"2. Don't cause pain.

"3. Don't disable.

"4. Don't deprive of freedom.

"5. Don't deprive of pleasure."

B. Moral Rules that Prohibit Actions that Generally Lead to Evil

> "6. Don't deceive.
>
> "7. Keep your promise. (Don't break your promise.)
>
> "8. Don't cheat.
>
> "9. Obey the law. (Don't break the law.)
>
> "10. Do your duty. (Don't neglect your duty.)" — This means in your job or profession.

Gert allows for exceptions (riders) to these rules. How does one know when to make an exception? Gert's answer is this:

> Everyone is always to obey the rule unless an impartial rational person can advocate that violating it be publicly allowed. Anyone who violates the rule when an impartial rational person can not advocate that violating it be publicly allowed may be punished.

However, this does not mean that all rational people will always agree about exceptions. People can legitimately disagree over a ranking of goods and evils. In contrast to other ethical theorists, Mr. Gert recognizes that an ethical theory will not always lead to agreement about what we ought to do.

For example, should doctors lie to their patients? This used to be done regularly. A patient would be dying of cancer, and the doctor would know it, but the doctor would tell the patient that he or she had nothing to worry about. Some rational people may argue that this policy relieves some of the suffering the patient would otherwise undergo. Others may argue that if it were publicly known that doctors sometimes lie to their patients, then healthy patients would

suffer because when their doctor told them that they were OK, they would not know whether to believe the doctor. In addition, isn't the doctor depriving a terminally ill patient of the freedom to make decisions based on accurate information when the doctor lies to the patient?

VI. Contrasts With Other Systems for Guiding Conduct

Mr. Gert's moral system incorporates, but differs from, both Kantian Ethics and Utilitarianism. His system has both rules (Kantian in nature) and also pays attention to consequences (Utilitarianism). However, Mr. Gert's moral system also differs from these two ethical theories.

For example, Kantian ethics can be rigid. Mr. Kant even wrote that one ought never to break a promise! Mr. Gert's moral system, however, allows one to break one's promise if the consequences will be good; for example, if breaking a promise will result in saving an innocent person's life.

Another example: Utilitarianism could allow cheating on a test, if it were unlikely that the student would not be caught. However, Mr. Gert's moral system would not allow cheating on a test, because "if this kind of violation were publicly allowed, it would eliminate the possibility of even having exams."

VII. Moral Ideals

Mr. Gert also believes in moral ideals, such as preserving life and relieving pain. However, these ideals merely encourage certain kinds of actions — they do not require them. For example, you are not required to run into a burning house to save the house's inhabitants, although it would be praiseworthy if you were to do so.

VIII. A Short Summary

As Donald Borchert, Alburey Castell, and Arthur Zucker, the authors of the textbook *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, say, "Our attitude toward the moral rules should be one that allows violations (exceptions) if and only if an impartial, rational person can publicly advocate that violation."

Chapter 2.13: W.D. Ross (1877-1971): Prima Facie Duties

Imagine this scenario:

> You are living in Nazi-occupied France during World War II. Late at night you hear a knock at the door. You open the door, and your best friend is standing there. "Quick," he says. "Hide me. I'm a member of the underground, and the Gestapo are after me!" You hide your friend in a closet, then you hear another knock at the door. This time members of the Gestapo are standing on the threshold. "We believe a member of the underground is in this area," the head Gestapo states. "Do you know where he is hiding?"

What would Immanuel Kant advise you to do? Incredible as it sounds, in his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant said that you should always tell the truth, even if it results in the death of a friend. According to Kant, you ought never to lie, apparently because lying makes you less human.

What would a utilitarian tell you to do? A utilitarian would look at the consequences of telling the truth, see that the consequences are bad, and therefore advise you to lie to the Gestapo. In this case, I would agree with the utilitarians.

Note: In my opinion, Kant misinterpreted his own ethical theory. The maxim "Don't lie" is categorical — there are no exceptions— and it is an imperative, but Kant stated that there was only one categorical imperative. Besides, if I were to use the categorical imperative in this situation, I could never universalize the maxim "Tell the truth, even if it means an innocent person will be killed."

Be that as it may, this situation points out a problem in Kantian ethics. What ought we to do when we have conflicting duties? In the situation described above, we

have a duty of telling the truth, but we also have a duty to protect our friend's life. An ethical theory ought to give us ways of ranking duties so that we know what to do when duties conflict.

Prima Facie and Actual Duties

W.D. Ross addresses this problem of conflicting duties in Kantian ethics. To do so, he came up with his theory of prima facie and actual duties. A prima facie duty is our duty at first glance. We look at a situation and see that we have certain duties to perform. Unfortunately, these duties may conflict, and then we have to discover where our actual duty lies.

Ross made a list of six prima facie duties, but he did not claim that his list was complete. One may add to the list when relevant. Here are the prima facie duties Ross listed, along with some examples of them:

1) Duties Resulting from my Previous Actions

These duties can be divided into two groups: First, duties of fidelity. These result from promises. If I have made a promise, I have a duty to keep it. Second, duties of reparation. If I have harmed someone wrongfully, then I have a duty to make good on the damages.

2) Duties of Gratitude

These result from the acts of others. If someone does me a favor, then I have a duty to return him or her a similar favor.

3) Duties of Justice

A teacher has a duty to grade fairly. A judge has a duty to weigh evidence impartially and to give a

punishment that fits the crime when a person is found guilty.

4) Duties of Beneficence

This is a duty to do good. One can perform this duty in many ways. Some people donate money to charity; others volunteer time at shelters for the homeless; still others donate cookies for bake sales. I tend to pick up litter as I walk along the streets of Athens, Ohio.

5) Duties of Self-Improvement

If you have been born with a talent for music, poetry, or sewing, you have a duty to develop that talent.

6) Duties of No Harm to Others

You have a duty not to walk along the street and slap the faces of small children.

These are the prima facie duties that Ross lists. Often, these prima facie duties conflict, as when we are faced with a difficult moral decision. For example, think of someone faced with deciding whether to have an abortion. In such a case, we need to decide what our actual duty is.

Unfortunately, although our prima facie duties are self-evident, our actual duty is not. In addition, our actual duty cannot be derived from our prima facie duties or any other self-evident principles. However, in a given situation, we can discern what our actual duty is through using our creative imagination and our cool reason. I know that this sounds vague, and it is, but sometimes that cannot be helped. Ross believes that by thinking about a situation, we can discover what our actual duty is in that situation.

Criticism of Teleological Ethics

As a Kantian, Ross criticized teleological ethics. (Readers will remember that utilitarianism is one form of teleological ethics.) He did this by listing various forms of teleological ethics and criticizing each form

Form #1: I ought to maximize my own pleasures (ethical egoism).

Ross rejects this theory as inadequate because what is right does not always equal my own pleasure. For example, the right thing to do if you are guilty of a crime is to confess your guilt even if it means going to prison for a long time. Another example is to imagine yourself living during the Holocaust and deciding whether to try to hide a Jew. The right thing to do would be to hide the Jew but this means putting yourself at risk because if the Gestapo discovers you hiding the Jew, you could end up in a concentration camp or dead.

Form #2: I ought to maximize the happiness of society (utilitarianism).

Once again, we can criticize this view. For one thing, happiness is not the only intrinsic good. Having a good character is another intrinsic good.

Also, imagine two people: one good, the other bad. We have $1000, and we can give it to either person. Suppose we do a hedonistic calculus and discover that giving the $1000 to the good person will result in 1000 units of pleasure (he will use the money to buy books for his children), while giving the $1000 to the bad person will result in 1001 units of pleasure (he will use it to buy cigarettes and beer for himself). Is it self-evident that we ought to give the money to the bad person? No, of course not.

Form #3: I ought to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people (G. E. Moore).

This is the most plausible form of teleological ethics, according to Ross, yet it will not hold up to critical scrutiny either. This form says that we ought to do what is optimific; that is, what will result in the greatest good. If something is optimific, then it has a tendency to optimize desirable consequences (for example, happiness or pleasure or good). As you can see, each of the forms of teleological ethics we are looking at is optimific.

However, to criticize Moore's version of optimific ethics, we can imagine the following scenario:

> A friend of yours is lying on her deathbed. She has $1000 and wants you to donate it to a certain charity: the junior hockey league. You promise that you will donate it to the junior hockey league; she hands you the money, then dies. However, you are a follower of G.E. Moore and you want to do what is optimific, so you calculate the amount of good that will result if you give the $1000 to the junior hockey league, and if you give the $1000 to children's opera. As it turns out, giving the money to the junior hockey league will result in 1000 units of good, while giving the money to children's opera will result in 1000.1 units of good. Is it self-evident that you ought to break your promise and give the money to children's opera? No, of course not.

This shows that what is right does not equal what is optimific. Instead, duties such as keeping your promises are important in deciding what is right.

Conclusion

Ross is a Kantian, not a utilitarian, and so he places an emphasis on duty. However, his theory of prima facie

duties does allow us to consider consequences when deciding what our actual duty is. Thus, in the situation involving the Gestapo and your best friend that began this essay, Ross would say that your actual duty is to lie to the Gestapo and thus protect the life of your friend.

Chapter 2.14: Dorothy Emmet (1904-2000): The Moral Prism

Dorothy Emmet was born in England in 1904; she published *The Moral Prism* in 1979.

I. Virtue Theory:

In recent ethical thought, virtue theory has become very popular. According to virtue theory, the basic question in morality is not: How should I act? or What are the rules? Instead, it is: What kind of a person should I be?

In other words, before doing an action, we should always ask these questions:

- What sort of a person will doing this make me become?
- Do I want to become that sort of a person?
- Would any (rational) person want to become that sort of person?

For example, suppose you are considering whether to cheat on an upcoming test. You would ask yourself,

- What sort of a person cheats on tests?
- Do I want to become the sort of person who cheats on tests?
- Would (any) rational person want to become the sort of person who cheats on tests?

I think that we have something valuable in virtue ethics. The rules are still important; however, virtue ethics recognizes that a person with a good character is more willing to obey rules that are just.

II. The Prism Metaphor

Ms. Emmet uses a metaphor of a prism in her work. If you pass a beam of light through a prism, what was white light (or light with no colors at all) is shown to consist of a rainbow of colors. Something that seemed simple is now known to be complex.

Moral growth is similar. A child may see things in black and white; however, growing up morally means being to able to see various shades of gray. The morally mature person becomes aware that moral issues are often complex and require careful reasoning.

III. Three Ways of Looking at Morality

There are at least three ways of looking at morality:

1. Custom (Ethical Relativists). This emphasizes the way that we have always done things. This is something that is needed in complex societies. People need roots — even moral roots. Changing things too quickly can upset people.

2. Reciprocity and the Use of Reason to See Where Reciprocity is Involved (Kantians). This way emphasizes reason. Immanuel Kant attempted to make morality completely rational; in fact, to make it scientific. All actions must be consistent with the Categorical Imperative if they are to be considered moral.

3. Generosity. This means being humane in our ethics. If we are generous, we go beyond what we are obligated to do. People have no right to our generosity, yet we can give it if we feel like it.

One thing that we have to decide is when each of the above three ways of looking at morality fits a certain situation. At a job interview, you would do what is expected and wear nice clothes. When borrowing money, you would be sure to

pay back your debt. And at certain times, you may decide to be generous and give more than is strictly required (for example, occasionally when buying a present or giving money to charity).

IV. Just Actions

According to Emmet, just actions have four qualities. As Donald Borchert, Alburey Castell, and Arthur Zucker, the authors of the textbook *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, put it, just actions

1. Increase our abilities to see complexity.

2. Allow us to see the importance of mutuality over self-interest.

3. Make clear the need for mutual trust.

4. Allow us to enlarge our imagination and thereby develop true sympathy for those in need.

In addition, they add, "Emmet's morality tries to give us the ability to know when to shift back and forth between custom, reciprocity, and generosity."

Virtue ethics actually began in ancient Greece, with the philosopher Aristotle, who wrote about moral virtue and intellectual virtue, and how to acquire them.

Chapter 3: Applied Ethics

Chapter 3.1: David Bruce (born 1954): Is It Ethical to Plagiarize?

Ethics will be a concern in your life. At times, you may have to decide if a certain action you are thinking of doing or a certain communication you are thinking of writing is moral. Therefore, it is a good idea to know some ethical rules and how to apply them to real life.

Mama Bruce's Ethical Rules

The rules of ethics are T-shirt simple, and chances are, your mother is an expert in ethics. I know that my mother was. Here are Mama Bruce's T-shirt simple ethical rules:

• If you are allowed to do it, everyone (in a similar position to yours) should be allowed to do it.

• Treat other people the way that you want to be treated.

• Do actions that have good consequences

Mama Bruce's Ethical Questions

Along with the ethical rules go ethical questions. These are questions that a person can ask when determining whether an action that person is thinking of doing is moral:

• What would happen if everyone were to do what you are thinking of doing?

• Would you want done to you what you are thinking of doing to other people?

• What are the consequences of the action you are thinking about doing?

Is Plagiarism Morally Justified?

Let's apply Mama Bruce's ethical rules and ethical questions to determine whether plagiarism is morally justified:

• *What would happen if everyone were to do what you are thinking of doing?*

If everyone plagiarizes papers, the professor will think of another way to have students write papers that are not plagiarized. For example, a professor friend of mine recently stopped giving take-home exams (the answers to which were sometimes plagiarized) and started giving in-class essay exams. There is a contradiction here. The student makes the rule "I will plagiarize my paper," but if every student follows the rule, soon it will become impossible to plagiarize. Students will no longer have the opportunity to learn how to write papers outside of class — this kind of writing is a job skill. Alternatively, if everyone in a course that requires papers (such as a composition course) plagiarizes, then everyone will receive lower grades, perhaps even F's.

• *Would you want done to you what you are thinking of doing to other people?*

Suppose the student writes a truly excellent paper, then later finds out that the professor has plagiarized the paper and published it in a journal. Of course, now the student is unable to publish the paper that the student wrote because the student will be accused of plagiarizing the professor's paper. Is this fair?

• *What are the consequences of the action you are thinking about doing?*

One consequence, of course, is that the student will learn much less than the student would have learned if the

student had actually done the work. It also means that parents and taxpayers are getting a poor return on the money that they are paying for the student's education. Also, a teacher who has been overwhelmed with cases of plagiarism may think of leaving the education field in order to pursue a lucrative and exciting career as an international jewel thief. In addition, if lots of students plagiarize at Ohio University, then Ohio University will become known as the Plagiarism School, and the value of a degree from Ohio University will be lessened. Finally, being caught plagiarizing can result in a grade of F for the paper, a grade of F for the course, and/or referral to Ohio University Judiciaries.

Additional Questions

• *When is it ethical to use someone else's words and ideas?*

Of course, the correct answer is when the student gives credit to the other person.

• *Suppose someone plagiarizes an excellent communication created by an experienced professional working in the field and that communication receives an A. What happens to the student-written papers that would have normally received an A?*

The standard for an A in the course is likely to go up. If the plagiarized paper gets an A, then the student-written papers that would have normally received an A may receive grades of A- or lower.

Chapter 3.2: David Bruce (born 1954): Are Students Morally Obligated to Attend Class on a Regular Basis?

Let's say that a student is thinking about cutting large numbers of classes this grading period.

• *What would happen if everyone were to do what you are thinking of doing?*

Most students attend Ohio University to get an education; in fact, the purpose of Ohio University is to get an education. What would happen if large numbers of students were to cut large numbers of classes? Certainly, the students would find it more difficult to get an education. In addition, the professors are likely to get very angry and to toughen the attendance policies for the professors' courses. There is a contradiction here. The student makes the rule "I will cut large numbers of classes" so that he or she can cut class, but if everyone follows the rule, the result is that the professors will toughen their attendance policies and make it much more difficult for students to cut class.

• *Would you want done to you what you are thinking of doing to other people?*

Here the student can think about the teacher. If the student were the teacher, would he or she want lots of students to miss lots of classes? Possibly, an answer would be, "That would be great! If no one ever shows up for class, then I don't have to teach!" But of course if no one ever shows for class, then the teacher will not have a job for very long. In addition, many students are supported in part by their parents while attending Ohio University. If the student were a parent using their money to send a son or daughter through school, would the student want his or her son or daughter to attend class?

• *What are the consequences of the action you are thinking about doing?*

Of course, we have to think about the consequences for everyone affected by the action. If the student misses lots of classes, then the student will not learn very much. If parents are paying lots of money (perhaps using money that could be used for their retirement) for the student to get a good education, then if the student misses lots of classes, the parents are not getting a good return for their money and perhaps that money should be used for their retirement. Much the same is true of the taxpayers; because Ohio University is a state university, tax money pays for part of the student's education at Ohio University. If a particular student blows off lots of classes, the taxpayers may very well be unhappy and prefer to use their tax money to support a student who regularly attends class.

Chapter 3.3: David Bruce (born 1954): Are Students Morally Obligated to Show Up for Conferences?

Let's say that a student in a writing class sets up a conference to have a professor review a paper, then the student decides not to attend the conference and not to cancel the conference in advance. Of course, the student does not want to be punished for missing the conference and not cancelling it in advance.

• *What would happen if everyone were to do what you are thinking of doing?*

The purpose of a conference is get help from a professor. If everyone were to set up conferences with the professor, then not show up for the conference and not cancel the conference in advance, soon the professor will either set up a penalty for missed conferences or simply not allow any student to set up conferences. There is a contradiction either way here. The student makes the rule "I will miss a conference and not cancel it in advance, and I don't want to be punished for it," but if everyone does what the student is thinking of doing, then either the student will be punished for missing the conference or it will be impossible for the student to set up a conference in the first place.

• *Would you want done to you what you are thinking of doing to other people?*

Every professor has had the experience of a student setting up a conference, then not attending and not cancelling it in advance. To determine if the student's action is moral, the student can think of a job interview. Suppose the student were to set up a job interview, drive to the site of the interview, get dressed up, and show up for the interview, only to be told, "Sorry, the person who was going to interview you flew to a meeting on the coast a couple of

days ago and won't be back until next week. Get out." Would the student consider the interviewer's action moral?

• *What are the consequences of the action you are thinking about doing?*

One consequence is a very angry professor — a very angry professor who will grade the student's work and a very angry professor who is unlikely to write a letter of recommendation for or be a mentor to the student.

Chapter 3.4: David Bruce (born 1954): Is Rape Ethical?

Mama Bruce's Ethical Rules

The rules of ethics are T-shirt simple, and chances are, your mother is an expert in ethics. I know that my mother was. Here are Mama Bruce's T-shirt simple ethical rules:

• If you are allowed to do it, everyone (in a similar position to yours) should be allowed to do it.

• Treat other people the way that you want to be treated.

• Do actions that have good consequences.

Mama Bruce's Ethical Questions

Along with the ethical rules go ethical questions. These are questions that a person can ask when determining whether an action that person is thinking of doing is moral:

• What would happen if everyone were to do what you are thinking of doing?

• Would you want done to you what you are thinking of doing to other people?

• What are the consequences of the action you are thinking about doing?

An Example of Mama Bruce's Ethical Questions In Action

Of course, ethics systems should give the correct answer to the easy questions. For example, is rape moral? All would agree that rape is immoral, but let's see how we can use Mama Bruce's ethical questions to determine whether rape is moral. Let's say that a man is wondering whether it is morally permissible to rape a woman.

• *What would happen if everyone were to do what you are thinking of doing?*

Suppose every man became a rapist. What would happen? At first, of course, many more rapes would happen, but it is plausible that once women catch on to what is happening, soon a handgun will be in every handbag, self-defense classes for women will be widely available, and women will not travel alone. In other words, heavily armed women will be travelling in packs. (This could make a good science-fiction novel.) There is a contradiction here. A man makes the rule "I will rape women" so he can rape women, but if every man follows the rule, soon it will be very difficult — and dangerous — to attempt to rape women.

• *Would you want done to you what you are thinking of doing to other people?*

Some men may say, "I would be very happy if a woman were to rape me," but of course that would not be rape. Rape is unwanted, forced sex, and if a man wants a woman to rape him, that is not rape. The proper way to answer this question is to think of an example of unwanted, forced sex. For example, the man is in a locker room shower, he drops his soap, he bends over — and the guy in back of him gives him an unwanted, forced surprise. In this case, few if any men would want done to them what they are thinking of doing to women. (And if they do want it done to them, once again it is not rape.)

• *What are the consequences of the action you are thinking about doing?*

Some men may point out that some women who have been raped go on to become rape counselors for other women, and/or become experts in self-defense and teach self-defense to other women, and/or volunteer at a 24-hour crisis hotline, etc. These things are good, and they probably

would not have happened if the woman were not raped, so aren't at least some of the effects of rape is this case good? Of course, that is a faulty way of looking at the situation. There are two sets of consequences here, resulting from two different actions. The first action is the rape itself, and the consequences of rape are bad. The rapist commits the rape, the consequences of the rape are bad, and the rapist is responsible for doing the bad action. The second action is the woman's response to rape. Some women do become experts in self-defense and teach self-defense to other women, and/or volunteer at a 24-hour crisis hotline, etc. They do the action, the consequences of the action are good, and they deserve the credit for doing the good action.

Chapter 3.5: David Bruce (born 1954): Sex and Lying

The situation:

You are a guy, and you have been on a first date with a woman that you really don't care for, but who you know does care for you very much. You realize that she is receptive to having sex with you. You realize that if you do have sex with her, you will never call her again. You also realize that she will be very hurt and know that she's been used when you don't call. At the same time, you realize that you sleep alone more often than you like to admit. The choice is yours: 1) sleep with the woman and promise to call her, although you realize you never will, or 2) say goodnight to the woman, and never call her.

What I would do:

In a situation such as this, I would say goodnight to the woman and never call her. So what if I sleep alone more often than I like to admit.

What Aristotle would tell me to do:

Aristotle believed in the mean between extremes and in being virtuous. With the mean between extremes, I would try to avoid excesses and deficiencies of character traits and instead aim for the Golden Mean. (Of course, I would keep in mind that for actions such as adultery there is no mean — just a little adultery is still an excess.) In this situation, two different means between extremes come into effect:

> **Truthfulness**
>
> Boastfulness (Excess); Truthfulness (Virtue); False Modesty (Deficiency)

Sex

> Promiscuity (Excess); Sex with someone you love — many people would say, are married to (Virtue); Chastity (Deficiency)

First is truthfulness. In this case, there is an excess and a deficiency. The excess is always telling the truth even if it unnecessarily hurts someone. In this case, if I were to tell the woman I didn't like her and never wanted to see her again, I would be engaging in an excess of truthfulness. (If I were married to the woman and wanted to divorce her, then I would owe her an explanation, but in this case, the woman and I are on a first date. I believe that the woman would rather that I never call her again than to hear why I really don't care for her.) Lying is a deficiency and should be avoided, so I shouldn't lie to the woman. The second mean relates to sex. I have no doubt that Aristotle would regard chastity as a deficiency of sex in the case of normal adults. (Of course, chastity is all right for children. Also, priests can have a good reason for being chaste.) Still, we know that Aristotle was concerned about society and man's place in it. I believe that Aristotle would regard sex between committed, caring adults to be the best sex possible. Since Aristotle was concerned with actualizing human nature, I think that he would agree with Colin McGinn that sex involves a contract between consenting adults. As Mr. McGinn wrote that

> having sex with someone is a sort of personal contract, an agreement carrying certain responsibilities. This contract involves not knowingly risking the transmission of disease, not betraying your partner's confidence, acting afterwards with kindness and consideration, not telling lies about your long-term intentions, and so

> forth. (*Moral Literacy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1992, p. 56)

With these things in mind, I believe that Aristotle would advise me to say goodnight to the woman and never call her.

What the Will of God would tell me to do:

Two verses from the Bible are relevant here. The first is from the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not lie." The second is from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Flee fornication" (I Cor. 6:18). With these verses in mind, I think the will of God would be for me to say goodnight to the woman and never call her. Somehow, I think God is in favor of commitment and marriage and families.

What a Utilitarian would tell me to do:

Utilitarians are concerned with providing the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Utilitarians also believe that we must consider the happiness of every person affected by an action. I believe that saying goodnight to the woman would result in the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Something important to keep in mind here is that in determining what I ought to do, I must consider everybody affected by my actions. In this case, clearly the woman will feel very unhappy if I never call her after sleeping with her. She will realize that she has been used — never a good feeling — and this unhappiness will outweigh whatever pleasure was felt by us during the sex act. In addition, I personally would feel guilty because I used the woman. Most of us have been dumped at one time or another, and so we can empathize with someone who has been deliberately used, then dumped. I suppose some guy could say that he is so fantastic in bed that the pleasure of the sex act will outweigh the pain of being dumped, but in my

opinion that man is overestimating his ability in bed. (And if he really is that good, think of the woman's pain when she realizes that she will never again sleep with someone that good!)

I believe that a rule utilitarian such as John Stuart Mill would advocate a rule saying not to deceive someone in order to sleep with her when you know you will dump her in the morning.

What the Categorical Imperative would tell me to do:

If I sleep with the woman tonight, then dump her in the morning, the maxim of my action would be this: "It's OK to lie to a woman in order to get her to sleep with you even though you know you will dump her the next day." The first thing to ask is whether this maxim is universalizable. Although many people in fact act this way, this maxim is not universalizable. To understand this, remember Kant's example about the lying promise a man made in order to borrow money even though he knew he could never repay it. He makes the lying promise to borrow money, yet if everybody made lying promises to borrow money, soon no one would be able to borrow money because all possible lenders would laugh in the would-be borrowers' faces. Lying to a woman to get her to sleep with you is similar. The lie works only because many men keep their promises to call the next day. If we attempt to universalize the maxim, we see immediately that no one would ever be able to sleep with a woman after making a lying promise because the woman would laugh in the man's face. Jewelers would sell many wedding rings, and sex would happen after marriage.

The next thing to do is to determine whether the maxim is reversible. Of course, it is not. Many men would probably say that they would love it if women would sleep with them then never call them. (Sex without responsibility! A young

man's dream! If this is torture, then nail me to the wall!) However, that situation is not similar to the situation of the young woman who really, really likes the young man who lies to her in order to get her to sleep with him. To make the situation similar, think of a young woman who uses you, then cuts your heart out and stomps on it. Furthermore, the man is willing to deceive someone else's daughter, sister, or mother in order to get her to sleep with him. Is he willing for someone to do the same to his daughter, sister, or mother?

In addition, reversibility means that you have to put yourself in the used woman's place. No one wants to be used then dumped, and this woman has been. No one would want to be in the used woman's place. So, the maxim fails the test of reversibility. Plus, you want to use someone's daughter; are you willing for someone to use your daughter, once you begin to have children?

Another test involves asking whether the man is treating the woman as an end or as a means. If he regards her as valuable in herself, then he is treating her as an end. If he treats her as valuable only for something else, then he is treating her as a means. In this case, the man who makes a lying promise is clearly regarding the woman only as a means to an orgasm. The woman isn't valuable to the man — only the orgasm is valuable to the man.

Clearly, the categorical imperative would tell me to say goodnight to the woman, and never call her.

A final comment:

In this situation, all four ethical theories are in agreement about what one ought to do. It's nice when ethical theories agree like this; however, often the theories don't agree. When they don't agree, spend some time thinking about why they don't agree. Often, it's because the theories were

developed to tell how we ought to relate to other humans — when it comes to animals or fetuses, it's unclear whether animals or fetuses should count as much as humans. All I can advise you to do is to consider each of the four main ethical theories you have studied and try to determine which one is most relevant to the ethical issue you are considering.

Chapter 3.6: David Bruce (born 1954): Harassment

The situation:

You are walking the streets of your town alone early in the morning after a night out when you see a woman being harassed by three drunk men. There is no doubt that she is being harassed because she is crying and the men are yelling "slut" and "whore" at her. The choice is yours: 1) use your cell phone to call the police, then render what aid you can, or 2) keep walking and go home.

What I would do:

In a situation such as this, I would go to the nearby pay phone and call the police, then come back and yell at the three drunks (from a safe distance) to let them know there is a witness and to tell them that I have called the police.

What Aristotle would tell me to do:

Aristotle believed in the mean between extremes and in being virtuous. With the mean between extremes, I would try to avoid excesses and deficiencies of character traits and instead aim for the Golden Mean. (Of course, I would keep in mind that for actions such as adultery there is no mean — just a little adultery is an excess.) When it comes to courage, an excess is foolhardiness and a deficiency is cowardice; the Golden Mean is courage:

Foolhardiness (Excess)

Courage (Virtue)

Cowardice (Deficiency)

A foolhardy person would probably ignore his cell phone and instead go up to the three men and try to fight them off. This may be unwise because instead of just the woman being harassed, the foolhardy person could also be beaten

up. Possibly, the foolhardy person could be beaten for his trouble, and since he didn't call the police, no help would be on its way. A coward would ignore the situation, go home, and not call the police. People sometimes do this, but it seems the least any moral person could do is to call the police. Calling the police would be the action that is the mean between extremes and is what a virtuous person ought to do.

What the Will of God would tell me to do:

A relevant Christian (of course, I realize that not all religious people are Christian, but I am saying what I would do) parable here is that of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan found a man who had been robbed and beaten, but the Good Samaritan did not ignore the man's plight. Instead, the Good Samaritan took care of the man and made sure he healed. Taking care of a person after they have been hurt is very good, and preventing a person from being unnecessarily hurt is even better. I think the will of God would say to render assistance to people who need it. In this situation, I think the best way to render assistance is to call the police.

What a Utilitarian would tell me to do:

Utilitarians are concerned with providing the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Utilitarians also believe that we must consider the happiness of every person affected by an action. I believe that calling the police would result in the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Certainly if I call the police, several people will be happy. Most important, the woman would be happy, but her family and friends would also be happy. I would also be happy because I would be a hero for calling the police. If I would not call the police, I believe that living with myself would be very difficult because I would know that I was a coward.

The police would be happy, for their job is to protect the public and doing one's job competently is a source of pleasure.

However, we also have to consider the happiness of the three drunk men. Certainly they would not want to be arrested, and their families and friends would be unhappy to read of the trouble they had gotten themselves into. So let's consider several actions, and let's see which action would bring about the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. The best action by this standard would have been for the three drunk men to leave the woman alone; unfortunately, they did not do this.

The worst action by this standard would be for me to ignore the situation, not call the police, and instead go home. This would be bad for the woman, for the woman's family and friends, and for me. In addition, I believe that it would be bad for the men. One of the best things that can happen to a person is justice, and justice in this case requires that the three drunk men be caught and punished. A person who gets away with something he shouldn't have can lead an unhappy life. For example, a person who goes to Las Vegas and wins can become a compulsive gambler. (I've known a few.) It's much better to lose; that way, you're less likely to become addicted to gambling.

Since the three drunk men did not do what they should have done (leave the woman alone), the best action now available is for me to call the police. That way, the woman will be helped, I will be a hero, and the three drunk men may be caught and punished (and perhaps learn not to harass women).

I believe that a rule utilitarian such as John Stuart Mill would come up with a rule saying not to harass someone, but if someone is being harassed, to render any aid you can.

What the Categorical Imperative would tell me to do:

If I choose to ignore the situation and go home without calling the police, the maxim for my action would be, "When a woman is being harassed, ignore the situation and go home without calling the police." This maxim is universalizable (many people probably would do this) without contradiction in the Kantian sense; however, the maxim is not reversible. If I were the woman who is being harassed, I would certainly want someone to help me. The maxim also fails the second formulation of the categorical imperative. To treat the woman as an end, I should help her by calling the police. In addition, I believe that in order to treat the three drunk men as ends, I ought to call the police. These men are worthy of being caught and punished; to treat people as being valuable, you have to consider them worthy of praise when they do something right, and worthy of blame when they do something wrong. I also believe that if I were one of the three men harassing the woman, the best thing anyone could do for me would be to call the police on me. I would hate for the violence to escalate and for me to become guilty of something worse than verbal harassment.

A final comment:

In this situation, you have a cell phone, so the best thing to do would be to call the police. (After all, you should call the fire station before attempting to put out a fire on your own because the fire may grow out of control.) If there were no phone handy, what ought I to do? One possibility would be to stay across the street, but yell at the three drunk men that I have called the police — a lie may work. If other people are around, I could alert them to the situation and perhaps the three drunk men would soon face several angry people — not just one. A final possibility would be to go across the street and render what aid I

could; this is the most dangerous action and would take a very courageous person to do it, but if other means of rendering aid are not available, this dangerous action may be the best choice and may be what the mean between extremes, the will of God, utilitarianism, and the categorical imperative demand.

Chapter 3.7: Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968): The Case for Civil Disobedience

Law is a wonderful invention. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes once speculated on what life would be like without law. His State of Nature was a horrible place indeed, in which human life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Fortunately, because human beings are rational, they form a Commonwealth (republic) that has law and enforcers (police) to ensure that everybody obeys the law.

However, we recognize that occasionally the law is not just. After all, at one time in the United States, slavery was legal, although it has never been moral. What ought we to do when faced with an unjust law? Two philosophers will have an answer to this: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), who wrote "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" (1849), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), who wrote "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963).

Henry David Thoreau

First, we will begin with Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau was against both slavery and a war the United States was waging against Mexico. To protest the war against Mexico, he refused to pay a state tax whose proceeds he felt would be used in this unjust war. He was jailed, but he spent only a short time in jail, because someone paid the tax for him.

The story goes that Ralph Waldo Emerson found his friend Thoreau in jail and asked him, "Henry, what are you doing in there?" Thoreau replied, "The question is, what are you doing out there?" Apparently, Emerson was also against the war and Thoreau was therefore asking him why he was not also in prison as a person using civil disobedience to alert fellow citizens to the injustice of the war against Mexico.

(Here is another story about Thoreau: On his deathbed, Thoreau was asked to make his peace with God. Thoreau replied, “We’ve never quarreled.”)

In his essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” Thoreau writes about the kind of government he would like to have. He believes this: “That government is best which governs least.” In other words, the less government, the better. On this point, Thoreau is in agreement with the conservatives.

However, Thoreau does not ask for no government at once, but for a better government at once. Thoreau seems to realize that the government is necessary for some things; after all, he does not refuse to pay the highway tax — the government is good at providing highways. (I also believe that the government is good at providing public libraries.)

Still, Thoreau believes that the government can on occasion be very bad — as when waging war — and that citizens ought not to resign their conscience to the legislators. Instead, citizens need to cultivate a respect for what is right instead of cultivating a respect for the law. After all, too high a respect for the law can make one do what is immoral — for example, serving in the Army during an unjust war. Let us remember that many Nazi war criminals defended their unjust actions by saying that they were merely following orders.

Fortunately, as the Declaration of Independence states, all men recognize the right of revolution. When a government becomes unjust, its citizens are justified in rising up against it.

So what are we to do when faced with an unjust law? Thoreau says that we are faced with three options:

1) obey it,

2) obey it but try to change it, and

3) disobey it and try to change it.

What we should do depends on the severity of the injustice. If the injustice is "part of the necessary friction of the government," then we can ignore it. I suppose an example of this may be some taxes. Many people are against governmental taxation, but taxation seems to be the price for civilization: Someone has to pay for highways and for public libraries.

However, when an injustice is severe, as when slavery is legal or when an unjust war is waged, then we should disobey the law. If enough people disobey the law, then the law will be changed. After all, Thoreau says, governments get their power from citizens, and governments must recognize this if there is to be a "really free and enlightened State."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

When King wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," he stated his reasons for coming to Birmingham. For one thing, he had organizational ties there. King had helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. One of the members of the SCLC had asked King to go to Birmingham to help in the civil rights movement there.

But more basically, King went to Birmingham because injustice was there. Birmingham is where Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a public bus. Eventually, through a bus boycott King and his followers were able to desegregate the public bus system. In addition, King made the point that he was an American, and a citizen of the United States should be able to go to any American state without being called an outsider.

The most important part of King's letter is his answer to an important question raised by some Alabama clergymen:

How can King advocate breaking some laws, yet advocate keeping other laws? After all, King wanted people to disobey the Jim Crow segregation laws of the South, yet he wanted them to obey the desegregation laws that came about because of *Brown v. Board of Education* — a ruling by the United States Supreme Court which desegregated the public schools.

In answering this question, King makes a distinction between just and unjust laws. A just law is a man-made law that is in accordance with the law of God and the moral law. An unjust law is not. A just law uplifts human personality. An unjust law degrades human personality. A just law is one that the majority imposes on a minority but that the majority is willing to make binding on itself. An unjust law is one that a majority imposes on a minority but that the majority does *not* make binding on itself. An example of an unjust law is any Jim Crow law; for example, the law saying that black passengers have to sit on the back of a public bus and allow the white passengers to sit in the front.

King does not advocate evading the law, for that would result in anarchy. Instead, he recommends disobeying unjust laws, but the disobedience must be done with the highest respect for the law. This may sound like an oxymoron, but it is not.

When one breaks an unjust law, King writes, one must break it in a certain way. One must break an unjust law "openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the punishment." One breaks the law openly, in a place where one can be arrested. One breaks the law lovingly, in an attempt to change the law and make it just. And one accepts the penalty, whether it be a fine or a prison sentence.

When one breaks an unjust law in this way, one hopes to arouse public consciousness about the unjust law. When

enough people are aware of the unjust law, the unjust law will be changed to make it just.

Of course, many people nowadays have forgotten some of King's words. They break an unjust law (or one that they regard as unjust) openly and lovingly, but when they are sitting in a courtroom, they argue that because they were acting in accordance with their conscience, they ought not to be punished. However, civil disobedience doesn't work that way. King went to jail, Ralph David Abernathy went to jail, Bertrand Russell went to jail, St. Paul went to jail, and Jesus went to jail. To engage in civil disobedience, you must be willing to accept the penalty.

King ends his letter with the hope that someday "the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty." By using civil disobedience, he did quite a lot in his life to make his hope a reality.

Chapter 3.8: Peter Singer (born 1946): The Argument to Assist

• What are "absolute poverty" and "absolute affluence"?

Absolute poverty is when you can't provide yourself and your dependents with the necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. Many people in third-world nations suffer from absolute poverty.

Absolute affluence is when you have a significant amount of income above what is needed to provide yourself and your dependents with the necessities of life. Many people in Europe, North America, and Asia have absolute affluence.

Part of Singer's point is that people in first-world nations don't do enough to help people in third-world nations. This comes out in his discussion of the percentage of GNP that first-world nations spend on developmental assistance to third-world nations.

• What causes absolute poverty?

Singer believes that the World produces enough food to feed its population. (The Vatican agrees with this.) One problem is that we feed grain to cattle and other animals. This is an inefficient use of protein and food, as it takes a lot of pounds of grain to produce one pound of animal protein. If we were to become vegetarians, this would make a lot of grain available for purposes other than feeding cattle.

In general, Singer believes that the problem is one of distribution, not of production. The world produces enough food, but it isn't distributed to those who need it.

In addition, there may be economic exploitation of third-world countries by first-world countries.

• Is it a consequence of my spending money on a luxury item that someone in the third world dies?

According to Singer and consequentialism, yes. If you don't buy the luxury item and instead use the money to feed a starving person and save his life, then you have done a good thing. But if you do buy a luxury item and don't use the money to save the life of a person in a third-world nation, then you have done a bad thing. What you do with your money is up to you, but you are responsible for the consequences of your actions.

• What is the "non-consequentialist view of responsibility"? (A theory of rights with an appended distinction between acts and omissions — killing and letting die.)

According to a non-consequentialist view of responsibility, I can spend my money on a luxury item as long as my action does not leave the person in the third-world nation worse off than he was before. In other words, there is a distinction between killing and letting die. If I murder a person in a third-nation world nation by shooting him with a gun, then I am responsible for that person's death, but if that person dies because I didn't give money to charity, then I am not responsible for that person's death.

• Why does Singer think we ought to reject the "non-consequentialist view of responsibility"?

Singer thinks that it is an individual theory, based on people living separately in a state of nature. However, Singer knows that we are social creatures and that many of our accomplishments have come about because we are social creatures.

• Explain how Singer arrives at the conclusion that "We ought to prevent some absolute poverty." What "plausible principle" does he use to get his argument started?

Singer uses an analogy. On his walk to work is an ornamental pond. Suppose he were to see a child drowning in the pool. Shouldn't he rescue the child even if it is inconvenient to him? For example, even if he has to get his pants dirty and be late for a lecture, wouldn't we think that he ought to rescue the child? Of course we do. Singer believes that this situation is analogous to helping a person in a third-world nation.

The plausible principle he arrives at is this: "If something is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought to do it."

• Singer says that this plausible principle will please consequentialists, but non-consequentialists should accept it, too. Who does he have in mind here and why should they accept it? Why is the "plausible principle" not open to many of the standard counterexamples to consequentialism?

Non-consequentialists will be pleased with the theory because of the part in the middle: "If something is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, <u>without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance</u>, we ought to do it." As Kantians know, things other than consequences are important; for example, keeping promises, not lying, etc. This plausible principle does not require us to lie or break a promise if doing so will have a good consequence.

• What would happen if we took Singer's argument seriously and began to live our lives by it?

It would have a big impact on our lives. We would give much, much more money to charity. Instead of having a second car or a second home, we would give the money to charity (if you think that saving someone's life is more important than having a second car or a second home).

• Can we escape our obligation to help by saying that we ought to take care of our own first?

We will not let our own family fall into absolute poverty while we help others. To do so would mean sacrificing something of comparable moral significance. However, we need to recognize that other people need help and that absolute poverty mainly exists in the poor nations.

• Can we escape our obligation to help by appealing to property rights?

Singer thinks that the theory of property rights leaves too much to chance. For example, you may be rich or poor because of chance. If you are born into a wealthy family, you will be rich. If you are born into a poor family, you will be poor. If you didn't know which family you would be born into ahead of time, wouldn't you hope that the rich would share with the poor?

• What is triage, and what is the argument that tries to show that we ought to adopt it as a policy toward the poor countries?

Triage is a way of dealing with the wounded in wartime when medical resources are limited. The wounded are divided into three groups: 1) those who will probably get better without medical assistance, 2) those who will probably get better with medical assistance, and 3) those who will probably not get better with medical assistance,

Because medical resources are limited, the idea is to make the best use of them by focusing on people in the middle group. That way, the greatest number of people will live.

People who make use of this argument believe that the world is like a lifeboat. If too many get on the lifeboat, it will sink and everyone will die. Therefore, we should focus on helping only those we think it possible to save without thereby jeopardizing ourselves. In this way of reasoning, people think that if we help the poorest of the poor, we will only be setting up conditions for even more people to die in the future. People will live to have lots of children, and the children will die.

• What is a "demographic transition"? What role does it play in Singer's argument against triage?

As countries become affluent, there is a demographic transition. Instead of having lots of children because so many die in infancy, people begin to have fewer children. Because of this, we need not be setting up conditions for even greater misery in the future. Singer does say, however, that we need to consider population growth in the kind of aid we give, and that we ought to give the kinds of aid that lead to the desired demographic transition.

• What kinds of aid ought we to give?

We ought to give the kinds of aid that will result in the desired demographic transition. Instead of simply giving away food, we might instead educate farmers about how to grow more plentiful crops or we might give away food-producing animals.

Note: The quotations by Peter Singer that appear in this essay are from his *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Chapter 3.9: James F. Childress (born 1940): Scarce Life-Saving Medical Resources

James F. Childress is a philosopher who has studied ethical issues involving scarce life-saving medical resources. He wrote about his findings in his article "Who Shall Live When Not All Can Live?", published in *Soundings*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Winter, 1970).

He believes that we can choose — ethically — who shall live in a situation where only four hearts are available and 10 people need them. In making this choice, Childress proposes two stages.

Stage One: Identifying the Medically Acceptable

First, we need to identify the medically acceptable. By medically acceptable, Childress does not mean those who can afford the operation. Instead, he means those who will benefit substantially if they have the operation. Thus, if there are a limited number of hearts and one person will die soon even if he or she receives a heart, Childress would deny a heart to that person. Instead, Childress would give the heart to a person who is likely to be in perfect health after receiving the heart.

Stage one is utilitarian; that is, it brings about the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Greater benefit will result if we give a heart to a person who will be able to live a long time than if we give the heart to a person who is likely to die within a few months even with a new heart.

Stage Two: Utilitarianism Rejected

Once we have rejected those who are not medically acceptable, we still have to decide who will get the hearts (assuming that people still need more hearts than are available). This raises some problems. In stage one, we

used utilitarianism; in stage two, should we continue to use utilitarianism? If we do, then we have to decide such things as which people, if they continue to live, will bring the greatest amount of happiness into the society they live in.

Childress rejects utilitarianism in stage two. Instead, he advocates randomness; that is, casting lots to decide who will receive hearts. Thus, chance will be used to determine who lives and who dies. Childress gives seven arguments for using randomness in the second stage.

1: Randomness preserves human dignity by providing equality of opportunity.

If we believe that all human life is valuable, then we can treat it as valuable by not ranking the quality of lives according to social utility.

2: Randomness safeguards the relationship of trust between the physician and patient.

If you were a patient, would you want your physician snooping around trying to determine whether you are a socially valuable person so he or she can decide whether you shall live? Probably not; instead, you'd want your physician to be on your side, doing everything possible to keep you alive.

3. Randomness would be the method selected as the most rational and fairest by persons who were self-interested, who were summoned to plan for themselves and their families, and who were ignorant of their own value to society.

Let's try a thought experiment. Let's assume that we have to decide who shall live when not all can live. As a way to make this decision absolutely impartial, let's assume that everyone is ignorant of his or her position in society. (That way, I can't argue that professors are incredibly valuable

people, and thus I should get a heart.) If we were covered by this veil of ignorance, how do you think we would decide to distribute the hearts? Probably by throwing lots; that way, everyone would have an equal chance at getting a heart.

4. Rejection on the basis of randomness would generate less psychological stress for the rejected candidate than would rejection on the basis of inadequate social worth.

Let's assume that you don't get a heart. Your physician comes into your hospital room and says, "Sorry, but we gave the hearts to people we consider more worthy than you." Alternatively, your physician says, "Sorry, we threw lots and your number wasn't one of the lucky ones." What would you rather hear? That you aren't regarded as being valuable, or that you weren't lucky?

5. Randomness is already practiced in the allocation of scarce life-saving medical resources, and thereby its value is tacitly recognized.

This is self-explanatory.

6. Randomness would remove the need for selection committees charged with the responsibility of weighing the relative social worth of applicants for scarce life-saving medical resources.

These committees have a heavy responsibility that should be removed if it is ethical to do so. Also, these committees suffer from the problems involved in trying to determine the social worth of individuals. For example, members of these committees could be biased by the societies they live in. If you live in the logging state of Oregon, you may not highly regard the social worth of an environmentalist.

7. Randomness might cause the powerful and wealthy to commit their resources to the removal of the scarcity of

life-saving medical resources in order to insure their own access to them.

If the wealthy become aware that they can't simply buy a heart, but may have to submit to the casting of lots, the wealthy may donate more of their money to providing life-saving medical resources for everybody.

An Argument Against Childress

I agree with much of what Childress has to say. I do agree that in the first stage, we ought to determine who is medically acceptable. If a person won't benefit much from receiving a heart, we ought to give that heart to someone who will benefit substantially more from it.

However, I disagree with total randomness in the second stage. I believe that we can be utilitarian even here — in extreme cases. For example, what if a person who needs a heart is a famous cancer researcher on the verge of a major breakthrough that could save the lives of thousands of people? Since this person is in a position to save so many lives, I would make sure this person gets a heart.

Another example: What if a person who needs a heart is a rapist? Wouldn't it be an affront to justice if the rapist gets a heart and people who are law-abiding citizens don't? (Suppose one of the rapist's victims doesn't get a heart because the rapist gets one?) Because of these considerations, I would make sure that the rapist does not get a heart.

My Solution

Here's how I would decide who gets hearts that are needed for transplants when there are not enough hearts for everyone to get one:

Stage One: Identifying the Medically Acceptable.

Suppose a person will die within a few months even if she receives a heart; I would deny that person a heart since the other applicants will benefit much more if they receive the heart.

Stage Two: Utilitarianism Used to Identify Exceptional Cases.

Suppose a person is a cancer researcher on the verge of a major breakthrough. I would make sure that person received a heart because that person may be able to save many thousands of lives if that person can complete the research.

Suppose one candidate for a heart is a convicted serial rapist. That rapist has brought misery to many lives. I would deny that person a heart.

Stage Three: Randomness.

For whatever hearts are left, I would cast lots to determine who gets the hearts.

Note: The quotations by James F. Childress that appear in this essay come from his article "Who Shall Live When Not All Can Live?", published in *Soundings*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Winter, 1970).

Chapter 3.10: Richard T. DeGeorge: Truth-Telling in Advertising

The contemporary philosopher Richard DeGeorge, in his book *Business Ethics*, has written about the issue of truth-telling in advertising. Obviously, advertising is all around us, and it can be controversial. For example, should cigarette advertising be allowed on television, should children's TV programming be allowed to be little more than half-hour commercials for products, and does advertising make us buy unwanted and unneeded products? DeGeorge investigates the issue of truth-telling and advertising.

Advertising is Not Inherently Immoral

DeGeorge's first point is that advertising is not inherently immoral. As he points out, if you produce a product, you need to have a way to let potential consumers know that the product is for sale. This is what advertising does. In fact, advertising can help both the seller and the buyer, if the advertising gives the buyer useful information about the product.

According to DeGeorge, "From a moral point of view, since advertising helps achieve the goal of both seller and buyer, it is morally justifiable and permissible, providing it is not deceptive, misleading, or coercive. It can be abused, but it is not inherently immoral."

Three Attacks on Advertising

Three main attacks on the morality of advertising have been made. DeGeorge first states them, then gives his objections against them.

First, the charge that "advertising is not necessary in a socialist economic system and that it is an immoral part of capitalism is vague and for the most part untrue."

DeGeorge points out that there is advertising even in socialist countries because once a product has been made, people must learn that it is for sale. Thus, putting a product in the window or on a shelf is a form of advertising, as is word-of-mouth advertising. In addition, DeGeorge points out that competition is responsible for the greater amount of advertising in the United States as opposed to that in poorer countries. If only one brand of car were available in the U.S., the car manufacturer would not need to advertise much, but since many brands of cars are available here, the car manufacturers find it necessary to advertise.

The second charge against advertising is that it is frequently in poor taste. So it is, DeGeorge admits, but he points out that being in poor taste is not the same thing as being immoral, adding, "As members of society we can make known our displeasure at such advertising either by vocal or written protest or by not purchasing the item advertised."

The third charge against advertising is that "advertising takes advantage of people either by forcing them to buy what they do not want or, more plausibly, by psychologically manipulating them to buy what they do not need." However, DeGeorge points out that Americans want to have the freedom to buy what they choose. (Let me add that freedom includes the freedom to make mistakes.) Also, DeGeorge does not believe that we are as helpless against advertising as these critics seem to assume.

Functions of Advertising

Obviously, a major function of advertising is to sell goods, but there are other functions: Advertising may "educate the public or mold public opinion." Just think of political advertising. However, much advertising seeks to convey information about a product and to persuade you to buy the product. DeGeorge believes that an examination of

advertising would be too narrow if it considered advertising's main function to be supplying information. That is what the government seems to do, since governmental regulation of advertising focuses on the truthfulness of statements made in advertising.

Advertising and Lying

DeGeorge believes that we should focus on the issue of lying, not falsehood; thus, he believes that we should consider the motives of the advertiser. After all, he says, lying and falsehood are distinct. To illustrate this, he gives an example. It's a fact that there are two pints in a quart. But let's say that you sincerely but mistakenly believe that there are four pints in a quart. If someone asks you how many pints are in a quart and you want to be helpful and say "four," you have said something that was false but you have not lied. According to DeGeorge, "From a moral point of view lying is an activity. Lying consists of making a statement which one believes is false to another person whom one has reason to think will believe the statement to be true." Therefore, if someone is baking a cake and asks you how many pints are in a quart, and you want the cake to fail and so say "two," believing that the correct answer is four, then you have lied, although you actually gave the correct and true answer to the question of the person you were hoping to deceive. Fortunately, in this case the person you were hoping to deceive gets the information he was seeking.

DeGeorge's conclusion here is: "If an ad makes a false claim, which the advertiser knows to be false, for the purpose of misleading, misinforming, or deceiving potential customers, then the ad is immoral. It is immoral because the advertiser in the ad is lying, and lying is immoral."

Advertising and Deception

DeGeorge is concerned with the advertiser's intentions, not solely with whether the statements the advertiser makes are true or false. He goes on to consider ways in which deception can occur even though no false statements are made. His definition of a misleading ad is this:

> A misleading ad is one in which the ad does not misrepresent or make false claims but makes claims in such a way that the normal person, or at least many ordinary people reading it quickly and without any great attention and thought, will make a false inference or draw a false conclusion. … Such ads are immoral because they intend to deceive even if they do not literally state what is false.

For example, this is true of some packaging. Let's say there are two cans of tomato soup on the store shelf; both contain the same 12 ounces of soup, but one can is larger than the other can because it is only partially filled.

Advertising and Persuasion

DeGeorge allows advertising to attempt to persuade people to buy the products advertised. One example is cosmetics. Does anyone believe that if they use the hair products that Christie Brinkley advertises that their hair will be as beautiful as Christie's? Probably not, for as DeGeorge points out, "Repeat sales for such products is an indication that the customer is not being deceived."

Advertising and Half-Truths

A final point that DeGeorge makes is, "What the ad does *not* say is as important as what the ad says. A dangerous product cannot morally be advertised and sold without indicating its dangers."

Summary

Finally, DeGeorge provides a summary of his major points:

> Our general rules concerning truth in advertising can be summarized in the following way. It is immoral to lie, mislead, and deceive in advertising. It is immoral to fail to indicate dangers that are not normally expected. It is not immoral to use metaphors or other figures of speech if these will be normally understood as the figurative use of language; nor is it immoral to persuade as well as to inform.

Assessment

DeGeorge has used a deontological approach to truth-telling in advertising: the motive of the advertiser is useful in determining the morality of the advertising. However, adding the insights of the teleologists (consequentialists) could help us to assess the morality of advertising. Some companies sell infant formula to impoverished citizens of impoverished countries. These citizens dilute the formula with bad water, resulting in the malnourishment and deaths of their babies — malnourishment and deaths which would not have occurred had the infants been breastfed. Knowing the consequences of this action, we will have to call such advertising immoral.

Note: The quotations by Richard T. DeGeorge in this essay come from his book *Business Ethics* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982).

Chapter 3.11: Charles E. Reagan and John O. Mingle: Corporate and Individual Responsibility

When a corporation does something wrong, who do you punish? The chief executive officer? The person who made a bad decision? The manager in charge of the person who made a bad decision? This problem points up the issue of corporate and individual responsibility.

In their article "Legal Responsibility Versus Moral Responsibility: The Engineer's Dilemma," philosopher Charles E. Reagan and engineer John O. Mingle write about the special dilemma faced by engineers. According to Reagan and Mingle, engineers have a utilitarian outlook in which they must balance costs versus benefits — the costs sometimes include lives in cases where a product cannot reasonably be made 100 percent safe. However, when something goes wrong with a product and people are hurt, the engineers and the companies they work for are often faced with a jury that has a deontological outlook, meaning that they believe that no loss of life due to a manufactured product is acceptable.

In writing about the conflict often faced by engineers — the conflict in serving two different functions: using engineering skills to benefit humankind and staying loyal to a company whose purpose is to maximize profit — Reagan and Mingle describe two separate cases that illustrate that conflict. In both, engineers are aware of a defect in a service or product, and they have to decide which response to make: simply pass the word up to higher management and let them make the decision about whether something should be done, or blow the whistle on the company if higher management seems unwilling to make changes in an unsafe product.

The first case involves a defective door on DC-10 airplanes. F. D. Applegate, Director of Product Engineering

at Convair, became aware of the defective doors and realized that they could result in loss of airplanes — of course with the loss of some or all of the lives on board. Mr. Applegate wrote his superior, who wrote back that at this late date, Convair would probably have to assume the cost of fixing the doors, which Convair did not want to do. The matter stopped there, and Mr. Applegate did not pursue the matter further. In fact, the doors were defective and many lives were lost as a result of not fixing the problem.

The second case involved BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit). In this case, three engineers became worried about what they "considered design flaws in the automatic control system and the computer system." In this case, since higher management did not seem responsive to the problem, the engineers went to a local politician and blew the whistle on BART. Because of this, the three engineers were fired.

According to Reagan and Mingle, there is a fundamental difference in the views of upper management and these three engineers. Managers, as well as most engineers, use a utilitarian standard in deciding acceptable risk. They realize that many products cannot be made 100 percent safe; therefore, they assume that some loss of life will result if they make the product. For example, automobiles are not 100 percent safe; to make them so is probably impossible, but even if it were possible, it would be prohibitively expensive. Other people, including whistle-blowers, are much more egalitarian or deontological. They believe that all human life is valuable and that a price ought not to be put on human life. Therefore, the amount of lack of safety the utilitarian and the deontologist will tolerate in a product differs significantly.

Today, an engineer who believes that a company is erring by making a dangerous product has two alternatives: 1) to keep his job, he can simply alert higher management about

the problem, then keep quiet if they decide to ignore the problem, or 2) he can leave his job before a problem arises, or if a problem has already arisen and is being ignored by higher management, he can blow the whistle and risk being fired (however, some legislation today protects the job of the whistle-blower). This choice represents a dilemma for the engineer: 1) go against his conscience, or 2) lose his job.

An alternative to this situation is suggested in a quotation by the philosopher Richard DeGeorge:

> In addition to asking how an engineer should respond to moral quandaries and dilemmas, and rather than asking how to educate or train engineers to be moral heroes, those in engineering ethics should ask how large organizations can be changed so that they do not squeeze engineers in moral dilemmas, place them in the position of facing moral quandaries, and make them feel that they must blow the whistle.

Occasionally, we read about a case in which engineers clearly made the wrong decision. One such case is that of the Ford Pinto. Since the automobile was designed with the gasoline tank in the rear of the automobile, engineers knew that in an accident in which a Pinto was rear-ended by another automobile that the Pinto's gas tank could explode, causing death and burning. In this case, Ford ran a cost-benefits analysis. Ford assumed 180 burn deaths and 180 serious burn injuries and estimated that the cost in legal liability would be $50 million. Ford also estimated that fixing the problem and protecting Pinto drivers would cost $137 million. On the basis of this cost-benefits analysis, Ford decided not to fix the design of the Pinto. When a jury found out about the cost-benefits analysis, it awarded

punitive damages of $125 million against Ford. In this case, the jury was deontological.

In conclusion, as Donald Borchert and David Stewart, the authors of the textbook *Exploring Ethics*, point out, Reagan and Mingle suggest "that the conflict between the largely utilitarian calculations of the business manager or engineer in an industrial setting and the deontological demands placed on business by the courts and sympathetic juries is not going to be solved by further philosophical analysis. Why? Because it has not been possible to show conclusively that either utilitarianism or a deontological theory is adequate by itself to guide us through the thicket of moral decision-making" (p. 287). However, as Borchert and Stewart remind us, we need to remain open to the insights of both the utilitarians and the deontologists; each of these ethical theories by itself is incomplete, for a good ethical theory ought to have the insights revealed by both theories.

Note: The quotations by Charles E. Reagan and John O. Mingle that appear in this essay come from their article "Legal responsibility Versus Moral Responsibility: The Engineer's Dilemma," which appeared in *Jurimetrics Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1983).

Chapter 3.12: Richard Brandt (1910-1997): Criminal Justice

Richard Brandt discusses the issue of criminal justice in his book *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics*. First, Brandt asks, "What is meant by an 'examination of the ethical foundations of the institutions and principles of criminal justice'?" Brandt answers this question by writing: "… it is to identify the more important valid ethical principles that are relevant to the institution of criminal justice and to furnish a model in their use in criticism or justification of important features of this institution." In doing this, Brandt feels that two important questions must be answered:

> 1) "What justifies anyone in inflicting pain or loss on an individual on account of his past acts?" and
>
> 2) Is there a valid general principle about the punishments proper for various acts?"

Brandt reaches two conclusions at the beginning of his essay:

> 1) Since punishment involves treating the person unequally in comparison with persons who are not being punished, that treatment must be shown to be required by moral principles; in other words, the laws must be just, and
>
> 2) These just laws must be applied justly; that is, a fair trial must be guaranteed for all.

In his essay, Brandt writes about four views of punishment:

> 1) *deterrence*. By punishing criminals, we deter other people from acting like criminals,
>
> 2) *rehabilitation*. By punishing criminals, we make them fit to become members of society,

3) *protection* of society. While locked up, criminals cannot perpetuate outrages on society, and

4) *retribution*. Criminals deserve their punishment.

Of these views of punishment, three are especially teleological: deterrence, rehabilitation, and protection. (Readers will remember that utilitarianism is a teleological ethical theory.) Deontologists, however, are especially concerned with retribution. (Readers will remember that Kantian ethics is a deontological ethical theory.)

As we will see, Brandt takes a utilitarian perspective on the issue of criminal justice; in particular, he is in agreement with rule utilitarianism. In looking at criminal justice, Brandt writes about traditional utilitarian theory, which justifies our present system of punishment with three main reasons:

1) "People who are tempted to misbehave, to trample on the rights of others, to sacrifice public welfare for personal gain, can usually be deterred from misconduct by fear of punishment, such as death, imprisonment, or fine,"

2) "Imprisonment or fine will teach malefactors a lesson; their characters may be improved, and at any rate a personal experience of punishment will make them less likely to misbehave again," and

3) "Imprisonment will certainly have the result of physically preventing past malefactors from misbehaving during the period of their incarceration."

Utilitarianism can also help us decide about the severity of punishments: "Punishment should have precisely such a degree of severity (not more or less) that the probable disutility of greater severity just balances the probable gain

in utility (less crime because of the more serious threat)." Jeremy Bentham gives good advice when he says (in a paraphrased passage) that punishment needs to be severe enough to serve as a deterrent. If the penalty for bank robbery were a $10 fine, no one would be deterred by the $10 fine from robbing banks.

Bentham also believed in extenuating circumstances that would lessen the punishment or perhaps result in no punishment at all. Five of these circumstances are:

> 1) "the fact that the relevant law was passed only after the act of the accused,"
>
> 2) "that the law had not been made public,"
>
> 3) "that the criminal was an infant, insane, or was intoxicated,"
>
> 4) "that the crime was done under physical compulsion," and
>
> 5) "that the agent was ignorant of the probable consequences of his act or was acting on the basis of an innocent misapprehension of the facts."

According to Brandt, "Bentham's account of the logic of legal 'defenses' needs amendment. What he should have argued is that *not* punishing in certain types of cases (cases where such defenses as those just indicated can be offered) reduces the amount of suffering imposed by law and the insecurity of everybody, and that failure to impose punishment in these types of case will cause only a negligible increase in the incidence of crime."

Brandt also defends the utilitarian theory of punishment against several charges made against it. The first charge is that utilitarianism requires "strict liability"; if someone is guilty of doing something wrong, they should be punished

because of this. However, Brandt believes that this charge is unfounded. A utilitarian must consider the long-term stability of society. If we did not make such exceptions as Bentham recommended, the result would be a lack of stability in society. As Brandt writes, "… the utilitarian can point out that abolition of the standard exculpating excuses would lead to serious insecurity. Imagine the pleasure of driving an automobile if one knew one could be executed for running down a child whom it was absolutely impossible to avoid striking!"

The next criticism Brandt responds to is that utilitarianism "must view imprisonment for crime as morally no different from quarantine." For example, lepers used to be kept apart from society — for the good of that society. The same applies to imprisoned criminals. However, all of us would agree that there is a big difference between the cases. Of course, Brandt agrees that the cases are different; the leper did not to choose to contract leprosy, but the criminal did choose to do evil. Therefore, we should try to make the leper comfortable, but no such obligation applies to the criminal.

Another criticism Brandt responds to is that "the utilitarian must approve of prosecutors or judges occasionally withholding evidence known to them, for the sake of convicting an innocent man, if the public welfare really is served by so doing." However, Brandt responds that if we allowed this, it would have a bad effect on society; therefore, this is something we cannot allow.

Brandt also writes about Kant's deontological theory, which states that punishment is required because of retribution. As Kant writes, "Juridical punishment … can be inflicted on a criminal, never *just* as instrumental to the achievement of some other good for the criminal himself or for the civil society, but *only* because he has committed a

crime." However, Brandt advances five reasons why he rejects the retribution principle:

> 1) "Our ethical theory is *simpler* without this principle …."
>
> 2) "We shall see that some people today question the whole practice of assigning 'penalties to fit the crime.' They think treatment of the criminal should be criminal-centered, not crime-centered,"
>
> 3) "The retributive principle, in whichever form we take it, asserts in effect that a principal aim of the law is to punish either moral guilt or intentional deviation from subjective obligation. But if so, then it ought to punish merely *attempted* crimes as severely as successful crimes"; in other words, the retributive principle requires that a person who attempts murder be punished as severely as a person who actually commits murder because both persons' intent was the same,
>
> 4) "The 'moral reprehensibility' form of the theory is open to serious objection. According to it, laws should be so framed that no one will be punished, no matter what he does, if he is morally blameless"; in other words, a person who commits a crime out of conscience cannot be punished, and
>
> 5) "The *lex talionis* [*lex talionis* is literally 'the law of retaliation'; that is, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth] version of the theory has its special difficulties. For instance, it is inconsistent with recognition of a difference between first degree murder, second degree murder, and manslaughter on account of provocation, since the degree of subjective obligation is equal in all these cases."

Brandt also rejects W. D. Ross' modified deontological theory. Although Brandt believes that Ross' theory is "slightly superior" to Kant's, he finds "no reason for adopting it in preference to the much simpler rule-utilitarian theory" he has already argued for.

Finally, Brandt makes some utilitarian suggestions for reform of the criminal justice system: According to some thinkers, "we should extend, to all criminal justice, the practices of juvenile courts and institutions for the reform of juvenile offenders. Here, retributive concepts have been largely discarded at least in theory, and psychiatric treatment and programs for the prevention of crime by means of slum clearance, the organization of boys' clubs, and so forth, have replaced even deterrence as guiding ideas for social action."

Putting these ideas in action means we would first use the courts to determine guilt; then, if someone is found guilty, experts would decide on the offender's treatment. The experts would also decide when the offender was ready to return to society. This type of treatment would be "criminal-centered treatment, not crime-centered treatment."

Here are three objections to this proposal:

1) Such a proposal ignores the deterrent effect of punishment. To this, Brandt replies that such punishment does not seem to provide much of a deterrence to criminal activity.

2) Such a proposal may mean more danger for police officers, since offenders may believe that the punishment for killing a police officer may not be very severe. To this, Brandt replies that this system is already in effect in Scandinavian countries, and he suggests that it seems to be working.

> 3) What we know about psychiatry and criminology is not advanced enough for this system to work. The way an offender is treated will depend on the personal likes and dislikes of a theorist. To this, Brandt replies that now punishment depends on the personal likes and dislikes of our judges.

In conclusion, Brandt points out an advantage of his proposed system: "An institution of criminal justice operating on such basic principles would come closer to our views about how parents should treat their children, or teachers their students, than the more traditional practices of criminal justice today."

Note: the quotations by Richard Brandt that appear in this essay come from his book *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959).

Chapter 3.13: Sissela Bok (born 1934): Abortion

Abortion is definitely a controversial subject in applied ethics. To know that, one has only to look at the protests that the two groups on opposite sides of the issue have made. Both the pro-life and the pro-choice groups have protested in large numbers in Washington D.C.

The first point I want to make is that the morality of abortion is not as simple as the pro-life and pro-choice groups may make it appear. I believe that in at least one situation abortion is morally wrong and in at least one situation abortion is morally right.

Let's take a situation in which abortion is morally wrong. Imagine a couple whose wife is nine months pregnant. The mother is healthy, the nine-months-old fetus is healthy, and both parents want to have the child. In this situation, I believe that abortion is morally wrong.

Now let's take a situation in which abortion is morally right. Some pregnancies, if allowed to develop, will result in a 100 percent chance of death for both the mother and the embryo. One example is an inter-tubal pregnancy, in which the egg is not in the mother's uterus but is still in one of the mother's fallopian tubes. In this situation, the sperm cell travels up the fallopian tube and fertilizes the egg. If the fetus is allowed to develop, the result will eventually be death for both the mother and the fetus. In this situation, I believe that abortion is morally right.

Since it's simplistic to say that abortion is morally right or that abortion is morally wrong, we need to decide which factors make one abortion morally right and another abortion morally wrong. One philosopher who has provided a plausible answer is Sissela Bok in her article "Ethical Problems of Abortion" (*Hastings Center Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1974).

Ms. Bok's strategy is to list reasons for protecting life, then determine if and when these reasons are relevant to life in the prenatal period. The reasons we have for protecting life are these:

> 1) "Killing is viewed as the greatest of all dangers *for the victim*."
>
> 2) "Killing is brutalizing and criminalizing *for the killer*."
>
> 3) "Killing often causes *the family of the victims and others* to experience grief and loss."

These three considerations lead to this conclusion:

> *All of society*, as a result, has a stake in the protection of life.

Whether these reasons for protecting life are relevant to life in the prenatal period depends largely on how long the woman has been pregnant. Very early in the pregnancy, the reasons for protecting life are nearly absent. Ms. Bok writes:

> Consider the very earliest cell formations soon after conception. Clearly, most of these reasons for protecting human life are absent.
>
> This group of cells cannot suffer in death, nor can it fear death. Its experiencing of life has not yet begun; it is not yet conscious of the loss of anything it has come to value in life and is not tied by bonds of affection to other human beings. If the abortion is desired by both parents, it will cause no grief such as that which accompanies the death of a child. Almost no human care and emotion and resources have been invested in it. Nor is a very early abortion brutalizing for the person voluntarily performing it,

> or a threat to other members of the human community.

The later the pregnancy progresses, of course, the more the reasons for protecting life are present and applicable to life in the prenatal period. Certainly, infanticide — deliberately causing the death of an infant after it is born — goes against the rules for preserving life. The question becomes when abortion can be morally permitted and when it cannot. In deciding this, a continuum showing the progress of a pregnancy can be helpful.

Ms. Bok writes, "Since most abortions can be permitted earlier or later during pregnancy, it would be preferable to encourage early abortions rather than late ones, and to draw a line before the second half of the pregnancy, permitting later abortions only on a clear showing of need." In determining these limits, Ms. Bok suggests using the concepts of quickening and viability.

Quickening occurs when the fetus can be felt moving. Before quickening, Ms. Bok believes that the reasons for protecting life are largely absent and thus that the embryo can be aborted on request. Viability occurs when the fetus is able to live on its own outside the mother's body. Between quickening and viability, abortion should require special reasons before it is performed. After viability, Ms. Bok writes, "… all abortions save the rare ones required to save the life of the mother, should be prohibited …." Indeed, if possible, at this late stage, instead of an abortion, premature birth should be induced so that the fetus is not harmed.

There is a problem with stating the times in a pregnancy that quickening and viability occur because they vary from fetus to fetus and because science is helping fetuses to survive outside their mothers' bodies earlier and earlier. Ms. Bok believes that we should use the conventional

definition of validity (survival outside the mother's body *without* the aid of scientific devices). If we accept this, then quickening occurs at 10 to 12 weeks, and viability occurs at 24 to 26 weeks.

One thing to note is that Ms. Bok is in general agreement with the Supreme Court decision in the case *Roe v. Wade*. According to that decision, abortion is legal if performed early in the pregnancy. Later in the pregnancy, the state is allowed to regulate abortions and not let them be performed on demand.

Note: The quotations by Sissela Bok that appear in this essay come from her essay "Ethical Problems of Abortion," *Hastings Center Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1974): 33-52.

Chapter 3.14: David Bruce (born 1954): Animals

In his book *Moral Literacy: or How to Do the Right Thing* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1992), British philosopher Colin McGinn writes,

> We should, at the very least, minimize our dependence on animals, treating their interests as comparable to the interests of fellow humans in the respects relevant to the case at hand. This will mean, for starters, stopping eating meat if you live in one of the societies in which it is perfectly possible to find other sources of food, i.e., almost everywhere on earth. Don't even think about owning a fur coat. Very few animal experiments, if any. Bloodsports — give me a break. In sum, we have to cease doing to animals what we would not in good conscience do to humans. We must make our morality consistent.

In general, I am in agreement with McGinn that we need to consider the interests of animals; however, I wish to elaborate on when it is moral to use animals for food, and I wish to argue that in some cases it is moral to use animals for experiments.

First let me talk about using animals for food. McGinn says that we ought not to use animals for food if alterative sources of food re available, but I want to give my reasons why we humans can morally eat animals when other food sources are not available.

I believe that all creatures, including animals, do what is necessary to survive, except in extraordinary cases such as those involving mental illness. Let's perform a thought experiment to illustrate this. Imagine that you are shipwrecked on a desert island and the only available food is a living animal that has also been shipwrecked; in such a

case, I am sure that you will agree that it is morally right to kill that animal and use it as food. It's also important to realize that the animal, if it is carnivorous, also may attempt to kill you to survive; we are not making any special allowances for human beings that we would not allow for animals. On that deserted island, you will use your intelligence to try to kill the animal, and the animal may use its teeth and claws to try to kill you. (Let's hope that the animal is a bunny rabbit and not a lion.) On this reasoning, therefore, in places where food is scarce, human beings can use animals for food. McGinn agrees with this. Both McGinn and I are also in agreement that should we need to kill an animal for food, we ought to kill the animal as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

I also believe that we will do whatever it takes to keep our children safe. (As in the previous case, many animals do this, too. Let's perform a thought experiment to illustrate this. Imagine that a bear is running after your child; you have a rifle that you have been carrying for target shooting (you are not hunting). I think that you will agree that it is morally right for you to kill that bear in order to protect your child. In the same way, animals protect their young. If you are out walking in the woods and you run across a couple of bear cubs, I advise you to get as far from the bear cubs as possible before their mother returns. (You do not want to be in between a mother bear and her cubs.) Both human beings and animals do whatever is necessary to protect their young. Human beings use their intelligence (and the weapons their intelligence has fashioned)., and animals use their teeth and claws to protect their young.

However, because of their intelligence, humans can see many threats to their children that animals are incapable of seeing. For example, humans know that diseases can be deadly to children. Since human beings have the right to protect their children, they use their intelligence to develop

vaccines that will immunize their children against diseases that can kill them.

Therefore, if experiments on animals can produce a vaccine that will wipe out a disease deadly to humans (and no other method can be used to produce that life-saving vaccine), I believe that we have the right to perform experiments on animals (always taking care to keep the animals' pain at a minimum). However, since cosmetics are not necessary to human survival, I do not believe we have the right to perform experiments resulting in pain and/or death for animals simply so that a company can develop a new cosmetic product.

I must plead guilty to speciesism here. I would not allow experiments to be performed on mentally defective human beings or on children, yet I would allow them to be performed on animals. Let's perform a thought experiment to see if experimentation on animals is justified. Suppose that your child is dying of a disease for which there is no cure. Further suppose that an experiment involving the deaths of 1,000,000 white mice will result in medicine that will save your child. (No other tests can be used to develop the medicine; the only available test involves experimentation on animals.) Would you say to go ahead with the animal experimentation? I would, and think you would, too.

As you can see, I agree with much of what McGinn says. However, McGinn believes in "[V]ery few animal experiments, if any." Since I believe that there are life-and-death situations in which it is both moral and necessary to use animals in experiments, I believe at this time that there must be some experiments performed on animals.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Some Books by David Bruce

Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature

Dante's Inferno: *A Retelling in Prose*

Dante's Purgatory: *A Retelling in Prose*

Dante's Paradise: *A Retelling in Prose*

Dante's Divine Comedy: *A Retelling in Prose*

From the Iliad *to the* Odyssey*: A Retelling in Prose of Quintus of Smyrna's* Posthomerica

Homer's Iliad: *A Retelling in Prose*

Homer's Odyssey: *A Retelling in Prose*

Jason and the Argonauts: A Retelling in Prose of Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica

Virgil's Aeneid: *A Retelling in Prose*

William Shakespeare's Macbeth: *A Retelling in Prose*

Children's Biography

Nadia Comaneci: Perfect Ten

Anecdote Collections

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

Be a Work of Art: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in the Arts: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Create, Then Take a Break: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 1: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Reality is Fabulous: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Resist Psychic Death: 250 Anecdotes

Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Kindest People Series

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 1

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 2

(Free) Kindest People Volumes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 3

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 4

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 5

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 6

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 7

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 1)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 2)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 3)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 4)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 5)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 6)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 7)

The Kindest People: Be Excellent to Each Other (Volume 1)

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Appendix B: About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a master's degree in English and a master's degree in Philosophy. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled "Wise Up!" for *The Athens News* and I am a retired English instructor at Ohio U.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)