
Philosophical Thought

**across cultures and
through the ages, 4th Ed.**

Edited by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

Philosophical Thought

PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

across cultures and through the ages, 4th Edition

EDITED BY HEATHER WILBURN, PH.D.

Tulsa Community College
Tulsa, OK



Philosophical Thought by Heather Wilburn / Tulsa Community College is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Philosophical Thought
2020 Heather Wilburn

Unless otherwise noted, this work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

This work was built from a variety of sources, including:

- *Sapientia* by Henry Imler
- *Phronesis* by Henry Imler
- *Reading for Philosophical Inquiry* edited by Lee Archie and John G. Archie
- *Introduction to Philosophy Reader* edited by Noah Levin
- *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy* edited by Jeff McLaughlin
- primary texts from a variety of authors; and
- original content and editing by Heather Wilburn

Sapientia use note:

The book was published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This allows one to adapt the work so long as attribution is made.

Attribution:

Imler, H. (2019). *Sapientia*. Eidenai OER. Retrieved from <https://sapientia.pressbooks.com/>

Phronesis use note:

The book was published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This allowed one to adapt the work so long as attribution is made.

Attribution:

Imler, H. (2019). *Phronesis*. Eidenai OER. Retrieved from <https://phronesis.pressbooks.com/>

The Originals use note:

The book was published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This allows one to adapt the work so long as attribution is made.

Attribution:

McLaughlin, J. (2017). *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy*. Victoria, BC: BCcampus/TRU. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/classicalreadings>

Introduction to Philosophy Reader use note:

The book was published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This allows one to adapt the work so long as attribution is made.

Attribution:

Levin, Noah, ed. *Introduction to Philosophy Reader*. N.G.E. Press, 2019.

Primary Texts Use Note:

The inclusion of primary texts are governed by

- the Public Domain,
- the Fair Use Doctrine, or
- by permission of the author.

At the end of each reading we provide which of these uses applies to the best of our judgement.

Cover Photo

Photo by Yeshi Kangrang on Unsplash

Complaint Mechanism

If you believe yourself to be the copyright holder of any of the primary texts and believe that our use of the work is not governed by the Public Domain, Fair Use, or you wish to rescind the permission given, please contact the editor by means of the following:

Email jamie.holmes@tulsacc.edu with the subject “Philosophical Thought Copyright Complaint.”

Upon receiving your communication, we will dialog with you concerning the use and proceed from there, possibly removing the work from the primary texts portion.

CONTENTS

Introduction (Updated for the Fourth Edition) Heather Wilburn, Ph.D	xvii
A Note for Instructors and Others Using this Open Resource	xxi
Read Online or Download This Book	xxiii
Unit I. Unit 1: What Is Philosophy?	
LOGOS: Critical Thinking, Arguments, and Fallacies Heather Wilburn, Ph.D	2
An Introduction to Russell's "The Value of Philosophy" Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.	11
The Value of Philosophy Bertrand Russell	13
Philosophy: Who Needs It	18
An Introduction to Plato's Apology Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.	19
The Apology Plato	25
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) Edited by: Timothy Robbins	40
Unit 1 Supplemental Readings	57

Unit II. Unit 2: Metaphysics

An Introduction to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"	59
Heather Wilburn, Ph.D	
The Allegory of the Cave	62
Plato	
A Critical Comparison between Plato's Socrates and Xenophon's Socrates in the Face of Death	69
Dr. Pankaj Singh	
Plato's "Simile of the Sun" and "The Divided Line"	76
Plato	
Parmenides	84
Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo	
Symposium	94
Plato	
An Introduction to Aristotle's Metaphysics	125
Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.	
Selected Readings from Aristotle's Categories	132
Aristotle	
An Introduction to 'Self and Ātman'	138
Lunneihoi Thangeo	
Self and Atman (from Bhagavad Gita)	143
Noah Levin	

Reality and Time (from Bhagavad Gita) Noah Levin	155
Dhamma: What the Buddha Taught Douglas Sjoquist	172
An Introduction to "What is A Chariot? (What are we?)" Lunneihoi Thangeo	192
What is a Chariot? (And what are we?)	197
We are Our Awareness John Locke	201
Bundle Theory of the Self David Hume	207
Ship of Theseus Noah Levin	215
Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "The City of God" Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo	220
Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "On the Holy Trinity" Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo	222
Augustine's Treatment of the Problem of Evil Rocco A. Astore	225
Aquinas's Five Proofs for the Existence of God St. Mary's Press	229

St. Thomas Aquinas – On the Five Ways to Prove God’s Existence	231
St. Thomas Aquinas	
Selected Reading's from William Paley's "Natural Theology"	234
William Paley	
Selected Readings from St. Anselm's Proslogium; Monologium: An Appendix In Behalf Of The Fool By Gaunilo; And Cur Deus Homo	242
St. Anselm	
David Hume– On the Irrationality of Believing in Miracles	246
Jeff McLaughlin	
Selections from Pascal's Pensées	259
Blaise Pascal	
William James – On the Will to Believe	288
Jeff McLaughlin	
Unit 2 Supplemental Readings	303
 Unit III. Unit 3: Epistemology	
An Introduction to Western Epistemology	305
Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.	
Selected Readings from Russell's The Problems of Philosophy	317
Plato's Meno	320
Plato	

Cogito	357
René Descartes	
Empiricism	368
John Locke	
Selections from A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge	382
George Berkeley	
Radical Empiricism	394
David Hume	
Why Time Is In Your Mind: Transcendental Idealism and the Reality of Time	404
Guus Duindam	
Selected Readings on Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism	411
Transcendental Idealism	413
Immanuel Kant	
Selections from "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" by William James	426
William James	
Jean Piaget on Reasoning and Logic	457
Dr. Mark A. Winstanley	
Johnson-Laird on Reasoning and Logic	466
Dr. Mark A. Winstanley	
Unit 3 Supplemental Readings	473

Unit IV. Unit 4: How One Should Live

Slave and Master Morality (From Chapter IX of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil) Lee Archie and John G. Archie	475
The Ring of Gyges Plato	483
A Little Book of Stoicism St. George Stock	489
The Simple and Happy Life Epicurus	522
An Introduction to Western Ethical Thought: Aristotle, Kant, Utilitarianism Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.	527
Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock	536
Reason and Emotion in the Moral Life Scott O'Leary	551
Virtue Aristotle	556
An Introduction to Kant's Moral Theory Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.	576
Kantian Ethics Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock	578

Selected Readings from Kant's Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals Immanuel Kant	594
The Categorical Imperative Immanuel Kant	609
Utilitarianism Andrew Fisher; Mark Dimmock; and Henry Imler	614
A Pig, a Fool, and Socrates John Stuart Mill	634
Religious Ethical Systems Andrew Fisher; Mark Dimmock; Henry Imler; and Kristin Whaley	640
God, Morality, and Religion Kristin Whaley	668
Euthyphro Plato	676
Letter from the Birmingham City Jail Martin King	696
Unit 4 Supplemental Readings	710
 Unit V. Unit 5: Justice	
Plato's Republic - Book II Plato	712

Selected Readings from Thomas Hobbes' "Leviathan"	740
Thomas Hobbes	
Selected Readings from John Locke's "Second Treatise of Government"	757
John Locke	
Original Acquisition	769
John Locke	
Rousseau's Social Contract Theory	779
Luke Tucker	
Selected Readings from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "The Social Contract & Discourses"	785
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	
A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality	798
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	
John Rawls and the "Veil of Ignorance"	820
Ben Davies	
John Stuart Mill – On The Equality of Women	828
Jeff McLaughlin	
Mary Wollstonecraft – On the Rights of Women	859
Jeff McLaughlin	
On Marxism and Value	875
Rasmin Canon	

An Introduction to Marx's Philosophic and Economic Thought Heather Wilburn, Ph.D	882
Manifesto of the Communist Party Frederick Engels and Karl Marx	890
Anarchy Pëtr Kropotkin	911
Social Contracts of Exploitation Charles Mills	921
Government in the Future	943
Republican Freedom David Campbell	945
Contemporary Just War Theory Femi Omotoyinbo	951
How can punishment be justified? On Kant's Retributivism Guus Duindam	960
Unit 5 Supplemental Readings	969

Unit VI. Unit 6: Aesthetics

Plato's Republic Book X Jeff McLaughlin	971
Selected Readings from Aristotle's Poetics Aristotle	988

Of the Standard of Taste David Hume	995
Kant's Project: A Short Overview Laura Mueller, Ph.D.	1011
Immanuel Kant – On the Aesthetic Taste Jeff McLaughlin	1022
Selected Readings from Edmund Burke's "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" Jeff McLaughlin	1041
Unit 6 Supplemental Readings	1069

Unit VII. Unit 7: Existentialism

Selected Reading from Søren Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling Søren Kierkegaard	1071
Selected Readings on Søren Kierkegaard	1090
Existentialism is a Humanism	1092
Selected Reading from Simone de Beauvoir: Introduction to The Second Sex	1093
The Myth of Sisyphus	1094
Selected Readings from and on Friedrich Nietzsche's "Eternal Recurrence" Friedrich Nietzsche	1096
Unit 7 Supplemental Readings	1098
Fourth Edition Notes	1099

INTRODUCTION (UPDATED FOR THE FOURTH EDITION)

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D

Philosophical Thought: Across Cultures and through the Ages, is an open-educational resource (OER) to be used as a collection of readings for introductory philosophy courses. The objectives for developing and sharing this open resource are three-fold:

1. to provide a collection of philosophical works that can be used as a foundation for faculty and students to use in undergraduate philosophy courses
2. to provide a resource that is free to students
3. to provide a resource that compiles philosophical thought from a variety of cultures and eras

The works included in this book come from a wide range of sources. However, this book is indebted to Henry Imler's editorial work on *Sapientia* and *Phronesis*, both of which are OER texts available on Pressbooks.

This book is organized into the following seven units:

Unit I: What is Philosophy?

Unit II: Metaphysics

Unit III: Epistemology

Unit IV: How Should One Live

Unit V: Justice

Unit VI: Aesthetics

Unit VII: Existentialism

Within each unit, there are a number of chapters. Additionally, you will find a page with online resources in the book to supplement these units as well as various other philosophical content.

This book would not be possible without the technical work of Jamie M. Holmes, MLS, a Reference,

Instruction and OER Librarian at Tulsa Community College, and Jennifer Brummett, formerly a student in the University of Oklahoma School of Library & Information Studies program.

Fourth Edition note: The fourth edition, like the third, primarily includes new chapters* intended to bring additional context to help make the original texts more accessible to students of philosophy, and we've added more interactivity in a handful of chapters, both existing and new.

One big change to note is that we removed the numbering from the chapters. We hope this accomplishes a few things:

- Reduces the possibility of confusion as the book moves through editions; chapter titles won't change even when content is added, removed, or re-ordered
- Reinforces and highlights the thematic organization of the book, rather than implying or suggesting a linear path
- Increases, if even just slightly, familiarity with philosophers, their works, and themes included

*The new chapters are listed below in the "Summer Version" note. While they are no longer numbered as shown below, they do appear in the units as shown below.

Summary of Changes made in the 3rd Edition to create the "summer version" of the Fourth Edition:

Two chapters were moved from Unit 1 to Unit 2:

- Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "The City of God" -was chapter 8, now chapter 25
- Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "On the Holy Trinity" – was chapter 9, now chapter 26

Chapters added to this new edition (13):

Unit 2:

- Ch. 10: A Critical Comparison between Plato's Socrates and Xenophon's Socrates in the Face of Death
- Ch. 16: An Introduction to Self and Atman
- Ch. 20: An Introduction to "What is a chariot? (What are we?)"
- Ch. 27: Augustine's Treatment of the Problem of Evil

Unit 3:

- Ch. 44: Why Time Is In Your Mind
- Ch. 50: Jean Piaget on Reasoning and Logic
- Ch. 51: Johnson-Laird on Reasoning & Logic

Unit 4:

- Ch. 65: Reason and Emotion in Moral Life

Unit 5:

- Ch. 76: Rousseau's Social Contract Theory
- Ch. 77: Selected Readings from Jean-Jacques Rosseau's The Social Contract & Discourses
- Ch. 88: Republican Freedom
- Ch. 89: Contemporary Just War Theory
- Ch. 90: How Can Punishment be Justified?

Most of the chapters added to this latest revision are made possible by funding from the Tulsa Community College Foundation. You'll find these chapters marked with the Foundation logo.



Summary of changes made in the 3rd Edition:

Unit 1:

- Ch. 4: Philosophy: Who Needs It
- Ch. 7: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
- Ch. 8: Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "The City of God"
- Ch. 9: Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "On the Holy Trinity"

Unit 2:

- Ch. 11: Plato’s “Simile of the Sun and “The Divided Line”
- Ch. 15: An Introduction to Aristotle’s Metaphysics
- Ch. 20: What is a Chariot? (And what are we?)
- Ch. 24: Aquinas’s Five Proofs for the Existence of God
- Ch. 29: Selections from Pascal’s Pensées

Unit 3:

- Ch. 33: Selected Readings from Russell’s The Problems of Philosophy
- Ch. 37: Selections from A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (Berkeley)
- Ch. 40: Selected Readings on Immanuel Kant’s Transcendental Idealism

Unit 5:

- Ch. 67: Original Acquisition
- Ch. 72: On Marxism and Value
- Ch. 76: Social Contracts of Exploitation



Introduction (Updated for the Fourth Edition) by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

A NOTE FOR INSTRUCTORS AND OTHERS USING THIS OPEN RESOURCE

Fourth Edition Note:

As of its official publication date of 8/12/22, the editor will make no significant changes as far as the number or order of chapters; however, enhancements will be ongoing throughout the Fall semester. Those enhancements will not change the basic content of the book; instead, they will include added multimedia or interactivity to increase its efficacy as a learning resource. All revisions to the book will be noted on the Fourth Edition Notes page in the appendix to provide transparency and clarity for users.

Attribution Notes:

This book serves as both an anthology and a textbook, as it is a compilation of original texts mixed in with expert essays and other material designed to help students beginning their study of philosophy.

To cite the book as a whole:

Philosophical Thought by Heather Wilburn / Tulsa Community College is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Some chapters hold a license that is different from that of the whole book. In that case, the suggested attribution can be found at the end of the chapter on the left side of the screen.

Let Us Know If You Are Using This Textbook!

Thank you in advance for sharing your interest in adopting all or part of *Philosophical Thought: Across Cultures & Through the Ages*. By completing this brief form, we will be able to better measure impact, usage, and the importance of information literacy instruction:

Adoption Form: *Philosophical Thought: Across Cultures & Through the Ages*

Let Us Know If You Have a Suggested Edit or Revision!

Help us improve this resource by reporting errors or suggesting edits or revisions:

Suggestion Form: *Philosophical Thought: Across Cultures & Through the Ages*

READ ONLINE OR DOWNLOAD THIS BOOK

Read Online

You may read this book fully online, here in Pressbooks. It has the social annotation tool Hypothesis embedded, so if you have or create a free Hypothesis account, you can annotate online. The webbook also has videos and interactivity built-in, and the work to ensure those remain accessible is ongoing. Accessibility problems can be reported via the suggestion form that is further described in the Instructor Note (next page).

Download

If you would prefer to download a PDF copy of this book, or if you prefer to read it on another eBook platform, some options are listed below. Please note that some multimedia and interactive content ***may have been added*** after the export files were generated on 10/25/22, so they may not be included. See the Fourth Edition Notes page in the appendix for details on elements added after that date.

- PDF (formatted for digital use with active hyperlinks, etc.)
- PDF (formatted for printing; placeholders are provided with a URL directing you back to the ebook to engage with the active & other digital content)
- EPUB (for Nook, Apple Books, Kobo, Kindle etc.)

These download files are for those who wish to create an adaptation:

- Pressbooks XML
- Common Cartridge with Web Links
- XHTML (unsupported by Pressbooks)
- HTMLBook (unsupported by Pressbooks)
- OpenDocument (unsupported by Pressbooks)
- WordPress XML (unsupported by Pressbooks)

UNIT I

UNIT 1: WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

LOGOS: CRITICAL THINKING, ARGUMENTS, AND FALLACIES

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D

Critical Thinking:

With respect to critical thinking, it seems that everyone uses this phrase. Yet, there is a fear that this is becoming a buzz-word (i.e. a word or phrase you use because it's popular or enticing in some way). Ultimately, this means that we may be using the phrase without a clear sense of what we even mean by it. So, here we are going to think about what this phrase might mean and look at some examples. As a former colleague of mine, Henry Imler, explains:

By critical thinking, we refer to thinking that is recursive in nature. Any time we encounter new information or new ideas, we double back and rethink our prior conclusions on the subject to see if any other conclusions are better suited. Critical thinking can be contrasted with Authoritarian thinking. This type of thinking seeks to preserve the original conclusion. Here, thinking and conclusions are policed, as to question the system is to threaten the system. And threats to the system demand a defensive response. Critical thinking is short-circuited in authoritarian systems so that the conclusions are conserved instead of being open for revision.¹

A condition for being recursive is to be open and not arrogant. If we come to a point where we think we have a handle on what is True, we are no longer open to consider, discuss, or accept information that might challenge our Truth. One becomes closed off and rejects everything that is different or strange—out of sync with one's own Truth. To be open and recursive entails a sense of thinking about your beliefs in a critical and reflective way, so that you have a chance to either strengthen your belief system or revise it if needed. I have been teaching philosophy and humanities classes for nearly 20 years; critical thinking is the single most important skill you can develop. In close but second place is communication. In my view, communication skills follow as a natural result of critical thinking because you are attempting to think through and articulate stronger and rationally justified views. At the risk of sounding cliché, education isn't about instilling content; it is about learning how to think.

In your philosophy classes your own ideas and beliefs will very likely be challenged. This does not mean that you will be asked to abandon your beliefs, but it does mean that you might be asked to defend them. Additionally, your mind will probably be twisted and turned about, which can be an uncomfortable experience. Yet, if at all possible, you should cherish these experiences and allow them to help you grow as

a thinker. To be challenged and perplexed is difficult; however, it is worthwhile because it compels deeper thinking and more significant levels of understanding. In turn, thinking itself can transform us not only in thought, but in our beliefs, and our actions. Hannah Arendt, a social and political philosopher that came to the United States in exile during WWII, relates the transformative elements of philosophical thinking to Socrates. She writes:

Socrates...who is commonly said to have believed in the teachability of virtue, seems to have held that talking and thinking about piety, justice, courage, and the rest were liable to make men more pious, more just, more courageous, even though they were not given definitions or “values” to direct their further conduct.²

Thinking and communication are transformative insofar as these activities have the potential to alter our perspectives and, thus, change our behavior. In fact, Arendt connects the ability to think critically and reflectively to morality. As she notes above, morality does not have to give a predetermined set of rules to affect our behavior. Instead, morality can also be related to the open and sometimes perplexing conversations we have with others (and ourselves) about moral issues and moral character traits. Theodor W. Adorno, another philosopher that came to the United States in exile during WWII, argues that autonomous thinking (i.e. thinking for oneself) is crucial if we want to prevent the occurrence of another event like Auschwitz, a concentration camp where over 1 million individuals died during the Holocaust.³ To think autonomously entails reflective and critical thinking—a type of thinking rooted in philosophical activity and a type of thinking that questions and challenges social norms and the status quo. In this sense thinking is critical of what is, allowing us to think beyond what is and to think about what ought to be, or what ought not be. This is one of the transformative elements of philosophical activity and one that is useful in promoting justice and ethical living.

With respect to the meaning of education, the German philosopher Hegel uses the term *bildung*, which means education or upbringing, to indicate the differences between the traditional type of education that focuses on facts and memorization, and education as transformative. Allen Wood explains how Hegel uses the term *bildung*: it is “a process of self-transformation and an acquisition of the power to grasp and articulate the reasons for what one believes or knows.”⁴ If we think back through all of our years of schooling, particularly those subject matters that involve the teacher passing on information that is to be memorized and repeated, most of us would be hard pressed to recall anything substantial. However, if the focus of education is on how to think and the development of skills include analyzing, synthesizing, and communicating ideas and problems, most of us will use those skills whether we are in the field of philosophy, politics, business, nursing, computer programming, or education. In this sense, philosophy can help you develop a strong foundational skill set that will be marketable for your individual paths. While philosophy is not the only subject that will foster these skills, its method is one that heavily focuses on the types of activities that will help you develop such skills.

Arguments:

Let's turn to discuss arguments. Arguments consist of a set of statements, which are claims that something is or is not the case, or is either true or false. The conclusion of your argument is a statement that is being argued for, or the point of view being argued for. The other statements serve as evidence or support for your conclusion; we refer to these statements as premises. It's important to keep in mind that a statement is either true or false, so questions, commands, or exclamations are not statements. If we are thinking critically we will not accept a statement as true or false without good reason(s), so our premises are important here. Keep in mind the idea that supporting statements are called premises and the statement that is being supported is called the conclusion. Here are a couple of examples:

Example 1: Capital punishment is morally justifiable since it restores some sense of balance to victims or victims' families.

Let's break it down so it's easier to see in what we might call a typical argument form:

Premise: Capital punishment restores some sense of balance to victims or victims' families.

Conclusion: Capital punishment is morally justifiable.

Example 2: Because innocent people are sometimes found guilty and potentially executed, capital punishment is not morally justifiable.

Premise: Innocent people are sometimes found guilty and potentially executed.

Conclusion: Capital punishment is not morally justifiable.

It is worth noting the use of the terms "since" and "because" in these arguments. Terms or phrases like these often serve as signifiers that we are looking at evidence, or a premise.

Check out another example:

Example 3: All human beings are mortal. Heather is a human being. Therefore, Heather is mortal.

Premise 1: All human beings are mortal.

Premise 2: Heather is a human being.

Conclusion: Heather is mortal.

In this example, there are a couple of things worth noting: First, there can be more than one premise. In fact, you could have a rather complex argument with several premises. If you've written an argumentative paper you may have encountered arguments that are rather complex. Second, just as the arguments prior had signifiers to show that we are looking at evidence, this argument has a signifier (i.e. therefore) to demonstrate the argument's conclusion.

So many arguments!!! Are they all equally good?

No, arguments are not equally good; there are many ways to make a faulty argument. In fact, there are a lot of different types of arguments and, to some extent, the type of argument can help us figure out if the argument is a good one. For a full elaboration of arguments, take a logic class! Here's a brief version:

Deductive Arguments: in a deductive argument the conclusion necessarily follows the premises. Take argument Example 3 above. It is absolutely necessary that Heather is a mortal, if she is a human being and if mortality is a specific condition for being human. We know that all humans die, so that's tight evidence. This argument would be a very good argument; it is valid (i.e. the conclusion necessarily follows the premises) and it is sound (i.e. all the premises are true).

Inductive Arguments: in an inductive argument the conclusion likely (at best) follows the premises. Let's have an example:

Example 4: 98.9% of all TCC students like pizza. You are a TCC student. Thus, you like pizza.

Premise 1: 98.9% of all TCC students like pizza

Premise 2: You are a TCC student.

Conclusion: You like pizza. (*Thus is a conclusion indicator)

In this example, the conclusion doesn't necessarily follow; it likely follows. But you might be part of that 1.1% for whatever reason. Inductive arguments are good arguments if they are strong. So, instead of saying an inductive argument is valid, we say it is strong. You can also use the term sound to describe the truth of the premises, if they are true. Let's suppose they are true and you absolutely love Hideaway pizza. Let's also assume you are a TCC student. So, the argument is really strong and it is sound.

There are many types of inductive argument, including: causal arguments, arguments based on probabilities or statistics, arguments that are supported by analogies, and arguments that are based on some type of authority

figure. So, when you encounter an argument based on one of these types, think about how strong the argument is. If you want to see examples of the different types, a web search (or a logic class!) will get you where you need to go.

Fallacies:

Some arguments are faulty, not necessarily because of the truth or falsity of the premises, but because they rely on psychological and emotional ploys. These are bad arguments because people shouldn't accept your conclusion if you are using scare tactics or distracting and manipulating reasoning. Arguments that have this issue are called fallacies. There are a lot of fallacies, so, again, if you want to know more a web search will be useful. We are going to look at several that seem to be the most relevant for our day-to-day experiences.

1. **Inappropriate Appeal to Authority:** We are definitely going to use authority figures in our lives (e.g. doctors, lawyers, mechanics, financial advisors, etc.), but we need to make sure that the authority figure is a reliable one.

Things to look for here might include: reputation in the field, not holding widely controversial views, experience, education, and the like. So, if we take an authority figure's word and they're not legit, we've committed the fallacy of appeal to authority.

Example 5: I think I am going to take my investments to Voya. After all, Steven Adams advocates for Voya in an advertisement I recently saw.

If we look at the criteria for evaluating arguments that appeal to authority figures, it is pretty easy to see that Adams is not an expert in the finance field. Thus, this is an inappropriate appeal to authority.

2. **Slippery Slope Arguments:** Slippery slope arguments are found everywhere it seems. The essential characteristic of a slippery slope argument is that it uses problematic premises to argue that doing 'x' will ultimately lead to other actions that are extreme, unlikely, and disastrous. You can think of this type of argument as a faulty chain of events or domino effect type of argument.

Example 6: If you don't study for your philosophy exam you will not do well on the exam. This will lead to you failing the class. The next thing you know you will have lost your scholarship, dropped out of school, and will be living on the streets without any chance of getting a job.

While you should certainly study for your philosophy exam, if you don't it is unlikely that this will lead to your full economic demise.

One challenge to evaluating slippery slope arguments is that they are predictions, so we cannot be certain about what will or will not actually happen. But this chain of events type of argument should be assessed in terms of whether the outcome will likely follow if action ‘x’ is pursued.

3. **Faulty Analogy:** We often make arguments based on analogy and these can be good arguments. But we often use faulty reasoning with analogies and this is what we want to learn how to avoid.

When evaluating an argument that is based on an analogy here are a few things to keep in mind: you want to look at the relevant similarities and the relevant differences between the things that are being compared. As a general rule, if there are more differences than similarities the argument is likely weak.

Example 7: Alcohol is legal. Therefore, we should legalize marijuana too.

So, the first step here is to identify the two things being compared, which are alcohol and marijuana. Next, note relevant similarities and differences. These might include effects on health, community safety, economic factors, criminal justice factors, and the like.

This is probably not the best argument in support for marijuana legalization. It would seem that one could just as easily conclude that since marijuana is illegal, alcohol should be too. In fact, one might find that alcohol is an often abused and highly problematic drug for many people, so it is too risky to legalize marijuana if it is similar to alcohol.

4. **Appeal to Emotion:** Arguments should be based on reason and evidence, not emotional tactics. When we use an emotional tactic, we are essentially trying to manipulate someone into accepting our position by evoking pity or fear, when our positions should actually be backed by reasonable and justifiable evidence.

Example 8: Officer please don’t give me a speeding ticket. My girlfriend broke up with me last night, my alarm didn’t go off this morning, and I’m late for class.

While this is a really horrible start to one’s day, being broken up with and an alarm malfunctioning is not a justifiable reason for speeding.

Example 9: Professor, I’d like you to remember that my mother is a dean here at TCC. I’m sure that she will be very disappointed if I don’t receive an A in your class.

This is a scare tactic and is not a good way to make an argument. Scare tactics can come in the form of psychological or physical threats; both forms are to be avoided.

5. **Appeal to Ignorance:** This fallacy occurs when our argument relies on lack of evidence when evidence is actually needed to support a position.

Example 10: No one has proven that sasquatch doesn't exist; therefore it does exist.

Example 11: No one has proven God exists; therefore God doesn't exist.

The key here is that lack of evidence against something cannot be an argument for something. Lack of evidence can only show that we are ignorant of the facts.

6. **Straw Man:** A straw man argument is a specific type of argument that is intended to weaken an opponent's position so that it is easier to refute. So, we create a weaker version of the original argument (i.e. a straw man argument), so when we present it everyone will agree with us and denounce the original position.

Example 12: Women are crazy arguing for equal treatment. No one wants women hanging around men's locker rooms or saunas.

This is a misrepresentation of arguments for equal treatment. Women (and others arguing for equal treatment) are not trying to obtain equal access to men's locker rooms or saunas.

The best way to avoid this fallacy is to make sure that you are not oversimplifying or misrepresenting others' positions. Even if we don't agree with a position, we want to make the strongest case against it and this can only be accomplished if we can refute the actual argument, not a weakened version of it. So, let's all bring the strongest arguments we have to the table!

7. **Red Herring:** A red herring is a distraction or a change in subject matter. Sometimes this is subtle, but if you find yourself feeling lost in the argument, take a close look and make sure there is not an attempt to distract you.

Example 13: Can you believe that so many people are concerned with global warming? The real threat to our country is terrorism.

It could be the case that both global warming and terrorism are concerns for us. But the red herring fallacy is committed when someone tries to distract you from the argument at hand by bringing up another issue or side-stepping a question. Politicians are masters at this, by the way.

8. **Appeal to the Person:** This fallacy is also referred to as the ad hominem fallacy. We commit this fallacy when we dismiss someone's argument or position by attacking them instead of refuting the premises or

support for their argument.

Example 14: I am not going to listen to what Professor ‘X’ has to say about the history of religion. He told one of his previous classes he wasn’t religious.

The problem here is that the student is dismissing course material based on the professor’s religious views and not evaluating the course content on its own ground.

To avoid this fallacy, make sure that you target the argument or their claims and not the person making the argument in your rebuttal.

9. **Hasty Generalization:** We make and use generalizations on a regular basis and in all types of decisions. We rely on generalizations when trying to decide which schools to apply to, which phone is the best for us, which neighborhood we want to live in, what type of job we want, and so on. Generalizations can be strong and reliable, but they can also be fallacious. There are three main ways in which a generalization can commit a fallacy: your sample size is too small, your sample size is not representative of the group you are making a generalization about, or your data could be outdated.

Example 15: I had horrible customer service at the last Starbucks I was at. It is clear that Starbucks employees do not care about their customers. I will never visit another Starbucks again.

The problem with this generalization is that the claim made about all Starbucks is based on one experience. While it is tempting to not spend your money where people are rude to their customers, this is only one employee and presumably doesn’t reflect all employees or the company as a whole. So, to make this a stronger generalization we would want to have a larger sample size (multiple horrible experiences) to support the claim. Let’s look at a second hasty generalization:

Example 16: I had horrible customer service at the Starbucks on 81st street. It is clear that Starbucks employees do not care about their customers. I will never visit another Starbucks again.

The problem with this generalization mirrors the previous problem in that the claim is based on only one experience. But there’s an additional issue here as well, which is that the claim is based off of an experience at one location. To make a claim about the whole company, our sample group needs to be larger than one and it needs to come from a variety of locations.

10. **Begging the Question:** An argument begs the question when the argument’s premises assume the conclusion, instead of providing support for the conclusion. One common form of begging the question is referred to as circular reasoning.

Example 17: Of course, everyone wants to see the new Marvel movie is because it is the most popular movie right now!

The conclusion here is that everyone wants to see the new Marvel movie, but the premise simply assumes that is the case by claiming it is the most popular movie. Remember the premise should give reasons for the conclusion, not merely assume it to be true.

11. **Equivocation:** In the English language there are many words that have different meanings (e.g. bank, good, right, steal, etc.). When we use the same word but shift the meaning without explaining this move to your audience, we equivocate the word and this is a fallacy. So, if you must use the same word more than once and with more than one meaning you need to explain that you're shifting the meaning you intend. Although, most of the time it is just easier to use a different word.

Example 18: Yes, philosophy helps people argue better, but should we really encourage people to argue? There is enough hostility in the world.

Here, argue is used in two different senses. The meaning of the first refers to the philosophical meaning of argument (i.e. premises and a conclusion), whereas the second sense is in line with the common use of argument (i.e. yelling between two or more people, etc.).



LOGOS: Critical Thinking, Arguments, and Fallacies by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Henry Imler, ed., *Phronesis An Ethics Primer with Readings*, (2018). 7-8.
2. Arendt, Hannah, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Social Research*, 38:3 (1971: Autumn): 431.
3. Theodor W. Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz," in *Can One Live After Auschwitz*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003): 23.
4. Allen W. Wood, "Hegel on Education," in *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty (London: Routledge 1998): 302.

AN INTRODUCTION TO RUSSELL'S "THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY"

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

Russell's "The Value of Philosophy" is a chapter in his book, *Problems of Philosophy*. Overall, "The Value of Philosophy" presents four main points to keep in mind.

- The first is that the practical person is the one who recognizes the need for food for the body, but not food for the mind. The goods of the mind are at least as important as the goods of the body. If everyone in the world had food and biological needs met, there would still be needs to produce a solid society. Russell's point here is that we need to get away from the idea that the only needs we have are biological.
- The second point is that philosophy aims at knowledge. However, it is a type of knowledge that we are typically not accustomed to. It is a kind of knowledge that gives order to the sciences and that critically evaluates our beliefs and prejudices.
- The third point is that once an answer becomes absolute, it ceases to be philosophical; we are now in a separate science. For example, the study of the heavens used to be a point of inquiry in philosophy, but now it has moved to astronomy. Furthermore, some questions that philosophy asks cannot be answered definitely. For instance, does this universe have a plan or purpose? Are good and evil important to the universe or only to man?
- Finally, philosophical inquiry is possible to eliminate prejudice, dogmatic lines of thought, maintain curiosity, and allow us to think speculatively (into what may be, rather than what already is). It also enlarges our world, perspective, and experiences. Thus, even if we cannot have a definite answer, the inquiry itself is important.

Watch this video interview on YouTube (00:30:57) with Russell explaining his take on what philosophy is:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=465#oembed-1>



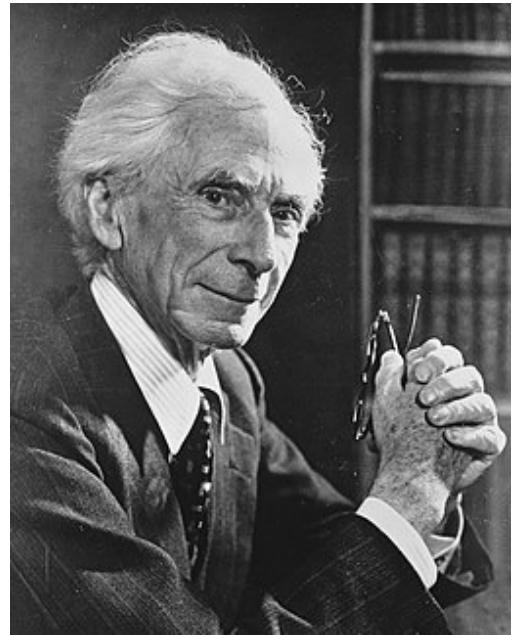
An Introduction to Russell's "The Value of Philosophy" by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

Bertrand Russell

We need to consider what is the value of philosophy and why it ought to be studied. It is the more necessary to consider this question, in view of the fact that many people, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hairsplitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible.

This view of philosophy appears to result, partly from a wrong conception of the ends of life, partly from a wrong conception of the kind of goods which philosophy strives to achieve. Physical science, through the medium of inventions, is useful to innumerable people who are wholly ignorant of it; thus the study of physical science is to be recommended, not only, or primarily, because of the effect on the student, but rather because of the effect on mankind in general. This utility does not belong to philosophy. If the study of philosophy has any value at all for others than students of philosophy, it must be only indirectly, through its effects upon the lives of those who study it. It is in these effects, therefore, if anywhere, that the value of philosophy must be primarily sought.



Bertrand Russell in 1957

But further, if we are not to fail in our endeavor to determine the value of philosophy, we must first free our minds from the prejudices of what are wrongly called “practical” people. The “practical” person, as this word is often used, is one who recognizes only material needs, who realizes that people must have food for the body, but is oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind. If all people were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society; and even in the existing world the goods of the mind are at least as important as the goods of the body. It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time.

Philosophy, like all other studies, aims primarily at knowledge. The knowledge it aims at is the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs. But it cannot be maintained that

philosophy has had any very great measure of success in its attempts to provide definite answers to its questions. If you ask a mathematician, a mineralogist, a historian, or any other person of learning, what definite body of truths has been ascertained by his science, his answer will last as long as you are willing to listen. But if you put the same question to a philosopher, he will, if he is candid, have to confess that his study has not achieved positive results such as have been achieved by other sciences. It is true that this is partly accounted for by the fact that, as soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a separate science. The whole study of the heavens, which now belongs to astronomy, was once included in philosophy; Newton's great work was called "the mathematical principles of natural philosophy." Similarly, the study of the human mind, which was, until very lately, a part of philosophy, has now been separated from philosophy and has become the science of psychology. Thus, to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real: those questions which are already capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while those only to which, at present, no definite answer can be given, remain to form the residue which is called philosophy.

This is, however, only a part of the truth concerning the uncertainty of philosophy. There are many questions—and among them those that are of the profoundest interest to our spiritual life—which, so far as we can see, must remain insoluble to the human intellect unless its powers become of quite a different order from what they are now. Has the universe any unity of plan or purpose, or is it a fortuitous concourse of atoms? Is consciousness a permanent part of the universe, giving hope of indefinite growth in wisdom, or is it a transitory accident on a small planet on which life must ultimately become impossible? Are good and evil of importance to the universe or only to humanity? Such questions are asked by philosophy, and variously answered by various philosophers. But it would seem that, whether answers be otherwise discoverable or not, the answers suggested by philosophy are none of them demonstrably true. Yet, however slight may be the hope of discovering an answer, it is part of the business of philosophy to continue the consideration of such questions, to make us aware of their importance, to examine all the approaches to them, and to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge...

The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The person who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a person the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find, as we saw in our opening chapters, that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the

somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.

Apart from its utility in showing unsuspected possibilities, philosophy has a value—perhaps its chief value—through the greatness of the objects which it contemplates, and the freedom from narrow and personal aims resulting from this contemplation. The life of the instinctive person is shut up within the circle of his private interests: family and friends may be included, but the outer world is not regarded except as it may help or hinder what comes within the circle of instinctive wishes. In such a life there is something feverish and confined, in comparison with which the philosophic life is calm and free. The private world of instinctive interests is a small one, set in the midst of a great and powerful world which must, sooner or later, lay our private world in ruins. Unless we can so enlarge our interests as to include the whole outer world, we remain like a garrison in a beleaguered fortress, knowing that the enemy prevents escape and that ultimate surrender is inevitable. In such a life there is no peace, but a constant strife between the insistence of desire and the powerlessness of will. In one way or another, if our life is to be great and free, we must escape this prison and this strife.

One way of escape is by philosophic contemplation. Philosophic contemplation does not, in its widest survey, divide the universe into two hostile camps—friends and foes, helpful and hostile, good and bad—it views the whole impartially. Philosophic contemplation, when it is unalloyed, does not aim at proving that the rest of the universe is akin to humanity. All acquisition of knowledge is an enlargement of the Self, but this enlargement is best attained when it is not directly sought. It is obtained when the desire for knowledge is alone operative, by a study which does not wish in advance that its objects should have this or that character, but adapts the Self to the characters which it finds in its objects. This enlargement of Self is not obtained when, taking the Self as it is, we try to show that the world is so similar to this Self that knowledge of it is possible without any admission of what seems alien. The desire to prove this is a form of self-assertion, and like all self-assertion, it is an obstacle to the growth of Self which it desires, and of which the Self knows that it is capable. Self-assertion, in philosophic speculation as elsewhere, views the world as a means to its own ends; thus it makes the world of less account than Self, and the Self sets bounds to the greatness of its goods. In contemplation, on the contrary, we start from the not-Self, and through its greatness the boundaries of Self are enlarged; through the infinity of the universe the mind which contemplates it achieves some share in infinity.

For this reason greatness of soul is not fostered by those philosophies which assimilate the universe to Humanity. Knowledge is a form of union of Self and not-Self; like all union, it is impaired by dominion, and therefore by any attempt to force the universe into conformity with what we find in ourselves. There is a widespread philosophical tendency towards the view which tells us that humanity is the measure of all things, that truth is person-made, that space and time and the world of universals are properties of the mind, and that, if there be anything not created by the mind, it is unknowable and of no account for us. This view, if our previous discussions were correct, is untrue; but in addition to being untrue, it has the effect of

robbing philosophic contemplation of all that gives it value, since it fetters contemplation to Self. What it calls knowledge is not a union with the not-Self, but a set of prejudices, habits, and desires, making an impenetrable veil between us and the world beyond. The person who finds pleasure in such a theory of knowledge is like the person who never leaves the domestic circle for fear his word might not be law.

The true philosophic contemplation, on the contrary, finds its satisfaction in every enlargement of the not-Self, in everything that magnifies the objects contemplated, and thereby the subject contemplating. Everything, in contemplation, that is personal or private, everything that depends upon habit, self-interest, or desire, distorts the object, and hence impairs the union which the intellect seeks. By thus making a barrier between subject and object, such personal and private things become a prison to the intellect. The free intellect will see as God might see, without a here and now, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge—knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for humanity to attain. Hence also the free intellect will value more the abstract and universal knowledge into which the accidents of private history do not enter, than the knowledge brought by the senses, and dependent, as such knowledge must be, upon an exclusive and personal point of view and a body whose sense-organs distort as much as they reveal.

The mind which has become accustomed to the freedom and impartiality of philosophic contemplation will preserve something of the same freedom and impartiality in the world of action and emotion. It will view its purposes and desires as parts of the whole, with the absence of insistence that results from seeing them as infinitesimal fragments in a world of which all the rest is unaffected by any one person's deeds. The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can be given to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable. Thus, contemplation enlarges not only the objects of our thoughts, but also the objects of our actions and our affections: it makes us citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest. In this citizenship of the universe consists humanity's true freedom, and his liberation from the thralldom of narrow hopes and fears.

Thus, to sum up our discussion of the value of philosophy: Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2004), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5827>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.

Media Attributions

- Bertrand_Russell_1957 is licensed under a CC0 (Creative Commons Zero) license



This work (The Value of Philosophy by Bertrand Russell) is free of known copyright restrictions.

PHILOSOPHY: WHO NEEDS IT

Philosophy: Who Needs It

Editor's Note: The following essay is based on a lecture Ayn Rand delivered to the graduating class of West Point Military Academy in March 1974. It was originally published in *The Ayn Rand Letter* and later included in the 1982 anthology, *Philosophy: Who Needs It*.

The audio file linked below includes the 41 minute lecture as well as a 27 minute Q & A session.

<https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/122101286&color=ff5500>

aynrandinstitute · Philosophy: Who Needs It

You can access a written transcript of the lecture here: <https://courses.aynrand.org/works/philosophy-who-needs-it/>

AN INTRODUCTION TO PLATO'S APOLOGY

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

Western philosophy begins in Ancient Greece, with a range of thinkers pushing the status quo to delve into topics that affect us as human beings. This chapter provides a brief overview of how philosophy developed in the west by looking at some key elements of Plato's Apology.

History:

In the western world, rational thinking begins in Ancient Greece. It arises as an alternative way to understand the world in comparison to myth. Myth gives anthropomorphic explanations of the world and refers to gods, magic, and the like.¹ Rational inquiry in Greece begins by giving physical and natural explanations of things and using law, predictions, and scientific thinking instead of myth.

With respect to myth, everything in nature is thought to have powers and to be alive: water, air, sun, and the like. The basic way to understand the world at this time (i.e. think Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and the early Greeks) was that all events were the result of some spirit's action. For instance, a mythic explanation of a tsunami might be that the god Poseidon was angry, whereas now we give a rational and physical explanation of such. Some gods and goddesses were good and benevolent and others were not. Furthermore, the deities could be influenced by prayer and ritual (if you have read Homer, you can easily see multiple human characteristics attributed to the gods). Essentially, myth gives order and understanding.

However, around 600 BC there was a transformative shift in thinking. The early Greek philosophers (i.e. generally referred to as natural philosophers and PreSocratics) did not assume that everything was alive. Instead, they gave physical and natural explanations of things. These early Greeks were seeking a unifying principle that could explain all things.

The Greeks referred to this more rational approach as philosophy (i.e. the love of wisdom) and they began applying this rational approach to all questions: reality, society, morality, thinking, knowledge, and human nature. You can consider this way of thinking as an emphasis on our cognitive capacities as human beings. This really grounds what we think of as the humanities in the west and it is reflected in various artifacts from these cultures (e.g. the great epics, drama, poetry, the classical style in visual art, conceptions of justice, democracy—Athens was the first democracy in the world—, beauty, education and the list goes on).

There was an additional group of thinkers in Ancient Greece. They were a group of “teachers” known as the

sophists. They would visit wealthy families and teach young men the art of persuasion. Sophists believed that truth and morality are relative to the individual. As such they did not believe in ultimate truths—they did not believe that rational inquiry could lead to objective truths (i.e. the capital T truths, if you will). Essentially, they analyzed the method of reasoning and argumentation, which would help young men enter politics and secure a successful civic life.

However, the idea that beauty, justice and wisdom lie in the eye of the beholder actually ties with the sophists' view, not Socrates or Plato's view. Both Socrates and Plato defended the view that there's objective truth and morality.

As the story goes, Socrates was Plato's mentor in the sense that he learned what a philosophical life looked like. He goes on to open the first university in the west—The Academy. Aristotle, who would go on to tutor Alexander the Great, was a student and later a critic of Plato's. Plato's writings feature his mentor Socrates as the spokesperson for various topics of inquiry and discourse, including justice, piety, beauty, and immortality. In other words, Socrates is the main character in Plato's written works.

Plato's works are delivered in the form of dialogues. The first time you read a Plato text, it can be a bit disorienting. Yet, once you realize the importance of tracking Socrates and the speakers, it is an interesting way to experience philosophical ideas. It is almost as if you are an observer of a conversation that is unfolding. Additionally, the dialogue form is likely a nod to the importance of “doing” philosophy—trying to obtain a higher understanding of things via conversation. Conversation involves questions of inquiry, a gap of understanding, or an attempt to clarify something vague or ambiguous. Through a process of questioning, answering, challenging, responding...repeat...repeat...understanding. As Hannah Arendt puts it, thinking in this way grounds the object of inquiry in the way that a root grounds a tree. The philosophical world refers to this specific type of philosophical thought as “dialectical” and as the “Socratic method.”

This method uses a process, which most often begins with Socrates asking a question of one of his peers. After an answer or definition is given, Socrates gets his peer to agree to a statement, which contradicts their original statement. Next his peer offers up an alternative definition, which is closer to the truth, but is still shown by Socrates to be faulty. This process might go on until an acceptable definition is reached or it is felt not profitable to continue with the discussion. This is the very technique that he used to point out the ignorances of his fellow Athenians and his followers imitated, winning Socrates many enemies. Ultimately, this landed him in court.

Socrates' Defense:

Let's turn now to the essay that traces his appearance in court, which is recorded by Plato in a work titled, his *Apology*. The actual title is in Greek, so this is translated to English. However, apology in English involves

something like atonement. The Greek word translates more appropriately to defend. So, in this text, Socrates is being charged with corrupting the youth and impiety; however, the impiety charge eventually shifts over to atheism. The Apology is Socrates' defense of the charges he's facing.

Delphic Oracle:

Socrates' philosophy activity is traceable to the Delphic Oracle. This oracle is where everyone would go to find answers from the god Apollo. If you've read Oedipus the King, this is the same oracle that informed Oedipus' of his tragic fate.

In the text we are reading, Socrates points out that someone on the jury is likely wondering what led to these accusations if they are not true. Socrates gives an account of how he began living a philosophical life, examining life and values, and, essentially, why he does what he does. All of this began with the Oracle at Delphi.

So, initially his pursuit begins by trying to show the god wrong, but then comes to understand his activity as a service to the god—as assisting the god when he encountered someone who thought he was wise, but was not.

Socrates sees this service to one of the maxims at the Oracle at Delphi, “know yourself.” In literature, this maxim, which is inscribed at the courtyard at the Temple, has a few different interpretations, two of which are very much related to Socrates' philosophy: a directive to those who believe they know more than they know & a warning to not pay attention to the opinions of the masses. In the Apology, Socrates makes his famous claim: “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

Socrates' interpretation of the Oracles' announcement and his subsequent activity also plays rather nicely in his defense against the charge of atheism/not believing in the gods of the state. If he was an atheist or did not believe in the gods of the state why would he dedicate his life activity—his services—to the gods?

The Charges:

Remember the two charges that he is facing: corrupting the youth and impiety. As I noted earlier, the second charge regarding Socrates' disbelief in the state religion quickly turns to the accusation that he is an atheist. Socrates easily refutes this by pointing out that just as people who believe in the existence of human things must also believe in the existence of human beings, people who believe in divine agencies, must also believe in gods. In the indictment, one of the prosecutors, Meletus, swore that Socrates teaches and believes in divine agencies other than those of the state. Socrates led him straight into a contradiction, demonstrating he didn't understand the charges he was pushing.

With respect to the first charge, corrupting the youth, Socrates defends himself by getting Meletus to admit

that the whole of Athens—everyone in the city-state—improves the youth with the exception of Socrates, which is their sole corrupter. First, Meletus cannot name even one person that improves the youth, yet in all other fields of human inquiry we leave it to experts to “improve” something. This gives rise to the following question: do we need experts to train or improve our young? It would seem that we would need experts if such improvement was a matter of knowledge. But is this the sense in which the horse trainer has knowledge? There seems to be two senses of knowledge at play here: wisdom and technical skill. This distinction is worth considering as we move through Plato’s readings.

Another point worth considering is that the first accusation implies Socrates is a teacher, which is why he denies such during the opening statements. Thus, the question arises: is he a teacher or does he just question? What is the difference between teaching and questioning? Questioning can open you up to the premises and evidence regarding the things taught to you. From this type of reflection and questioning one can learn how things are related and fit into the bigger picture.

In the second part of Socrates’ defense regarding the charge of corrupting the youth, he argues: Bad people have a harmful effect upon those they are in contact with. No one prefers to be harmed. Hence, Socrates cannot intentionally have a bad influence on his close companions, since by spoiling their character he would run the risk of being harmed by them in return. I wonder if you think this a valid point? What would we say about criminals and other people who harm others?

Another question I encourage you to think about is this: would you agree with Socrates’ point that if he does corrupt the youth it must be unintentionally, which would not be a crime. If something is done wrong unintentionally the correct course of action would be advice and correction, not punishment.

If we think about these last two points it would seem that bad things are done unintentionally, which, in turn, would mean that wrong-doers should be reeducated and rehabilitated. Essentially, it would seem that we could only do bad things knowingly if we thought that such bad acts would not harm ourselves. Plato, in other dialogues, gives an argument that evil actions are in fact harmful to the evil doer.

While these points refer to the specific charges that Socrates is facing there are some other elements of the text that are worth considering. The first is the theme of death and why it is that Socrates seems willing to die for his principles or what he believes is right.

Death and Wisdom:

At one point in the text, Socrates indicates that fearing death amounts to thinking one is wise when one is not. This is because it assumes that one knows something about death when such knowledge is impossible to obtain. All of your experiences come from life and living, not from death. Death is the end of experience, so

it cannot be experienced; it cannot be faced. Thus, it is presumptuous to think that I possess some knowledge about death. In this sense, perhaps Socrates is wiser than his neighbors (and the oracle was right); he knows that he knows nothing about death and recognizes his limitations as a human being.

Part of human wisdom is admitting that we do not know and cannot know everything, which allows us to be inquisitive and curious. Recognizing our limitations allows us to be open. This lack of fear of death—courage—comes from our humility and our confession of not knowing.

Care of the Soul:

If we ought not be concerned with death, what should we be concerned with? For Socrates, we should be concerned with the welfare of our souls (i.e. essence). In fact, he went to people individually and tried to convey the significance of this. He says, “all I do is to go about persuading you, young and old alike, not to care for your bodies or for your wealth so intensely as for the greatest possible well-being of your souls.”

Conclusion:

It's worth thinking about what Plato has to say in light of our contemporary settings. There are many selections of Plato's work that apply today and many more of Plato's ideas that have influenced life in the west.

The video below (00:07:03) will be helpful to watch, as it touches on several key points from the text.

(There are no captions because all meaningful content is shown with images and text; the only audio is music.)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=461#oembed-1>

For Reflection and Discussion:

1. Identify the psychological, emotional, and persuasiveness of Socrates' opening statement. What are the main points he tries to get across and what does he want his audience to think about? Is his speech moving? Is it effective?
2. Socrates notes there are older accusations that he thinks are more damaging than the formal charges he's facing. What are these? Why does he take these claims more seriously? How are these accusations related to the intellectual trends in Ancient Greece at the time?
3. What was Chaerephon's question to the Oracle at Delphi and what was the priestess' reply? What was Socrates' interpretation and reaction to the reply? What does Socrates believe this oracle says about human wisdom?
4. What are the two formal charges Socrates is facing? How does he defend himself? Are his points throughout his defense compelling?
5. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? What is the difference between teaching and questioning? How does Socrates fit into your understanding of these concepts?
6. Socrates claims that we ought not fear death. Explain his reasoning.
7. Socrates compares himself to a gadfly. Explain the analogy. Discuss whether you think gadflies are important to our own societies and communities?
8. Is a life intrinsically valuable or instrumentally valuable? How do you think Socrates would answer this question?



An Introduction to Plato's Apology by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Anthropomorphism means that we, as humans, project our faculties upon non-human things. If you're a pet person, odds are you do this with your dog or cat. For the Ancient Greeks (and even earlier cultures), things in nature take on human qualities. With respect to myth, this helps explain natural occurrences and develop rituals to summon the favor of the gods.

THE APOLOGY

Plato

Socrates Requests a Just Listening

How you, O Athenians, have been affected by my accusers, I cannot tell; but I know that they almost made me forget who I was—so persuasively did they speak; and yet they have hardly uttered a word of truth. But of the many falsehoods told by them, there was one which quite amazed me;—I mean when they said that you should be upon your guard and not allow yourselves to be deceived by the force of my eloquence. To say this, when they were certain to be detected as soon as I opened my lips and proved myself to be anything but a great speaker, did indeed appear to me most shameless—unless by the force of eloquence they mean the force of truth; for is such is their meaning, I admit that I am eloquent. But in how different a way from theirs! Well, as I was saying, they have scarcely spoken the truth at all; but from me you shall hear the whole truth: not, however, delivered after their manner in a set oration duly ornamented with words and phrases. No, by heaven! but I shall use the words and arguments which occur to me at the moment; for I am confident in the justice of my cause (Or, I am certain that I am right in taking this course.): at my time of life I ought not to be appearing before you, O men of Athens, in the character of a juvenile orator—let no one expect it of me. And I must beg of you to grant me a favor:—If I defend myself in my accustomed manner, and you hear me using the words which I have been in the habit of using in the agora, at the tables of the money changers, or anywhere else, I would ask you not to be surprised, and not to interrupt me on this account. For I am more than seventy years of age, and appearing now for the first time in a court of law, I am quite a stranger to the language of the place; and therefore I would have you regard me as if I were really a stranger, whom you would excuse if he spoke in his native tongue, and after the fashion of his country:—Am I making an unfair request of you? Never mind the manner, which may or may not be good; but think only of the truth of my words, and give heed to that: let the speaker speak truly and the judge decide justly.

Charges of the Older Accusers

And first, I have to reply to the older charges and to my first accusers, and then I will go on to the later ones. For of old I have had many accusers, who have accused me falsely to you during many years; and I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way. But far more dangerous are the others, who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, telling of one Socrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into

the earth beneath, and made the worse appear the better cause. The disseminators of this tale are the accusers whom I dread; for their hearers are apt to fancy that such enquirers do not believe in the existence of the gods. And they are many, and their charges against me are of ancient date, and they were made by them in the days when you were more impressible than you are now—in childhood, or it may have been in youth—and the cause when heard went by default, for there was none to answer. And hardest of all, I do not know and cannot tell the names of my accusers; unless in the chance case of a Comic poet.

All who from envy and malice have persuaded you—some of them having first convinced themselves—all this class of men are most difficult to deal with; for I cannot have them up here, and cross-examine them, and therefore I must simply fight with shadows in my own defense, and argue when there is no one who answers. I will ask you then to assume with me, as I was saying, that my opponents are of two kinds; one recent, the other ancient: and I hope that you will see the propriety of my answering the latter first, for these accusations you heard long before the others, and much oftener.

Well, then, I must make my defense, and endeavor to clear away in a short time, a slander which has lasted a long time. May I succeed, if to succeed be for my good and yours, or likely to avail me in my cause! The task is not an easy one; I quite understand the nature of it. And so leaving the event with God, in obedience to the law I will now make my defense.

Defense Against Older Accusations

I will begin at the beginning, and ask what is the accusation which has given rise to the slander of me, and in fact has encouraged Meletus to proof this charge against me. Well, what do the slanderers say? They shall be my prosecutors, and I will sum up their words in an affidavit: “Socrates is an evildoer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse appear the better cause; and he teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others.”

Such is the nature of the accusation: it is just what you have yourselves seen in the comedy of Aristophanes, who has introduced a man whom he calls Socrates, going about and saying that he walks in air, and talking a deal of nonsense concerning matters of which I do not pretend to know either much or little—not that I mean to speak disparagingly of any one who is a student of natural philosophy.

I should be very sorry if Meletus could bring so grave a charge against me. But the simple truth is, O Athenians, that I have nothing to do with physical speculations. Very many of those here present are witnesses to the truth of this, and to them I appeal. Speak then, you who have heard me, and tell your neighbours whether any of you have ever known me hold forth in few words or in many upon such matters. . . You hear their answer. And from what they say of this part of the charge you will be able to judge of the truth of the rest.

As little foundation is there for the report that I am a teacher, and take money; this accusation has no more truth in it than the other. Although, if a man were really able to instruct mankind, to receive money for giving instruction would, in my opinion, be an honor to him. There is Gorgias of Leontium, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis, who go the round of the cities, and are able to persuade the young men to leave their own citizens by whom they might be taught for nothing, and come to them whom they not only pay, but are thankful if they may be allowed to pay them. There is at this time a Parian philosopher residing in Athens, of whom I have heard; and I came to hear of him in this way:—I came across a man who has spent a world of money on the Sophists, Callias, the son of Hipponicus, and knowing that he had sons, I asked him: “Callias,” I said, “if your two sons were foals or calves, there would be no difficulty in finding some one to put over them; we should hire a trainer of horses, or a farmer probably, who would improve and perfect them in their own proper virtue and excellence; but as they are human beings, whom are you thinking of placing over them? Is there any one who understands human and political virtue? You must have thought about the matter, for you have sons; is there any one?” “There is,” he said. “Who is he?” said I; “and of what country? and what does he charge?” “Evenus the Parian,” he replied; “he is the man, and his charge is five minae.” Happy is Evenus, I said to myself, if he really has this wisdom, and teaches at such a moderate charge. Had I the same, I should have been very proud and conceited; but the truth is that I have no knowledge of the kind.

Delphic Oracle

I dare say, Athenians, that some one among you will reply, “Yes, Socrates, but what is the origin of these accusations which are brought against you; there must have been something strange which you have been doing? All these rumours and this talk about you would never have arisen if you had been like other men: tell us, then, what is the cause of them, for we should be sorry to judge hastily of you.” Now I regard this as a fair challenge, and I will endeavour to explain to you the reason why I am called wise and have such an evil fame. Please to attend then. And although some of you may think that I am joking, I declare that I will tell you the entire truth. Men of Athens, this reputation of mine has come of a certain sort of wisdom which I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, wisdom such as may perhaps be attained by man, for to that extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise; whereas the persons of whom I was speaking have a superhuman wisdom which I may fail to describe, because I have it not myself; and he who says that I have, speaks falsely, and is taking away my character. And here, O men of Athens, I must beg you not to interrupt me, even if I seem to say something extravagant. For the word which I will speak is not mine. I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit; that witness shall be the God of Delphi—he will tell you about my wisdom, if I have any, and of what sort it is. You must have known Chaerephon; he was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours, for he shared in the recent exile of the people, and returned with you. Well, Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether—as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt—he asked the oracle to tell him whether anyone was wiser than I

was, and the Pythian prophetess answered, that there was no man wiser. Chaerephon is dead himself; but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth of what I am saying.

Socrates Cross-examines Others

Why do I mention this? Because I am going to explain to you why I have such an evil name. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of his riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What then can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god, and cannot lie; that would be against his nature. After long consideration, I thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, “Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest.” Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed him—his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination—and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me. So, I left him, saying to myself, as I went away: Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is, — for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him. Then I went to another who had still higher pretensions to wisdom, and my conclusion was exactly the same. Whereupon I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him. Then I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the enmity which I provoked, and I lamented and feared this: but necessity was laid upon me, —the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, Go I must to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle. And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear! —for I must tell you the truth—the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that others less esteemed were really wiser and better. I will tell you the tale of my wanderings and of the “Herculean” labors, as I may call them, which I endured only to find at last the oracle irrefutable. After the politicians, I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. And there, I said to myself, you will be instantly detected; now you will find out that you are more ignorant than they are. Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them—thinking that they would teach me something. Will you believe me? I am almost ashamed to confess the truth, but I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them. The poets appeared to me to be much in the same case; and I further observed that upon the strength of their poetry they believed themselves to be the wisest of

men in other things in which they were not wise. So, I departed, conceiving myself to be superior to them for the same reason that I was superior to the politicians.

At last I went to the artisans. I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, as I may say, and I was sure that they knew many fine things; and here I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I was ignorant, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was. But I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets;—because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom; and therefore I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself and to the oracle that I was better off as I was.

Why Socrates is Wise

This inquisition has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies. And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make inquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.

Prejudice Against Socrates

There is another thing:—young men of the richer classes, who have not much to do, come about me of their own accord; they like to hear the pretenders examined, and they often imitate me, and proceed to examine others; there are plenty of persons, as they quickly discover, who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing; and then those who are examined by them instead of being angry with themselves are angry with me: This confounded Socrates, they say; this villainous misleader of youth!— and then if somebody asks them, Why, what evil does he practice or teach? they do not know, and cannot tell; but in order that they may not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready made charges which are used against all philosophers about teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth, and having no gods, and making the worse appear the better cause; for they do not like to confess that their pretense of knowledge has been detected— which is the truth; and as they are numerous and ambitious and energetic, and are drawn up in battle array and have

persuasive tongues, they have filled your ears with their loud and inveterate calumnies. And this is the reason why my three accusers, Meletus and Anytus and Lycon, have set upon me; Meletus, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus, on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians; Lycon, on behalf of the rhetoricians: and as I said at the beginning, I cannot expect to get rid of such a mass of calumny all in a moment. And this, O men of Athens, is the truth and the whole truth; I have concealed nothing, I have dissembled nothing. And yet, I know that my plainness of speech makes them hate me, and what is their hatred but a proof that I am speaking the truth? —Hence has arisen the prejudice against me; and this is the reason of it, as you will find out either in this or in any future inquiry.

Defence Against Corruption of the Youth

Editor's Note: For this part of the Apology, we have added in who is speaking at any particular point as Socrates asks questions and others answer.

Socrates: I have said enough in my defense against the first class of my accusers; I turn to the second class. They are headed by Meletus, that good man and true lover of his country, as he calls himself. Against these, too, I must try to make a defense: —Let their affidavit be read: it contains something of this kind: It says that Socrates is a doer of evil, who corrupts the youth; and who does not believe in the gods of the state, but has other new divinities of his own. Such is the charge; and now let us examine the particular counts. He says that I am a doer of evil, and corrupt the youth; but I say, O men of Athens, that Meletus is a doer of evil, in that he pretends to be in earnest when he is only in jest, and is so eager to bring men to trial from a pretended zeal and interest about matters in which he really never had the smallest interest. And the truth of this I will endeavor to prove to you. Come hither, Meletus, and let me ask a question of you. You think a great deal about the improvement of youth?

Meletus: Yes, I do.

Socrates: Tell the judges, then, who is their improver; for you must know, as you have taken the pains to discover their corrupter, and are citing and accusing me before them. Speak, then, and tell the judges who their improver is—observe, Meletus, that you are silent, and have nothing to say. But is not this rather disgraceful, and a very considerable proof of what I was saying, that you have no interest in the matter? Speak up, friend, and tell us who their improver is.

Meletus: The laws.

Socrates: But that, my good sir, is not my meaning. I want to know who the person is, who, in the first place, knows the laws.

Meletus: The judges, Socrates, who are present in court.

Socrates: What, do you mean to say, Meletus, that they are able to instruct and improve youth?

Meletus: Certainly, they are.

What, all of them, or some only and not others?

Meletus: All of them.

Socrates: By the goddess Here, that is good news! There are plenty of improvers, then. And what do you say of the audience—do they improve them?

Meletus: Yes, they do.

And the senators?

Meletus: Yes, the senators improve them.

Socrates: But perhaps the members of the assembly corrupt them? —or do they too improve them?

Meletus: They improve them.

Socrates: Then every Athenian improves and elevates them; all with the exception of myself; and I alone am their corrupter? Is that what you affirm?

Meletus: That is what I stoutly affirm.

Socrates: I am very unfortunate if you are right. But suppose I ask you a question: How about horses? Does one man do them harm and all the world good? Is not the exact opposite the truth? One man is able to do them good, or at least not many; —the trainer of horses, that is to say, does them good, and others who have to do with them rather injure them? Is not that true, Meletus, of horses, or of any other animals? Most assuredly it is; whether you and Anytus say yes or no. Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and all the rest of the world were their improvers. But you, Meletus, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young: your carelessness is seen in your not caring about the very things which you bring against me.

And now, Meletus, I will ask you another question—by Zeus I will: Which is better, to live among bad citizens,

or among good ones? Answer, friend, I say; the question is one which may be easily answered. Do not the good do their neighbors good, and the bad do them evil?

Meletus: Certainly.

Socrates: And is there anyone who would rather be injured than benefited by those who live with him? Answer, my good friend, the law requires you to answer—does any one like to be injured?

Meletus: Certainly not.

Socrates: And when you accuse me of corrupting and deteriorating the youth, do you allege that I corrupt them intentionally or unintentionally?

Meletus: Intentionally, I say.

Socrates: But you have just admitted that the good do their neighbors good, and the evil do them evil. Now, is that a truth which your superior wisdom has recognized thus early in life, and am I, at my age, in such darkness and ignorance as not to know that if a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me, I am very likely to be harmed by him; and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too—so you say, although neither I nor any other human being is ever likely to be convinced by you. But either I do not corrupt them, or I corrupt them unintentionally; and on either view of the case you lie. If my offence is unintentional, the law has no cognizance of unintentional offences: you ought to have taken me privately, and warned and admonished me; for if I had been better advised, I should have left off doing what I only did unintentionally—no doubt I should; but you would have nothing to say to me and refused to teach me. And now you bring me up in this court, which is a place not of instruction, but of punishment.

Defense Against Atheism

Editor's Note: For this part of the Apology, we have added in who is speaking at any particular point as Socrates asks questions and others answer.

Socrates: It will be very clear to you, Athenians, as I was saying, that Meletus has no care at all, great or small, about the matter. But still I should like to know, Meletus, in what I am affirmed to corrupt the young. I suppose you mean, as I infer from your indictment, that I teach them not to acknowledge the gods which the state acknowledges, but some other new divinities or spiritual agencies in their stead. These are the lessons by which I corrupt the youth, as you say.

Meletus: Yes, that I say emphatically.

Socrates: Then, by the gods, Meletus, of whom we are speaking, tell me and the court, in somewhat plainer terms, what you mean! for I do not as yet understand whether you affirm that I teach other men to acknowledge some gods, and therefore that I do believe in gods, and am not an entire atheist— this you do not lay to my charge,—but only you say that they are not the same gods which the city recognizes—the charge is that they are different gods. Or, do you mean that I am an atheist simply, and a teacher of atheism?

Meletus: I mean the latter—that you are a complete atheist.

Socrates: What an extraordinary statement! Why do you think so, Meletus? Do you mean that I do not believe in the godhead of the sun or moon, like other men?

Meletus: I assure you, judges, that he does not: for he says that the sun is stone, and the moon earth.

Socrates: Friend Meletus, you think that you are accusing Anaxagoras: and you have but a bad opinion of the judges, if you fancy them illiterate to such a degree as not to know that these doctrines are found in the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian, which are full of them. And so, forsooth, the youth are said to be taught them by Socrates, when there are not unfrequently exhibitions of them at the theatre (Probably in allusion to Aristophanes who caricatured, and to Euripides who borrowed the notions of Anaxagoras, as well as to other dramatic poets.) (price of admission one drachma at the most); and they might pay their money, and laugh at Socrates if he pretends to father these extraordinary views. And so, Meletus, you really think that I do not believe in any god?

Meletus: I swear by Zeus that you believe absolutely in none at all.

Socrates: Nobody will believe you, Meletus, and I am pretty sure that you do not believe yourself. I cannot help thinking, men of Athens, that Meletus is reckless and impudent, and that he has written this indictment in a spirit of mere wantonness and youthful bravado. Has he not compounded a riddle, thinking to try me? He said to himself: —I shall see whether the wise Socrates will discover my facetious contradiction, or whether I shall be able to deceive him and the rest of them. For he certainly does appear to me to contradict himself in the indictment as much as if he said that Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, and yet of believing in them—but this is not like a person who is in earnest.

I should like you, O men of Athens, to join me in examining what I conceive to be his inconsistency; and do you, Meletus, answer. And I must remind the audience of my request that they would not make a disturbance if I speak in my accustomed manner: Did ever man, Meletus, believe in the existence of human things, and not of human beings? . . . I wish, men of Athens, that he would answer, and not be always trying to get up an interruption. Did ever any man believe in horsemanship, and not in horses? or in flute playing, and not in fluteplayers? No, my friend; I will answer to you and to the court, as you refuse to answer for yourself. There

is no man who ever did. But now please to answer the next question: Can a man believe in spiritual and divine agencies, and not in spirits or demigods?

Meletus: He cannot.

Socrates: How lucky I am to have extracted that answer, by the assistance of the court! But then you swear in the indictment that I teach and believe in divine or spiritual agencies (new or old, no matter for that); at any rate, I believe in spiritual agencies, —so you say and swear in the affidavit; and yet if I believe in divine beings, how can I help believing in spirits or demigods; —must I not? To be sure I must; and therefore, I may assume that your silence gives consent. Now what are spirits or demigods? Are they not either gods or the sons of gods?

Meletus: Certainly, they are.

Socrates: But this is what I call the facetious riddle invented by you: the demigods or spirits are gods, and you say first that I do not believe in gods, and then again that I do believe in gods; that is, if I believe in demigods. For if the demigods are the illegitimate sons of gods, whether by the nymphs or by any other mothers, of whom they are said to be the sons—what human being will ever believe that there are no gods if they are the sons of gods? You might as well affirm the existence of mules, and deny that of horses and asses. Such nonsense, Meletus, could only have been intended by you to make trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me. But no one who has a particle of understanding will ever be convinced by you that the same men can believe in divine and superhuman things, and yet not believe that there are gods and demigods and heroes.

Socrates: I have said enough in answer to the charge of Meletus: any elaborate defense is unnecessary, but I know only too well how many are the enmities which I have incurred, and this is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed;— not Meletus, nor yet Anytus, but the envy and detraction of the world, which has been the death of many good men, and will probably be the death of many more; there is no danger of my being the last of them.

Do What's Right, Regardless

Someone will say: And are you not ashamed, Socrates, of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end? To him I may fairly answer: There you are mistaken: a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or of a bad. Whereas, upon your view, the heroes who fell at Troy were not good for much, and the son of Thetis above all, who altogether despised danger in comparison with disgrace; and when he was so eager to slay Hector, his goddess mother said to him, that if he avenged his companion Patroclus, and slew Hector, he would die himself—“Fate,” she said, in these or the like words,

“waits for you next after Hector;” he, receiving this warning, utterly despised danger and death, and instead of fearing them, feared rather to live in dishonor, and not to avenge his friend. “Let me die forthwith,” he replies, “and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the beaked ships, a laughingstock and a burden of the earth.” Had Achilles any thought of death and danger? For wherever a man’s place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything but of disgrace. And this, O men of Athens, is a true saying. Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, O men of Athens, if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium, remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death—if now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher’s mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear; that would indeed be strange, and I might justly be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods, if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death, fancying that I was wise when I was not wise. For the fear of death is indeed the pretense of wisdom, and not real wisdom, being a pretense of knowing the unknown; and no one knows whether death, which men in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good. Is not this ignorance of a disgraceful sort, the ignorance which is the conceit that a man knows what he does not know? And in this respect only I believe myself to differ from between us that you should hear me to the end: I have something more to say, at which you may be inclined to cry out; but I believe that to hear me will be good for you, and therefore I beg that you will not cry out. I would have you know, that if you kill such a one as I am, you will injure yourselves more than you will injure me. Nothing will injure me, not Meletus nor yet Anytus—they cannot, for a bad man is not permitted to injure a better than himself. I do not deny that Anytus may, perhaps, kill him, or drive him into exile, or deprive him of civil rights; and he may imagine, and others may imagine, that he is inflicting a great injury upon him: but there I do not agree. For the evil of doing as he is doing—the evil of unjustly taking away the life of another—is greater far.

Socrates, a Gadfly

And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the God by condemning me, who am his gift to you. For if you kill me you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God; and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing, and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me. I dare say that you may feel out of temper (like a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep), and you think that you might easily strike me dead as Anytus advises, and then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you sent you another gadfly. When I say that I am given to you by God, the proof of my mission is this: —if I had been like other men, I

should not have neglected all my own concerns or patiently seen the neglect of them during all these years, and have been doing yours, coming to you individually like a father or elder brother, exhorting you to regard virtue; such conduct, I say, would be unlike human nature. If I had gained anything, or if my exhortations had been paid, there would have been some sense in my doing so; but now, as you will perceive, not even the impudence of my accusers dares to say that I have ever exacted or sought pay of any one; of that they have no witness. And I have a sufficient witness to the truth of what I say—my poverty.

Socrates' Divine Sign

Someone may wonder why I go about in private giving advice and busying myself with the concerns of others, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the state. I will tell you why. You have heard me speak at sundry times and in divers places of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do. This is what deters me from being a politician. And rightly, as I think. For I am certain, O men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. And do not be offended at my telling you the truth: for the truth is, that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one.

Doing What's Right, Regardless of Threat

I can give you convincing evidence of what I say, not words only, but what you value far more—actions. Let me relate to you a passage of my own life which will prove to you that I should never have yielded to injustice from any fear of death, and that “as I should have refused to yield” I must have died at once. I will tell you a tale of the courts, not very interesting perhaps, but nevertheless true. The only office of state which I ever held, O men of Athens, was that of senator: the tribe Antiochis, which is my tribe, had the presidency at the trial of the generals who had not taken up the bodies of the slain after the battle of Arginusae; and you proposed to try them in a body, contrary to law, as you all thought afterwards; but at the time I was the only one of the Prytanes who was opposed to the illegality, and I gave my vote against you; and when the orators threatened to impeach and arrest me, and you called and shouted, I made up my mind that I would run the risk, having law and justice with me, rather than take part in your injustice because I feared imprisonment and death. This happened in the days of the democracy. But when the oligarchy of the Thirty was in power, they sent for me and four others into the rotunda, and bade us bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis, as they wanted to put him to death. This was a specimen of the sort of commands which they were always giving with the view of implicating as many as possible in their crimes; and then I showed, not in word only but in deed, that, if I may

be allowed to use such an expression, I cared not a straw for death, and that my great and only care was lest I should do an unrighteous or unholy thing. For the strong arm of that oppressive power did not frighten me into doing wrong; and when we came out of the rotunda the other four went to Salamis and fetched Leon, but I went quietly home. For which I might have lost my life, had not the power of the Thirty shortly afterwards come to an end. And many will witness to my words. Now do you really imagine that I could have survived all these years, if I had led a public life, supposing that like a good man I had always maintained the right and had made justice, as I ought, the first thing? No indeed, men of Athens, neither I nor any other man. But I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private, and never have I yielded any base compliance to those who are slanderously termed my disciples, or to any other. Not that I have any regular disciples. But if any one likes to come and hear me while I am pursuing my mission, whether he be young or old, he is not excluded. Nor do I converse only with those who pay; but any one, whether he be rich or poor, may ask and answer me and listen to my words; and whether he turns out to be a bad man or a good one, neither result can be justly imputed to me; for I never taught or professed to teach him anything. And if any one says that he has ever learned or heard anything from me in private which all the world has not heard, let me tell you that he is lying.

But I shall be asked, Why do people delight in continually conversing with to his mind, and he may be set against me, and vote in anger because he is displeased at me on this account. Now if there be such a person among you,—mind, I do not say that there is,—to him I may fairly reply: My friend, I am a man, and like other men, a creature of flesh and blood, and not “of wood or stone,” as Homer says; and I have a family, yes, and sons, O Athenians, three in number, one almost a man, and two others who are still young; and yet I will not bring any of them hither in order to petition you for an acquittal. And why not? Not from any self-assertion or want of respect for you. Whether I am or am not afraid of death is another question, of which I will not now speak. But, having regard to public opinion, I feel that such conduct would be discreditable to myself, and to you, and to the whole state. One who has reached my years, and who has a name for wisdom, ought not to demean himself. Whether this opinion of me be deserved or not, at any rate the world has decided that Socrates is in some way superior to other men. And if those among you who are said to be superior in wisdom and courage, and any other virtue, demean themselves in this way, how shameful is their conduct! I have seen men of reputation, when they have been condemned, behaving in the strangest manner: they seemed to fancy that they were going to suffer something dreadful if they died, and that they could be immortal if you only allowed them to live; and I think that such are a dishonor to the state, and that any stranger coming in would have said of them that the most eminent men of Athens, to whom the Athenians themselves give honor and command, are no better than women. And I say that these things ought not to be done by those of us who have a reputation; and if they are done, you ought not to permit them; you ought rather to show that you are far more disposed to condemn the man who gets up a doleful scene and makes the city ridiculous, than him who holds his peace.

The Defense Concluded

But, setting aside the question of public opinion, there seems to be something wrong in asking a favor of a judge, and thus procuring an acquittal, instead of informing and convincing him. For his duty is, not to make a present of justice, but to give judgment; and he has sworn that he will judge according to the laws, and not according to his own good pleasure; and we ought not to encourage you, nor should you allow yourselves to be encouraged, in this habit of perjury—there can be no piety in that. Do not then require me to do what I consider dishonorable and impious and wrong, especially now, when I am being tried for impiety on the indictment of Meletus. For if, O men of Athens, by force of persuasion and entreaty I could overpower your oaths, then I should be teaching you to believe that there are no gods, and in defending should simply convict myself of the charge of not believing in them. But that is not so—far otherwise. For I do believe that there are gods, and in a sense higher than that in which any of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and me.

Check your Understanding

Directions: Answer the question below and check your answer. Use the arrow below on the right to move to the next question. When you have answered all four questions, click Finish.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=21#h5p-2>

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Plato, “The Apology,” in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Paul Shorey, vol. 1, 12 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0170:text=Apol>.

The use of this work is governed by Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License.

The *Check your Understanding* questions were added by the editor and carry the same license as the book, CC-BY-NC-SA.

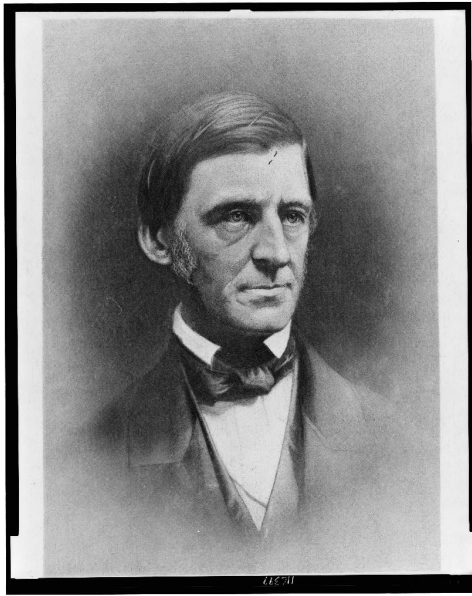


This work (The Apology by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882)

Edited by: Timothy Robbins

Introduction



Ralph Waldo Emerson c. 1884.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born May 25th, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts. He was an American poet, essayist, and lecturer. After he graduated from Harvard, he became a preacher for a few years, but had to discontinue due to grief over his wife, Ellen Tucker, who died from Tuberculosis. Her death sparked Emerson to write a poem titled *Fate* that was about needing to strike balance between liberty and fate. It also conveyed Emerson's love for his wife although she had passed, and how he thought everything should be given to love. About a year later in 1832, Emerson sailed to Europe and met with literary figures, Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. When he returned home in 1833, it was then he began to lecture on topics concerning ethical living and spiritual experience. Upon his return, he also became remarried to a woman named Lydia Jackson. Emerson was known as the "Sage of Concord" because his local literary circle thought of him as the most advanced of their time's knowledge. Sages were believed to be able to see beyond the universe.

Something that set apart Emerson in his time was his transcendental beliefs. A transcendentalist is someone who believes that each individual could move beyond the physical world and delve deeper into the spiritual senses through free will and intuition. He was also one of several figures that took a pantheist approach by not thinking of God as a separate being from nature. His first book that he published in 1836, *Nature*, is his best work that expresses his transcendentalism as well as his pantheism. In *Nature*, Emerson conveys that humans do not fully appreciate nor fully see nature's beauty, that instead they take it for granted. It is a very spiritual essay that channels Emerson's views about nature contrasted with society. Some other famous essays that followed Emerson's transcendental beliefs are "Self-Reliance" and "The American Scholar" which was based off of a lecture he gave in 1837.

In the 1840s, Emerson founded and co-edited the literary magazine *The Dial*, from which he published two volumes of essays. Although it ceased publication in 1844, Horace Greeley proclaimed it was the "most

original and thoughtful periodical ever published in this country.” The 1840s were also the time where he was blessed with four children, two sons and two daughters. Throughout the 1860s, he continued to advocate for the abolition of slavery and kept lecturing throughout the country even though he was not in good health. Emerson then passed away on April 27th, 1882, in Concord, Massachusetts due to pneumonia. Not only was Emerson an influential person to the common society, but also to other famous writers such as Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau.

References

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/ralph-waldo-emerson>

<http://www.biography.com/people/ralph-waldo-emerson-9287153>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Waldo_Emerson

<http://emersonwaldoralph.weebly.com/3-poems-3-analysis.html>

“NATURE.”

TO go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he

whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title.

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,—he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances,—master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.

Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt

by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.

The American Scholar

This address was delivered at Cambridge in 1837, before the Harvard Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, a college fraternity composed of the first twenty-five men in each graduating class. The society has annual meetings, which have been the occasion for addresses from the most distinguished scholars and thinkers of the day.

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

I greet you on the recommencement of our literary year. Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough of labor. We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science, like our co-temporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. Perhaps the time is already come when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?

In the light of this hope I accept the topic which not only usage but the nature of our association seem to prescribe to this day,—the American Scholar. Year by year we come up hither to read one more chapter of his biography. Let us inquire what new lights, new events, and more days have thrown on his character, his duties, and his hopes.

It is one of those fables which out of an unknown antiquity convey an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,—present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the divided or social state these functions are parceled out to individuals, each

of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But, unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney a statute-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor a rope of the ship.

In this distribution of functions the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is Man hinking. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.

In this view of him, as Man Thinking, the whole theory of his office is contained. Him Nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory pictures. Him the past instructs. Him the future invites. Is not indeed every man a student, and do not all things exist for the student's behoof? And, finally, is not the true scholar the only true master? But as the old oracle said, "All things have two handles: Beware of the wrong one." In life, too often, the scholar errs with mankind and forfeits his privilege. Let us see him in his school, and consider him in reference to the main influences he receives.

I. The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, Night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar must needs stand wistful and admiring before this great spectacle. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,—so entire, so boundless. Far too as her splendors shine, system on system shooting; like rays, upward, downward, without center, without circumference,—in the mass and in the particle, Nature hastens to render account of herself to the mind. Classification begins. To the young mind everything is individual, stands by itself. By and by it finds how to join two things and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem. It presently

learns that since the dawn of history there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on forever to animate the last fiber of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Thus to him, to this school-boy under the bending dome of day, is suggested that he and it proceed from one Root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that root? Is not that the soul of his soul?—A thought too bold?—A dream too wild? Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures,—when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand,—he shall look forward to an ever-expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator. He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, “Know thyself,” and the modern precept, “Study nature,” become at last one maxim.

II. The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar is the mind of the Past,—in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed. Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth,—learn the amount of this influence more conveniently,—by considering their value alone.

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him life; [25]it went out from him truth. It came to him short-lived actions; it went out from him immortal thoughts. It came to him business; it went from him poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

Or, I might say, it depends on how far the process had gone, of transmuting life into truth. In proportion to the completeness of the distillation, so will the purity and imperishableness of the product be. But none is quite perfect. As no air-pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought, that shall be as efficient,

in all respects, to a remote posterity, as to contemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is instantly transferred to the record. The poet chanting was felt to be a divine man. Henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit. Henceforward it is settled the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly the book becomes noxious. The guide is a tyrant. We sought a brother, and lo, a governor. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, always slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking, by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate, with the world and soul. Hence the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees. This is bad; this is worse than it seems.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world of value is the active soul,—the soul, free, sovereign, active. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,—let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius always looks forward. The eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead. Man hopes. Genius creates. To create,—to create,—is the proof of a divine presence. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his;—cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive always from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery; and a fatal disservice is done. Genius

is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,—when the soul seeth not, when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining,—we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, “A fig-tree, looking on a fig-tree, becometh fruitful.”

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us ever with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy,—with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all *time* from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some pre-established harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. We all know that as the human body can be nourished on any food, though it were boiled grass and the broth of shoes, so the human mind can be fed by any knowledge. And great and heroic men have existed who had almost no other information than by the printed page. I only would say that it needs a strong head to bear that diet. One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, “He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies must carry out the wealth of the Indies.” There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. We then see, what is always true, that as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the least part of his volume. The discerning will read, in his Plato or Shakespeare, only that least part,—only the authentic utterances of the oracle;—all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakespeare's.

Of course there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History and exact science he must learn by laborious reading. Colleges, in like manner, have their indispensable office,—to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pretension avail nothing. Gowns and pecuniary

foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit. Forget this, and our American colleges will recede in their public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.

III. There goes in the world a notion that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian,—as unfit for any handiwork or public labor as a penknife for an axe. The so-called “practical men” sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or *see*, they could do nothing. I have heard it said that the clergy—who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day—are addressed as women; that the rough, spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech. They are often virtually disfranchised; and indeed there are advocates for their celibacy. As far as this is true of the studious classes, it is not just and wise. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth. Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty. Inaction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not.

The world—this shadow of the soul, or *other me*, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I launch eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action passed by, as a loss of power.

It is the raw material out of which the intellect molds her splendid products. A strange process too, this by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry-leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours.

The actions and events of our childhood and youth are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions,—with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life,—remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption.

Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. Observe, too, the impossibility of antedating this act. In its grub state it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. Cradle and infancy, school and playground, the fear of boys, and dogs, and ferules, the love of little maids and berries, and many another fact that once filled the whole sky, are gone already; friend and relative, profession and party, town and country, nation and world, must also soar and sing.

Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions has the richest return of wisdom. I will not shut myself out of this globe of action, and transplant an oak into a flower-pot, there to hunger and pine; nor trust the revenue of some single faculty, and exhaust one vein of thought, much like those Savoyards, who, getting their livelihood by carving shepherds, shepherdesses, and smoking Dutchmen, for all Europe, went out one day to the mountain to find stock, and discovered that they had whittled up the last of their pine-trees. Authors we have, in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers, to replenish their merchantable stock.

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town; in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

But the final value of action, like that of books, and better than books, is that it is a resource. That great principle of Undulation in nature, that shows itself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath; in desire and satiety; in the ebb and flow of the sea; in day and night; in heat and cold; and, as yet more deeply ingrained in every atom and every fluid, is known to us under the name of Polarity,—these “fits of easy transmission and reflection,” as Newton called them, are the law of nature because they are the law of spirit.

The mind now thinks, now acts, and each fit reproduces the other. When the artist has exhausted his materials, when the fancy no longer paints, when thoughts are no longer apprehended and books are a weariness,—he has always the resource *to live*. Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truth? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs. Let the beauty of affection cheer his lowly roof. Those “far from fame,” who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day [35] better than it can be measured by any public and designed display.

Time shall teach him that the scholar loses no hour which the man lives. Herein he unfolds the sacred germ of his instinct, screened from influence. What is lost in seemliness is gained in strength. Not out of those on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture comes the helpful giant to destroy the old or to build the new, but out of unhandselled savage nature; out of terrible Druids and Berserkers come at last Alfred and Shakespeare. I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands. And labor is everywhere welcome; always we are invited to work; only be this limitation observed, that a man shall not for the sake of wider activity sacrifice any opinion to the popular judgments and modes of action.

I have now spoken of the education of the scholar by nature, by books, and by action. It remains to say somewhat of his duties.

They are such as become Man Thinking. They may all be comprised in self-trust. The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation. Flamsteed and Herschel, in their glazed observatories, may catalogue the stars with the praise of all men, and, the results being splendid and useful, honor is sure. But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human mind, which as yet no man has thought of as such,—watching days and months sometimes for a few facts; correcting still his old records,—must relinquish display and immediate fame. In the long period of his preparation he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. Long he must stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept—how often!—poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society. For all this loss and scorn, what offset? He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one who raises himself from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history. Whatsoever oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions,—these he shall receive and impart. And whatsoever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day,—this he shall hear and promulgate.

These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great

decorum, some fetich of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy. Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom. In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach, and bide his own time,—happy enough if he can satisfy himself alone that this day he has seen something truly. Success treads on every right step. For the instinct is sure that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that which men in cities vast find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers;—that they drink his words because he fulfills for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels—This is my music; this is myself.

In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, “without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.” Brave; for fear is a thing which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance. It is a shame to him if his tranquility, amid dangerous times, arise from the presumption that like children and women his is a protected class; or if he seek a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes, peeping into microscopes, and turning rhymes, as a boy whistles to keep his courage up. So is the danger a danger still; so is the fear worse. Manlike let him turn and face it. Let him look into its eye and search its nature, inspect its origin,—see the whelping of this lion,—which lies no great way back; he will then find in himself a perfect comprehension of its nature and extent; he will have made his hands meet on the other side, and can henceforth defy it and pass on superior. The world is his who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold is there only by sufferance,—by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow.

Yes, we are the cowed,—we the trustless. It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has any thing in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind. They are the kings of the world who give the color of their present thought to all nature and all art, and persuade men, by the cheerful

serenity of their carrying the matter, that this thing which they do is the apple which the ages have desired to pluck, now at last ripe, and inviting nations to the harvest. The great man makes the great thing. Wherever Macdonald sits, there is the head of the table. Linnæus makes botany the most alluring of studies, and wins it from the farmer and the herb-woman: Davy, chemistry; and Cuvier, fossils. The day is always his who works in it with serenity and great aims. The unstable estimates of men crowd to him whose mind is filled with a truth, as the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon.

For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathomed,—darker than can be enlightened. I might not carry with me the feeling of my audience in stating my own belief. But I have already shown the ground of my hope, in adverting to the doctrine that man is one. I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has almost lost the light that can lead him back to his prerogatives. Men are become of no account. Men in history, men in the world of to-day, are bugs, are spawn, and are called “the mass” and “the herd.” In a century, in a millenium, one or two men; that is to say, one or two approximations to the right state of every man. All the rest behold in the hero or the poet their own green and crude being,—ripened; yes, and are content to be less, so *that* may attain to its full stature. What a testimony, full of grandeur, full of pity, is borne to the demands of his own nature, by the poor clansman, the poor partisan, who rejoices in the glory of his chief! The poor and the low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which it is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified. They sun themselves in the great man’s light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make that great heart beat, those giant sinews combat and conquer. He lives for us, and we live in him.

Men such as they are very naturally seek money or power; and power because it is as good as money,—the “spoils,” so called, “of office.” And why not? For they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them and they shall quit the false good and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strewn along the ground. The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men. Each philosopher, each bard, each actor has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself. The books which once we valued more than the apple of the eye, we have quite exhausted. What is that but saying that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on. First, one, then another, we drain all cisterns, and waxing greater by all these supplies, we crave a better and a more abundant food. The man has never lived that can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire, which, flaming now out of the lips of Etna, lightens the capes of Sicily, and now out of the throat of Vesuvius,

illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.

But I have dwelt perhaps tediously upon this abstraction of the Scholar. I ought not to delay longer to add what I have to say of nearer reference to the time and to this country.

Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated of the oneness or the identity of the mind through all individuals, I do not much dwell on these differences. In fact, I believe each individual passes through all three. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective. I deny not, however, that a revolution in the leading idea may be distinctly enough traced.

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical. We are embarrassed with second thoughts. We cannot enjoy anything for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists. We are lined with eyes. We see with our feet. The time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness,—

“Sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.”

Is it so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? I look upon the discontent of the literary class as a mere announcement of the fact that they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers, and regret the coming state as untried; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim. If there is any period one would desire to be born in, is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.

I read with some joy of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state.

One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a

sign—is it not?—of new vigor when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provençal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body;—show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law; and the shop, the plow, and the ledger referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing;—and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order: there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

This idea has inspired the genius of Goldsmith, Burns, Cowper, and, in a newer time, of Goethe, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. This idea they have differently followed and with various success. In contrast with their writing, the style of Pope, of Johnson, of Gibbon, looks cold and pedantic. This writing is blood-warm. Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. This perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful in discoveries. Goethe, in this very thing the most modern of the moderns, has shown us, as none ever did, the genius of the ancients.

There is one man of genius who has done much for this philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly estimated:—I mean Emanuel Swedenborg. The most imaginative of men, yet writing with the precision of a mathematician, he endeavored to engraft a purely philosophical Ethics on the popular Christianity of his time. Such an attempt of course must have difficulty which no genius could surmount. But he saw and showed the connexion between nature and the affections of the soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual character of the visible, audible, tangible world. Especially did his shade-loving muse hover over and interpret the lower parts of nature; he showed the mysterious bond that allies moral evil to the foul material forms, and has given in epical parables a theory of insanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is the new importance given to the single person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual—to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state—tends to true union as well as greatness. “I learned,” said the melancholy Pestalozzi, “that no man in God’s wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man.” Help must come from the bosom alone. The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another that should pierce his ear, it is—The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is

for you to know all; it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any one but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career do not yet see, that if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience,—patience; with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be an unit; not to be reckoned one character; not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends,—please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. Then shall man be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defense and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

References

The Project Gutenberg EBook of Essays, by Ralph Waldo Emerson

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16643/16643-h/16643-h.htm#THE_AMERICAN_SCHOLAR

<http://digitalemerson.wsulibs.wsu.edu/exhibits/show/text/the-american-scholar>

Media Attributions

- Ralph Waldo Emerson c. 1884.



Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) by Edited by: Timothy Robbins is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

UNIT 1 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper
Harvard College Writing Center

The PreSocratics
by James Fieser; From The History of Philosophy: A Short Survey

This is Water
David Foster Wallace

UNIT II

UNIT 2: METAPHYSICS

AN INTRODUCTION TO PLATO'S "ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE"

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D

Plato's Objective: illustrate the effects of education, or lack thereof, on the soul (i.e. psyche)

Part I: Two preliminary questions to start:

- What is an allegory and how are allegories useful?
- The aim of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" is to illustrate the effects of education on the soul. What does Plato mean by education in this allegory?

Part II: The Allegory (broken into 5 sections):

Section 1 Inside the Cave & Shackled:

- Prisoners shackled and only able to look straight ahead at the cave wall.
- There is a fire and a wall behind them and people are carrying puppets just above the wall to project shadows on the cave wall in front of the prisoners.
- Prisoners have never experienced anything other than the shadows.
- Prisoners play games by attempting to identify the shadows and make predictions about which shadow will appear next. They are honored with praise and rewards.

Consider the following:

- Is there anything about the allegory that resembles your own education?
- What do the shadows, the puppets and statues, and the puppet masters represent in Plato's allegory?
- What types of rewards and praises have you or others received that would be analogous to what Plato has in mind here?

Section 2 Inside the Cave and Physically Free:

- A prisoner is freed and painfully turns around to be blinded by the light of the fire.
- Even once the prisoner's eyes adjust and she is shown the puppets, she prefers the shadows.

Consider the following:

- What does the fire represent in the allegory and why is experiencing the fire so painful?
- Have you ever experienced a painful transformation like the freed prisoner?

Section 3 Exiting the Cave:

- The prisoner is dragged outside of the cave.
- This is a painful experience and she is angry because she is being forced to turn away from everything she has ever known.
- She is also blinded again, this time by the light of the sun.
- As she adjusts to the world outside the cave, she at first would only be able to see shadows, then physical objects, and eventually comes to contemplate the stars and moon.

Consider the following:

- How should we think about the cognitive or intellectual transformation the prisoner has undergone?

Section 4 The Sun:

- Over time the prisoner will adjust her vision and be capable of viewing the sun as an object of contemplation.
- She would come to understand that the sun is responsible for the seasons and for all things that we see and know.
- Finally, the prisoner feels grateful for the transformation that she has undergone and comes to pity those still shackled.

Consider the following:

- What does the sun represent in this allegory?

Section 5 The Return:

- Moving from sunlight back to the darkness of the cave, the freed prisoner would struggle to see.
- She would not be very good at their games because of her inability to clearly see.
- The others would tell her that she had ruined her vision by leaving and ridicule her and tell her she was unable to participate in their games.
- She tries to free them—to liberate them so they too can be transformed, but they resist and kill her.

Consider the following:

- Imagine the resistance you might feel if you were the prisoner trying to return as a guide.
- Plato's account connects desire to education. How can education be cultivated or thwarted by one's desires? Which type of desires might be useful for the type of liberation Plato has in mind?

Here's a video that highlights some important points to consider:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=509#oembed-1>

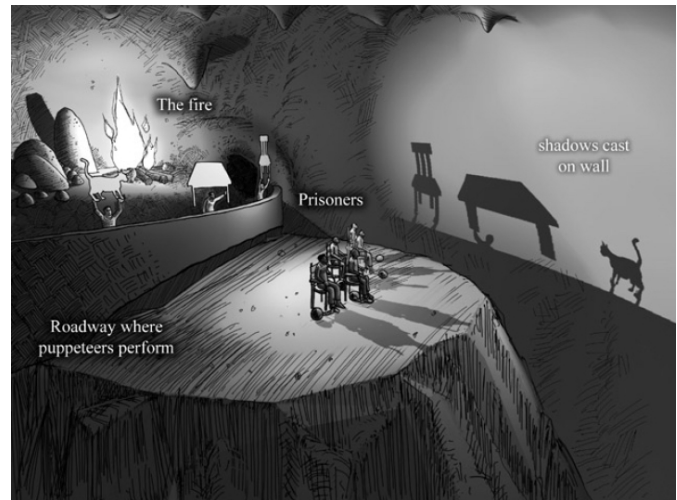


An Introduction to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

Plato

Socrates: AND NOW, I SAID, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.



Glaucou: I see.

Socrates: And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

Glaucou: You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Socrates: Like ourselves and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

Glaucou: True how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

Socrates: And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Glaucou: Yes.

Socrates: And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Glaucón: Very true.

Socrates: And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passersby spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

Glaucón: No question.

Socrates: To them, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

Glaucón: That is certain.

Socrates: And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, what will be his reply?

And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Glaucón: Far truer.

Socrates: And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

Glaucón: True.

Socrates: And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Glaucón: Not all in a moment.

Socrates: He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Glaucou: Certainly.

Socrates: Last of he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Glaucou: Certainly.

Socrates: He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Glaucou: Clearly he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

Socrates: And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Glaucou: Certainly, he would.

Socrates: And if they were in the habit of conferring honors among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honors and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer,

to be the poor servant of a poor master,

And to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Glaucou: Yes, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Socrates: Imagine once more, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

Glaucou: To be sure.

Socrates: And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

Glaucón: No question.

Socrates: This entire allegory, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

Glaucón: I agree, as far as I am able to understand you.

Socrates: Moreover, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.

Glaucón: Yes, very natural.

Socrates: And is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in courts of law, or in other places, about the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavoring to meet the conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice?

Glaucón: Anything but surprising, he replied.

Socrates: Anyone who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter light, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

Glaucón: That, is a very just distinction.

Socrates: But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

Glaucou: They undoubtedly say this.

Socrates: Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

Glaucou: Very true.

Socrates: And must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?

Glaucou: Yes, such an art may be presumed.

Socrates: And whereas the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be akin to bodily qualities, for even when they are not originally innate they can be implanted later by habit and exercise, the virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; or, on the other hand, hurtful and useless. Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue—how eager he is, how clearly his paltry soul sees the way to his end; he is the reverse of blind, but his keen eyesight is forced into the service of evil, and he is mischievous in proportion to his cleverness.

Glaucou: Very true.

Socrates: But what if there had been a circumcision of such natures in the days of their youth; and they had been severed from those sensual pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which, like leaden weights, were attached to them at their birth, and which drag them down and turn the vision of their souls upon the things that are below—if, I say, they had been released from these impediments and turned in the opposite direction, the very same faculty in them would have seen the truth as keenly as they see what their eyes are turned to now.

Glaucou: Very likely.

Socrates: Yes, and there is another thing which is likely. or rather a necessary inference from what has preceded, that neither the uneducated and uninformed of the truth, nor yet those who never make an end of their education, will be able ministers of State; not the former, because they have no single aim of duty which is

the rule of all their actions, private as well as public; nor the latter, because they will not act at all except upon compulsion, fancying that they are already dwelling apart in the islands of the blest.

Glaucou: Very true.

Socrates: Then, the business of us who are the founders of the State will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all; they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now.

Glaucou: What do you mean?

Socrates: I mean that they remain in the upper world: but this must not be allowed; they must be made to descend again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labours and honors, whether they are worth having or not.

Glaucou: But is not this unjust? Ought we to give them a worse life, when they might have a better?

Socrates: You have again forgotten, my friend, the intention of the legislator, who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Plato, “Republic, Book 7,” in PLATO IN TWELVE VOLUMES, trans. Paul Shorey, vol. 5 and 6, 12 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg030.perseus-eng1:1>.

The use of this translation is governed by Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License.

Media Attributions

- Plato’s Allegory of the Cave is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license



This work (The Allegory of the Cave by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

A CRITICAL COMPARISON BETWEEN PLATO'S SOCRATES AND XENOPHON'S SOCRATES IN THE FACE OF DEATH

Dr. Pankaj Singh

*An assistant professor at the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, School for Liberal Studies, in Dehradun, India, **Dr. Pankaj Singh** is a brooder. He generally sleeps with unanswered philosophical concerns of existence on his mind. He is frequently bothered with the ultimate existential issue, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" He frequently finds himself floating in the realm of imagination. His favorite pastimes are sci-fi TV shows and movies. He doesn't simply watch a show or a movie; he also writes about the work's philosophical implications. He enjoys writing about pop culture and philosophy. He has produced several chapters and papers on pop culture and philosophy. His work includes chapters and studies on pop cultural phenomena such as *The Expanse*, *Indiana Jones*, *Westworld*, and *the Hulk*. Finally, he fantasizes of producing a fantastic best-seller that combines philosophical elements with a fast-paced thrilling story.*

Introduction

The trial and death of Socrates are some of the most tragic chapters in philosophical history. Socrates was put on trial in 399 BC for allegedly corrupting the minds of Athens' youth and for impiety. Socrates tried unsuccessfully to justify himself. A jury of hundreds of male Athenian residents convicted him guilty by a majority vote. The main official charges were: (1) worshipping false gods; and not worshipping the state religion (2) corrupting youth. The main goal of the chapter is to compare and contrast two versions of Socrates' defense in the face of death, one as described in Plato's *The Apology of Socrates* and the other as presented by Xenophon in his *The Apology of Socrates to the Jury*. However, the goal isn't only to uncover distinctions; it's also to emphasize the significance of those differences. The following sections discuss some of the most significant distinctions.

Approach to Socrates as a Person

Both texts have taken a distinct approach to portray Socrates as a person. Plato's and Xenophon's personalities are mirrored in Socrates' depiction in the respective texts. Plato, as a philosopher, emphasized the philosophical parts of Socrates' defense, but Xenophon, as a practical man who wrote about practical subjects like as hunting, horsemanship, estate management, cavalry command, and military history, threw light on Socrates' practical features. Even when addressing the representatives, Plato's Socrates employs the dialectic approach to defend himself by asking questions regarding the allegations leveled against him. On the other hand, Xenophon's Socrates is aggressive in temperament, and rather than asking questions, he gives his side of the story.

Focus of the Texts

The focus of these texts should also be kept in mind. While Plato concentrated on presenting a complete description of the entire episode as it unfolded in the court, Xenophon focused his inquiry on the question of whether Socrates' rebellious tone was intentional or not. Xenophon appears to be focusing on strengthening the character of Socrates in the practical direction as a person of tough character like a warrior who is not afraid in the face of death, whereas Plato appears to be focusing on highlighting the philosophical aspect of his personality through a detailed description of the trial.

Objections to the First Accusation

Socrates has been put on trial on two primary accusations. To the first accusation, Plato and Xenophon both presented different types of arguments and proofs. They have presented the accusations in different ways, in addition to their diverse responses to the accusation. Plato writes about the first accusation:

Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse into stronger argument and he teaches the same to others". While Xenophon writes, " his opponent has accused him of not acknowledging the gods the city acknowledged, introducing new daimonic activities instead (Grube et al., 1981, p.24).

For example, in response to the charge of studying objects in the sky, Socrates emphasizes that the ideas published by others, such as Anaxagoras concerning the Sun and Moon, are theories that may be found in a bookstore. He has read these theories, even if he does not agree with them. He further argues for his belief in god and sprits by asking Meletus:

"Does any man, Meletus, believe in human activities who does not believe in humans? ... Does any man who does not believe in horses believe in horseman's activities? Or flute playing activities but not in flute players? Does any man believe in spiritual activities who does not believe in spirits? (Grube et al., 1981, p.31-32).

He goes on to say that if he believes in spirits who are said to be the children of gods, then I must believe in God as well.

Socrates' reply against the charge of not believing in God is different in Xenophon's narrative, less rational but more pragmatic. He discusses the rituals of offering sacrifices to the city god. He says:

The first thing I find amazing about the Meletus is what evidence he could ever had for saying that I don't acknowledge the god that city acknowledges. Because anyone who happened to be around would see me making sacrifices at the state festivals and on the public altars (Reeve, 2002, p.179).

As a result, he apparently believes in city gods, proving that the charges are incorrect. To clear up the allegation, he adds that his belief in the daimonic voice does not deny the God's power. Socrates uses the example of other people who claim to receive messages from God through other sources, which are acceptable in society and are not seen as acts of disobedience toward God. He says:

But while they speak of bird omens, chance sayings, signs, and seers as prophetic warnings, I call mine a daimonic thing. Actually, I have the following proof that I am not falsely attributing things to the god: for I have reported the god's advice to very many of my friends, and I have never yet been shown to be wrong (Reeve, 2002, p.179).

Objections to Second Accusation

Contrary to the presentation of the first accusation, there is no major difference in framing the second accusation between Plato and Xenophon's accounts. According to Plato and Xenophon, the second main accusation leveled against Socrates is to corrupt young minds. However, the evidence and reasoning presented in support of Socrates' claim that he does not corrupt the youth are significantly different. Plato's Socrates denies ever teaching anyone anything. His Socrates believes that it is his responsibility to study persons who profess to be wise to determine if they truly know or are merely pretending to know. Socrates also says that his talk is private, but many young people would follow him out of curiosity to observe individuals being examined, and they like it. They love witnessing it. Therefore they may occasionally try to do the same with others who profess to be intelligent. Socrates says:

I have never been anyone's teacher. If anyone, young or old, desires to listen to me when I am talking and dealing with my own concerns, I have never begrudged this to anyone, but I do not converse when I receive a fee and not when I do not. I am equally ready to question the rich and the poor if anyone is willing to answer my questions and listen to what I say. And I can not justly be held responsible for the good and bad conduct of these people, as I never promised then to teach anything and have not done so (Grube et al., 1981, p.37).

To the second accusation, Xenophon gives a completely different narrative of defense. Socrates asks his accuser whether they have any evidence of someone becoming a worse person as a result of his teachings. Xenophon writes:

So why don't you say whether you know anyone who has gone from reverence to impiety because of me, or from modesty to arrogance, or from temperance to extravagance, or from moderate drinking to drunkenness, or from diligence to negligence, or has been overcome by any base pleasure? (Reeve, 2002, p.181).

It is apparent that Xenophon's Socrates acknowledges that he teaches people, but Plato's Socrates categorically rejects that he teaches anybody. Socrates in Xenophon's Socrates not only accepts instructing young minds, but he also thinks it's a good thing that they're being taught by someone who is solely focused on education. On the charge that people whom Socrates trains begin to obey him more than their parents in this manner, he believes that if this occurs, Socrates sees nothing wrong with it. He uses the metaphor of a doctor and a patient to argue that it is beneficial for young people seeking answers to various concerns to come to him for education since he is more suited for them than their parents. Xenophon writes:

Don't you think it amazing that whereas the best practitioner in other areas of expertise are not only given an appropriate reward, but are also highly esteemed, I myself who am considered by some to be the best judge about the greatest good for men, I mean education (Reeve, 2002, p.182).

When Socrates responds to the allegations by citing the practical components of his argument, Xenophon's portrayal of him appears to be more human. Plato's Socrates, while more rational, appears to be less credible in the court.

Wisdom of Socrates

Plato's Socrates claims that the deity has given him a duty to question those who profess to be smart, whether they be politicians, poets, craftsmen, affluent or poor. This quest began with the Oracle of Delphi's revelation that Socrates was the wisest of all the Greeks. Socrates sought to put this prophecy to the test by questioning those who claimed to be intelligent. During his investigation, he found no one who claimed to be intelligent was truly wise. Socrates observed that because of their accomplishment in a particular profession or subject, people mistook it for wisdom and understanding. They had the delusion that they knew something when, in fact, they didn't, as Socrates discovered when he questioned them about their expertise. Socrates concluded that, while it is difficult to state anything with certainty about knowledge, he was better than all others with whom he inquired about wisdom in that he is at least conscious of his ignorance, whereas others are not. Their claims were false. As Plato writes about Socrates:

I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us know anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I don't know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know (Grube et al., 1981, p.26).

Plato's Socrates, based on the oracle's prophecy, comes to the conclusion after investigation that he is wiser than others owing to the above-mentioned line of reasoning.

In Xenophon's version, the Oracle of Delphi says that no man was freer, more just, or more moderate than Socrates. Socrates tries to question the Delphi prophecy once more, but this time he evaluates his own character and activities rather than comparing wisdom with others. Oracle's assertion that he is a free, wise, and righteous man is confirmed via his self-analysis and evaluation. Xenophon mentions about Socrates:

Well then, who do you know who's less enslaved by the body's appetites than myself? And who is freer than I, since I take neither gifts nor pay from anyone? And who on the earth could you reasonably consider more than someone who is so well adapted to his circumstances that he has no need of anyone else's possession? And how could anyone reasonably deny that I am a wise man since as soon as I could understand speech, I began seeking out and learning whatever good things I could and I have never stopped doing so since (Reeve, 2002, p.181).

It is clear that Plato's philosophical bent has proven that Socrates' knowledge is generated by constant questioning of those around him who are thought to be clever. And Socrates in Plato's Socrates does not pretend to have absolute knowledge; rather, he appears to be a sincere admirer of wisdom, a philosopher in particular. On the other hand, Xenophon does not hesitate to list all of Socrates' remarkable characteristics that make him a certain intelligent person. Socrates, as depicted by Xenophon appears to be more sophist in nature.

Deliberation to Die

The rebellious tone of Socrates' defense is one of the central points of debate among scholars. Plato's Socrates does not appear to be attempting to avoid a death sentence on purpose. All he wants to do is tell his side of the story without sympathy since it obstructs genuine justice. There is no question that his defense approach appears to be suicidal in character, as when Socrates appears to be baiting the Jury after the guilty verdict and before the death sentence, as seen by his contemplation of other options if he does not get the death penalty. He claims that exile will do him no good because philosophizing is a god-given job. He reflects about his acquittal based on his lack of speech, and comes to the conclusion that an unexamined life is not worth living. Apart from that, the fact that Socrates states to his friends and followers after his death sentence that it must be for the purpose of good because his inner voice does not contradict him at any time throughout the trial is often emphasized in favor of deliberation. However, few subtle statements in Plato's Socrates indicate that he did not intend to be executed. For example, Socrates' statement of the trial's brief duration hampered his ability to persuade more people of his innocence. As he said:

If it were law with us, as it is elsewhere, that a trial for life should not last one but for many days, you would be convinced, but now it is not easy to dispel great slanders in a short time (Grube et al., 1981, p.26).

His assessment of penalty of thirty mina also cannot be ignored. It shows that the attempt of his defense was genuine without any deliberation to die. Although the outcome was not in Socrates' favor, he handled it

graciously as a great man. I believe his grace should not be seen as a deliberate decision to die but rather as an example that a good man and message cannot be hurt even by an unjust death.

Xenophon's account of Socrates' defense, which is premised on Socrates' contemplation for death, now presents the opposing side of the narrative. The concept of Xenophon is based on Hermogene's description of a discussion with Socrates prior to his execution. Three points from the conversation have been highlighted to support Socrates' claim of death deliberation: first, he had lived a just and fulfilled life and was ready to die; second, he wanted to avoid the suffering of old age; and third, his daimonic voice did not prevent him from saying anything else in the trial. These three factors persuade Xenophon that Socrates' defense was premeditated since he decided to die. However, if we examine these three arguments in the context of Socrates' overall nature, we can contradict them. To begin with, there is no doubt that Socrates appears to have lived a fulfilled life, but this does not imply that he desired to die. In confessing his love for philosophy, Socrates stated that even if he dies and there is such a thing as spirit that goes to another place after death, he would be very happy to examine people there as well, implying that had he been alive, he would have continued his mission of examining people as it would have greatly aided him.

Second, his portrayal of old age suffering does not necessarily imply that he was about to commit suicide in response to his accusations. As a just man, Socrates would not have been afraid of death or old age. He was not an escapist and would have lived his old age as gracefully as he lived the rest of his life. Xenophon took the third point of no indication from the daimonic voice as it was good for Socrates to die at that point in his life, but the interpretation of no daimonic intervention comes later when Socrates is found guilty and sentenced to death, implying that he later connected the dots and discovered why such an unjust thing had happened to him. Nevertheless, that does not mean he presented deliberate defiance to the jury in order to die. Instead, the tone of defiance should be taken as a sign that he was committed to truth only even in the face of death. He could have appealed to pity, manipulated the jury through oratory, but he chose to be brave Socrates, as he had been all his life and spoke everything he thought fit to defend himself, regardless of any concern about the outcome of his defense.

Conclusion

The above sections discussed that there is a substantial difference between Plato's and Xenophon's accounts of Socrates' trial and defense, but, as is the characteristic of philosophy in general, there is no conclusive solution. Thus we cannot say who's story is closest to the reality of the true occurrence at the time. We should not place too much emphasis on whether he intended to die on purpose or not, but rather on what he really stated through those challenges of living an examined life and not stray from the truth even in the face of death. Whether Oracle said so or not, his serenity at the time of death qualifies him as a wise man.

References

Grube, George Maximilian Anthony, and John M. Cooper. Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo. Hackett Publishing, 1981.

Reeve, C. D. C. The trials of Socrates: six classic texts. Hackett Publishing, 2002.



A Critical Comparison between Plato's Socrates and Xenophon's Socrates in the Face of Death by Dr. Pankaj Singh is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

PLATO'S "SIMILE OF THE SUN" AND "THE DIVIDED LINE"

Plato

Editor's Note: This text is taken from the Sixth Chapter of Plato's Republic.

And which, I said, of the gods in heaven would you say was the lord of this element? Whose is that light which makes the eye to see perfectly and the visible to appear?

You mean the sun, as you and all mankind say.

May not the relation of sight to this deity be described as follows?

How?

Neither sight nor the eye in which sight resides is the sun?

No.

The eye like the sun, but not the same with it. Yet of all the organs of sense the eye is the most like the sun?

By far the most like.

And the power which the eye possesses is a sort of effluence which is dispensed from the sun?

Exactly.

Then the sun is not sight, but the author of sight who is recognised by sight?

True, he said.

And this is he whom I call the child of the good, whom the good begat in his own likeness, to be in the visible world, in relation to sight and the things of sight, what the good is in the intellectual world in relation to mind and the things of mind:

Will you be a little more explicit? he said.

Why, you know, I said, that the eyes, when a person directs them towards objects on which the light of day is no longer shining, but the moon and stars only, see dimly, and are nearly blind; they seem to have no clearness of vision in them?

Very true.

Divisible objects are to be seen only when the sun shines upon them; truth is only known when illuminated by the idea of good. But when they are directed towards objects on which the sun shines, they see clearly and there is sight in them?

Certainly.

And the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands, and is radiant with intelligence; but when turned towards the twilight of becoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes blinking about, and is first of one opinion and then of another, and seems to have no intelligence?

Just so.

The idea of good higher than science or truth (the objective than the subjective). Now, that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the idea of good, and this you will deem to be the cause of science, and of truth in so far as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge; beautiful too, as are both truth and knowledge, you will be right in esteeming this other nature as more beautiful than either; and, as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere, science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honour yet higher.

What a wonder of beauty that must be, he said, which is the author of science and truth, and yet surpasses them in beauty; for you surely cannot mean to say that pleasure is the good?

God forbid, I replied; but may I ask you to consider the image in another point of view?

In what point of view?

You would say, would you not, that the sun is not only the author of visibility in all visible things, but of generation and nourishment and growth, though he himself is not generation?

Certainly.

As the sun is the cause of generation, so the good is the cause of being and essence. In like manner the good

may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence, and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power.

Glaucon said, with a ludicrous earnestness: By the light of heaven, how amazing!

Yes, I said, and the exaggeration may be set down to you; for you made me utter my fancies.

And pray continue to utter them; at any rate let us hear if there is anything more to be said about the similitude of the sun.

Yes, I said, there is a great deal more.

Then omit nothing, however slight.

I will do my best, I said; but I should think that a great deal will have to be omitted.

I hope not, he said.

You have to imagine, then, that there are two ruling powers, and that one of them is set over the intellectual world, the other over the visible. I do not say heaven, lest you should fancy that I am playing upon the name (οὐρανός, ὄρατός). May I suppose that you have this distinction of the visible and intelligible fixed in your mind?

I have.

The two spheres of sight and knowledge are represented by a line which is divided into two unequal parts. Now take a line which has been cut into two unequal parts, and divide each of them again in the same proportion, and suppose the two main divisions to answer, one to the visible and the other to the intelligible, and then compare the subdivisions in respect of their clearness and want of clearness, and you will find that the first section in the sphere of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, in the first place, shadows, and in the second place, reflections in water and in solid, smooth and polished bodies and the like: Do you understand?

Yes, I understand.

Imagine, now, the other section, of which this is only the resemblance, to include the animals which we see, and everything that grows or is made.

Very good.

Would you not admit that both the sections of this division have different degrees of truth, and that the copy is to the original as the sphere of opinion is to the sphere of knowledge?

Most undoubtedly.

Next proceed to consider the manner in which the sphere of the intellectual is to be divided.

In what manner?

Images and hypotheses. Thus:—There are two subdivisions, in the lower of which the soul uses the figures given by the former division as images; the enquiry can only be hypothetical, and instead of going upwards to a principle descends to the other end; in the higher of the two, the soul passes out of hypotheses, and goes up to a principle which is above hypotheses, making no use of images as in the former case, but proceeding only in and through the ideas themselves.

I do not quite understand your meaning, he said.

The hypotheses of mathematics. Then I will try again; you will understand me better when I have made some preliminary remarks. You are aware that students of geometry, arithmetic, and the kindred sciences assume the odd and the even and the figures and three kinds of angles and the like in their several branches of science; these are their hypotheses, which they and every body are supposed to know, and therefore they do not deign to give any account of them either to themselves or others; but they begin with them, and go on until they arrive at last, and in a consistent manner, at their conclusion?

Yes, he said, I know.

In both spheres hypotheses are used, in the lower taking the form of images, but in the higher the soul ascends above hypotheses to the idea of good. And do you not know also that although they make use of the visible forms and reason about them, they are thinking not of these, but of the ideals which they resemble; not of the figures which they draw, but of the absolute square and the absolute diameter, and so on—the forms which they draw or make, and which have shadows and reflections in water of their own, are converted by them into images, but they are really seeking to behold the things themselves, which can only be seen with the eye of the mind?

That is true.

And of this kind I spoke as the intelligible, although in the search after it the soul is compelled to use hypotheses; not ascending to a first principle, because she is unable to rise above the region of hypothesis, but employing the objects of which the shadows below are resemblances in their turn as images, they having in relation to the shadows and reflections of them a greater distinctness, and therefore a higher value.

I understand, he said, that you are speaking of the province of geometry and the sister arts.

Dialectic by the help of hypotheses rises above hypotheses. And when I speak of the other division of the

intelligible, you will understand me to speak of that other sort of knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of dialectic, using the hypotheses not as first principles, but only as hypotheses—that is to say, as steps and points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses, in order that she may soar beyond them to the first principle of the whole; and clinging to this and then to that which depends on this, by successive steps she descends again without the aid of any sensible object, from ideas, through ideas, and in ideas she ends.

I understand you, he replied; not perfectly, for you seem to me to be describing a task which is really tremendous; but, at any rate, I understand you to say that knowledge and being, which the science of dialectic contemplates, are clearer than the notions of the arts, as they are termed, which proceed from hypotheses only: these are also contemplated by the understanding, and not by the senses: yet, because they start from hypotheses and do not ascend to a principle, those who contemplate them appear to you not to exercise the higher reason upon them, although when a first principle is added to them they are cognizable by the higher reason. Return to psychology. And the habit which is concerned with geometry and the cognate sciences I suppose that you would term understanding and not reason, as being intermediate between opinion and reason.

Four faculties: Reason, understanding, faith, perception of shadows. You have quite conceived my meaning, I said; and now, corresponding to these four divisions, let there be four faculties in the soul—reason answering to the highest, understanding to the second, faith (or conviction) to the third, and perception of shadows to the last—and let there be a scale of them, and let us suppose that the several faculties have clearness in the same degree that their objects have truth.

I understand, he replied, and give my assent, and accept your arrangement.

Additional Resources

This brief video (5:08) will provide more clarity on Plato's Sun analogy.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=792#oembed-1>

For a relevant and concise overview of Plato's "Divided Line" (including some additional background information), please review the information here: [The Divided Line](#).

Plato's Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Good

The Good (source of illumination)			An Example using a shape (triangle)	
Intelligible realm - accessible via thinking and reasoning	Objects of Knowledge	The Forms	noesis (rational intuition & full understanding)	the essence or ideal standard for triangles (What makes all triangles fall under the category of triangle)
		Mathematics & hypothesis	dianoia (reasoning)	the properties of a triangle (i.e., 3 sides & 3 angles)
		"metaphysics" Plato's account of reality	"epistemology" Plato's account of what we can know about reality	

Plato's Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Sun

The Sun (source of illumination)			An Example using a shape (triangle)	
Visible realm - accessible via sense & perception	Objects of perception & opinion	Physical Objects	pistis (belief)	a triangular physical & edible slice of pie
		Images, reflections, & shadows	eikasia (imagination)	a photograph of a triangular slice of pie
		"metaphysics" Plato's account of reality	"epistemology" Plato's account of what we can know about reality	

Check Your Understanding

Consider the 2 charts above, which summarize Plato's "Divided Line," and the information provided on this website: *The Four Segments of the Divided Line*.

Then follow the instructions to complete two matching exercises below the chart to check your understanding of the concepts.

How well do you understand the epistemology?

For this first activity, consider each word/phrase below the chart. Click and drag each to the section containing the Ancient Greek term to which it most closely matches.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=792#h5p-16>

Activity 2 Directions: The tiles below the chart each describe a stage of the character's awareness in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave." Drag each tile to the correct row on the chart.

Accessibility note: The background for the activity is an image derived from the two table charts expressed above. For screen-reader access, the four drop zones are associated as follows:

top row: noesis

second row: dianoia

third row: pistis

bottom row: eikasia



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=792#h5p-18>



This work (Plato's "Simile of the Sun" and "The Divided Line" by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

PARMENIDES

Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

We had come from our home at Clazomenae to Athens, and met Adeimantus and Glaucon in the Agora. Welcome, Cephalus, said Adeimantus, taking me by the hand; is there anything which we can do for you in Athens?

Yes; that is why I am here; I wish to ask a favor of you. What may that be? he said.

I want you to tell me the name of your half brother, which I have forgotten; he was a mere child when I last came hither from Clazomenae, but that was a long time ago; his father's name, if I remember rightly, was Pyrilampes?

Yes, he said, and the name of our brother, Antiphon; but why do you ask?

Let me introduce some countrymen of mine, I said; they are lovers of philosophy, and have heard that Antiphon was intimate with a certain Pythodorus, a friend of Zeno, and remembers a conversation which took place between Socrates, Zeno, and Parmenides many years ago, Pythodorus having often recited it to him.

Quite true.

And could we hear it? I asked.

Nothing easier, he replied; when he was a youth he made a careful study of the piece; at present his thoughts run in another direction; like his grandfather Antiphon he is devoted to horses. But, if that is what you want, let us go and look for him; he dwells at Melita, which is quite near, and he has only just left us to go home.

Accordingly we went to look for him; he was at home, and in the act of giving a bridle to a smith to be fitted. When he had done with the smith, his brothers told him the purpose of our visit; and he saluted me as an acquaintance whom he remembered from my former visit, and we asked him to repeat the dialogue. At first he was not very willing, and complained of the trouble, but at length he consented. He told us that Pythodorus had described to him the appearance of Parmenides and Zeno; they came to Athens, as he said, at the great Panathenaea; the former was, at the time of his visit, about 65 years old, very white with age, but well favored. Zeno was nearly 40 years of age, tall and fair to look upon; in the days of his youth he was reported to have been beloved by Parmenides. He said that they lodged with Pythodorus in the Ceramicus, outside the wall, whither Socrates, then a very young man, came to see them, and many others with him; they wanted to hear the writings of Zeno, which had been brought to Athens for the first time on the occasion of their visit. These Zeno himself

read to them in the absence of Parmenides, and had very nearly finished when Pythodorus entered, and with him Parmenides and Aristoteles who was afterwards one of the Thirty, and heard the little that remained of the dialogue. Pythodorus had heard Zeno repeat them before.

When the recitation was completed, Socrates requested that the first thesis of the first argument might be read over again, and this having been done, he said: What is your meaning, Zeno? Do you maintain that if being is many, it must be both like and unlike, and that this is impossible, for neither can the like be unlike, nor the unlike like—is that your position?

Just so, said Zeno.

And if the unlike cannot be like, or the like unlike, then according to you, being could not be many; for this would involve an impossibility. In all that you say have you any other purpose except to disprove the being of the many? And is not each division of your treatise intended to furnish a separate proof of this, there being in all as many proofs of the not-being of the many as you have composed arguments? Is that your meaning, or have I misunderstood you?

No, said Zeno; you have correctly understood my general purpose.

I see, Parmenides, said Socrates, that Zeno would like to be not only one with you in friendship but your second self in his writings too; he puts what you say in another way, and would fain make believe that he is telling us something which is new. For you, in your poems, say The All is one, and of this you adduce excellent proofs; and he on the other hand says There is no many; and on behalf of this he offers overwhelming evidence. You affirm unity, he denies plurality. And so you deceive the world into believing that you are saying different things when really you are saying much the same. This is a strain of art beyond the reach of most of us.

Yes, Socrates, said Zeno. But although you are as keen as a Spartan hound in pursuing the track, you do not fully apprehend the true motive of the composition, which is not really such an artificial work as you imagine; for what you speak of was an accident; there was no pretence of a great purpose; nor any serious intention of deceiving the world. The truth is, that these writings of mine were meant to protect the arguments of Parmenides against those who make fun of him and seek to show the many ridiculous and contradictory results which they suppose to follow from the affirmation of the one. My answer is addressed to the partisans of the many, whose attack I return with interest by retorting upon them that their hypothesis of the being of many, if carried out, appears to be still more ridiculous than the hypothesis of the being of one. Zeal for my master led me to write the book in the days of my youth, but some one stole the copy; and therefore I had no choice whether it should be published or not; the motive, however, of writing, was not the ambition of an elder man, but the pugnacity of a young one. This you do not seem to see, Socrates; though in other respects, as I was saying, your notion is a very just one.

I understand, said Socrates, and quite accept your account. But tell me, Zeno, do you not further think that

there is an idea of likeness in itself, and another idea of unlikeness, which is the opposite of likeness, and that in these two, you and I and all other things to which we apply the term many, participate—things which participate in likeness become in that degree and manner like; and so far as they participate in unlikeness become in that degree unlike, or both like and unlike in the degree in which they participate in both? And may not all things partake of both opposites, and be both like and unlike, by reason of this participation?—Where is the wonder? Now if a person could prove the absolute like to become unlike, or the absolute unlike to become like, that, in my opinion, would indeed be a wonder; but there is nothing extraordinary, Zeno, in showing that the things which only partake of likeness and unlikeness experience both. Nor, again, if a person were to show that all is one by partaking of one, and at the same time many by partaking of many, would that be very astonishing. But if he were to show me that the absolute one was many, or the absolute many one, I should be truly amazed. And so of all the rest: I should be surprised to hear that the natures or ideas themselves had these opposite qualities; but not if a person wanted to prove of me that I was many and also one. When he wanted to show that I was many he would say that I have a right and a left side, and a front and a back, and an upper and a lower half, for I cannot deny that I partake of multitude; when, on the other hand, he wants to prove that I am one, he will say, that we who are here assembled are seven, and that I am one and partake of the one. In both instances he proves his case. So again, if a person shows that such things as wood, stones, and the like, being many are also one, we admit that he shows the coexistence of the one and many, but he does not show that the many are one or the one many; he is uttering not a paradox but a truism. If however, as I just now suggested, some one were to abstract simple notions of like, unlike, one, many, rest, motion, and similar ideas, and then to show that these admit of admixture and separation in themselves, I should be very much astonished. This part of the argument appears to be treated by you, Zeno, in a very spirited manner; but, as I was saying, I should be far more amazed if any one found in the ideas themselves which are apprehended by reason, the same puzzle and entanglement which you have shown to exist in visible objects.

While Socrates was speaking, Pythodorus thought that Parmenides and Zeno were not altogether pleased at the successive steps of the argument; but still they gave the closest attention, and often looked at one another, and smiled as if in admiration of him. When he had finished, Parmenides expressed their feelings in the following words:

Socrates, he said, I admire the bent of your mind towards philosophy; tell me now, was this your own distinction between ideas in themselves and the things which partake of them? and do you think that there is an idea of likeness apart from the likeness which we possess, and of the one and many, and of the other things which Zeno mentioned?

I think that there are such ideas, said Socrates.

Parmenides proceeded: And would you also make absolute ideas of the just and the beautiful and the good, and of all that class?

Yes, he said, I should.

And would you make an idea of man apart from us and from all other human creatures, or of fire and water?

I am often undecided, Parmenides, as to whether I ought to include them or not.

And would you feel equally undecided, Socrates, about things of which the mention may provoke a smile?—I mean such things as hair, mud, dirt, or anything else which is vile and paltry; would you suppose that each of these has an idea distinct from the actual objects with which we come into contact, or not?

Certainly not, said Socrates; visible things like these are such as they appear to us, and I am afraid that there would be an absurdity in assuming any idea of them, although I sometimes get disturbed, and begin to think that there is nothing without an idea; but then again, when I have taken up this position, I run away, because I am afraid that I may fall into a bottomless pit of nonsense, and perish; and so I return to the ideas of which I was just now speaking, and occupy myself with them.

Yes, Socrates, said Parmenides; that is because you are still young; the time will come, if I am not mistaken, when philosophy will have a firmer grasp of you, and then you will not despise even the meanest things; at your age, you are too much disposed to regard the opinions of men. But I should like to know whether you mean that there are certain ideas of which all other things partake, and from which they derive their names; that similars, for example, become similar, because they partake of similarity; and great things become great, because they partake of greatness; and that just and beautiful things become just and beautiful, because they partake of justice and beauty?

Yes, certainly, said Socrates that is my meaning.

Then each individual partakes either of the whole of the idea or else of a part of the idea? Can there be any other mode of participation?

There cannot be, he said.

Then do you think that the whole idea is one, and yet, being one, is in each one of the many?

Why not, Parmenides? said Socrates.

Because one and the same thing will exist as a whole at the same time in many separate individuals, and will therefore be in a state of separation from itself.

Nay, but the idea may be like the day which is one and the same in many places at once, and yet continuous with itself; in this way each idea may be one and the same in all at the same time.

I like your way, Socrates, of making one in many places at once. You mean to say, that if I were to spread out a sail and cover a number of men, there would be one whole including many—is not that your meaning?

I think so.

And would you say that the whole sail includes each man, or a part of it only, and different parts different men?

The latter.

Then, Socrates, the ideas themselves will be divisible, and things which participate in them will have a part of them only and not the whole idea existing in each of them?

That seems to follow.

Then would you like to say, Socrates, that the one idea is really divisible and yet remains one?

Certainly not, he said.

Suppose that you divide absolute greatness, and that of the many great things, each one is great in virtue of a portion of greatness less than absolute greatness—is that conceivable?

No.

Or will each equal thing, if possessing some small portion of equality less than absolute equality, be equal to some other thing by virtue of that portion only?

Impossible.

Or suppose one of us to have a portion of smallness; this is but a part of the small, and therefore the absolutely small is greater; if the absolutely small be greater, that to which the part of the small is added will be smaller and not greater than before.

How absurd!

Then in what way, Socrates, will all things participate in the ideas, if they are unable to participate in them either as parts or wholes?

Indeed, he said, you have asked a question which is not easily answered.

Well, said Parmenides, and what do you say of another question?

What question?

I imagine that the way in which you are led to assume one idea of each kind is as follows: You see a number of great objects, and when you look at them there seems to you to be one and the same idea (or nature) in them all; hence you conceive of greatness as one.

Very true, said Socrates.

And if you go on and allow your mind in like manner to embrace in one view the idea of greatness and of great things which are not the idea, and to compare them, will not another greatness arise, which will appear to be the source of all these?

It would seem so.

Then another idea of greatness now comes into view over and above absolute greatness, and the individuals which partake of it; and then another, over and above all these, by virtue of which they will all be great, and so each idea instead of being one will be infinitely multiplied.

But may not the ideas, asked Socrates, be thoughts only, and have no proper existence except in our minds, Parmenides? For in that case each idea may still be one, and not experience this infinite multiplication.

And can there be individual thoughts which are thoughts of nothing?

Impossible, he said.

The thought must be of something?

Yes.

Of something which is or which is not?

Of something which is.

Must it not be of a single something, which the thought recognizes as attaching to all, being a single form or nature?

Yes.

And will not the something which is apprehended as one and the same in all, be an idea?

From that, again, there is no escape.

Then, said Parmenides, if you say that everything else participates in the ideas, must you not say either that everything is made up of thoughts, and that all things think; or that they are thoughts but have no thought?

The latter view, Parmenides, is no more rational than the previous one. In my opinion, the ideas are, as it were, patterns fixed in nature, and other things are like them, and resemblances of them—what is meant by the participation of other things in the ideas, is really assimilation to them.

But if, said he, the individual is like the idea, must not the idea also be like the individual, in so far as the individual is a resemblance of the idea? That which is like, cannot be conceived of as other than the like of like.

Impossible.

And when two things are alike, must they not partake of the same idea?

They must.

And will not that of which the two partake, and which makes them alike, be the idea itself?

Certainly.

Then the idea cannot be like the individual, or the individual like the idea; for if they are alike, some further idea of likeness will always be coming to light, and if that be like anything else, another; and new ideas will be always arising, if the idea resembles that which partakes of it?

Quite true.

The theory, then, that other things participate in the ideas by resemblance, has to be given up, and some other mode of participation devised?

It would seem so.

Do you see then, Socrates, how great is the difficulty of affirming the ideas to be absolute?

Yes, indeed.

And, further, let me say that as yet you only understand a small part of the difficulty which is involved if you make of each thing a single idea, parting it off from other things.

What difficulty? he said.

There are many, but the greatest of all is this:—If an opponent argues that these ideas, being such as we say they ought to be, must remain unknown, no one can prove to him that he is wrong, unless he who denies their existence be a man of great ability and knowledge, and is willing to follow a long and laborious demonstration; he will remain unconvinced, and still insist that they cannot be known.

What do you mean, Parmenides? said Socrates.

In the first place, I think, Socrates, that you, or any one who maintains the existence of absolute essences, will admit that they cannot exist in us.

No, said Socrates; for then they would be no longer absolute.

True, he said; and therefore when ideas are what they are in relation to one another, their essence is determined by a relation among themselves, and has nothing to do with the resemblances, or whatever they are to be termed, which are in our sphere, and from which we receive this or that name when we partake of them. And the things which are within our sphere and have the same names with them, are likewise only relative to one another, and not to the ideas which have the same names with them, but belong to themselves and not to them.

What do you mean? said Socrates.

I may illustrate my meaning in this way, said Parmenides:—A master has a slave; now there is nothing absolute in the relation between them, which is simply a relation of one man to another. But there is also an idea of mastership in the abstract, which is relative to the idea of slavery in the abstract. These natures have nothing to do with us, nor we with them; they are concerned with themselves only, and we with ourselves. Do you see my meaning?

Yes, said Socrates, I quite see your meaning.

And will not knowledge—I mean absolute knowledge—answer to absolute truth?

Certainly.

And each kind of absolute knowledge will answer to each kind of absolute being?

Yes.

But the knowledge which we have, will answer to the truth which we have; and again, each kind of knowledge which we have, will be a knowledge of each kind of being which we have?

Certainly.

But the ideas themselves, as you admit, we have not, and cannot have?

No, we cannot.

And the absolute natures or kinds are known severally by the absolute idea of knowledge?

Yes.

And we have not got the idea of knowledge?

No.

Then none of the ideas are known to us, because we have no share in absolute knowledge?

I suppose not.

Then the nature of the beautiful in itself, and of the good in itself, and all other ideas which we suppose to exist absolutely, are unknown to us?

It would seem so.

I think that there is a stranger consequence still.

What is it?

Would you, or would you not say, that absolute knowledge, if there is such a thing, must be a far more exact knowledge than our knowledge; and the same of beauty and of the rest?

Yes.

And if there be such a thing as participation in absolute knowledge, no one is more likely than God to have this most exact knowledge?

Certainly.

But then, will God, having absolute knowledge, have a knowledge of human things?

Why not?

Because, Socrates, said Parmenides, we have admitted that the ideas are not valid in relation to human things; nor human things in relation to them; the relations of either are limited to their respective spheres.

Yes, that has been admitted.

And if God has this perfect authority, and perfect knowledge, his authority cannot rule us, nor his knowledge know us, or any human thing; just as our authority does not extend to the gods, nor our knowledge know anything which is divine, so by parity of reason they, being gods, are not our masters, neither do they know the things of men.

Yet, surely, said Socrates, to deprive God of knowledge is monstrous.

These, Socrates, said Parmenides, are a few, and only a few of the difficulties in which we are involved if ideas

really are and we determine each one of them to be an absolute unity. He who hears what may be said against them will deny the very existence of

them—and even if they do exist, he will say that they must of necessity be unknown to man; and he will seem to have reason on his side, and as we were remarking just now, will be very difficult to convince; a man must be gifted with very considerable ability before he can learn that everything has a class and an absolute essence; and still more remarkable will he be who discovers all these things for himself, and having thoroughly investigated them is able to teach them to others.

I agree with you, Parmenides, said Socrates; and what you say is very much to my mind.

And yet, Socrates, said Parmenides, if a man, fixing his attention on these and the like difficulties, does away with ideas of things and will not admit that every individual thing has its own determinate idea which is always one and the same, he will have nothing on which his mind can rest; and so he will utterly destroy the power of reasoning, as you seem to me to have particularly noted.

Very true, he said.

But, then, what is to become of philosophy? Whither shall we turn, if the ideas are unknown?

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Plato, “Parmenides Dialogue,” in *Plato in 12 Volumes*, trans. Harold North Flower, vol. 9, 12 vols. (London: Harvard University Press, 1966), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg009.perseus-eng1:126>.

The use of this work is governed by the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License.



This work (Parmenides by Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SYMPOSIUM

Plato

Symposium

By Plato

Written 360 B.C.E

Translated by Benjamin Jowett

Persons of the Dialogue

APOLLODORUS, who repeats to his companion the dialogue which he had heard from Aristodemus, and had already once narrated to Glauco

PHAEDRUS

PAUSANIAS

ERYXIMACHUS

ARISTOPHANES

AGATHON

SOCRATES

ALCIBIADES

A TROOP OF REVELLERS

Scene

The House of Agathon.

Concerning the things about which you ask to be informed I believe that I am not ill-prepared with an answer. For the day before yesterday I was coming from my own home at Phalerum to the city, and one of my acquaintance, who had caught a sight of me from behind, hind, out playfully in the distance, said: Apollodorus, O thou Phalerian man, halt! So I did as I was bid; and then he said, I was looking for you, Apollodorus, only just now, that I might ask you about the speeches in praise of love, which were delivered by Socrates, Alcibiades, and others, at Agathon's supper. Phoenix, the son of Philip, told another person who told me of them; his narrative was very indistinct, but he said that you knew, and I wish that you would give me an account of them. Who, if not you, should be the reporter of the words of your friend? And first tell me, he said, were you present at this meeting?

Your informant, Glaucon, I said, must have been very indistinct indeed, if you imagine that the occasion was recent; or that I could have been of the party.

Why, yes, he replied, I thought so.

Impossible: I said. Are you ignorant that for many years Agathon has not resided at Athens; and not three have elapsed since I became acquainted with Socrates, and have made it my daily business to know all that he says and does. There was a time when I was running about the world, fancying myself to be well employed, but I was really a most wretched thing, no better than you are now. I thought that I ought to do anything rather than be a philosopher.

Well, he said, jesting apart, tell me when the meeting occurred.

In our boyhood, I replied, when Agathon won the prize with his first tragedy, on the day after that on which he and his chorus offered the sacrifice of victory.

Then it must have been a long while ago, he said; and who told you-did Socrates?

No indeed, I replied, but the same person who told Phoenix;-he was a little fellow, who never wore any shoes Aristodemus, of the deme of Cydathenaeum. He had been at Agathon's feast; and I think that in those days there was no one who was a more devoted admirer of Socrates. Moreover, I have asked Socrates about the truth of some parts of his narrative, and he confirmed them. Then, said Glaucon, let us have the tale over again; is not the road to Athens just made for conversation? And so we walked, and talked of the discourses on love; and therefore, as I said at first, I am not ill-prepared to comply with your request, and will have another rehearsal of them if you like. For to speak or to hear others speak of philosophy always gives me the greatest pleasure, to say nothing of the profit. But when I hear another strain, especially that of you rich men and traders, such conversation displeases me; and I pity you who are my companions, because you think that you are doing something when in reality you are doing nothing. And I dare say that you pity me in return, whom you regard as an unhappy creature, and very probably you are right. But I certainly know of you what you only think of me-there is the difference.

Companion. I see, Apollodorus, that you are just the same-always speaking evil of yourself, and of others; and I do believe that you pity all mankind, with the exception of Socrates, yourself first of all, true in this to your old name, which, however deserved I know how you acquired, of Apollodorus the madman; for you are always raging against yourself and everybody but Socrates.

Apollodorus. Yes, friend, and the reason why I am said to be mad, and out of my wits, is just because I have these notions of myself and you; no other evidence is required.

Com. No more of that, Apollodorus; but let me renew my request that you would repeat the conversation.

Apoll. Well, the tale of love was on this wise:-But perhaps I had better begin at the beginning, and endeavour to give you the exact words of Aristodemus:

He said that he met Socrates fresh from the bath and sandalled; and as the sight of the sandals was unusual, he asked him whither he was going that he had been converted into such a beau:-

To a banquet at Agathon's, he replied, whose invitation to his sacrifice of victory I refused yesterday, fearing a crowd, but promising that I would come to-day instead; and so I have put on my finery, because he is such a fine man. What say you to going with me unasked?

I will do as you bid me, I replied.

Follow then, he said, and let us demolish the proverb:

To the feasts of inferior men the good unbidden go; instead of which our proverb will run:-

To the feasts of the good the good unbidden go; and this alteration may be supported by the authority of Homer himself, who not only demolishes but literally outrages the proverb. For, after picturing Agamemnon as the most valiant of men, he makes Menelaus, who is but a fainthearted warrior, come unbidden to the banquet of Agamemnon, who is feasting and offering sacrifices, not the better to the worse, but the worse to the better.

I rather fear, Socrates, said Aristodemus, lest this may still be my case; and that, like Menelaus in Homer, I shall be the inferior person, who

To the feasts of the wise unbidden goes. But I shall say that I was bidden of you, and then you will have to make an excuse.

Two going together, he replied, in Homeric fashion, one or other of them may invent an excuse by the way.

This was the style of their conversation as they went along. Socrates dropped behind in a fit of abstraction, and desired Aristodemus, who was waiting, to go on before him. When he reached the house of Agathon he found the doors wide open, and a comical thing happened. A servant coming out met him, and led him at once into the banqueting-hall in which the guests were reclining, for the banquet was about to begin. Welcome, Aristodemus, said Agathon, as soon as he appeared-you are just in time to sup with us; if you come on any other matter put it off, and make one of us, as I was looking for you yesterday and meant to have asked you, if I could have found you. But what have you done with Socrates?

I turned round, but Socrates was nowhere to be seen; and I had to explain that he had been with me a moment before, and that I came by his invitation to the supper.

You were quite right in coming, said Agathon; but where is he himself?

He was behind me just now, as I entered, he said, and I cannot think what has become of him.

Go and look for him, boy, said Agathon, and bring him in; and do you, Aristodemus, meanwhile take the place by Eryximachus.

The servant then assisted him to wash, and he lay down, and presently another servant came in and reported that our friend Socrates had retired into the portico of the neighbouring house. "There he is fixed," said he, "and when I call to him he will not stir."

How strange, said Agathon; then you must call him again, and keep calling him.

Let him alone, said my informant; he has a way of stopping anywhere and losing himself without any reason. I believe that he will soon appear; do not therefore disturb him.

Well, if you think so, I will leave him, said Agathon. And then, turning to the servants, he added, "Let us have supper without waiting for him. Serve up whatever you please, for there; is no one to give you orders; hitherto I have never left you to yourselves. But on this occasion imagine that you are our hosts, and that I and the company are your guests; treat us well, and then we shall commend you." After this, supper was served, but still no-Socrates; and during the meal Agathon several times expressed a wish to send for him, but Aristodemus objected; and at last when the feast was about half over-for the fit, as usual, was not of long duration-Socrates entered; Agathon, who was reclining alone at the end of the table, begged that he would take the place next to him; that "I may touch you," he said, "and have the benefit of that wise thought which came into your mind in the portico, and is now in your possession; for I am certain that you would not have come away until you had found what you sought."

How I wish, said Socrates, taking his place as he was desired, that wisdom could be infused by touch, out of the fuller the emptier man, as water runs through wool out of a fuller cup into an emptier one; if that were so, how greatly should I value the privilege of reclining at your side! For you would have filled me full with a stream of wisdom plenteous and fair; whereas my own is of a very mean and questionable sort, no better than a dream. But yours is bright and full of promise, and was manifested forth in all the splendour of youth the day before yesterday, in the presence of more than thirty thousand Hellenes.

You are mocking, Socrates, said Agathon, and ere long you and I will have to determine who bears off the palm of wisdom-of this Dionysus shall be the judge; but at present you are better occupied with supper.

Socrates took his place on the couch, and supped with the rest; and then libations were offered, and after a hymn had been sung to the god, and there had been the usual ceremonies, they were about to commence drinking, when Pausanias said, And now, my friends, how can we drink with least injury to ourselves? I can assure you that I feel severely the effect of yesterday's potations, and must have time to recover; and I suspect that most of you are in the same predicament, for you were of the party yesterday. Consider then: How can the drinking be made easiest?

I entirely agree, said Aristophanes, that we should, by all means, avoid hard drinking, for I was myself one of those who were yesterday drowned in drink.

I think that you are right, said Eryximachus, the son of Acumenus; but I should still like to hear one other person speak: Is Agathon able to drink hard?

I am not equal to it, said Agathon.

Then, the Eryximachus, the weak heads like myself, Aristodemus, Phaedrus, and others who never can drink, are fortunate in finding that the stronger ones are not in a drinking mood. (I do not include Socrates, who is able either to drink or to abstain, and will not mind, whichever we do.) Well, as of none of the company seem disposed to drink much, I may be forgiven for saying, as a physician, that drinking deep is a bad practice, which I never follow, if I can help, and certainly do not recommend to another, least of all to any one who still feels the effects of yesterday's carouse.

I always do what you advise, and especially what you prescribe as a physician, rejoined Phaedrus the Myrrhinusian, and the rest of the company, if they are wise, will do the same.

It was agreed that drinking was not to be the order of the day, but that they were all to drink only so much as they pleased.

Then, said Eryximachus, as you are all agreed that drinking is to be voluntary, and that there is to be no compulsion, I move, in the next place, that the flute-girl, who has just made her appearance, be told to go away and play to herself, or, if she likes, to the women who are within. To-day let us have conversation instead; and, if you will allow me, I will tell you what sort of conversation. This proposal having been accepted, Eryximachus proceeded as follows:-

I will begin, he said, after the manner of Melanippe in Euripides,

Not mine the word which I am about to speak, but that of Phaedrus. For often he says to me in an indignant tone: "What a strange thing it is, Eryximachus, that, whereas other gods have poems and hymns made in their honour, the great and glorious god, Love, has no encomiast among all the poets who are so many. There are the worthy sophists too-the excellent Prodicus for example, who have descanted in prose on the virtues of Heracles and other heroes; and, what is still more extraordinary, I have met with a philosophical work in which the utility of salt has been made the theme of an eloquent discourse; and many other like things have had a like honour bestowed upon them. And only to think that there should have been an eager interest created about them, and yet that to this day no one has ever dared worthily to hymn Love's praises! So entirely has this great deity been neglected." Now in this Phaedrus seems to me to be quite right, and therefore I want to offer him a contribution; also I think that at the present moment we who are here assembled cannot do better than honour the god Love. If you agree with me, there will be no lack of conversation; for I mean to propose that each of us in turn, going from left to right, shall make a speech in honour of Love. Let him give us the best which he can; and Phaedrus, because he is sitting first on the left hand, and because he is the father of the thought, shall begin.

No one will vote against you, Eryximachus, said Socrates. How can I oppose your motion, who profess to understand nothing but matters of love; nor, I presume, will Agathon and Pausanias; and there can be no doubt of Aristophanes, whose whole concern is with Dionysus and Aphrodite; nor will any one disagree of those whom I, see around me. The proposal, as I am aware, may seem rather hard upon us whose place is last; but we shall be contented if we hear some good speeches first. Let Phaedrus begin the praise of Love, and good luck to him. All the company expressed their assent, and desired him to do as Socrates bade him.

Aristodemus did not recollect all that was said, nor do I recollect all that he related to me; but I will tell you what I thought most worthy of remembrance, and what the chief speakers said.

Phaedrus began by affirming that love is a mighty god, and wonderful among gods and men, but especially wonderful in his birth. For he is the eldest of the gods, which is an honour to him; and a proof of his claim to this honour is, that of his parents there is no memorial; neither poet nor prose-writer has ever affirmed that he had any. As Hesiod says:

First Chaos came, and then broad-bosomed Earth,
The everlasting seat of all that is,

And Love. In other words, after Chaos, the Earth and Love, these two, came into being. Also Parmenides sings of Generation:

First in the train of gods, he fashioned Love. And Acusilaus agrees with Hesiod. Thus numerous are the witnesses who acknowledge Love to be the eldest of the gods. And not only is he the eldest, he is also the source of the greatest benefits to us. For I know not any greater blessing to a young man who is beginning life than a virtuous lover or to the lover than a beloved youth. For the principle which ought to be the guide of men who would nobly live at principle, I say, neither kindred, nor honour, nor wealth, nor any other motive is able to implant so well as love. Of what am I speaking? Of the sense of honour and dishonour, without which neither states nor individuals ever do any good or great work. And I say that a lover who is detected in doing any dishonourable act, or submitting through cowardice when any dishonour is done to him by another, will be more pained at being detected by his beloved than at being seen by his father, or by his companions, or by any one else. The beloved too, when he is found in any disgraceful situation, has the same feeling about his lover. And if there were only some way of contriving that a state or an army should be made up of lovers and their loves, they would be the very best governors of their own city, abstaining from all dishonour, and emulating one another in honour; and when fighting at each other's side, although a mere handful, they would overcome the world. For what lover would not choose rather to be seen by all mankind than by his beloved, either when abandoning his post or throwing away his arms? He would be ready to die a thousand deaths rather than endure this. Or who would desert his beloved or fail him in the hour of danger? The veriest coward would become an inspired hero, equal to the bravest, at such a time; Love would inspire him. That courage which, as Homer says, the god breathes into the souls of some heroes, Love of his own nature infuses into the lover.

Love will make men dare to die for their beloved-love alone; and women as well as men. Of this, Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias, is a monument to all Hellas; for she was willing to lay down her life on behalf of her husband, when no one else would, although he had a father and mother; but the tenderness of her love so far exceeded theirs, that she made them seem to be strangers in blood to their own son, and in name only related to him; and so noble did this action of hers appear to the gods, as well as to men, that among the many who have done virtuously she is one of the very few to whom, in admiration of her noble action, they have granted the privilege of returning alive to earth; such exceeding honour is paid by the gods to the devotion and virtue of love. But Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus, the harper, they sent empty away, and presented to him an apparition only of her whom he sought, but herself they would not give up, because he showed no spirit; he was only a harp-player, and did not-dare like Alcestis to die for love, but was contriving how he might enter hades alive; moreover, they afterwards caused him to suffer death at the hands of women, as the punishment of his cowardliness. Very different was the reward of the true love of Achilles towards his lover Patroclus-his lover and not his love (the notion that Patroclus was the beloved one is a foolish error into which Aeschylus has fallen, for Achilles was surely the fairer of the two, fairer also than all the other heroes; and, as Homer informs us, he was still beardless, and younger far). And greatly as the gods honour the virtue of love, still the return of love on the part of the beloved to the lover is more admired and valued and rewarded by them, for the lover is more divine; because he is inspired by God. Now Achilles was quite aware, for he had been told by his mother, that he might avoid death and return home, and live to a good old age, if he abstained from slaying Hector. Nevertheless he gave his life to revenge his friend, and dared to die, not only in his defence, but after he was dead Wherefore the gods honoured him even above Alcestis, and sent him to the Islands of the Blest. These are my reasons for affirming that Love is the eldest and noblest and mightiest of the gods; and the chiefest author and giver of virtue in life, and of happiness after death.

This, or something like this, was the speech of Phaedrus; and some other speeches followed which Aristodemus did not remember; the next which he repeated was that of Pausanias. Phaedrus, he said, the argument has not been set before us, I think, quite in the right form;-we should not be called upon to praise Love in such an indiscriminate manner. If there were only one Love, then what you said would be well enough; but since there are more Loves than one,-should have begun by determining which of them was to be the theme of our praises. I will amend this defect; and first of all I would tell you which Love is deserving of praise, and then try to hymn the praiseworthy one in a manner worthy of him. For we all know that Love is inseparable from Aphrodite, and if there were only one Aphrodite there would be only one Love; but as there are two goddesses there must be two Loves.

And am I not right in asserting that there are two goddesses? The elder one, having no mother, who is called the heavenly Aphrodite-she is the daughter of Uranus; the younger, who is the daughter of Zeus and Dione-her we call common; and the Love who is her fellow-worker is rightly named common, as the other love is called heavenly. All the gods ought to have praise given to them, but not without distinction of their natures; and therefore I must try to distinguish the characters of the two Loves. Now actions vary according to the

manner of their performance. Take, for example, that which we are now doing, drinking, singing and talking these actions are not in themselves either good or evil, but they turn out in this or that way according to the mode of performing them; and when well done they are good, and when wrongly done they are evil; and in like manner not every love, but only that which has a noble purpose, is noble and worthy of praise. The Love who is the offspring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, and has no discrimination, being such as the meaner sort of men feel, and is apt to be of women as well as of youths, and is of the body rather than of the soul-the most foolish beings are the objects of this love which desires only to gain an end, but never thinks of accomplishing the end nobly, and therefore does good and evil quite indiscriminately. The goddess who is his mother is far younger than the other, and she was born of the union of the male and female, and partakes of both.

But the offspring of the heavenly Aphrodite is derived from a mother in whose birth the female has no part,- she is from the male only; this is that love which is of youths, and the goddess being older, there is nothing of wantonness in her. Those who are inspired by this love turn to the male, and delight in him who is the more valiant and intelligent nature; any one may recognise the pure enthusiasts in the very character of their attachments. For they love not boys, but intelligent, beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time at which their beards begin to grow. And in choosing young men to be their companions, they mean to be faithful to them, and pass their whole life in company with them, not to take them in their inexperience, and deceive them, and play the fool with them, or run away from one to another of them. But the love of young boys should be forbidden by law, because their future is uncertain; they may turn out good or bad, either in body or soul, and much noble enthusiasm may be thrown away upon them; in this matter the good are a law to themselves, and the coarser sort of lovers ought to be restrained by force; as we restrain or attempt to restrain them from fixing their affections on women of free birth. These are the persons who bring a reproach on love; and some have been led to deny the lawfulness of such attachments because they see the impropriety and evil of them; for surely nothing that is decorously and lawfully done can justly be censured.

Now here and in Lacedaemon the rules about love are perplexing, but in most cities they are simple and easily intelligible; in Elis and Boeotia, and in countries having no gifts of eloquence, they are very straightforward; the law is simply in favour of these connexions, and no one, whether young or old, has anything to say to their discredit; the reason being, as I suppose, that they are men of few words in those parts, and therefore the lovers do not like the trouble of pleading their suit. In Ionia and other places, and generally in countries which are subject to the barbarians, the custom is held to be dishonourable; loves of youths share the evil reputation in which philosophy and gymnastics are held because they are inimical to tyranny; for the interests of rulers require that their subjects should be poor in spirit and that there should be no strong bond of friendship or society among them, which love, above all other motives, is likely to inspire, as our Athenian tyrants-learned by experience; for the love of Aristogeiton and the constancy of Harmodius had strength which undid their power. And, therefore, the ill-repute into which these attachments have fallen is to be ascribed to the evil condition of those who make them to be ill-reputed; that is to say, to the self-seeking of the governors and the cowardice

of the governed; on the other hand, the indiscriminate honour which is given to them in some countries is attributable to the laziness of those who hold this opinion of them. In our own country a far better principle prevails, but, as I was saying, the explanation of it is rather perplexing. For, observe that open loves are held to be more honourable than secret ones, and that the love of the noblest and highest, even if their persons are less beautiful than others, is especially honourable.

Consider, too, how great is the encouragement which all the world gives to the lover; neither is he supposed to be doing anything dishonourable; but if he succeeds he is praised, and if he fail he is blamed. And in the pursuit of his love the custom of mankind allows him to do many strange things, which philosophy would bitterly censure if they were done from any motive of interest, or wish for office or power. He may pray, and entreat, and supplicate, and swear, and lie on a mat at the door, and endure a slavery worse than that of any slave-in any other case friends and enemies would be equally ready to prevent him, but now there is no friend who will be ashamed of him and admonish him, and no enemy will charge him with meanness or flattery; the actions of a lover have a grace which ennobles them; and custom has decided that they are highly commendable and that there no loss of character in them; and, what is strangest of all, he only may swear and forswear himself (so men say), and the gods will forgive his transgression, for there is no such thing as a lover's oath. Such is the entire liberty which gods and men have allowed the lover, according to the custom which prevails in our part of the world. From this point of view a man fairly argues in Athens to love and to be loved is held to be a very honourable thing. But when parents forbid their sons to talk with their lovers, and place them under a tutor's care, who is appointed to see to these things, and their companions and equals cast in their teeth anything of the sort which they may observe, and their elders refuse to silence the reprovers and do not rebuke them-any one who reflects on all this will, on the contrary, think that we hold these practices to be most disgraceful. But, as I was saying at first, the truth as I imagine is, that whether such practices are honourable or whether they are dishonourable is not a simple question; they are honourable to him who follows them honourably, dishonourable to him who follows them dishonourably. There is dishonour in yielding to the evil, or in an evil manner; but there is honour in yielding to the good, or in an honourable manner.

Evil is the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul, inasmuch as he is not even stable, because he loves a thing which is in itself unstable, and therefore when the bloom of youth which he was desiring is over, he takes wing and flies away, in spite of all his words and promises; whereas the love of the noble disposition is life-long, for it becomes one with the everlasting. The custom of our country would have both of them proven well and truly, and would have us yield to the one sort of lover and avoid the other, and therefore encourages some to pursue, and others to fly; testing both the lover and beloved in contests and trials, until they show to which of the two classes they respectively belong. And this is the reason why, in the first place, a hasty attachment is held to be dishonourable, because time is the true test of this as of most other things; and secondly there is a dishonour in being overcome by the love of money, or of wealth, or of political power, whether a man is frightened into surrender by the loss of them, or, having experienced the benefits of money and political corruption, is unable to rise above the seductions of them. For none of these

things are of a permanent or lasting nature; not to mention that no generous friendship ever sprang from them. There remains, then, only one way of honourable attachment which custom allows in the beloved, and this is the way of virtue; for as we admitted that any service which the lover does to him is not to be accounted flattery or a dishonour to himself, so the beloved has one way only of voluntary service which is not dishonourable, and this is virtuous service.

For we have a custom, and according to our custom any one who does service to another under the idea that he will be improved by him either in wisdom, or, in some other particular of virtue-such a voluntary service, I say, is not to be regarded as a dishonour, and is not open to the charge of flattery. And these two customs, one the love of youth, and the other the practice of philosophy and virtue in general, ought to meet in one, and then the beloved may honourably indulge the lover. For when the lover and beloved come together, having each of them a law, and the lover thinks that he is right in doing any service which he can to his gracious loving one; and the other that he is right in showing any kindness which he can to him who is making him wise and good; the one capable of communicating wisdom and virtue, the other seeking to acquire them with a view to education and wisdom, when the two laws of love are fulfilled and meet in one-then, and then only, may the beloved yield with honour to the lover. Nor when love is of this disinterested sort is there any disgrace in being deceived, but in every other case there is equal disgrace in being or not being deceived. For he who is gracious to his lover under the impression that he is rich, and is disappointed of his gains because he turns out to be poor, is disgraced all the same: for he has done his best to show that he would give himself up to any one's "uses base" for the sake of money; but this is not honourable. And on the same principle he who gives himself to a lover because he is a good man, and in the hope that he will be improved by his company, shows himself to be virtuous, even though the object of his affection turn out to be a villain, and to have no virtue; and if he is deceived he has committed a noble error. For he has proved that for his part he will do anything for anybody with a view to virtue and improvement, than which there can be nothing nobler. Thus noble in every case is the acceptance of another for the sake of virtue. This is that love which is the love of the heavenly goddess, and is heavenly, and of great price to individuals and cities, making the lover and the beloved alike eager in the work of their own improvement. But all other loves are the offspring of the other, who is the common goddess. To you, Phaedrus, I offer this my contribution in praise of love, which is as good as I could make extempore.

Pausanias came to a pause-this is the balanced way in which I have been taught by the wise to speak; and Aristodemus said that the turn of Aristophanes was next, but either he had eaten too much, or from some other cause he had the hiccough, and was obliged to change turns with Eryximachus the physician, who was reclining on the couch below him. Eryximachus, he said, you ought either to stop my hiccough, or to speak in my turn until I have left off.

I will do both, said Eryximachus: I will speak in your turn, and do you speak in mine; and while I am speaking let me recommend you to hold your breath, and if after you have done so for some time the hiccough is no better, then gargle with a little water; and if it still continues, tickle your nose with something and sneeze;

and if you sneeze once or twice, even the most violent hiccough is sure to go. I will do as you prescribe, said Aristophanes, and now get on.

Eryximachus spoke as follows: Seeing that Pausanias made a fair beginning, and but a lame ending, I must endeavour to supply his deficiency. I think that he has rightly distinguished two kinds of love. But my art further informs me that the double love is not merely an affection of the soul of man towards the fair, or towards anything, but is to be found in the bodies of all animals and in productions of the earth, and I may say in all that is; such is the conclusion which I seem to have gathered from my own art of medicine, whence I learn how great and wonderful and universal is the deity of love, whose empire extends over all things, divine as well as human. And from medicine I would begin that I may do honour to my art. There are in the human body these two kinds of love, which are confessedly different and unlike, and being unlike, they have loves and desires which are unlike; and the desire of the healthy is one, and the desire of the diseased is another; and as Pausanias was just now saying that to indulge good men is honourable, and bad men dishonourable:-so too in the body the good and healthy elements are to be indulged, and the bad elements and the elements of disease are not to be indulged, but discouraged. And this is what the physician has to do, and in this the art of medicine consists: for medicine may be regarded generally as the knowledge of the loves and desires of the body, and how to satisfy them or not; and the best physician is he who is able to separate fair love from foul, or to convert one into the other; and he who knows how to eradicate and how to implant love, whichever is required, and can reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends, is skilful practitioner. Now the: most hostile are the most opposite, such as hot and cold, bitter and sweet, moist and dry, and the like. And my ancestor, Asclepius, knowing how-to implant friendship and accord in these elements, was the creator of our art, as our friends the poets here tell us, and I believe them; and not only medicine in every branch but the arts of gymnastic and husbandry are under his dominion.

Any one who pays the least attention to the subject will also perceive that in music there is the same reconciliation of opposites; and I suppose that this must have been the meaning, of Heracleitus, although, his words are not accurate, for he says that is united by disunion, like the harmony-of bow and the lyre. Now there is an absurdity saying that harmony is discord or is composed of elements which are still in a state of discord. But what he probably meant was, that, harmony is composed of differing notes of higher or lower pitch which disagreed once, but are now reconciled by the art of music; for if the higher and lower notes still disagreed, there could be there could be no harmony-clearly not. For harmony is a symphony, and symphony is an agreement; but an agreement of disagreements while they disagree there cannot be; you cannot harmonize that which disagrees. In like manner rhythm is compounded of elements short and long, once differing and now-in accord; which accordance, as in the former instance, medicine, so in all these other cases, music implants, making love and unison to grow up among them; and thus music, too, is concerned with the principles of love in their application to harmony and rhythm. Again, in the essential nature of harmony and rhythm there is no difficulty in discerning love which has not yet become double. But when you want to use them in actual life, either in the composition of songs or in the correct performance of airs or metres composed already, which

latter is called education, then the difficulty begins, and the good artist is needed. Then the old tale has to be repeated of fair and heavenly love -the love of Urania the fair and heavenly muse, and of the duty of accepting the temperate, and those who are as yet intemperate only that they may become temperate, and of preserving their love; and again, of the vulgar Polyhymnia, who must be used with circumspection that the pleasure be enjoyed, but may not generate licentiousness; just as in my own art it is a great matter so to regulate the desires of the epicure that he may gratify his tastes without the attendant evil of disease. Whence I infer that in music, in medicine, in all other things human as which as divine, both loves ought to be noted as far as may be, for they are both present.

The course of the seasons is also full of both these principles; and when, as I was saying, the elements of hot and cold, moist and dry, attain the harmonious love of one another and blend in temperance and harmony, they bring to men, animals, and plants health and plenty, and do them no harm; whereas the wanton love, getting the upper hand and affecting the seasons of the year, is very destructive and injurious, being the source of pestilence, and bringing many other kinds of diseases on animals and plants; for hoar-frost and hail and blight spring from the excesses and disorders of these elements of love, which to know in relation to the revolutions of the heavenly bodies and the seasons of the year is termed astronomy. Furthermore all sacrifices and the whole province of divination, which is the art of communion between gods and men-these, I say, are concerned with the preservation of the good and the cure of the evil love. For all manner of impiety is likely to ensue if, instead of accepting and honouring and reverencing the harmonious love in all his actions, a man honours the other love, whether in his feelings towards gods or parents, towards the living or the dead. Wherefore the business of divination is to see to these loves and to heal them, and divination is the peacemaker of gods and men, working by a knowledge of the religious or irreligious tendencies which exist in human loves. Such is the great and mighty, or rather omnipotent force of love in general. And the love, more especially, which is concerned with the good, and which is perfected in company with temperance and justice, whether among gods or men, has the greatest power, and is the source of all our happiness and harmony, and makes us friends with the gods who are above us, and with one another. I dare say that I too have omitted several things which might be said in praise of Love, but this was not intentional, and you, Aristophanes, may now supply the omission or take some other line of commendation; for I perceive that you are rid of the hiccough.

Yes, said Aristophanes, who followed, the hiccough is gone; not, however, until I applied the sneezing; and I wonder whether the harmony of the body has a love of such noises and ticklings, for I no sooner applied the sneezing than I was cured.

Eryximachus said: Beware, friend Aristophanes, although you are going to speak, you are making fun of me; and I shall have to watch and see whether I cannot have a laugh at your expense, when you might speak in peace.

You are right, said Aristophanes, laughing. I will unsay my words; but do you please not to watch me, as I fear

that in the speech which I am about to make, instead of others laughing with me, which is to the manner born of our muse and would be all the better, I shall only be laughed at by them.

Do you expect to shoot your bolt and escape, Aristophanes? Well, perhaps if you are very careful and bear in mind that you will be called to account, I may be induced to let you off.

Aristophanes professed to open another vein of discourse; he had a mind to praise Love in another way, unlike that either of Pausanias or Eryximachus. Mankind; he said, judging by their neglect of him, have never, as I think, at all understood the power of Love. For if they had understood him they would surely have built noble temples and altars, and offered solemn sacrifices in his honour; but this is not done, and most certainly ought to be done: since of all the gods he is the best friend of men, the helper and the healer of the ills which are the great impediment to the happiness of the race. I will try to describe his power to you, and you shall teach the rest of the world what I am teaching you. In the first place, let me treat of the nature of man and what has happened to it; for the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word “Androgynous” is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men now do, backwards or forwards as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four feet, eight in all, like tumblers going over and over with their legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast. Now the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round: like their parents. Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods; of them is told the tale of Otys and Ephialtes who, as Homer says, dared to scale heaven, and would have laid hands upon the gods. Doubt reigned in the celestial councils. Should they kill them and annihilate the race with thunderbolts, as they had done the giants, then there would be an end of the sacrifices and worship which men offered to them; but, on the other hand, the gods could not suffer their insolence to be unrestrained.

At last, after a good deal of reflection, Zeus discovered a way. He said: “Methinks I have a plan which will humble their pride and improve their manners; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg.” He spoke and cut men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with a hair; and as he cut them one after another, he bade Apollo give the face and the half of the neck a turn in order that the man might contemplate

the section of himself: he would thus learn a lesson of humility. Apollo was also bidden to heal their wounds and compose their forms. So he gave a turn to the face and pulled the skin from the sides all over that which in our language is called the belly, like the purses which draw in, and he made one mouth at the centre, which he fastened in a knot (the same which is called the navel); he also moulded the breast and took out most of the wrinkles, much as a shoemaker might smooth leather upon a last; he left a few, however, in the region of the belly and navel, as a memorial of the primeval state. After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one, they were on the point of dying from hunger and self-neglect, because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate, man or woman as we call them, being the sections of entire men or women, and clung to that. They were being destroyed, when Zeus in pity of them invented a new plan: he turned the parts of generation round to the front, for this had not been always their position and they sowed the seed no longer as hitherto like grasshoppers in the ground, but in one another; and after the transposition the male generated in the female in order that by the mutual embraces of man and woman they might breed, and the race might continue; or if man came to man they might be satisfied, and rest, and go their ways to the business of life: so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man.

Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of a man, and he is always looking for his other half. Men who are a section of that double nature which was once called Androgynous are lovers of women; adulterers are generally of this breed, and also adulterous women who lust after men: the women who are a section of the woman do not care for men, but have female attachments; the female companions are of this sort. But they who are a section of the male follow the male, and while they are young, being slices of the original man, they hang about men and embrace them, and they are themselves the best of boys and youths, because they have the most manly nature. Some indeed assert that they are shameless, but this is not true; for they do not act thus from any want of shame, but because they are valiant and manly, and have a manly countenance, and they embrace that which is like them. And these when they grow up become our statesmen, and these only, which is a great proof of the truth of what I am saying. When they reach manhood they are loves of youth, and are not naturally inclined to marry or beget children, if at all, they do so only in obedience to the law; but they are satisfied if they may be allowed to live with one another unwedded; and such a nature is prone to love and ready to return love, always embracing that which is akin to him. And when one of them meets with his other half, the actual half of himself, whether he be a lover of youth or a lover of another sort, the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and would not be out of the other's sight, as I may say, even for a moment: these are the people who pass their whole lives together; yet they could not explain what they desire of one another. For the intense yearning which each of them has towards the other does not appear to be the desire of lover's intercourse, but of something else which the soul of either evidently desires and cannot tell, and of which she has only a dark and doubtful presentiment. Suppose Hephaestus, with his instruments, to come to the pair who are lying side, by side and to say to them,

“What do you people want of one another?” they would be unable to explain. And suppose further, that when he saw their perplexity he said: “Do you desire to be wholly one; always day and night to be in one another’s company? for if this is what you desire, I am ready to melt you into one and let you grow together, so that being two you shall become one, and while you live a common life as if you were a single man, and after your death in the world below still be one departed soul instead of two-I ask whether this is what you lovingly desire, and whether you are satisfied to attain this?”-there is not a man of them who when he heard the proposal would deny or would not acknowledge that this meeting and melting into one another, this becoming one instead of two, was the very expression of his ancient need. And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love. There was a time, I say, when we were one, but now because of the wickedness of mankind God has dispersed us, as the Arcadians were dispersed into villages by the Lacedaemonians. And if we are not obedient to the gods, there is a danger that we shall be split up again and go about in basso-relievo, like the profile figures having only half a nose which are sculptured on monuments, and that we shall be like tallies.

Wherefore let us exhort all men to piety, that we may avoid evil, and obtain the good, of which Love is to us the lord and minister; and let no one oppose him-he is the enemy of the gods who oppose him. For if we are friends of the God and at peace with him we shall find our own true loves, which rarely happens in this world at present. I am serious, and therefore I must beg Eryximachus not to make fun or to find any allusion in what I am saying to Pausanias and Agathon, who, as I suspect, are both of the manly nature, and belong to the class which I have been describing. But my words have a wider application-they include men and women everywhere; and I believe that if our loves were perfectly accomplished, and each one returning to his primeval nature had his original true love, then our race would be happy. And if this would be best of all, the best in the next degree and under present circumstances must be the nearest approach to such an union; and that will be the attainment of a congenial love. Wherefore, if we would praise him who has given to us the benefit, we must praise the god Love, who is our greatest benefactor, both leading us in this life back to our own nature, and giving us high hopes for the future, for he promises that if we are pious, he will restore us to our original state, and heal us and make us happy and blessed. This, Eryximachus, is my discourse of love, which, although different to yours, I must beg you to leave unassailed by the shafts of your ridicule, in order that each may have his turn; each, or rather either, for Agathon and Socrates are the only ones left.

Indeed, I am not going to attack you, said Eryximachus, for I thought your speech charming, and did I not know that Agathon and Socrates are masters in the art of love, I should be really afraid that they would have nothing to say, after the world of things which have been said already. But, for all that, I am not without hopes.

Socrates said: You played your part well, Eryximachus; but if you were as I am now, or rather as I shall be when Agathon has spoken, you would, indeed, be in a great strait.

You want to cast a spell over me, Socrates, said Agathon, in the hope that I may be disconcerted at the expectation raised among the audience that I shall speak well.

I should be strangely forgetful, Agathon replied Socrates, of the courage and magnanimity which you showed when your own compositions were about to be exhibited, and you came upon the stage with the actors and faced the vast theatre altogether undismayed, if I thought that your nerves could be fluttered at a small party of friends.

Do you think, Socrates, said Agathon, that my head is so full of the theatre as not to know how much more formidable to a man of sense a few good judges are than many fools?

Nay, replied Socrates, I should be very wrong in attributing to you, Agathon, that or any other want of refinement. And I am quite aware that if you happened to meet with any whom you thought wise, you would care for their opinion much more than for that of the many. But then we, having been a part of the foolish many in the theatre, cannot be regarded as the select wise; though I know that if you chanced to be in the presence, not of one of ourselves, but of some really wise man, you would be ashamed of disgracing yourself before him-would you not?

Yes, said Agathon.

But before the many you would not be ashamed, if you thought that you were doing something disgraceful in their presence?

Here Phaedrus interrupted them, saying: not answer him, my dear Agathon; for if he can only get a partner with whom he can talk, especially a good-looking one, he will no longer care about the completion of our plan. Now I love to hear him talk; but just at present I must not forget the encomium on Love which I ought to receive from him and from every one. When you and he have paid your tribute to the god, then you may talk.

Very good, Phaedrus, said Agathon; I see no reason why I should not proceed with my speech, as I shall have many other opportunities of conversing with Socrates. Let me say first how I ought to speak, and then speak:-

The previous speakers, instead of praising the god Love, or unfolding his nature, appear to have congratulated mankind on the benefits which he confers upon them. But I would rather praise the god first, and then speak of his gifts; this is always the right way of praising everything. May I say without impiety or offence, that of all the blessed gods he is the most blessed because he is the fairest and best? And he is the fairest: for, in the first place, he is the youngest, and of his youth he is himself the witness, fleeing out of the way of age, who is swift enough, swifter truly than most of us like:-Love hates him and will not come near him; but youth and love live and move together-like to like, as the proverb says. Many things were said by Phaedrus about Love in which I agree with him; but I cannot agree that he is older than Iapetus and Kronos:-not so; I maintain him to be the youngest of the gods, and youthful ever. The ancient doings among the gods of which Hesiod and Parmenides spoke, if the tradition of them be true, were done of Necessity and not Love; had Love been in those days, there

would have been no chaining or mutilation of the gods, or other violence, but peace and sweetness, as there is now in heaven, since the rule of Love began.

Love is young and also tender; he ought to have a poet like Homer to describe his tenderness, as Homer says of Ate, that she is a goddess and tender:

Her feet are tender, for she sets her steps,

Not on the ground but on the heads of men: herein is an excellent proof of her tenderness that, she walks not upon the hard but upon the soft. Let us adduce a similar proof of the tenderness of Love; for he walks not upon the earth, nor yet upon skulls of men, which are not so very soft, but in the hearts and souls of both god, and men, which are of all things the softest: in them he walks and dwells and makes his home. Not in every soul without exception, for Where there is hardness he departs, where there is softness there he dwells; and nestling always with his feet and in all manner of ways in the softest of soft places, how can he be other than the softest of all things? Of a truth he is the tenderest as well as the youngest, and also he is of flexible form; for if he were hard and without flexure he could not enfold all things, or wind his way into and out of every soul of man undiscovered. And a proof of his flexibility and symmetry of form is his grace, which is universally admitted to be in an especial manner the attribute of Love; ungrace and love are always at war with one another. The fairness of his complexion is revealed by his habitation among the flowers; for he dwells not amid bloomless or fading beauties, whether of body or soul or aught else, but in the place of flowers and scents, there he sits and abides. Concerning the beauty of the god I have said enough; and yet there remains much more which I might say. Of his virtue I have now to speak: his greatest glory is that he can neither do nor suffer wrong to or from any god or any man; for he suffers not by force if he suffers; force comes not near him, neither when he acts does he act by force. For all men in all things serve him of their own free will, and where there is voluntary agreement, there, as the laws which are the lords of the city say, is justice. And not only is he just but exceedingly temperate, for Temperance is the acknowledged ruler of the pleasures and desires, and no pleasure ever masters Love; he is their master and they are his servants; and if he conquers them he must be temperate indeed. As to courage, even the God of War is no match for him; he is the captive and Love is the lord, for love, the love of Aphrodite, masters him, as the tale runs; and the master is stronger than the servant. And if he conquers the bravest of all others, he must be himself the bravest.

Of his courage and justice and temperance I have spoken, but I have yet to speak of his wisdom-and according to the measure of my ability I must try to do my best. In the first place he is a poet (and here, like Eryximachus, I magnify my art), and he is also the source of poesy in others, which he could not be if he were not himself a poet. And at the touch of him every one becomes a poet, even though he had no music in him before; this also is a proof that Love is a good poet and accomplished in all the fine arts; for no one can give to another that which he has not himself, or teach that of which he has no knowledge. Who will deny that the creation of the animals is his doing? Are they not all the works his wisdom, born and begotten of him? And as to the artists, do we not know that he only of them whom love inspires has the light of fame?-he whom Love touches riot

walks in darkness. The arts of medicine and archery and divination were discovered by Apollo, under the guidance of love and desire; so that he too is a disciple of Love. Also the melody of the Muses, the metallurgy of Hephaestus, the weaving of Athene, the empire of Zeus over gods and men, are all due to Love, who was the inventor of them. And so Love set in order the empire of the gods-the love of beauty, as is evident, for with deformity Love has no concern. In the days of old, as I began by saying, dreadful deeds were done among the gods, for they were ruled by Necessity; but now since the birth of Love, and from the Love of the beautiful, has sprung every good in heaven and earth. Therefore, Phaedrus, I say of Love that he is the fairest and best in himself, and the cause of what is fairest and best in all other things. And there comes into my mind a line of poetry in which he is said to be the god who

Gives peace on earth and calms the stormy deep,

Who stills the winds and bids the sufferer sleep. This is he who empties men of disaffection and fills them with affection, who makes them to meet together at banquets such as these: in sacrifices, feasts, dances, he is our lord-who sends courtesy and sends away discourtesy, who gives kindness ever and never gives unkindness; the friend of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods; desired by those who have no part in him, and precious to those who have the better part in him; parent of delicacy, luxury, desire, fondness, softness, grace; regardful of the good, regardless of the evil: in every word, work, wish, fear-saviour, pilot, comrade, helper; glory of gods and men, leader best and brightest: in whose footsteps let every man follow, sweetly singing in his honour and joining in that sweet strain with which love charms the souls of gods and men. Such is the speech, Phaedrus, half-playful, yet having a certain measure of seriousness, which, according to my ability, I dedicate to the god.

When Agathon had done speaking, Aristodemus said that there was a general cheer; the young man was thought to have spoken in a manner worthy of himself, and of the god. And Socrates, looking at Eryximachus, said: Tell me, son of Acumenus, was there not reason in my fears? and was I not a true prophet when I said that Agathon would make a wonderful oration, and that I should be in a strait?

The part of the prophecy which concerns Agathon, replied Eryximachus, appears to me to be true; but, not the other part-that you will be in a strait.

Why, my dear friend, said Socrates, must not I or any one be in a strait who has to speak after he has heard such a rich and varied discourse? I am especially struck with the beauty of the concluding words-who could listen to them without amazement? When I reflected on the immeasurable inferiority of my own powers, I was ready to run away for shame, if there had been a possibility of escape. For I was reminded of Gorgias, and at the end of his speech I fancied that Agathon was shaking at me the Gorginian or Gorgonian head of the great master of rhetoric, which was simply to turn me and my speech, into stone, as Homer says, and strike me dumb. And then I perceived how foolish I had been in consenting to take my turn with you in praising love, and saying that I too was a master of the art, when I really had no conception how anything ought to be praised. For in my simplicity I imagined that the topics of praise should be true, and that this being presupposed, out

of the true the speaker was to choose the best and set them forth in the best manner. And I felt quite proud, thinking that I knew the nature of true praise, and should speak well. Whereas I now see that the intention was to attribute to Love every species of greatness and glory, whether really belonging to him not, without regard to truth or falsehood-that was no matter; for the original, proposal seems to have been not that each of you should really praise Love, but only that you should appear to praise him. And so you attribute to Love every imaginable form of praise which can be gathered anywhere; and you say that “he is all this,” and “the cause of all that,” making him appear the fairest and best of all to those who know him not, for you cannot impose upon those who know him. And a noble and solemn hymn of praise have you rehearsed. But as I misunderstood the nature of the praise when I said that I would take my turn, I must beg to be absolved from the promise which I made in ignorance, and which (as Euripides would say) was a promise of the lips and not of the mind. Farewell then to such a strain: for I do not praise in that way; no, indeed, I cannot. But if you like to here the truth about love, I am ready to speak in my own manner, though I will not make myself ridiculous by entering into any rivalry with you. Say then, Phaedrus, whether you would like, to have the truth about love, spoken in any words and in any order which may happen to come into my mind at the time. Will that be agreeable to you?

Aristodemus said that Phaedrus and the company bid him speak in any manner which he thought best. Then, he added, let me have your permission first to ask Agathon a few more questions, in order that I may take his admissions as the premises of my discourse.

I grant the permission, said Phaedrus: put your questions. Socrates then proceeded as follows:-

In the magnificent oration which you have just uttered, I think that you were right, my dear Agathon, in proposing to speak of the nature of Love first and afterwards of his works-that is a way of beginning which I very much approve. And as you have spoken so eloquently of his nature, may I ask you further, Whether love is the love of something or of nothing? And here I must explain myself: I do not want you to say that love is the love of a father or the love of a mother-that would be ridiculous; but to answer as you would, if I asked is a father a father of something? to which you would find no difficulty in replying, of a son or daughter: and the answer would be right.

Very true, said Agathon.

And you would say the same of a mother?

He assented.

Yet let me ask you one more question in order to illustrate my meaning: Is not a brother to be regarded essentially as a brother of something?

Certainly, he replied.

That is, of a brother or sister?

Yes, he said.

And now, said Socrates, I will ask about Love:-Is Love of something or of nothing?

Of something, surely, he replied.

Keep in mind what this is, and tell me what I want to know-whether Love desires that of which love is.

Yes, surely.

And does he possess, or does he not possess, that which he loves and desires?

Probably not, I should say.

Nay, replied Socrates, I would have you consider whether “necessarily” is not rather the word. The inference that he who desires something is in want of something, and that he who desires nothing is in want of nothing, is in my judgment, Agathon absolutely and necessarily true. What do you think?

I agree with you, said Agathon.

Very good. Would he who is great, desire to be great, or he who is strong, desire to be strong?

That would be inconsistent with our previous admissions.

True. For he who is anything cannot want to be that which he is?

Very true.

And yet, added Socrates, if a man being strong desired to be strong, or being swift desired to be swift, or being healthy desired to be healthy, in that case he might be thought to desire something which he already has or is. I give the example in order that we may avoid misconception. For the possessors of these qualities, Agathon, must be supposed to have their respective advantages at the time, whether they choose or not; and who can desire that which he has? Therefore when a person says, I am well and wish to be well, or I am rich and wish to be rich, and I desire simply to have what I have-to him we shall reply: “You, my friend, having wealth and health and strength, want to have the continuance of them; for at this moment, whether you choose or no, you have them. And when you say, I desire that which I have and nothing else, is not your meaning that you want to have what you now have in the future? “He must agree with us-must he not?

He must, replied Agathon.

Then, said Socrates, he desires that what he has at present may be preserved to him in the future, which is equivalent to saying that he desires something which is non-existent to him, and which as yet he has not got.

Very true, he said.

Then he and every one who desires, desires that which he has not already, and which is future and not present, and which he has not, and is not, and of which he is in want;-these are the sort of things which love and desire seek?

Very true, he said.

Then now, said Socrates, let us recapitulate the argument. First, is not love of something, and of something too which is wanting to a man?

Yes, he replied.

Remember further what you said in your speech, or if you do not remember I will remind you: you said that the love of the beautiful set in order the empire of the gods, for that of deformed things there is no love-did you not say something of that kind?

Yes, said Agathon.

Yes, my friend, and the remark was a just one. And if this is true, Love is the love of beauty and not of deformity?

He assented.

And the admission has been already made that Love is of something which a man wants and has not?

True, he said.

Then Love wants and has not beauty?

Certainly, he replied.

And would you call that beautiful which wants and does not possess beauty?

Certainly not.

Then would you still say that love is beautiful?

Agathon replied: I fear that I did not understand what I was saying.

You made a very good speech, Agathon, replied Socrates; but there is yet one small question which I would fain ask:-Is not the good also the beautiful?

Yes.

Then in wanting the beautiful, love wants also the good?

I cannot refute you, Socrates, said Agathon:-Let us assume that what you say is true.

Say rather, beloved Agathon, that you cannot refute the truth; for Socrates is easily refuted.

And now, taking my leave of you, I would rehearse a tale of love which I heard from Diotima of Mantinea, a woman wise in this and in many other kinds of knowledge, who in the days of old, when the Athenians offered sacrifice before the coming of the plague, delayed the disease ten years. She was my instructress in the art of love, and I shall repeat to you what she said to me, beginning with the admissions made by Agathon, which are nearly if not quite the same which I made to the wise woman when she questioned me-I think that this will be the easiest way, and I shall take both parts myself as well as I can. As you, Agathon, suggested, I must speak first of the being and nature of Love, and then of his works. First I said to her in nearly the same words which he used to me, that Love was a mighty god, and likewise fair and she proved to me as I proved to him that, by my own showing, Love was neither fair nor good. "What do you mean, Diotima," I said, "is love then evil and foul?" "Hush," she cried; "must that be foul which is not fair?" "Certainly," I said. "And is that which is not wise, ignorant? do you not see that there is a mean between wisdom and ignorance?" "And what may

that be?" I said. "Right opinion," she replied; "which, as you know, being incapable of giving a reason, is not knowledge (for how can knowledge be devoid of reason? nor again, ignorance, for neither can ignorance attain the truth), but is clearly something which is a mean between ignorance and wisdom." "Quite true," I replied. "Do not then insist," she said, "that what is not fair is of necessity foul, or what is not good evil; or infer that because love is not fair and good he is therefore foul and evil; for he is in a mean between them." "Well," I said, "Love is surely admitted by all to be a great god." "By those who know or by those who do not know?" "By all." "And how, Socrates," she said with a smile, "can Love be acknowledged to be a great god by those who say that he is not a god at all?" "And who are they?" I said. "You and I are two of them," she replied. "How can that be?" I said. "It is quite intelligible," she replied; "for you yourself would acknowledge that the gods are happy and fair of course you would-would to say that any god was not?" "Certainly not," I replied. "And you mean by the happy, those who are the possessors of things good or fair?" "Yes." "And you admitted that Love, because he was in want, desires those good and fair things of which he is in want?" "Yes, I did." "But how can he be a god who has no portion in what is either good or fair?" "Impossible." "Then you see that you also deny the divinity of Love."

"What then is Love?" I asked; "Is he mortal?" "No." "What then?" "As in the former instance, he is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two." "What is he, Diotima?" "He is a great spirit (daimon), and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal." "And what," I said, "is his power?" "He interprets," she replied, "between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all, prophecy and incantation, find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love. all the intercourse, and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar. Now these spirits or intermediate powers are many and diverse, and one of them is Love. "And who," I said, "was his father, and who his mother?" "The tale," she said, "will take time; nevertheless I will tell you. On the birthday of Aphrodite there was a feast of the gods, at which the god Poros or Plenty, who is the son of Metis or Discretion, was one of the guests. When the feast was over, Penia or Poverty, as the manner is on such occasions, came about the doors to beg. Now Plenty who was the worse for nectar (there was no wine in those days), went into the garden of Zeus and fell into a heavy sleep, and Poverty considering her own straitened circumstances, plotted to have a child by him, and accordingly she lay down at his side and conceived love, who partly because he is naturally a lover of the beautiful, and because Aphrodite is herself beautiful, and also because he was born on her birthday, is her follower and attendant. And as his parentage is, so also are his fortunes. In the first place he is always poor, and anything but tender and fair, as the many imagine him; and he is rough and squalid, and has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in; on the bare earth exposed he lies under the open heaven, in the streets, or at the doors of houses, taking his rest; and like his mother he is always in distress. Like his father too, whom he also partly resembles, he is always plotting against the fair and good; he is bold, enterprising, strong, a mighty hunter,

always weaving some intrigue or other, keen in the pursuit of wisdom, fertile in resources; a philosopher at all times, terrible as an enchanter, sorcerer, sophist. He is by nature neither mortal nor immortal, but alive and flourishing at one moment when he is in plenty, and dead at another moment, and again alive by reason of his father's nature. But that which is always flowing in is always flowing out, and so he is never in want and never in wealth; and, further, he is in a mean between ignorance and knowledge. The truth of the matter is this: No god is a philosopher. or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after Wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want." "But-who then, Diotima," I said, "are the lovers of wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the foolish?" "A child may answer that question," she replied; "they are those who are in a mean between the two; Love is one of them. For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is of the beautiful; and therefore Love is also a philosopher: or lover of wisdom, and being a lover of wisdom is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant. And of this too his birth is the cause; for his father is wealthy and wise, and his mother poor and foolish. Such, my dear Socrates, is the nature of the spirit Love. The error in your conception of him was very natural, and as I imagine from what you say, has arisen out of a confusion of love and the beloved, which made you think that love was all beautiful. For the beloved is the truly beautiful, and delicate, and perfect, and blessed; but the principle of love is of another nature, and is such as I have described."

I said, "O thou stranger woman, thou sayest well; but, assuming Love to be such as you say, what is the use of him to men?" "That, Socrates," she replied, "I will attempt to unfold: of his nature and birth I have already spoken; and you acknowledge that love is of the beautiful. But some one will say: Of the beautiful in what, Socrates and Diotima?-or rather let me put the question more dearly, and ask: When a man loves the beautiful, what does he desire?" I answered her "That the beautiful may be his." "Still," she said, "the answer suggests a further question: What is given by the possession of beauty?" "To what you have asked," I replied, "I have no answer ready." "Then," she said, "Let me put the word 'good' in the place of the beautiful, and repeat the question once more: If he who loves good, what is it then that he loves? "The possession of the good," I said. "And what does he gain who possesses the good?" "Happiness," I replied; "there is less difficulty in answering that question." "Yes," she said, "the happy are made happy by the acquisition of good things. Nor is there any need to ask why a man desires happiness; the answer is already final." "You are right." I said. "And is this wish and this desire common to all? and do all men always desire their own good, or only some men?-what say you?" "All men," I replied; "the desire is common to all." "Why, then," she rejoined, "are not all men, Socrates, said to love, but only some them? whereas you say that all men are always loving the same things." "I myself wonder," I said,-why this is." "There is nothing to wonder at," she replied; "the reason is that one part of love is separated off and receives the name of the whole, but the other parts have other names." "Give an illustration," I said. She answered me as follows: "There is poetry, which, as you know, is complex; and manifold. All creation or passage of non-being into being is poetry or making, and the processes of all art are creative; and the masters of arts are all poets or makers." "Very true." "Still," she said, "you know that they are not called poets, but have other names; only that portion of the art which is separated off from the rest, and

is concerned with music and metre, is termed poetry, and they who possess poetry in this sense of the word are called poets.” “Very true,” I said. “And the same holds of love. For you may say generally that all desire of good and happiness is only the great and subtle power of love; but they who are drawn towards him by any other path, whether the path of money-making or gymnastics or philosophy, are not called lovers -the name of the whole is appropriated to those whose affection takes one form only-they alone are said to love, or to be lovers.” “I dare say,” I replied, “that you are right.” “Yes,” she added, “and you hear people say that lovers are seeking for their other half; but I say that they are seeking neither for the half of themselves, nor for the whole, unless the half or the whole be also a good. And they will cut off their own hands and feet and cast them away, if they are evil; for they love not what is their own, unless perchance there be some one who calls what belongs to him the good, and what belongs to another the evil. For there is nothing which men love but the good. Is there anything?” “Certainly, I should say, that there is nothing.” “Then,” she said, “the simple truth is, that men love the good.” “Yes,” I said. “To which must be added that they love the possession of the good?” “Yes, that must be added.” “And not only the possession, but the everlasting possession of the good?” “That must be added too.” “Then love,” she said, “may be described generally as the love of the everlasting possession of the good?” “That is most true.”

“Then if this be the nature of love, can you tell me further,” she said, “what is the manner of the pursuit? what are they doing who show all this eagerness and heat which is called love? and what is the object which they have in view? Answer me.” “Nay, Diotima,” I replied, “if I had known, I should not have wondered at your wisdom, neither should I have come to learn from you about this very matter.” “Well,” she said, “I will teach you:-The object which they have in view is birth in beauty, whether of body or, soul.” “I do not understand you,” I said; “the oracle requires an explanation.” “I will make my meaning dearer,” she replied. “I mean to say, that all men are bringing to the birth in their bodies and in their souls. There is a certain age at which human nature is desirous of procreation-procreation which must be in beauty and not in deformity; and this procreation is the union of man and woman, and is a divine thing; for conception and generation are an immortal principle in the mortal creature, and in the inharmonious they can never be. But the deformed is always inharmonious with the divine, and the beautiful harmonious. Beauty, then, is the destiny or goddess of parturition who presides at birth, and therefore, when approaching beauty, the conceiving power is propitious, and diffusive, and benign, and begets and bears fruit: at the sight of ugliness she frowns and contracts and has a sense of pain, and turns away, and shrivels up, and not without a pang refrains from conception. And this is the reason why, when the hour of conception arrives, and the teeming nature is full, there is such a flutter and ecstasy about beauty whose approach is the alleviation of the pain of travail. For love, Socrates, is not, as you imagine, the love of the beautiful only.” “What then?” “The love of generation and of birth in beauty.” “Yes,” I said. “Yes, indeed,” she replied. “But why of generation?” “Because to the mortal creature, generation is a sort of eternity and immortality,” she replied; “and if, as has been already admitted, love is of the everlasting possession of the good, all men will necessarily desire immortality together with good: Wherefore love is of immortality.”

All this she taught me at various times when she spoke of love. And I remember her once saying to me, “What

is the cause, Socrates, of love, and the attendant desire? See you not how all animals, birds, as well as beasts, in their desire of procreation, are in agony when they take the infection of love, which begins with the desire of union; whereto is added the care of offspring, on whose behalf the weakest are ready to battle against the strongest even to the uttermost, and to die for them, and will, let themselves be tormented with hunger or suffer anything in order to maintain their young. Man may be supposed to act thus from reason; but why should animals have these passionate feelings? Can you tell me why?" Again I replied that I did not know. She said to me: "And do you expect ever to become a master in the art of love, if you do not know this?" "But I have told you already, Diotima, that my ignorance is the reason why I come to you; for I am conscious that I want a teacher; tell me then the cause of this and of the other mysteries of love." "Marvel not," she said, "if you believe that love is of the immortal, as we have several times acknowledged; for here again, and on the same principle too, the mortal nature is seeking as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal: and this is only to be attained by generation, because generation always leaves behind a new existence in the place of the old. Nay even in the life, of the same individual there is succession and not absolute unity: a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and in which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation-hair, flesh, bones, blood, and the whole body are always changing. Which is true not only of the body, but also of the soul, whose habits, tempers, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, never remain the same in any one of us, but are always coming and going; and equally true of knowledge, and what is still more surprising to us mortals, not only do the sciences in general spring up and decay, so that in respect of them we are never the same; but each of them individually experiences a like change. For what is implied in the word 'recollection,' but the departure of knowledge, which is ever being forgotten, and is renewed and preserved by recollection, and appears to be the same although in reality new, according to that law of succession by which all mortal things are preserved, not absolutely the same, but by substitution, the old worn-out mortality leaving another new and similar existence behind unlike the divine, which is always the same and not another? And in this way, Socrates, the mortal body, or mortal anything, partakes of immortality; but the immortal in another way. Marvel not then at the love which all men have of their offspring; for that universal love and interest is for the sake of immortality."

I was astonished at her words, and said: "Is this really true, O thou wise Diotima?" And she answered with all the authority of an accomplished sophist: "Of that, Socrates, you may be assured;-think only of the ambition of men, and you will wonder at the senselessness of their ways, unless you consider how they are stirred by the love of an immortality of fame. They are ready to run all risks greater far than they would have for their children, and to spend money and undergo any sort of toil, and even to die, for the sake of leaving behind them a name which shall be eternal. Do you imagine that Alcestis would have died to save Admetus, or Achilles to avenge Patroclus, or your own Codrus in order to preserve the kingdom for his sons, if they had not imagined that the memory of their virtues, which still survives among us, would be immortal? Nay," she said, "I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue; for they desire the immortal."

“Those who are pregnant in the body only, betake themselves to women and beget children-this is the character of their love; their offspring, as they hope, will preserve their memory and giving them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future. But souls which are pregnant-for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions?-wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor. But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice. And he who in youth has the seed of these implanted in him and is himself inspired, when he comes to maturity desires to beget and generate. He wanders about seeking beauty that he may beget offspring-for in deformity he will beget nothing-and naturally embraces the beautiful rather than the deformed body; above all when he finds fair and noble and well-nurtured soul, he embraces the two in one person, and to such an one he is full of speech about virtue and the nature and pursuits of a good man; and he tries to educate him; and at the touch of the beautiful which is ever present to his memory, even when absent, he brings forth that which he had conceived long before, and in company with him tends that which he brings forth; and they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children, for the children who are their common offspring are fairer and more immortal. Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory? Or who would not have such children as Lycurgus left behind him to be the saviours, not only of Lacedaemon, but of Hellas, as one may say? There is Solon, too, who is the revered father of Athenian laws; and many others there are in many other places, both among hellenes and barbarians, who have given to the world many noble works, and have been the parents of virtue of every kind; and many temples have been raised in their honour for the sake of children such as theirs; which were never raised in honour of any one, for the sake of his mortal children.

“These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you, Socrates, may enter; to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these, and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit, they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can. For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only-out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with

the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded, but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere. To this I will proceed; please to give me your very best attention:

“He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty (and this, Socrates, is the final cause of all our former toils)-a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and-foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. This, my dear Socrates,” said the stranger of Mantinea, “is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, whose presence now entrances you; and you and many a one would be content to live seeing them only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible-you only want to look at them and to be with them. But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty-the divine beauty, I mean, pure and dear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life-thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life?”

Such, Phaedrus-and I speak not only to you, but to all of you-were the words of Diotima; and I am persuaded of their truth. And being persuaded of them, I try to persuade others, that in the attainment of this end human nature will not easily find a helper better than love: And therefore, also, I say that every man ought to honour him as I myself honour him, and walk in his ways, and exhort others to do the same, and praise the power and spirit of love according to the measure of my ability now and ever.

The words which I have spoken, you, Phaedrus, may call an encomium of love, or anything else which you please.

When Socrates had done speaking, the company applauded, and Aristophanes was beginning to say something in answer to the allusion which Socrates had made to his own speech, when suddenly there was a great knocking at the door of the house, as of revellers, and the sound of a flute-girl was heard. Agathon told the attendants to go and see who were the intruders. "If they are friends of ours," he said, "invite them in, but if not, say that the drinking is over." A little while afterwards they heard the voice of Alcibiades resounding in the court; he was in a great state of intoxication and kept roaring and shouting "Where is Agathon? Lead me to Agathon," and at length, supported by the flute-girl and some of his attendants, he found his way to them. "Hail, friends," he said, appearing-at the door crown, with a massive garland of ivy and violets, his head flowing with ribands. "Will you have a very drunken man as a companion of your revels? Or shall I crown Agathon, which was my intention in coming, and go away? For I was unable to come yesterday, and therefore I am here to-day, carrying on my head these ribands, that taking them from my own head, I may crown the head of this fairest and wisest of men, as I may be allowed to call him. Will you laugh at me because I am drunk? Yet I know very well that I am speaking the truth, although you may laugh. But first tell me; if I come in shall we have the understanding of which I spoke? Will you drink with me or not?"

The company were vociferous in begging that he would take his place among them, and Agathon specially invited him. Thereupon he was led in by the people who were with him; and as he was being led, intending to crown Agathon, he took the ribands from his own head and held them in front of his eyes; he was thus prevented from seeing Socrates, who made way for him, and Alcibiades took the vacant place between Agathon and Socrates, and in taking the place he embraced Agathon and crowned him. Take off his sandals, said Agathon, and let him make a third on the same couch.

By all means; but who makes the third partner in our revels? said Alcibiades, turning round and starting up as he caught sight of Socrates. By Heracles, he said, what is this? here is Socrates always lying in wait for me, and always, as his way is, coming out at all sorts of unsuspected places: and now, what have you to say for yourself, and why are you lying here, where I perceive that you have contrived to find a place, not by a joker or lover of jokes, like Aristophanes, but by the fairest of the company?

Socrates turned to Agathon and said: I must ask you to protect me, Agathon; for the passion of this man has grown quite a serious matter to me. Since I became his admirer I have never been allowed to speak to any other fair one, or so much as to look at them. If I do, he goes wild with envy and jealousy, and not only abuses me but can hardly keep his hands off me, and at this moment he may do me some harm. Please to see to this, and either reconcile me to him, or, if he attempts violence, protect me, as I am in bodily fear of his mad and passionate attempts.

There can never be reconciliation between you and me, said Alcibiades; but for the present I will defer

your chastisement. And I must beg you, Agathoron, to give me back some of the ribands that I may crown the marvellous head of this universal despot-I would not have him complain of me for crowning you, and neglecting him, who in conversation is the conqueror of all mankind; and this not only once, as you were the day before yesterday, but always. Whereupon, taking some of the ribands, he crowned Socrates, and again reclined.

Then he said: You seem, my friends, to be sober, which is a thing not to be endured; you must drink-for that was the agreement under which I was admitted-and I elect myself master of the feast until you are well drunk. Let us have a large goblet, Agathon, or rather, he said, addressing the attendant, bring me that wine-cooler. The wine-cooler which had caught his eye was a vessel holding more than two quarts-this he filled and emptied, and bade the attendant fill it again for Socrates. Observe, my friends, said Alcibiades, that this ingenious trick of mine will have no effect on Socrates, for he can drink any quantity of wine and not be at all nearer being drunk. Socrates drank the cup which the attendant filled for him.

Eryximachus said! What is this Alcibiades? Are we to have neither conversation nor singing over our cups; but simply to drink as if we were thirsty?

Alcibiades replied: Hail, worthy son of a most wise and worthy sire!

The same to you, said Eryximachus; but what shall we do?

That I leave to you, said Alcibiades.

The wise physician skilled our wounds to heal shall prescribe and we will obey. What do you want?

Well, said Eryximachus, before you appeared we had passed a resolution that each one of us in turn should make a speech in praise of love, and as good a one as he could: the turn was passed round from left to right; and as all of us have spoken, and you have not spoken but have well drunken, you ought to speak, and then impose upon Socrates any task which you please, and he on his right hand neighbour, and so on.

That is good, Eryximachus, said Alcibiades; and yet the comparison, of a drunken man's speech with those of sober men is hardly fair; and I should like to know, sweet friend, whether you really believe-what Socrates was just now saying; for I can assure you that the very reverse is the fact, and that if I praise any one but himself in his presence, whether God or man, he will hardly keep his hands off me.

For shame, said Socrates. Hold your tongue, said Alcibiades, for by Poseidon, there is no one else whom I will praise when you are-of the company.

Well then, said Eryximachus, if you like praise Socrates.

What do you think, Eryximachus? said Alcibiades: shall I attack him: and inflict the punishment before you all?

What are you about? said Socrates; are you going to raise a laugh at my expense? Is that the meaning of your praise?

I am going to speak the truth, if you will permit me. I not only permit, but exhort you to speak the truth. Then I will begin at once, said Alcibiades, and if I say anything which is not true, you may interrupt me if you will, and say "that is a lie," though my intention is to speak the truth. But you must not wonder if I speak any how as things come into my mind; for the fluent and orderly enumeration of all your singularities is not a task which is easy to a man in my condition.

And now, my boys, I shall praise Socrates in a figure which will appear to him to be a caricature, and yet I speak, not to make fun of him, but only for the truth's sake. I say, that he is exactly like the busts of Silenus, which are set up in the statuary shops, holding pipes and flutes in their mouths; and they are made to open in the middle, and have images of gods inside them. I say also that he is like Marsyas the satyr. You yourself will not deny, Socrates, that your face is like that of a satyr. Aye, and there is a resemblance in other points too. For example, you are a bully, as I can prove by witnesses, if you will not confess. And are you not a flute-player? That you are, and a performer far more wonderful than Marsyas. He indeed with instruments used to charm the souls of men by the powers of his breath, and the players of his music do so still: for the melodies of Olympus are derived from Marsyas who taught them, and these, whether they are played by a great master or by a miserable flute-girl, have a power which no others have; they alone possess the soul and reveal the wants of those who have need of gods and mysteries, because they are divine. But you produce the same effect with your words only, and do not require the flute; that is the difference between you and him. When we hear any other speaker, even very good one, he produces absolutely no effect upon us, or not much, whereas the mere fragments of you and your words, even at second-hand, and however imperfectly repeated, amaze and possess the souls of every man, woman, and child who comes within hearing of them. And if I were not, afraid that you would think me hopelessly drunk, I would have sworn as well as spoken to the influence which they have always had and still have over me. For my heart leaps within me more than that of any Corybantian reveller, and my eyes rain tears when I hear them. And I observe that many others are affected in the same manner. I have heard Pericles and other great orators, and I thought that they spoke well, but I never had any similar feeling; my soul was not stirred by them, nor was I angry at the thought of my own slavish state. But this Marsyas has often brought me to such pass, that I have felt as if I could hardly endure the life which I am leading (this, Socrates, you will admit); and I am conscious that if I did not shut my ears against him, and fly as from the voice of the siren, my fate would be like that of others, - he would transfix me, and I should grow old sitting at his feet. For he makes me confess that I ought not to live as I do, neglecting the wants of my own soul, and busying myself with the concerns of the Athenians; therefore I hold my ears and tear myself away from him. And he is the only person who ever made me ashamed, which you might think not to be in my nature, and there is no one else

who does the same. For I know that I cannot answer him or say that I ought not to do as he bids, but when I leave his presence the love of popularity gets the better of me. And therefore I run away and fly from him, and when I see him I am ashamed of what I have confessed to him. Many a time have I wished that he were dead, and yet I know that I should be much more sorry than glad, if he were to die: so that am at my wit's end.

And this is what I and many others have suffered, from the flute-playing of this satyr. Yet hear me once more while I show you how exact the image is, and how marvellous his power. For let me tell you; none of you know him; but I will reveal him to you; having begun, I must go on. See you how fond he is of the fair? He is always with them and is always being smitten by them, and then again he knows nothing and is ignorant of all things such as the appearance.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work:

Plato, "Symposium," in *the internet Classics Archive*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, (site by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics.), <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html>.

Permission to download and copy for inclusion in this open textbook was granted by the site owner and can be found here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Help/permissions.html>



This work (Symposium by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

Aristotle:

Aristotle sees philosophy as an extension of science, which means that he is attempting to understand the whole—the universe, humanity, and culture. He tries to find the basic principles that reveal the underlying pattern in all of the changing and conflicting aspects of our world.¹

Modern science is grounded by a few basic concepts: mass, force, element, evolution and the like. Aristotle's concepts are function, classification, and hierarchy; he uses these concepts to explain everything. While modern science emphasizes laws, Aristotle emphasizes the search for accurate definitions of things in terms of their essential properties. He believed that philosophy could find answers to things through observation. Another difference is that modern science sees the world as a machine whereas Aristotle sees it as an organism. Everything has a function or purpose and its essential nature is to grow and achieve its purpose. This applies to ethics, politics, art, and the natural world (ibid.).

Plato and Aristotle's Relationship:

According to Plato's theory of Forms, all else is an imperfect copy—an illusion in comparison. Aristotle believed that it is the physical world that is observable. He rejected Plato's transcendentalism (i.e. his notion that there is a higher reality that is only graspable by the mind).

Explain the objections that Aristotle raised regarding Plato's Forms:

Plato's Forms fail to explain the relationship between the Forms and the particular things. Specifically, the idea that an object "participates" with a Form is vague and tells us nothing about how these things truly interact.

Plato's Forms are degrading to the particular things we experience in the world

The eternal nature of the Forms made them useless for understanding how particular things could change.

Also, Aristotle wanted to determine the nature of reality, but Plato had argued that reality was something transcendent—beyond our experiences. Aristotle believed that this world is our world. He agreed with Plato

that knowledge must be universal and concerned with what things have in common, but he rejected Plato's view that Forms could be separated from particular things.

What is metaphysics for Aristotle?

Metaphysics, for Aristotle, was the study of nature and ourselves. In this sense he brings metaphysics to this world of sense experience—where we live, learn, know, think, and speak.

Metaphysics is the study of being *qua* being, which is, first, the study of the different ways the word “be” can be used.

The primary type of being is the “what,” which indicates the substance of the thing. For example, when I say that a person is good or that a person is 6 feet tall, we are referring to that person. This is the substance.

All other things are said to be because they are quantities or qualities of that substance (6 feet, or good). These are secondary.

Hence, substance is that which stands alone or first. I would exist even if I didn't have hair, but my hair could not exist without me, so hair is not a substance.

He was Plato's student so his rejection of Plato's Forms was gradual. He began by asking some basic questions: what is real, what types of things exist, what is the world made of, is the table more or less real than squareness? His solution was to examine all of the things that could be said about the table and to classify these statements into categories, of which there are 10:

Joe is 6 feet tall: quantity.

Joe has brown eyes and brown eyes: quality.

Joe is 2 years older than Jill: relation.

Joe is in the office: place.

Joe is 18 years old: time.

Joe is standing: position.

Joe is in good health condition.

Other categories are action (cutting or burning), affection (is cut or burned), and substance (table or human being).

What is primary substance?

Substance is a unique category: it is basic. It is that which all of the other categories refer to. So, Joe (substance) is...or has all of the above qualities. Joe is primary or most basic and the others are secondary (ibid.). This means Joe can exist without the other categories but the other categories cannot exist without substance. For example, without a substance like Joe there is no condition of the thing being older or healthy.

Things that we make (artifacts) are not primary beings because primary beings have their own natures. Something we make cannot exist without a human being and, as such, have a lower existence.

How does matter + form relate to substance?

For Aristotle, a substance is a particular thing and its properties. The substance is the matter and the secondary categories or properties are form. A substance consists of matter and form. Form is not a separable realm as it was for Plato; it must exist with matter.

While Plato holds that the more abstract Forms are the most real, Aristotle thinks that the more concrete things are most real. For example, individuals are more real than species.

Aristotle gives four definitions of substance. ***What are these?***

Substance is the thing referred to by a noun; the subject of a sentence. Joe is tall. Joe is the substance, which is independent of all else—all other qualities.

Substance is what underlines all the properties and changes in something. Joe is Joe despite the changes he undergoes.

Substance can be thought of as what is essential. “For example, it is part of the essence of being Socrates that he is a human being, that he lived in the fourth century B.C.E. and that he is wise. Other properties like his gray hair, big nose, or the like are all accidental rather than secondary.

Substance is a combination of form and matter. Form here means basically the same thing as Plato’s notion of Form, but it does not exist apart from matter (i.e. it is not transcendent). It is always informing some matter. Matter is what the thing is made out of and form is what gives the thing its shape and structure.

Use the little “f” when referring to Aristotle’s forms.

Essence does not change whereas accidental properties can.

So, we cannot separate form and matter, but we can distinguish the two. Clay is matter and it can be shaped to form a bowl (the shape is the form). We can talk about matter and form separately, which is what allows us to understand change and stability.

Substance changes but also remains stable (self).

If we are trying to understand something, why is being able to give a definition so important?

Given the essence of the thing is so very important and the fact that Aristotle does believe that knowledge is universal, it is important to understand the **definitions** of things (like Plato).

In order to organize our observations it is important to have a system. Aristotle classified animals according to those that laid eggs and those that gave birth to live young, by their means of movement, and so forth. This type of classification is a way to understand a thing's nature. So, we have a specific animal then we can determine which group it belongs to.

The goal of philosophy is to understand the nature of things and understanding the nature of a thing means being able to define it. We can try to define all sorts of things: humans, art, happiness, etc. We must be able to define something if we are to understand it (Washburn).

If we are trying to understand something how would prioritizing things in a hierarchy be helpful?

Another important concept for Aristotle is hierarchy. If we want to truly understand something, understanding its relation and level of importance in comparison to other things is crucial.

Hierarchy: Hierarchy is an arrangement of things in a scale from the least to the most valuable. Aristotle believed that nature was a hierarchy. Everything has an essential nature, expressed in its definition and the most important things are its function or goal. For example, there are four types of life: 1) nutritive in plants, which absorb food and reproduce; 2) nutritive plus sensitive for simple animals that absorb food and reproduce but can also sense things; 3) locomotion for higher animals, which in addition to the other faculties, can move about; and 4) rationality for human beings, who do all the things below but also can use reason.

He also applied hierarchy to the physical world. As one ascends the scale from plant to animal to human, one sees an increase in the power of the mind. The highest development on earth is human reasoning or intellectual contemplation. Aristotle believed that the heavenly bodies were gods with greater powers of understanding than humans. They were made of an element called ether and did not eat, reproduce, perceive, or feel pleasure or pain. They only thought.

He believed that at the highest point there was a god that was pure thought, pure actuality (instead of potentiality), and the highest stage of growth. All activities are attempts to reach the pure actuality of god (I keep the term god in lower case letters, because Aristotle was prior to the monotheistic religions of the West: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

Everything an animal does is aimed at its fullest development of its potential. Everything strives for this state of pure consciousness. Aristotle called this the unmoved mover: the ultimate cause of everything including motion and change. The unmoved mover draws everything in the sense that it is the goal of all change.

Everything is drawn toward it and things change because they are attempting to reach the unmoved mover/god (ibid.).

The idea that everything develops according to potential entails that all things have a purpose or goal. This is different than our modern conception of science and the push for causal explanations. Instead of asking why, Aristotle would have asked how. The answer to this question is given in terms of the purpose of the thing or the part in question.

Function: Everything in the world, for Aristotle, has a distinctive and essential function. Trees grow in certain ways depending on their kinds, buildings are made for certain purposes, human beings have their particular arts. In Aristotle's view, this function or activity determines excellent characteristics or virtues. Good carpenters, for example, are those who build sturdy and beautiful things. Therefore, virtue in carpenters is an eye for proportion, kills with a saw and other tools, and a feel for what a piece of wood can and cannot do. In this sense the virtue of the thing under investigation means that it functions excellently according to its purpose.

The function of brakes in a car is to stop and the function of the battery is to provide electricity. To understand a car we must recognize what the function of its parts are. This holds true for plants and animals as well. To understand an animal we need to go beyond describing the parts or stages of growth and understand what the parts are for. For instance, the little pads on an octopus' arms—the function is suction. The roots of a plant are not just for branching; they also absorb water and provide nutrients (ibid.).

What does the term telos or teleological mean?

Telos or Teleological: Aristotle believed that asking what the function of something is, is fundamental to explaining and understanding the natural world. Function meant natural development. When something exercises its function, it is fulfilling its nature. Hence, you can think of a thing's function as its natural development. Growth is universal for all living things. An acorn's function is to become an oak tree and its growth can be explained as its blind attempt to realize its true nature.

From the Greek, telos refers to the fulfillment, completion, or perfection of something. For Aristotle, everything has a final end or purpose and everything aims at some good. There are different goods (contrary to Plato) that correspond to different creatures, arts, or sciences and some of these ends are subordinate to more ultimate ends. For instance, a specific law's goal may be to gain taxation; however, the more ultimate goal is for government to provide services that are directed at the citizen's well being (ibid.). See his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk I, section 1-2 and 5-10.

Function of the Human Being: Because plants and animals also experience growth, nutrition, and sensation, these activities cannot be representative of human function in particular. Only human beings have the capacity for rationality, thus, Aristotle concludes that the function of the human being is the activity of the soul in

accordance with reason. Reason is what makes us unique and if we want to understand what human beings are, we need to understand that we are rational beings.

What it means to be a rational being, for Aristotle, includes the ability, habits, wisdom, and judgment that enables us to bring a complex self into order as it unfolds—self-actualization or flourishing (Washburn).

Aristotle explains four causes. What are these?

In Aristotle's teleological account, he does explain cause, but not in the same way we do today. For him there are four types of cause, all of which combined together explain why a thing is the way it is at any given time.

material cause: the clay of the bowl or the silver of the spoon

formal cause: the blueprint, model, or plan

efficient cause: the person or event that makes something happen

final cause: this is its telos

How does Aristotle's teleological understanding of the world differ from how we think about the world today?

One of the main differences between how we think about these issues and how Aristotle did, is the fact that when we think about purpose we are generally referring to human activities (the purpose for my action). When we discuss nature we generally do not think in terms of purpose. However, Aristotle, thought that all things (natural, human, or artifact) have purpose. Everything that exists has to be accounted for in terms of inner purpose and the overall purpose it served in nature. This was the view until the 17th century and was obviously very influential in the development of Christian beliefs (Saint Thomas Aquinas followed Aristotle).

What is Aristotle's concern with infinite regress?

Teleological explanations cannot go on forever. We cannot have an infinite regress. So, if x exists for the purpose of y, and y exists for the purpose of z, there must be an ultimate purpose that will explain them all (final cause). Likewise, if p makes q happen, and q makes r happen, there must be an end (efficient cause). We cannot go on forever, or infinitely. This is, once again, where Aristotle's prime mover comes in; god.

Aristotle's prime mover, however, is different than the Christian God in a few fundamental ways:

- the prime mover did not create the universe or has no special concern for human beings.
- the prime mover is more of a metaphysical necessity than a proper object of worship
- ultimate goal was contemplation itself



An Introduction to Aristotle's Metaphysics by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Phil Washburn, *The Many Faces of Wisdom: Great Philosophers' Visions of Philosophy* (Pearson, 2002), 67-78. Hereafter this text will be referred to as MFW.

SELECTED READINGS FROM ARISTOTLE'S CATEGORIES

Aristotle

Categories

Section 1, Part 4

Expressions which are in no way composite signify substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, or affection. To sketch my meaning roughly, examples of substance are 'man' or 'the horse', of quantity, such terms as 'two cubits long' or 'three cubits long', of quality, such attributes as 'white', 'grammatical'. 'Double', 'half', 'greater', fall under the category of relation; 'in the market place', 'in the Lyceum', under that of place; 'yesterday', 'last year', under that of time. 'Lying', 'sitting', are terms indicating position, 'shod', 'armed', state; 'to lance', 'to cauterize', action; 'to be lanced', 'to be cauterized', affection.

No one of these terms, in and by itself, involves an affirmation; it is by the combination of such terms that positive or negative statements arise. For every assertion must, as is admitted, be either true or false, whereas expressions which are not in any way composite such as 'man', 'white', 'runs', 'wins', cannot be either true or false.

Section 1, Part 5

Substance, in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse. But in a secondary sense those things are called substances within which, as species, the primary substances are included; also those which, as genera, include the species. For instance, the individual man is included in the species 'man', and the genus to which the species belongs is 'animal'; these, therefore—that is to say, the species 'man' and the genus 'animal',—are termed secondary substances.

It is plain from what has been said that both the name and the definition of the predicate must be predicable of the subject. For instance, 'man' is predicated of the individual man. Now in this case the name of the species 'man' is applied to the individual, for we use the term 'man' in describing the individual; and the definition of 'man' will also be predicated of the individual man, for the individual man is both man and animal. Thus, both the name and the definition of the species are predicable of the individual.

With regard, on the other hand, to those things which are present in a subject, it is generally the case that neither their name nor their definition is predicable of that in which they are present. Though, however, the definition is never predicable, there is nothing in certain cases to prevent the name being used. For instance, 'white' being present in a body is predicated of that in which it is present, for a body is called white: the definition, however, of the colour 'white' is never predicable of the body.

Everything except primary substances is either predicable of a primary substance or present in a primary substance. This becomes evident by reference to particular instances which occur. 'Animal' is predicated of the species 'man', therefore of the individual man, for if there were no individual man of whom it could be predicated, it could not be predicated of the species 'man' at all. Again, colour is present in body, therefore in individual bodies, for if there were no individual body in which it was present, it could not be present in body at all. Thus everything except primary substances is either predicated of primary substances, or is present in them, and if these last did not exist, it would be impossible for anything else to exist.

Of secondary substances, the species is more truly substance than the genus, being more nearly related to primary substance. For if any one should render an account of what a primary substance is, he would render a more instructive account, and one more proper to the subject, by stating the species than by stating the genus. Thus, he would give a more instructive account of an individual man by stating that he was man than by stating that he was animal, for the former description is peculiar to the individual in a greater degree, while the latter is too general. Again, the man who gives an account of the nature of an individual tree will give a more instructive account by mentioning the species 'tree' than by mentioning the genus 'plant'.

Moreover, primary substances are most properly called substances in virtue of the fact that they are the entities which underlie everything else, and that everything else is either predicated of them or present in them. Now the same relation which subsists between primary substance and everything else subsists also between the species and the genus: for the species is to the genus as subject is to predicate, since the genus is predicated of the species, whereas the species cannot be predicated of the genus. Thus we have a second ground for asserting that the species is more truly substance than the genus.

Of species themselves, except in the case of such as are genera, no one is more truly substance than another. We should not give a more appropriate account of the individual man by stating the species to which he belonged, than we should of an individual horse by adopting the same method of definition. In the same way, of primary substances, no one is more truly substance than another; an individual man is not more truly substance than an individual ox.

It is, then, with good reason that of all that remains, when we exclude primary substances, we concede to species and genera alone the name 'secondary substance', for these alone of all the predicates convey a knowledge of primary substance. For it is by stating the species or the genus that we appropriately define any individual man; and we shall make our definition more exact by stating the former than by stating the latter.

All other things that we state, such as that he is white, that he runs, and so on, are irrelevant to the definition. Thus it is just that these alone, apart from primary substances, should be called substances.

Further, primary substances are most properly so called, because they underlie and are the subjects of everything else. Now the same relation that subsists between primary substance and everything else subsists also between the species and the genus to which the primary substance belongs, on the one hand, and every attribute which is not included within these, on the other. For these are the subjects of all such. If we call an individual man 'skilled in grammar', the predicate is applicable also to the species and to the genus to which he belongs. This law holds good in all cases.

It is a common characteristic of all substance that it is never present in a subject. For primary substance is neither present in a subject nor predicated of a subject; while, with regard to secondary substances, it is clear from the following arguments (apart from others) that they are not present in a subject. For 'man' is predicated of the individual man, but is not present in any subject: for manhood is not present in the individual man. In the same way, 'animal' is also predicated of the individual man, but is not present in him. Again, when a thing is present in a subject, though the name may quite well be applied to that in which it is present, the definition cannot be applied. Yet of secondary substances, not only the name, but also the definition, applies to the subject: we should use both the definition of the species and that of the genus with reference to the individual man. Thus substance cannot be present in a subject.

Yet this is not peculiar to substance, for it is also the case that differentiae cannot be present in subjects. The characteristics 'terrestrial' and 'two-footed' are predicated of the species 'man', but not present in it. For they are not in man. Moreover, the definition of the differentia may be predicated of that of which the differentia itself is predicated. For instance, if the characteristic 'terrestrial' is predicated of the species 'man', the definition also of that characteristic may be used to form the predicate of the species 'man': for 'man' is terrestrial.

The fact that the parts of substances appear to be present in the whole, as in a subject, should not make us apprehensive lest we should have to admit that such parts are not substances: for in explaining the phrase 'being present in a subject', we stated' that we meant 'otherwise than as parts in a whole'.

It is the mark of substances and of differentiae that, in all propositions of which they form the predicate, they are predicated univocally. For all such propositions have for their subject either the individual or the species. It is true that, inasmuch as primary substance is not predicable of anything, it can never form the predicate of any proposition. But of secondary substances, the species is predicated of the individual, the genus both of the species and of the individual. Similarly the differentiae are predicated of the species and of the individuals. Moreover, the definition of the species and that of the genus are applicable to the primary substance, and that of the genus to the species. For all that is predicated of the predicate will be predicated also of the subject. Similarly, the definition of the differentiae will be applicable to the species and to the individuals. But it was stated above that the word 'univocal' was applied to those things which had both name and definition in

common. It is, therefore, established that in every proposition, of which either substance or a differentia forms the predicate, these are predicated univocally.

All substance appears to signify that which is individual. In the case of primary substance this is indisputably true, for the thing is a unit. In the case of secondary substances, when we speak, for instance, of 'man' or 'animal', our form of speech gives the impression that we are here also indicating that which is individual, but the impression is not strictly true; for a secondary substance is not an individual, but a class with a certain qualification; for it is not one and single as a primary substance is; the words 'man', 'animal', are predicable of more than one subject.

Yet species and genus do not merely indicate quality, like the term 'white'; 'white' indicates quality and nothing further, but species and genus determine the quality with reference to a substance: they signify substance qualitatively differentiated. The determinate qualification covers a larger field in the case of the genus than in that of the species: he who uses the word 'animal' is herein using a word of wider extension than he who uses the word 'man'.

Another mark of substance is that it has no contrary. What could be the contrary of any primary substance, such as the individual man or animal? It has none. Nor can the species or the genus have a contrary. Yet this characteristic is not peculiar to substance, but is true of many other things, such as quantity. There is nothing that forms the contrary of 'two cubits long' or of 'three cubits long', or of 'ten', or of any such term. A man may contend that 'much' is the contrary of 'little', or 'great' of 'small', but of definite quantitative terms no contrary exists.

Substance, again, does not appear to admit of variation of degree. I do not mean by this that one substance cannot be more or less truly substance than another, for it has already been stated that this is the case; but that no single substance admits of varying degrees within itself. For instance, one particular substance, 'man', cannot be more or less man either than himself at some other time or than some other man. One man cannot be more man than another, as that which is white may be more or less white than some other white object, or as that which is beautiful may be more or less beautiful than some other beautiful object. The same quality, moreover, is said to subsist in a thing in varying degrees at different times. A body, being white, is said to be whiter at one time than it was before, or, being warm, is said to be warmer or less warm than at some other time. But substance is not said to be more or less that which it is: a man is not more truly a man at one time than he was before, nor is anything, if it is substance, more or less what it is. Substance, then, does not admit of variation of degree.

The most distinctive mark of substance appears to be that, while remaining numerically one and the same, it is capable of admitting contrary qualities. From among things other than substance, we should find ourselves unable to bring forward any which possessed this mark. Thus, one and the same colour cannot be white and black. Nor can the same one action be good and bad: this law holds good with everything that is not substance.

But one and the selfsame substance, while retaining its identity, is yet capable of admitting contrary qualities. The same individual person is at one time white, at another black, at one time warm, at another cold, at one time good, at another bad. This capacity is found nowhere else, though it might be maintained that a statement or opinion was an exception to the rule. The same statement, it is agreed, can be both true and false. For if the statement 'he is sitting' is true, yet, when the person in question has risen, the same statement will be false. The same applies to opinions. For if any one thinks truly that a person is sitting, yet, when that person has risen, this same opinion, if still held, will be false. Yet although this exception may be allowed, there is, nevertheless, a difference in the manner in which the thing takes place. It is by themselves changing that substances admit contrary qualities. It is thus that that which was hot becomes cold, for it has entered into a different state. Similarly that which was white becomes black, and that which was bad good, by a process of change; and in the same way in all other cases it is by changing that substances are capable of admitting contrary qualities. But statements and opinions themselves remain unaltered in all respects: it is by the alteration in the facts of the case that the contrary quality comes to be theirs. The statement 'he is sitting' remains unaltered, but it is at one time true, at another false, according to circumstances. What has been said of statements applies also to opinions. Thus, in respect of the manner in which the thing takes place, it is the peculiar mark of substance that it should be capable of admitting contrary qualities; for it is by itself changing that it does so.

If, then, a man should make this exception and contend that statements and opinions are capable of admitting contrary qualities, his contention is unsound. For statements and opinions are said to have this capacity, not because they themselves undergo modification, but because this modification occurs in the case of something else. The truth or falsity of a statement depends on facts, and not on any power on the part of the statement itself of admitting contrary qualities. In short, there is nothing which can alter the nature of statements and opinions. As, then, no change takes place in themselves, these cannot be said to be capable of admitting contrary qualities.

But it is by reason of the modification which takes place within the substance itself that a substance is said to be capable of admitting contrary qualities; for a substance admits within itself either disease or health, whiteness or blackness. It is in this sense that it is said to be capable of admitting contrary qualities.

To sum up, it is a distinctive mark of substance, that, while remaining numerically one and the same, it is capable of admitting contrary qualities, the modification taking place through a change in the substance itself.

Let these remarks suffice on the subject of substance.

Editor's Note: To continue reading *The Categories* by Aristotle, follow this link to view the book on Project Gutenberg. This content focuses on how Aristotle conceptualizes the specific

categories.

Citation and Use

This text was taken from the following work.

Aristotle, *The Categories* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2008), Trans. by E. M. Edghill.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2412/2412-h/2412-h.htm#part01>

The use of this work is governed by the public domain.



This work (Selected Readings from Aristotle's Categories by Aristotle) is free of known copyright restrictions.

AN INTRODUCTION TO 'SELF AND ĀTMAN'

Lunneihoi Thangeo

Lunneihoi Thangeo is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at North-Eastern Hill University, India. She also teaches introductory courses in philosophy to undergraduates at St. Anthony's College as a part-time lecturer. Her main interests are metaphysics and epistemology.

Ātman can be variously understood as the inner being, the eternally existing, the **conscious**, and the witness. It has also been called the true self that remains constant amidst all bodily changes. In Indian philosophy, there is a distinction between the lower self and the higher self. The consciousness of the lower self is finite, while the consciousness of the higher self is infinite. The lower self is trapped in the cycle of rebirths and re-deaths due to the law of *karma*, while the higher self is free. However, the lower self can get liberation from the *karmic* cycle using right knowledge and right action. Depending on the school of Indian philosophy, at liberation, the lower self can attain any of these three states – it realizes that it had always been the higher self, it becomes identical to the higher self, or it attains communion with the higher self.

The first sense of liberation (where the lower self realizes that it had always been the higher self) is the theme of the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna during the Kurukshetra War. The Kurukshetra War was a struggle for power between two groups of cousins. These were the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Arjuna belonged to the Pandava army and Krishna was his charioteer during the war. When they reached the battlefield, Arjuna's determination to fight was weakened after recognizing familiar faces in the opposing army. Besides his cousins, he recognized his uncles and former teachers whom he did not want to harm. When Krishna saw this hesitancy, he began to instruct Arjuna on the true nature of the self. The Bhagavad Gita mentions Krishna as saying,

"The one who thinks that *Ātman* is a slayer, and the one who thinks that *Ātman* is slain, both are ignorant, because *Ātman* neither slays nor is slain... It is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. The *Ātman* is not destroyed when the body is destroyed." (2.19-20)

Purusha

The nature of the self that emerges in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna is that of pure consciousness.

Such a theory of self is taught by the Sāṅkhya and Yoga schools of Indian philosophy (henceforth, Sāṅkhya-Yoga). To say that the self is pure consciousness means that consciousness is the essence of the self. In other words, it means that the self is consciousness itself. This is different from saying that the self *possesses* consciousness. For the self to possess consciousness, we would have to think of the self as a **substance**. But Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophers deny that the self is a substance.

To clarify the point of how the self is not a substance, let us consider the meaning of a substance. By 'substance', we mean the basic constituent of reality. A substance is called the substratum of qualities. As a substratum, the existence of a substance is supposed to be prior to and separate from the qualities that are found in it. For instance, take the conception of a substance found in another Indian school of philosophy called the Vaiśeṣika. According to the Vaiśeṣikas, a total of nine substances make our reality. These are earth, air, water, fire, ether, space, time, soul, and mind. Each substance possesses unique qualities that differentiate it from others. Earth has the unique quality of smell, air has touch, water has taste, fire has color, ether has sound, space has extension and co-existence, time has duration and changes, the soul has consciousness and mind has perception. As per Vaiśeṣika philosophy, the soul substance represents the true nature of the self. The soul substance is not always conscious. The quality of consciousness is activated only when it comes into contact with the mind substance, which in turn has to be in contact with the physical substances. This means that in Vaiśeṣikas philosophy, we can separate the self from consciousness. But we cannot do the same in Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophy. In Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophy, the self is always conscious. This eternally conscious self is called *purusha*.

In Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophy, there is no fundamental difference between the higher self and the lower self. The higher self is the original state of *purusha*, while the lower self is the ignorant state of the same *purusha*. *Purusha* has always existed. It cannot be killed. *Purusha* is *Ātman*. This is why Krishna could say to Arjuna,

"There was never a time when I, you, or these kings did not exist; nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future."
(2.12)

Krishna was talking about *purusha* and not the physical body. The physical body is a part of matter. In its original state, *purusha* is infinite and independent of matter. In its ignorant state, *purusha* is limited and dependent on matter. Matter is co-eternal with *purusha*. The name given to this **primordial** matter is *prakṛti*.

Prakṛti

Prakṛti is uncaused and independent. While *purusha* is the conscious self, *prakṛti* is the unconscious matter. *Prakṛti* is a unity of three essential constituents. These are *sattva guṇa*, *rajas guṇa*, and *tamas guṇa*. Each of them has a distinct character. *Sattva guṇa* has the nature of illumination and pleasure. *Rajas guṇa* has the nature of activity and pain. *Tamas guṇa* has the nature of **ignorance** and indifference.

The creation of the universe cannot take place without *prakṛti*. But *prakṛti* alone cannot begin producing. *Prakṛti* needs *puruṣa* to commence the creation process. We can understand the exact roles played by each using Aristotle's classification of causes. Aristotle had divided all causes into formal, material, efficient, and final. The formal cause is that according to which the effect is to be formed or shaped. For instance, when an architect plans for a bamboo house, the blueprint of the bamboo house is the formal cause. The material cause is that out of which the effect will be formed. In the example of the bamboo house, the material cause is bamboo. The efficient cause is the force that will transform matter according to the plan. The energy of the builders will be the force that converts the bamboo sticks into the planned bamboo house. Lastly, the final cause is the driving reason behind the other causes. If the bamboo house was built for commercial purposes, then the final cause of the house is profit-making.

We can now put the roles of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛiti* in terms of these four causes. *Prakṛti* performs the three roles of being the formal, material, and efficient cause. *Prakṛti* is the formal cause because the nature of *guṇas* determines the form of everything that comes into existence. The combination of the three *guṇas* is present in all things in different proportions. *Prakṛti* is the material cause of the universe because there is no other matter besides it. *Prakṛti* is also the efficient cause because it already possesses the energy required for creation in the form of *rajas guṇa*. The final cause is *puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* is the witness to the creation process. Creation takes place for the self-realization of *puruṣa*.

In Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophy, *prakṛti* is not just the cause of the sense and motor organs, but also the intellect, mind, and **ego**. Thus, in human beings, the ability to sense pain and pleasure, to be at rest or perform an activity, and to gain knowledge or remain ignorant are the potentials of the material body and not the self.

Bondage and Liberation

Even though *prakṛti* possesses the potential for sensations and mental formations, these cannot be experienced by *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is devoid of all awareness. Even the mind and **ego** seem to be aware only because they reflect the consciousness of *puruṣa*. The mind and **ego** can reflect the consciousness of *puruṣa* because they are dominated by *sattva guṇa*, the *guṇa* of illumination. This can be illustrated in the following way. Of all the natural surfaces, the water surface possesses the property of reflection. So, when we want to see the reflected image of the bright moon at night, we approach a water surface. Although the water surface has this extra reflective property compared to say, a mound of earth, it does not know about it. The water surface remains as unconscious as the mound of earth. This is the same thing that happens with the mind and ego. They are like the water surface, capable of reflection, but they are not aware that they are reflecting. The mind and ego remain as unconscious as the sense and motor organs.

If the mind and ego remain unconscious, then what is it that says, 'I have a mind' or 'This is my body' or 'I am feeling pleasure'? According to Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophers, this is *puruṣa*. We can explain this by taking the

example of the moon again. The moon seems engaged by the boundaries of the water body which reflects it. In the same way, *purusha* seems confined by the mind and ego that reflects it.

But *purusha* does not possess *guṇa* so it cannot have sensations and mental formations. However, since *purusha* is awareness, what happens here is that it becomes aware of the sensations and mental formations taking place in *prakṛti*. So, *purusha* experiences pain and pleasure only in association with *prakṛti*. In other words, *purusha* has a sense of having a finite body and limited perception only in association with *prakṛti*.

During this association, *purusha* ignores its true nature by paying attention to its reflection in *prakṛti*. It begins to appropriate the physical and psychical changes occurring in *prakṛti* as its own. This mistaken identity can trap *purusha* for a long time. Since matter goes through composition and decomposition, *purusha* also seems to pass through recurring cycles of births and deaths according to the law of *karma*.

Purusha can get liberated from this endless cycle by realizing that it is eternally independent of *prakṛti*. There was never an actual association between them. Matter cannot imprison consciousness. Rather, consciousness seems to be imprisoned only by a misconception.

Meditative practices can also facilitate the removal of misconception. The purpose of meditation is to wean the consciousness away from the various sensations in the body and the ever-changing thoughts in the mind. At first, a single object is chosen as the locus of concentration. When consciousness gets distracted, it is brought back to this object. The ultimate aim, however, is to **transcend** even this locus of concentration and become free of all thoughts. Only then will *purusha* become truly liberated.

There are two kinds of liberation – *jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti*. In *jīvanmukti*, the self is enlightened, but it has not yet discarded the body. However, it is no longer moved by pain or pleasure and the fear of death is removed. In *jīvanmukti*, the **discriminatory** knowledge of the self and the not-self is achieved. In *videhamukti*, the self **transcends** this **discriminatory** knowledge and returns to its original state of pure consciousness. Pure consciousness is devoid of intellectual content, change, and activity. *Videhamukti* is the event of the release of the enlightened self from the body at death.

Even though *videhamukti* is the final liberation, it cannot be achieved without *jīvanmukti*. A *jīvanmukta* continues to perform actions but only out of a sense of obligation. When actions are performed without any self-interest, then no new *karma* residues are collected. For this reason, a *jīvanmukta* is also a *karma-yogi*.

Karma-yogi

After talking about the true nature of the self, Krishna then instructs Arjuna to follow the path of *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* is the practice of doing things without the expectation of results. A person who takes this path is called a *karma-yogi*.

“A *Karma-yogi* whose mind is pure, whose mind and senses are under control, and who sees the same Self in all beings, is not bound (by *Karma*) though engaged in work.” (5.07)

When the true nature of the self is known, then struggling ends. No action can enrich or take away anything from the self. The true self, *purusha*, is never-changing, does not have any requirements, and does not aspire to become anything else. A *karma-yogi* is no longer enticed by praise, material possessions, or heavenly bliss. A *karma-yogi* is also not driven by negative emotions such as hatred, jealousy, or vengeance. The actions of a *karma-yogi* are passionless. The only motivation for action is to meet the demands of the various responsibilities that one is given in life. These responsibilities could be that of a parent, a student, a laborer, or a warrior as in the case of Arjuna.

Reading Questions

1. What do you understand by *Ātman*?
2. Illustrate how *purusha* is the true self and ego is the false self.
3. Explain how *purusha* gets associated with *prakṛti*.
4. Can *prakṛti* ever become conscious?

References

Levin, Noah, ed. “Self and Atman.” In SOUTH AND EAST ASIAN PHILOSOPHY READER, AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE, 105–15. NGE Far Press, 2019. [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_\(Levin_et_al.\)](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_(Levin_et_al.))



An Introduction to 'Self and Ātman' by Lunneiboi Thangeo is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

SELF AND ATMAN (FROM BHAGAVAD GITA)

Noah Levin

Chapter 2: Transcendental Knowledge

Sanjaya said: Lord Krishna spoke these words to Arjuna whose eyes were tearful and downcast, and who was overwhelmed with compassion and despair. (2.01)

The Supreme Lord said: How has the dejection come to you at this juncture? This is not fit for an Aryan (or the people of noble mind and deeds). It is disgraceful, and it does not lead one to heaven, O Arjuna. (2.02)

Do not become a coward, O Arjuna, because it does not befit you. Shake off this weakness of your heart and get up (for the battle), O Arjuna. (2.03)

Arjuna said: How shall I strike Bheeshma and Drona, who are worthy of my worship, with arrows in battle, O Krishna? (2.04)

It would be better, indeed, to live on alms in this world than to slay these noble gurus, because, by killing them I would enjoy wealth and pleasures stained with (theirs) blood. (2.05)

Neither do we know which alternative (to beg or to kill) is better for us, nor do we know whether we shall conquer them or they will conquer us. We should not even wish to live after killing the sons of Dhritaraashtra who are standing in front of us. (2.06)

My heart is overcome by the weakness of pity, and my mind is confused about Dharma. I request You to tell me, decisively, what is better for me. I am Your disciple. Teach me who has taken refuge in You. (2.07)¹**Dharma**

I do not perceive that gaining an unrivaled and prosperous kingdom on this earth, or even lordship over the gods will remove the sorrow that is drying up my senses. (2.08)

Sanjaya said: O King, after speaking like this to Lord Krishna, the mighty Arjuna said to Krishna: I shall not fight, and became silent. (2.09)

O King, Lord Krishna, as if smiling, spoke these words to the despondent Arjuna in the midst of the two armies. (2.10)

The Supreme Lord said: You grieve for those who are not worthy of grief, and yet speak the words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. (2.11)

There was never a time when I, you, or these kings did not exist; nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future. (2.12)

Just as the **Atman** acquires a childhood body, a youth body, and an old age body during this life, similarly Atman acquires another body after death. The wise are not deluded by this. (See also 15.08) (2.13)²

The contacts of the senses with the sense objects give rise to the feelings of heat and cold, and pain and pleasure. They are transitory and impermanent. Therefore, (learn to) endure them, O Arjuna. (2.14)

Because the calm person, who is not afflicted by these feelings and is steady in pain and pleasure, becomes fit for immortality, O Arjuna. (2.15)

There is no nonexistence of the Sat (or Atman) and no existence of the Asat. The reality of these two is indeed certainly seen by the seers of truth. (2.16) *(Sat exists at all times — past, present, and future. Atman is called Sat. Asat is a notion that does not exist at all (like the horn of a rabbit, or the water in a mirage). The one that has a beginning and an end is neither Sat nor Asat. The body is neither Sat nor Asat, or both Sat and Asat, because, it has a temporary existence. Mithya is the one that appears Sat at first sight, but is really Asat. Body, like the universe or Jagat, is called Mithya.)*

Know That, by which all this (universe) is pervaded, to be indestructible. No one can destroy the indestructible (Atman). (2.17)

Bodies of the eternal, imperishable, and incomprehensible soul are said to be perishable. Therefore, fight, O Arjuna. (2.18)

The one who thinks that Atman is a slayer, and the one who thinks that Atman is slain, both are ignorant, because Atman neither slays nor is slain. (2.19)

The Atman is neither born nor does it die at any time, nor having been it will cease to exist again. It is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. The Atman is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. (2.20)

O Arjuna, how can a person who knows that the Atman is indestructible, eternal, unborn, and imperishable, kill anyone or cause anyone to be killed? (2.21)

Just as a person puts on new garments after discarding the old ones, similarly Atman acquires new bodies after casting away the old bodies. (2.22)

Weapons do not cut this Atman, fire does not burn it, water does not make it wet, and the wind does not make it dry. (2.23)

This Atman cannot be cut, burned, wetted, or dried up. It is eternal, all pervading, unchanging, immovable, and primeval. (2.24)

The Atman is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable, and unchanging. Knowing this Atman as such you should not grieve. (2.25)

If you think that this (body) takes birth and dies perpetually, even then, O Arjuna, you should not grieve like this. (2.26)

Because, death is certain for the one who is born, and birth is certain for the one who dies. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable. (2.27)

All beings, O Arjuna, are unmanifest before birth and after death. They are manifest between the birth and the death only. What is there to grieve about? (2.28)

Some look upon this Atman as a wonder, another describes it as wonderful, and others hear of it as a wonder. Even after hearing about it no one actually knows it. (2.29)

O Arjuna, the Atman that dwells in the body of all (beings) is eternally indestructible. Therefore, you should not mourn for any body. (2.30)

Considering also your duty as a warrior you should not waver. Because there is nothing more auspicious for a warrior than a righteous war. (2.31)

Only the fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get such an opportunity for an unsought war that is like an open door to heaven. (2.32)

If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty, lose your reputation, and incur sin. (2.33)

People will talk about your disgrace forever. To the honored, dishonor is worse than death. (2.34)

The great warriors will think that you have retreated from the battle out of fear. Those who have greatly esteemed you will lose respect for you. (2.35)

Your enemies will speak many unmentionable words and scorn your ability. What could be more painful than this? (2.36)

You will go to heaven if killed, or you will enjoy the earth if victorious. Therefore, get up with a determination to fight, O Arjuna. (2.37)

Treating pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat alike, engage yourself in your duty. By doing your duty this way you will not incur sin. (2.38)

The wisdom of Saamkhya (or the knowledge of the Self) has been imparted to you, O Arjuna. Now listen to the wisdom of Karma-yoga endowed with which you will free yourself from the bondage of Karma. (2.39)

In Karma-yoga no effort is ever lost, and there is no harm. Even a little practice of this discipline protects one from great fear (of birth and death). (2.40) (*Karma-yoga is also referred to as Nishkaama Karma-yoga, Seva, selfless service, Buddhi yoga, yoga of work, science of proper action, and yoga of equanimity. A Karma-yogi works for the Lord as a matter of duty without a selfish desire for the fruits of work, or any attachment to results. The word Karma also means duty, action, deeds, work, or the results of past deeds.*)

Those who are resolute have only one thought (of Self-realization), but the thoughts of the irresolute are endless and many-branched, O Arjuna. (2.41)

The unwise who delight in flowery words (or the chanting of the Vedas without understanding the real meaning) stress Karma-Kaanda, the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas, O Arjuna, and say that there is nothing else (except material enjoyment). (2.42)

They prescribe various specific rites for the attainment of pleasure and power to those who are full of desires, and hold the attainment of heaven as the highest goal of life. The rebirth is their fruit of action. (2.43)

The resolute determination (of Self-realization) is not formed in the minds of those who are attached to pleasure and power; and whose discernment is obscured by such (ritualistic) activities. (2.44)

The Vedas deal with the three states or Gunas of mind. Become free from dualities, be ever balanced and unconcerned with the thoughts of acquisition and preservation. Rise above the three Gunas, and be Self-conscious, O Arjuna. (2.45) (*Guna means the quality, state, or the property of mind, matter, and the nature. Refer to Chapter 14 for more details on Gunas.*)

To a Self-realized person the Vedas are as useful as a reservoir of water when there is flood water available everywhere. (2.46)

You have Adhikaara over your respective duty only, but no control or claim over the results. The fruits of work should not be your motive. You should never be inactive. (2.47) (*The word Adhikaara means ability and privilege, prerogative, jurisdiction, discretion, right, preference, choice, rightful claim, authority, control.*)

Do your duty to the best of your ability, O Arjuna, with your mind attached to the Lord, abandoning (worry

and) attachment to the results, and remaining calm in both success and failure. The equanimity of mind is called Karma-yoga. (2.48)

Work done with selfish motives is inferior by far to the selfless service or Karma-yoga. Therefore be a Karma-yogi, O Arjuna. Those who seek (to enjoy) the fruits of their work are verily unhappy (because one has no control over the results). (2.49)

A Karma-yogi gets freedom from both vice and virtue in this life itself. Therefore, strive for Karma-yoga. Working to the best of one's abilities without getting attached to the fruits of work is called (Nishkaama) Karma-yoga. (2.50)

Wise Karma-yogis, possessed with mental poise by renouncing the attachment to the fruits of work, are indeed freed from the bondage of rebirth and attain the blissful divine state. (2.51)

When your intellect will completely pierce the veil of delusion, then you will become indifferent to what has been heard and what is to be heard (from the scriptures). (2.52)

When your intellect, that is confused by the conflicting opinions and the ritualistic doctrine of the Vedas, shall stay steady and firm with the Self, then you shall attain Self-realization. (2.53)

Arjuna said: O Krishna, what is the mark of a person whose Prajna is steady and merged in superconscious state? How does a person of steady Prajna speak? How does such a person sit and walk? (2.54) (*Prajna means consciousness, mind, intellect, judgment, discrimination, and wisdom.*)

The Supreme Lord said: When one is completely free from all desires of the mind and is satisfied in the Self by the (joy of) Self, then one is called a person of steady Prajna, O Arjuna. (2.55)

A person whose mind is unperturbed by sorrow, who does not crave pleasures, and who is free from attachment, fear, and anger; such a person is called a sage of steady Prajna. (2.56)

Those who are not attached to anything, who are neither elated by getting desired results nor troubled by undesired results, their Prajna is deemed steady. (2.57)

When one can completely withdraw (or restrain) the senses from the sense objects as a tortoise withdraws its limbs (into the shell), then the Prajna of such a person is considered steady. (2.58)

The desire for sensual pleasures fades away if one abstains from sense enjoyment, but the craving (for sense enjoyment) remains. The craving also disappears from the one who has seen (or known) the Supreme. (2.59)

Restless senses, O Arjuna, forcibly carry away the mind of even a wise person striving for perfection. (2.60)

Having brought the senses under control, one should fix one's mind on the Self. One's Prajna becomes steady whose senses are under control. (2.61)

One develops attachment to sense objects by thinking about sense objects. Desire for sense objects comes from attachment to sense objects, and anger comes from unfulfilled desires. (2.62)

Delusion arises from anger. The mind is bewildered by delusion. Reasoning is destroyed when the mind is bewildered. One falls down (from the right path) when reasoning is destroyed. (2.63)

A disciplined person, enjoying sense objects with senses that are under control and free from likes and dislikes, attains tranquillity. (2.64)

All sorrows are destroyed upon attainment of tranquillity. The intellect of such a tranquil person soon becomes completely steady. (2.65)

There is neither Self-knowledge nor Self-perception to those whose senses are not under control. Without Self-perception there is no peace; and without peace there can be no happiness. (2.66)

The mind, when controlled by the roving senses, steals away the Prajna as a storm takes away a boat on the sea from its destination, the spiritual shore. (2.67)

Therefore, O Arjuna, one's Prajna becomes steady whose senses are completely withdrawn from the sense objects. (2.68)

A yogi is aware of the thing (or Atman) about which others are unaware. A sage who sees is unaware of the experience (of sense objects) about which others are aware. (2.69)

One attains peace in whose mind all desires enter without creating any disturbance, as river waters enter the full ocean without creating a disturbance. One who desires material objects is never peaceful. (2.70)

One who abandons all desires and becomes free from longing and the feeling of 'I' and 'my' attains peace. (2.71)

O Arjuna, this is the Braahmee or superconscious state. Attaining this (state), one is no longer deluded. Gaining this state, even at the end of one's life, a person attains oneness with the Supreme. (2.72)

Chapter 5: Path of Renunciation

Arjuna said: O Krishna, You praise transcendental knowledge (the Saamkhya or Karma-Samnyasa) and also performance of unattached action, Karma-yoga. Tell me, definitely, which one is better of the two. (See also 5.05) (5.01) (*Karma-Samnyasa means renunciation of doership, ownership, and selfish motive behind an action, and not the renunciation of work, or the worldly objects. Karma-Samnyasa comes only after the dawn of Self-*

knowledge. Therefore, words Jnana, Saamkhya, Samnyasa, and Karma-Samnyasa are used interchangeably throughout the Gita. Renunciation is considered the goal of life, and Karma and Jnana are the necessary means to achieve the goal.)

The Supreme Lord said: Karma-Samnyasa, and Karma-yoga both lead to the Supreme. But, of the two, Karma-yoga is superior to Karma-Samnyasa. (5.02)

A person should be considered a true Samnyasi or renunciant who neither likes nor dislikes. Because, free from the dualities, O Arjuna, one is easily liberated from bondage. (5.03)

The ignorant, not the wise, consider Karma-Samnyasa and Karma-yoga as different from each other. The person who has truly mastered one, gets the benefits of both. (5.04)

Whatever goal a Samnyasi reaches, a Karma-yogi also reaches the same goal. One who sees the path of renunciation and the path of work as the same, really sees. (See also 6.01 and 6.02) (5.05)

But Samnyasa, O Arjuna, is difficult to attain without Karma-yoga. A Karma-yogi sage quickly attains Brahman. (See also 4.31, and 4.38) (5.06)

A Karma-yogi whose mind is pure, whose mind and senses are under control, and who sees one and the same Self in all beings, is not bound (by Karma) though engaged in work. (5.07)

A Samnyasi who knows the truth thinks: I do nothing at all. For in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, breathing; and (5.08)

Speaking, giving, taking, opening and closing the eyes, a Samnyasi believes that only the senses are operating upon their sense objects. (See also 3.27, 13.29, and 14.19) (5.09)

One who does all work as an offering to the Lord, abandoning attachment to the results, is as untouched by sin (or Karmic reaction) as a lotus leaf is untouched by water. (5.10)

A Karma-yogi performs action by body, mind, intellect, and senses, without attachment (or ego), only for self-purification. (5.11)

A Karma-yogi, abandoning the fruit of work, attains Supreme Bliss while others, who are attached to the fruits of work, become bound by selfish work. (5.12)

A person who has subdued the senses and completely renounced (the fruits of) all works, dwells happily in the City of Nine Gates, neither performing nor directing action. (5.13)

The Lord neither creates the urge for action nor the feeling of doership nor the attachment to the results of action in people. All these are done by the (Gunas of) nature. (5.14)

The Lord does not take the (responsibility for) good or evil deeds of anybody. The knowledge is covered by (the veil of) ignorance, thereby people are deluded. (5.15)

But their knowledge, whose ignorance is destroyed by the Self-knowledge, reveals the Supreme like the sun (reveals the beauty of objects of the world). (5.16)

They, whose mind and intellect are absorbed in the Self, who remain firmly attached with the Self, who have Self as their supreme goal, whose sins (or impurities) have been destroyed by the knowledge, do not take birth again. (5.17)

An enlightened person looks at a learned and humble Braahmana, an outcast, even a cow, an elephant, or a dog with an equal eye. (5.18)

Everything has been accomplished in this very life by those whose mind is set in equality. Such a person has realized Brahman because Brahman is flawless and impartial. (See also 18.55) (5.19)

One who neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieves on obtaining the unpleasant, who is undeluded, who has a steady mind, and who is a knower of Brahman; such a person abides in Brahman. (5.20)

A person whose mind is unattached to sensual pleasures, who discovers the joy of the Self, and whose mind is in union with Brahman through meditation, enjoys eternal bliss. (5.21)

Pleasures derived from the contact of senses with their objects (or the sensual pleasures) are verily the source of misery, and have a beginning and an end. The wise, O Arjuna, do not rejoice in sensual pleasures. (See also 18.38) (5.22)

One who is able to withstand the impulse of lust and anger before death is a yogi, and a happy person. (5.23)

One who finds happiness with the Self, who rejoices the Self within, and who is illuminated by the Self-knowledge; such a yogi becomes one with Brahman and attains supreme nirvana. (5.24)

Seers whose sins (or imperfections) are destroyed, whose doubts have been dispelled by knowledge, whose disciplined minds are attached with the Self, and who are engaged in the welfare of all beings attain Supreme Brahman. (5.25)

A Self-realized person who is free from lust and anger, and who has subdued the mind and senses easily attains nirvana. (5.26)

Renouncing sense enjoyments; fixing the eyes and mind at the midbrows; equalizing the breath moving through the nostrils (by Kriya techniques); (See also 4.29, 6.13 and 8.10) (5.27)

With senses, mind, and intellect under control; having liberation as the prime goal; free from lust, anger, and fear; such a sage is verily liberated. (5.28)

The one who knows Me as the enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, as the great Lord of all the worlds, and as the friend of all beings, attains peace. (5.29)

Chapter 13: Creation and the Creator

The Supreme Lord said: O Arjuna, this body (the miniature universe) may be called the field or creation. One who knows the creation is called the creator by the seers of truth. (13.01)

Know Me to be the creator of all creation, O Arjuna. The true understanding of both the creator and the creation is considered by Me to be the transcendental or metaphysical knowledge. (13.02)

What the creation is, what it is like, what its transformations are, where the source is, who that creator is, and what His powers are, hear all these from Me in brief. (13.03)

The sages have described Him in many ways, in various Vedic hymns, and also in the conclusive and convincing verses of the Brahmasutra. (13.04)

The five basic elements, the “I” consciousness or ego, the intellect, the unmanifest Prakriti, the ten senses, the mind, and the five sense objects; (See also 7.04) (13.05)

Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the physical body, consciousness, and resolve. Thus the field (the creation or body) has been briefly described with its transformations. (13.06)

Humility, modesty, nonviolence, forbearance, honesty, service to guru, purity (of thought, word, and deed), steadfastness, self-control; and (13.07)

Aversion towards sense objects, absence of ego, constant reflection on the agony and suffering inherent in birth, old age, disease, and death. (13.08)

Detachment, non-fondness with son, wife, and home; unfailing equanimity upon attainment of the desirable and the undesirable; and (13.09)

Unswerving devotion to Me by the yoga of exclusivity, love for solitude, distaste for social gossips; and (13.10)

Steadfastness in knowledge of the Supreme Spirit, and the perception of (the omnipresent God as) the object of true knowledge is called knowledge; what is contrary to this is ignorance. (13.11)

I shall fully describe the object of knowledge, knowing which one attains immortality. The beginningless Supreme Brahman is said to be neither Sat nor Asat. (See also 9.19) (13.12)

Having hands and feet everywhere; having eyes, head, and face everywhere; having ears everywhere; the creator exists in the creation by pervading everything. (13.13)

He is the perceiver of all sense objects without the senses; unattached, yet the sustainer of all; devoid of the Gunas, yet the enjoyer of the Gunas. (13.14)

He is inside as well as outside all beings, animate and inanimate. He is incomprehensible because of His subtlety. He is very near as well as far away. (13.15)

Undivided, yet appears as if divided in beings; He, the object of knowledge, is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of (all) beings. (13.16)

The light of all lights, He is said to be beyond darkness. He is the knowledge, the object of knowledge, and seated in the hearts of all beings, He is to be realized by the knowledge. (13.17)

Thus the creation as well as the knowledge and the object of knowledge have been briefly described. Understanding this, My devotee attains Me. (13.18)

Know that Prakriti and Purusha are both beginningless; and also know that all manifestations and Gunas arise from the Prakriti. (13.19)

The Prakriti is said to be the cause of production of physical body and organs (of perception and action). The Purusha (or the consciousness) is said to be the cause of experiencing pleasures and pains. (13.20)

The Purusha associating with Prakriti (or matter), enjoys the Gunas of Prakriti. Attachment to the Gunas (due to ignorance caused by previous Karma) is the cause of the birth of JeevaAtman in good and evil wombs. (13.21) *(JeevaAtman or Jeeva is defined as Atman accompanied by the subtile (or astral) body consisting of the six sensory faculties and vital forces; the living entity; the individual soul enshrined in the physical body.)*

The Supreme Spirit in the body is also called the witness, the guide, the supporter, the enjoyer, and the great Lord or ParamaAtman. (13.22)

They who truly understand Purusha and Prakriti with its Gunas are not born again regardless of their mode of life. (13.23)

Some perceive God in the heart by the intellect through meditation; others by the yoga of knowledge; and others by the yoga of work (or Karma-yoga). (13.24)

Some, however, do not understand Brahman, but having heard (of it) from others, take to worship. They also transcend death by their firm faith to what they have heard. (13.25)

Whatever is born, animate or inanimate, know them to be (born) from the union of the field (or Prakriti) and the field knower (or Purusha), O Arjuna. (See also 7.06) (13.26)

The one who sees the imperishable Supreme Lord dwelling equally within all perishable beings truly sees. (13.27)

Seeing the same Lord existing in everybeing, one does not injure the other self and thereupon attains the Supreme goal. (13.28)

Those who perceive that all works are done by the (Gunas of) Prakriti alone, and thus they are not the doer, they truly understand. (See also 3.27, 5.09, and 14.19) (13.29)

When one perceives diverse variety of beings resting in One and spreading out from That alone, then one attains Brahman. (13.30)

The imperishable Supreme Self, being beginningless and without Gunas, though dwelling in the body (as Atman) neither does anything nor gets tainted, O Arjuna. (13.31)

As the all-pervading ether is not tainted because of its subtlety, similarly the Self, seated in everybody, is not tainted. (13.32)

O Arjuna, just as one sun illuminates this entire world, similarly the creator illumines (or gives life to) the entire creation. (13.33)

They, who understand the difference between the creation (or the body) and the creator (or the Atman) and know the technique of liberation (of Jeeva) from the trap of Maya with the help of knowledge, attain the Supreme. (13.34)

Citation and Use

This reading was taken from the following source.

Levin, Noah, ed. "Self and Atman." In SOUTH AND EAST ASIAN PHILOSOPHY READER, AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE, 105–15. NGE Far Press, 2019. [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_\(Levin_et_al.\)](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_(Levin_et_al.))

Use of this work is governed by CC-BY-SA-NC license.



Self and Atman (from Bhagavad Gita) by Noah Levin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Dharma may be defined as the eternal law governing, upholding, and supporting the creation and the world order. It also means duty, righteousness, ideal conduct, moral principles, and truth. Adharma is an antonym to Dharma. Expert guidance should be sought during the moment of crisis.
2. Atma or Atmann means consciousness, spirit, soul, self, the source of life and the cosmic power behind the body-mind complex. Just as our body exists in space, similarly our thoughts, intellect, emotions, and psyche exist in Atman, the space of consciousness. Atman cannot be perceived by the senses, because, the senses abide in Atman.

REALITY AND TIME (FROM BHAGAVAD GITA)

Noah Levin

Chapter 3: Path of Karma Yoga

Arjuna said: If You consider that transcendental knowledge is better than work then why do You want me to engage in this horrible war, O Krishna? (3.01)

You seem to confuse my mind by apparently conflicting words. Tell me, decisively, one thing by which I may attain the Supreme. (3.02)

The Supreme Lord said: In this world, O Arjuna, a twofold path of Sadhana (or the spiritual practice) has been stated by Me in the past. The path of Self-knowledge (or **Jnana-yoga**) for the contemplative, and the path of unselfish work (or Karma-yoga) for the active. (3.03)¹

One does not attain freedom from the bondage of Karma by merely abstaining from work. No one attains perfection by merely giving up work. (3.04)

Because no one can remain actionless even for a moment. Everyone is driven to action, helplessly indeed, by the Gunas of nature. (3.05)

The deluded ones, who restrain their organs of action but mentally dwell upon the sense enjoyment, are called hypocrites. (3.06)

The one who controls the senses by the (trained and purified) mind and intellect, and engages the organs of action to Nishkaama Karma-yoga, is superior, O Arjuna. (3.07)

Perform your obligatory duty, because action is indeed better than inaction. Even the maintenance of your body would not be possible by inaction. (3.08)

Human beings are bound by Karma (or works) other than those done as **Yajna**. Therefore, O Arjuna, do your duty efficiently as a service or Seva to Me, free from attachment to the fruits of work. (3.09)²

Brahmaa, the creator, in the beginning created human beings together with Yajna and said: By Yajna you shall prosper and Yajna shall fulfill all your desires. (3.10)

Nourish the Devas with Yajna, and the **Devas** will nourish you. Thus nourishing one another you shall attain the Supreme goal. (3.11)³

The Devas, nourished by Yajna, will give you the desired objects. One who enjoys the gift of the Devas without offering them (anything in return) is, indeed, a thief. (3.12)

The righteous who eat the remnants of the Yajna are freed from all sins, but the impious who cook food only for themselves (without sharing with others in charity) verily eat sin. (3.13)

The living beings are born from food, food is produced by rain, rain comes by performing Yajna. The Yajna is performed by doing Karma. (See also 4.32) (3.14)

The Karma or duty is prescribed in the Vedas. The Vedas come from Brahman. Thus the all-pervading Brahman is ever present in Yajna or service. (3.15)

The one who does not help to keep the wheel of creation in motion by sacrificial duty, and who rejoices in sense pleasures, that sinful person lives in vain, O Arjuna. (3.16)

The one who rejoices in the Self only, who is satisfied with the Self, who is content in the Self alone, for such a (Self-realized) person there is no duty. (3.17)

Such a person has no interest, whatsoever, in what is done or what is not done. A Self-realized person does not depend on anybody (except God) for anything. (3.18)

Therefore, always perform your duty efficiently and without attachment to the results, because by doing work without attachment one attains the Supreme. (3.19)

King Janaka and others attained perfection (or Self-realization) by Karma-yoga alone. You should perform your duty (with apathetic frame of mind) with a view to guide people and for the universal welfare (of the society). (3.20)

Because, whatever noble persons do, others follow. Whatever standard they set up, the world follows. (3.21)

O Arjuna, there is nothing in the three worlds (earth, heaven, and the upper regions) that should be done by Me, nor there is anything unobtained that I should obtain, yet I engage in action. (3.22)

Because, if I do not engage in action relentlessly, O Arjuna, people would follow My path in every way. (3.23)

These worlds would perish if I do not work, and I shall be the cause of confusion and destruction of all these people. (3.24)

As the ignorant work, O Arjuna, with attachment (to the fruits of work), so the wise should work without attachment, for the welfare of the society. (3.25)

The wise should not unsettle the mind of the ignorant who is attached to the fruits of work, but the enlightened one should inspire others by performing all works efficiently without attachment. (See also 3.29) (3.26)

All works are being done by the Gunas (or the energy and power) of nature, but due to delusion of ego people assume themselves to be the doer. (See also 5.09, 13.29, and 14.19) (3.27)

The one who knows the truth, O Arjuna, about the role of Guna and action does not get attached to the work, knowing that it is the Gunas that work with their instruments, the organs. (3.28)

Those who are deluded by the Gunas of nature get attached to the works of the Gunas. The wise should not disturb the mind of the ignorant whose knowledge is imperfect. (See also 3.26) (3.29)

Dedicating all works to Me in a spiritual frame of mind, free from desire, attachment, and mental grief, do your duty. (3.30)

Those who always practice this teaching of Mine, with faith and free from cavil, are freed from the bondage of Karma. (3.31)

But, those who carp at My teaching and do not practice it, consider them as ignorant of all knowledge, senseless, and lost. (3.32)

All beings follow their nature. Even the wise act according to their own nature. What, then, is the value of sense restraint? (3.33)

Raaga and Dwesha (or the attachments and aversions) for the sense objects remain in the senses. One should not come under the control of these two, because they are two stumbling blocks, indeed, on one's path of Self-realization. (3.34)

One's inferior natural work is better than superior unnatural work. Death in carrying out one's natural work is useful. Unnatural work produces too much stress. (See also 18.47) (3.35)

Arjuna said: O Krishna, what impels one to commit sin as if unwillingly and forced against one's will? (3.36)

The Supreme Lord said: It is Kaama and anger born of Rajo Guna. Kaama is insatiable and is a great devil. Know this as the enemy. (3.37)

Kaama, the passionate desire for all sensual and material pleasures, becomes anger if it is unfulfilled. As the fire

is covered by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, similarly the Self-knowledge gets obscured by Kaama. (3.38)

O Arjuna, Jnana gets covered by this insatiable fire of Kaama, the eternal enemy of Jnani. (3.39)

The senses, the mind, and the intellect are said to be the seat of Kaama. Kaama, with the help of the senses, deludes a person by veiling Jnana. (3.40)

Therefore, O Arjuna, by controlling the senses kill this devil (of material desire) that destroys knowledge and discrimination. (3.41)

The senses are said to be superior (to matter or the body), the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind, and Atma is superior to the intellect. (3.42)

Thus, knowing the Atma to be superior to the intellect, and controlling the mind by the intellect (that is purified by Jnana), one must kill this mighty enemy, Kaama, O Arjuna. (3.43)

Chapter 4: Path of Renunciation with Knowledge

The Supreme Lord said: I taught this imperishable (science of right action, or) Karma-yoga to (King) Vivasvaan. Vivasvaan taught it to Manu. Manu taught it to Ikshavaaku. (4.01)

Thus handed down in succession the royal sages knew this (Karma-yoga). After a long time the science of Karma-yoga was lost from this earth. (4.02)

Today I have described the same ancient science to you, because you are my sincere devotee and friend. Karma-yoga is a supreme secret indeed. (4.03)

Arjuna said: You were born later, but Vivasvaan was born in ancient time. How am I to understand that You taught this yoga in the beginning (of the creation)? (4.04)

The Supreme Lord said: Both you and I have taken many births. I remember them all, O Arjuna, but you do not remember. (4.05)

Though I am eternal, imperishable, and the Lord of all beings; yet I (voluntarily) manifest by controlling My own material nature using My Yoga-Maya. ⁴(4.06) ⁵

Whenever there is a decline of Dharma and the rise of Adharma, O Arjuna, then I manifest (or incarnate) Myself. I incarnate from time to time for protecting the good, for transforming the wicked, and for establishing Dharma, the world order. (4.07-08)

The one who truly understands My transcendental birth and activities (of creation, maintenance, and dissolution), is not born again after leaving this body and attains My abode, O Arjuna. (4.09)

Freed from attachment, fear, and anger; fully absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, and purified by the fire of Self-knowledge, many have attained Me. (4.10)

With whatever motive people worship Me, I reward them (or fulfill their desires) accordingly. People worship (or approach) Me with different motives. (4.11)

Those who long for success in their work here (on the earth) worship the demigods (or Devas). Success in work comes quickly in this human world. (4.12)

The four Varna or divisions of human society, based on aptitude and vocation, were created by Me. Though I am the author of this system, one should know that I do nothing and I am eternal. (See also 18.41) (4.13)

Works do not bind Me, because I have no desire for the fruits of work. The one who understands this truth is (also) not bound by Karma. (4.14)

The ancient seekers of liberation also performed their duties with this understanding. Therefore, you should do your duty as the ancients did. (4.15)

Even the wise are confused about what is action and what is inaction. Therefore, I shall clearly explain what is action, knowing that one shall be liberated from the evil (of birth and death). (4.16)

The true nature of action is very difficult to understand. Therefore, one should know the nature of attached action, the nature of detached action, and also the nature of forbidden action. (4.17)

Attached action is selfish work that produces Karmic bondage, detached action is unselfish work or Seva that leads to nirvana, and forbidden action is harmful to society. The one who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is a wise person. Such a person is a yogi and has accomplished everything. (See also 3.05, 3.27, 5.08 and 13.29) (4.18)

A person whose all works are free from selfish desires and motives, and whose all Karma is burned up in the fire of Self-knowledge, is called a sage by the wise. (4.19)

Having abandoned attachment to the fruits of work, ever content, and dependent on no one (but God); though engaged in activity, one does nothing at all (and incurs no Karmic reaction). (4.20)

Free from desires, mind and senses under control, renouncing all proprietorship, doing mere bodily action, one does not incur sin (or Karmic reaction). (4.21)

Content with whatever gain comes naturally by His will, unaffected by dualities, free from envy, equanimous in success and failure; though engaged in work such a person is not bound (by Karma). (4.22)

Those who are devoid of attachment, whose mind is fixed in knowledge, who does work as a Seva to the Lord, all Karma of such liberated persons dissolves away. (4.23)

Brahman is the oblation. Brahman is the clarified butter. The oblation is poured by Brahman into the fire of Brahman. Brahman shall be realized by the one who considers everything as (a manifestation or) an act of Brahman. (Also see 9.16) (4.24)

Some yogis perform the Yajna of worship to Devas alone, while others offer Yajna itself as offering in the fire of Brahman by performing the Yajna (of Self-knowledge). (4.25)

Some offer their hearing and other senses (as sacrifice) in the fires of restraint, others offer sound and other objects of the senses (as sacrifice) in the fires of the senses. (4.26)

Others offer all the functions of the senses, and the functions of Prana (or the five bioimpulses) as sacrifice in the fire of the yoga of self-restraint that is kindled by knowledge. (4.27)

Others offer their wealth, their austerity, and their practice of yoga as sacrifice, while the ascetics with strict vows offer their study of scriptures and knowledge as sacrifice. (4.28)

Those who are engaged in yogic practice, reach the breathless state by offering inhalation into exhalation and exhalation into inhalation as sacrifice (by using short breathing Kriya techniques).⁶ (4.29)

Others restrict their diet and offer their inhalations as sacrifice into their inhalations. All these are the knowers of sacrifice, and are purified by (theirs) sacrifice. (4.30)

Those who perform Yajna obtain the nectar (of knowledge) as a result of their sacrifice and attain eternal Brahman. O Arjuna, even this world is not (a happy place) for the non-sacrificer, how can the other world be?⁷ (4.31)

Thus many types of sacrifice are described in the Vedas. Know them all to be born from Karma or the action of body, mind, and senses. Knowing this, you shall attain nirvana. (See also 3.14) (4.32)

The knowledge sacrifice is superior to any material sacrifice, O Arjuna. Because, all actions in their entirety culminate in knowledge. (4.33)

Acquire this transcendental knowledge by humble reverence, by sincere inquiry, and by service (to a Self-realized guru). The wise who have realized the truth will teach you. (4.34)

Knowing that, O Arjuna, you shall not again get deluded like this. By this knowledge you shall behold the entire creation in your own Self/Lord, or in Brahman. (See also 6.29) (4.35)

Even if one is the most sinful of all sinners, yet one shall cross over the ocean of sin by the raft of knowledge alone. (4.36)

As the blazing fire reduces wood to ashes, similarly, the fire of Self-knowledge reduces all Karma to ashes, O Arjuna. (4.37)

Verily there is no purifier in this world like knowledge. One who becomes purified by Karma-yoga discovers this knowledge within (naturally) in course of time. (See also 4.31, and 5.06). (4.38)

The one who has faith, and is sincere, and has mastery over the senses, gains this knowledge. Having gained this, one at once attains the supreme peace. (4.39)

But the ignorant, who has no faith and is full of doubt (about the Self), perishes. There is neither this world nor the world beyond nor happiness for the one who doubts. (4.40)

Karma does not bind one who has renounced work (by renouncing the fruits of work) through Karma-yoga; whose doubt is completely destroyed by knowledge; and who is Self-realized, O Arjuna. (4.41)

Therefore, resort to Karma-yoga and cut the ignorance-born doubt abiding in your heart by the sword of Self-knowledge, and get up (to fight), O Arjuna. (4.42)

Chapter 10: Manifestation of the Absolute

The Supreme Lord said: O Arjuna, listen once again to My supreme word that I shall speak to you, who are dear, for your welfare. (10.01)

Neither the Devas nor the great sages know My origin, because I am the origin of all Devas and sages also. (10.02)

One who knows Me as the unborn, the beginningless, and the Supreme Lord of the universe, is considered wise among the mortals, and gets liberation from the bondage of Karma. (10.03)

Discrimination, knowledge, non-delusion, forgiveness, truthfulness, control over the mind and senses, pleasure, pain, birth, death, fear, fearlessness; (10.04).

Nonviolence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame, and ill fame; all these diverse qualities in human beings arise from Me alone. (10.05)

The seven great sages and four ancient Manus, from whom all these creatures of the world were born, originated from My potential energy. (10.06)

One who truly understands My manifestations and yogic powers, is united with Me in unswerving devotion. There is no doubt about this. (10.07)

I am the origin of all. Everything emanates from Me. Understanding this, the wise ones worship Me with love and devotion. (10.08)

With their minds absorbed in Me, with their lives surrendered unto Me, always enlightening each other by talking about Me; they remain ever content and delighted. (10.09)

I give the knowledge, to those who are ever united with Me and lovingly adore Me, by which they come to Me. (10.10)

Out of compassion for them I, who dwell within their heart, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the shining lamp of knowledge. (10.11)

Arjuna said: You are the Supreme Brahman, the supreme abode, the supreme purifier, the eternal divine spirit, the primal God, the unborn, and the omnipresent. (10.12)

All sages have thus acclaimed You. The divine sage Narada, Asita, Devala, Vyaasa, and You Yourself tell me. (10.13)

O Krishna, I believe all that You have told Me to be true. O Lord, neither the Devas nor the demons fully understand Your manifestations. (See also 4.06) (10.14)

O Creator and Lord of all beings, God of all gods, Supreme person and Lord of the universe, You alone know Yourself by Yourself. (10.15)

(Therefore), You alone are able to fully describe Your own divine glories, the manifestations, by which You exist pervading all the universe. (10.16)

How may I know You, O Lord, by constant contemplation? In what form (of manifestation) are You to be thought of by me, O Lord? (10.17)

O Lord, explain to me again in detail, Your yogic power and glory; because, I am not satiated by hearing Your nectar-like words. (10.18)

The Supreme Lord said: O Arjuna, now I shall explain to you My prominent divine manifestations, because My manifestations are endless. (10.19)

O Arjuna, I am the Atma abiding in the heart of all beings. I am also the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings. (10.20)

I am Vishnu among the (twelve) sons of Aditi, I am the radiant sun among the luminaries, I am Marici among the gods of wind, I am the moon among the stars. (10.21)

I am the Sama Veda among the Vedas; I am Indra among the Devas; I am the mind among the senses; I am the consciousness in living beings. (10.22)

I am Shiva among the Rudras; (I am) Kubera among the Yakshas and demons; I am the fire among the Vasus; and I am Meru among the mountain peaks. (10.23)

Among the priests, O Arjuna, know Me to be the chief, Brihaspati. Among the army generals, I am Skanda; I am the ocean among the bodies of water. (10.24)

I am Bhrigu among the great sages; I am the monosyllable OM among the words; I am Japa among the Yajna; and I am the Himalaya among the immovables. (10.25)

I am the Peepal tree among the trees, Narada among the sages, Chitraaratha among the Gandharvas, and sage Kapila among the Siddhas. (10.26)

Know Me as Uchchaihshrava, born at the time of churning the ocean for getting the nectar, among the horses; Airavata among the elephants; and the King among men. (10.27)

I am thunderbolt among the weapons, Kaamadhenu among the cows, and the cupid among the procreators. Among the serpents, I am Vaasuki. (10.28)

I am Sheshanaaga among the Naagas, I am Varuna among the water gods, and Aryamaa among the manes. I am Yama among the controllers. (10.29)

I am Prahlada among Diti's progeny, time or death among the healers, lion among the beasts, and the Garuda among birds. (10.30)

I am the wind among the purifiers, and Lord Rama among the warriors. I am the shark among the fishes, and the Ganges among the rivers. (10.31)

I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of the creation, O Arjuna. Among the knowledge I am knowledge of the supreme Self. I am logic of the logician. (10.32)

I am the letter "A" among the alphabets, among the compound words I am the dual compound, I am the endless time, I am the sustainer of all, and have faces on all sides (or I am omniscient). (10.33)

I am the all-devouring death, and also the origin of future beings. Among the feminine nouns I am fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intellect, resolve, and forgiveness. (10.34)

I am Brihatsaama among the hymns. I am Gaayatri among the mantras, I am Maargsirsha (November-December) among the months, I am the spring among the seasons. (10.35)

I am the fraud of the gambler; I am the splendor of the splendid; I am victory (of the victorious); I am resolution (of the resolute); I am the goodness of the good. (10.36)

I am Vaasudeva among the Vrishni, Arjuna among the Paandavas, Vyaasa among the sages, and Ushanaa among the poets. (10.37)

I am the power of rulers, the statesmanship of the seekers of victory, I am silence among the secrets, and the Self-knowledge of the knowledgeable. (10.38)

I am the origin or seed of all beings, O Arjuna. There is nothing, animate or inanimate, that can exist without Me. (See also 7.10 and 9.18) (10.39)

There is no end of My divine manifestations, O Arjuna. This is only a brief description by Me of the extent of My divine manifestations. (10.40)

Whatever is endowed with glory, brilliance, and power; know that to be a manifestation of a fraction of My splendor. (10.41)

What is the need for this detailed knowledge, O Arjuna? I continually support the entire universe by a small fraction of My energy. (10.42)

Chapter 11: Vision of the Cosmic Form

Arjuna said: My illusion is dispelled by Your profound words, that You spoke out of compassion towards me, about the supreme secret of the Self. (11.01)

O Krishna, I have heard from You in detail about the origin and dissolution of beings, and Your imperishable glory. (11.02)

O Lord, You are as You have said, yet I wish to see Your divine cosmic form, O Supreme Being. (11.03)

O Lord, if You think it is possible for me to see this, then O Lord of the yogis, show me Your imperishable Self. (11.04)

The Supreme Lord said: O Arjuna, behold My hundreds and thousands of multifarious divine forms of different colors and shapes. (11.05)

See the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Ashvins, and the Maruts. Behold, O Arjuna, many wonders never seen before. (11.06)

O Arjuna, now behold the entire creation; animate, inanimate, and whatever else you like to see; all at one place in My body. (11.07)

But, you are not able to see Me with your physical eye; therefore, I give you the divine eye to see My majestic power and glory. (11.08)

Sanjaya said: O King, having said this; Lord Krishna, the great Lord of (the mystic power of) yoga, revealed His supreme majestic form to Arjuna. (11.09)

(Arjuna saw the Universal Form of the Lord) with many mouths and eyes, and many visions of marvel, with numerous divine ornaments, and holding divine weapons. (11.10)

Wearing divine garlands and apparel, anointed with celestial perfumes and ointments, full of all wonders, the limitless God with faces on all sides. (11.11)

If the splendor of thousands of suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, even that would not resemble the splendor of that exalted being. (11.12)

Arjuna saw the entire universe, divided in many ways, but standing as (all in) One (and One in all) in the body of Krishna, the God of gods. (11.13)

Then Arjuna, filled with wonder and his hairs standing on end, bowed his head to the Lord and prayed with folded hands. (11.14)

Arjuna said: O Lord, I see in Your body all the gods and multitude of beings, all sages, celestial serpents, Lord Shiva as well as Lord Brahmaa seated on the lotus. (11.15)

O Lord of the universe, I see You everywhere with infinite form, with many arms, stomachs, faces, and eyes. Neither do I see the beginning nor the middle nor the end of Your Universal Form. (11.16)

I see You with Your crown, club, discus; and a mass of radiance, difficult to behold, shining all around with immeasurable brilliance of the sun and the blazing fire. (11.17)

I believe You are the imperishable, the Supreme to be realized. You are the ultimate resort of the universe. You are the protector of eternal Dharma, and the imperishable primal spirit. (11.18)

I see You with infinite power, without beginning, middle, or end; with many arms, with the sun and the moon as Your eyes, with Your mouth as a blazing fire whose radiance is scorching all the universe. (11.19)

The entire space between heaven and earth is pervaded by You alone in all directions. Seeing Your marvelous and terrible form, the three worlds are trembling with fear, O Lord. (11.20)

These hosts of demigods enter into You. Some with folded hands sing Your names and glories in fear. A multitude of Maharishis and Siddhas hail and adore You with abundant praises. (11.21)

Rudras, Adityas, Vasus, Saadhyas, Vishwedevas, Ashvins, Maruts, Ushmapas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Asuras, and Siddhas; they all amazingly gaze at You. (11.22)

Seeing your infinite form with many mouths, eyes, arms, thighs, feet, stomachs, and many fearful teeth; the worlds are trembling with fear and so do I, O mighty Lord. (11.23)

Seeing Your great effulgent and various-colored form touching the sky; Your mouth wide open and large shining eyes; I am frightened and find neither peace nor courage, O Krishna. (11.24)

Seeing Your mouths, with fearful teeth, glowing like fires of cosmic dissolution, I lose my sense of direction and find no comfort. Have mercy on me! O Lord of gods, refuge of the universe. (11.25)

The sons of Dhritaraashtra along with the hosts of kings; Bheeshma, Drona, and Karna together with chief warriors on our side are also quickly entering into Your fearful mouths having terrible teeth. Some are seen caught in between the teeth with their heads crushed. (11.26-27)

As many torrents of the rivers rush toward the ocean, similarly, those warriors of the mortal world are entering Your blazing mouths. (11.28)

As moths rush with great speed into the blazing flame for destruction, similarly all these people are rapidly rushing into Your mouths for destruction. (11.29)

You are licking up all the worlds with Your flaming mouths, swallowing them from all sides. Your powerful radiance is burning the entire universe, and filling it with splendor, O Krishna. (11.30)

Tell me who are You in such a fierce form? My salutations to You, O best of gods, be merciful! I wish to understand You, the primal Being, because I do not know Your mission. (11.31)

The Supreme Lord said: I am death, the mighty destroyer of the world, out to destroy. Even without your participation all the warriors standing arrayed in the opposing armies shall cease to exist. (11.32)

Therefore, you get up and attain glory. Conquer your enemies and enjoy a prosperous kingdom. All these (warriors) have already been destroyed by Me. You are only an instrument, O Arjuna. (11.33)

Kill Drona, Bheeshma, Jayadratha, Karna, and other great warriors who are already killed by Me. Do not fear. You will certainly conquer the enemies in the battle, therefore, fight! (11.34)

Sanjaya said: Having heard these words of Krishna; the crowned Arjuna, trembling with folded hands, prostrated with fear and spoke to Krishna in a choked voice. (11.35)

Arjuna said: Rightly, O Krishna, the world delights and rejoices in glorifying You. Terrified demons flee in all directions. The hosts of Siddhas bow to You in adoration. (11.36)

Why should they not, O great soul, bow to You, the original creator who is even greater than Brahmaa? O infinite Lord, O God of gods, O abode of the universe, You are both Sat and Asat, and the imperishable Brahman that is beyond both (Sat and Asat). (11.37)

You are the primal God, the most ancient Person. You are the ultimate resort of all the universe. You are the knower, the object of knowledge, and the supreme abode. The entire universe is pervaded by You, O Lord of the infinite form. (11.38)

You are Vaayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, Shashaanka, and Brahmaa as well as the father of Brahmaa. Salutations to You a thousand times, and again and again salutations to You. (11.39)

My salutations to You from front and from behind. O Lord, my obeisances to You from all sides. You are infinite valor and the boundless might. You pervade everything, and therefore You are everywhere and in everything. (11.40)

Considering You merely as a friend, not knowing Your greatness, I have inadvertently addressed You as O Krishna, O Yadava, O friend; merely out of affection or carelessness. (11.41)

In whatever way I may have insulted You in jokes; while playing, reposing in bed, sitting, or at meals; when alone, or in front of others; O Krishna, I implore You for forgiveness. (11.42)

You are the father of this animate and inanimate world, and the greatest guru to be worshipped. No one is even equal to You in the three worlds; how can there be one greater than You? O Being of Incomparable Glory. (11.43)

Therefore, O adorable Lord, I seek Your grace by bowing down and prostrating my body before You. Bear with me as a father to his son, as a friend to a friend, and as a husband to his wife, O Lord. (11.44)

I am delighted by beholding that which has never been seen before, and yet my mind is tormented with fear. Show me that (four-armed) form. O God of gods, the refuge of the universe have mercy! (11.45)

I wish to see You with a crown, holding mace and discus in Your hand. O Lord with thousand arms and universal form, appear in the four-armed form. (11.46)

The Supreme Lord said: O Arjuna, being pleased with you I have shown you, through My own yogic powers, this supreme, shining, universal, infinite, and primal form of Mine that has never been seen before by anyone other than you. (11.47)

Neither by study of the Vedas, nor by Yajna, nor by charity, nor by rituals, nor by severe austerities, can I be seen in the cosmic form in this human world by anyone other than you, O Arjuna. (11.48)

Do not be perturbed and deluded by seeing such a terrible form of Mine as this. With fearless and cheerful mind, now behold My four-armed form. (11.49)

Sanjaya said: Lord Krishna, having thus spoken to Arjuna, revealed His four-armed form. Then assuming His gentle human form, Mahatma Krishna consoled Arjuna who was terrified. (11.50)

Arjuna said: O Krishna, seeing this gentle human form of Yours, I have now become composed and I am normal again. (11.51)

The Supreme Lord said: This (four-armed) form of Mine that you have seen is very difficult, indeed, to see. Even the gods are ever longing to see this form. (11.52)

Neither by study of the Vedas, nor by austerity, nor by charity, nor by ritual, can I be seen in this form as you have seen Me. (11.53)

However, through single-minded devotion alone, I can be seen in this form, can be known in essence, and also can be reached, O Arjuna. (11.54)

The one who does all works for Me, and to whom I am the supreme goal, who is my devotee, who has no attachment, and is free from enmity towards any being attains Me, O Arjuna. (See also 8.22) (11.55)

Chapter 15: Supreme Spirit

The Supreme Lord said: They (or the wise) speak of the eternal Ashvattha tree having its origin above (in unmanifest Brahman) and its branches below (in the cosmos) whose leaves are the (Vedic) hymns. One who understands this is a knower of the Vedas. (15.01)

The branches (of this world tree of Maya) spread below and above (or all over the cosmos). The tree is nourished by the Gunas; sense pleasures are its sprouts; and its roots (of ego and desires) stretch below in the human world causing Karmic bondage. (15.02)

Neither its (real) form nor its beginning, neither its end nor its existence is perceptible here on the earth. Having cut these firm roots of the Ashvattha tree by the mighty ax of (Jnana and) Vairaagya or detachment; (15.03)

The goal (of nirvana) should be sought reaching which one does not come back; thus thinking: In that very primal spirit I take refuge from which this primal manifestation comes forth. (15.04)

Those who are free from pride and delusion, who have conquered the evil of attachment, who are constantly dwelling in the Supreme Self with all Kaama completely stilled, who are free from the dualities known as pleasure and pain; such undeluded persons reach the eternal goal. (15.05)

The sun does not illumine there, nor the moon, nor the fire. That is My supreme abode. Having reached there they do not come back. (15.06)

Atma in the body is My eternal indivisible fragment indeed. Atma gets bound (or attached, and is called Jeevaatma) due to superimposition or association with the six sensory faculties, including the mind, of perception. (15.07)

As the air takes away the aroma from the source (or flower), similarly Atma takes the six sensory faculties from the physical body it casts off (during death) to the (new physical) body it acquires (in reincarnation by the power of Karma). (See also 2.13) (15.08)

The Jeevaatma enjoys sense pleasures with the help of six sensory faculties: hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell, and mind. (15.09)

The ignorant do not perceive Jeeva departing from the body, or remaining in the body and enjoying sense pleasures by associating with the Gunas. Those with the eye of knowledge can see. (15.10)

The yogis striving (for perfection) behold Atma abiding in their heart; but the ignorant, whose intellect is not pure, do not perceive Him even though striving. (15.11)

The light that coming from the sun illumines the whole world; and which is in the moon, and in the fire; know that light to be Mine. (See also 13.17 and 15.06) (15.12).

Entering the earth I support all beings with My energy; becoming the sap-giving moon I nourish all the plants. (15.13)

Becoming the digestive fire, I remain in the body of all living beings; uniting with vital breaths, the Prana and Apana, I digest all four varieties of food; and (15.14)

I am seated in the hearts of all beings. The memory, knowledge, and the removal of doubts and wrong notions

(about the Self) by reasoning or in Samadhi come from Me. I am verily that which is to be known by (the study of) all the Vedas. I am, indeed, the author of the Vedanta and the knower of the Vedas. (See also 6.39) (15.15)

There are two entities in this world: the perishable and the imperishable. (The bodies of) all beings are perishable, and the Atma is imperishable. (15.16)

There is another supreme spirit called Ishvara or Paramaatma, the indestructible Lord who pervades the three worlds and sustains them. (15.17)

I am beyond the perishable body, and higher than the imperishable Atma; therefore, I am known in this world and in the Vedas as Purushottama, or the Supreme Spirit. (15.18)

The wise one, who truly knows Me as the Purushottama, knows everything and worships (or surrenders unto) Me wholeheartedly, O Arjuna. (See also 7.14, 14.26, and 18.66) (15.19)

Thus this most secret science has been explained by Me, O sinless Arjuna. Having understood this, one becomes enlightened and one's all duties are accomplished. (15.20)

Citation and Use

This reading was taken from the following source.

Levin, Noah, ed. "Reality and Time." In SOUTH AND EAST ASIAN PHILOSOPHY READER, AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE, 116–30. NGE Far Press, 2019. [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_\(Levin_et_al.\)](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_(Levin_et_al.))

Use of this work is governed by **CC-BY-SA-NC** license.



Reality and Time (from Bhagavad Gita) by Noah Levin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Jnana-yoga is also called Saamkhya-yoga, Samnyasa-yoga, and yoga of knowledge. A Jnana-yogi does not consider oneself the doer of any action, but only an instrument in the hands of divine for His use. The word Jnana means metaphysical or transcendental knowledge.

2. Yajna means sacrifice, selfless service, unselfish work, Seva, meritorious deeds, giving away something to others, and a religious rite in which oblation is offered to gods through the mouth of fire.
3. Deva means a deity, a demigod, a celestial person, the agent of God, one who fulfills desires and protects.
4. See also 10.14
5. Yoga-Maya is same as Maya; the supernatural, extraordinary, and mystic power of Brahman. The word Maya means unreal, illusory, or deceptive image of the creation. Due to the power of Maya one consider the universe as existent and distinct from Brahman, the Supreme spirit. Brahman is invisible potential energy; Maya is kinetic energy, the force of action. They are inseparable like fire and heat. Maya is a metaphor used to explain the visible world or Jagat to common people.
6. Deep spiritual meaning and interpretation of the practical yogic verses (4.29, 4.30, 5.27, 6.13, 8.10, 8.12, 8.13, 8.24, and 8.25) should be acquired from a Self-realized master of Kriya-yoga.
7. See also 4.38, and 5.06

DHAMMA: WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT

Douglas Sjoquist

Introduction

Many people think of Buddhism as a religion rather than a philosophy and so one might wonder why there is a chapter on Buddhism in an introduction to philosophy textbook. However, metaphysical and epistemological ideas have always been a feature of religious thinking in India (and Asia more generally). Religion and philosophy were never thought of as separate and distinct disciplines. The Buddha's teachings (called "Dhamma") addressed fundamental questions about the self, the human condition, and the nature of existence—all of which are recognized philosophical questions within the Western tradition. At the same time, the Buddha emphasized an adherence to moral practice. It might be said that intellectual philosophy and religious practice are intrinsic to the Buddha's teachings.

This chapter begins by placing the Buddha in the context of Indian history and Asian history. What were the prevailing ideas and practices in India that gave rise to Buddhism? Which philosophical/religious systems of his day did the Buddha embrace or reject? The chapter will also discuss some of the many misconceptions and misrepresentations of the Buddha's teachings. By examining these misconceptions and misrepresentations, students will gain insights into what the Buddha actually taught in contrast to what people think he taught. Tackling these mistaken views on karma, for example, serves as a useful introduction to Dhamma.

The story of Malunkyaputta and the parable of the poisoned arrow can function as a preface to the Dhamma and will provide students with an orientation to both what is important to and irrelevant in the Buddha's teachings. Inherent in the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Three Marks of Existence is a rational investigation of self and existence – both features of philosophical inquiry throughout human history.

The Buddha never expected his followers to blindly accept the truth of his teachings. Instead, he encouraged his followers to verify the truth of Dhamma by making their own honest observations about self and existence. This chapter lends itself to a comparative analysis between what the Buddha taught and the wisdom and methodologies of philosophers presented elsewhere in this textbook. How do the three pillars of Dhamma (wisdom, mental discipline and ethical conduct), for instance, compare with other philosophical traditions such as Roman Stoicism, American Pragmatism, or the teachings of Pythagoras? How would the Buddha view our contemporary relationship with the environment? It is hoped this chapter will stimulate these kinds of questions and contribute to a greater sensitivity to and appreciation for Buddhist thought and practice. Some of these issues will be discussed in the "philosophical afterward" at the end of the chapter.

Pali: The Original Language of Buddhism

The original written language of Buddhism is Pali. This ancient language has its origins in India and is for all practical purposes a simplified version of Sanskrit, an ancient language also from India and the original written language of Hinduism. It might be said that the relationship between Pali and Sanskrit is analogous to the relationship between Italian and Latin. That the Buddha spoke Pali is more difficult to ascertain but scholars think he probably spoke something very similar to it. Whatever the case may be, the Buddha never heard the word “Buddhism” nor did he ever see the word in writing.

It should also be noted that the teachings of the Buddha were not written down until the first century BCE. That is to say, Buddhism existed in oral form for at least four hundred years. During that time monks trained in memorization techniques memorized the Buddha’s teachings. Ananda, a disciple of the Buddha, is said to have recited from memory all of the Buddha’s sermons at the first Buddhist council in Rajagaha, India and Upali, another disciple of the Buddha, recited for the council all of the Buddha’s 227 rules. This council was held shortly after the Buddha’s death in 483 BCE. Memorization of large quantities of doctrinal information was common in India at the time of the Buddha and this was how the Buddha’s teachings were passed on from generation to generation. Tradition says that at the fourth Buddhist council, convened by King Vattagamani (88-77 BCE) in Sri Lanka, the Buddha’s teachings and rules were written down for the first time. In addition to the sermons and rules of the Buddha, commentaries on the Buddha’s sermons by various disciples were gradually added over the years and these, too, came to be written down. In Buddhism, these written teachings, rules, and commentaries are known as the Tipitaka (“three baskets”) and constitute what’s called the Pali Canon. Historians believe that the teachings, rules, and commentaries were initially written at this council on palm leaves and then appropriately placed into three baskets. This is the origin of the word “tipitaka.” As a written language Pali died out probably around the 14th-c. Still, scholars study this language to gain access to the original teachings of the Buddha.

Historical Context

The traditional dates for the Buddha’s birth and death are 563-483 BCE, respectively. This makes him a contemporary of Mahavira (599-527 BCE), K’ung Fu-tzu (551-479 BCE), and Lao Tzu (570-517 BCE). Jainism, Confucianism, and Taoism, therefore, all came into existence in Asia about the same time as Buddhism. The area where the Buddha was born is actually now in modern-day Nepal. His mother gave birth to him in the Nepalese village of Lumbini. (Tragically, she died seven days later). Since his father was a king, he was a prince and brought up in a luxurious palace in the city of Kapilavatthu – also in Nepal. The Buddha’s given name is Siddhattha Gotama (in Sanskrit, “Siddhartha Gautama”). He was born into the Sakya clan and many scholars simply refer to him by the name “Sakyamuni” (meaning “sage of the Sakya clan”).

His family belonged to the nobility class. In India, this class was called the Khatiya (in Sanskrit, “Kshatriya”) class. Also, the Buddha’s family was Hindu. Hinduism was the dominant religion in India at the time but there was great diversity in philosophical thought among Hindus. World-views such as theism, materialism, agnosticism, determinism, nihilism, etc. all fell under the Hindu umbrella. The philosophical abstractness and the great variety in views made Hinduism virtually impossible for commoners to understand. Furthermore, many Hindu priests (called “brahmins”) taught that salvation was only available to brahmins. That is, one had to be born as a brahmin (and as a male) to attain freedom from the miseries of the world and from death. Brahmins also promoted the idea that rituals were the most effective means for securing assistance from the various deities that dominated the Hindu pantheon and the only people competent to perform these rituals were the brahmins themselves. It might be said that the priests had a spiritual stranglehold on the commoner. To complicate matters even further most commoners were uneducated and could not speak, read, or write Sanskrit – the language of the brahmins. It’s well-known that the priestly class had corrupted Hinduism by the time the Buddha entered the picture in India’s history. India was ripe for a new world-view. The Buddha experimented with the various practices and theories associated with the Hinduism of his day and he came to the conclusion that practices such as extreme austerities and solitude were harmful and that the dominant philosophical views were erroneous. He rejected, for example, the ideas of savior beings, divine assistance, sacrifices and rituals, a creator god, and the exclusivist views of priests as means to attain salvation. (It’s important to mention, perhaps, that during the time of the Buddha, the Hindu teachings represented by Upanishads had yet to reach fruition. These Upanishad teachings ushered in a Hindu reformation after the Buddha’s passing).

This chapter on Buddhism will examine the central teachings of the Buddha. It is vital that students note at the onset that a distinction should be made between what the Buddha taught and what is called Buddhism. Buddhism is a religion that represents an evolution of practices and thinking that evolved over a long period of time as it migrated from one geographical area to another and split into three traditions: the Theravada, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana.

There’s great diversity in Buddhism just as there is great diversity in the various traditions of Christianity or Islam. Ronald Eyre (1929-1992), a British theater director and narrator of the television documentary series called, *The Long Search*, proposed a thoughtful question: “If the Buddha of Sri Lanka or India and the Buddha of Japan were to meet would they recognize each other?” The question is apropos since what the Buddha taught is quite different from what some Mahayana schools (for example, the Pure Land sects in China or Japan) taught, for example. Buddhist scholars like to distinguish what the Buddha actually taught (that is, the Dhamma) and what came to be known as Buddhism. This chapter embraces the above scholarly position and will inspect only what the Buddha taught.

The Story of Malunkyaputta

An appropriate place to begin a discussion about Dhamma is to tell the story of an exchange between a monk named Malunkyaputta and the Buddha. The scene takes place at a monastery in Savatthi, India. Malunkyaputta had been bothered by many questions that he wanted the Buddha to answer. He felt the Buddha ignored the kinds of questions that for him were important. In essence, Malunkyaputta wanted answers to questions that would be considered central issues in metaphysics or other areas of philosophy as well as dominant topics in some religions like Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam. “Is the world eternal or not eternal? Is the world finite or infinite? Is the soul the same as the body or is the soul one thing and the body another thing? After death does a Buddha exist or not exist?” He went to the Buddha and demanded that the Buddha answer these questions once and for all. Malunkyaputta declared to the Buddha that he would abandon his training and return to a normal life if these questions were not answered. The Buddha quietly listened to Malunkyaputta and then told the following parable:

“Suppose, Malunkyaputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison and his friends and family brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: ‘I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow that wounded me until I know if the man who wounded me was tall, short, or middle height, dark or brown or golden-skinned, whether the man lived in a village or town or city; . . . until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a crossbow, whether the bowstring was made of fiber, reed, sinew, hemp or bark; . . . until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted – whether those of a vulture, a heron, a stork, a hawk, or a peacock.’” The Buddha went on in great detail and ended by saying that all these questions would still be unknown to that man and meanwhile he would die. He continued and said, “So, too, Malunkyaputta, if anyone comes to the Buddha and says he will not follow the Buddha until these questions are answered he, too, will die” (Majjhima Nikaya 63).¹

The orientation of the Buddha’s teachings is clearly illustrated in this story. The above tale shows readers that the focus of the Buddha’s teachings was on the elimination of suffering and not on theory or beliefs. In other words, we as humans should concentrate our energies on removing the “arrow of suffering” rather than wasting our time on useless doctrinal speculations. Whether the universe is finite or infinite, created or non-created, etc. matters very little with regard to the realities of one’s suffering. The issue of one’s liberation from suffering is more important, for example, than knowing the nature of God or knowing whether the world was created or not created. The Buddha’s teachings emphasize realistic solutions to human problems.

The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha was like a doctor/scientist who observed the problem with the human condition and presented

a cure or solution. More precisely, he analyzed, investigated, and then offered a course of action. After his enlightenment he gave a sermon to five monks in a place called Deer Park. This sermon (“sutta”) is called “The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Teaching.” At the beginning of this first sermon was the idea that we should avoid the extremes of self-indulgence on one hand and self-denial on the other. He said, “There are two extremes, monks, which must be avoided. What are these extremes? A life given to pleasures, dedicated to pleasures and lusts – this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, unworthy, and useless. And, a life given to self-torture – this is painful, unworthy, and useless.” We must, said the Buddha, follow the Middle Path “which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom, which produces calm, knowledge, enlightenment, and nibbana” (Samyutta Nikaya 56).² The Buddha’s teaching is often called the “middle path” because he taught that one should shun all extremes and instead live a life of moderation.

He then presented in this sermon what are called the **Four Noble Truths**:

1. There is suffering (“dukkha”)
2. Suffering has a cause
3. Suffering can be eliminated
4. There is a way to eliminate suffering

These Four Noble Truths might be considered the essence of the Buddha’s teachings on the human condition. Summarizing the Buddha’s own words he said, “I teach suffering, its causes, its cessation, and the way to end suffering.”

Regarding the First Noble Truth the Buddha said this: “Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with the unpleasant is suffering, to be separated from the pleasant is suffering, not to get what one desires is suffering” (Samyutta Nikaya 56). The First Noble Truth implies that life is defective. Suffering is inevitable. To be born into the world means to experience suffering (mental, physical). To paraphrase from his book, *Being and Nothingness*, the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, would say “if we are born in the world we are condemned to be free.” The Buddha would say, “if we are born in the world we are condemned to suffer.”

The Second Noble Truth says that suffering has a cause: “It is craving (tanha) which renews being, and is accompanied by desire and lust, desire for this and that. In other words, craving for sensual pleasures, craving to be, craving not to be” (Samyutta Nikaya 56). The Second Noble Truth identifies the cause of suffering as craving. It should be noted here that some scholars translate the Pali word tanha as “desire” but this is misleading because it implies that the Buddha taught that all desires must be eliminated to end suffering. This is simply inaccurate. Desires can be wholesome (for example, the desire to help others, the desire to be a kind person, the desire to end suffering for one’s self and for others, etc.). Desires can be neutral like the desire to ride your bike or go swimming or eat when you’re hungry. Other desires are unwholesome ones and these are

better translated as “cravings.” This translation of *tanha* better captures the essence of the Second Noble Truth. These unwholesome desires would include craving sensual pleasure, wealth, notoriety, and so forth. It might also include craving life and good health in the face of death or sickness, respectively. What gives rise to this craving in the first place is ignorance. We fail to see, for example, how our craving for those things, people, and activities that brings us pleasure leads to suffering.

Consider this. An object can fulfill a craving, or a person can fulfill a craving, or an activity can fulfill a craving. The fulfillment of that craving, however, brings with it attachment. In other words, we become attached to the things, the people, and the activities that brings us pleasure. This attachment is a human characteristic. It is natural. This attachment, however, gives rise to separation anxiety. We become anxious about losing the things, the people, and the activities that bring us pleasure. This anxiety is one example of suffering. It’s a complicated cycle that, in Buddhism, eventually leads to rebirth. The root cause of suffering, then, is craving, which arises out of ignorance and leads to attachment that leads to suffering.

The Third Noble Truth says, “It is the complete stopping of this craving, the elimination of passions so that craving can be laid aside, given up, harbored no longer, and gotten free from” (Samyutta Nikaya 56). If the cause of suffering lies in craving, ignorance, and attachment then the elimination of suffering involves abandoning them. We don’t rid ourselves of the objects, the people, or the activities; we rid ourselves of the craving and attachment to them. To eliminate suffering is to get rid of the craving and attachment and ignorance that underlie it and the Fourth Noble Truth prescribes a way to do this.

The Fourth Noble Truth says, “There is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering: it is, indeed, the Noble Eightfold Path: right views, right intentions, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration” (Samyutta Nikaya 56).

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path (*Magga*) is considered the path in Buddhism. The book called the *Dhammapada* (literally the “teaching path”) is a collection of sayings from the Buddha. It says in the book, “Of all the paths the Eightfold is the best; of truths the Four Noble are best; of mental states, detachment is best; of human beings the illuminated one is best” (*Dhammapada*, 273).³ The Noble Eightfold Path represents the middle course one must tread in life. It’s the Buddhist prescription for ending suffering. That is, it is the path we must adhere to in order to avoid the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification and attain the awakened state like the Buddha. The NEP consists of eight principles that are usually categorized under the headings of wisdom (*panna*), ethics (*sila*), and mental discipline (*samadhi*). Let’s look at each.

Right View simply means knowing through personal investigation and experience what suffering is, its causes,

that it can be eliminated, and the way to eliminate it. It implies a correct understanding of the law of kamma, for example, and a commitment to abandoning wrong views.

Right Intention is, perhaps, the most important feature of the NEP. The Buddha asked us to consider the intent behind thought, action, and speech. In other words, whenever we act, think, or speak we should be mindful of our intent behind those thoughts, actions, and speech. Is the intent to foster harm and ill will or is the intent meant to bring about good will and harmlessness to those around you and the environment? Before you act, think, or speak ask yourself, “What is my intent?” This is important to remember since the intent of an action creates kamma.

Right Speech requires that we refrain from lying, false accusations, idle gossip, and harsh or loud talk. We should not use speech to inflame passions or incite hatred, divisiveness, or violence. Instead, speech should be quiet, compassionate, and used to create harmony in one’s surroundings. Has your mother ever said, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say it”? If yes, she was probably a Buddhist and you didn’t know it.

Right Action constitutes five principles that all Buddhists should observe. They are 1) to avoid killing, and/or harming, 2) to avoid taking that which is not given to you (that is, no stealing), 3) to avoid false speech (see above), 4) to avoid sexual misconduct (such as adultery), and finally 5) to avoid intoxication by using drugs or alcohol. It is, of course, expected of Buddhist laypeople that these precepts be observed. For Buddhist monks, these precepts and many others are more strictly prescribed. For instance, monks must remain celibate. “Having thus gone forth and possessing the monk’s training and way of life, he abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, he extends compassion to all living beings. Abandoning the taking of what’s not given, taking only what is given and expecting only what is given. He observes celibacy, living apart from the practice of sexual intercourse.” (Mijjhima Nikaya 272)

Not surprisingly, students typically ask many questions about these precepts associated with right action as it relates to them – especially to avoid killing, to avoid sexual misconduct, and to avoid intoxication. “What if a mosquito lands on my arm? Can I kill it?” “What if someone comes to my house who intends to steal or murder? Can I kill that person?” “Can my girlfriend and I have sex and still be Buddhist?” “Can my boyfriend and I have a beer before or after dinner?” One way to answer these questions is to first ask, “What is the intent of my action? Will my action bring harm to another person, the environment, or myself?” Secondly, another way to address these kinds of issues for laypeople is to assess whether they conform to the practice of moderation. The Buddha warned against self-indulgence. Notice, for example, that the prohibition is against intoxication – not drinking. The prohibition is against sexual misconduct not sex.

Right Livelihood is an extension of right speech and right action into one’s profession or livelihood. One must avoid deceptive practices, exploitation, violence, etc. Any occupation that brings harm to others, the environment, or oneself should be avoided. Clear examples of this would be occupations that harm or deceive

others, such as engaging in human trafficking or working for an company that deploys deceptive sales tactics. One's profession should carry with it a sense of service to others or to the environment.

Right Effort means one must be resolved to cultivating wisdom, right views, right actions, etc. One cannot simply expect that things will get better or automatically improve. Suffering will not go away like magic. There must be a mental resolve to expel evil thoughts and nourish wholesome ones. There must be a mental resolve to cultivate compassion, wisdom, and generosity. Nurturing spiritual ideals requires mental discipline.

Right Mindfulness is an important feature of training the mind. It goes beyond simply having a global awareness of your surroundings at all times. It means paying attention to how one's actions, thoughts, and speech affect the environment and other people. It means paying attention to how a certain feeling or emotion has arisen in the mind. It means paying attention to how your current situation or circumstance (good or bad) has ties to past actions, words, and deeds. Right mindfulness means paying attention! Right mindfulness can mean "alertness" or "recollection" or "presence of mind," too. In the Buddha's teaching it refers to "egoless observing." One approaches the present without mental prejudice or preconception.

Right Concentration simply refers to meditation practice. Meditation practice trains the mind to focus and develop the ability to sustain a one-pointedness. It involves unifying the mind for one purpose: enlightenment or awakening.

These eight principles known as the Noble Eightfold Path are practiced concurrently and in accordance with the practice of moderation. As one can see the NEP does not represent a belief system. The eight principles represent a process, a practical guide to end suffering. These eight principles are linked and can be thought of in three categories as mentioned above: panna (Right Views and Right Intentions), sila (Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood), and samadhi (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration). The categories and their respective principles are intended to be practiced together. They are mutually supportive or interdependent. One cannot expect to conduct oneself ethically without mental discipline and mental discipline has no foundation without ethical conduct. And, both ethical conduct and mental discipline are connected with wisdom and wisdom is developed through mental discipline and ethical conduct.

The Three Marks of Existence

It's important to supplement the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path in this chapter with a short discussion on the Buddha's three marks of existence (tilakkhana). These characteristics do not appear as a separate and distinct sutta but they are mentioned so often in many suttas that scholars consider them essential elements in the Buddha's teachings. They should be viewed as complementary teachings to the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Dhammapada says this regarding these marks of existence: “All created things are transitory; those who realize this are freed from suffering. All created beings are involved in sorrow; those who realize this are freed from suffering.

All states are without self; all those who realize this are freed from suffering” (Dhammapada 277-279). In the Anguttara Nikaya (meaning “gradual sayings”) the Buddha said, “Whether Tathagatas (Buddhas) arise in the world or not, it still remains a fact, a firm and necessary condition of existence, that all formations are impermanent . . . that all formations are subject to suffering . . . that all things are non-self.”⁴

The first mark of existence is impermanence (anicca). That is, existence is characterized by constant change. There is no permanence in anything. There is no permanence in our thoughts, in our emotions, or in our bodies. There is no permanence in the objects of our world. All is in a constant state of change.

Ask yourself this: can I hold one particular thought or do my thoughts constantly change? Do my feelings stay the same or do they constantly change? Does my body stay the same or does it constantly change? Do the things that come to me in my experience of the world have any permanence? Clearly the answer is, “no!” All that is created is transitory. This is an existential condition.

The second mark of existence is that all beings (including animals) are subject to dissatisfaction or suffering (dukkha). We saw in the First Noble Truth that to be born in the world is to experience suffering. Part of the reason for this is that everything is subject to impermanence. Everything that changes brings with it unhappiness or distress. This is also an existential condition.

The third characteristic is, perhaps, one of the most complex and difficult principles in Buddhism to grasp for Westerners brought up in a Judeo-Christian-Islamic environment. It has even generated controversy. It’s the concept called “no-self” (anatta). Normally, we think of ourselves as being the “owner” of certain features that would constitute a human being such as bodily processes, sensations, perceptions, consciousness, etc. In the Buddha’s teachings, however, there is no “owner” or “self” attached to these features. The Buddhist monk, teacher, and author, Ajahn Khemansanto, posed this thought: “Long ago Descartes justified the existence of self by saying ‘I think, therefore I am’ (cogito ergo sum). From the Buddhist point of view he almost had it correct but it should be, ‘I think, therefore I think I am’. What is this thinker? Is this one who is aware separate from the thoughts, actions, feelings, or perceptions of the one who has them?” (Even Against the Wind, p.219).⁵

We utilize the word “self” for linguistic convenience to refer to the collection of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and body but it is not a “thing” separate from those same perceptions, etc. Furthermore, those perceptions, feelings, etc. are always changing or impermanent. Simply, there is no self (that is, there is no permanent and separate entity acting as an owner of sensations, consciousness, thoughts, etc.). “Suffering exists, but not the

sufferer. The act is done, but there is no doer. Peace exists, but not the one who is at peace. There is a path, but no one walks it” – Buddhaghosa (Visuddhimagga 513).⁶

Related to this third mark of existence is that Buddhists do not have a concept of a soul. Sometimes the Buddhist term *anatta* is interpreted as “no-soul.” In Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions it is assumed that humans have a soul that is separate from our bodies and when we die this soul continues to exist and goes to either Heaven or Hell. The Buddha put forward no such idea. There is no evidence that anything exists over and above our transitory bodies and minds that can be identified as a separate eternal entity or a “soul.” This idea of no- self/no-soul is a core principle in the Buddhist ontology.

Common Misconceptions

One common misconception is that the Buddha preached a pessimistic world- view that devalues life. This wrong interpretation stems from the Buddha’s principal position that if one is born into the world one can expect to experience suffering. What some critics of the Buddha’s teachings ignore, however, is that he taught that suffering has causes and suffering can be eliminated.

Additionally, the Buddha taught a way to eliminate suffering! The Dhamma is not pessimistic; it’s realistic. Look at any image of the Buddha. Does he have the face of a pessimist?

A second misconception is that the Buddha was a god. The Buddha never presented himself as a god nor did his disciples think of him as one. He was a human being – albeit a very unique one – who became enlightened or “awakened” to the realities of life and then taught people how to discover their own awakening and overcome suffering associated with these realities. What are the realities of human life? According to the Buddha it is, first and foremost, that although we all want *lasting* happiness and pleasure, we find only frustration, disappointment, and impermanence in that which brings us pleasure and happiness. The word “Buddha” means “one who is awake” (to the nature, causes, and elimination of suffering).

A third misconception is that the Buddha taught reincarnation. There is no notion of reincarnation in the Buddha’s teachings like there is in Hinduism. There is no soul that migrates from one lifetime to the next. What the Buddha taught was the notion of rebirth. Life does indeed continue after death but it is kammic/ karmic tendencies rather a soul that migrates from one life to another.

It seems there is great misunderstanding of the notion of kamma (“karma” in Sanskrit), as well. The Buddhist interpretation of kamma is distinguishable from the Hindu notion of karma. In Hinduism, karma can mean “action” or the consequences of a physical or mental action. It can also mean the sum of all consequences of actions. Furthermore, Hindus think of karma as a cause-and- effect relationship operative in human behavior. Buddhism generally accepts these ideas about karma found in Hinduism. However, in Buddhism the link

holding the universal law of cause-and-effect together is intention. Actions only produce results under certain circumstances. In other words, the effect of an action is not primarily determined by the act itself but rather by the intent of the action. It is the conscious intention of actions that causes kammic/karmic effects to arise. For example, if you unintentionally run over a squirrel with your car on the way to school it does not necessarily mean that you'll accumulate "bad karma" as a result. There has to be some conscious intent behind the action.

In today's "New Age" thinking people often embrace the idea that a person who suffers from a certain fate (for example, someone who has cancer, someone who was murdered, someone with a birth defect, etc.) deserved that fate due to their actions in the past – perhaps even lifetimes ago. The Buddha warned his monks not to fall into that wrong thinking. Humans are conditioned not only by their kamma but also by genetics, their environment, physical laws, and the mind, as well. Most importantly, it is the intention of an action that causes a certain effect in the future.

This brings up two other points regarding the Buddhist notion of kamma/karma. John Lennon sang a song called "Instant Karma." This idea of kamma/karma is also erroneous. The effect of an action is not instantaneous! In other words, an action and the effect of an action cannot happen simultaneously. The consequence of an action may not manifest until several days, years, or even lifetimes later. Secondly, the effect of an action is not necessarily an effect in kind. In some religions you find phrases like "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" or "as you sow, so shall you reap." This, too, is erroneous thinking from the perspective of Buddhism. For example, if you cheat on your girlfriend the consequence of that action might be that she leaves you forever instead of reciprocating by cheating on you while in the relationship. For every intensive action there is a reaction but not necessarily a reaction in kind or in proximity to the action itself.

There are many misrepresentations and misinterpretations regarding Buddhist concepts. This applies to Buddhist art, as well. Many people have seen the imagery below. This is not the Buddha. This is an image of Pu-tai, a Chinese Buddhist monk associated with Ch'an Buddhism. He is associated with prosperity and longevity and is a well-known figure in Chinese popular culture. This imagery dates back to about the 10th-c. The image is commonly referred to as the "laughing Buddha" or the "fat Buddha." This is not, however, the historical Buddha.



(Image: Douglas Sjoquist)

There are other misconceptions about Buddhism and what the Buddha taught (for example, all Buddhists are vegetarians, most Buddhists live in India, all Buddhists practice meditation) but the above represent the most commonly held ones.

Concluding Remarks

The Buddha did not create a theology, a cosmology, a cosmogony, or eschatology. There are no divinely revealed scriptures regarding what he taught. He did not develop a liturgy or prescribe any rituals. In other words, the Dhamma is not a religion in the way that many of think about religion. Rather, it is a path – a path that suggests mental discipline, living a life of moderation, being mindful of our intent behind thoughts, words, and actions, and practicing generosity and kindness will lead to insights on the human condition and eventually an awakened state. This awakened state in Buddhism is referred to as “enlightenment” (bodhi). What exactly is one awakened to? One is awakened to the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, the realization that suffering can be eliminated, and the complete understanding that there is a way to eliminate it. Ultimately, the goal is nibbana (literally, “to be extinguished”) – the highest kind of enlightenment. It says in the “Udana” (the third subdivision of the *Kbuddaka Nikaya*): “There is, monks, that state where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air; no base consisting of the infinity of space, no base consisting of the infinity of consciousness, no base consisting of nothingness, no base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world nor the next nor both; neither sun nor moon. Here, monks, I say there is no coming, no going, no staying, no decreasing, no uprising, no fixed, no moveable, it has no support. Just this is the end of dukkha” (Udana 8.1).⁷

Study questions

1. It seems that Buddhism arrived in Indian history at an opportune time. Describe some of the characteristics of Hinduism – especially the Brahmin class – that made India eager to embrace a new teacher and his teachings.
2. What is the name for the Buddha’s teachings? Why do scholars (and some Buddhists) make a distinction between what the Buddha taught and Buddhism? Do you think such a distinction has merit?
3. Identify at least three common misconceptions about Buddhism. (NOTE: Include in your answer the concept of kamma and two other misunderstandings about Buddhism commonly found in the West). How do you suppose these misconceptions arise and why do you suppose they get perpetuated? Can the same be said about the teachings of Jesus and/or Muhammad?
4. What message was the Buddha trying to convey in telling Malunkyaputta the parable of the poisoned

arrow?

5. Buddhism is often referred to as “the Middle Path.” Why?
 6. We all enjoy the simple pleasures in life like having coffee in the morning or putting on headphones and listening to our favorite music in the evening. Illustrate how engaging in a simple pleasure might lead to a form of suffering.
 7. According to the Buddha’s teachings, if various forms of suffering are tied to ignorance, craving, and attachment how, then, is this suffering to be eliminated?
 8. Arrange each of the principles associated with the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path according to the following categories: Wisdom, Mental Discipline, and Ethical Conduct. Illustrate how these principles (and categories) are mutually supportive.
 9. “Suffering exists, but not the sufferer. The act is done, but there is no doer. Peace exists, but not the one who is at peace. There is a path, but no one walks it.” – Buddhaghosa (Visuddhimagga 513). What Buddhist concept does Buddhaghosa refer to in the above quotation? Explain.
 10. What elements in Western religious traditions are not found in the Buddha’s Dhamma? What elements in Western philosophical thought are not found in the Dhamma? Does the absence of these elements imply that Dhamma is neither a religion nor a philosophy?
-

Philosophical Afterward (Matthew Van Cleave)

Many philosophical works address theoretical and conceptual problems. The problem of other minds, external world skepticism, the problem of free will and determinism—none of these issues concern the practical matter of how to live well. Rather, they are more intellectual than practical. Although much of the western philosophical tradition focuses on these intellectual and conceptual issues, the concern with practical matters, such as how to live well, has always concerned philosophers, as well. Going all the way back to ancient Greece, Socrates was first and foremost concerned with how to live well—with “ethics” in the broadest sense of that term. Today, ethics remains a flourishing area within the discipline of philosophy, alongside metaphysics, epistemology, and logic. Although contemporary philosophers have tended to intellectualize much of the discipline of ethics, there remains ongoing interest in older traditions that emphasize the practical and therapeutic over the intellectual.

Buddhism, and specifically the Dhamma, is clearly philosophical in this sense. As the story of Malunkyaputta suggests, we often don’t need a subtle *intellectual* understanding of things in order to reap *practical* or *therapeutic* benefits. Indeed, Malunkyaputta’s questions only inhibit his reaping the therapeutic benefits of the surgery. One philosophical tradition that exemplifies this therapeutic conception of philosophy is Stoicism. Since Stoicism is interestingly similar to the Buddha’s teaching about how desire leads to suffering and that living well involves taming our desires, it would be instructive to consider this similarity.

Stoicism began in ancient Greece and was imported to ancient Rome, where it was developed in the hands of influential Roman statesmen and emperors, including Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.⁸ As we have seen in this chapter, the second noble truth identifies the cause of suffering with faulty desires and suggests that in order to live better we should constrain not only *what* we desire, but also the *way* we desire things. The third noble truth suggests that we can (and should) learn to desire without getting attached to things. Stoicism makes a very similar claim about desire: that we should only desire those things which are under our control. Stoics had an interesting way of reconciling free will with determinism. On the one hand, Stoics believed that everything that happened was fated (by god/nature) to happen and it could not have happened otherwise (this is determinism). On the other hand, they believed that if we could come to desire whatever it was that happened, then whatever happened is something that we would want and in this sense we would have freedom.⁹ In contrast, we lack freedom when our desires are in conflict with what happens in the world. Thus, according to the Stoics, if we want to increase our freedom, we should learn to be accept with equanimity whatever happens. We should focus our energy on what we can control and although we cannot control what happens in the world, we can control *our reactions to* what happens in the world (our own minds). As Epictetus said, “Don’t demand that things happen as you wish, but wish that they happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.”¹⁰ The Stoics called this state of mind of calm acceptance of whatever happens **apatheia**. Indeed, some Stoics such as Epictetus pushed this acceptance to the extreme:

With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, *say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies.*¹¹

Thus the third noble truth and the Stoic notion of *apatheia* seem to share the idea that in order to live well, we should tame and control our desires so that we do not become attached to things that are not within our control and that we could lose.

This is both a serious but contentious claim about what human beings need to do in order to live well. Not everyone agrees that in order to live well we should narrow the scope and nature of what we desire, but this same issue is one that arises in other places within philosophy’s long history. Martha Nussbaum has argued that there was a longstanding debate on exactly this issue between the ancient Greek tragedians (like Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus), on the one hand, and Socrates and Plato, on the other. The tragedians, as Nussbaum reads them, are trying to show us that because of the scope and complexity of what humans desire, we will inevitably have to face tragic choices in life. These tragic situations cannot be avoided. Socrates’ response to the tragedians, as Nussbaum sees it, was to grant that they were correct in seeing that most human lives would involve tragedies—conflicts between things that we equally deeply value—but to suggest that we could escape the tragedy by narrowing the range of what we desire. For example, if we could reduce everything we valued

to one kind of value, then there wouldn't be any conflicts between incommensurable values (such as loyalty to family versus loyalty to state or religion). Consider love: if we could "ascend" to valuing only abstract beauty and not particular beautiful people, then there is no risk of loss or hurt. (This is exactly what Nussbaum argues is Socrates' position in Plato's *Symposium* and it also sounds remarkably similar to the Epictetus quote above.) Nussbaum argues that Plato is well aware of the fact that ascending to this kind of abstraction involves giving up something that is a deep part of our humanity and that safeguarding ourselves from loss in this way isn't worth the price of making ourselves less human.¹² Perhaps there is a similar philosophical debate to be had regarding the viability of the third noble truth and of the Stoic ideal of apatheia.

There is another clear philosophical connection to be made with the Buddhist concept of *anatta* (no-self). Claims about what "the self" is connect with the traditional philosophical issue of personal identity (see the chapter in this textbook). One of the key questions that philosophers have asked about personal identity is how we can persist through time. Consider the fact that who you are now and who you were when you were 7 years old are radically different in almost every way. So, in what sense are we talking about the same person in these two instances? This is what philosophers have labelled "the persistence question" (see the personal identity chapter in this textbook). Some philosophers have taken the view that there is, in fact, nothing that persists through time and thus that we do not have a persisting self. Such philosophers seem to be in alignment with the Buddhist concept of *anatta*. One Buddhist text in which the doctrine of *anatta* is clearly stated (and that reads very similarly to philosophical writing about personal identity) is *The Questions of King Milinda* in which the Buddhist sage, Nāgasena, explains to King Milinda that just as a chariot is nothing in addition to all its parts, so the self is nothing—no extra thing—in addition to all of our parts. I quote that text here at length.

Now Milinda the king went up to where the venerable Nāgasena was, and addressed him with the greetings and compliments of friendship and courtesy, and took his seat respectfully apart. And Nāgasena reciprocated his courtesy, so that the heart of the king was propitiated. And Milinda began by asking, 'How is your Reverence known, and what, Sir, is your name?'

'I am known as Nāgasena, O king, and it is by that name that my brethren in the faith address me. But although parents, O king, give such a name as Nāgasena, or Sūrasena, or Vīrasena, or Sīhasena, yet this, Sire,—Nāgasena and so on—is only a generally understood term, a designation in common use. For there is no permanent individuality (no soul) involved in the matter.'

Then Milinda called upon the Yonakas and the brethren to witness: 'This Nāgasena says there is no permanent individuality (no soul) implied in his name. Is it now even possible to approve him in that?' And turning to Nāgasena, he said: 'If, most reverend Nāgasena, there be no permanent individuality (no soul) involved in the matter, who is it, pray, who gives to you members of the Order your robes and food and lodging and necessities for the sick? Who is it who enjoys such things when given?

Who is it who lives a life of righteousness? Who is it who devotes himself to meditation? Who is it who

attains to the goal of the Excellent Way, to the Nirvâṇa of Arahatsip? And who is it who destroys living creatures? who is it who takes what is not his own? who is it who lives an evil life of worldly lusts, who speaks lies, who drinks strong drink, who (in a word) commits any one of the five sins which work out their bitter fruit even in this life? If that be so there is neither merit nor demerit; there is neither doer nor causer of good or evil deeds; there is neither fruit nor result of good or evil Karma. If, most reverend Nâgasena, we are to think that were a man to kill you there would be no murder, then it follows that there are no real masters or teachers in your Order, and that your ordinations are void.—You tell me that your brethren in the Order are in the habit of addressing you as Nâgasena. Now what is that Nâgasena?

Do you mean to say that the hair is Nâgasena?’ ‘I don’t say that, great king.’

‘Or the hairs on the body, perhaps?’ ‘Certainly not.’

‘Or is it the nails, the teeth, the skin, the flesh, the nerves, the bones, the marrow, the kidneys, the heart, the liver, the abdomen, the spleen, the lungs, the larger intestines, the lower intestines, the stomach, the fæces, the bile, the phlegm, the pus, the blood, the sweat, the fat, the tears, the serum, the saliva, the mucus, the oil that lubricates the joints, the urine, or the brain, or any or all of these, that is Nâgasena?’

And to each of these he answered no.

‘Is it the outward form then (Rûpa) that is Nâgasena, or the sensations (Vedanâ), or the ideas (Saṃjñâ), or the confections (the constituent elements of character, Samkhârâ), or the consciousness (Vigñânâna), that is Nâgasena?’

And to each of these also he answered no.

‘Then is it all these Skandhas combined that are Nâgasena?’ ‘No! great king.’

‘But is there anything outside the five Skandhas that is Nâgasena?’ And still he answered no.

‘Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no Nâgasena. Nâgasena is a mere empty sound. Who then is the Nâgasena that we see before us? It is a falsehood that your reverence has spoken, an untruth!’

And the venerable Nâgasena said to Milinda the king: ‘You, Sire, have been brought up in great luxury, as befits your noble birth. If you were to walk this dry weather on the hot and sandy ground, trampling under foot the gritty, gravelly grains of the hard sand, your feet would hurt you. And as your body would be in pain, your mind would be disturbed, and you would experience a sense of bodily suffering. How then did you come, on foot, or in a chariot?’

‘I did not come, Sir, on foot. I came in a carriage.’

‘Then if you came, Sire, in a carriage, explain to me what that is. Is it the pole that is the chariot?’

‘I did not say that.’

‘Is it the axle that is the chariot?’ ‘Certainly not.’

‘Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?’

And to all these he still answered no.

‘Then is it all these parts of it that are the chariot?’ ‘No, Sir.’

‘But is there anything outside them that is the chariot?’ And still he answered no.

‘Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot. Chariot is a mere empty sound. What then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your Majesty has spoken, an untruth! There is no such thing as a chariot! You are king over all India, a mighty monarch. Of whom then are you afraid that you speak untruth? And he called upon the Yonakas and the brethren to witness, saying: ‘Milinda the king here has said that he came by carriage. But when asked in that case to explain what the carriage was, he is unable to establish what he averred. Is it, forsooth, possible to approve him in that?’

When he had thus spoken the five hundred Yonakas shouted their applause, and said to the king: Now let your Majesty get out of that if you can?’

And Milinda the king replied to Nâgasena, and said: ‘I have spoken no untruth, reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things—the pole, and the axle, the wheels, and the framework, the ropes, the yoke, the spokes, and the goad—that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of “chariot.”’

‘Very good! Your Majesty has rightly grasped the meaning of “chariot.” And just even so it is on account of all those things you questioned me about—the thirty-two kinds of organic matter in a human body, and the five constituent elements of being—that I come under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of “Nâgasena.”’¹³

I will end this philosophical afterward with a question I had when reading this chapter. It is clear that the Buddha put forward the four noble truths and eightfold path and that he thought that these were crucial for humans to understand in order to live well. But how did the Buddha know this? This is an epistemological question; I am asking why we should believe that what the Buddha said was true. This question is especially pressing given that the Buddha doesn’t really try to give any arguments or reasoning for why what he said was true. What does seem to be clear from this chapter is that the Buddha discovered these truths from

experience—from actually living it himself. It is here perhaps that we can tie the Buddha’s way of answering this question to an existing American philosophical tradition: pragmatism. American pragmatists (the big three being C.S. Pierce, William James, and John Dewey) suggested that what we mean by truth is simply what we can establish through experience. In short, if x works well, then x is true. Whatever might be our ultimate judgment about pragmatic theories of truth, there is another question that seems to me more pressing. The question is: Even if we grant that living in this way (following “the path”) worked for the Buddha, why should that mean it will thereby work for me? Of course, if I try it and find it works, then I have my answer. But why should I invest the time and energy into this particular path when there are so many other “paths” that other traditions think I should follow? These are questions that anyone who thinks deeply about what it means for humans to live well cannot avoid asking. Buddhism enters its answer into a *mélange* of other answers that have been offered by other philosophical and religious traditions. The role of philosophy is to sort through this *mélange* of answers for the truth.

Citation and Use Note

This reading was taken from the following source.

Levin, Noah, ed. “Self and Atman.” In *SOUTH AND EAST ASIAN PHILOSOPHY READER, AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE*, 105–15. NGE Far Press, 2019. [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_\(Levin_et_al.\)](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_(Levin_et_al.))

Use of this work is governed by CC-BY-SA-NC license.



Dhamma: What the Buddha Taught by Douglas Sjoquist is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. *The Majjhima Nikaya*. Nanamoli and Bodhi, translators: Wisdom Publications, 1995.
2. *The Samyutta Nikaya*, Nanamoli and Bodhi, translators: Wisdom Publications, 1995.
3. *The Dhammpada*, Easwaran, Eknath, translator: Nilgiri Press, 2007.
4. *Anguttara Nikaya*, p. 236
5. *Even Against the Wind*, Khemasanto: Dhammasala Forest Monastery, 2000.
6. *Visuddhimagga*, Nanamoli, translator: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991.
7. *The Khuddaka Nikaya*, Thanissaro, translator: Metta Forest Monastery, 2005.

8. Juczak, Paul M. 2014. *Worldly and Unworldly Philosophies: From the First Philosophers to the 15th Century*. Open textbook available through author: jurczap@lcc.edu
9. Stoicism thus takes a “compatibilist” position regarding the problem of free will and determinism. See the chapter on free will and determinism in this textbook.
10. *Epictetus*, Enchiridion, 8. Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>
11. *Epictetus*, Enchiridion, 3 (emphasis mine). Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>
12. Martha Nussbaum argues all of the preceding points in her magisterial work, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
13. Note that *The Questions of King Milinda* is not part of Dhamma, is not a sermon of the Buddha, is not found in Thai or Sri Lankan translations of Pali Canon, and is not in the sutras of the Pali Canon in Theravada tradition (except Burma). Full text of *The Questions of King Milinda* is available here: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe35/sbe3504.htm>

AN INTRODUCTION TO "WHAT IS A CHARIOT? (WHAT ARE WE?)"

Lunneihoi Thangeo

***Lunneihoi Thangeo** is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at North-Eastern Hill University, India. She also teaches introductory courses in philosophy to undergraduates at St. Anthony's College as a part-time lecturer. Her main interests are metaphysics and epistemology.*

This question wants us to ponder whether we are perishable bodies or immortal souls. What is it that we call 'I' or in this case, what is it that we call 'chariot'?

"Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?" (Davids, 1890, pp. 43-44)

According to the Buddhist monk Nāgasena, the chariot does not stand for any one thing that has permanent existence. It is simply a convenient label, a common name, that we use when we see different objects like wheels, frames, and ropes connected to enable transportation. There is no chariot above and beyond this combination. Nāgasena then uses this understanding of a chariot to disprove the idea of an underlying permanent soul in human beings. According to Nāgasena, the idea of an individual soul is as **contingent** as the idea of a chariot. Just as a chariot is a combination of different parts and functions, so also is the individual soul.

The context of the chariot story is this. One day, King Milinda decided to visit a well-known Buddhist monk. When the king asked this monk his name, the monk replied that he was known as Nāgasena. The monk then added that the name 'Nāgasena' should not be associated with anything distinctive like an underlying permanent soul. This name was simply a way of identifying the collection of mind and matter that composed him. The monk's parents had decided to call him Nāgasena upon his birth, and this became the way others came to recognize him. But such a designation is no proof that there is a unique invisible soul of Nāgasena besides the composition of matter that the king saw.

King Milinda was puzzled by the monk's reply. He exclaimed –

"This Nāgasena says there is no permanent individuality (no soul) implied in his name. Is it now even possible to approve him in that?" (ibid)

According to the king, we usually imagine an agent behind desires and actions. If we do not assume the existence of a permanent entity like an individual soul, we will not be able to comprehend the meaning of satisfaction of desires and the consequences of actions. If there is no enduring agent, then there is no point in talking about the fulfillment or unfulfillment of desires. Similarly, rewards and punishments become meaningless if we are not rewarding/punishing the same person whose actions deserved them.

“If that be so there is neither merit nor demerit; there is neither doer nor causer of good or evil deeds ; there is neither fruit nor result of good or evil *Karma*.” (ibid)

To clear the king’s confusion, Nāgasena probed the king about the chariot he arrived in. Nāgasena began by questioning whether the chariot was any particular thing like the wheel, frame, and ropes. The king answered that the chariot was none of those. Then Nāgasena asked whether the chariot was something beyond the parts. The king denied this too. Nāgasena then remarked that since the chariot was not locatable in any of the visible parts nor was it anywhere outside of the parts, it meant that the chariot did not exist. King Milinda protested that the chariot existed and that ‘chariot’ was a general name for designating the collection of objects that he arrived in. Nāgasena was satisfied with the king’s answer. He then explained to the king that the name ‘Nāgasena’ was like ‘chariot’, they were both general terms. They referred to a ‘group of things’ instead of being ‘a thing’ with separate existence.

“Just as it is by the condition precedent of the co-existence of its various parts that the word chariot is used, just so is it that when the *Skandhas* are there we talk of a being.” (ibid)

In Buddhist philosophy, *skandhas* refer to the five **compounds** that come together to form the human being. These five compounds are form, feelings, cognition, **volition**, and consciousness. The compound of form (*rūpa*) consists of the external sense organs as well their corresponding objects. The external sense organs are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. The corresponding objects are those that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. We can talk about solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion because of the forms. The compound of feelings (*vedanā*) consists of the various sensations that we receive when the external sense organs come into contact with their corresponding objects. Feelings are known through the internal sense organ, which is the mind. The mind comes into contact with the external sense organs, and we get the experience of pleasant, unpleasant, desirable, or repulsive sensations. The compound of cognition (*saṃjñā*) comprises concepts and classes. Cognition helps us to distinguish one thing from another thing. Concepts and classes are necessary for knowledge formation. Our memory and perception are built on the recognition of similarities and differences between objects of experience. The compound of volitions (*saṃskāra*) consists of decisions, impulses, and intentional actions based on them. Volitions are responsible for creating *karma* residues. The *karma* residues can be good or bad depending on the quality of actions. Finally, the compound of consciousness (*viññāna*) is the totality of awareness. It consists of eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, touch consciousness, and mental consciousness.

The existence of consciousness is no proof of the existence of a permanent soul. Without the other four *skandhas*, consciousness also ceases because without them there is nothing to be conscious about. The soul is nothing but the general name for the awareness arising out of the collection of these five *skandhas*. Buddhists do not believe that the five *skandhas* are eternal. Each of the *skandhas* has conditional existence. The conditional existence of the five *skandhas* is depicted by the theory of dependent origination, *Pratītyasamutpāda*.

Pratītyasamutpāda consists of twelve interconnected links. These links are put in such a way that they explain the connection between past, present, and future lives. They are arranged cyclically to show that the past causes the present, the present causes the future, and the future has the potential to become the cause for other lives. Two links represent the past life, eight links describe the present life, and two links point to the future life. The links belonging to the past life are ignorance and karma residues from actions performed under ignorance. The links belonging to the present life start from consciousness formed by karma residues of the past and gradually progress to the adult human person. The link of consciousness is immediately followed by the link where a **psycho-physical** organism is created. Then comes the six successive links of the sense organs, sense-object contact, sense experience, thirst for sense enjoyment, clinging to this enjoyment, and will to be reborn. The two links belonging to the future life are rebirth followed by old age and death.

Pratītyasamutpāda is illustrative of the teaching contained in the First and Second Noble Truths that there is suffering and that there is a cause for suffering. If we can identify the cause of suffering, we can make that suffering stop by removing the cause. Here, the cause of suffering is the belief in the existence of a sufferer. But this belief is false. There is no sufferer, there are only *skandhas* and the combinations of *skandhas*.

What is the metaphysical significance of the chariot story? In Indian philosophy, there are a variety of views on what the soul is and what consciousness means. The school of Vaiśeṣikas believes that there are many individual souls, and these souls are eternal. In contrast to them, the school of Cārvākas believes that the soul is simply a fleeting by-product of matter like the inebriating effect of an intoxicating drink. The school of Advaita Vedānta believes that there is only one conscious reality, called *Brahman* and the individual soul is identical to this cosmic consciousness.

Unlike the Vaiśeṣikas, Buddhists do not believe that consciousness is the potency of the soul. A soul is not a substance for Buddhists. They also do not teach that the conscious part of us is permanently destroyed after the disintegration of the body as the Cārvākas do. For Buddhists, consciousness is governed by the law of *karma*. As long as *karma* residues remain, consciousness is trapped in the cycle of dependent origination. Buddhist beliefs also differ from Advaita Vedānta in that Buddhists do not regard the multiplicity of individual consciousness as appearances of the one consciousness. The Advaita Vedānta teaching suggests that there is at least one permanent underlying soul, namely *Brahman*, and liberation according to them is the realization that we are actually this one universal pure consciousness. But Buddhism regards consciousness as one of the impermanent *skandhas*, so their view of liberation is most probably not a state of consciousness.

Buddha says that those who talk about wanting to release the soul from suffering are mistaken. They speak as if they are certain that there is a distinct soul that **transmigrates** from one birth to another occupying different bodies until it is finally released. But their certainty is as misconceived as the case of someone who falls in love with the most beautiful woman, who has never been seen or known by anyone. Buddha also compares the efforts directed at freeing a soul, to the efforts of a delusionary person who builds a stairway to get to a place that does not exist on any map.

According to Buddhism, instead of a distinct individual soul, we find a succession of instants of consciousness. Each instant of consciousness is caused by the previous instant of consciousness. It is like when one candle lights another candle, there is a transfer of light from one candle to the next. Consciousness is like the light of a candle. Rebirth is simply previous birth 'lighting' another birth. We get an illusion of unified experience because the contents of past consciousness are carried forward to future consciousness.

The stream of consciousness ends only when all *karma* residues are exhausted. Buddhists believe that when the *karma* residues are completely destroyed, the state of liberation called *nirvāṇa* is attained. *Nirvāṇa* literally means to become extinguished. Taking the example of a candle again, *nirvāṇa* is like blowing out the light of a candle. Just as no new candle can be lighted by a fireless candle, so too, a liberated consciousness can no longer 'light' another consciousness.

But what is the state of this liberated consciousness? What happens to that which is liberated? According to Nāgasena both the state of *nirvāṇa* and that of the *Tathāgatha* (liberated one) cannot be described in ordinary language. Buddha was also silent on this matter. According to one eminent Indian philosopher, S. Radhakrishnan, even if individuality is not preserved, it is more plausible that Buddha saw *nirvāṇa* as some kind of elevated existence rather than as the termination of existence.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Can you think of another metaphor like the chariot that can illustrate the Buddhist theory of the non-existence of the soul?
2. According to you, does the Buddhist theory of the stream of consciousness adequately explain why present life has to suffer for past lives? State reasons for your answer.
3. Why is there a need to end suffering if there is no soul?

4. According to Buddhist teachings, what do we find when we investigate the idea of an individual soul?

References

Davids, T. W. Rhys, trans. "The Chariot Silile." In *The Sacred Books of the East*, XXXV:43–44. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1890. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe35/sbe3504.htm>.



An Introduction to "What is A Chariot? (What are we?)" by Lunneiboi Thangeo is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

WHAT IS A CHARIOT? (AND WHAT ARE WE?)

Now Milinda the king went up to where the venerable Nāgasena was, and addressed him with the greetings and compliments of friendship and courtesy, and took his seat respectfully apart. And Nāgasena reciprocated his courtesy, so that the heart of the king was propitiated.

Milinda: How is your Reverence known, and what, Sir, is your name?

Nagasena: I am known as Nāgasena, O king, and it is by that name that my brethren in the faith address me. But although parents, O king, give such a name as Nāgasena, or Sūrasena, or Vīrasena, or Sīhasena, yet this, Sire—Nāgasena and so on—is only a generally understood term, a designation in common use. For there is no permanent individuality (no soul) involved in the matter.

Then Milinda called upon the Yonakas and the brethren to witness.

Milinda: This Nāgasena says there is no permanent individuality (no soul) implied in his name. Is it now even possible to approve him in that?

Milinda: If, most reverend Nāgasena, there be no permanent individuality (no soul) involved in the matter, who is it, pray, who gives to you members of the Order your robes and food and lodging and necessities for the sick?

Who is it who enjoys such things when given?

Who is it who lives a life of righteousness?

Who is it who devotes himself to meditation?

Who is it who attains to the goal of the Excellent Way, to the Nirvāṇa of Arahatsip?

And who is it who destroys living creatures?

Who is it who takes what is not his own? who is it who lives an evil life of worldly lusts, who speaks lies, who drinks strong drink, who (in a word) commits any one of the five sins which work out their bitter fruit even in this life ?

If that be so there is neither merit nor demerit; there is neither doer nor causer of good or evil deeds ; there is neither fruit nor result of good or evil Karma.

If, most reverend Nāgasena, we are to think that were a man to kill you there would be no murder, then it follows that there are no real masters or teachers in your Order, and that your ordinations are void.

You tell me that your brethren in the Order are in the habit of addressing you as Nāgasena. Now what is that Nāgasena? Do you mean to say that the hair is Nāgasena?

Nagasena: I dont say that, great king.

Milinda: Or the hairs on the body, perhaps?

Nagasena: Certainly not.

Milinda: Or is it the nails, the teeth, the skin, the flesh, the nerves, the bones, the marrow, the kidneys, the heart, the liver, the abdomen, the spleen, the lungs, the larger intestines, the lower intestines, the stomach, the faeces, the bile, the phlegm, the pus, the blood, the sweat, the fat, the tears, the serum, the saliva, the mucus, the oil that lubricates the joints, the urine, or the brain, or any or all of these, that is Nāgasena ?

And to each of these he answered no.

Milinda: Is it the

- outward form then (Rūpa) that is Nāgasena, or
- the sensations (Vedanā), or
- the ideas (Saññā), or
- the conditions (the constituent elements of character, Saṃkhārā), or
- the consciousness (Vigñāna), that is Nāgasena ?

And to each of these also Nagasena answered no.

Milinda: Then is it all these Skandhas combined that are Nāgasena?

Nagasena: No! great king.

Milinda: But is there anything outside the five Skandhas that is Nāgasena?

And still he answered no.

Milinda: Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no Nāgasena. Nāgasena is a mere empty sound. Who then is the Nāgasena that we see before us? It is a falsehood that your reverence has spoken, an untruth!

Nagasena: You, Sire, have been brought up in great luxury, as befits your noble birth. If you were to walk this dry weather on the hot and sandy ground, trampling under foot the gritty, gravelly grains of the hard sand, your feet would hurt you. And as your body would be in pain, your mind would be disturbed, and you would experience a sense of bodily suffering. How then did you come, on foot, or in a chariot?

Milinda: I did not come, Sir, on foot. I came in a carriage.

Nagasena: Then if you came, Sire, in a carriage, explain to me what that is. Is it the pole that is the chariot?

Milinda: I did not say that.

Nagasena: Is it the axle that is the chariot?

Milinda: Certainly not.

Nagasena: Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?

And to all these he still answered no.

Nagasena: Then is it all these parts of it that are the chariot?

Milinda: No, Sir.

Nagasena: But is there anything outside them that is the chariot?

And still he answered no.

Nagasena: Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot. Chariot is a mere empty sound. What then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your Majesty has spoken, an untruth! There is no such thing as a chariot! You are king over all India, a mighty monarch. Of whom then are you afraid that you speak untruth? And he called upon the Yonakas and the brethren to witness, saying: Milinda the king here has said that he came by carriage. But when asked in that case to explain what the carriage was, he is unable to establish what he averred. Is it, forsooth, possible to approve him in that?

When he had thus spoken the five hundred Yonakas shouted their applause, and said to the king: “Now let your Majesty get out of that if you can!”

Milinda: I have spoken no untruth, reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things—the pole, and the axle, the wheels, and the framework, the ropes, the yoke, the spokes, and the goad—that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of “chariot.”

Nagasena: Very good! Your Majesty has rightly grasped the meaning of “chariot.” And just even so it is on account of all those things you questioned me about—The thirty-two kinds of organic matter in a human body, and the five constituent elements of being—that I come under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of “Nāgasena.” For it was said, Sire, by our Sister Vajirā in the presence of the Blessed One:¹

“Just as it is by the condition precedent
Of the co-existence of its various parts
That the word chariot is used,
Just so is it that when the Skandhas
Are there we talk of a being.”

Milinda: Most wonderful, Nāgasena, and most strange. Well has the puzzle put to you, most difficult though it was, been solved. Were the Buddha himself here he would approve your answer. Well done, well done, Nāgasena!

Citation and Use

Davids, T. W. Rhys, trans. “The Chariot Silile.” In *The Sacred Books of the East*, XXXV:43–44. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1890. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe35/sbe3504.htm>.

This text is in the Public Domain.

Notes

1. The Buddha

WE ARE OUR AWARENESS

John Locke

With ‘same man’ in hand, let us turn to ‘same person’. To find what personal identity consists in, we must consider what ‘person’ stands for.

I think it is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing at different times and places. What enables it to think of itself is its consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking and (it seems to me) essential to it.

It is impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving that he perceives. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. It is always like that with our present sensations and perceptions. And it is through this that everyone is to himself that which he calls ‘self, not raising the question of whether the same self is continued in the same substance.

Consciousness always accompanies thinking, and makes everyone to be what he calls ‘self’ and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now that it was then; and this present self that now reflects on it is the one by which that action was performed.

Given that it is the same person, is it the same identical substance? Most people would think that it is the same substance if these perceptions with their consciousness always remained present in the mind, making the same thinking thing always consciously present and (most people would think) evidently the same to itself. What seems to make the difficulty— that is, to make it at least questionable whether the same person must be the same substance— is the following fact.

Consciousness is often interrupted by forgetfulness, and at no moment of our lives do we have the whole sequence of all our past actions before our eyes in one view; even the best memories lose the sight of one part while they are viewing another.

Furthermore, for the greatest part of our lives we don’t reflect on our past selves at all, because we are intent on our present thoughts or (in sound sleep) have no thoughts at all, or at least none with the consciousness that characterizes our waking thoughts. In all these cases our consciousness is interrupted, and we lose the sight of our past selves, and so doubts are raised as to whether or not we are the same thinking thing, i.e. the same substance.

That may be a reasonable question, but it has nothing to do with personal identity. For the latter, the question is about what makes the same person, and not whether the same identical substance always thinks in the same person. Different substances might all partake in a single consciousness and thereby be united into one person, just as different bodies can enter into the same life and thereby be united into one animal, whose identity is preserved throughout that change of substances by the unity of the single continued life. What makes a man be himself to himself is sameness of consciousness, so personal identity depends entirely on that—whether the consciousness is tied to one substance throughout or rather is continued in a series of different substances. For as far as any thinking being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness that he had of it at first, and with the same consciousness he has of his present actions, so far is he the same personal self. For it is by the consciousness he has of his present thoughts and actions that he is self to himself now, and so will be the same self as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come. Distance of time doesn't make him two or more persons, and nor does change of substance; any more than a man is made to be two men by having a long or short sleep or by changing his clothes.

Our own bodies give us some kind of evidence for this. All the particles of your body, while they are vitally united to a single thinking conscious self—so that you feel when they are touched, and are affected by and conscious of good or harm that happens to them—are a part of yourself, i.e. of your thinking conscious self. Thus, the limbs of his body are to everyone a part of himself; he feels for them and is concerned for them. Cut off a hand and thereby separate it from that consciousness the person had of its heat, cold, and other states, and it is then no longer a part of himself, any more than is the remotest material thing. Thus, we see the substance of which the personal self consisted at one time may be varied at another without change of personal identity; for there is no doubt that it is the same person, even though one of its limbs has been cut off.

But it is asked: Can it be the same person if the substance changes? and Can it be different persons if the same substance does the thinking throughout?

Before I address these questions in sections 13 and 14, there's a preliminary point I want to make. It is that neither question is alive for those who hold that thought is a property of a purely material animal constitution, with no immaterial substance being involved. Whether or not they are right about that, they obviously conceive personal identity as being preserved in something other than identity of substance; just as animal identity is preserved in identity of life, not of substance. This pair of questions does present a challenge to those who hold that only immaterial substances can think, and that sameness of person requires sameness of immaterial substance.

Before they can confront their materialist opponents, they have to show why personal identity can't be preserved through a change of immaterial substances, just as animal identity is preserved through a change of material substances. Unless they say that what makes the same life and thus the animal identity in lower animals is one immaterial spirit, just as (according to them) one immaterial spirit makes the same person in men—and Cartesians at least won't take that way out, for fear of making the lower animals thinking things too.

As to the first question, If the thinking substance is changed, can it be the same person? I answer that this can be settled only by those who know what kind of substances they are that think, and whether the consciousness of past actions can be transferred from one such substance to another.

Admittedly, if the same consciousness were the same individual action, it couldn't be transferred because in that case bringing a past headache (say) into one's consciousness would be bringing back that very headache, and that is tied to the substance to which it occurred. But a present consciousness of a past event isn't like that. Rather it is a present representation of a past action, and we have still to be shown why something can't be represented to the mind as having happened though really it did not. How far the consciousness of past actions is tied to one individual agent, so that another can't possibly have it, will be hard for us to determine until we know what kind of action it is that can't be done without a reflex act of perception accompanying it, and how such an action is done by thinking substances who can't think without being conscious of it. In our present state of knowledge, it is hard to see how it can be impossible, in the nature of things, for an intellectual substance to have represented to it as done by itself something that it never did, and was perhaps done by some other agent.... Until we have a clearer view of the nature of thinking substances, we had better assume that such changes of substance within a single person never do in fact happen, basing this on the goodness of God. Having a concern for the happiness or misery of his creatures, he won't transfer from one substance to another the consciousness that draws reward or punishment with it. ...

The second question, Can it be different persons if the same substance does the thinking throughout? seems to me to arise out of the question of whether the following is possible:

An immaterial being that has been conscious of the events in its past is wholly stripped of all that consciousness, losing it beyond the power of ever retrieving it again; so that now it (as it were) opens a new account, with a new starting date, having a consciousness that can't reach back beyond this new state.

Really, the question is whether if this happened it could be the same person who had first one consciousness and then another, with no possibility of communication between them. [Locke says that this must be regarded as possible by 'those who hold preexistence', that is, who believe in reincarnation. He attacks them, thereby attacking the separation of 'same person' from 'same consciousness', and proposes a thought experiment:] Reflect on yourself, and conclude that you have in yourself an immaterial spirit that is what thinks in you, keeps you the same throughout the constant change of your body, and is what you call 'myself'. Now try to suppose also that it is the same soul that was in Nestor or Thersites at the siege of Troy. This isn't obviously absurd; for souls, as far as we know anything of their nature, can go with any portion of matter as well as with any other; so the soul or thinking substance that is now yourself may once really have been the soul of someone else, such as Thersites or Nestor. But you don't now have any consciousness of any of the actions either of those two; so can you conceive yourself as being the same person with either of them? Can their actions have anything to do with you? Can you attribute those actions to yourself, or think of them as yours more than the actions of any other men that ever existed? Of course you can't

So we can easily conceive of being the same person at the resurrection, though in a body with partly different parts or structure from what one has now, as long as the same consciousness stays with the soul that inhabits the body. But the soul alone, in the change of bodies, would not be accounted enough to make the same man—except by someone who identifies the soul with the man. If the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, were to enter and inform the body of a cobbler who has been deserted by his own soul, everyone sees that he would be the same person as the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions; but who would say it was the same man? The body contributes to making the man, and in this case, I should think everyone would let the body settle the 'same man' question, not dissuaded from this by the soul, with all its princely thoughts. To everyone but himself he would be the same cobbler, the same man. I know that in common parlance 'same person' and 'same man' stand for the same thing; and of course everyone will always be free to speak as he pleases, giving words what meanings he thinks fit, and changing them as often as he likes. Still, when we want to explore what makes the same spirit, man, or person, we must fix the ideas of spirit, man, or person in our minds; and when we have become clear about what we mean by them, we shan't find it hard to settle, for each of them, when it is 'the same' and when not.

But although the same immaterial substance or soul does not by itself, in all circumstances, make the same man, it is clear that consciousness unites actions—whether from long ago or from the immediately preceding moment—into the same person. Whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions is the same person to whom they both belong. If my present consciousness that I am now writing were also a consciousness that I saw an overflowing of the Thames last winter and that I saw Noah's ark and the flood, I couldn't doubt that I who write this now am the same self that saw the Thames overflowed last winter and viewed the flood at the general deluge—place that self in what substance you please. I could no more doubt this than I can doubt that I who write this am the same myself now while I write as I was yesterday, whether or not I consist of all the same substance, material or immaterial. For sameness of substance is irrelevant to sameness of self: I am as much involved in—and as justly accountable for—an action that was done a thousand years ago and is appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness as I am for what I did a moment ago.

Self is that conscious thinking thing that feels or is conscious of pleasure and pain and capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself as far as that consciousness extends. (This holds true whatever substance the thinking thing is made up of; it doesn't matter whether it is spiritual or material, simple or compounded.) You must find that while your little finger is brought under your consciousness it is as much a part of yourself as is your head or your heart. If the finger were amputated and this consciousness went along with it, deserting the rest of the body, it is evident that the little finger would then be the person, the same person; and this self would then would have nothing to do with the rest of the body. As with spatial separation so also with temporal: something with which the consciousness of this present thinking thing can join itself makes the same person, and is one self with it, as everyone who reflects will perceive.

Personal identity is the basis for all the right and justice of reward and punishment. What everyone is concerned

for, for himself, is happiness and misery—with no concern for what becomes of any substance that isn't connected with that consciousness. [Locke goes on to apply that to his 'finger' example, supposing that the finger takes the original consciousness with it, and that the rest of the body acquires a new consciousness.]

This illustrates my thesis that personal identity consists not in the identity of substance but in the identity of consciousness. If Socrates and the present mayor of Queenborough agree in that, they are the same person; if Socrates awake doesn't partake of the same consciousness as Socrates sleeping, they aren't the same person. And to punish Socrates awake for something done by sleeping Socrates without Socrates awake ever being conscious of it would be as unjust as to punish someone for an action of his twin brother's merely because their outsides were so alike that they couldn't be distinguished.

It may be objected: 'Suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life beyond any possibility of retrieving them, so that I shall never be conscious of them again; aren't I still the same person who did those actions, had those thoughts that I once was conscious of, even though I have now forgotten them?' To this I answer that we must be careful about what the word 'I' is applied to. This objector is thinking of sameness of the man, and calls it 'I' because he assumes that the same man is the same person. But the assumption isn't necessarily correct. If one man could have distinct disconnected consciousnesses at different times, that same man would certainly make different persons at different times. That this is what people in general think can be seen in the most solemn declaration of their opinions: human laws don't punish the madman for the sane man's actions, or the sane man for what the madman did, because they treat them as two persons. This is reflected in common speech when we say that someone is 'not himself' or is 'beside himself'. Those phrases insinuate that the speaker thinks—or that those who coined the phrases thought—that the self was changed, the self-same person was no longer in that man.

'It is still hard to conceive that Socrates, the same individual man, might be two persons.' To help us with this we must consider what is meant by 'Socrates', or 'the same individual man'. There are three options. The same man might be any of these:

- the same individual, immaterial, thinking substance; in short, the numerically same soul and nothing else,
- the same animal, without any regard to an immaterial soul,
- the same immaterial spirit united to the same animal.

Help yourself! On any of these accounts of 'same man', it is impossible for personal identity to consist in anything but consciousness, or reach any further than that does. According to 1, a man born of different women, and in distant times, might still be the same man. Anyone who allows this must also allow that the same man could be two distinct persons. . . . According to 2 and 3, Socrates in this life cannot be the same man as anyone in the afterlife. The only way to do this—allowing for the possibility that Socrates in Athens and

Socrates in Limbo are the same man— is through an appeal to sameness of consciousness; and that amounts to equating human identity— ‘same man’— with personal identity. But that equation is problematic, because it makes it hard to see how the infant Socrates can be the same man as Socrates after the resurrection. There seems to be little agreement about what makes a man, and thus about what makes the same individual man; but whatever we think about that, if we are not to fall into great absurdities we must agree that sameness of person resides in consciousness.

You may want to object: ‘But isn’t a man drunk and sober the same person? Why else is he punished for what he does when drunk, even if he is never afterwards conscious of it? He is just as much a single person as a man who walks in his sleep and is answerable, while awake, for any harm he did in his sleep.’ Here is my reply to that . Human laws punish both, with a justice suitable to the state of knowledge of those who administer the law: in these cases they can’t distinguish for sure what is real from what is counterfeit; and so they don’t allow the ignorance in drunkenness or sleep as a plea. Granted: punishment is tied to personhood, which is tied to consciousness, and the drunkard may not be conscious of what he did; but the courts justly punish him, because his bad actions are proved against him, and his lack of consciousness of them can’t be proved for him. It may be reasonable to think that on the great day when the secrets of all hearts are laid open, nobody will be held accountable for actions of which he knows nothing; everybody will receive his sentence with his conscience agreeing with God’s judgment by accusing or excusing him.

Nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person. The identity of substance won’t do it. For whatever substance there is, and whatever it is like, without consciousness there is no person. A substance without consciousness can no more be a person than a carcass can.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Locke, John. AN ESSAY CONCERNING HUMANE UNDERSTANDING, VOLUME 2. Project Gutenberg, 1694. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10616>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.



This work (We are Our Awareness by John Locke) is free of known copyright restrictions.

BUNDLE THEORY OF THE SELF

David Hume

From A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I: Of the understanding, Part IV: Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy Section VI: Of Personal Identity by David Hume.

1. There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity. The strongest sensation, the most violent passion, say they, instead of distracting us from this view, only fix it the more intensely, and make us consider their influence on self either by their pain or pleasure. To attempt a farther proof of this were to weaken its evidence; since no proof can be deriv'd from any fact, of which we are so intimately conscious; nor is there any thing, of which we can be certain, if we doubt of this.
2. Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of self, after the manner it is here explain'd. For from what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must necessarily be answer'd, if we wou'd have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible. It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea.
3. But farther, what must become of all our particular perceptions upon this hypothesis? All these are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider'd, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence. After what manner, therefore, do they belong to self; and how are they connected with it? For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.

When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov'd by death, and cou'd I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I shou'd be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity. If any one, upon serious and unprejudic'd reflection thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls himself; tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me.

4. But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd.

5. What then gives us so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possest of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives? In order to answer this question, we must distinguish betwixt personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves. The first is our present subject; and to explain it perfectly we must take the matter pretty deep, and account for that identity, which we attribute to plants and animals; there being a great analogy betwixt it, and the identity of a self or person.

6. We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness. We have also a distinct idea of several different objects existing in succession, and connected together by a close relation; and this to an accurate view affords as perfect a notion of diversity, as if there was no manner of relation among the objects. But tho' these two ideas of identity, and a succession of related objects be in themselves perfectly distinct, and even contrary, yet 'tis certain, that in our common way of thinking they are generally confounded with each other. That action of the imagination, by which we consider the uninterrupted and invariable object, and that by which we reflect on the succession of related objects, are almost the same to the feeling, nor is there much more effort of thought requir'd in the latter case than in the former. The relation facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continu'd object. This resemblance is the

cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects. However at one instant we may consider the related succession as variable or interrupted, we are sure the next to ascribe to it a perfect identity, and regard it as enviable and uninterrupted. Our propensity to this mistake is so great from the resemblance above-mention'd, that we fall into it before we are aware; and tho' we incessantly correct ourselves by reflection, and return to a more accurate method of thinking, yet we cannot long sustain our philosophy, or take off this bias from the imagination. Our last resource is to yield to it, and boldly assert that these different related objects are in effect the same, however interrupted and variable. In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption: and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation. But we may farther observe, that where we do not give rise to such a fiction, our propension to confound identity with relation is so great, that we are apt to imagine¹ something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, beside their relation; and this I take to be the case with regard to the identity we ascribe to plants and vegetables. And even when this does not take place, we still feel a propensity to confound these ideas, tho' we are not able fully to satisfy ourselves in that particular, nor find any thing invariable and uninterrupted to justify our notion of identity.

7. Thus the controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words. For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confin'd to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions. What will suffice to prove this hypothesis to the satisfaction of every fair enquirer, is to shew from daily experience and observation, that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are suppos'd to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation. For as such a succession answers evidently to our notion of diversity, it can only be by mistake we ascribe to it an identity; and as the relation of parts, which leads us into this mistake, is really nothing but a quality, which produces an association of ideas, and an easy transition of the imagination from one to another, it can only be from the resemblance, which this act of the mind bears to that, by which we contemplate one continu'd object, that the error arises. Our chief business, then, must be to prove, that all objects, to which we ascribe identity, without observing their invariableness and uninterruptedness, are such as consist of a succession of related objects.

8. In order to this, suppose any mass of matter, of which the parts are contiguous and connected, to be plac'd before us; 'tis plain we must attribute a perfect identity to this mass, provided all the parts continue uninterruptedly and invariably the same, whatever motion or change of place we may observe either in the whole or in any of the parts. But supposing some very small or inconsiderable part to be added to the mass, or subtracted from it; tho' this absolutely destroys the identity of the whole, strictly speaking; yet as we seldom think so accurately, we scruple not to pronounce a mass of matter the same, where we find so trivial an alteration. The passage of the thought from the object before the change to the object after it, is so smooth and

easy, that we scarce perceive the transition, and are apt to imagine, that 'tis nothing but a continu'd survey of the same object.

9. There is a very remarkable circumstance, that attends this experiment; which is, that tho' the change of any considerable part in a mass of matter destroys the identity of the whole, yet we must measure the greatness of the part, not absolutely, but by its proportion to the whole. The addition or diminution of a mountain wou'd not be sufficient to produce a diversity in a planet: tho' the change of a very few inches wou'd be able to destroy the identity of some bodies. 'Twill be impossible to account for this, but by reflecting that objects operate upon the mind, and break or interrupt the continuity of its actions not according to their real greatness, but according to their proportion to each other: And therefore, since this interruption makes an object cease to appear the same, it must be the uninterrupted progress of the thought, which constitutes the imperfect identity.

10. This may be confirm'd by another phenomenon. A change in any considerable part of a body destroys its identity; but 'tis remarkable, that where the change is produc'd gradually and insensibly we are less apt to ascribe to it the same effect. The reason can plainly be no other, than that the mind, in following the successive changes of the body, feels an easy passage from the surveying its condition in one moment to the viewing of it in another, and at no particular time perceives any interruption in its actions. From which continu'd perception, it ascribes a continu'd existence and identity to the object.

11. But whatever precaution we may use in introducing the changes gradually, and making them proportionable to the whole, 'tis certain, that where the changes are at last observ'd to become considerable, we make a scruple of ascribing identity to such different objects. There is, however, another artifice, by which we may induce the imagination to advance a step farther; and that is, by producing a reference of the parts to each other, and a combination to some common end or purpose. A ship, of which a considerable part has been chang'd by frequent reparations, is still considered as the same; nor does the difference of the materials hinder us from ascribing an identity to it. The common end, in which the parts conspire, is the same under all their variations, and affords an easy transition of the imagination from one situation of the body to another.

12. But this is still more remarkable, when we add a sympathy of parts to their common end, and suppose that they bear to each other, the reciprocal relation of cause and effect in all their actions and operations. This is the case with all animals and vegetables; where not only the several parts have a reference to some general purpose, but also a mutual dependence on, and connexion with each other. The effect of so strong a relation is, that tho' every one must allow, that in a very few years both vegetables and animals endure a total change, yet we still attribute identity to them, while their form, size, and substance are entirely alter'd. An oak, that grows from a small plant to a large tree, is still the same oak; tho' there be not one particle of matter, or figure of its parts the same. An infant becomes a man, and is sometimes fat, sometimes lean, without any change in his identity.

13. We may also consider the two following phaenomena, which are remarkable in their kind. The first is, that tho' we commonly be able to distinguish pretty exactly betwixt numerical and specific identity, yet it

sometimes happens, that we confound them, and in our thinking and reasoning employ the one for the other. Thus a man, who hears a noise, that is frequently interrupted and renew'd, says, it is still the same noise; tho' 'tis evident the sounds have only a specific identity or resemblance, and there is nothing numerically the same, but the cause, which produc'd them. In like manner it may be said without breach of the propriety of language, that such a church, which was formerly of brick, fell to ruin, and that the parish rebuilt the same church of free-stone, and according to modern architecture. Here neither the form nor materials are the same, nor is there any thing common to the two objects, but their relation to the inhabitants of the parish; and yet this alone is sufficient to make us denominate them the same. But we must observe, that in these cases the first object is in a manner annihilated before the second comes into existence; by which means, we are never presented in any one point of time with the idea of difference and multiplicity: and for that reason are less scrupulous in calling them the same.

14. Secondly, We may remark, that tho' in a succession of related objects, it be in a manner requisite, that the change of parts be not sudden nor entire, in order to preserve the identity, yet where the objects are in their nature changeable and inconstant, we admit of a more sudden transition, than wou'd otherwise be consistent with that relation. Thus as the nature of a river consists in the motion and change of parts; tho' in less than four and twenty hours these be totally alter'd; this hinders not the river from continuing the same during several ages. What is natural and essential to any thing is, in a manner, expected; and what is expected makes less impression, and appears of less moment, than what is unusual and extraordinary. A considerable change of the former kind seems really less to the imagination, than the most trivial alteration of the latter; and by breaking less the continuity of the thought, has less influence in destroying the identity.

15. We now proceed to explain the nature of personal identity, which has become so great a question in philosophy, especially of late years in England, where all the abstruser sciences are study'd with a peculiar ardour and application. And here 'tis evident, the same method of reasoning must be continu'd. which has so successfully explain'd the identity of plants, and animals, and ships, and houses, and of all the compounded and changeable productions either of art or nature. The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies. It cannot, therefore, have a different origin, but must proceed from a like operation of the imagination upon like objects.

16. But lest this argument shou'd not convince the reader; tho' in my opinion perfectly decisive; let him weigh the following reasoning, which is still closer and more immediate. 'Tis evident, that the identity, which we attribute to the human mind, however perfect we may imagine it to be, is not able to run the several different perceptions into one, and make them lose their characters of distinction and difference, which are essential to them. 'Tis still true, that every distinct perception, which enters into the composition of the mind, is a distinct existence, and is different, and distinguishable, and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive. But, as, notwithstanding this distinction and separability, we suppose the whole train of perceptions to be united by identity, a question naturally arises concerning this relation of identity;

whether it be something that really binds our several perceptions together, or only associates their ideas in the imagination. That is, in other words, whether in pronouncing concerning the identity of a person, we observe some real bond among his perceptions, or only feel one among the ideas we form of them. This question we might easily decide, if we wou'd recollect what has been already prov'd at large, that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect, when strictly examin'd, resolves itself into a customary association of ideas. For from thence it evidently follows, that identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them. Now the only qualities, which can give ideas an union in the imagination, are these three relations above-mention'd. These are the uniting principles in the ideal world, and without them every distinct object is separable by the mind, and may be separately considered, and appears not to have any more connexion with any other object, than if disjoin'd by the greatest difference and remoteness. 'Tis, therefore, on some of these three relations of resemblance, contiguity and causation, that identity depends; and as the very essence of these relations consists in their producing an easy transition of ideas; it follows, that our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas, according to the principles above-explain'd.

17. The only question, therefore, which remains, is, by what relations this uninterrupted progress of our thought is produc'd, when we consider the successive existence of a mind or thinking person. And here 'tis evident we must confine ourselves to resemblance and causation, and must drop contiguity, which has little or no influence in the present case.

18. To begin with resemblance; suppose we cou'd see clearly into the breast of another, and observe that succession of perceptions, which constitutes his mind or thinking principle, and suppose that he always preserves the memory of a considerable part of past perceptions; 'tis evident that nothing cou'd more contribute to the bestowing a relation on this succession amidst all its variations. For what is the memory but a faculty, by which we raise up the images of past perceptions? And as an image necessarily resembles its object, must not the frequent placing of these resembling perceptions in the chain of thought, convey the imagination more easily from one link to another, and make the whole seem like the continuance of one object? In this particular, then, the memory not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions. The case is the same whether we consider ourselves or others.

19. As to causation; we may observe, that the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other. Our impressions give rise to their correspondent ideas; and these ideas in their turn produce other impressions. One thought chaces another, and draws after it a third, by which it is expell'd in its turn. In this respect, I cannot compare the soul more properly to any

thing than to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts. And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. Whatever changes he endures, his several parts are still connected by the relation of causation. And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures.

20. As a memory alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions, 'tis to be considered, upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity. Had we no memory, we never shou'd have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person. But having once acquir'd this notion of causation from the memory, we can extend the same chain of causes, and consequently the identity of our persons beyond our memory, and can comprehend times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed. For how few of our past actions are there, of which we have any memory? Who can tell me, for instance, what were his thoughts and actions on the 1st of January 1715, the 11th of March 1719, and the 3rd of August 1733? Or will he affirm, because he has entirely forgot the incidents of these days, that the present self is not the same person with the self of that time; and by that means overturn all the most established notions of personal identity? In this view, therefore, memory does not so much produce as discover personal identity, by shewing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. 'Twill be incumbent on those, who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity, to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory.

21. The whole of this doctrine leads us to a conclusion, which is of great importance in the present affair, viz. that all the nice and subtile questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties. Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of that easy transition they occasion. But as the relations, and the easiness of the transition may diminish by insensible degrees, we have no just standard, by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time, when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity. All the disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union, as we have already observed.

22. What I have said concerning the first origin and uncertainty of our notion of identity, as apply'd to the human mind, may be extended with little or no variation to that of simplicity. An object, whose different co-existent parts are bound together by a close relation, operates upon the imagination after much the same manner as one perfectly simple and indivisible and requires not a much greater stretch of thought in order to

its conception. From this similarity of operation we attribute a simplicity to it, and feign a principle of union as the support of this simplicity, and the center of all the different parts and qualities of the object.

Thus we have finish'd our examination of the several systems of philosophy, both of the intellectual and natural world; and in our miscellaneous way of reasoning have been led into several topics; which will either illustrate and confirm some preceding part of this discourse, or prepare the way for our following opinions. 'Tis now time to return to a more close examination of our subject, and to proceed in the accurate anatomy of human nature, having fully explain'd the nature of our judgment and understandings.

Citation and Use.

Hume, David. "Of Personal Identity." In *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Project Gutenberg, 1739. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm#link2H_4_0043.

This work is in the Public Domain.

Notes



This work (Bundle Theory of the Self by David Hume) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. If the reader is desirous to see how a great genius may be influenc'd by these seemingly trivial principles of the imagination, as well as the mere vulgar, let him read my Lord Shaftsbury's reasonings concerning the uniting principle of the universe, and the identity of plants and animals. See his *Moralists or Philosophical Rhapsody*.

SHIP OF THESEUS

Noah Levin

The **ship of Theseus**, also known as **Theseus' paradox**, is a thought experiment that raises the question of whether an object that has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object. The paradox is most notably recorded by Plutarch in *Life of Theseus* from the late first century. Plutarch asked whether a ship that had been restored by replacing every single wooden part remained the same ship.

The paradox had been discussed by other ancient philosophers such as Heraclitus and Plato prior to Plutarch's writings, and more recently by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Several variants are known, including the *grandfather's axe*, which has had both head and handle replaced.

Variations of the paradox

The classic paradox

This particular version of the paradox was first introduced in Greek legend as reported by the historian, biographer, and essayist Plutarch,

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, in so much that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.

— Plutarch, Theseus

Plutarch thus questions whether the ship would remain the same if it were entirely replaced, piece by piece. Centuries later, the philosopher Thomas Hobbes introduced a further puzzle, wondering what would happen if the original planks were gathered up after they were replaced, and used to build a second ship. Hobbes asked which ship, if either, would be the original Ship of Theseus.

Modern variations

John Locke proposed a scenario regarding a favorite sock that develops a hole. He pondered whether the sock would still be the same after a patch was applied to the hole, and if it would be the same sock after a second patch was applied, and a third, etc., until all of the material of the original sock has been replaced with patches.

George Washington's axe (sometimes "my grandfather's axe") is the subject of an apocryphal story of unknown origin in which the famous artifact is "still George Washington's axe" despite having had both its head and handle replaced.

This has also been recited as "Abe Lincoln's axe"; Lincoln was well known for his ability with an axe, and axes associated with his life are held in various museums.

The French equivalent is the story of Jeannot's knife, where the eponymous knife has had its blade changed fifteen times and its handle fifteen times, but is still the same knife. In some Spanish-speaking countries, Jeannot's knife is present as a proverb, though referred to simply as "the family knife". The principle, however, remains the same.

A Hungarian version of the story features "Lajos Kossuth's pocket knife", having its blade and handle continuously replaced but still being referred to as the very knife of the famous statesman. As a proverbial expression it is used for objects or solutions being repeatedly renewed and gradually replaced to an extent that it has no original parts.

One version is often discussed in introductory Jurisprudence and Evidence classes in law school, discussing whether a weapon used in a murder, for example, would still be considered the "murder weapon" if both its handle and head/blade were to be replaced at separate, subsequent times.

Examples in popular culture

The paradox appears in various forms in fictional contexts, particularly in fantasy or science-fiction, for example where a character has body parts swapped for artificial replacements until the person has been entirely replaced. There are many other variations with reference to the same concept in popular culture for example axes and brooms.

Examples in Japan

In Japan, Shinto shrines are rebuilt every twenty years with entirely "new wood". The continuity over the

centuries is spiritual and comes from the source of the wood in the case of the Ise Jingu's Naiku shrine, which is harvested from an adjoining forest that is considered sacred. The shrine has currently been rebuilt 62 times.

Proposed resolutions

Heraclitus

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus attempted to solve the paradox by introducing the idea of a river where water replenishes it. Arius Didymus quoted him as saying “upon those who step into the same rivers, different and again different waters flow”. Plutarch disputed Heraclitus' claim about stepping twice into the same river, citing that it cannot be done because “it scatters and again comes together, and approaches and recedes”.

Aristotle's causes

According to the philosophical system of Aristotle and his followers, four causes or reasons describe a thing; these causes can be analyzed to get to a solution to the paradox. The formal cause or ‘form’ (perhaps best parsed as the cause of an object's form or of its having that form) is the design of a thing, while the material cause is the matter of which the thing is made. Another of Aristotle's causes is the ‘end’ or final cause, which is the intended purpose of a thing. The ship of Theseus would have the same ends, those being, mythically, transporting Theseus, and politically, convincing the Athenians that Theseus was once a living person, though its material cause would change with time. The efficient cause is how and by whom a thing is made, for example, how artisans fabricate and assemble something; in the case of the ship of Theseus, the workers who built the ship in the first place could have used the same tools and techniques to replace the planks in the ship.

According to Aristotle, the “what-it-is” of a thing is its formal cause, so the ship of Theseus is the ‘same’ ship, because the formal cause, or design, does not change, even though the matter used to construct it may vary with time. In the same manner, for Heraclitus's paradox, a river has the same formal cause, although the material cause (the particular water in it) changes with time, and likewise for the person who steps in the river.

This argument's validity and soundness as applied to the paradox depend on the accuracy not only of Aristotle's expressed premise that an object's formal cause is not only the primary or even sole determiner of its defining characteristic(s) or essence (“what-it-is”) but also of the unstated, stronger premise that an object's formal cause is the sole determiner of its *identity* or “*which-it-is*” (*i.e.*, whether the previous and the later ships or rivers are the “same” ship or river). This latter premise is subject to attack by indirect proof using arguments such as “Suppose two ships are built using the same design and exist at the same time until one sinks the other in battle. Clearly the two ships are not the same ship even before, let alone after, one sinks the other, and yet

the two have the same formal cause; therefore, formal cause cannot by itself suffice to determine an object's identity" or " [...] therefore, two objects' or object-instances' having the same formal cause does not by itself suffice to make them the same object or prove that they are the same object."

Definitions of "the same"

One common argument found in the philosophical literature is that in the case of Heraclitus' river one is tripped up by two different definitions of "the same". In one sense, things can be "qualitatively identical", by sharing some properties. In another sense, they might be "numerically identical" by being "one". As an example, consider two different marbles that look identical. They would be qualitatively, but not numerically, identical. A marble can be numerically identical only to itself.

Note that some languages differentiate between these two forms of identity. In German, for example, "*gleich*" ("equal") and "*selbe*" ("self-same") are the pertinent terms, respectively. At least in formal speech, the former refers to qualitative identity (e.g. *die gleiche Murmel*, "the same [qualitative] marble") and the latter to numerical identity (e.g. *die selbe Murmel*, "the same [numerical] marble"). Colloquially, "*gleich*" is also used in place of "*selbe*", however.

Four-dimensionalism

Ted Sider and others have proposed that considering objects to extend across time as four-dimensional causal series of three-dimensional "time-slices" could solve the ship of Theseus problem because, in taking such an approach, each time-slice and all four dimensional objects remain numerically identical to themselves while allowing individual time-slices to differ from each other. The aforementioned river, therefore, comprises different three-dimensional time-slices of itself while remaining numerically identical to itself across time; one can never step into the same river-time-slice twice, but one can step into the same (four-dimensional) river twice.

Citation and Use

Levin, Noah, ed. "Introduction to Philosophy and the Ship of Theseus." In ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY READER, AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE. NGE Far Press, 2019. [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_Ancient_Philosophy_Reader_\(Levin\)/01%3A_The_Start_of_Western_Philosophy_and_the_Pre-Socratics/1.01%3A_Introduction_to_Philosophy_and_the_Ship_of_Theseus](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Book%3A_Ancient_Philosophy_Reader_(Levin)/01%3A_The_Start_of_Western_Philosophy_and_the_Pre-Socratics/1.01%3A_Introduction_to_Philosophy_and_the_Ship_of_Theseus)

Use of this work is governed by CC-BY-SA-NC license.



Ship of Theseus by Noah Levin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

SELECTED READING FROM ST. AUGUSTINE'S "THE CITY OF GOD"

Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

Editor's Note: The following text is the fourth chapter ("How like kingdoms without justice are to robberies.") of the fourth book ("Book Fourth – Argument") of Augustine's *The City of God*.

Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is ruled by the authority of a prince, it is knit together by the pact of the confederacy; the booty is divided by the law agreed on. If, by the admittance of abandoned men, this evil increase to such a degree that it holds places, fixes abodes, takes possession of cities, and subdues peoples, it assumes the more plainly the name of a kingdom, because the reality is now manifestly conferred on it, not by the removal of covetousness, but by the addition of impunity. Indeed, that was an apt and true reply which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate who had been seized. For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride, "What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, whilst thou who dost it with a great fleet art styled emperor."¹

Citation and Use

This text was taken from the following work.

Ausustine, Aurelius, Bishop of Hippo. *The City of God* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2014), Trans. by E. M. Edghill.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2412/2412-h/2412-h.htm#part01>

The use of this work is governed by the public domain.



This work (Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "The City of God" by Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. Nonius Marcell. borrows this anecdote from Cicero, De Repub. iii

SELECTED READING FROM ST. AUGUSTINE'S "ON THE HOLY TRINITY"

Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

Editor's Note: The following text is the eleventh chapter ("In Memory, Understanding [or Intelligence], and Will, We Have to Note Ability, Learning, and Use. Memory, Understanding, and Will are One Essentially, and Three Relatively.") of the tenth book of Augustine's *On the Holy Trinity*.

Chapter 11.—In Memory, Understanding [or Intelligence], and Will, We Have to Note Ability, Learning, and Use. Memory, Understanding, and Will are One Essentially, and Three Relatively.

17. Putting aside, then, for a little while all other things, of which the mind is certain concerning itself, let us especially consider and discuss these three—memory, understanding, will. For we may commonly discern in these three the character of the abilities of the young also; since the more tenaciously and easily a boy remembers, and the more acutely he understands, and the more ardently he studies, the more praiseworthy is he in point of ability. But when the question is about any one's learning, then we ask not how solidly and easily he remembers, or how shrewdly he understands; but what it is that he remembers, and what it is that he understands. And because the mind is regarded as praiseworthy, not only as being learned, but also as being good, one gives heed not only to what he remembers and what he understands, but also to what he wills (velit); not how ardently he wills, but first what it is he wills, and then how greatly he wills it. For the mind that loves eagerly is then to be praised, when it loves that which ought to be loved eagerly. Since, then, we speak of these three—ability, knowledge, use—the first of these is to be considered under the three heads, of what a man can do in memory, and understanding, and will. The second of them is to be considered in regard to that which any one has in his memory and in his understanding, which he has attained by a studious will. But the third, viz. use, lies in the will, which handles those things that are contained in the memory and understanding, whether it refer them to anything further, or rest satisfied with them as an end. For to use, is to take up something into the power of the will; and to enjoy, is to use with joy, not any longer of hope, but of the actual thing. Accordingly, every one who enjoys, uses; for he takes up something into the power of the will, wherein he also is satisfied as

with an end. But not every one who uses, enjoys, if he has sought after that, which he takes up into the power of the will, not on account of the thing itself, but on account of something else.

18. Since, then, these three, memory, understanding, will, are not three lives, but one life; nor three minds, but one mind; it follows certainly that neither are they three substances, but one substance. Since memory, which is called life, and mind, and substance, is so called in respect to itself; but it is called memory, relatively to something. And I should say the same also of understanding and of will, since they are called understanding and will relatively to something; but each in respect to itself is life, and mind, and essence. And hence these three are one, in that they are one life, one mind, one essence; and whatever else they are severally called in respect to themselves, they are called also together, not plurally, but in the singular number. But they are three, in that wherein they are mutually referred to each other; and if they were not equal, and this not only each to each, but also each to all, they certainly could not mutually contain each other; for not only is each contained by each, but also all by each. For I remember that I have memory and understanding, and will; and I understand that I understand, and will, and remember; and I will that I will, and remember, and understand; and I remember together my whole memory, and understanding, and will. For that of my memory which I do not remember, is not in my memory; and nothing is so much in the memory as memory itself. Therefore I remember the whole memory. Also, whatever I understand I know that I understand, and I know that I will whatever I will; but whatever I know I remember. Therefore I remember the whole of my understanding, and the whole of my will. Likewise, when I understand these three things, I understand them together as whole. For there is none of things intelligible which I do not understand, except what I do not know; but what I do not know, I neither remember, nor will. Therefore, whatever of things intelligible I do not understand, it follows also that I neither remember nor will. And whatever of things intelligible I remember and will, it follows that I understand. My will also embraces my whole understanding and my whole memory whilst I use the whole that I understand and remember. And, therefore, while all are mutually comprehended by each, and as wholes, each as a whole is equal to each as a whole, and each as a whole at the same time to all as wholes; and these three are one, one life, one mind, one essence.¹

Citation and Use

This text was taken from the following work.

Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series I/Volume III/Doctrinal Treatises of St. Augustin/On the Holy Trinity/Book X/Chapter 11. (2010, December 23). In *Wikisource* . Retrieved April 21, 2021, from https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Nicene_and_Post-Nicene_Fathers:_Series_I/Volume_III/Doctrinal_Treatises_of_St._Augustin/On_the_Holy_Trinity/Book_X/Chapter_11&oldid=2259393

The use of this work is governed by the public domain.



Selected Reading from St. Augustine's "On the Holy Trinity" by Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. [This ternary of memory, understanding, and will, is a better analogue to the Trinity than the preceding one in chapter IX—namely, mind, knowledge, and love. Memory, understanding, and will have equal substantiality, while mind, knowledge, and love have not. The former are three faculties, in each of which is the whole mind or spirit. The memory is the whole mind as remembering; the understanding is the whole mind as cognizing; and the will is the whole mind as determining. The one essence of the mind is in each of these three modes, each of which is distinct from the others; and yet there are not three essences or minds. In the other ternary, of mind, knowledge, and love, the last two are not faculties but single acts of the mind. A particular act of cognition is not the whole mind in the general mode of cognition. This would make it a faculty. A particular act of loving, or of willing, is not the whole mind in the general mode of loving, or of willing. This would make the momentary and transient act a permanent faculty. This ternary fails, as we have noticed in a previous annotation (IX. ii. 2), in that only the mind is a substance. The ternary of memory, understanding, and will is an adequate analogue to the Trinity in respect to equal substantiality. But it fails when the separate consciousness of the Trinitarian distinctions is brought into consideration. The three faculties of memory, understanding, and will, are not so objective to each other as to admit of three forms of consciousness, of the use of the personal pronouns, and of the personal actions that are ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also fails, in that these three are not all the modes of the mind. There are other faculties: e. g., the imagination. The whole essence of the mind is in this also.—W.G.T.S.]

AUGUSTINE'S TREATMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Rocco A. Astore

Rocco A. Astore is currently an Adjunct Lecturer of Philosophy at CUNY: Borough of Manhattan Community College as well as an Adjunct Instructor of Philosophy at St. John's University, both in New York City, New York. His interests include metaphysical topics primarily of the Early-Modern Period.

God is omnibenevolent, or all-good; however, evil abounds. Now, if we enter Augustine of Hippo (354CE-430CE), philosopher, and theologian, often known as one of the most influential doctors of the Catholic Church, we find that such a problem was nothing new to this titan of thought. First, this chapter will unfurl with a description of Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil, by drawing from his seminal work the Confessions. Next, this entry will then propose arguments given by Augustine, who wishes to negate the idea that evil can be a substance, that evil truly exists on its own, and finally his understanding of the true source of the appearance of evil in our world.

Now, from nearly the onset of Confessions Book VII, we readers find Augustine asserting the following:

"...I set myself to think of You as the supreme and sole and true God with all my heart I believed You incorruptible and inviolable and immutable..."

In other words, Augustine understands nothing to possess the capacity to blemish God or cause God to sway. This is important for us to note for we must first establish why it is that God is all-good to Augustine before tackling how Augustine treats the topic of evil.

So, as for God's all-good nature, we locate in Augustine one who first considers that because that which can change is of less perfection than that which can undergo no change, it must be that God, as perfect, is verily immutable, or unchangeable. That is because to Augustine God is conceivable, or thinkable as "mighty everywhere" and "nowhere bounded" and thus nothing can overpower God or cause God to be other than supreme, or limit God by stopping God's perfection from being the cornerstone of reality. In other words,

we find Augustine revealing to we readers how it is that God cannot undergo corruption, due to God's unchangeableness, which leaves God only to remain as the "all-good Creator."

Next, if God is without a tinge of corruption and even without the potential to suffer from corruption, and therefore, everlastingly good, God, from Augustine's vantage, cannot be that which causes evil. That is because evil is unakin or estranged from the nature of God. As such, is it not the case that all things created by God must therefore be themselves good, initially? Or as Augustine attests:

"Who made me? Was it not my God, who is not only Good but Goodness itself?"

In other words, we find the beginnings of Augustine's belief as to why it is that all people are born good because of their creator being and being at the pinnacle of all that is good. That is, God can only create good things alone, for, Augustine, a precursor to Descartes, would believe that it would be unlike God to create something that was absent of goodness because if God begrudged a creature of goodness, that would imply that God is corrupt, and thus not all-good, or perfect.

Accordingly, we find Augustine's argument that because we are not as great as God, for we are not God, and rather made in the image and likeness of God, we are finite and swayable, and thus able to succumb to corruption. However, we should note that Augustine finds that although the human soul, which is free to go against God, since God as all-good would never prevent us the power of freedom, can breed evil, we are nevertheless initially good. That is because if God created us corrupt, we would never be able to undergo corruption, since we would already lack goodness. In other words, just as something which is already the worst cannot become worser, people, who are beings who do face evil, and can become worser than we know ourselves to usually be, shows to Augustine, that we were therefore initially good.

As such, if God is always good and people initially good, nothing that contains a soul, or a substance can truly be evil from its start. Consequently, our first question as to if evil exists as a substance, we find is impossible to be so, because substances like God and ourselves are either good or good and therefore, insofar as substances go, there is no option, or room for evil to be truly all that real to Augustine. In fact, we find Augustine asserts the following as to how it is that we can understand evil as unsubstantial and therefore also unreal:

"...evil whose origin I sought is not a substance."

"... To You, then evil utterly is not—and not only to You, but to Your whole creation likewise, evil is not..."

Moreover, because evil is not, or that evil bares no reality as a substance, we may declare from an Augustinian lens that it is we who misunderstand evil on the one hand, and due to our lack of infinite knowledge, or omniscience we commit evil on the other. That is and drawing from Augustine's own example as found in Confessions Book VII Chapter V, it is we who misinterpret something such as that we fear evil, when, in reality, it is evil for us to fear. In other words, evil is not independent of us, and hence it is truly nothing to fear, for it

possesses no compelling power over us, who are, at least, initially good. At the same time, it is when we give into negative inclinations and manifest negative emotions, due to our finite knowledge and will, especially when leading to affecting others detrimentally, that we then undergo fear because we committed evil. That is, or as Augustine declares:

“...the fact that we fear is evil”

Consequently, what then is the cause of the appearance of evil in our world? Simply put, Augustine adheres to the view that our limited, or finite minds and their lack of absolute knowledge, or the knowledge of God who knows all of time since God, as eternal, can only create in one eternal and single act of creation, is the basis of why evil emerges in our world. In other words, from an Augustinian viewpoint, if we possessed absolute knowledge, as does God, then we would know all the consequences of our actions, and to Augustine, this would in the very least help us to refrain from doing evil. Lastly, let us understand Augustine, as one who denies the substantiality and independent existence of evil. As well as one who holds to the notion that it is human finitude, our absence of infinite knowledge, and our ability to sway that leads to the arrival of evil in the world, or the abuse of our will leading us to stray from the all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfect God.

Additional Resources

Jaspers, Karl. Hannah Arendt ed., *The Great Philosophers Volume I* (Harcourt Brace & Co.: New York., 1962).

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy* (Simon & Schuster, Inc: New York., 1972).

Brown, Peter. *Augustine: A Biography* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2000).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=998#oembed-1>

Reference

Augustine. F.J. Sheed trans., *Confessions* (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis., 2006).



Augustine's Treatment of the Problem of Evil by Rocco A. Astore is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

AQUINAS'S FIVE PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

St. Mary's Press

The Summa Theologica is a famous work written by Saint Thomas Aquinas between AD 1265 and 1274. It is divided into three main parts and covers all of the core theological teachings of Aquinas's time. One of the questions the Summa Theologica is well known for addressing is the question of the existence of God. Aquinas responds to this question by offering the following five proofs:

1. The Argument from Motion: Our senses can perceive motion by seeing that things act on one another. Whatever moves is moved by something else. Consequently, there must be a First Mover that creates this chain reaction of motions. This is God. God sets all things in motion and gives them their potential.
2. The Argument from Efficient Cause: Because nothing can cause itself, everything must have a cause or something that creates an effect on another thing. Without a first cause, there would be no others. Therefore, the First Cause is God.
3. The Argument from Necessary Being: Because objects in the world come into existence and pass out of it, it is possible for those objects to exist or not exist at any particular time. However, nothing can come from nothing. This means something must exist at all times. This is God.
4. The Argument from Gradation: There are different degrees of goodness in different things. Following the "Great Chain of Being," which states there is a gradual increase in complexity, created objects move from unformed inorganic matter to biologically complex organisms. Therefore, there must be a being of the highest form of good. This perfect being is God.
5. The Argument from Design: All things have an order or arrangement that leads them to a particular goal. Because the order of the universe cannot be the result of chance, design and purpose must be at work. This implies divine intelligence on the part of the designer. This is God.

Citation and Use

"Aquinas's Five Proofs for the Existence of God." In The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Teacher Guide. © 2011 by Saint Mary's Press. <https://www.smp.org/resourcecenter/resource/7061/>

Permission to reproduce is granted. Document #: TX001543

Aquinas's Five Proofs for the Existence of God Copyright © 2020 by St. Mary's Press. All Rights Reserved.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS – ON THE FIVE WAYS TO PROVE GOD'S EXISTENCE

St. Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae

I answer that, the existence of God can be proved in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause



St. Thomas Aquinas in picture of Gentile da Fabriano (about 1400)

be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes.

Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But “more” and “less” are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph.* ii. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided by:** BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** *CC BY: Attribution*

Media Attributions

- Gentile_da_Fabriano_052 is licensed under a Public Domain license



This work (St. Thomas Aquinas – On the Five Ways to Prove God’s Existence by St. Thomas Aquinas) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SELECTED READING'S FROM WILLIAM PALEY'S "NATURAL THEOLOGY"

William Paley

Natural Theology

CHAPTER I.

STATE OF THE ARGUMENT

IN crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz. that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, *e. g.* that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it. To reckon up a few of the plainest of these parts, and of their offices, all tending to one result:— We see a cylindrical box containing a coiled elastic spring, which, by its endeavour to relax itself, turns round the box. We next observe a flexible chain (artificially wrought for the sake of flexure), communicating the action of the spring from the box to the fusee. We then find a series of wheels, the teeth of which catch in, and apply to, each other, conducting the motion from the fusee to the balance, and from the balance to the pointer; and at the same time, by the size and shape of those wheels, so regulating that motion, as to terminate in causing an index, by an equable and measured progression, to pass over a given space in a given time. We take notice that the wheels are made of brass in order to keep them from rust; the springs of steel, no other metal being so elastic; that over the face of the watch there is placed a glass, a material employed in no other part of the work, but in the room of which, if there had been any other than a transparent substance, the hour could not be seen without opening the case. This mechanism being observed (it requires indeed an examination of

the instrument, and perhaps some previous knowledge of the subject, to perceive and understand it; but being once, as we have said, observed and understood), the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

Nor would it, I apprehend, weaken the conclusion, that we had never seen a watch made; that we had never known an artist capable of making one; that we were altogether incapable of executing such a piece of workmanship ourselves, or of understanding in what manner it was performed; all this being no more than what is true of some exquisite remains of ancient art, of some lost arts, and, to the generality of mankind, of the more curious productions of modern manufacture. Does one man in a million know how oval frames are turned? Ignorance of this kind exalts our opinion of the unseen and unknown artist's skill, if he be unseen and unknown, but raises no doubt in our minds of the existence and agency of such an artist, at some former time, and in some place or other. Nor can I perceive that it varies at all the inference, whether the question arise concerning a human agent, or concerning an agent of a different species, or an agent possessing, in some respects, a different nature.

Neither, secondly, would it invalidate our conclusion, that the watch sometimes went wrong, or that it seldom went exactly right. The purpose of the machinery, the design, and the designer, might be evident, and in the case supposed would be evident, in whatever way we accounted for the irregularity of the movement, or whether we could account for it or not. It is not necessary that a machine be perfect, in order to show with what design it was made: still less necessary, where the only question is, whether it were made with any design at all.

Nor, thirdly, would it bring any uncertainty into the argument, if there were a few parts of the watch, concerning which we could not discover, or had not yet discovered, in what manner they conduced to the general effect; or even some parts, concerning which we could not ascertain, whether they conduced to that effect in any manner whatever. For, as to the first branch of the case; if by the loss, or disorder, or decay of the parts in question, the movement of the watch were found in fact to be stopped, or disturbed, or retarded, no doubt would remain in our minds as to the utility or intention of these parts, although we should be unable to investigate the manner according to which, or the connexion by which, the ultimate effect depended upon their action or assistance; and the more complex is the machine, the more likely is this obscurity to arise. Then, as to the second thing supposed, namely, that there were parts which might be spared, without prejudice to the movement of the watch, and that we had proved this by experiment,—these superfluous parts, even if we were completely assured that they were such, would not vacate the reasoning which we had instituted concerning other parts. The indication of contrivance remained, with respect to them, nearly as it was before.

Nor, fourthly, would any man in his senses think the existence of the watch, with its various machinery, accounted for, by being told that it was one out of possible combinations of material forms; that whatever he

had found in the place where he found the watch, must have contained some internal configuration or other; and that this configuration might be the structure now exhibited, viz. of the works of a watch, as well as a different structure.

Nor, fifthly, would it yield his inquiry more satisfaction to be answered, that there existed in things a principle of order, which had disposed the parts of the watch into their present form and situation. He never knew a watch made by the principle of order; nor can he even form to himself an idea of what is meant by a principle of order, distinct from the intelligence of the watch-maker.

Sixthly, he would be surprised to hear that the mechanism of the watch was no proof of contrivance, only a motive to induce the mind to think so:

And not less surprised to be informed, that the watch in his hand was nothing more than the result of the laws of *metallic* nature. It is a perversion of language to assign any law, as the efficient, operative cause of any thing. A law presupposes an agent; for it is only the mode, according to which an agent proceeds: it implies a power; for it is the order, according to which that power acts. Without this agent, without this power, which are both distinct from itself, the *law* does nothing; is nothing. The expression,

the law of metallic nature,

may sound strange and harsh to a philosophic ear; but it seems quite as justifiable as some others which are more familiar to him, such as

the law of vegetable nature,

the law of animal nature,

or indeed as

the law of nature

in general, when assigned as the cause of phænomena, in exclusion of agency and power; or when it is substituted into the place of these.

VIII. Neither, lastly, would our observer be driven out of his conclusion, or from his confidence in its truth, by being told that he knew nothing at all about the matter. He knows enough for his argument: he knows the utility of the end: he knows the subserviency and adaptation of the means to the end. These points being known, his ignorance of other points, his doubts concerning other points, affect not the certainty of his reasoning. The consciousness of knowing little, need not beget a distrust of that which he does know.

CHAPTER II.

STATE OF THE ARGUMENT CONTINUED

SUPPOSE, in the next place, that the person who found the watch, should, after some time, discover that, in addition to all the properties which he had hitherto observed in it, it possessed the unexpected property of producing, in the course of its movement, another watch like itself (the thing is conceivable); that it contained within it a mechanism, a system of parts, a mould for instance, or a complex adjustment of lathes, files, and other tools, evidently and separately calculated for this purpose; let us inquire, what effect ought such a discovery to have upon his former conclusion.

I. The first effect would be to increase his admiration of the contrivance, and his conviction of the consummate skill of the contriver. Whether he regarded the object of the contrivance, the distinct apparatus, the intricate, yet in many parts intelligible mechanism, by which it was carried on, he would perceive, in this new observation, nothing but an additional reason for doing what he had already done,—for referring the construction of the watch to design, and to supreme art. If that construction *without* this property, or which is the same thing, before this property had been noticed, proved intention and art to have been employed about it; still more strong would the proof appear, when he came to the knowledge of this further property, the crown and perfection of all the rest.

He would reflect, that though the watch before him were, *in some sense*, the maker of the watch, which was fabricated in the course of its movements, yet it was in a very different sense from that, in which a carpenter, for instance, is the maker of a chair; the author of its contrivance, the cause of the relation of its parts to their use. With respect to these, the first watch was no cause at all to the second: in no such sense as this was it the author of the constitution and order, either of the parts which the new watch contained, or of the parts by the aid and instrumentality of which it was produced. We might possibly say, but with great latitude of expression, that a stream of water ground corn: but no latitude of expression would allow us to say, no stretch of conjecture could lead us to think, that the stream of water built the mill, though it were too ancient for us to know who the builder was. What the stream of water does in the affair, is neither more nor less than this; by the application of an unintelligent impulse to a mechanism previously arranged, arranged independently of it, and arranged by intelligence, an effect is produced, viz. the corn is ground. But the effect results from the arrangement. The force of the stream cannot be said to be the cause or author of the effect, still less of the arrangement. Understanding and plan in the formation of the mill were not the less necessary, for any share which the water has in grinding the corn: yet is this share the same, as that which the watch would have contributed to the production of the new watch, upon the supposition assumed in the last section. Therefore,

Though it be now no longer probable, that the individual watch, which our observer had found, was made immediately by the hand of an artificer, yet doth not this alteration in anywise affect the inference, that an

artificer had been originally employed and concerned in the production. The argument from design remains as it was. Marks of design and contrivance are no more accounted for now, than they were before. In the same thing, we may ask for the cause of different properties. We may ask for the cause of the colour of a body, of its hardness, of its head; and these causes may be all different. We are now asking for the cause of that subserviency to a use, that relation to an end, which we have remarked in the watch before us. No answer is given to this question, by telling us that a preceding watch produced it. There cannot be design without a designer; contrivance without a contriver; order without choice; arrangement, without any thing capable of arranging; subserviency and relation to a purpose, without that which could intend a purpose; means suitable to an end, and executing their office, in accomplishing that end, without the end ever having been contemplated, or the means accommodated to it. Arrangement, disposition of parts, subserviency of means to an end, relation of instruments to a use, imply the presence of intelligence and mind. No one, therefore, can rationally believe, that the insensible, inanimate watch, from which the watch before us issued, was the proper cause of the mechanism we so much admire in it;—could be truly said to have constructed the instrument, disposed its parts, assigned their office, determined their order, action, and mutual dependency, combined their several motions into one result, and that also a result connected with the utilities of other beings. All these properties, therefore, are as much unaccounted for, as they were before.

Nor is any thing gained by running the difficulty farther back, *i. e.* by supposing the watch before us to have been produced from another watch, that from a former, and so on indefinitely. Our going back ever so far, brings us no nearer to the least degree of satisfaction upon the subject. Contrivance is still unaccounted for. We still want a contriver. A designing mind is neither supplied by this supposition, nor dispensed with. If the difficulty were diminished the further we went back, by going back indefinitely we might exhaust it. And this is the only case to which this sort of reasoning applies. Where there is a tendency, or, as we increase the number of terms, a continual approach towards a limit, *there*, by supposing the number of terms to be what is called infinite, we may conceive the limit to be attained: but where there is no such tendency, or approach, nothing is effected by lengthening the series. There is no difference as to the point in question (whatever there may be as to many points), between one series and another; between a series which is finite, and a series which is infinite. A chain, composed of an infinite number of links, can no more support itself, than a chain composed of a finite number of links. And of this we are assured (though we never *can* have tried the experiment), because, by increasing the number of links, from ten for instance to a hundred, from a hundred to a thousand, &c. we make not the smallest approach, we observe not the smallest tendency, towards self-support. There is no difference in this respect (yet there may be a great difference in several respects) between a chain of a greater or less length, between one chain and another, between one that is finite and one that is infinite. This very much resembles the case before us. The machine which we are inspecting, demonstrates, by its construction, contrivance and design. Contrivance must have had a contriver; design, a designer; whether the machine immediately proceeded from another machine or not. That circumstance alters not the case. That other machine may, in like manner, have proceeded from a former machine: nor does that alter the case; contrivance must have had a contriver. That former one from one preceding it: no alteration still; a contriver

is still necessary. No tendency is perceived, no approach towards a diminution of this necessity. It is the same with any and every succession of these machines; a succession of ten, of a hundred, of a thousand; with one series, as with another; a series which is finite, as with a series which is infinite. In whatever other respects they may differ, in this they do not. In all equally, contrivance and design are unaccounted for.

The question is not simply, How came the first watch into existence? which question, it may be pretended, is done away by supposing the series of watches thus produced from one another to have been infinite, and consequently to have had no-such *first*, for which it was necessary to provide a cause. This, perhaps, would have been nearly the state of the question, if no thing had been before us but an unorganized, unmechanized substance, without mark or indication of contrivance. It might be difficult to show that such substance could not have existed from eternity, either in succession (if it were possible, which I think it is not, for unorganized bodies to spring from one another), or by individual perpetuity. But that is not the question now. To suppose it to be so, is to suppose that it made no difference whether we had found a watch or a stone. As it is, the metaphysics of that question have no place; for, in the watch which we are examining, are seen contrivance, design; an end, a purpose; means for the end, adaptation to the purpose. And the question which irresistibly presses upon our thoughts, is, whence this contrivance and design? The thing required is the intending mind, the adapting hand, the intelligence by which that hand was directed. This question, this demand, is not shaken off, by increasing a number or succession of substances, destitute of these properties; nor the more, by increasing that number to infinity. If it be said, that, upon the supposition of one watch being produced from another in the course of that other's movements, and by means of the mechanism within it, we have a cause for the watch in my hand, viz. the watch from which it proceeded. I deny, that for the design, the contrivance, the suitableness of means to an end, the adaptation of instruments to a use (all which we discover in the watch), we have any cause whatever. It is in vain, therefore, to assign a series of such causes, or to allege that a series may be carried back to infinity; for I do not admit that we have yet any cause at all of the phenomena, still less any series of causes either finite or infinite. Here is contrivance, but no contriver; proofs of design, but no designer.

Our observer would further also reflect, that the maker of the watch before him, was, in truth and reality, the maker of every watch produced from it; there being no difference (except that the latter manifests a more exquisite skill) between the making of another watch with his own hands, by the mediation of files, lathes, chisels, &c. and the disposing, fixing, and inserting of these instruments, or of others equivalent to them, in the body of the watch already made in such a manner, as to form a new watch in the course of the movements which he had given to the old one. It is only working by one set of tools, instead of another.

The conclusion of which the *first* examination of the watch, of its works, construction, and movement, suggested, was, that it must have had, for the cause and author of that construction, an artificer, who understood its mechanism, and designed its use. This conclusion is invincible. A *second* examination presents us with a new discovery. The watch is found, in the course of its movement, to produce another watch, similar to itself; and not only so, but we perceive in it a system or organization, separately calculated for that purpose.

What effect would this discovery have, or ought it to have, upon our former inference? What, as hath already been said, but to increase, beyond measure, our admiration of the skill, which had been employed in the formation of such a machine? Or shall it, instead of this, all at once turn us round to an opposite conclusion, viz. that no art or skill whatever has been concerned in the business, although all other evidences of art and skill remain as they were, and this last and supreme piece of art be now added to the rest? Can this be maintained without absurdity? Yet this is atheism.

CHAPTER III.

APPLICATION OF THE ARGUMENT

THIS is atheism: for every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.

I know no better method of introducing so large a subject, than that of comparing a single thing with a single thing; an eye, for example, with a telescope. As far as the examination of the instrument goes, there is precisely the same proof that the eye was made for vision, as there is that the telescope was made for assisting it. They are made upon the same principles; both being adjusted to the laws by which the transmission and refraction of rays of light are regulated. I speak not of the origin of the laws themselves; but such laws being fixed, the construction, in both cases, is adapted to them. For instance; these laws require, in order to produce the same effect, that the rays of light, in passing from water into the eye, should be refracted by a more convex surface, than when it passes out of air into the eye. Accordingly we find that the eye of a fish, in that part of it called the crystalline lens, is much rounder than the eye of terrestrial animals. What plainer manifestation of design can there be than this difference? What could a mathematical-instrument-maker have done more, to show his knowledge of his principle, his application of that knowledge, his suiting of his means to his end; I will not say to display the compass or excellence of his skill and art, for in these all comparison is indecorous, but to testify counsel, choice, consideration, purpose?

To some it may appear a difference sufficient to destroy all similitude between the eye and the telescope, that the one is a perceiving organ, the other an unperceiving instrument. The fact is, that they are both instruments. And, as to the mechanism, at least as to mechanism being employed, and even as to the kind of it, this circumstance varies not the analogy at all. For observe, what the constitution of the eye is. It is necessary, in order to produce distinct vision, that an image or picture of the object be formed at the bottom of the eye.

Whence this necessity arises, or how the picture is connected with the sensation, or contributes to it, it may be difficult, nay we will confess, if you please, impossible for us to search out. But the present question is not concerned in the inquiry. It may be true, that, in this, and in other instances, we trace mechanical contrivance a certain way; and that then we come to something which is not mechanical, or which is inscrutable. But this affects not the certainty of our investigation, as far as we have gone. The difference between an animal and an automatic statue, consists in this,—that, in the animal, we trace the mechanism to a certain point, and then we are stopped; either the mechanism becoming too subtle for our discernment, or something else beside the known laws of mechanism taking place; whereas, in the automaton, for the comparatively few motions of which it is capable, we trace the mechanism throughout. But, up to the limit, the reasoning is as clear and certain in the one case, as in the other. In the example before us, it is a matter of certainty, because it is a matter which experience and observation demonstrate, that the formation of an image at the bottom of the eye is necessary to perfect vision. The image itself can be shown. Whatever affects the distinctness of the image, affects the distinctness of the vision. The formation then of such an image being necessary (no matter how) to the sense of sight, and to the exercise of that sense, the apparatus by which it is formed is constructed and put together, not only with infinitely more art, but upon the self-same principles of art, as in the telescope or the camera obscura. The perception arising from the image may be laid out of the question; for the production of the image, these are instruments of the same kind. The end is the same; the means are the same. The purpose in both is alike; the contrivance for accomplishing that purpose is in both alike. The lenses of the telescope, and the humours of the eye, bear a complete resemblance to one another, in their figure, their position, and in their power over the rays of light, viz. in bringing each pencil to a point at the right distance from the lens; namely, in the eye, at the exact place where the membrane is spread to receive it. How is it possible, under circumstances of such close affinity, and under the operation of equal evidence, to exclude contrivance from the one; yet to acknowledge the proof of contrivance having been employed, as the plainest and clearest of all propositions, in the other?

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided by:** BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY:

Attribution



This work (Selected Reading's from William Paley's "Natural Theology" by William Paley) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SELECTED READINGS FROM ST. ANSELM'S PROSLOGIUM; MONOLOGIUM: AN APPENDIX IN BEHALF OF THE FOOL BY GAUNILO; AND CUR DEUS HOMO

St. Anselm

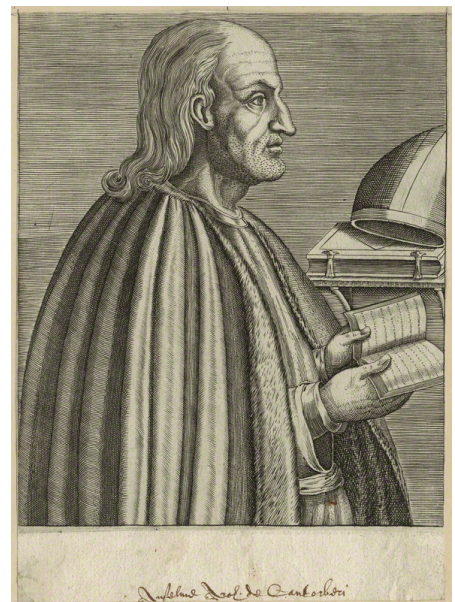
Editor's Note: The following text includes chapters two – five of *Proslogium; Monologium: An Appendix In Behalf Of The Fool By Gaunilo; And Cur Deus Homo*, Translated From Latin – additional attribution below the text.

Prosologion

Chapter II

Truly there is a God, although the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalms xiv. 1). But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak –a being than which



Line engraving of Anselm of Canterbury by an unknown artist in the late 16th century.

nothing greater can be conceived –understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

Chapter III

God cannot be conceived not to exist. –God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. –That which can be conceived not to exist is not God.

And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.

So truly, therefore, dost thou exist, O Lord, my God, that thou canst not be conceived not to exist; and rightly. For, if a mind could conceive of a being better than thee, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except thee alone, can be conceived not to exist. To thee alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence in a higher degree than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence in a less degree it belongs to it to exist. Why, then, has the fool said in his heart, there is no God (Psalms xiv. 1), since it is so evident, to a rational mind, that thou dost exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is dull and a fool?

Chapter IV

How the fool has said in his heart what cannot be conceived. –A thing may be conceived in two ways: (1) when the word signifying it is conceived; (2) when the thing itself is understood. As far as the word goes, God can be conceived not to exist; in reality he cannot.

But how has the fool said in his heart what he could not conceive; or how is it that he could not conceive what he said in his heart? Since it is the same to say in the heart, and to conceive.

But, if really, nay, since really, he both conceived, because he said in his heart; and did not say in his heart, because he could not conceive; there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived. For, in one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood.

In the former sense, then, God can be conceived not to exist; but in the latter, not at all. For no one who understands what fire and water are can conceive fire to be water, in accordance with the nature of the facts themselves, although this is possible according to the words. So, then, no one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist; although he says these words in his heart, either without any or with some foreign, signification. For, God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. And he who thoroughly understands this, assuredly understands that this being so truly exists, that not even in concept can it be non-existent. Therefore, he who understands that God so exists, cannot conceive that he does not exist.

I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now so understand by thine illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that thou dost exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true.

Chapter V

God is whatever it is better to be than not to be; and he, as the only self-existent being, creates all things from nothing.

What art thou, then, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived? But what art thou, except that which, as the highest of all beings, alone exists through itself, and creates all other things from nothing? For, whatever is not this is less than a thing which can be conceived of. But this cannot be conceived of thee. What good, therefore, does the supreme Good lack, through which every good is? Therefore, thou art just, truthful, blessed, and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is better to be just than not just; better to be blessed than not blessed.

Citation and Use

This content was excerpted from the following source:

St. Anselm: *Proslogium; Monologium: An Appendix In Behalf Of The Fool By Gaunilo; And Cur Deus Homo*, Translated From The Latin By Sidney Norton Deane, B. A. With An Introduction, Bibliography, And Reprints Of The Opinions Of Leading Philosophers And Writers On The Ontological Argument, (Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Company, 1903, reprinted 1926).

Etext (with permission) from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, here modernized in some spellings.

This text is part of the *Internet Medieval Source Book*. The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Unless otherwise indicated the specific electronic form of the document is copyright. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

© Paul Halsall, August 1998 halsall@murray.fordham.edu

Media Attributions

- NPG D23949; St Anselm after Unknown artist © Unknown is licensed under a Public Domain license



This work (Selected Readings from St. Anselm's Proslogium; Monologium: An Appendix In Behalf Of The Fool By Gaunilo; And Cur Deus Homo by St. Anselm) is free of known copyright restrictions.

DAVID HUME– ON THE IRRATIONALITY OF BELIEVING IN MIRACLES

Jeff McLaughlin

Miracles

Sect. X. PART I.

86. There is, in Dr. Tillotson's writings, an argument against the real presence, which is as concise, and elegant, and strong as any argument can possibly be supposed against a doctrine, so little worthy of a serious refutation. It is acknowledged on all hands, says that learned prelate, that the authority, either of the scripture or of tradition, is founded merely in the testimony of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses to those miracles of our Saviour, by which he proved his divine mission. Our evidence, then, for the truth of the Christian religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses; because, even in the first authors of our religion, it was no greater; and it is evident it must diminish in passing from them to their disciples; nor can any one rest such confidence in their testimony, as in the immediate object of his senses. But a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger; and therefore, were the doctrine of the real presence ever so clearly revealed in scripture, it were directly contrary to the rules of just reasoning to give our assent to it. It contradicts sense, though both the scripture and tradition, on which it is supposed to be built, carry not such evidence with them as sense; when they are considered merely as external evidences, and are not brought home to every one's breast, by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is so convenient as a decisive argument of this kind, which must at least silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition, and free us from their impertinent solicitations. I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures. For so long, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and profane.

87. Though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact; it must be acknowledged, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors. One, who in our climate, should expect better weather in any week of June than in one of December, would reason justly, and conformably to experience; but it is certain, that he may happen, in the event, to find himself mistaken. However, we may observe, that, in such a case, he would have no cause to complain of experience; because it commonly informs us beforehand of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of events, which we may learn from

a diligent observation. All effects follow not with like certainty from their supposed causes. Some events are found, in all countries and all ages, to have been constantly conjoined together: Others are found to have been more variable, and sometimes to disappoint our expectations; so that, in our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence.

A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full proof of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution: He weighs the opposite experiments: He considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: to that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgement, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call probability. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence, proportioned to the superiority. A hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another, afford a doubtful expectation of any event; though a hundred uniform experiments, with only one that is contradictory, reasonably beget a pretty strong degree of assurance. In all cases, we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.

88. To apply these principles to a particular instance; we may observe that there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators. This species of reasoning, perhaps, one may deny to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. I shall not dispute about a word. It will be sufficient to observe that our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. It being a general maxim, that no objects have any discoverable connexion together, and that all the inferences, which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction; it is evident that we ought not to make an exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connexion with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other. Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood: Were not these, I say, discovered by experience to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villany, has no manner of authority with us.

And as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded either as a proof or a probability, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable. There are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgements of this kind; and the ultimate standard,

by which we determine all disputes, that may arise concerning them, is always derived from experience and observation. Where this experience is not entirely uniform on any side, it is attended with an unavoidable contrariety in our judgements, and with the same opposition and mutual destruction of argument as in every other kind of evidence. We frequently hesitate concerning the reports of others. We balance the opposite circumstances, which cause any doubt or uncertainty; and when we discover a superiority on any side, we incline to it; but still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist.

89. This contrariety of evidence, in the present case, may be derived from several different causes; from the opposition of contrary testimony; from the character or number of the witnesses; from the manner of their delivering their testimony; or from the union of all these circumstances. We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few, or of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary, with too violent asseverations. There are many other particulars of the same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument, derived from human testimony.

Suppose, for instance, that the fact, which the testimony endeavours to establish, partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous; in that case, the evidence, resulting from the testimony, admits of a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any connexion, which we perceive a priori, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them. But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force, which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact, which they endeavour to establish; from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoize, and mutual destruction of belief and authority.

I should not believe such a story were it told me by Cato, was a proverbial saying in Rome, even during the lifetime of that philosophical patriot.¹ The incredibility of a fact, it was allowed, might invalidate so great an authority.

The Indian prince, who refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, reasoned justly; and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts, that arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and which bore so little analogy to those events, of which he had had constant and uniform experience. Though they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it.²

90. But in order to encrease the probability against the testimony of witnesses, let us suppose, that the fact, which they affirm, instead of being only marvellous, is really miraculous; and suppose also, that the testimony

considered apart and in itself, amounts to an entire proof; in that case, there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist.

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.³

91. The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), “That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.” When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.

PART II.

92. In the foregoing reasoning we have supposed that the testimony, upon which a miracle is founded, may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a real prodigy: But it is easy to shew that we have been a great deal too liberal in our concession, and that there never was a miraculous event established on so full an evidence.

For first, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such

undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.

93. Secondly. We may observe in human nature a principle which, if strictly examined, will be found to diminish extremely the assurance, which we might, from human testimony, have, in any kind of prodigy. The maxim, by which we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings, is, that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have; that what we have found to be most usual is always most probable; and that where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations. But though, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree; yet in advancing farther, the mind observes not always the same rule; but when anything is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, it rather the more readily admits of such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of surprise and wonder, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second-hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others.

With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners? But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority. A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality: he may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause: or even where this delusion has not place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances; and self-interest with equal force. His auditors may not have, and commonly have not, sufficient judgement to canvass his evidence: what judgement they have, they renounce by principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects: or if they were ever so willing to employ it, passion and a heated imagination disturb the regularity of its operations. Their credulity increases his impudence: and his impudence overpowers their credulity.

Eloquence, when at its highest pitch, leaves little room for reason or reflection; but addressing itself entirely to the fancy or the affections, captivates the willing hearers, and subdues their understanding. Happily, this pitch it seldom attains. But what a Tully or a Demosthenes could scarcely effect over a Roman or Athenian audience, every Capuchin, every itinerant or stationary teacher can perform over the generality of mankind, and in a higher degree, by touching such gross and vulgar passions.

The many instances of forged miracles, and prophecies, and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind. This is our natural way of thinking, even with regard to the most common and most credible events. For instance: There is no kind of report which rises so easily, and spreads so quickly, especially in country places and provincial towns, as those concerning marriages; insomuch that two young persons of equal condition never see each other twice, but the whole neighbourhood immediately join them together. The pleasure of telling a piece of news so interesting, of propagating it, and of being the first reporters of it, spreads the intelligence. And this is so well known, that no man of sense gives attention to these reports, till he find them confirmed by some greater evidence. Do not the same passions, and others still stronger, incline the generality of mankind to believe and report, with the greatest vehemence and assurance, all religious miracles?

94. Thirdly. It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend received opinions. When we peruse the first histories of all nations, we are apt to imagine ourselves transported into some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed, and every element performs its operations in a different manner, from what it does at present. Battles, revolutions, pestilence, famine and death, are never the effect of those natural causes, which we experience. Prodigies, omens, oracles, judgements, quite obscure the few natural events, that are intermingled with them. But as the former grow thinner every page, in proportion as we advance nearer the enlightened ages, we soon learn, that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural in the case, but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvellous, and that, though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature.

It is strange, a judicious reader is apt to say, upon the perusal of these wonderful historians, that such prodigious events never happen in our days. But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages. You must surely have seen instances enough of that frailty. You have yourself heard many such marvellous relations started, which, being treated with scorn by all the wise and judicious, have at last been abandoned even by the vulgar. Be assured, that those renowned lies, which have spread and flourished to such a monstrous height, arose from like beginnings; but being sown in a more proper soil, shot up at last into prodigies almost equal to those which they relate.

It was a wise policy in that false prophet, Alexander, who though now forgotten, was once so famous, to lay the first scene of his impostures in Paphlagonia, where, as Lucian tells us, the people were extremely ignorant and stupid, and ready to swallow even the grossest delusion. People at a distance, who are weak enough to think the

matter at all worth enquiry, have no opportunity of receiving better information. The stories come magnified to them by a hundred circumstances. Fools are industrious in propagating the imposture; while the wise and learned are contented, in general, to deride its absurdity, without informing themselves of the particular facts, by which it may be distinctly refuted. And thus the impostor above mentioned was enabled to proceed, from his ignorant Paphlagonians, to the enlisting of votaries, even among the Grecian philosophers, and men of the most eminent rank and distinction in Rome: nay, could engage the attention of that sage emperor Marcus Aurelius; so far as to make him trust the success of a military expedition to his delusive prophecies.

The advantages are so great, of starting an imposture among an ignorant people, that, even though the delusion should be too gross to impose on the generality of them (which, though seldom, is sometimes the case) it has a much better chance for succeeding in remote countries, than if the first scene had been laid in a city renowned for arts and knowledge. The most ignorant and barbarous of these barbarians carry the report abroad. None of their countrymen have a large correspondence, or sufficient credit and authority to contradict and beat down the delusion. Men's inclination to the marvellous has full opportunity to display itself. And thus a story, which is universally exploded in the place where it was first started, shall pass for certain at a thousand miles distance. But had Alexander fixed his residence at Athens, the philosophers of that renowned mart of learning had immediately spread, throughout the whole Roman empire, their sense of the matter; which, being supported by so great authority, and displayed by all the force of reason and eloquence, had entirely opened the eyes of mankind. It is true; Lucian, passing by chance through Paphlagonia, had an opportunity of performing this good office. But, though much to be wished, it does not always happen, that every Alexander meets with a Lucian, ready to expose and detect his impostures.

95. I may add as a fourth reason, which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of testimony, but the testimony destroys itself. To make this the better understood, let us consider, that, in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China should, all of them, be established on any solid foundation. Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other. According to this method of reasoning, when we believe any miracle of Mahomet or his successors, we have for our warrant the testimony of a few barbarous Arabians: And on the other hand, we are to regard the authority of Titus Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus, and, in short, of all the authors and witnesses, Grecian, Chinese, and Roman Catholic, who have related any miracle in their particular religion; I say, we are to regard their testimony in the same light as if they had mentioned that Mahometan miracle, and had in express terms contradicted it, with the same certainty as they have for the miracle they

relate. This argument may appear over subtle and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant, at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed.

96. One of the best attested miracles in all profane history, is that which Tacitus reports of Vespasian, who cured a blind man in Alexandria, by means of his spittle, and a lame man by the mere touch of his foot; in obedience to a vision of the god Serapis, who had enjoined them to have recourse to the Emperor, for these miraculous cures. The story may be seen in that fine historian;⁴ where every circumstance seems to add weight to the testimony, and might be displayed at large with all the force of argument and eloquence, if any one were now concerned to enforce the evidence of that exploded and idolatrous superstition. The gravity, solidity, age, and probity of so great an emperor, who, through the whole course of his life, conversed in a familiar manner with his friends and courtiers, and never affected those extraordinary airs of divinity assumed by Alexander and Demetrius. The historian, a contemporary writer, noted for candour and veracity, and withal, the greatest and most penetrating genius, perhaps, of all antiquity; and so free from any tendency to credulity, that he even lies under the contrary imputation, of atheism and profaneness: The persons, from whose authority he related the miracle, of established character for judgement and veracity, as we may well presume; eye-witnesses of the fact, and confirming their testimony, after the Flavian family was despoiled of the empire, and could no longer give any reward, as the price of a lie. *Utrumque, qui interfuere, nunc quoque memorant, postquam nullum mendacio pretium.* To which if we add the public nature of the facts, as related, it will appear, that no evidence can well be supposed stronger for so gross and so palpable a falsehood.

There is also a memorable story related by Cardinal de Retz, which may well deserve our consideration. When that intriguing politician fled into Spain, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he passed through Saragossa, the capital of Aragon, where he was shewn, in the cathedral, a man, who had served seven years as a doorkeeper, and was well known to every body in town, that had ever paid his devotions at that church. He had been seen, for so long a time, wanting a leg; but recovered that limb by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump; and the cardinal assures us that he saw him with two legs. This miracle was vouched by all the canons of the church; and the whole company in town were appealed to for a confirmation of the fact; whom the cardinal found, by their zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle. Here the relater was also contemporary to the supposed prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius; the miracle of so singular a nature as could scarcely admit of a counterfeit, and the witnesses very numerous, and all of them, in a manner, spectators of the fact, to which they gave their testimony. And what adds mightily to the force of the evidence, and may double our surprise on this occasion, is, that the cardinal himself, who relates the story, seems not to give any credit to it, and consequently cannot be suspected of any concurrence in the holy fraud. He considered justly, that it was not requisite, in order to reject a fact of this nature, to be able accurately to disprove the

testimony, and to trace its falsehood, through all the circumstances of knavery and credulity which produced it. He knew, that, as this was commonly altogether impossible at any small distance of time and place; so was it extremely difficult, even where one was immediately present, by reason of the bigotry, ignorance, cunning, and roguery of a great part of mankind. He therefore concluded, like a just reasoner, that such an evidence carried falsehood upon the very face of it, and that a miracle, supported by any human testimony, was more properly a subject of derision than of argument.

There surely never was a greater number of miracles ascribed to one person, than those, which were lately said to have been wrought in France upon the tomb of Abbe Paris, the famous Jansenist, with whose sanctity the people were so long deluded. The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, were every where talked of as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre. But what is more extraordinary; many of the miracles were immediately proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age, and on the most eminent theatre that is now in the world. Nor is this all: a relation of them was published and dispersed every where; nor were the Jesuits, though a learned body, supported by the civil magistrate, and determined enemies to those opinions, in whose favour the miracles were said to have been wrought, ever able distinctly to refute or detect them. Where shall we find such a number of circumstances, agreeing to the corroboration of one fact? And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation.

97. Is the consequence just, because some human testimony has the utmost force and authority in some cases, when it relates the battle of Philippi or Pharsalia for instance; that therefore all kinds of testimony must, in all cases, have equal force and authority? Suppose that the Caesarean and Pompeian factions had, each of them, claimed the victory in these battles, and that the historians of each party had uniformly ascribed the advantage to their own side; how could mankind, at this distance, have been able to determine between them? The contrariety is equally strong between the miracles related by Herodotus or Plutarch, and those delivered by Mariana, Bede, or any monkish historian.

The wise lend a very academic faith to every report which favours the passion of the reporter; whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities. But what greater temptation than to appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many dangers and difficulties, in order to attain so sublime a character? Or if, by the help of vanity and a heated imagination, a man has first made a convert of himself, and entered seriously into the delusion I who ever scruples to make use of pious frauds, in support of so holy and meritorious a cause?

The smallest spark may here kindle into the greatest flame; because the materials are always prepared for it. The avidum genus auricularum,⁵ the gazing populace, receive greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition, and promotes wonder.

How many stories of this nature have in all ages, been detected and exploded in their infancy? How many more have been celebrated for a time, and have afterwards sunk into neglect and oblivion? Where such reports, therefore, fly about, the solution of the phenomenon is obvious; and we in conformity to regular experience and observation, when we account for it by the known and natural principles of credulity and delusion. And shall we, rather than have a recourse to so natural a solution, allow of a miraculous violation of the most established laws of nature?

I need not mention the difficulty of detecting a falsehood in any private or even public history, at the place, where it is said to happen; much more when the scene is removed to ever so small a distance. Even a court of judicature, with all the authority, accuracy, and judgement, which they can employ, find themselves often at a loss to distinguish between truth and falsehood in the most recent actions. But the matter never comes to any issue, if trusted to the common method of altercations and debate and flying rumours; especially when men's passions have taken part on either side.

In the infancy of new religions, the wise and learned commonly esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention or regard. And when afterwards they would willingly detect the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, the season is now past, and the records and witnesses, which might clear up the matter, have perished beyond recovery.

No means of detection remain, but those which must be drawn from the very testimony itself of the reporters: and these, though always sufficient with the judicious and knowing, are commonly too fine to fall under the comprehension of the vulgar.

98. Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof, derived from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavour to establish. It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but substract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this substraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.

99. I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony; though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history. Thus, suppose all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: suppose that

the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: it is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived. The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phenomenon, which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform.

But suppose, that all the historians who treat of England, should agree, that, on the first of January 1600, Queen Elizabeth died; that both before and after her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court, as is usual with persons of her rank; that her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by the parliament; and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed England for three years: I must confess that I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real. You would in vain object to me the difficulty, and almost impossibility of deceiving the world in an affair of such consequence; the wisdom and solid judgement of that renowned queen; with the little or no advantage which she could reap from so poor an artifice: All this might astonish me; but I would still reply, that the knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature.

But should this miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion; men, in all ages, have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient, with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination. Though the Being to whom the miracle is ascribed, be, in this case, Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a Being, otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions, in the usual course of nature. This still reduces us to past observation, and obliges us to compare the instances of the violation of truth in the testimony of men, with those of the violation of the laws of nature by miracles, in order to judge which of them is most likely and probable. As the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact; this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution, never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretence it may be covered.

Lord Bacon seems to have embraced the same principles of reasoning. “We ought,” says he, “to make a collection or particular history of all monsters and prodigious births or productions, and in a word of everything new, rare, and extraordinary in nature. But this must be done with the most severe scrutiny, lest we depart from truth. Above all, every relation must be considered as suspicious, which depends in any degree

upon religion, as the prodigies of Livy: And no less so, everything that is to be found in the writers of natural magic or alchemy, or such authors, who seem, all of them, to have an unconquerable appetite for falsehood and fable.”⁶

100. I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure. To make this more evident, let us examine those miracles, related in scripture; and not to lose ourselves in too wide a field, let us confine ourselves to such as we find in the Pentateuch, which we shall examine, according to the principles of these pretended Christians, not as the word or testimony of God himself, but as the production of a mere human writer and historian. Here then we are first to consider a book, presented to us by a barbarous and ignorant people, written in an age when they were still more barbarous, and in all probability long after the facts which it relates, corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin. Upon reading this book, we find it full of prodigies and miracles. It gives an account of a state of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present: Of our fall from that state: Of the age of man, extended to near a thousand years: Of the destruction of the world by a deluge: Of the arbitrary choice of one people, as the favourites of heaven; and that people the countrymen of the author: Of their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable: I desire anyone to lay his hand upon his heart, and after a serious consideration declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is, however, necessary to make it be received, according to the measures of probability above established.

101. What we have said of miracles may be applied, without any variation, to prophecies; and indeed, all prophecies are real miracles, and as such only, can be admitted as proofs of any revelation. If it did not exceed the capacity of human nature to foretell future events, it would be absurd to employ any prophecy as an argument for a divine mission or authority from heaven. So that, upon the whole, we may conclude, that the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided by:** BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY:

Attribution

David Hume– On the Irrationality of Believing in Miracles by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Plutarch, Marcus Cato.
2. No Indian, it is evident, could have experience that water did not freeze in cold climates. This is placing nature in a situation quite unknown to him; and it is impossible for him to tell a priori what will result from it. It is making a new experiment, the consequence of which is always uncertain. One may sometimes conjecture from analogy what will follow; but still this is but conjecture. And it must be confessed, that, in the present case of freezing, the event follows contrary to the rules of analogy, and is such as a rational Indian would not look for. The operations of cold upon water are not gradual, according to the degrees of cold; but whenever it comes to the freezing point, the water passes in a moment, from the utmost liquidity to perfect hardness. Such an event, therefore, may be denominated extraordinary, and requires a pretty strong testimony to render it credible to people in a warm climate: But still it is not miraculous, nor contrary to uniform experience of the course of nature in cases where all the circumstances are the same. The inhabitants of Sumatra have always seen water fluid in their own climate, and the freezing of their rivers ought to be deemed a prodigy: But they never saw water in Muscovy during the winter; and therefore they cannot reasonably be positive what would there be the consequence.
3. Sometimes an event may not, in itself, seem to be contrary to the laws of nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, in fact, it is contrary to these laws. Thus if a person, claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour rain, the winds to blow, in short, should order many natural events, which immediately follow upon his command; these might justly be esteemed miracles, because they are really, in this case, contrary to the laws of nature. For if any suspicion remain, that the event and command concurred by accident, there is no miracle and no transgression of the laws of nature. If this suspicion be removed, there is evidently a miracle, and a transgression of these laws; because nothing can be more contrary to nature than that the voice or command of a man should have such an influence. A miracle may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle. The raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so sensible with regard to us.
4. Histories, iv. 81. Suetonius gives nearly the same account, Lives of the Caesars (Vespasian).
5. Lucretius.
6. Novum Organum, II, aph. 29.

SELECTIONS FROM PASCAL'S PENSÉES

Blaise Pascal

Editor's Note: The following texts are the Third and Fourth Chapters ("Of the Necessity of the Wager" and "Of the Means of Belief") of Pascal's *Pensées*.

SECTION III

OF THE NECESSITY OF THE WAGER

184

A letter to incite to the search after God.

And then to make people seek Him among the philosophers, sceptics, and dogmatists, who disquiet him who inquires of them.

185

The conduct of God, who disposes all things kindly, is to put religion into the mind by reason, and into the heart by grace. But to will to put it into the mind and heart by force and threats is not to put religion there, but terror, *terrorrem potius quam religionem*.

186

Nisi terrerentur et non docerentur, improba quasi dominatio videretur (Aug., Ep. 48 or 49), *Contra Mendacium ad Consentium*.

187

Order.—Men despise religion; they hate it, and fear it is true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing that

religion is not contrary to reason; that it is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true.

Venerable, because it has perfect knowledge of man; lovable, because it promises the true good.

188

In every dialogue and discourse, we must be able to say to those who take offence, “Of what do you complain?”

189

To begin by pitying unbelievers; they are wretched enough by their condition. We ought only to revile them where it is beneficial; but this does them harm. [Pg 53]

190

To pity atheists who seek, for are they not unhappy enough? To inveigh against those who make a boast of it.

191

And will this one scoff at the other? Who ought to scoff? And yet, the latter does not scoff at the other, but pities him.

192

To reproach Miton¹ with not being troubled, since God will reproach him.

193

Quid fiet hominibus qui minima contemnunt, majora non credunt?

194

... Let them at least learn what is the religion they attack, before attacking it. If this religion boasted of having a clear view of God, and of possessing it open and unveiled, it would be attacking it to say that we see nothing in the world which shows it with this clearness. But since, on the contrary, it says that men are in darkness and estranged from God, that He has hidden Himself from their knowledge, that this is in fact the name which He gives Himself in the Scriptures, *Deus absconditus*;² and finally, if it endeavours equally to establish these two things: that God has set up in the Church visible signs to make Himself known to those who should seek Him sincerely, and that He has nevertheless so disguised them that He will only be perceived by those who

seek Him with all their heart; what advantage can they obtain, when, in the negligence with which they make profession of being in search of the truth, they cry out that nothing reveals it to them; and since that darkness in which they are, and with which they upbraid the Church, establishes only one of the things which she affirms, without touching the other, and, very far from destroying, proves her doctrine?

In order to attack it, they should have protested that they had made every effort to seek Him everywhere, and even in that which the Church proposes for their instruction, but without satisfaction. If they talked in this manner, they would in truth be attacking one of her pretensions. But I hope here to show that no reasonable person can speak thus, and I venture[Pg 54] even to say that no one has ever done so. We know well enough how those who are of this mind behave. They believe they have made great efforts for their instruction, when they have spent a few hours in reading some book of Scripture, and have questioned some priest on the truths of the faith. After that, they boast of having made vain search in books and among men. But, verily, I will tell them what I have often said, that this negligence is insufferable. We are not here concerned with the trifling interests of some stranger, that we should treat it in this fashion; the matter concerns ourselves and our all.

The immortality of the soul is a matter which is of so great consequence to us, and which touches us so profoundly, that we must have lost all feeling to be indifferent as to knowing what it is. All our actions and thoughts must take such different courses, according as there are or are not eternal joys to hope for, that it is impossible to take one step with sense and judgment, unless we regulate our course by our view of this point which ought to be our ultimate end.

Thus our first interest and our first duty is to enlighten ourselves on this subject, whereon depends all our conduct. Therefore among those who do not believe, I make a vast difference between those who strive with all their power to inform themselves, and those who live without troubling or thinking about it.

I can have only compassion for those who sincerely bewail their doubt, who regard it as the greatest of misfortunes, and who, sparing no effort to escape it, make of this inquiry their principal and most serious occupations.

But as for those who pass their life without thinking of this ultimate end of life, and who, for this sole reason that they do not find within themselves the lights which convince them of it, neglect to seek them elsewhere, and to examine thoroughly whether this opinion is one of those which people receive with credulous simplicity, or one of those which, although obscure in themselves, have nevertheless a solid and immovable foundation, I look upon them in a manner quite different.

This carelessness in a matter which concerns themselves, their eternity, their all, moves me more to anger than pity; it astonishes and shocks me; it is to me monstrous. I do not say this out of the pious zeal of a spiritual devotion. I expect, on the contrary, that we ought to have this feeling from principles of human interest and self-love; for this we need only see what the least enlightened persons see.[Pg 55]

We do not require great education of the mind to understand that here is no real and lasting satisfaction; that our pleasures are only vanity; that our evils are infinite; and, lastly, that death, which threatens us every moment, must infallibly place us within a few years under the dreadful necessity of being for ever either annihilated or unhappy.

There is nothing more real than this, nothing more terrible. Be we as heroic as we like, that is the end which awaits the noblest life in the world. Let us reflect on this, and then say whether it is not beyond doubt that there is no good in this life but in the hope of another; that we are happy only in proportion as we draw near it; and that, as there are no more woes for those who have complete assurance of eternity, so there is no more happiness for those who have no insight into it.

Surely then it is a great evil thus to be in doubt, but it is at least an indispensable duty to seek when we are in such doubt; and thus the doubter who does not seek is altogether completely unhappy and completely wrong. And if besides this he is easy and content, professes to be so, and indeed boasts of it; if it is this state itself which is the subject of his joy and vanity, I have no words to describe so silly a creature.

How can people hold these opinions? What joy can we find in the expectation of nothing but hopeless misery? What reason for boasting that we are in impenetrable darkness? And how can it happen that the following argument occurs to a reasonable man?

"I know not who put me into the world, nor what the world is, nor what I myself am. I am in terrible ignorance of everything. I know not what my body is, nor my senses, nor my soul, not even that part of me which thinks what I say, which reflects on all and on itself, and knows itself no more than the rest. I see those frightful spaces of the universe which surround me, and I find myself tied to one corner of this vast expanse, without knowing why I am put in this place rather than in another, nor why the short time which is given me to live is assigned to me at this point rather than at another of the whole eternity which was before me or which shall come after me. I see nothing but infinities on all sides, which surround me as an atom, and as a shadow which endures only for an instant and returns no more. All I know is that I must soon die, but what I know least is this very death which I cannot escape.

"As I know not whence I come, so I know not whither I go.[Pg 56] I know only that, in leaving this world, I fall for ever either into annihilation or into the hands of an angry God, without knowing to which of these two states I shall be for ever assigned. Such is my state, full of weakness and uncertainty. And from all this I conclude that I ought to spend all the days of my life without caring to inquire into what must happen to me. Perhaps I might find some solution to my doubts, but I will not take the trouble, nor take a step to seek it; and after treating with scorn those who are concerned with this care, I will go without foresight and without fear to try the great event, and let myself be led carelessly to death, uncertain of the eternity of my future state."

Who would desire to have for a friend a man who talks in this fashion? Who would choose him out from others

to tell him of his affairs? Who would have recourse to him in affliction? And indeed to what use in life could one put him?

In truth, it is the glory of religion to have for enemies men so unreasonable: and their opposition to it is so little dangerous that it serves on the contrary to establish its truths. For the Christian faith goes mainly to establish these two facts, the corruption of nature, and redemption by Jesus Christ. Now I contend that if these men do not serve to prove the truth of the redemption by the holiness of their behaviour, they at least serve admirably to show the corruption of nature by sentiments so unnatural.

Nothing is so important to man as his own state, nothing is so formidable to him as eternity; and thus it is not natural that there should be men indifferent to the loss of their existence, and to the perils of everlasting suffering. They are quite different with regard to all other things. They are afraid of mere trifles; they foresee them; they feel them. And this same man who spends so many days and nights in rage and despair for the loss of office, or for some imaginary insult to his honour, is the very one who knows without anxiety and without emotion that he will lose all by death. It is a monstrous thing to see in the same heart and at the same time this sensibility to trifles and this strange insensibility to the greatest objects. It is an incomprehensible enchantment, and a supernatural slumber, which indicates as its cause an all-powerful force.

There must be a strange confusion in the nature of man, that he should boast of being in that state in which it seems incredible that a single individual should be. However, experience has[Pg 57] shown me so great a number of such persons that the fact would be surprising, if we did not know that the greater part of those who trouble themselves about the matter are disingenuous, and not in fact what they say. They are people who have heard it said that it is the fashion to be thus daring. It is what they call shaking off the yoke, and they try to imitate this. But it would not be difficult to make them understand how greatly they deceive themselves in thus seeking esteem. This is not the way to gain it, even I say among those men of the world who take a healthy view of things, and who know that the only way to succeed in this life is to make ourselves appear honourable, faithful, judicious, and capable of useful service to a friend; because naturally men love only what may be useful to them. Now, what do we gain by hearing it said of a man that he has now thrown off the yoke, that he does not believe there is a God who watches our actions, that he considers himself the sole master of his conduct, and that he thinks he is accountable for it only to himself? Does he think that he has thus brought us to have henceforth complete confidence in him, and to look to him for consolation, advice, and help in every need of life? Do they profess to have delighted us by telling us that they hold our soul to be only a little wind and smoke, especially by telling us this in a haughty and self-satisfied tone of voice? Is this a thing to say gaily? Is it not, on the contrary, a thing to say sadly, as the saddest thing in the world?

If they thought of it seriously, they would see that this is so bad a mistake, so contrary to good sense, so opposed to decency and so removed in every respect from that good breeding which they seek, that they would be more likely to correct than to pervert those who had an inclination to follow them. And indeed, make them give an account of their opinions, and of the reasons which they have for doubting religion, and they will say to

you things so feeble and so petty, that they will persuade you of the contrary. The following is what a person one day said to such a one very appositely: "If you continue to talk in this manner, you will really make me religious." And he was right, for who would not have a horror of holding opinions in which he would have such contemptible persons as companions!

Thus those who only feign these opinions would be very unhappy, if they restrained their natural feelings in order to make themselves the most conceited of men. If, at the bottom of their heart, they are troubled at not having more light, let[Pg 58] them not disguise the fact; this avowal will not be shameful. The only shame is to have none. Nothing reveals more an extreme weakness of mind than not to know the misery of a godless man. Nothing is more indicative of a bad disposition of heart than not to desire the truth of eternal promises. Nothing is more dastardly than to act with bravado before God. Let them then leave these impieties to those who are sufficiently ill-bred to be really capable of them. Let them at least be honest men, if they cannot be Christians. Finally, let them recognise that there are two kinds of people one can call reasonable; those who serve God with all their heart because they know Him, and those who seek Him with all their heart because they do not know Him.

But as for those who live without knowing Him and without seeking Him, they judge themselves so little worthy of their own care, that they are not worthy of the care of others; and it needs all the charity of the religion which they despise, not to despise them even to the point of leaving them to their folly. But because this religion obliges us always to regard them, so long as they are in this life, as capable of the grace which can enlighten them, and to believe that they may, in a little time, be more replenished with faith than we are, and that, on the other hand, we may fall into the blindness wherein they are, we must do for them what we would they should do for us if we were in their place, and call upon them to have pity upon themselves, and to take at least some steps in the endeavour to find light. Let them give to reading this some of the hours which they otherwise employ so uselessly; whatever aversion they may bring to the task, they will perhaps gain something, and at least will not lose much. But as for those who bring to the task perfect sincerity and a real desire to meet with truth, those I hope will be satisfied and convinced of the proofs of a religion so divine, which I have here collected, and in which I have followed somewhat after this order ...

195

Before entering into the proofs of the Christian religion, I find it necessary to point out the sinfulness of those men who live in indifference to the search for truth in a matter which is so important to them, and which touches them so nearly.

Of all their errors, this doubtless is the one which most convicts them of foolishness and blindness, and in which it is[Pg 59] easiest to confound them by the first glimmerings of common sense, and by natural feelings.

For it is not to be doubted that the duration of this life is but a moment; that the state of death is eternal,

whatever may be its nature; and that thus all our actions and thoughts must take such different directions according to the state of that eternity, that it is impossible to take one step with sense and judgment, unless we regulate our course by the truth of that point which ought to be our ultimate end.

There is nothing clearer than this; and thus, according to the principles of reason, the conduct of men is wholly unreasonable, if they do not take another course.

On this point, therefore, we condemn those who live without thought of the ultimate end of life, who let themselves be guided by their own inclinations and their own pleasures without reflection and without concern, and, as if they could annihilate eternity by turning away their thought from it, think only of making themselves happy for the moment.

Yet this eternity exists, and death, which must open into it, and threatens them every hour, must in a little time infallibly put them under the dreadful necessity of being either annihilated or unhappy for ever, without knowing which of these eternities is for ever prepared for them.

This is a doubt of terrible consequence. They are in peril of eternal woe; and thereupon, as if the matter were not worth the trouble, they neglect to inquire whether this is one of those opinions which people receive with too credulous a facility, or one of those which, obscure in themselves, have a very firm, though hidden, foundation. Thus they know not whether there be truth or falsity in the matter, nor whether there be strength or weakness in the proofs. They have them before their eyes; they refuse to look at them; and in that ignorance they choose all that is necessary to fall into this misfortune if it exists, to await death to make trial of it, yet to be very content in this state, to make profession of it, and indeed to boast of it. Can we think seriously on the importance of this subject without being horrified at conduct so extravagant?

This resting in ignorance is a monstrous thing, and they who pass their life in it must be made to feel its extravagance and stupidity, by having it shown to them, so that they may be confounded by the sight of their folly. For this is how men reason, when they choose to live in such ignorance of what they [Pg 60] are, and without seeking enlightenment. "I know not," they say ...

196

Men lack heart; they would not make a friend of it.

197

To be insensible to the extent of despising interesting things, and to become insensible to the point which interests us most.

198

The sensibility of man to trifles, and his insensibility to great things, indicates a strange inversion.

199

Let us imagine a number of men in chains, and all condemned to death, where some are killed each day in the sight of the others, and those who remain see their own fate in that of their fellows, and wait their turn, looking at each other sorrowfully and without hope. It is an image of the condition of men.

200

A man in a dungeon, ignorant whether his sentence be pronounced, and having only one hour to learn it, but this hour enough, if he know that it is pronounced, to obtain its repeal, would act unnaturally in spending that hour, not in ascertaining his sentence, but in playing piquet. So it is against nature that man, etc. It is making heavy the hand of God.

Thus not only the zeal of those who seek Him proves God, but also the blindness of those who seek Him not.

201

All the objections of this one and that one only go against themselves, and not against religion. All that infidels say ...

202

[From those who are in despair at being without faith, we see that God does not enlighten them; but as to the rest, we see there is a God who makes them blind.]

203

*Fascinatio nugacitatis.*³ That passion may not harm us, let us act as if we had only eight hours to live. [Pg 61]

204

If we ought to devote eight hours of life, we ought to devote a hundred years.

205

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space

which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me? *Memoria hospitii unius diei pretereuntis.*⁴

206

The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.

207

How many kingdoms know us not!

208

Why is my knowledge limited? Why my stature? Why my life to one hundred years rather than to a thousand? What reason has nature had for giving me such, and for choosing this number rather than another in the infinity of those from which there is no more reason to choose one than another, trying nothing else?

209

Art thou less a slave by being loved and favoured by thy master? Thou art indeed well off, slave. Thy master favours thee; he will soon beat thee.

210

The last act is tragic, however happy all the rest of the play is; at the last a little earth is thrown upon our head, and that is the end for ever.

211

We are fools to depend upon the society of our fellow-men. Wretched as we are, powerless as we are, they will not aid us;[Pg 62] we shall die alone. We should therefore act as if we were alone, and in that case should we build fine houses, etc.? We should seek the truth without hesitation; and, if we refuse it, we show that we value the esteem of men more than the search for truth.

212

*Instability.*⁵ It is a horrible thing to feel all that we possess slipping away.

213

Between us and heaven or hell there is only life, which is the frailest thing in the world.

214

Injustice.—That presumption should be joined to meanness is extreme injustice.

215

To fear death without danger, and not in danger, for one must be a man.

216

Sudden death alone is feared; hence confessors stay with lords.

217

An heir finds the title-deeds of his house. Will he say, “Perhaps they are forged?” and neglect to examine them?

218

Dungeon.—I approve of not examining the opinion of Copernicus; but this...! It concerns all our life to know whether the soul be mortal or immortal.

219

It is certain that the mortality or immortality of the soul must make an entire difference to morality. And yet philosophers have constructed their ethics independently of this: they discuss to pass an hour.

Plato, to incline to Christianity.

220

The fallacy of philosophers who have not discussed the immortality of the soul. The fallacy of their dilemma in Montaigne.[Pg 63]

221

Atheists ought to say what is perfectly evident; now it is not perfectly evident that the soul is material.

222

Atheists.—What reason have they for saying that we cannot rise from the dead? What is more difficult, to be born or to rise again; that what has never been should be, or that what has been should be again? Is it more difficult to come into existence than to return to it? Habit makes the one appear easy to us; want of habit makes the other impossible. A popular way of thinking!

Why cannot a virgin bear a child? Does a hen not lay eggs without a cock? What distinguishes these outwardly from others? And who has told us that the hen may not form the germ as well as the cock?

223

What have they to say against the resurrection, and against the child-bearing of the Virgin? Which is the more difficult, to produce a man or an animal, or to reproduce it? And if they had never seen any species of animals, could they have conjectured whether they were produced without connection with each other?

224

How I hate these follies of not believing in the Eucharist, etc.! If the Gospel be true, if Jesus Christ be God, what difficulty is there?

225

Atheism shows strength of mind, but only to a certain degree.

226

Infidels, who profess to follow reason, ought to be exceedingly strong in reason. What say they then? “Do we not see,” say they, “that the brutes live and die like men, and Turks like Christians? They have their ceremonies, their prophets, their doctors, their saints, their monks, like us,” etc. (Is this contrary to Scripture? Does it not say all this?)

If you care but little to know the truth, here is enough of it to leave you in repose. But if you desire with all your heart[Pg 64] to know it, it is not enough; look at it in detail. This would be sufficient for a question in philosophy; but not here, where it concerns your all. And yet, after a trifling reflection of this kind, we go to amuse ourselves, etc. Let us inquire of this same religion whether it does not give a reason for this obscurity; perhaps it will teach it to us.

227

Order by dialogues.—What ought I to do? I see only darkness everywhere. Shall I believe I am nothing? Shall I believe I am God?

“All things change and succeed each other.” You are mistaken; there is ...

228

Objection of atheists: “But we have no light.”

229

This is what I see and what troubles me. I look on all sides, and I see only darkness everywhere. Nature presents to me nothing which is not matter of doubt and concern. If I saw nothing there which revealed a Divinity, I would come to a negative conclusion; if I saw everywhere the signs of a Creator, I would remain peacefully in faith. But, seeing too much to deny and too little to be sure, I am in a state to be pitied; wherefore I have a hundred time wished that if a God maintains nature, she should testify to Him unequivocally, and that, if the signs she gives are deceptive, she should suppress them altogether; that she should say everything or nothing, that I might see which cause I ought to follow. Whereas in my present state, ignorant of what I am or of what I ought to do, I know neither my condition nor my duty. My heart inclines wholly to know where is the true good, in order to follow it; nothing would be too dear to me for eternity.

I envy those whom I see living in the faith with such carelessness, and who make such a bad use of a gift of which it seems to me I would make such a different use.

230

It is incomprehensible that God should exist, and it is incomprehensible that He should not exist; that the soul should be joined to the body, and that we should have no soul; that the [Pg 65] world should be created, and that it should not be created, etc.; that original sin should be, and that it should not be.

231

Do you believe it to be impossible that God is infinite, without parts?—Yes. I wish therefore to show you an infinite and indivisible thing. It is a point moving everywhere with an infinite velocity; for it is one in all places, and is all totality in every place.

Let this effect of nature, which previously seemed to you impossible, make you know that there may be others

of which you are still ignorant. Do not draw this conclusion from your experiment, that there remains nothing for you to know; but rather that there remains an infinity for you to know.

232

Infinite movement, the point which fills everything, the moment of rest; infinite without quantity, indivisible and infinite.

233

Infinite—nothing.—Our soul is cast into a body, where it finds number, time, dimension. Thereupon it reasons, and calls this nature, necessity, and can believe nothing else.

Unity joined to infinity adds nothing to it, no more than one foot to an infinite measure. The finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite, and becomes a pure nothing. So our spirit before God, so our justice before divine justice. There is not so great a disproportion between our justice and that of God, as between unity and infinity.

The justice of God must be vast like His compassion. Now justice to the outcast is less vast, and ought less to offend our feelings than mercy towards the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, and are ignorant of its nature. As we know it to be false that numbers are finite, it is therefore true that there is an infinity in number. But we do not know what it is. It is false that it is even, it is false that it is odd; for the addition of a unit can make no change in its nature. Yet it is a number, and every number is odd or even (this is certainly true of every finite number). So we may well know that there is a God without knowing what He is. Is there not one substantial truth, seeing there are so many things which are not the truth itself? [Pg 66]

We know then the existence and nature of the finite, because we also are finite and have extension. We know the existence of the infinite, and are ignorant of its nature, because it has extension like us, but not limits like us. But we know neither the existence nor the nature of God, because He has neither extension nor limits.

But by faith we know His existence; in glory we shall know His nature. Now, I have already shown that we may well know the existence of a thing, without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to natural lights.

If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is. This being so, who will dare to undertake the decision of the question? Not we, who have no affinity to Him.

Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason? They declare, in expounding it to the world, that it is a foolishness, *stultitiam*;⁶ and then you complain that they do not prove it! If they proved it, they would not keep their word; it is in lacking proofs, that they are not lacking in sense. “Yes, but although this excuses those who offer it as such, and takes away from them the blame of putting it forward without reason, it does not excuse those who receive it.” Let us then examine this point, and say, “God is, or He is not.” But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.

Do not then reprove for error those who have made a choice; for you know nothing about it. “No, but I blame them for having made, not this choice, but a choice; for again both he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally at fault, they are both in the wrong. The true course is not to wager at all.”

Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. You have two things to lose, the true and the good; and two things to stake, [Pg 67] your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to shun, error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.—”That is very fine. Yes, I must wager; but I may perhaps wager too much.”—Let us see. Since there is an equal risk of gain and of loss, if you had only to gain two lives, instead of one, you might still wager. But if there were three lives to gain, you would have to play (since you are under the necessity of playing), and you would be imprudent, when you are forced to play, not to chance your life to gain three at a game where there is an equal risk of loss and gain. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. And this being so, if there were an infinity of chances, of which one only would be for you, you would still be right in wagering one to win two, and you would act stupidly, being obliged to play, by refusing to stake one life against three at a game in which out of an infinity of chances there is one for you, if there were an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain. But there is here an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain, a chance of gain against a finite number of chances of loss, and what you stake is finite. It is all divided; wherever the infinite is and there is not an infinity of chances of loss against that of gain, there is no time to hesitate, you must give all. And thus, when one is forced to play, he must renounce reason to preserve his life, rather than risk it for infinite gain, as likely to happen as the loss of nothingness.

For it is no use to say it is uncertain if we will gain, and it is certain that we risk, and that the infinite distance between the *certainly* of what is staked and the *uncertainty* of what will be gained, equals the finite good which is certainly staked against the uncertain infinite. It is not so, as every player stakes a certainty to gain an

uncertainty, and yet he stakes a finite certainty to gain a finite uncertainty, without transgressing against reason. There is not an infinite distance between the certainty staked and the uncertainty of the gain; that is untrue. In truth, there is an infinity between the certainty of gain and the certainty of loss. But the uncertainty of the gain is proportioned to the certainty of the stake according to the [Pg 68] proportion of the chances of gain and loss. Hence it comes that, if there are as many risks on one side as on the other, the course is to play even; and then the certainty of the stake is equal to the uncertainty of the gain, so far is it from fact that there is an infinite distance between them. And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gain and of loss, and the infinite to gain. This is demonstrable; and if men are capable of any truths, this is one.

“I confess it, I admit it. But, still, is there no means of seeing the faces of the cards?”—Yes, Scripture and the rest, etc. “Yes, but I have my hands tied and my mouth closed; I am forced to wager, and am not free. I am not released, and am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?”

True. But at least learn your inability to believe, since reason brings you to this, and yet you cannot believe. Endeavour then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness.—”But this is what I am afraid of.”—And why? What have you to lose?

But to show you that this leads you there, it is this which will lessen the passions, which are your stumbling-blocks.

The end of this discourse.—Now, what harm will befall you in taking this side? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognise that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing.

“Ah! This discourse transports me, charms me,” etc.

If this discourse pleases you and seems impressive, know [Pg 69] that it is made by a man who has knelt, both before and after it, in prayer to that Being, infinite and without parts, before whom he lays all he has, for you also to lay before Him all you have for your own good and for His glory, that so strength may be given to lowliness.

234

If we must not act save on a certainty, we ought not to act on religion, for it is not certain. But how many things we do on an uncertainty, sea voyages, battles! I say then we must do nothing at all, for nothing is certain, and that there is more certainty in religion than there is as to whether we may see to-morrow; for it is not certain that we may see to-morrow, and it is certainly possible that we may not see it. We cannot say as much about religion. It is not certain that it is; but who will venture to say that it is certainly possible that it is not? Now when we work for to-morrow, and so on an uncertainty, we act reasonably; for we ought to work for an uncertainty according to the doctrine of chance which was demonstrated above.

Saint Augustine has seen that we work for an uncertainty, on sea, in battle, etc. But he has not seen the doctrine of chance which proves that we should do so. Montaigne has seen that we are shocked at a fool, and that habit is all-powerful; but he has not seen the reason of this effect.

All these persons have seen the effects, but they have not seen the causes. They are, in comparison with those who have discovered the causes, as those who have only eyes are in comparison with those who have intellect. For the effects are perceptible by sense, and the causes are visible only to the intellect. And although these effects are seen by the mind, this mind is, in comparison with the mind which sees the causes, as the bodily senses are in comparison with the intellect.

235

Rem viderunt, causam non viderunt.

236

According to the doctrine of chance, you ought to put yourself to the trouble of searching for the truth; for if you die without worshipping the True Cause, you are lost.—”But,” say you, “if He had wished me to worship Him, He would have left me [Pg 70] signs of His will.”—He has done so; but you neglect them. Seek them, therefore; it is well worth it.

237

Chances.—We must live differently in the world, according to these different assumptions: (1) that we could always remain in it; (2) that it is certain that we shall not remain here long, and uncertain if we shall remain here one hour. This last assumption is our condition.

238

What do you then promise me, in addition to certain troubles, but ten years of self-love (for ten years is the chance), to try hard to please without success?

239

Objection.—Those who hope for salvation are so far happy; but they have as a counterpoise the fear of hell.

Reply.—Who has most reason to fear hell: he who is in ignorance whether there is a hell, and who is certain of damnation if there is; or he who certainly believes there is a hell, and hopes to be saved if there is?

240

“I would soon have renounced pleasure,” say they, “had I faith.” For my part I tell you, “You would soon have faith, if you renounced pleasure.” Now, it is for you to begin. If I could, I would give you faith. I cannot do so, nor therefore test the truth of what you say. But you can well renounce pleasure, and test whether what I say is true.

241

Order.—I would have far more fear of being mistaken, and of finding that the Christian religion was true, than of not being mistaken in believing it true.[Pg 71]

SECTION IV

OF THE MEANS OF BELIEF

242

Preface to the second part.—To speak of those who have treated of this matter.

I admire the boldness with which these persons undertake to speak of God. In addressing their argument to infidels, their first chapter is to prove Divinity from the works of nature.⁷ I should not be astonished at their enterprise, if they were addressing their argument to the faithful; for it is certain that those who have the living faith in their heart see at once that all existence is none other than the work of the God whom they adore. But for those in whom this light is extinguished, and in whom we purpose to rekindle it, persons destitute of faith

and grace, who, seeking with all their light whatever they see in nature that can bring them to this knowledge, find only obscurity and darkness; to tell them that they have only to look at the smallest things which surround them, and they will see God openly, to give them, as a complete proof of this great and important matter, the course of the moon and planets, and to claim to have concluded the proof with such an argument, is to give them ground for believing that the proofs of our religion are very weak. And I see by reason and experience that nothing is more calculated to arouse their contempt.

It is not after this manner that Scripture speaks, which has a better knowledge of the things that are of God. It says, on the contrary, that God is a hidden God, and that, since the corruption of nature, He has left men in a darkness from which they can escape only through Jesus Christ, without whom all communion with God is cut off. *Nemo novit Patrem, nisi Filius, et cui voluerit Filius revelare.*⁸

This is what Scripture points out to us, when it says in so many places that those who seek God find Him.⁹ It is not of that light, “like the noonday sun,” that this is said. We do [Pg 72] not say that those who seek the noonday sun, or water in the sea, shall find them; and hence the evidence of God must not be of this nature. So it tells us elsewhere: *Vere tu es Deus absconditus.*¹⁰

243

It is an astounding fact that no canonical writer has ever made use of nature to prove God. They all strive to make us believe in Him. David, Solomon, etc., have never said, “There is no void, therefore there is a God.” They must have had more knowledge than the most learned people who came after them, and who have all made use of this argument. This is worthy of attention.

244

“Why! Do you not say yourself that the heavens and birds prove God?” No. “And does your religion not say so?” No. For although it is true in a sense for some souls to whom God gives this light, yet it is false with respect to the majority of men.

245

There are three sources of belief: reason, custom, inspiration. The Christian religion, which alone has reason, does not acknowledge as her true children those who believe without inspiration. It is not that she excludes reason and custom. On the contrary, the mind must be opened to proofs, must be confirmed by custom, and offer itself in humbleness to inspirations, which alone can produce a true and saving effect. *Ne evacuetur crux Christi.*¹¹

246

Order.—After the letter *That we ought to seek God*, to write the letter *On removing obstacles*; which is the discourse on “the machine,”¹² on preparing the machine, on seeking by reason.

247

Order.—A letter of exhortation to a friend to induce him to seek. And he will reply, “But what is the use of seeking? Nothing is seen.” Then to reply to him, “Do not despair.” And he will answer that he would be glad to find some light, but that, according to this very religion, if he believed in it, it will be of no use to him, and that therefore he prefers not to seek. And to answer to that: The machine.[Pg 73]

248

A letter which indicates the use of proofs by the machine.— Faith is different from proof; the one is human, the other is a gift of God. *Justus ex fide vivit.*¹³ It is this faith that God Himself puts into the heart, of which the proof is often the instrument, *fides ex auditu*;¹⁴ but this faith is in the heart, and makes us not say *scio*, but *credo*.

249

It is superstition to put one’s hope in formalities; but it is pride to be unwilling to submit to them.

250

The external must be joined to the internal to obtain anything from God, that is to say, we must kneel, pray with the lips, etc., in order that proud man, who would not submit himself to God, may be now subject to the creature.¹⁵ To expect help from these externals is superstition; to refuse to join them to the internal is pride.

251

Other religions, as the pagan, are more popular, for they consist in externals. But they are not for educated people. A purely intellectual religion would be more suited to the learned, but it would be of no use to the common people. The Christian religion alone is adapted to all, being composed of externals and internals. It raises the common people to the internal, and humbles the proud to the external; it is not perfect without the two, for the people must understand the spirit of the letter, and the learned must submit their spirit to the letter.

252

For we must not misunderstand ourselves; we are as much automatic as intellectual; and hence it comes that the instrument by which conviction is attained is not demonstrated alone. How few things are demonstrated? Proofs only convince the mind. Custom is the source of our strongest and most believed proofs. It bends the automaton, which persuades the mind without its thinking about the matter. Who has demonstrated that there will be a to-morrow, and that we shall die? And what is more believed? It is, then, custom which persuades us of it; it is[Pg 74] custom that makes so many men Christians; custom that makes them Turks, heathens, artisans, soldiers, etc. (Faith in baptism is more received among Christians than among Turks.) Finally, we must have recourse to it when once the mind has seen where the truth is, in order to quench our thirst, and steep ourselves in that belief, which escapes us at every hour; for always to have proofs ready is too much trouble. We must get an easier belief, which is that of custom, which, without violence, without art, without argument, makes us believe things, and inclines all our powers to this belief, so that our soul falls naturally into it. It is not enough to believe only by force of conviction, when the automaton is inclined to believe the contrary. Both our parts must be made to believe, the mind by reasons which it is sufficient to have seen once in a lifetime, and the automaton by custom, and by not allowing it to incline to the contrary. *Inclina cor meum, Deus.*¹⁶

The reason acts slowly, with so many examinations, and on so many principles, which must be always present, that at every hour it falls asleep, or wanders, through want of having all its principles present. Feeling does not act thus; it acts in a moment, and is always ready to act. We must then put our faith in feeling; otherwise it will be always vacillating.

253

Two extremes: to exclude reason, to admit reason only.

254

It is not a rare thing to have to reprove the world for too much docility. It is a natural vice like credulity, and as pernicious. Superstition.

255

Piety is different from superstition.

To carry piety as far as superstition is to destroy it.

The heretics reproach us for this superstitious submission. This is to do what they reproach us for ...

Infidelity, not to believe in the Eucharist, because it is not seen.

Superstition to believe propositions. Faith, etc.

256

I say there are few true Christians, even as regards faith. There are many who believe but from superstition. There are [Pg 75] many who do not believe solely from wickedness. Few are between the two.

In this I do not include those who are of truly pious character, nor all those who believe from a feeling in their heart.

257

There are only three kinds of persons; those who serve God, having found Him; others who are occupied in seeking Him, not having found Him; while the remainder live without seeking Him, and without having found Him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy; those between are unhappy and reasonable.

258

*Unusquisque sibi Deum fingit.*¹⁷

Disgust.

259

Ordinary people have the power of not thinking of that about which they do not wish to think. “Do not meditate on the passages about the Messiah,” said the Jew to his son. Thus our people often act. Thus are false religions preserved, and even the true one, in regard to many persons.

But there are some who have not the power of thus preventing thought, and who think so much the more as they are forbidden. These undo false religions, and even the true one, if they do not find solid arguments.

260

They hide themselves in the press, and call numbers to their rescue. Tumult.

Authority.—So far from making it a rule to believe a thing because you have heard it, you ought to believe nothing without putting yourself into the position as if you had never heard it.

It is your own assent to yourself, and the constant voice of your own reason, and not of others, that should make you believe.

Belief is so important! A hundred contradictions might be true. If antiquity were the rule of belief, men of ancient time would then be without rule. If general consent, if men had perished?

False humanity, pride.

Lift the curtain. You try in vain; if you must either believe,[Pg 76] or deny, or doubt. Shall we then have no rule? We judge that animals do well what they do. Is there no rule whereby to judge men?

To deny, to believe, and to doubt well, are to a man what the race is to a horse.

Punishment of those who sin, error.

261

Those who do not love the truth take as a pretext that it is disputed, and that a multitude deny it. And so their error arises only from this, that they do not love either truth or charity. Thus they are without excuse.

262

Superstition and lust. Scruples, evil desires. Evil fear; fear, not such as comes from a belief in God, but such as comes from a doubt whether He exists or not. True fear comes from faith; false fear comes from doubt. True fear is joined to hope, because it is born of faith, and because men hope in the God in whom they believe. False fear is joined to despair, because men fear the God in whom they have no belief. The former fear to lose Him; the latter fear to find Him.

263

“A miracle,” says one, “would strengthen my faith.” He says so when he does not see one. Reasons, seen from afar, appear to limit our view; but when they are reached, we begin to see beyond. Nothing stops the nimbleness of our mind. There is no rule, say we, which has not some exceptions, no truth so general which has not some aspect in which it fails. It is sufficient that it be not absolutely universal to give us a pretext for applying the exceptions to the present subject, and for saying, “This is not always true; there are therefore cases where it is not so.” It only remains to show that this is one of them; and that is why we are very awkward or unlucky, if we do not find one some day.

264

We do not weary of eating and sleeping every day, for hunger and sleepiness recur. Without that we should weary of them. So, without the hunger for spiritual things, we weary of them. Hunger after righteousness, the eighth beatitude.[Pg 77]¹⁸

265

Faith indeed tells what the senses do not tell, but not the contrary of what they see. It is above them and not contrary to them.

266

How many stars have telescopes revealed to us which did not exist for our philosophers of old! We freely attack Holy Scripture on the great number of stars, saying, “There are only one thousand and twenty-eight,¹⁹ we know it.” There is grass on the earth, we see it—from the moon we would not see it—and on the grass are leaves, and in these leaves are small animals; but after that no more.—O presumptuous man!—The compounds are composed of elements, and the elements not.—O presumptuous man! Here is a fine reflection.—We must not say that there is anything which we do not see.—We must then talk like others, but not think like them.

267

The last proceeding of reason is to recognise that there is an infinity of things which are beyond it. It is but feeble if it does not see so far as to know this. But if natural things are beyond it, what will be said of supernatural?

268

Submission.—We must know where to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit. He who does not do so, understands not the force of reason. There are some who offend against these three rules, either by affirming everything as demonstrative, from want of knowing what demonstration is; or by doubting everything, from want of knowing where to submit; or by submitting in everything, from want of knowing where they must judge.

269

Submission is the use of reason in which consists true Christianity.

270

*St. Augustine.*²⁰ Reason would never submit, if it did not judge that there are some occasions on which it ought to submit. It is then right for it to submit, when it judges that it ought to submit. [Pg 78]

271

Wisdom sends us to childhood. *Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli.*²¹

272

There is nothing so conformable to reason as this disavowal of reason.

273

If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have no mysterious and supernatural element. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous.

274

All our reasoning reduces itself to yielding to feeling.

But fancy is like, though contrary to feeling, so that we cannot distinguish between these contraries. One person says that my feeling is fancy, another that his fancy is feeling. We should have a rule. Reason offers itself; but it is pliable in every sense; and thus there is no rule.

275

Men often take their imagination for their heart; and they believe they are converted as soon as they think of being converted.

276

M. de Roannez said: "Reasons come to me afterwards, but at first a thing pleases or shocks me without my knowing the reason, and yet it shocks me for that reason which I only discover afterwards." But I believe, not that it shocked him for the reasons which were found afterwards, but that these reasons were only found because it shocks him.

277

The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things. I say that the heart naturally loves the Universal Being, and also itself naturally, according as it gives itself to them; and it hardens itself against one or the other at its will. You have rejected the one, and kept the other. Is it by reason that you love yourself?

278

It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason.[Pg 79]

279

Faith is a gift of God; do not believe that we said it was a gift of reasoning. Other religions do not say this of their faith. They only gave reasoning in order to arrive at it, and yet it does not bring them to it.

280

The knowledge of God is very far from the love of Him.

281

Heart, instinct, principles.

282

We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles; and reason, which has no part in it, tries in vain to impugn them. The sceptics, who have only this for their object, labour to no purpose. We know that we do not dream, and however impossible it is for us to prove it by reason, this inability demonstrates only the weakness of our reason, but not, as they affirm, the uncertainty of all our knowledge. For the knowledge of first principles, as space, time, motion, number, is as sure as any of those which we get from reasoning. And reason must trust these intuitions of the heart, and must base them on every argument. (We have intuitive knowledge of the tri-dimensional nature of space, and of the infinity of number, and reason then shows that there are no two square numbers one of which is double of the other. Principles are intuited, propositions are inferred, all with certainty, though in different ways.) And it is as useless and absurd for reason to demand from the heart proofs of her first principles, before admitting them, as it would be for the heart to demand from reason an intuition of all demonstrated propositions before accepting them.

This inability ought, then, to serve only to humble reason, which would judge all, but not to impugn our certainty, as if only reason were capable of instructing us. Would to God, on the contrary, that we had never need of it, and that we knew everything by instinct and intuition! But nature has refused us this boon. On the contrary, she has given us but very little knowledge of this kind; and all the rest can be acquired only by reasoning.[Pg 80]

Therefore, those to whom God has imparted religion by intuition are very fortunate, and justly convinced. But to those who do not have it, we can give it only by reasoning, waiting for God to give them spiritual insight, without which faith is only human, and useless for salvation.

283

Order.—Against the objection that Scripture has no order.

The heart has its own order; the intellect has its own, which is by principle and demonstration. The heart has another. We do not prove that we ought to be loved by enumerating in order the causes of love; that would be ridiculous.

Jesus Christ and Saint Paul employ the rule of love, not of intellect; for they would warm, not instruct. It is the same with Saint Augustine. This order consists chiefly in digressions on each point to indicate the end, and keep it always in sight.

284

Do not wonder to see simple people believe without reasoning. God imparts to them love of Him and hatred of self. He inclines their heart to believe. Men will never believe with a saving and real faith, unless God inclines their heart; and they will believe as soon as He inclines it. And this is what David knew well, when he said: *Inclina cor meum, Deus, in ...*²²

285

Religion is suited to all kinds of minds. Some pay attention only to its establishment,²³ and this religion is such that its very establishment suffices to prove its truth. Others trace it even to the apostles. The more learned go back to the beginning of the world. The angels see it better still, and from a more distant time.

286

Those who believe without having read the Testaments, do so because they have an inward disposition entirely holy, and all that they hear of our religion conforms to it. They feel that a God has made them; they desire

only to love God; they desire to hate themselves only. They feel that they have no strength in themselves; that they are incapable of coming to God; and that if God does not come to them, they can have no communion with Him. And they hear our religion say that men must love[Pg 81] God only, and hate self only; but that all being corrupt and unworthy of God, God made Himself man to unite Himself to us. No more is required to persuade men who have this disposition in their heart, and who have this knowledge of their duty and of their inefficiency.

287

Those whom we see to be Christians without the knowledge of the prophets and evidences, nevertheless judge of their religion as well as those who have that knowledge. They judge of it by the heart, as others judge of it by the intellect. God Himself inclines them to believe, and thus they are most effectively convinced.

I confess indeed that one of those Christians who believe without proofs will not perhaps be capable of convincing an infidel who will say the same of himself. But those who know the proofs of religion will prove without difficulty that such a believer is truly inspired by God, though he cannot prove it himself.

For God having said in His prophecies (which are undoubtedly prophecies), that in the reign of Jesus Christ He would spread His spirit abroad among nations, and that the youths and maidens and children of the Church would prophesy;²⁴ it is certain that the Spirit of God is in these, and not in the others.

288

Instead of complaining that God had hidden Himself, you will give Him thanks for having revealed so much of Himself; and you will also give Him thanks for not having revealed Himself to haughty sages, unworthy to know so holy a God.

Two kinds of persons know Him: those who have a humble heart, and who love lowliness, whatever kind of intellect they may have, high or low; and those who have sufficient understanding to see the truth, whatever opposition they may have to it.

289

Proof.—1. The Christian religion, by its establishment, having established itself so strongly, so gently, whilst contrary to nature.—2. The sanctity, the dignity, and the humility of a Christian soul.—3. The miracles of Holy Scripture.—4. Jesus Christ in particular.—5. The apostles in particular.—6. Moses[Pg 82] and the prophets in particular.—7. The Jewish people.—8. The prophecies.—9. Perpetuity; no religion has perpetuity.—10. The doctrine which gives a reason for everything.—11. The sanctity of this law.—12. By the course of the world.

Surely, after considering what is life and what is religion, we should not refuse to obey the inclination to follow it, if it comes into our heart; and it is certain that there is no ground for laughing at those who follow it.

290

Proofs of religion.—Morality, Doctrine, Miracles, Prophecies, Types.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Pascal, Blaise, *Pascal's Pensées*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1958), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm>.

The use of this work is governed by the Project Gutenberg License, included with the eBook linked above.



This work (Selections from Pascal's Pensées by Blaise Pascal) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. P. 53, l. 5. Miton.—A man of fashion in Paris known to Pascal.
2. P. 53, l. 15. Deus absconditus.—Is. xiv, 15.
3. P. 60, l. 26. Fascinatio nugacitatis.—Book of Wisdom iv, 12.
4. P. 61, l. 10. Memoria hospititis, etc.—Book of Wisdom v, 15.
5. P. 62, l. 5. Instability.—Compare Montaigne, *Essais*, iii, 12.
6. P. 66, l. 19. Foolishness, stultitium.—I Cor. i, 18.
7. P. 71, l. 5. To prove Divinity from the works of nature.—A traditional argument of the Stoics like Cicero and Seneca, and of rationalist theologians like Raymond Sebond, Charron, etc. It is the argument from Design in modern philosophy.
8. P. 71, l. 27. Nemo novit, etc.—Matthew xi, 27. In the Vulgate, it is Neque patrem quis novit, etc. Pascal's biblical quotations are often incorrect. Many seem to have been made from memory.
9. P. 71, l. 30. Those who seek God find Him.—Matthew vii, 7.

10. P. 72, l. 3. Vere tu es Deus absconditus.—Is. xiv, 15.
11. P. 72, l. 22. Ne evacuetur crux Christi.—I Cor. i, 17. In the Vulgate we haveut non instead of ne.
12. P. 72, l. 25. The machine.—A Cartesian expression. Descartes considered animals as mere automata. According to Pascal, whatever does not proceed in us from reflective thought is a product of a necessary mechanism, which has its root in the body, and which is continued into the mind in imagination and the passions. It is therefore necessary for man so to alter, and adjust this mechanism, that it will always follow, and not obstruct, the good will.
13. P. 73, l. 3. Justus ex fide vivit.—Romans i, 17.
14. P. 73, l. 5. Fides ex auditu.—Romans x, 17.
15. P. 73, l. 12. The creature.—What is purely natural in us.
16. P. 74, l. 15. Inclina cor meum, Deus.—Ps. cxix, 36.
17. P. 75, l. 11. Unus quisque sibi Deum fingit.—See Book of Wisdom xv, 6, 16.
18. P. 76, l. 34. Eighth beatitude.—Matthew v, 10. It is to the fourth beatitude that the thought directly refers.
19. P. 77, l. 6. One thousand and twenty-eight.—The number of the stars according to Ptolemy's catalogue.
20. P. 77, l. 29. Saint Augustine.—Epist. cxx, 3.
21. P. 78, l. 1. Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli.—Matthew xviii, 3.
22. P. 80, l. 20. Inclina cor meum, Deus, in....—Ps. cxix, 36.
23. P. 80, l. 22. Its establishment.—The constitution of the Christian Church.
24. P. 81, l. 20. The youths and maidens and children of the Church would prophesy.—Joel ii, 28.

WILLIAM JAMES – ON THE WILL TO BELIEVE

Jeff McLaughlin

Essays in Popular Philosophy

The Will to Believe

IN the recently published *The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* by Leslie Stephen of his brother, Fitz-James, there is an account of a school to which the latter went when he was a boy. The teacher, a certain Mr. Guest, used to converse with his pupils in this wise: “Gurney, what is the difference between justification and sanctification?—Stephen, prove the omnipotence of God!” etc. In the midst of our Harvard freethinking and indifference we are prone to imagine that here at your good old orthodox College conversation continues to be somewhat upon this order; and to show you that we at Harvard have not lost all interest in these vital subjects, I have brought with me to-night something like a sermon on justification by faith to read to you,—I mean an essay in justification *of* faith, a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced. ‘The Will to Believe,’ accordingly, is the title of my paper.

I have long defended to my own students the lawfulness of voluntarily adopted faith; but as soon as they have got well imbued with the logical spirit, they have as a rule refused to admit my contention to be lawful philosophically, even though in point of fact they were personally all the time chock-full of some faith or other themselves. I am all the while, however, so profoundly convinced that my own position is correct, that your invitation has seemed to me a good occasion to make my statements more clear. Perhaps your minds will be more open than those with which I have hitherto had to deal. I will be as little technical as I can, though I must begin by setting up some technical distinctions that will help us in the end.

I.

Let us give the name of *hypothesis* to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either *live* or *dead*. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature,—it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi’s followers), the hypothesis

is among the mind's possibilities: it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all.

Next, let us call the decision between two hypotheses an *option*. Options may be of several kinds. They may be—1, *living* or *dead*; 2, *forced* or *avoidable*; 3, *momentous* or *trivial*; and for our purposes we may call an option a *genuine* option when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind.

A living option is one in which both hypotheses are live ones. If I say to you: "Be a theosophist or be a Mohammedan," it is probably a dead option, because for you neither hypothesis is likely to be alive. But if I say: "Be an agnostic or be a Christian," it is otherwise: trained as you are, each hypothesis makes some appeal, however small, to your belief.

Next, if I say to you: "Choose between going out with your umbrella or without it," I do not offer you a genuine option, for it is not forced. You can easily avoid it by not going out at all. Similarly, if I say, "Either love me or hate me," "Either call my theory true or call it false," your option is avoidable. You may remain indifferent to me, neither loving nor hating, and you may decline to offer any judgment as to my theory. But if I say, "Either accept this truth or go without it," I put on you a forced option, for there is no standing place outside of the alternative. Every dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction, with no possibility of not choosing, is an option of this forced kind.

Finally, if I were Dr. Nansen and proposed to you to join my North Pole expedition, your option would be momentous; for this would probably be your only similar opportunity, and your choice now would either exclude you from the North Pole sort of immortality altogether or put at least the chance of it into your hands. He who refuses to embrace a unique opportunity loses the prize as surely as if he tried and failed. *Per contra*, the option is trivial when the opportunity is not unique, when the stake is insignificant, or when the decision is reversible if it later prove unwise. Such trivial options abound in the scientific life. A chemist finds an hypothesis live enough to spend a year in its verification: he believes in it to that extent. But if his experiments prove inconclusive either way, he is quit for his loss of time, no vital harm being done.

It will facilitate our discussion if we keep all these distinctions well in mind.

II.

The next matter to consider is the actual psychology of human opinion. When we look at certain facts, it seems as if our passional and volitional nature lay at the root of all our convictions. When we look at others, it seems as if they could do nothing when the intellect had once said its say. Let us take the latter facts up first.

Does it not seem preposterous on the very face of it to talk of our opinions being modifiable at will? Can

our will either help or hinder our intellect in its perceptions of truth? Can we, by just willing it, believe that Abraham Lincoln's existence is a myth, and that the portraits of him in McClure's Magazine are all of some one else? Can we, by any effort of our will, or by any strength of wish that it were true, believe ourselves well and about when we are roaring with rheumatism in bed, or feel certain that the sum of the two one-dollar bills in our pocket must be a hundred dollars? We can say any of these things, but we are absolutely impotent to believe them; and of just such things is the whole fabric of the truths that we do believe in made up,—matters of fact, immediate or remote, as Hume said, and relations between ideas, which are either there or not there for us if we see them so, and which if not there cannot be put there by any action of our own.

In Pascal's *Thoughts* there is a celebrated passage known in literature as Pascal's wager. In it he tries to force us into Christianity by reasoning as if our concern with truth resembled our concern with the stakes in a game of chance. Translated freely his words are these: You must either believe or not believe that God is—which will you do? Your human reason cannot say. A game is going on between you and the nature of things which at the day of judgment will bring out either heads or tails. Weigh what your gains and your losses would be if you should stake all you have on heads, or God's existence: if you win in such case, you gain eternal beatitude; if you lose, you lose nothing at all. If there were an infinity of chances, and only one for God in this wager, still you ought to stake your all on God; for though you surely risk a finite loss by this procedure, any finite loss is reasonable, even a certain one is reasonable, if there is but the possibility of infinite gain. Go, then, and take holy water, and have masses said; belief will come and stupefy your scruples,—*Cela vous fera croire et vous abetira*. Why should you not? At bottom, what have you to lose?

You probably feel that when religious faith expresses itself thus, in the language of the gaming-table, it is put to its last trumps. Surely Pascal's own personal belief in masses and holy water had far other springs; and this celebrated page of his is but an argument for others, a last desperate snatch at a weapon against the hardness of the unbelieving heart. We feel that a faith in masses and holy water adopted wilfully after such a mechanical calculation would lack the inner soul of faith's reality; and if we were ourselves in the place of the Deity, we should probably take particular pleasure in cutting off believers of this pattern from their infinite reward. It is evident that unless there be some pre-existing tendency to believe in masses and holy water, the option offered to the will by Pascal is not a living option. Certainly no Turk ever took to masses and holy water on its account; and even to us Protestants these means of salvation seem such foregone impossibilities that Pascal's logic, invoked for them specifically, leaves us unmoved. As well might the Mahdi write to us, saying, "I am the Expected One whom God has created in his effulgence. You shall be infinitely happy if you confess me; otherwise you shall be cut off from the light of the sun. Weigh, then, your infinite gain if I am genuine against your finite sacrifice if I am not!" His logic would be that of Pascal; but he would vainly use it on us, for the hypothesis he offers us is dead. No tendency to act on it exists in us to any degree. The talk of believing by our volition seems, then, from one point of view, simply silly. From another point of view it is worse than silly, it is vile. When one turns to the magnificent edifice of the physical sciences, and sees how it was reared; what thousands of disinterested moral lives of men lie buried in its mere foundations; what

patience and postponement, what choking down of preference, what submission to the icy laws of outer fact are wrought into its very stones and mortar; how absolutely impersonal it stands in its vast augustness,—then how besotted and contemptible seems every little sentimentalist who comes blowing his voluntary smoke-wreaths, and pretending to decide things from out of his private dream! Can we wonder if those bred in the rugged and manly school of science should feel like spewing such subjectivism out of their mouths? The whole system of loyalties which grow up in the schools of science go dead against its toleration; so that it is only natural that those who have caught the scientific fever should pass over to the opposite extreme, and write sometimes as if the incorruptibly truthful intellect ought positively to prefer bitterness and unacceptableness to the heart in its cup.

It fortifies my soul to know That, though I perish, Truth is so—

sings Clough, while Huxley exclaims: “My only consolation lies in the reflection that, however bad our posterity may become, so far as they hold by the plain rule of not pretending to believe what they have no reason to believe, because it may be to their advantage so to pretend [the word ‘pretend’ is surely here redundant], they will not have reached the lowest depth of immorality.” And that delicious *enfant terrible* Clifford writes: “Belief is desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements for the solace and private pleasure of the believer. . . . Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of his belief with a very fanaticism of jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away. . . . If [a] belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence [even though the belief be true, as Clifford on the same page explains] the pleasure is a stolen one. . . . It is sinful because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence which may shortly master our own body and then spread to the rest of the town. . . . It is wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”

III.

All this strikes one as healthy, even when expressed, as by Clifford, with somewhat too much of robustious pathos in the voice. Free-will and simple wishing do seem, in the matter of our credences, to be only fifth wheels to the coach. Yet if any one should thereupon assume that intellectual insight is what remains after wish and will and sentimental preference have taken wing, or that pure reason is what then settles our opinions, he would fly quite as directly in the teeth of the facts.

It is only our already dead hypotheses that our willing nature is unable to bring to life again. But what has made them dead for us is for the most part a previous action of our willing nature of an antagonistic kind. When I say ‘willing nature,’ I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from,—I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set. As a matter of fact we find ourselves believing, we hardly know how or why. Mr. Balfour gives the name of ‘authority’ to all those influences, born of the intellectual

climate, that make hypotheses possible or impossible for us, alive or dead. Here in this room, we all of us believe in molecules and the conservation of energy, in democracy and necessary progress, in Protestant Christianity and the duty of fighting for ‘the doctrine of the immortal Monroe,’ all for no reasons worthy of the name. We see into these matters with no more inner clearness, and probably with much less, than any disbeliever in them might possess. His unconventionality would probably have some grounds to show for its conclusions; but for us, not insight, but the *prestige* of the opinions, is what makes the spark shoot from them and light up our sleeping magazines of faith. Our reason is quite satisfied, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand of us, if it can find a few arguments that will do to recite in case our credulity is criticised by some one else. Our faith is faith in some one else’s faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case. Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other,—what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives. But if a pyrrhonic sceptic asks us *how we know* all this, can our logic find a reply? No! certainly it cannot. It is just one volition against another,—we willing to go in for life upon a trust or assumption which he, for his part, does not care to make.¹

As a rule we disbelieve all facts and theories for which we have no use. Clifford’s cosmic emotions find no use for Christian feelings. Huxley belabors the bishops because there is no use for sacerdotalism in his scheme of life. Newman, on the contrary, goes over to Romanism, and finds all sorts of reasons good for staying there, because a priestly system is for him an organic need and delight. Why do so few ‘scientists’ even look at the evidence for telepathy, so called? Because they think, as a leading biologist, now dead, once said to me, that even if such a thing were true, scientists ought to band together to keep it suppressed and concealed. It would undo the uniformity of Nature and all sorts of other things without which scientists cannot carry on their pursuits. But if this very man had been shown something which as a scientist he might *do* with telepathy, he might not only have examined the evidence, but even have found it good enough. This very law which the logicians would impose upon us—if I may give the name of logicians to those who would rule out our willing nature here—is based on nothing but their own natural wish to exclude all elements for which they, in their professional quality of logicians, can find no use.

Evidently, then, our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions. There are passional tendencies and volitions which run before and others which come after belief, and it is only the latter that are too late for the fair; and they are not too late when the previous passional work has been already in their own direction. Pascal’s argument, instead of being powerless, then seems a regular clincher, and is the last stroke needed to make our faith in masses and holy water complete. The state of things is evidently far from simple; and pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally, are not the only things that really do produce our creeds.

IV.

Our next duty, having recognized this mixed-up state of affairs, is to ask whether it be simply reprehensible

and pathological, or whether, on the contrary, we must treat it as a normal element in making up our minds. The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: *Our passionate nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, “Do not decide, but leave the question open,” is itself a passionate decision,—just like deciding yes or no,—and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.* The thesis thus abstractly expressed will, I trust, soon become quite clear. But I must first indulge in a bit more of preliminary work.

V.

It will be observed that for the purposes of this discussion we are on ‘dogmatic’ ground,—ground, I mean, which leaves systematic philosophical scepticism altogether out of account. The postulate that there is truth, and that it is the destiny of our minds to attain it, we are deliberately resolving to make, though the sceptic will not make it. We part company with him, therefore, absolutely, at this point. But the faith that truth exists, and that our minds can find it, may be held in two ways. We may talk of the *empiricist* way and of the *absolutist* way of believing in truth. The absolutists in this matter say that we not only can attain to knowing truth, but we can *know when* we have attained to knowing it; while the empiricists think that although we may attain it, we cannot infallibly know when. To *know* is one thing, and to know for certain *that* we know is another. One may hold to the first being possible without the second; hence the empiricists and the absolutists, although neither of them is a sceptic in the usual philosophic sense of the term, show very different degrees of dogmatism in their lives.

If we look at the history of opinions, we see that the empiricist tendency has largely prevailed in science, while in philosophy the absolutist tendency has had everything its own way. The characteristic sort of happiness, indeed, which philosophies yield has mainly consisted in the conviction felt by each successive school or system that by it bottom-certitude had been attained. “Other philosophies are collections of opinions, mostly false; *my* philosophy gives standing-ground forever,”—who does not recognize in this the key-note of every system worthy of the name? A system, to be a system at all, must come as a *closed* system, reversible in this or that detail, perchance, but in its essential features never!

Scholastic orthodoxy, to which one must always go when one wishes to find perfectly clear statement, has beautifully elaborated this absolutist conviction in a doctrine which it calls that of ‘objective evidence.’ If, for example, I am unable to doubt that I now exist before you, that two is less than three, or that if all men are mortal then I am mortal too, it is because these things illumine my intellect irresistibly. The final ground of this objective evidence possessed by certain propositions is the *adaequatio intellectus nostri cum re*. The certitude it brings involves an *aptitudinem ad extorquendum certum assensum* on the part of the truth envisaged, and on the side of the subject a *quietem in cognitione*, when once the object is mentally received, that leaves no possibility of doubt behind; and in the whole transaction nothing operates but the *entitas ipsa* of the object and the *entitas ipsa* of the mind. We slouchy modern thinkers dislike to talk in Latin,—indeed, we dislike to talk

in set terms at all; but at bottom our own state of mind is very much like this whenever we uncritically abandon ourselves: You believe in objective evidence, and I do. Of some things we feel that we are certain: we know, and we know that we do know. There is something that gives a click inside of us, a bell that strikes twelve, when the hands of our mental clock have swept the dial and meet over the meridian hour. The greatest empiricists among us are only empiricists on reflection: when left to their instincts, they dogmatize like infallible popes. When the Cliffords tell us how sinful it is to be Christians on such ‘insufficient evidence,’ insufficiency is really the last thing they have in mind. For them the evidence is absolutely sufficient, only it makes the other way. They believe so completely in an anti-christian order of the universe that there is no living option: Christianity is a dead hypothesis from the start.

VI.

But now, since we are all such absolutists by instinct, what in our quality of students of philosophy ought we to do about the fact? Shall we espouse and indorse it? Or shall we treat it as a weakness of our nature from which we must free ourselves, if we can?

I sincerely believe that the latter course is the only one we can follow as reflective men. Objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found? I am, therefore, myself a complete empiricist so far as my theory of human knowledge goes. I live, to be sure, by the practical faith that we must go on experiencing and thinking over our experience, for only thus can our opinions grow more true; but to hold any one of them—I absolutely do not care which—as if it never could be reinterpretable or corrigible, I believe to be a tremendously mistaken attitude, and I think that the whole history of philosophy will bear me out. There is but one indefectibly certain truth, and that is the truth that pyrrhonic scepticism itself leaves standing,—the truth that the present phenomenon of consciousness exists. That, however, is the bare starting-point of knowledge, the mere admission of a stuff to be philosophized about. The various philosophies are but so many attempts at expressing what this stuff really is. And if we repair to our libraries what disagreement do we discover! Where is a certainly true answer found? Apart from abstract propositions of comparison (such as two and two are the same as four), propositions which tell us nothing by themselves about concrete reality, we find no proposition ever regarded by any one as evidently certain that has not either been called a falsehood, or at least had its truth sincerely questioned by some one else. The transcending of the axioms of geometry, not in play but in earnest, by certain of our contemporaries (as Zöllner and Charles H. Hinton), and the rejection of the whole Aristotelian logic by the Hegelians, are striking instances in point.

No concrete test of what is really true has ever been agreed upon. Some make the criterion external to the moment of perception, putting it either in revelation, the *consensus gentium*, the instincts of the heart, or the systematized experience of the race. Others make the perceptive moment its own test,—Descartes, for instance, with his clear and distinct ideas guaranteed by the veracity of God; Reid with his ‘common-sense;’ and Kant with his forms of synthetic judgment *a priori*. The inconceivability of the opposite; the capacity

to be verified by sense; the possession of complete organic unity or self-relation, realized when a thing is its own other,—are standards which, in turn, have been used. The much lauded objective evidence is never triumphantly there; it is a mere aspiration or *Grenzbegriff*, marking the infinitely remote ideal of our thinking life. To claim that certain truths now possess it, is simply to say that when you think them true and they *are* true, then their evidence is objective, otherwise it is not. But practically one's conviction that the evidence one goes by is of the real objective brand, is only one more subjective opinion added to the lot. For what a contradictory array of opinions have objective evidence and absolute certitude been claimed! The world is rational through and through,—its existence is an ultimate brute fact; there is a personal God,—a personal God is inconceivable; there is an extra-mental physical world immediately known,—the mind can only know its own ideas; a moral imperative exists,—obligation is only the resultant of desires; a permanent spiritual principle is in every one,—there are only shifting states of mind; there is an endless chain of causes,—there is an absolute first cause; an eternal necessity,—a freedom; a purpose,—no purpose; a primal One,—a primal Many; a universal continuity,—an essential discontinuity in things; an infinity,—no infinity. There is this,—there is that; there is indeed nothing which some one has not thought absolutely true, while his neighbor deemed it absolutely false; and not an absolutist among them seems ever to have considered that the trouble may all the time be essential, and that the intellect, even with truth directly in its grasp, may have no infallible signal for knowing whether it be truth or no. When, indeed, one remembers that the most striking practical application to life of the doctrine of objective certitude has been the conscientious labors of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, one feels less tempted than ever to lend the doctrine a respectful ear.

But please observe, now, that when as empiricists we give up the doctrine of objective certitude, we do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself. We still pin our faith on its existence, and still believe that we gain an ever better position towards it by systematically continuing to roll up experiences and think. Our great difference from the scholastic lies in the way we face. The strength of his system lies in the principles, the origin, the *terminus a quo* of his thought; for us the strength is in the outcome, the upshot, the *terminus ad quem*. Not where it comes from but what it leads to is to decide. It matters not to an empiricist from what quarter an hypothesis may come to him: he may have acquired it by fair means or by foul; passion may have whispered or accident suggested it; but if the total drift of thinking continues to confirm it, that is what he means by its being true.

VII.

One more point, small but important, and our preliminaries are done. There are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion,—ways entirely different, and yet ways about whose difference the theory of knowledge seems hitherto to have shown very little concern. *We must know the truth*; and *we must avoid error*,—these are our first and great commandments as would-be knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical commandment, they are two separable laws. Although it may indeed happen that when we believe the truth *A*, we escape as an incidental consequence from believing the falsehood *B*, it hardly ever happens that

by merely disbelieving *B* we necessarily believe *A*. We may in escaping *B* fall into believing other falsehoods, *C* or *D*, just as bad as *B*; or we may escape *B* by not believing anything at all, not even *A*.

Believe truth! Shun error!—these, we see, are two materially different laws; and by choosing between them we may end, coloring differently our whole intellectual life. We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance. Clifford, in the instructive passage which I have quoted, exhorts us to the latter course. Believe nothing, he tells us, keep your mind in suspense forever, rather than by closing it on insufficient evidence incur the awful risk of believing lies. You, on the other hand, may think that the risk of being in error is a very small matter when compared with the blessings of real knowledge, and be ready to be duped many times in your investigation rather than postpone indefinitely the chance of guessing true. I myself find it impossible to go with Clifford. We must remember that these feelings of our duty about either truth or error are in any case only expressions of our passional life. Biologically considered, our minds are as ready to grind out falsehood as veracity, and he who says, “Better go without belief forever than believe a lie!” merely shows his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe. He may be critical of many of his desires and fears, but this fear he slavishly obeys. He cannot imagine any one questioning its binding force. For my own part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world: so Clifford’s exhortation has to my ears a thoroughly fantastic sound. It is like a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle forever than to risk a single wound. Not so are victories either over enemies or over nature gained. Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf. At any rate, it seems the fittest thing for the empiricist philosopher.

VIII.

And now, after all this introduction, let us go straight at our question. I have said, and now repeat it, that not only as a matter of fact do we find our passional nature influencing us in our opinions, but that there are some options between opinions in which this influence must be regarded both as an inevitable and as a lawful determinant of our choice.

I fear here that some of you my hearers will begin to scent danger, and lend an inhospitable ear. Two first steps of passion you have indeed had to admit as necessary, —we must think so as to avoid dupery, and we must think so as to gain truth; but the surest path to those ideal consummations, you will probably consider, is from now onwards to take no further passional step.

Well, of course, I agree as far as the facts will allow. Wherever the option between losing truth and gaining it is not momentous, we can throw the chance of *gaining truth* away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of *believing falsehood*, by not making up our minds at all till objective evidence has come. In scientific

questions, this is almost always the case; and even in human affairs in general, the need of acting is seldom so urgent that a false belief to act on is better than no belief at all. Law courts, indeed, have to decide on the best evidence attainable for the moment, because a judge's duty is to make law as well as to ascertain it, and (as a learned judge once said to me) few cases are worth spending much time over: the great thing is to have them decided on *any* acceptable principle, and got out of the way. But in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth; and decisions for the mere sake of deciding promptly and getting on to the next business would be wholly out of place. Throughout the breadth of physical nature facts are what they are quite independently of us, and seldom is there any such hurry about them that the risks of being duped by believing a premature theory need be faced. The questions here are always trivial options, the hypotheses are hardly living (at any rate not living for us spectators), the choice between believing truth or falsehood is seldom forced. The attitude of sceptical balance is therefore the absolutely wise one if we would escape mistakes. What difference, indeed, does it make to most of us whether we have or have not a theory of the Röntgen rays, whether we believe or not in mind-stuff, or have a conviction about the causality of conscious states? It makes no difference. Such options are not forced on us. On every account it is better not to make them, but still keep weighing reasons *pro et contra* with an indifferent hand.

I speak, of course, here of the purely judging mind. For purposes of discovery such indifference is to be less highly recommended, and science would be far less advanced than she is if the passionate desires of individuals to get their own faiths confirmed had been kept out of the game. See for example the sagacity which Spencer and Weismann now display. On the other hand, if you want an absolute duffer in an investigation, you must, after all, take the man who has no interest whatever in its results: he is the warranted incapable, the positive fool. The most useful investigator, because the most sensitive observer, is always he whose eager interest in one side of the question is balanced by an equally keen nervousness lest he become deceived.² Science has organized this nervousness into a regular *technique*, her so-called method of verification; and she has fallen so deeply in love with the method that one may even say she has ceased to care for truth by itself at all. It is only truth as technically verified that interests her. The truth of truths might come in merely affirmative form, and she would decline to touch it. Such truth as that, she might repeat with Clifford, would be stolen in defiance of her duty to mankind. Human passions, however, are stronger than technical rules. “Le coeur a ses raisons,” as Pascal says, “que la raison ne connaît pas;” and however indifferent to all but the bare rules of the game the umpire, the abstract intellect, may be, the concrete players who furnish him the materials to judge of are usually, each one of them, in love with some pet ‘live hypothesis’ of his own. Let us agree, however, that wherever there is no forced option, the dispassionately judicial intellect with no pet hypothesis, saving us, as it does, from dupery at any rate, ought to be our ideal.

The question next arises: Are there not somewhere forced options in our speculative questions, and can we (as men who may be interested at least as much in positively gaining truth as in merely escaping dupery) always wait with impunity till the coercive evidence shall have arrived? It seems *a priori* improbable that the truth should be so nicely adjusted to our needs and powers as that. In the great boarding-house of nature, the cakes

and the butter and the syrup seldom come out so even and leave the plates so clean. Indeed, we should view them with scientific suspicion if they did.

IX.

Moral questions immediately present themselves as questions whose solution cannot wait for sensible proof. A moral question is a question not of what sensibly exists, but of what is good, or would be good if it did exist. Science can tell us what exists; but to compare the *worths*, both of what exists and of what does not exist, we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls our heart. Science herself consults her heart when she lays it down that the infinite ascertainment of fact and correction of false belief are the supreme goods for man. Challenge the statement, and science can only repeat it oracularly, or else prove it by showing that such ascertainment and correction bring man all sorts of other goods which man's heart in turn declares. The question of having moral beliefs at all or not having them is decided by our will. Are our moral preferences true or false, or are they only odd biological phenomena, making things good or bad for *us*, but in themselves indifferent? How can your pure intellect decide? If your heart does not *want* a world of moral reality, your head will assuredly never make you believe in one. Mephistophelian scepticism, indeed, will satisfy the head's play-instincts much better than any rigorous idealism can. Some men (even at the student age) are so naturally cool-hearted that the moralistic hypothesis never has for them any pungent life, and in their supercilious presence the hot young moralist always feels strangely ill at ease. The appearance of knowingness is on their side, of *naïveté* and gullibility on his. Yet, in the inarticulate heart of him, he clings to it that he is not a dupe, and that there is a realm in which (as Emerson says) all their wit and intellectual superiority is no better than the cunning of a fox. Moral scepticism can no more be refuted or proved by logic than intellectual scepticism can. When we stick to it that there *is* truth (be it of either kind), we do so with our whole nature, and resolve to stand or fall by the results. The sceptic with his whole nature adopts the doubting attitude; but which of us is the wiser, Omniscience only knows.

Turn now from these wide questions of good to a certain class of questions of fact, questions concerning personal relations, states of mind between one man and another. *Do you like me or not?*—for example. Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking's existence is in such cases what makes your liking come. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence, until you shall have done something apt, as the absolutists say, *ad extorquendum assensum meum*, ten to one your liking never comes. How many women's hearts are vanquished by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they *must* love him! he will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot. The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts. Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but the man in whose life they are seen to play the part of live hypotheses, who discounts them, sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come, and takes risks for them in advance? His faith acts on the powers above him as a claim, and creates its own verification.

A social organism of any sort whatever, large or small, is what it is because each member proceeds to his own duty with a trust that the other members will simultaneously do theirs. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned. A government, an army, a commercial system, a ship, a college, an athletic team, all exist on this condition, without which not only is nothing achieved, but nothing is even attempted. A whole train of passengers (individually brave enough) will be looted by a few highwaymen, simply because the latter can count on one another, while each passenger fears that if he makes a movement of resistance, he will be shot before any one else backs him up. If we believed that the whole car-full would rise at once with us, we should each severally rise, and train-robbing would never even be attempted. There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. *And where faith in a fact can help create the fact*, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the ‘lowest kind of immorality’ into which a thinking being can fall. Yet such is the logic by which our scientific absolutists pretend to regulate our lives!

X.

In truths dependent on our personal action, then, faith based on desire is certainly a lawful and possibly an indispensable thing.

But now, it will be said, these are all childish human cases, and have nothing to do with great cosmical matters, like the question of religious faith. Let us then pass on to that. Religions differ so much in their accidents that in discussing the religious question we must make it very generic and broad. What then do we now mean by the religious hypothesis? Science says things are; morality says some things are better than other things; and religion says essentially two things.

First, she says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word. “Perfection is eternal,”—this phrase of Charles Secrétan seems a good way of putting this first affirmation of religion, an affirmation which obviously cannot yet be verified scientifically at all.

The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true.

Now, let us consider what the logical elements of this situation are *in case the religious hypothesis in both its branches be really true*. (Of course, we must admit that possibility at the outset. If we are to discuss the question at all, it must involve a living option. If for any of you religion be a hypothesis that cannot, by any living possibility be true, then you need go no farther. I speak to the ‘saving remnant’ alone.) So proceeding, we see, first, that religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good. Secondly, religion is a *forced* option, so far as that good goes.

We cannot escape the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve. It is as if a man should hesitate indefinitely to ask a certain woman to marry him because he was not perfectly sure that she would prove an angel after he brought her home. Would he not cut himself off from that particular angel-possibility as decisively as if he went and married some one else? Scepticism, then, is not avoidance of option; it is option of a certain particular kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error*,—that is your faith-vetoer's exact position. He is actively playing his stake as much as the believer is; he is backing the field against the religious hypothesis, just as the believer is backing the religious hypothesis against the field. To preach scepticism to us as a duty until 'sufficient evidence' for religion be found, is tantamount therefore to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true. It is not intellect against all passions, then; it is only intellect with one passion laying down its law. And by what, forsooth, is the supreme wisdom of this passion warranted? Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear? I, for one, can see no proof; and I simply refuse obedience to the scientist's command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk. If religion be true and the evidence for it be still insufficient, I do not wish, by putting your extinguisher upon my nature (which feels to me as if it had after all some business in this matter), to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting upon the winning side,—that chance depending, of course, on my willingness to run the risk of acting as if my passional need of taking the world religiously might be prophetic and right.

All this is on the supposition that it really may be prophetic and right, and that, even to us who are discussing the matter, religion is a live hypothesis which may be true. Now, to most of us religion comes in a still further way that makes a veto on our active faith even more illogical. The more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form. The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*, if we are religious; and any relation that may be possible from person to person might be possible here. For instance, although in one sense we are passive portions of the universe, in another we show a curious autonomy, as if we were small active centres on our own account. We feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active good-will, as if evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis half-way. To take a trivial illustration: just as a man who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one's word without proof, would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trusting spirit would earn,—so here, one who should shut himself up in snarling logicity and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the gods' acquaintance. This feeling, forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing that there are gods (although not to do so would be so easy both for our logic and our life) we are doing the universe the deepest service we can, seems part of the living essence of the religious hypothesis. If the hypothesis *were* true in all its parts, including this one, then pure intellectualism, with its veto on our making willing advances, would be an absurdity; and some participation of our sympathetic nature would be logically required. I, therefore, for one, cannot see my way

to accepting the agnostic rules for truth-seeking, or wilfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game. I cannot do so for this plain reason, that *a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.* That for me is the long and short of the formal logic of the situation, no matter what the kinds of truth might materially be.

I confess I do not see how this logic can be escaped. But sad experience makes me fear that some of you may still shrink from radically saying with me, *in abstracto*, that we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will. I suspect, however, that if this is so, it is because you have got away from the abstract logical point of view altogether, and are thinking (perhaps without realizing it) of some particular religious hypothesis which for you is dead. The freedom to ‘believe what we will’ you apply to the case of some patent superstition; and the faith you think of is the faith defined by the schoolboy when he said, “Faith is when you believe something that you know ain’t true.” I can only repeat that this is misapprehension. *In concreto*, the freedom to believe can only cover living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve; and living options never seem absurdities to him who has them to consider. When I look at the religious question as it really puts itself to concrete men, and when I think of all the possibilities which both practically and theoretically it involves, then this command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instincts, and courage, and *wait*—acting of course meanwhile more or less as if religion were *not* true³—till doomsday, or till such time as our intellect and senses working together may have raked in evidence enough,—this command, I say, seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave. Were we scholastic absolutists, there might be more excuse. If we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitudes, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ of knowledge in not trusting to it exclusively, in not waiting for its releasing word. But if we are empiricists, if we believe that no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp, then it seems a piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell. Indeed we *may* wait if we will,—I hope you do not think that I am denying that,—but if we do so, we do so at our peril as much as if we believed. In either case we *act*, taking our life in our hands. No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect one another’s mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism’s glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as in practical things.

I began by a reference to Fitz James Stephen; let me end by a quotation from him. “What do you think of yourself? What do you think of the world? . . . These are questions with which all must deal as it seems good to them. They are riddles of the Sphinx, and in some way or other we must deal with them. . . . In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark. . . . If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice: but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future, no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that

any one can prove that *he* is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? ‘Be strong and of a good courage.’ Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. . . . If death ends all, we cannot meet death better.”⁴

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided by:** BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY: Attribution



William James – On the Will to Believe by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Compare the admirable page 310 in S. H. Hodgson’s “Time and Space,” London, 1865.
2. Compare Wilfrid Ward’s Essay, “The Wish to Believe,” in his *Witnesses to the Unseen*, Macmillan & Co., 1893.
3. Since belief is measured by action, he who forbids us to believe religion to be true, necessarily also forbids us to act as we should if we did believe it to be true. The whole defence of religious faith hinges upon action. If the action required or inspired by the religious hypothesis is in no way different from that dictated by the naturalistic hypothesis, then religious faith is a pure superfluity, better pruned away, and controversy about its legitimacy is a piece of idle trifling, unworthy of serious minds. I myself believe, of course, that the religious hypothesis gives to the world an expression which specifically determines our reactions, and makes them in a large part unlike what they might be on a purely naturalistic scheme of belief.
4. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, p. 353, 2d edition. London, 1874.

UNIT 2 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

What the Buddha Taught
by Walpola Sri Rahula, 1959

The Dilemma of Determinism
by William James

Why God Allows Evil
by Richard Swinburne, 1996

The Relevance of Religion in Modern Times
by Dalai Lama

UNIT III

UNIT 3: EPISTEMOLOGY

AN INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGY

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

The overall problem of epistemology is the attempt to get at the difference between how things appear to us and how things actually are. It seems we know the appearance of things in that we know the colors of an object, how an object feels, what it tastes like, and so forth. Still, all of these things that we know are based on our sense organs; we see the color blue, we feel smoothness, and we taste tartness. It seems that all of these qualities are in relation to us as perceivers. So, what can we say about the object itself? Bertrand Russell explores this question in *The Problems of Philosophy*.

Russell: *The Problems of Philosophy*

In our search for certainty and knowledge it is natural to begin with our experiences and then make inferences about what is or is not the case based on those experiences. However, Russell points out that many of the things that we assume to be true—many of the things that we take for granted—can really be doubted.

For example, if another person comes into the room, barring a lack of a specific sense organ, I expect that person to see and experience the same things I am currently experiencing. I expect others to experience the walls as white, the tables as brown, my water bottle as orange, and so forth. We expect other people with the same sense faculties to have the same experiences.

Russell shows why these kinds of assumptions are ungrounded and can be doubted. He claims that the “real” shape or color is not what we see; it is something that is inferred from what we see. What we see is constantly changing. For example, the lighting in the room can make the object appear darker or lighter. The position I occupy in the room can make the object appear less or more square. The tint of my glasses can make the object appear rose-colored or blue. Thus, the senses do not give us truth about the table itself, but only about the appearance of the table or about how we experience the table.

The real table, if there is one, is not immediately known to us. Two difficulties arise: 1) Is there a real table at all and 2) if so, what kind of object can it be?

This is the problem of knowledge: perhaps we know the appearances of things, but how can we know that we really know the reality “behind” them?

Russell's discussion sets up the main problem of epistemology in the west. Although these questions were taken up by thinkers in ancient times, over the course of time and through the period of modernity.

There are two main approaches to epistemology:

Rationalism: human reason can give us knowledge of reality

Empiricism: this view holds that experience is the source of all knowledge; knowledge is derived from sense experience. As John Locke claimed, the mind is a *tabula rasa* (i.e. a blank slate).

While this debate became formalized in modern philosophy in the west, the problem itself was laid out by Plato in his dialogue, *Theatetus*.

The character Theatetus is an empiricist; he holds that knowledge is based on perception—on sense experience.

Socrates shows this view to be problematic because one person can experience something in one way while another person can experience it in another. When it is windy, I am chilly and you are not.

If knowledge is based on sense experience, this would lead us to the absurd claim that the wind is both cold and not cold. An object, then, is not just one thing. Since this is an absurd claim the empiricists cannot have any knowledge at all.

Socrates concludes that knowledge must be something other than perception and it is reason that is the true source of knowledge. In the modern period, this approach to epistemology is adopted by Descartes.

Descartes

Descartes wanted to move from doubt to knowledge and certainty. So, his doubt is not simply a mode of skepticism, but, rather, it is to enable him to separate what is doubtful from what is not doubtful. He was seeking “clear and distinct” ideas, which could not be doubted. Once he finds one clear and distinct idea he can use it as a premise from which to deduce other beliefs about reality.

Recall the fallibility of our senses. From the examples we've been discussing to the problems that Russell pointed out: If we can be mistaken about something as simple and certain as color, it seems likely that we could be mistaken about all kinds of things that are based on our perceptions.

In his *Meditations*, Descartes delivers six meditations that begin with his resolve to doubt everything that he believes until he can find that one belief that just cannot be doubted. In Meditation 1, he states his method and then begins to eliminate beliefs about which he could be mistaken.

For the sake of the sciences, Descartes believes he must build a firm foundation for knowledge. In order to do this he must rid himself of all of his previous opinions. Now he is not going to go through each belief individually. Instead, he wants to systematically doubt his beliefs by breaking them down into categories.

The first set of beliefs are common sense beliefs that rest on the senses. Despite our reliance on our senses, we can be deceived by them.

Descartes continues: even though there are errors based on our senses, it seems likely that we can at least recognize that we are sitting in this workspace, dressed in certain clothing, writing our philosophical notes on these pages of paper, and the like. How can I deny that this body is mine?

The next category of faulty beliefs come from the possible experience of confusing one's waking state and dreaming state. Descartes explains, given he is a man who sleeps and dreams, he could be confusing his awake life with a dream. I appear to be doing all of these philosophical and academic activities, but I could simply be dreaming.

At this level of doubt, he doubts the existence of the whole of physical nature, even his own physical body. After all, one dreams about physical nature, so it seems that he can doubt whether his body and the external world exists. The film, *The Matrix* gives a visual representation of this idea with its emphasis on the mind and plugging in.

Next, Descartes thinks that the principles of mathematics should be certain. However, these too can be doubted. It seems that God could deceive him—tricking him into misunderstanding mathematical functions. He wonders, how can I be certain that an all-powerful God has not deceived me into thinking that the physical world exists or that $2+2=4$.

However, Descartes actually argues that God could not have done this. Why not? Remember, Descartes is writing shortly after Galileo's persecution. So, what does Descartes say about God?

God is God, so would not deceive him. God as a perfect being cannot be a trickster. Still, there could be an evil genius that is powerful enough to deceive me.

Another relevant film here is *The Truman Show*: the guy's life is a reality TV show. He has no idea and believes that this fixed world is reality. Eventually he becomes suspicious. The Truman Show illustrates the idea that what we think is real, is not actually real as well as the idea that there is a deceiver behind the deception. This is also a moment in *The Matrix*. Either of these films are excellent options to explore in light of Descartes' Meditation 1 (and Plato's Allegory of the Cave).

In Meditation II Descartes acknowledges everything that is now questionable, but it then occurs to him that this activity of doubting necessitates that there is an I involved in the cognitive process he is undertaking. At

this point he doubts everything until he finds one principle that is absolutely beyond doubt. He concludes, he must exist in some form because he doubts. Here's his argument: *Cogito, ergo, sum* (I think, therefore I am).

So, at this point he is certain that he is a thinking thing. This will be his starting point.

Now we must move from this point to prove the beliefs that he began by doubting: the existence of his own body, the existence of the external world, and the existence of God. He must also get rid of this evil deceiver. This process takes up the bulk of the remaining meditations. In the end, he proves God's existence and determines that the physical world, including his body, very likely exists because God is good and wouldn't trick us in this way. The problem with his reasoning at this point is that he's using a fallacious form of reasoning, called begging the question (or arguing in a circle). Descartes uses God to salvage the physical world, yet his proofs for God's existence depend upon the clear and distinct ideas that were needed to prove that God exists. This is referred to as the Cartesian Circle.

Another important element that Descartes introduces in Meditation II is a wax analogy. He sets up the analogy by describing a piece of wax: It is cold, hard, easily handled, it emits a sound when thumped or dropped, it is sweet to taste, and still smells a bit like flowers. However, if I bring the wax near the fire all of those things change: the taste changes, the smell evaporates, the color is altered as is the texture. "Does the same wax remain after this change?" Descartes says yes.

We cannot understand the wax as the same given our senses. All of those qualities have changed and are no more. So, how do we know that the wax is the same piece of wax as before? How do we know the essence of the wax? Descartes says that it is through an intuition of the mind. The mind has an understanding of the laws and conditions that physical things adhere to or undergo. We can separate these contents out from the sense data and have a more clear and trustworthy understanding of the thing in question.

This is key to rationalist thinking. The rationalist has to rely on nonempirical intuitions, which are grounded in reason.

Here's a video that highlights some important features of Descartes' philosophy:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#oembed-1>

Locke:

We now turn to discuss the empiricist's response to the problem of knowledge as we continue our epistemology section.

We start with John Locke, one of the most influential thinkers of the 17th century. Like Aristotle and Newton, Locke believed that knowledge comes from observation and survey of facts about sight, memory, and reasoning. Comparing the mind to a blank slate, Locke believed that the mind is like a receptacle that stores experiences. This is the empiricist tradition.

According to Locke, even though knowledge comes from experience, this does not mean that reason doesn't play a major role for us. It is from sense experience that we gain simple ideas, which are the foundations of knowledge. Simple ideas can be fused together (by reason) to make more complex ideas. For example, I have the experience of red, sweet, solidity, and my faculty of reason combines these to form a more complex idea like apple.

Locke accepted Descartes' method of tentative skepticism but questioned Descartes' move to tie the metaphysical questions regarding God to his epistemological method. From an empiricist's perspective, God cannot be experienced in the way we typically think of sense experience. Locke also rejected Descartes' idea that we have "intuitions of the mind."

Locke emphasized inductive modes of reasoning, which include generalizations. Inductive reasoning is never as secure as deductive reasoning; however, Locke believed that a lot of our knowledge is based on induction—generalizations from various experiences we have had. As such, Locke did not demand "perfect certainty," which is related to deductive reasoning. Instead, he allowed for varying degrees of probability, which, again, is related to inductive reasoning. Locke did acknowledge there were deductive truths but these come in the form of mathematical reasoning and the validity of deductive inferences.

To unfold these ideas and build our understanding of Locke and his place in the debate regarding the problem of knowledge, we start with Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The overall point of this text is that all knowledge comes from experience. There are no ideas that are prior to experience (a priori).

During Locke's time, the view that certain ideas are innate was tied to the stability of religion, morality, and political life. Locke explicitly argues against innate ideas, instead arguing that reason is a God-given faculty that we should use to better our lives and our understanding of the world.

As Hewett explains, aside from Locke's epistemology, his political thought is extremely influential, particularly to the French and American revolutions. He believed humans are capable of organizing society in a rational way. His rejection of innate ideas was intimately linked to this project for it is all too easy to claim all sorts of

principles as innate in order to maintain the status quo, meaning that people “might be more easily governed by, and made useful to some sort of men, who has the skill and office to principle and guide them. Nor is it a small power, it gives one man over another, to have the authority to be the dictator of principles, and teacher of unquestionable truths; and to make a man swallow that for an innate principle, which may serve his purpose, who teaches them.”¹ Locke thought humans are autonomous and self-governing because God gave us the faculty of reason.

Hewett continues by explaining that Locke is referring to the content of the mind, not its abilities. Locke clearly believes that we are born with a variety of faculties that enable us to receive and process information (the senses, memory, our ability to use language, etc.) and to manipulate it once we have it, but what we don’t have is innate knowledge or ideas.²

Locke must then show how sense experience can reveal the existence of things outside of us. He argues that we must distinguish between the objects of our experience (external objects) and our experiences of those objects (sensations or sense data). Physical objects cause sensations in us and we are directly aware of such sensations.³

Locke’s empiricism can be thought of as a representative theory of perception in that humans do not directly perceive physical objects. The physical object causes an idea to arise in our minds and these ideas are representations, or copies, of the physical object. Keep in mind that ideas and qualities are different things. Ideas are “mental entities,” things that exist “in our minds,” whereas qualities are the causal properties (“powers”) of physical objects.

According to Locke, our ideas come in two varieties:

Simple ideas are ideas that cannot be broken down into any component parts. For example, the idea of white. I cannot explain white to you; I can only show examples of white and hope you get it. Simple ideas arise from simple sensations.

Complex ideas are ideas that can be broken down into component parts. For example, the idea of (perception of) a unicorn. I can explain the idea of a unicorn to you. To explain a unicorn all one must do is take the concept of a horse, white, a horn and combine them in a certain way. The idea of an apple (i.e. one’s perception or experience of an apple) might include the simple ideas of red, round, sweet, solid, etc.⁴

From here, Locke makes his famous and important distinction between primary and secondary qualities. For Locke, primary qualities are those properties of an object that are not related to perceivers. The primary qualities are size, shape, motion, number, and solidity. We might say that the object has these properties ‘in and of itself’. Primary qualities, Locke says, are ‘inseparable’ from a physical object, whatever changes it goes through. For example, physical objects always have some shape and size. These properties don’t depend on whether and how the object is perceived by us.⁵

By contrast, secondary qualities are related to perceivers by definition. As we saw, color, by definition, is something that is experienced in vision. So it is a property that an object can have only in relation to its being seen by someone. The other secondary qualities are temperature, smell, taste, and sound. Secondary qualities aren't possessed by all physical objects, e.g. plain glass doesn't have a color or a smell. And they aren't even possessed by the same physical object at different times, e.g. glass is made from sand, and sand does have color. So sand loses its color completely when it is made into glass.⁶

Two ways to tell the Difference Between Primary and Secondary Properties:

1. To change a primary quality of the object you have actually have to change the object, but to change a secondary property you only need to change the conditions of perception.
2. Primary properties can be experienced by more than one sense, but secondary properties can be experienced by one sense alone.

Take an apple for example. It is a complex idea composed of, among other simple ideas, the ideas red, round, sweet, and solid.⁷

According to the criteria Locke provides, which of the apple's perceived properties are primary (really in the apple), and which are secondary (perception dependent, having no reality apart from perception)? Red is secondary- (I would no longer see red if I were to change the lighting or I stared at a bright green poster board. Also I have access to the color of things through only one sense: vision.) Round is primary- (I would have to cut or smash the apple to change its shape. Also, I have both visual and tactile access to the shape.) Sweet is secondary. Solid- primary (sight and touch).⁸

Essentially, we can have knowledge of material objects because some of our sense experiences represent the object's primary qualities, which are characteristics of the object itself.

Here's a video that summarizes the empiricist tradition:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#oembed-2>

Berkeley

In his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding* (Principles), Berkeley argues against Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and comes to the conclusion that objects are

immaterial and are objects of the mind (i.e. ideas). This idea is famously conveyed as: “esse est percipi” to be is to be perceived.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#oembed-3>

Hume

Hume follows the empiricist tradition. In fact he is committed to Locke’s method, but where Locke was generous with doubtful ideas that had no clear experiential basis (the metaphysical ideas of substance and God), Hume was ruthless. In a famous passage he claims that if a principle of knowledge is not grounded in abstract reasoning like math or in experimental reasoning concerning existence, it is mere illusion.

Like Locke, Hume insists that all knowledge begins with experience-basic sensory experience, which he called “impressions.” So, what Locke referred to as “sensations,” Hume calls “impressions.” Hume makes a distinction between impressions and ideas. The difference between the two consist in the degree of mental liveliness and the way they make their way into our thought and consciousness. The strong and lively perceptions are impressions. Hume includes all of our sensations, passions, and emotions as we first experience them. Ideas are the faint images of the impressions in our thinking and reasoning. Hume notes the difference between feeling and thinking. There are degrees of difference between these two. Consider the difference between when you are thrilled with enjoyment versus when you are thinking about how happy you were at that moment. These are two different experiences and the actual feeling is much stronger compared to your remembering the feeling. If you’ve seen the early Christopher Nolan film, *Memento*, you can see a way in which Hume’s impressions and ideas might work.

Following Locke, Hume makes a distinction between simple and complex ideas. Simple perceptions cannot be broken down, whereas a complex perception can be distinguished by parts. He uses the apple example as well. Let’s consider the color red: I have an idea of red that I can picture in my mind, even when I do not actually have a red object in front of me. I can also have an impression of red when I do in fact experience a red object. The idea and the impression are only different in degree. Again, like Locke, complex ideas are formed from the simple. These do not require an actual experience (e.g. unicorn). Complex ideas are associations of simple ideas.

For Hume, if we want to justify our belief as actual knowledge, we must break down the complex idea into the

simple ideas and then find the impression upon which these ideas are based. He is really holding Locke to his word regarding experience being the source of knowledge.

Hume also discusses two types of claims that we make. This is often referred to as Hume's Fork:

Relations of ideas—math and other claims that are intuitively or demonstratively certain. 3×5 is equal to the half of 30. This claim expresses a relation between these numbers. These types of propositions are discoverable by the mere operation of thought and do not depend upon any existent thing in the universe.

Matters of fact—these types of claims are not given by reason. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible. That the sun will not rise tomorrow is an intelligible proposition and implies no more of a contradiction than the contrary statement, that the sun will rise.

Hume further claims that all reasonings concerning matters of fact seem to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. If we are trying to explain a matter of fact, we give a causal explanation. We can see this from Hume's example of an absent friend. Where is this person? I believe he is downtown. Why? He told me he had a doctor's appointment and that his doctor is downtown. Alternatively, take the person finding a watch on a deserted island. They would conclude that some person had been there because watches are associated with people. If you hear a voice in the dark, you conclude there is a person there because these are the effects relevant to human beings.

Claims regarding cause and effect don't come from reasoning, but from our experiences of finding two objects "constantly conjoined." If we find a new object—an object we have never seen before—we will not be able to find its cause or effects.

We do not discover causation through the properties of the object, either the causes or the effects. The mind can never possibly find the effect in the cause (or in the object itself). The effect is different from the cause. When we hit a cue ball into the 8 ball, the motion in each is different. When the cue ball is moving toward the 8 ball, we can imagine (without contradiction) that the 8 ball will not move, or that it will fly off the table, or that it will move in the opposite way from which we expect. So, why do we give preference to the one idea regarding the 8 ball moving in a single direction? A priori reasoning is not going to tell us why we should prefer one direction or type of movement to another. The effect, which is the way that the 8 ball will move, is based on our repeated experiences. We predict the 8 ball will move in a specific way.

From Hume's method, it follows that if I am going to make a metaphysical claim about the existence of God, for example, I must be able to identify the idea and impression upon which that claim is based or I must show that it is a relation of ideas. If neither, then the claim must be committed to the flames. Metaphysical claims, by their very nature, cannot be defended by Hume's method, because these claims are beyond everyday experience. These claims cannot be based on impressions and they are not relations of ideas. Therefore, they cannot be justified.

This poses some serious problems for metaphysics, but also undermines some of the beliefs that are most essential to our everyday reasoning and experiences. Hume singles out three extremely common beliefs for analysis under this method: causation, the principle of induction, and our belief in the external world.

The principle of causation states that every event has a cause (or a set of causes). This is how we explain things. For example, if your car doesn't start, we search for the cause by looking at the batter, the carburetor, and so forth. We may not find the cause, but we know that there is one. We presuppose that every event has its cause. Neither experience nor reason can provide us with evidence that causal relationships exist. We observe no power or force that enables causes to produce effects. All we observe is one event associated with another and when we see this pairing repeatedly (constantly conjoined), we jump to the conclusion that such events are connected. So, these inferences are based on habit or custom, not logic or empirical evidence. Ultimately, this means that we cannot trace the causal connection back to any impression we've experienced. Causation then is simply a matter of expectation based on habit or custom because we find two events or things constantly conjoined.

Because of our belief in causation we are able to think beyond our immediate ideas and predict the future. This depends upon our ability to believe that our observations of the present will have some relevance in the future. This means that we can draw inductive generalizations from our experiences of the present to make a prediction about the future. In the morning when I wake up I expect the sun to rise.

Hume demonstrates this point: our senses inform us of certain properties of bread: color, taste, size, shape. But neither reason nor the senses can ever inform us of those qualities which make that object fit for our nourishment. Even though we cannot know the natural powers and principles, we always assume that when we see like qualities they will have like powers. I expect the effects to be similar. So, when I see a loaf of bread, I expect it to have a certain taste and I expect that it will nourish me. Why? Because other breads have had a certain taste and have nourished me. This is not known by the mind. Instead, I hold this belief because this has happened all of my life. Even though I expect the bread to be similar there is nothing in the object itself that tells me this is the case; this is something I infer. The consequence that I reach is not a necessary one.

Much like the argument, regarding cause and effect, it is only from experience that we know the properties and effects of things and events. However, with this argument he makes a distinction:

- 1) I have recognized a certain cause and effect relationship in my past experience
- 2) I predict that a similar cause and effect relationship will hold in the future.

When pressed to explain why such an inference is reasonable, Hume says we cannot do so by reason or by an appeal to experience. Hume argues that we cannot appeal to matters of fact to justify our predictions. So, there is no justification. In sum, he goes on to refute causation and the principle of induction by showing that neither can be defended either as a relation of idea or as a matter of fact.

Overall, I tend to think of Hume as taking Locke's theory to its logical and skeptical end, although I am not totally sure that's fair to Locke. Still, Kant famously claimed that Hume awoke him from his "dogmatic slumber."

Here's a set of videos that summarize Hume's epistemological positions:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#oembed-4>



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#oembed-5>

Kant:

For a brief overview of Kant's views on epistemology (as well as metaphysics), please review Dana Andreicut's "Kant and Rand on Rationality and Reality." The article will cover an overview of his own view as well as notes relating Kant's work to Rand, Hume, and Descartes.

Also, take a look at the following video, "Beginner's Guide to Kant's Metaphysics and Epistemology":



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#oembed-6>

Check Your Understanding

Directions: Answer the question below and check your answer before moving on. Use the arrow below on the right to move to the next question. When you have answered all four questions, click Finish.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=480#h5p-4>



An Introduction to Western Epistemology by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Hewett, C. (n.d.). John Locke's Theory of Knowledge. Retrieved August 10, 2020, from <http://www.thegreatdebate.org.uk/LockeEpistem.html>
2. *ibid*
3. Vaughn, L. (2014). *Living philosophy: A historical introduction to philosophical ideas*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 240.
4. John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception. (n.d.). Retrieved August 10, 2020, from <http://faculty.fiu.edu/~harrisk/Notes/Epistemology/Locke's Epistemology.html>
5. *ibid*
6. *ibid*
7. *ibid*
8. *ibid*

SELECTED READINGS FROM RUSSELL'S THE PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER I. APPEARANCE AND REALITY

Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? This question, which at first sight might not seem difficult, is really one of the most difficult that can be asked. When we have realized the obstacles in the way of a straightforward and confident answer, we shall be well launched on the study of philosophy—for philosophy is merely the attempt to answer such ultimate questions, not carelessly and dogmatically, as we do in ordinary life and even in the sciences, but critically, after exploring all that makes such questions puzzling, and after realizing all the vagueness and confusion that underlie our ordinary ideas.

In daily life, we assume as certain many things which, on a closer scrutiny, are found to be so full of apparent contradictions that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we really may believe. In the search for certainty, it is natural to begin with our present experiences, and in some sense, no doubt, knowledge is to be derived from them. But any statement as to what it is that our immediate experiences make us know is very likely to be wrong. It seems to me that I am now sitting in a chair, at a table of a certain shape, on which I see sheets of paper with writing or print. By turning my head I see out of the window buildings and clouds and the sun. I believe that the sun is about ninety-three million miles from the earth; that it is a hot globe many times bigger than the earth; that, owing to the earth's rotation, it rises every morning, and will continue to do so for an indefinite time in the future. I believe that, if any other normal person comes into my room, he will see the same chairs and tables and books and papers as I see, and that the table which I see is the same as the table which I feel pressing against my arm. All this seems to be so evident as to be hardly worth stating, except in answer to a man who doubts whether I know anything. Yet all this may be reasonably doubted, and all of it requires much careful discussion before we can be sure that we have stated it in a form that is wholly true.

To make our difficulties plain, let us concentrate attention on the table. To the eye it is oblong, brown and shiny, to the touch it is smooth and cool and hard; when I tap it, it gives out a wooden sound. Any one else who sees and feels and hears the table will agree with this description, so that it might seem as if no difficulty would arise; but as soon as we try to be more precise our troubles begin. Although I believe that the table is 'really' of the same colour all over, the parts that reflect the light look much brighter than the other parts, and some parts look white because of reflected light. I know that, if I move, the parts that reflect the light will be different, so that the apparent distribution of colours on the table will change. It follows that if several people are looking at the table at the same moment, no two of them will see exactly the same distribution of colours, because no

two can see it from exactly the same point of view, and any change in the point of view makes some change in the way the light is reflected.

For most practical purposes these differences are unimportant, but to the painter they are all-important: the painter has to unlearn the habit of thinking that things seem to have the colour which common sense says they 'really' have, and to learn the habit of seeing things as they appear. Here we have already the beginning of one of the distinctions that cause most trouble in philosophy—the distinction between 'appearance' and 'reality', between what things seem to be and what they are. The painter wants to know what things seem to be, the practical man and the philosopher want to know what they are; but the philosopher's wish to know this is stronger than the practical man's, and is more troubled by knowledge as to the difficulties of answering the question.

To return to the table. It is evident from what we have found, that there is no colour which pre-eminently appears to be *the* colour of the table, or even of any one particular part of the table—it appears to be of different colours from different points of view, and there is no reason for regarding some of these as more really its colour than others. And we know that even from a given point of view the colour will seem different by artificial light, or to a colour-blind man, or to a man wearing blue spectacles, while in the dark there will be no colour at all, though to touch and hearing the table will be unchanged. This colour is not something which is inherent in the table, but something depending upon the table and the spectator and the way the light falls on the table. When, in ordinary life, we speak of *the* colour of the table, we only mean the sort of colour which it will seem to have to a normal spectator from an ordinary point of view under usual conditions of light. But the other colours which appear under other conditions have just as good a right to be considered real; and therefore, to avoid favouritism, we are compelled to deny that, in itself, the table has any one particular colour.

The same thing applies to the texture. With the naked eye one can see the grain, but otherwise the table looks smooth and even. If we looked at it through a microscope, we should see roughnesses and hills and valleys, and all sorts of differences that are imperceptible to the naked eye. Which of these is the 'real' table? We are naturally tempted to say that what we see through the microscope is more real, but that in turn would be changed by a still more powerful microscope. If, then, we cannot trust what we see with the naked eye, why should we trust what we see through a microscope? Thus, again, the confidence in our senses with which we began deserts us.

The shape of the table is no better. We are all in the habit of judging as to the 'real' shapes of things, and we do this so unreflectingly that we come to think we actually see the real shapes. But, in fact, as we all have to learn if we try to draw, a given thing looks different in shape from every different point of view. If our table is 'really' rectangular, it will look, from almost all points of view, as if it had two acute angles and two obtuse angles. If opposite sides are parallel, they will look as if they converged to a point away from the spectator; if they are of equal length, they will look as if the nearer side were longer. All these things are not commonly noticed in looking at a table, because experience has taught us to construct the 'real' shape from the apparent shape, and the 'real' shape is what interests us as practical men. But the 'real' shape is not what we see; it is something

inferred from what we see. And what we see is constantly changing in shape as we move about the room; so that here again the senses seem not to give us the truth about the table itself, but only about the appearance of the table.

Similar difficulties arise when we consider the sense of touch. It is true that the table always gives us a sensation of hardness, and we feel that it resists pressure. But the sensation we obtain depends upon how hard we press the table and also upon what part of the body we press with; thus the various sensations due to various pressures or various parts of the body cannot be supposed to reveal *directly* any definite property of the table, but at most to be *signs* of some property which perhaps *causes* all the sensations, but is not actually apparent in any of them. And the same applies still more obviously to the sounds which can be elicited by rapping the table.

Thus it becomes evident that the real table, if there is one, is not the same as what we immediately experience by sight or touch or hearing. The real table, if there is one, is not *immediately* known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known. Hence, two very difficult questions at once arise; namely, (1) Is there a real table at all? (2) If so, what sort of object can it be?

It will help us in considering these questions to have a few simple terms of which the meaning is definite and clear. Let us give the name of 'sense-data' to the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on. We shall give the name 'sensation' to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus, whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation *of* the colour, but the colour itself is a sense-datum, not a sensation. The colour is that *of* which we are immediately aware, and the awareness itself is the sensation. It is plain that if we are to know anything about the table, it must be by means of the sense-data—brown colour, oblong shape, smoothness, etc.—which we associate with the table; but, for the reasons which have been given, we cannot say that the table is the sense-data, or even that the sense-data are directly properties of the table. Thus a problem arises as to the relation of the sense-data to the real table, supposing there is such a thing.

The real table, if it exists, we will call a 'physical object'. Thus we have to consider the relation of sense-data to physical objects. The collection of all physical objects is called 'matter'. Thus our two questions may be restated as follows: (1) Is there any such thing as matter? (2) If so, what is its nature?

PLATO'S MENO

Plato

Meno

By Plato

Written 380 B.C.E

Translated by Benjamin Jowett

Persons of the Dialogue

MENO

SOCRATES

A SLAVE OF MENO

ANYTUS

Meno. Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what otherway?

Socrates. O Meno, there was a time when the Thessalians were famous among the other Hellenes only for their riches and their riding; but now, if I am not mistaken, they are equally famous for their wisdom, especially at Larisa, which is the native city of your friend Aristippus. And this is Gorgias' doing; for when he came there, the flower of the Aleuadae, among them your admirer Aristippus, and the other chiefs of the Thessalians, fell in love with his wisdom. And he has taught you the habit of answering questions in a grand and bold style, which becomes those who know, and is the style in which he himself answers all comers; and any Hellene who likes may ask him anything. How different is our lot! my dear Meno. Here at Athens there is a dearth of the commodity, and all wisdom seems to have emigrated from us to you. I am certain that if you were to ask any Athenian whether virtue was natural or acquired, he would laugh in your face, and say: "Stranger, you have far too good an opinion of me, if you think that I can answer your question. For I literally do not know what virtue is, and much less whether it is acquired by teaching or not." And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world; and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue; and when I do not know the "quid" of anything how can I know the "quale"? How, if I knew

nothing at all of Meno, could I tell if he was fair, or the opposite of fair; rich and noble, or the reverse of rich and noble? Do you think that I could?

Men. No, Indeed. But are you in earnest, Socrates, in saying that you do not know what virtue is? And am I to carry back this report of you to Thessaly?

Soc. Not only that, my dear boy, but you may say further that I have never known of any one else who did, in my judgment.

Men. Then you have never met Gorgias when he was at Athens?

Soc. Yes, I have.

Men. And did you not think that he knew?

Soc. I have not a good memory, Meno, and therefore I cannot now tell what I thought of him at the time. And I dare say that he did know, and that you know what he said: please, therefore, to remind me of what he said; or, if you would rather, tell me your own view; for I suspect that you and he think much alike.

Men. Very true.

Soc. Then as he is not here, never mind him, and do you tell me: By the gods, Meno, be generous, and tell me what you say that virtue is; for I shall be truly delighted to find that I have been mistaken, and that you and Gorgias do really have this knowledge; although I have been just saying that I have never found anybody who had.

Men. There will be no difficulty, Socrates, in answering your question. Let us take first the virtue of a man—he should know how to administer the state, and in the administration of it to benefit his friends and harm his enemies; and he must also be careful not to suffer harm himself. A woman's virtue, if you wish to know about that, may also be easily described: her duty is to order her house, and keep what is indoors, and obey her husband. Every age, every condition of life, young or old, male or female, bond or free, has a different virtue: there are virtues numberless, and no lack of definitions of them; for virtue is relative to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do. And the same may be said of vice, Socrates.

Soc. How fortunate I am, Meno! When I ask you for one virtue, you present me with a swarm of them, which are in your keeping. Suppose that I carry on the figure of the swarm, and ask of you, What is the nature of the bee? and you answer that there are many kinds of bees, and I reply: But do bees differ as bees, because there are many and different kinds of them; or are they not rather to be distinguished by some other quality, as for example beauty, size, or shape? How would you answer me?

Men. I should answer that bees do not differ from one another, as bees.

Soc. And if I went on to say: That is what I desire to know, Meno; tell me what is the quality in which they do not differ, but are all alike;-would you be able to answer?

Men. I should.

Soc. And so of the virtues, however many and different they may be, they have all a common nature which makes them virtues; and on this he who would answer the question, "What is virtue?" would do well to have his eye fixed: Do you understand?

Men. I am beginning to understand; but I do not as yet take hold of the question as I could wish.

Soc. When you say, Meno, that there is one virtue of a man, another of a woman, another of a child, and so on, does this apply only to virtue, or would you say the same of health, and size, and strength? Or is the nature of health always the same, whether in man or woman?

Men. I should say that health is the same, both in man and woman.

Soc. And is not this true of size and strength? If a woman is strong, she will be strong by reason of the same form and of the same strength subsisting in her which there is in the man. I mean to say that strength, as strength, whether of man or woman, is the same. Is there any difference?

Men. I think not.

Soc. And will not virtue, as virtue, be the same, whether in a child or in a grown-up person, in a woman or in a man?

Men. I cannot help feeling, Socrates, that this case is different from the others.

Soc. But why? Were you not saying that the virtue of a man was to order a state, and the virtue of a woman was to order a house?

Men. I did say so.

Soc. And can either house or state or anything be well ordered without temperance and without justice?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. Then they who order a state or a house temperately or justly order them with temperance and justice?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Then both men and women, if they are to be good men and women, must have the same virtues of temperance and justice?

Men. True.

Soc. And can either a young man or an elder one be good, if they are intemperate and unjust?

Men. They cannot.

Soc. They must be temperate and just?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then all men are good in the same way, and by participation in the same virtues?

Men. Such is the inference.

Soc. And they surely would not have been good in the same way, unless their virtue had been the same?

Men. They would not.

Soc. Then now that the sameness of all virtue has been proven, try and remember what you and Gorgias say that virtue is.

Men. Will you have one definition of them all?

Soc. That is what I am seeking.

Men. If you want to have one definition of them all, I know not what to say, but that virtue is the power of governing mankind.

Soc. And does this definition of virtue include all virtue? Is virtue the same in a child and in a slave, Meno? Can the child govern his father, or the slave his master; and would he who governed be any longer a slave?

Men. I think not, Socrates.

Soc. No, indeed; there would be small reason in that. Yet once more, fair friend; according to you, virtue is “the power of governing”; but do you not add “justly and not unjustly”?

Men. Yes, Socrates; I agree there; for justice is virtue.

Soc. Would you say “virtue,” Meno, or “a virtue”?

Men. What do you mean?

Soc. I mean as I might say about anything; that a round, for example, is “a figure” and not simply “figure,” and I should adopt this mode of speaking, because there are other figures.

Men. Quite right; and that is just what I am saying about virtue-that there are other virtues as well as justice.

Soc. What are they? tell me the names of them, as I would tell you the names of the other figures if you asked me.

Men. Courage and temperance and wisdom and magnanimity are virtues; and there are many others.

Soc. Yes, Meno; and again we are in the same case: in searching after one virtue we have found many, though not in the same way as before; but we have been unable to find the common virtue which runs through them all.

Men. Why, Socrates, even now I am not able to follow you in the attempt to get at one common notion of virtue as of other things.

Soc. No wonder; but I will try to get nearer if I can, for you know that all things have a common notion. Suppose now that some one asked you the question which I asked before: Meno, he would say, what is figure? And if you answered "roundness," he would reply to you, in my way of speaking, by asking whether you would say that roundness is "figure" or "a figure"; and you would answer "a figure."

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And for this reason-that there are other figures?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And if he proceeded to ask, What other figures are there? you would have told him.

Men. I should.

Soc. And if he similarly asked what colour is, and you answered whiteness, and the questioner rejoined, Would you say that whiteness is colour or a colour? you would reply, A colour, because there are other colours as well.

Men. I should.

Soc. And if he had said, Tell me what they are?-you would have told him of other colours which are colours just as much as whiteness.

Men. Yes.

Soc. And suppose that he were to pursue the matter in my way, he would say: Ever and anon we are landed in particulars, but this is not what I want; tell me then, since you call them by a common name, and say that they are all figures, even when opposed to one another, what is that common nature which you designate as

figure-which contains straight as well as round, and is no more one than the other-that would be your mode of speaking?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And in speaking thus, you do not mean to say that the round is round any more than straight, or the straight any more straight than round?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. You only assert that the round figure is not more a figure than the straight, or the straight than the round?

Men. Very true.

Soc. To what then do we give the name of figure? Try and answer. Suppose that when a person asked you this question either about figure or colour, you were to reply, Man, I do not understand what you want, or know what you are saying; he would look rather astonished and say: Do you not understand that I am looking for the “simile in multis”? And then he might put the question in another form: Mono, he might say, what is that “simile in multis” which you call figure, and which includes not only round and straight figures, but all? Could you not answer that question, Meno? I wish that you would try; the attempt will be good practice with a view to the answer about virtue.

Men. I would rather that you should answer, Socrates.

Soc. Shall I indulge you?

Men. By all means.

Soc. And then you will tell me about virtue?

Men. I will.

Soc. Then I must do my best, for there is a prize to be won.

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Well, I will try and explain to you what figure is. What do you say to this answer?-Figure is the only thing which always follows colour. Will you be satisfied with it, as I am sure that I should be, if you would let me have a similar definition of virtue?

Men. But, Socrates, it is such a simple answer.

Soc. Why simple?

Men. Because, according to you, figure is that which always follows colour.

(Soc. Granted.)

Men. But if a person were to say that he does not know what colour is, any more than what figure is-what sort of answer would you have given him?

Soc. I should have told him the truth. And if he were a philosopher of the eristic and antagonistic sort, I should say to him: You have my answer, and if I am wrong, your business is to take up the argument and refute me. But if we were friends, and were talking as you and I are now, I should reply in a milder strain and more in the dialectician's vein; that is to say, I should not only speak the truth, but I should make use of premises which the person interrogated would be willing to admit. And this is the way in which I shall endeavour to approach you. You will acknowledge, will you not, that there is such a thing as an end, or termination, or extremity?-all which words use in the same sense, although I am aware that Prodicus might draw distinctions about them: but still you, I am sure, would speak of a thing as ended or terminated-that is all which I am saying-not anything very difficult.

Men. Yes, I should; and I believe that I understand your meaning.

Soc. And you would speak of a surface and also of a solid, as for example in geometry.

Men. Yes.

Soc. Well then, you are now in a condition to understand my definition of figure. I define figure to be that in which the solid ends; or, more concisely, the limit of solid.

Men. And now, Socrates, what is colour?

Soc. You are outrageous, Meno, in thus plaguing a poor old man to give you an answer, when you will not take the trouble of remembering what is Gorgias' definition of virtue.

Men. When you have told me what I ask, I will tell you, Socrates.

Soc. A man who was blindfolded has only to hear you talking, and he would know that you are a fair creature and have still many lovers.

Men. Why do you think so?

Soc. Why, because you always speak in imperatives: like all beauties when they are in their prime, you are

tyrannical; and also, as I suspect, you have found out that I have weakness for the fair, and therefore to humour you I must answer.

Men. Please do.

Soc. Would you like me to answer you after the manner of Gorgias, which is familiar to you?

Men. I should like nothing better.

Soc. Do not he and you and Empedocles say that there are certain effluences of existence?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And passages into which and through which the effluences pass?

Men. Exactly.

Soc. And some of the effluences fit into the passages, and some of them are too small or too large?

Men. True.

Soc. And there is such a thing as sight?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And now, as Pindar says, “read my meaning” colour is an effluence of form, commensurate with sight, and palpable to sense.

Men. That, Socrates, appears to me to be an admirable answer.

Soc. Why, yes, because it happens to be one which you have been in the habit of hearing: and your wit will have discovered, I suspect, that you may explain in the same way the nature of sound and smell, and of many other similar phenomena.

Men. Quite true.

Soc. The answer, Meno, was in the orthodox solemn vein, and therefore was more acceptable to you than the other answer about figure.

Men. Yes.

Soc. And yet, O son of Alexidemus, I cannot help thinking that the other was the better; and I am sure that

you would be of the same opinion, if you would only stay and be initiated, and were not compelled, as you said yesterday, to go away before the mysteries.

Men. But I will stay, Socrates, if you will give me many such answers.

Soc. Well then, for my own sake as well as for yours, I will do my very best; but I am afraid that I shall not be able to give you very many as good: and now, in your turn, you are to fulfil your promise, and tell me what virtue is in the universal; and do not make a singular into a plural, as the facetious say of those who break a thing, but deliver virtue to me whole and sound, and not broken into a number of pieces: I have given you the pattern.

Men. Well then, Socrates, virtue, as I take it, is when he, who desires the honourable, is able to provide it for himself; so the poet says, and I say too-

Virtue is the desire of things honourable and the power of attaining them.

Soc. And does he who desires the honourable also desire the good?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Then are there some who desire the evil and others who desire the good? Do not all men, my dear sir, desire good?

Men. I think not.

Soc. There are some who desire evil?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Do you mean that they think the evils which they desire, to be good; or do they know that they are evil and yet desire them?

Men. Both, I think.

Soc. And do you really imagine, Meno, that a man knows evils to be evils and desires them notwithstanding?

Men. Certainly I do.

Soc. And desire is of possession?

Men. Yes, of possession.

Soc. And does he think that the evils will do good to him who possesses them, or does he know that they will do him harm?

Men. There are some who think that the evils will do them good, and others who know that they will do them harm.

Soc. And, in your opinion, do those who think that they will do them good know that they are evils?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. Is it not obvious that those who are ignorant of their nature do not desire them; but they desire what they suppose to be goods although they are really evils; and if they are mistaken and suppose the evils to be good they really desire goods?

Men. Yes, in that case.

Soc. Well, and do those who, as you say, desire evils, and think that evils are hurtful to the possessor of them, know that they will be hurt by them?

Men. They must know it.

Soc. And must they not suppose that those who are hurt are miserable in proportion to the hurt which is inflicted upon them?

Men. How can it be otherwise?

Soc. But are not the miserable ill-fated?

Men. Yes, indeed.

Soc. And does any one desire to be miserable and ill-fated?

Men. I should say not, Socrates.

Soc. But if there is no one who desires to be miserable, there is no one, Meno, who desires evil; for what is misery but the desire and possession of evil?

Men. That appears to be the truth, Socrates, and I admit that nobody desires evil.

Soc. And yet, were you not saying just now that virtue is the desire and power of attaining good?

Men. Yes, I did say so.

Soc. But if this be affirmed, then the desire of good is common to all, and one man is no better than another in that respect?

Men. True.

Soc. And if one man is not better than another in desiring good, he must be better in the power of attaining it?

Men. Exactly.

Soc. Then, according to your definition, virtue would appear to be the power of attaining good?

Men. I entirely approve, Socrates, of the manner in which you now view this matter.

Soc. Then let us see whether what you say is true from another point of view; for very likely you may be right:- You affirm virtue to be the power of attaining goods?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And the goods which mean are such as health and wealth and the possession of gold and silver, and having office and honour in the state-those are what you would call goods?

Men. Yes, I should include all those.

Soc. Then, according to Meno, who is the hereditary friend of the great king, virtue is the power of getting silver and gold; and would you add that they must be gained piously, justly, or do you deem this to be of no consequence? And is any mode of acquisition, even if unjust and dishonest, equally to be deemed virtue?

Men. Not virtue, Socrates, but vice.

Soc. Then justice or temperance or holiness, or some other part of virtue, as would appear, must accompany the acquisition, and without them the mere acquisition of good will not be virtue.

Men. Why, how can there be virtue without these?

Soc. And the non-acquisition of gold and silver in a dishonest manner for oneself or another, or in other words the want of them, may be equally virtue?

Men. True.

Soc. Then the acquisition of such goods is no more virtue than the non-acquisition and want of them, but whatever is accompanied by justice or honesty is virtue, and whatever is devoid of justice is vice.

Men. It cannot be otherwise, in my judgment.

Soc. And were we not saying just now that justice, temperance, and the like, were each of them a part of virtue?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And so, Meno, this is the way in which you mock me.

Men. Why do you say that, Socrates?

Soc. Why, because I asked you to deliver virtue into my hands whole and unbroken, and I gave you a pattern according to which you were to frame your answer; and you have forgotten already, and tell me that virtue is the power of attaining good justly, or with justice; and justice you acknowledge to be a part of virtue.

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then it follows from your own admissions, that virtue is doing what you do with a part of virtue; for justice and the like are said by you to be parts of virtue.

Men. What of that?

Soc. What of that! Why, did not I ask you to tell me the nature of virtue as a whole? And you are very far from telling me this; but declare every action to be virtue which is done with a part of virtue; as though you had told me and I must already know the whole of virtue, and this too when frittered away into little pieces. And, therefore, my dear I fear that I must begin again and repeat the same question: What is virtue? for otherwise, I can only say, that every action done with a part of virtue is virtue; what else is the meaning of saying that every action done with justice is virtue? Ought I not to ask the question over again; for can any one who does not know virtue know a part of virtue?

Men. No; I do not say that he can.

Soc. Do you remember how, in the example of figure, we rejected any answer given in terms which were as yet unexplained or unadmitted?

Men. Yes, Socrates; and we were quite right in doing so.

Soc. But then, my friend, do not suppose that we can explain to any one the nature of virtue as a whole through some unexplained portion of virtue, or anything at all in that fashion; we should only have to ask over again the old question, What is virtue? Am I not right?

Men. I believe that you are.

Soc. Then begin again, and answer me, What, according to you and your friend Gorgias, is the definition of virtue?

Men. O Socrates, I used to be told, before I knew you, that you were always doubting yourself and making others doubt; and now you are casting your spells over me, and I am simply getting bewitched and enchanted, and am at my wits' end. And if I may venture to make a jest upon you, you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be very like the flat torpedo fish, who torpifies those who come near him and touch him, as you have now torpified me, I think. For my soul and my tongue are really torpid, and I do not know how to answer you; and though I have been delivered of an infinite variety of speeches about virtue before now, and to many persons-and very good ones they were, as I thought-at this moment I cannot even say what virtue is. And I think that. you are very wise in not voyaging and going away from home, for if you did in other places as do in Athens, you would be cast into prison as a magician.

Soc. You are a rogue, Meno, and had all but caught me.

Men. What do you mean, Socrates?

Soc. I can tell why you made a simile about me.

Men. Why?

Soc. In order that I might make another simile about you. For I know that all pretty young gentlemen like to have pretty similes made about them-as well they may-but I shall not return the compliment. As to my being a torpedo, if the torpedo is torpid as well as the cause of torpidity in others, then indeed I am a torpedo, but not otherwise; for I perplex others, not because I am clear, but because I am utterly perplexed myself. And now I know not what virtue is, and you seem to be in the same case, although you did once perhaps know before you touched me. However, I have no objection to join with you in the enquiry.

Men. And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?

Soc. I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the, very subject about which he is to enquire.

Men. Well, Socrates, and is not the argument sound?

Soc. I think not.

Men. Why not?

Soc. I will tell you why: I have heard from certain wise men and women who spoke of things divine that-

Men. What did they say?

Soc. They spoke of a glorious truth, as I conceive.

Men. What was it? and who were they?

Soc. Some of them were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might be able to give a reason of their profession: there, have been poets also, who spoke of these things by inspiration, like Pindar, and many others who were inspired. And they say-mark, now, and see whether their words are true-they say that the soul of man is immortal, and at one time has an end, which is termed dying, and at another time is born again, but is never destroyed. And the moral is, that a man ought to live always in perfect holiness. "For in the ninth year Persephone sends the souls of those from whom she has received the penalty of ancient crime back again from beneath into the light of the sun above, and these are they who become noble kings and mighty men and great in wisdom and are called saintly heroes in after ages." The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue, and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things; there is no difficulty in her eliciting or as men say learning, out of a single recollection -all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint; for all enquiry and all learning is but recollection. And therefore we ought not to listen to this sophistical argument about the impossibility of enquiry: for it will make us idle; and is sweet only to the sluggard; but the other saying will make us active and inquisitive. In that confiding, I will gladly enquire with you into the nature of virtue.

Men. Yes, Socrates; but what do you mean by saying that we do not learn, and that what we call learning is only a process of recollection? Can you teach me how this is?

Soc. I told you, Meno, just now that you were a rogue, and now you ask whether I can teach you, when I am saying that there is no teaching, but only recollection; and thus you imagine that you will involve me in a contradiction.

Men. Indeed, Socrates, I protest that I had no such intention. I only asked the question from habit; but if you can prove to me that what you say is true, I wish that you would.

Soc. It will be no easy matter, but I will try to please you to the utmost of my power. Suppose that you call one of your numerous attendants, that I may demonstrate on him.

Men. Certainly. Come hither, boy.

Soc. He is Greek, and speaks Greek, does he not?

Men. Yes, indeed; he was born in the house.

Soc. Attend now to the questions which I ask him, and observe whether he learns of me or only remembers.

Men. I will.

Soc. Tell me, boy, do you know that a figure like this is a square?

Boy. I do.

Soc. And you know that a square figure has these four lines equal?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And these lines which I have drawn through the middle of the square are also equal?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. A square may be of any size?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And if one side of the figure be of two feet, and the other side be of two feet, how much will the whole be? Let me explain: if in one direction the space was of two feet, and in other direction of one foot, the whole would be of two feet taken once?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. But since this side is also of two feet, there are twice two feet?

Boy. There are.

Soc. Then the square is of twice two feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many are twice two feet? count and tell me.

Boy. Four, Socrates.

Soc. And might there not be another square twice as large as this, and having like this the lines equal?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And of how many feet will that be?

Boy. Of eight feet.

Soc. And now try and tell me the length of the line which forms the side of that double square: this is two feet—what will that be?

Boy. Clearly, Socrates, it will be double.

Soc. Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions; and now he fancies that he knows how long a line is necessary in order to produce a figure of eight square feet; does he not?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And does he really know?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. He only guesses that because the square is double, the line is double.

Men. True.

Soc. Observe him while he recalls the steps in regular order. (To the Boy.) Tell me, boy, do you assert that a double space comes from a double line? Remember that I am not speaking of an oblong, but of a figure equal every way, and twice the size of this—that is to say of eight feet; and I want to know whether you still say that a double square comes from double line?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. But does not this line become doubled if we add another such line here?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And four such lines will make a space containing eight feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Let us describe such a figure: Would you not say that this is the figure of eight feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And are there not these four divisions in the figure, each of which is equal to the figure of four feet?

Boy. True.

Soc. And is not that four times four?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And four times is not double?

Boy. No, indeed.

Soc. But how much?

Boy. Four times as much.

Soc. Therefore the double line, boy, has given a space, not twice, but four times as much.

Boy. True.

Soc. Four times four are sixteen-are they not?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. What line would give you a space of eight feet, as this gives one of sixteen feet;-do you see?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And the space of four feet is made from this half line?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Good; and is not a space of eight feet twice the size of this, and half the size of the other?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. Such a space, then, will be made out of a line greater than this one, and less than that one?

Boy. Yes; I think so.

Soc. Very good; I like to hear you say what you think. And now tell me, is not this a line of two feet and that of four?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Then the line which forms the side of eight feet ought to be more than this line of two feet, and less than the other of four feet?

Boy. It ought.

Soc. Try and see if you can tell me how much it will be.

Boy. Three feet.

Soc. Then if we add a half to this line of two, that will be the line of three. Here are two and there is one; and on the other side, here are two also and there is one: and that makes the figure of which you speak?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. But if there are three feet this way and three feet that way, the whole space will be three times three feet?

Boy. That is evident.

Soc. And how much are three times three feet?

Boy. Nine.

Soc. And how much is the double of four?

Boy. Eight.

Soc. Then the figure of eight is not made out of a of three?

Boy. No.

Soc. But from what line?-tell me exactly; and if you would rather not reckon, try and show me the line.

Boy. Indeed, Socrates, I do not know.

Soc. Do you see, Meno, what advances he has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first, and he does not know now, what is the side of a figure of eight feet: but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently as if he knew, and had no difficulty; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor fancies that he knows.

Men. True.

Soc. Is he not better off in knowing his ignorance?

Men. I think that he is.

Soc. If we have made him doubt, and given him the “torpedo’s shock,” have we done him any harm?

Men. I think not.

Soc. We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance, but then he would have been ready to tell all the world again and again that the double space should have a double side.

Men. True.

Soc. But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he fancied that he knew, though he was really ignorant of it, until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know?

Men. I think not, Socrates.

Soc. Then he was the better for the torpedo’s touch?

Men. I think so.

Soc. Mark now the farther development. I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the enquiry with me: and do you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining anything to him, instead of eliciting his opinion. Tell me, boy, is not this a square of four feet which I have drawn?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And now I add another square equal to the former one?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And a third, which is equal to either of them?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. Suppose that we fill up the vacant corner?

Boy. Very good.

Soc. Here, then, there are four equal spaces?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many times larger is this space than this other?

Boy. Four times.

Soc. But it ought to have been twice only, as you will remember.

Boy. True.

Soc. And does not this line, reaching from corner to corner, bisect each of these spaces?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And are there not here four equal lines which contain this space?

Boy. There are.

Soc. Look and see how much this space is.

Boy. I do not understand.

Soc. Has not each interior line cut off half of the four spaces?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many spaces are there in this section?

Boy. Four.

Soc. And how many in this?

Boy. Two.

Soc. And four is how many times two?

Boy. Twice.

Soc. And this space is of how many feet?

Boy. Of eight feet.

Soc. And from what line do you get this figure?

Boy. From this.

Soc. That is, from the line which extends from corner to corner of the figure of four feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And that is the line which the learned call the diagonal. And if this is the proper name, then you, Meno's slave, are prepared to affirm that the double space is the square of the diagonal?

Boy. Certainly, Socrates.

Soc. What do you say of him, Meno? Were not all these answers given out of his own head?

Men. Yes, they were all his own.

Soc. And yet, as we were just now saying, he did not know?

Men. True.

Soc. But still he had in him those notions of his—had he not?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then he who does not know may still have true notions of that which he does not know?

Men. He has.

Soc. And at present these notions have just been stirred up in him, as in a dream; but if he were frequently asked the same questions, in different forms, he would know as well as any one at last?

Men. I dare say.

Soc. Without any one teaching him he will recover his knowledge for himself, if he is only asked questions?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And this spontaneous recovery of knowledge in him is recollection?

Men. True.

Soc. And this knowledge which he now has must he not either have acquired or always possessed?

Men. Yes.

Soc. But if he always possessed this knowledge he would always have known; or if he has acquired the knowledge he could not have acquired it in this life, unless he has been taught geometry; for he may be made to do the same with all geometry and every other branch of knowledge. Now, has any one ever taught him all this? You must know about him, if, as you say, he was born and bred in your house.

Men. And I am certain that no one ever did teach him.

Soc. And yet he has the knowledge?

Men. The fact, Socrates, is undeniable.

Soc. But if he did not acquire the knowledge in this life, then he must have had and learned it at some other time?

Men. Clearly he must.

Soc. Which must have been the time when he was not a man?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And if there have been always true thoughts in him, both at the time when he was and was not a man, which only need to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge, for he always either was or was not a man?

Men. Obviously.

Soc. And if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal. Wherefore be of good cheer, and try to recollect what you do not know, or rather what you do not remember.

Men. I feel, somehow, that I like what you are saying.

Soc. And I, Meno, like what I am saying. Some things I have said of which I am not altogether confident. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know;-that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.

Men. There again, Socrates, your words seem to me excellent.

Soc. Then, as we are agreed that a man should enquire about that which he does not know, shall you and I make an effort to enquire together into the nature of virtue?

Men. By all means, Socrates. And yet I would much rather return to my original question, Whether in seeking to acquire virtue we should regard it as a thing to be taught, or as a gift of nature, or as coming to men in some other way?

Soc. Had I the command of you as well as of myself, Meno, I would not have enquired whether virtue is given by instruction or not, until we had first ascertained "what it is." But as you think only of controlling me who am your slave, and never of controlling yourself,-such being your notion of freedom, I must yield to you, for you are irresistible. And therefore I have now to enquire into the qualities of a thing of which I do not as yet

know the nature. At any rate, will you condescend a little, and allow the question “Whether virtue is given by instruction, or in any other way,” to be argued upon hypothesis? As the geometrician, when he is asked whether a certain triangle is capable being inscribed in a certain circle, will reply: “I cannot tell you as yet; but I will offer a hypothesis which may assist us in forming a conclusion: If the figure be such that when you have produced a given side of it, the given area of the triangle falls short by an area corresponding to the part produced, then one consequence follows, and if this is impossible then some other; and therefore I wish to assume a hypothesis before I tell you whether this triangle is capable of being inscribed in the circle”:-that is a geometrical hypothesis. And we too, as we know not the nature and -qualities of virtue, must ask, whether virtue is or not taught, under a hypothesis: as thus, if virtue is of such a class of mental goods, will it be taught or not? Let the first hypothesis be-that virtue is or is not knowledge,-in that case will it be taught or not? or, as we were just now saying, remembered”? For there is no use in disputing about the name. But is virtue taught or not? or rather, does not everyone see that knowledge alone is taught?

Men. I agree.

Soc. Then if virtue is knowledge, virtue will be taught?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Then now we have made a quick end of this question: if virtue is of such a nature, it will be taught; and if not, not?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. The next question is, whether virtue is knowledge or of another species?

Men. Yes, that appears to be the -question which comes next in order.

Soc. Do we not say that virtue is a good?-This is a hypothesis which is not set aside.

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Now, if there be any sort-of good which is distinct from knowledge, virtue may be that good; but if knowledge embraces all good, then we shall be right in think in that virtue is knowledge?

Men. True.

Soc. And virtue makes us good?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And if we are good, then we are profitable; for all good things are profitable?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then virtue is profitable?

Men. That is the only inference.

Soc. Then now let us see what are the things which severally profit us. Health and strength, and beauty and wealth-these, and the like of these, we call profitable?

Men. True.

Soc. And yet these things may also sometimes do us harm: would you not think so?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And what is the guiding principle which makes them profitable or the reverse? Are they not profitable when they are rightly used, and hurtful when they are not rightly used?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Next, let us consider the goods of the soul: they are temperance, justice, courage, quickness of apprehension, memory, magnanimity, and the like?

Men. Surely.

Soc. And such of these as are not knowledge, but of another sort, are sometimes profitable and sometimes hurtful; as, for example, courage wanting prudence, which is only a sort of confidence? When a man has no sense he is harmed by courage, but when he has sense he is profited?

Men. True.

Soc. And the same may be said of temperance and quickness of apprehension; whatever things are learned or done with sense are profitable, but when done without sense they are hurtful?

Men. Very true.

Soc. And in general, all that she attempts or endures, when under the guidance of wisdom, ends in happiness; but when she is under the guidance of folly, in the opposite?

Men. That appears to be true.

Soc. If then virtue is a quality of the soul, and is admitted to be profitable, it must be wisdom or prudence, since none of the things of the soul are either profitable or hurtful in themselves, but they are all made profitable or

hurtful by the addition of wisdom or of folly; and therefore and therefore if virtue is profitable, virtue must be a sort of wisdom or prudence?

Men. I quite agree.

Soc. And the other goods, such as wealth and the like, of which we were just now saying that they are sometimes good and sometimes evil, do not they also become profitable or hurtful, accordingly as the soul guides and uses them rightly or wrongly; just as the things of the soul herself are benefited when under the guidance of wisdom and harmed by folly?

Men. True.

Soc. And the wise soul guides them rightly, and the foolish soul wrongly.

Men. Yes.

Soc. And is not this universally true of human nature? All other things hang upon the soul, and the things of the soul herself hang upon wisdom, if they are to be good; and so wisdom is inferred to be that which profits-and virtue, as we say, is profitable?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And thus we arrive at the conclusion that virtue is either wholly or partly wisdom?

Men. I think that what you are saying, Socrates, is very true.

Soc. But if this is true, then the good are not by nature good?

Men. I think not.

Soc. If they had been, there would assuredly have been discerners of characters among us who would have known our future great men; and on their showing we should have adopted them, and when we had got them, we should have kept them in the citadel out of the way of harm, and set a stamp upon them far rather than upon a piece of gold, in order that no one might tamper with them; and when they grew up they would have been useful to the state?

Men. Yes, Socrates, that would have been the right way.

Soc. But if the good are not by nature good, are they made good by instruction?

Men. There appears to be no other alternative, Socrates. On the supposition that virtue is knowledge, there can be no doubt that virtue is taught.

Soc. Yes, indeed; but what if the supposition is erroneous?

Men. I certainly thought just now that we were right.

Soc. Yes, Meno; but a principle which has any soundness should stand firm not only just now, but always.

Men. Well; and why are you so slow of heart to believe that knowledge is virtue?

Soc. I will try and tell you why, Meno. I do not retract the assertion that if virtue is knowledge it may be taught; but I fear that I have some reason in doubting whether virtue is knowledge: for consider now. and say whether virtue, and not only virtue but anything that is taught, must not have teachers and disciples?

Men. Surely.

Soc. And conversely, may not the art of which neither teachers nor disciples exist be assumed to be incapable of being taught?

Men. True; but do you think that there are no teachers of virtue?

Soc. I have certainly often enquired whether there were any, and taken great pains to find them, and have never succeeded; and many have assisted me in the search, and they were the persons whom I thought the most likely to know. Here at the moment when he is wanted we fortunately have sitting by us Anytus, the very person of whom we should make enquiry; to him then let us repair. In the first Place, he is the son of a wealthy and wise father, Anthemion, who acquired his wealth, not by accident or gift, like Ismenias the Theban (who has recently made himself as rich as Polycrates), but by his own skill and industry, and who is a well-conditioned, modest man, not insolent, or over-bearing, or annoying; moreover, this son of his has received a good education, as the Athenian people certainly appear to think, for they choose him to fill the highest offices. And these are the sort of men from whom you are likely to learn whether there are any teachers of virtue, and who they are. Please, Anytus, to help me and your friend Meno in answering our question, Who are the teachers? Consider the matter thus: If we wanted Meno to be a good physician, to whom should we send him? Should we not send him to the physicians?

Any. Certainly.

Soc. Or if we wanted him to be a good cobbler, should we not send him to the cobblers?

Any. Yes.

Soc. And so forth?

Any. Yes.

Soc. Let me trouble you with one more question. When we say that we should be right in sending him to the physicians if we wanted him to be a physician, do we mean that we should be right in sending him to those who profess the art, rather than to those who do not, and to those who demand payment for teaching the art, and profess to teach it to any one who will come and learn? And if these were our reasons, should we not be right in sending him?

Any. Yes.

Soc. And might not the same be said of flute-playing, and of the other arts? Would a man who wanted to make another a flute-player refuse to send him to those who profess to teach the art for money, and be plaguing other persons to give him instruction, who are not professed teachers and who never had a single disciple in that branch of knowledge which he wishes him to acquire-would not such conduct be the height of folly?

Any. Yes, by Zeus, and of ignorance too.

Soc. Very good. And now you are in a position to advise with me about my friend Meno. He has been telling me, Anytus, that he desires to attain that kind of wisdom and-virtue by which men order the state or the house, and honour their parents, and know when to receive and when to send away citizens and strangers, as a good man should. Now, to whom should he go in order that he may learn this virtue? Does not the previous argument imply clearly that we should send him to those who profess and avouch that they are the common teachers of all Hellas, and are ready to impart instruction to any one who likes, at a fixed price?

Any. Whom do you mean, Socrates?

Soc. You surely know, do you not, Anytus, that these are the people whom mankind call Sophists?

Any. By Heracles, Socrates, forbear! I only hope that no friend or kinsman or acquaintance of mine, whether citizen or stranger, will ever be so mad as to allow himself to be corrupted by them; for they are a manifest pest and corrupting influences to those who have to do with them.

Soc. What, Anytus? Of all the people who profess that they know how to do men good, do you mean to say that these are the only ones who not only do them no good, but positively corrupt those who are entrusted to them, and in return for this disservice have the face to demand money? Indeed, I cannot believe you; for I know of a single man, Protagoras, whomade more out of his craft than the illustrious Pheidias, who created such noble works, or any ten other statuarys. How could that A mender of old shoes, or patcher up of clothes, who made the shoes or clothes worse than he received them, could not have remained thirty days undetected, and would very soon have starved; whereas during more than forty years, Protagoras was corrupting all Hellas, and sending his disciples from him worse than he received them, and he was never found out. For, if I am not mistaken,-he was about seventy years old at his death, forty of which were spent in the practice of his profession; and during all that time he had a good reputation, which to this day he retains: and not only

Protagoras, but many others are well spoken of; some who lived before him, and others who are still living. Now, when you say that they deceived and corrupted the youth, are they to be supposed to have corrupted them consciously or unconsciously? Can those who were deemed by many to be the wisest men of Hellas have been out of their minds?

Any. Out of their minds! No, Socrates; the young men who gave their money to them, were out of their minds, and their relations and guardians who entrusted their youth to the care of these men were still more out of their minds, and most of all, the cities who allowed them to come in, and did not drive them out, citizen and stranger alike.

Soc. Has any of the Sophists wronged you, Anytus? What makes you so angry with them?

Any. No, indeed, neither I nor any of my belongings has ever had, nor would I suffer them to have, anything to do with them.

Soc. Then you are entirely unacquainted with them?

Any. And I have no wish to be acquainted.

Soc. Then, my dear friend, how can you know whether a thing is good or bad of which you are wholly ignorant?

Any. Quite well; I am sure that I know what manner of men these are, whether I am acquainted with them or not.

Soc. You must be a diviner, Anytus, for I really cannot make out, judging from your own words, how, if you are not acquainted with them, you know about them. But I am not enquiring of you who are the teachers who will corrupt Meno (let them be, if you please, the Sophists); I only ask you to tell him who there is in this great city who will teach him how to become eminent in the virtues which I was just, now describing. He is the friend of your family, and you will oblige him.

Any. Why do you not tell him yourself?

Soc. I have told him whom I supposed to be the teachers of these things; but I learn from you that I am utterly at fault, and I dare say that you are right. And now I wish that you, on your part, would tell me to whom among the Athenians he should go. Whom would you name? Any. Why single out individuals? Any Athenian gentleman, taken at random, if he will mind him, will do far more, good to him than the Sophists.

Soc. And did those gentlemen grow of themselves; and without having been taught by any one, were they nevertheless able to teach others that which they had never learned themselves?

Any. I imagine that they learned of the previous generation of gentlemen. Have there not been many good men in this city?

Soc. Yes, certainly, Anytus; and many good statesmen also there always have been and there are still, in the city of Athens. But the question is whether they were also good teachers of their own virtue;-not whether there are, or have been, good men in this part of the world, but whether virtue can be taught, is the question which we have been discussing. Now, do we mean to say that the good men our own and of other times knew how to impart to others that virtue which they had themselves; or is virtue a thing incapable of being communicated or imparted by one man to another? That is the question which I and Meno have been arguing. Look at the matter in your own way: Would you not admit that Themistocles was a goodman?

Any. Certainly; no man better.

Soc. And must not he then have been a good teacher, if any man ever was a good teacher, of his own virtue?

Any. Yes certainly,-if he wanted to be so.

Soc. But would he not have wanted? He would, at any rate, have desired to make his own son a good man and a gentleman; he could not have been jealous of him, or have intentionally abstained from imparting to him his own virtue. Did you never hear that he made his son Cleophantus a famous horseman; and had him taught to stand upright on horseback and hurl a javelin, and to do many other marvellous things; and in anything which could be learned from a master he was well trained? Have you not heard from our elders of him?

Any. I have.

Soc. Then no one could say that his son showed any want of capacity?

Any. Very likely not.

Soc. But did any one, old or young, ever say in your hearing that Cleophantus, son of Themistocles, was a wise or good man, as his father was?

Any. I have certainly never heard any one say so.

Soc. And if virtue could have been taught, would his father Themistocles have sought to train him in these minor accomplishments, and allowed him who, as you must remember, was his own son, to be no better than his neighbours in those qualities in which he himself excelled?

Any. Indeed, indeed, I think not.

Soc. Here was a teacher of virtue whom you admit to be among the best men of the past. Let us take another,-Aristides, the son of Lysimachus: would you not acknowledge that he was a good man?

Any. To be sure I should.

Soc. And did not he train his son Lysimachus better than any other Athenian in all that could be done for him by the help of masters? But what has been the result? Is he a bit better than any other mortal? He is an acquaintance of yours, and you see what he is like. There is Pericles, again, magnificent in his wisdom; and he, as you are aware, had two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus.

Any. I know.

Soc. And you know, also, that he taught them to be unrivalled horsemen, and had them trained in music and gymnastics and all sorts of arts-in these respects they were on a level with the best-and had he no wish to make good men of them? Nay, he must have wished it. But virtue, as I suspect, could not be taught. And that you may not suppose the incompetent teachers to be only the meaner sort of Athenians and few in number, remember again that Thucydides had two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, whom, besides giving them a good education in other things, he trained in wrestling, and they were the best wrestlers in Athens: one of them he committed to the care of Xanthias, and the other of Eudorus, who had the reputation of being the most celebrated wrestlers of that day. Do you remember them?

Any. I have heard of them.

Soc. Now, can there be a doubt that Thucydides, whose children were taught things for which he had to spend money, would have taught them to be good men, which would have cost him nothing, if virtue could have been taught? Will you reply that he was a mean man, and had not many friends among the Athenians and allies? Nay, but he was of a great family, and a man of influence at Athens and in all Hellas, and, if virtue could have been taught, he would have found out some Athenian or foreigner who would have made good men of his sons, if he could not himself spare the time from cares of state. Once more, I suspect, friend Anytus, that virtue is not a thing which can be taught?

Any. Socrates, I think that you are too ready to speak evil of men: and, if you will take my advice, I would recommend you to be careful. Perhaps there is no city in which it is not easier to do men harm than to do them good, and this is certainly the case at Athens, as I believe that you know.

Soc. O Meno, think that Anytus is in a rage. And he may well be in a rage, for he thinks, in the first place, that I am defaming these gentlemen; and in the second place, he is of opinion that he is one of them himself. But some day he will know what is the meaning of defamation, and if he ever does, he will forgive me. Meanwhile I will return to you, Meno; for I suppose that there are gentlemen in your region too?

Men. Certainly there are.

Soc. And are they willing to teach the young? and do they profess to be teachers? and do they agree that virtue is taught?

Men. No indeed, Socrates, they are anything but agreed; you may hear them saying at one time that virtue can be taught, and then again the reverse.

Soc. Can we call those teachers who do not acknowledge the possibility of their own vocation?

Men. I think not, Socrates.

Soc. And what do you think of these Sophists, who are the only professors? Do they seem to you to be teachers of virtue?

Men. I often wonder, Socrates, that Gorgias is never heard promising to teach virtue: and when he hears others promising he only laughs at them; but he thinks that men should be taught to speak.

Soc. Then do you not think that the Sophists are teachers?

Men. I cannot tell you, Socrates; like the rest of the world, I am in doubt, and sometimes I think that they are teachers and sometimes not.

Soc. And are you aware that not you only and other politicians have doubts whether virtue can be taught or not, but that Theognis the poet says the very same thing?

Men. Where does he say so?

Soc. In these elegiac verses:

Eat and drink and sit with the mighty, and make yourself agreeable to them; for from the good you will learn what is good, but if you mix with the bad you will lose the intelligence which you already have. Do you observe that here he seems to imply that virtue can be taught?

Men. Clearly.

Soc. But in some other verses he shifts about and says:

If understanding could be created and put into a man, then they [who were able to perform this feat] would have obtained great rewards. And again:-

Never would a bad son have sprung from a good sire, for he would have heard the voice of instruction; but not by teaching will you ever make a bad man into a good one. And this, as you may remark, is a contradiction of the other.

Men. Clearly.

Soc. And is there anything else of which the professors are affirmed not only not to be teachers of others, but to be ignorant themselves, and bad at the knowledge of that which they are professing to teach? or is there anything about which even the acknowledged “gentlemen” are sometimes saying that “this thing can be taught,” and sometimes the opposite? Can you say that they are teachers in any true sense whose ideas are in such confusion?

Men. I should say, certainly not.

Soc. But if neither the Sophists nor the gentlemen are teachers, clearly there can be no other teachers?

Men. No.

Soc. And if there are no teachers, neither are there disciples?

Men. Agreed.

Soc. And we have admitted that a thing cannot be taught of which there are neither teachers nor disciples?

Men. We have.

Soc. And there are no teachers of virtue to be found anywhere?

Men. There are not.

Soc. And if there are no teachers, neither are there scholars?

Men. That, I think, is true.

Soc. Then virtue cannot be taught?

Men. Not if we are right in our view. But I cannot believe, Socrates, that there are no good men: And if there are, how did they come into existence?

Soc. I am afraid, Meno, that you and I are not good for much, and that Gorgias has been as poor an educator of you as Prodicus has been of me. Certainly we shall have to look to ourselves, and try to find some one who will help in some way or other to improve us. This I say, because I observe that in the previous discussion none of us remarked that right and good action is possible to man under other guidance than that of knowledge (episteme);-and indeed if this be denied, there is no seeing how there can be any good men at all.

Men. How do you mean, Socrates?

Soc. I mean that good men are necessarily useful or profitable. Were we not right in admitting this? It must be so.

Men. Yes.

Soc. And in supposing that they will be useful only if they are true guides to us of action—there we were also right?

Men. Yes.

Soc. But when we said that a man cannot be a good guide unless he have knowledge (phronesis), this we were wrong.

Men. What do you mean by the word “right”?

Soc. I will explain. If a man knew the way to Larisa, or anywhere else, and went to the place and led others thither, would he not be a right and good guide?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And a person who had a right opinion about the way, but had never been and did not know, might be a good guide also, might he not?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And while he has true opinion about that which the other knows, he will be just as good a guide if he thinks the truth, as he who knows the truth?

Men. Exactly.

Soc. Then true opinion is as good a guide to correct action as knowledge; and that was the point which we omitted in our speculation about the nature of virtue, when we said that knowledge only is the guide of right action; whereas there is also right opinion.

Men. True.

Soc. Then right opinion is not less useful than knowledge?

Men. The difference, Socrates, is only that he who has knowledge will always be right; but he who has right opinion will sometimes be right, and sometimes not.

Soc. What do you mean? Can he be wrong who has right opinion, so long as he has right opinion?

Men. I admit the cogency of your argument, and therefore, Socrates, I wonder that knowledge should be preferred to right opinion-or why they should ever differ.

Soc. And shall I explain this wonder to you?

Men. Do tell me.

Soc. You would not wonder if you had ever observed the images of Daedalus; but perhaps you have not got them in your country?

Men. What have they to do with the question?

Soc. Because they require to be fastened in order to keep them, and if they are not fastened they will play truant and run away.

Men. Well. what of that?

Soc. I mean to say that they are not very valuable possessions if they are at liberty, for they will walk off like runaway slaves; but when fastened, they are of great value, for they are really beautiful works of art. Now this is an illustration of the nature of true opinions: while they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul, and do not remain long, and therefore they are not of much value until they are fastened by the tie of the cause; and this fastening of them, friend Meno, is recollection, as you and I have agreed to call it. But when they are bound, in the first place, they have the nature of knowledge; and, in the second place, they are abiding. And this is why knowledge is more honourable and excellent than true opinion, because fastened by a chain.

Men. What you are saying, Socrates, seems to be very like the truth.

Soc. I too speak rather in ignorance; I only conjecture. And yet that knowledge differs from true opinion is no matter of conjecture with me. There are not many things which I profess to know, but this is most certainly one of them.

Men. Yes, Socrates; and you are quite right in saying so.

Soc. And am I not also right in saying that true opinion leading the way perfects action quite as well as knowledge?

Men. There again, Socrates, I think you are right.

Soc. Then right opinion is not a whit inferior to knowledge, or less useful in action; nor is the man who has right opinion inferior to him who has knowledge?

Men. True.

Soc. And surely the good man has been acknowledged by us to be useful?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Seeing then that men become good and useful to states, not only because they have knowledge, but because they have right opinion, and that neither knowledge nor right opinion is given to man by nature or acquired by him-(do you imagine either of them to be given by nature?

Men. Not I.)

Soc. Then if they are not given by nature, neither are the good by nature good?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. And nature being excluded, then came the question whether virtue is acquired by teaching?

Men. Yes.

Soc. If virtue was wisdom [or knowledge], then, as we thought, it was taught?

Men. Yes.

Soc. And if it was taught it was wisdom?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And if there were teachers, it might be taught; and if there were no teachers, not?

Men. True.

Soc. But surely we acknowledged that there were no teachers of virtue?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then we acknowledged that it was not taught, and was not wisdom?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. And yet we admitted that it was a good?

Men. Yes. **Soc.** And the right guide is useful and good? **Men.** Certainly. **Soc.** And the only right guides are knowledge and true opinion-these are the guides of man; for things which happen by chance are not under

the guidance of man: but the guides of man are true opinion and knowledge. **Men.** I think so too. **Soc.** But if virtue is not taught, neither is virtue knowledge. **Men.** Clearly not. **Soc.** Then of two good and useful things, one, which is knowledge, has been set aside, and cannot be supposed to be our guide in political life. **Men.** I think not. **Soc.** And therefore not by any wisdom, and not because they were wise, did Themistocles and those others of whom Anytus spoke govern states. This was the reason why they were unable to make others like themselves-because their virtue was not grounded on knowledge. **Men.** That is probably true, Socrates. **Soc.** But if not by knowledge, the only alternative which remains is that statesmen must have guided states by right opinion, which is in politics what divination is in religion; for diviners and also prophets say many things truly, but they know not what they say. **Men.** So I believe.

Soc. And may we not, Meno, truly call those men “divine” who, having no understanding, yet succeed in many a grand deed and word?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Then we shall also be right in calling divine those whom we were just now speaking of as diviners and prophets, including the whole tribe of poets. Yes, and statesmen above all may be said to be divine and illumined, being inspired and possessed of God, in which condition they say many grand things, not knowing what they say.

Men. Yes.

Soc. And the women too, Meno, call good men divine-do they not? and the Spartans, when they praise a good man, say “that he is a divine man.”

Men. And I think, Socrates, that they are right; although very likely our friend Anytus may take offence at the word.

Soc. I da not care; as for Anytus, there will be another opportunity of talking with him. To sum up our enquiry-the result seems to be, if we are at all right in our view, that virtue is neither natural nor acquired, but an instinct given by God to the virtuous. Nor is the instinct accompanied by reason, unless there may be supposed to be among statesmen some one who is capable of educating statesmen. **Men.** And if there be such an one, he may be said to be among the living what Homer says that Tiresias was among the dead, “he alone has understanding; but the rest are flitting shades”; and he and his virtue in like manner will be a reality among shadows.

Men. That is excellent, Socrates.

Soc. Then, Meno, the conclusion is that virtue comes to the virtuous by the gift of God. But we shall never know the certain truth until, before asking how virtue is given, we enquire into the actual nature of virtue. I

fear that I must go away, but do you, now that you are persuaded yourself, persuade our friend Anytus. And do not let him be so exasperated; if you can conciliate him, you will have done good service to the Athenian people.

THE END

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work:

Plato, “Meno,” in *the Internet Classics Archive*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, (site by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics.), <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html>

Permission to download and copy for inclusion in this open textbook was granted by the site owner and can be found here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Help/permissions.html>



This work (Plato's Meno by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

COGITO

René Descartes

Editor's Note: Below are Meditations I and II from Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641 CE), where Descartes (1596-1650 CE) employs radical doubt to inquiry what we may know for certain. Notice the parells with Yacob's Hatäta.

Meditation I

OF THE THINGS OF WHICH WE MAY DOUBT.

SEVERAL years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterward based on such principles was highly doubtful; and from that time I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation, if I desired to establish a firm and abiding superstructure in the sciences. But as this enterprise appeared to me to be one of great magnitude, I waited until I had attained an age so mature as to leave me no hope that at any stage of life more advanced I should be better able to execute my design. On this account, I have delayed so long that I should henceforth consider I was doing wrong were I still to consume in deliberation any of the time that now remains for action. To-day, then, since I have opportunely freed my mind from all cares [and am happily disturbed by no passions], and since I am in the secure possession of leisure in a peaceable retirement, I will at length apply myself earnestly and freely to the general overthrow of all my former opinions.

But, to this end, it will not be necessary for me to show that the whole of these are false—a point, perhaps, which I shall never reach; but as even now my reason convinces me that I ought not the less carefully to withhold belief from what is not entirely certain and indubitable, than from what is manifestly false, it will be sufficient to justify the rejection of the whole if I shall find in each some ground for doubt. Nor for this purpose will it be necessary even to deal with each belief individually, which would be truly an endless labor; but, as the removal from below of the foundation necessarily involves the downfall of the whole edifice, I will at once approach the criticism of the principles on which all my former beliefs rested.

All that I have, up to this moment, accepted as possessed of the highest truth and certainty, I received either from or through the senses. I observed, however, that these sometimes misled us; and it is the part of prudence not to place absolute confidence in that by which we have even once been deceived.

But it may be said, perhaps, that, although the senses occasionally mislead us respecting minute objects, and such as are so far removed from us as to be beyond the reach of close observation, there are yet many other of their informations (presentations), of the truth of which it is manifestly impossible to doubt; as for example, that I am in this place, seated by the fire, clothed in a winter dressing gown, that I hold in my hands this piece of paper, with other intimations of the same nature. But how could I deny that I possess these hands and this body, and withal escape being classed with persons in a state of insanity, whose brains are so disordered and clouded by dark bilious vapors as to cause them pertinaciously to assert that they are monarchs when they are in the greatest poverty; or clothed [in gold] and purple when destitute of any covering; or that their head is made of clay, their body of glass, or that they are gourds? I should certainly be not less insane than they, were I to regulate my procedure according to examples so extravagant.

Though this be true, I must nevertheless here consider that I am a man, and that, consequently, I am in the habit of sleeping, and representing to myself in dreams those same things, or even sometimes others less probable, which the insane think are presented to them in their waking moments. How often have I dreamt that I was in these familiar circumstances, that I was dressed, and occupied this place by the fire, when I was lying undressed in bed? At the present moment, however, I certainly look upon this paper with eyes wide awake; the head which I now move is not asleep; I extend this hand consciously and with express purpose, and I perceive it; the occurrences in sleep are not so distinct as all this. But I cannot forget that, at other times I have been deceived in sleep by similar illusions; and, attentively considering those cases, I perceive so clearly that there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep, that I feel greatly astonished; and in amazement I almost persuade myself that I am now dreaming.

Let us suppose, then, that we are dreaming, and that all these particulars—namely, the opening of the eyes, the motion of the head, the forth-putting of the hands—are merely illusions; and even that we really possess neither an entire body nor hands such as we see. Nevertheless it must be admitted at least that the objects which appear to us in sleep are, as it were, painted representations which could not have been formed unless in the likeness of realities; and, therefore, that those general objects, at all events, namely, eyes, a head, hands, and an entire body, are not simply imaginary, but really existent. For, in truth, painters themselves, even when they study to represent sirens and satyrs by forms the most fantastic and extraordinary, cannot bestow upon them natures absolutely new, but can only make a certain medley of the members of different animals; or if they chance to imagine something so novel that nothing at all similar has ever been seen before, and such as is, therefore, purely fictitious and absolutely false, it is at least certain that the colors of which this is composed are real. And on the same principle, although these general objects, viz. [a body], eyes, a head, hands, and the like, be imaginary, we are nevertheless absolutely necessitated to admit the reality at least of some other objects still

more simple and universal than these, of which, just as of certain real colors, all those images of things, whether true and real, or false and fantastic, that are found in our consciousness (*cogitatio*), are formed.

To this class of objects seem to belong corporeal nature in general and its extension; the figure of extended things, their quantity or magnitude, and their number, as also the place in, and the time during, which they exist, and other things of the same sort.

We will not, therefore, perhaps reason illegitimately if we conclude from this that Physics, Astronomy, Medicine, and all the other sciences that have for their end the consideration of composite objects, are indeed of a doubtful character; but that Arithmetic, Geometry, and the other sciences of the same class, which regard merely the simplest and most general objects, and scarcely inquire whether or not these are really existent, contain somewhat that is certain and indubitable: for whether I am awake or dreaming, it remains true that two and three make five, and that a square has but four sides; nor does it seem possible that truths so apparent can ever fall under a suspicion of falsity [or incertitude].

Nevertheless, the belief that there is a God who is all powerful, and who created me, such as I am, has, for a long time, obtained steady possession of my mind. How, then, do I know that he has not arranged that there should be neither earth, nor sky, nor any extended thing, nor figure, nor magnitude, nor place, providing at the same time, however, for [the rise in me of the perceptions of all these objects, and] the persuasion that these do not exist otherwise than as I perceive them? And further, as I sometimes think that others are in error respecting matters of which they believe themselves to possess a perfect knowledge, how do I know that I am not also deceived each time I add together two and three, or number the sides of a square, or form some judgment still more simple, if more simple indeed can be imagined? But perhaps Deity has not been willing that I should be thus deceived, for he is said to be supremely good. If, however, it were repugnant to the goodness of Deity to have created me subject to constant deception, it would seem likewise to be contrary to his goodness to allow me to be occasionally deceived; and yet it is clear that this is permitted.

Some, indeed, might perhaps be found who would be disposed rather to deny the existence of a Being so powerful than to believe that there is nothing certain. But let us for the present refrain from opposing this opinion, and grant that all which is here said of a Deity is fabulous: nevertheless, in whatever way it be supposed that I reach the state in which I exist, whether by fate, or chance, or by an endless series of antecedents and consequents, or by any other means, it is clear (since to be deceived and to err is a certain defect) that the probability of my being so imperfect as to be the constant victim of deception, will be increased exactly in proportion as the power possessed by the cause, to which they assign my origin, is lessened. To these reasonings I have assuredly nothing to reply, but am constrained at last to avow that there is nothing of all that I formerly believed to be true of which it is impossible to doubt, and that not through thoughtlessness or levity, but from cogent and maturely considered reasons; so that henceforward, if I desire to discover anything certain, I ought not the less carefully to refrain from assenting to those same opinions than to what might be shown to be manifestly false.

But it is not sufficient to have made these observations; care must be taken likewise to keep them in remembrance. For those old and customary opinions perpetually recur—long and familiar usage giving them the right of occupying my mind, even almost against my will, and subduing my belief; nor will I lose the habit of deferring to them and confiding in them so long as I shall consider them to be what in truth they are, viz, opinions to some extent doubtful, as I have already shown, but still highly probable, and such as it is much more reasonable to believe than deny. It is for this reason I am persuaded that I shall not be doing wrong, if, taking an opposite judgment of deliberate design, I become my own deceiver, by supposing, for a time, that all those opinions are entirely false and imaginary, until at length, having thus balanced my old by my new prejudices, my judgment shall no longer be turned aside by perverted usage from the path that may conduct to the perception of truth. For I am assured that, meanwhile, there will arise neither peril nor error from this course, and that I cannot for the present yield too much to distrust, since the end I now seek is not action but knowledge.

I will suppose, then, not that Deity, who is sovereignly good and the fountain of truth, but that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams, by means of which this being has laid snares for my credulity; I will consider myself as without hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any of the senses, and as falsely believing that I am possessed of these; I will continue resolutely fixed in this belief, and if indeed by this means it be not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, viz., [suspend my judgment], and guard with settled purpose against giving my assent to what is false, and being imposed upon by this deceiver, whatever be his power and artifice. But this undertaking is arduous, and a certain indolence insensibly leads me back to my ordinary course of life; and just as the captive, who, perchance, was enjoying in his dreams an imaginary liberty, when he begins to suspect that it is but a vision, dreads awakening, and conspires with the agreeable illusions that the deception may be prolonged; so I, of my own accord, fall back into the train of my former beliefs, and fear to arouse myself from my slumber, lest the time of laborious wakefulness that would succeed this quiet rest, in place of bringing any light of day, should prove inadequate to dispel the darkness that will arise from the difficulties that have now been raised.

Meditation II

OF THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND; AND THAT IT IS MORE EASILY KNOWN THAN THE BODY.

The Meditation of yesterday has filled my mind with so many doubts, that it is no longer in my power to forget them. Nor do I see, meanwhile, any principle on which they can be resolved; and, just as if I had fallen all of

a sudden into very deep water, I am so greatly disconcerted as to be unable either to plant my feet firmly on the bottom or sustain myself by swimming on the surface. I will, nevertheless, make an effort, and try anew the same path on which I had entered yesterday, that is, proceed by casting aside all that admits of the slightest doubt, not less than if I had discovered it to be absolutely false; and I will continue always in this track until I shall find something that is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing more, until I shall know with certainty that there is nothing certain. Archimedes, that he might transport the entire globe from the place it occupied to another, demanded only a point that was firm and immovable; so, also, I shall be entitled to entertain the highest expectations, if I am fortunate enough to discover only one thing that is certain and indubitable.

I suppose, accordingly, that all the things which I see are false (fictitious); I believe that none of those objects which my fallacious memory represents ever existed; I suppose that I possess no senses; I believe that body, figure, extension, motion, and place are merely fictions of my mind. What is there, then, that can be esteemed true? Perhaps this only, that there is absolutely nothing certain.

But how do I know that there is not something different altogether from the objects I have now enumerated, of which it is impossible to entertain the slightest doubt? Is there not a God, or some being, by whatever name I may designate him, who causes these thoughts to arise in my mind? But why suppose such a being, for it may be I myself am capable of producing them? Am I, then, at least not something? But I before denied that I possessed senses or a body; I hesitate, however, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent on the body and the senses that without these I cannot exist? But I had the persuasion that there was absolutely nothing in the world, that there was no sky and no earth, neither minds nor bodies; was I not, therefore, at the same time, persuaded that I did not exist? Far from it; I assuredly existed, since I was persuaded. But there is I know not what being, who is possessed at once of the highest power and the deepest cunning, who is constantly employing all his ingenuity in deceiving me. Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am deceived; and, let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something. So that it must, in fine, be maintained, all things being maturely and carefully considered, that this proposition (pronunciatum) I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind.

But I do not yet know with sufficient clearness what I am, though assured that I am; and hence, in the next place, I must take care, lest perchance I inconsiderately substitute some other object in room of what is properly myself, and thus wander from truth, even in that knowledge (cognition) which I hold to be of all others the most certain and evident. For this reason, I will now consider anew what I formerly believed myself to be, before I entered on the present train of thought; and of my previous opinion I will retrench all that can in the least be invalidated by the grounds of doubt I have adduced, in order that there may at length remain nothing but what is certain and indubitable.

What then did I formerly think I was? Undoubtedly I judged that I was a man. But what is a man? Shall I say a rational animal? Assuredly not; for it would be necessary forthwith to inquire into what is meant by animal, and what by rational, and thus, from a single question, I should insensibly glide into others, and these

more difficult than the first; nor do I now possess enough of leisure to warrant me in wasting my time amid subtleties of this sort. I prefer here to attend to the thoughts that sprung up of themselves in my mind, and were inspired by my own nature alone, when I applied myself to the consideration of what I was. In the first place, then, I thought that I possessed a countenance, hands, arms, and all the fabric of members that appears in a corpse, and which I called by the name of body. It further occurred to me that I was nourished, that I walked, perceived, and thought, and all those actions I referred to the soul; but what the soul itself was I either did not stay to consider, or, if I did, I imagined that it was something extremely rare and subtile, like wind, or flame, or ether, spread through my grosser parts. As regarded the body, I did not even doubt of its nature, but thought I distinctly knew it, and if I had wished to describe it according to the notions I then entertained, I should have explained myself in this manner: By body I understand all that can be terminated by a certain figure; that can be comprised in a certain place, and so fill a certain space as therefrom to exclude every other body; that can be perceived either by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; that can be moved in different ways, not indeed of itself, but by something foreign to it by which it is touched [and from which it receives the impression]; for the power of self-motion, as likewise that of perceiving and thinking, I held as by no means pertaining to the nature of body; on the contrary, I was somewhat astonished to find such faculties existing in some bodies.

But [as to myself, what can I now say that I am], since I suppose there exists an extremely powerful, and, if I may so speak, malignant being, whose whole endeavors are directed toward deceiving me ? Can I affirm that I possess any one of all those attributes of which I have lately spoken as belonging to the nature of body ? After attentively considering them in my own mind, I find none of them that can properly be said to belong to myself. To recount them were idle and tedious. Let us pass, then, to the attributes of the soul. The first mentioned were the powers of nutrition and walking; but, if it be true that I have no body, it is true likewise that I am capable neither of walking nor of being nourished. Perception is another attribute of the soul; but perception too is impossible without the body; besides, I have frequently, during sleep, believed that I perceived objects which I afterward observed I did not in reality perceive. Thinking is another attribute of the soul; and here I discover what properly belongs to myself. This alone is inseparable from me. I am—I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be. I now admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind (*mens sive animus*), understanding, or reason, terms whose signification was before unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing? The answer was, a thinking thing.

The question now arises, am I aught besides ? I will stimulate my imagination with a view to discover whether I am not still something more than a thinking being. Now it is plain I am not the assemblage of members called the human body; I am not a thin and penetrating air diffused through all these members, or wind, or flame, or vapor, or breath, or any of all the things I can imagine; for I supposed that all these were not, and, without changing the supposition, I find that I still feel assured of my existence. But it is true, perhaps, that those very things which I suppose to be non-existent, because they are unknown to me, are not in truth different from

myself whom I know. This is a point I cannot determine, and do not now enter into any dispute regarding it. I can only judge of things that are known to me: I am conscious that I exist, and I who know that I exist inquire into what I am. It is, however, perfectly certain that the knowledge of my existence, thus precisely taken, is not dependent on things, the existence of which is as yet unknown to me: and consequently it is not dependent on any of the things I can feign in imagination. Moreover, the phrase itself, I frame an image (*effingo*), reminds me of my error; for I should in truth frame one if I were to imagine myself to be anything, since to imagine is nothing more than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing; but I already know that I exist, and that it is possible at the same time that all those images, and in general all that relates to the nature of body, are merely dreams [or chimeras]. From this I discover that it is not more reasonable to say, I will excite my imagination that I may know more distinctly what I am, than to express myself as follows: I am now awake, and perceive something real; but because my perception is not sufficiently clear, I will of express purpose go to sleep that my dreams may represent to me the object of my perception with more truth and clearness. And, therefore, I know that nothing of all that I can embrace in imagination belongs to the knowledge which I have of myself, and that there is need to recall with the utmost care the mind from this mode of thinking, that it may be able to know its own nature with perfect distinctness.

But what, then, am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives.

Assuredly it is not little, if all these properties belong to my nature. But why should they not belong to it? Am I not that very being who now doubts of almost everything; who, for all that, understands and conceives certain things; who affirms one alone as true, and denies the others; who desires to know more of them, and does not wish to be deceived; who imagines many things, sometimes even despite his will; and is likewise percipient of many, as if through the medium of the senses. Is there nothing of all this as true as that I am, even although I should be always dreaming, and although he who gave me being employed all his ingenuity to deceive me? Is there also any one of these attributes that can be properly distinguished from my thought, or that can be said to be separate from myself? For it is of itself so evident that it is I who doubt, I who understand, and I who desire, that it is here unnecessary to add anything by way of rendering it more clear. And I am as certainly the same being who imagines; for although it may be (as I before supposed) that nothing I imagine is true, still the power of imagination does not cease really to exist in me and to form part of my thought. In fine, I am the same being who perceives, that is, who apprehends certain objects as by the organs of sense, since, in truth, I see light, hear a noise, and feel heat. But it will be said that these presentations are false, and that I am dreaming. Let it be so. At all events it is certain that I seem to see light, hear a noise, and feel heat; this cannot be false, and this is what in me is properly called perceiving (*sentire*), which is nothing else than thinking.

From this I begin to know what I am with somewhat greater clearness and distinctness than heretofore. But, nevertheless, it still seems to me, and I cannot help believing, that corporeal things, whose images are formed by thought [which fall under the senses], and are examined by the same, are known with much greater distinctness

than that I know not what part of myself which is not imaginable; although, in truth, it may seem strange to say that I know and comprehend with greater distinctness things whose existence appears to me doubtful, that are unknown, and do not belong to me, than others of whose reality I am persuaded, that are known to me, and appertain to my proper nature; in a word, than myself. But I see clearly what is the state of the case. My mind is apt to wander, and will not yet submit to be restrained within the limits of truth. Let us therefore leave the mind to itself once more, and, according to it every kind of liberty [permit it to consider the objects that appear to it from without], in order that, having afterward withdrawn it from these gently and opportunely [and fixed it on the consideration of its being and the properties it finds in itself], it may then be the more easily controlled.

Let us now accordingly consider the objects that are commonly thought to be [the most easily, and likewise] the most distinctly known, viz, the bodies we touch and see; not, indeed, bodies in general, for these general notions are usually somewhat more confused, but one body in particular. Take, for example, this piece of wax; it is quite fresh, having been but recently taken from the beehive; it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey it contained; it still retains somewhat of the odor of the flowers from which it was gathered; its color, figure, size, are apparent (to the sight); it is hard, cold, easily handled; and sounds when struck upon with the finger. In fine, all that contributes to make a body as distinctly known as possible, is found in the one before us. But, while I am speaking, let it be placed near the fire—what remained of the taste exhales, the smell evaporates, the color changes, its figure is destroyed, its size increases, it becomes liquid, it grows hot, it can hardly be handled, and, although struck upon, it emits no sound. Does the same wax still remain after this change? It must be admitted that it does remain; no one doubts it, or judges otherwise. What, then, was it I knew with so much distinctness in the piece of wax? Assuredly, it could be nothing of all that I observed by means of the senses, since all the things that fell under taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing are changed, and yet the same wax remains.

It was perhaps what I now think, viz, that this wax was neither the sweetness of honey, the pleasant odor of flowers, the whiteness, the figure, nor the sound, but only a body that a little before appeared to me conspicuous under these forms, and which is now perceived under others. But, to speak precisely, what is it that I imagine when I think of it in this way? Let it be attentively considered, and, retrenching all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. There certainly remains nothing, except something extended, flexible, and movable. But what is meant by flexible and movable? Is it not that I imagine that the piece of wax, being round, is capable of becoming square, or of passing from a square into a triangular figure? Assuredly such is not the case, because I conceive that it admits of an infinity of similar changes; and I am, moreover, unable to compass this infinity by imagination, and consequently this conception which I have of the wax is not the product of the faculty of imagination. But what now is this extension? Is it not also unknown? for it becomes greater when the wax is melted, greater when it is boiled, and greater still when the heat increases; and I should not conceive [clearly and] according to truth, the wax as it is, if I did not suppose that the piece we are considering admitted even of a wider variety of extension than I ever imagined, I must, therefore, admit

that I cannot even comprehend by imagination what the piece of wax is, and that it is the mind alone (*mens*, Lat., *entendement*, F.) which perceives it. I speak of one piece in particular; for as to wax in general, this is still more evident. But what is the piece of wax that can be perceived only by the [understanding or] mind? It is certainly the same which I see, touch, imagine; and, in fine, it is the same which, from the beginning, I believed it to be. But (and this it is of moment to observe) the perception of it is neither an act of sight, of touch, nor of imagination, and never was either of these, though it might formerly seem so, but is simply an intuition (*inspectio*) of the mind, which may be imperfect and confused, as it formerly was, or very clear and distinct, as it is at present, according as the attention is more or less directed to the elements which it contains, and of which it is composed.

But, meanwhile, I feel greatly astonished when I observe [the weakness of my mind, and] its proneness to error. For although, without at all giving expression to what I think, I consider all this in my own mind, words yet occasionally impede my progress, and I am almost led into error by the terms of ordinary language. We say, for example, that we see the same wax when it is before us, and not that we judge it to be the same from its retaining the same color and figure: whence I should forthwith be disposed to conclude that the wax is known by the act of sight, and not by the intuition of the mind alone, were it not for the analogous instance of human beings passing on in the street below, as observed from a window. In this case I do not fail to say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax; and yet what do I see from the window beyond hats and cloaks that might cover artificial machines, whose motions might be determined by springs? But I judge that there are human beings from these appearances, and thus I comprehend, by the faculty of judgment alone which is in the mind, what I believed I saw with my eyes.

The man who makes it his aim to rise to knowledge superior to the common, ought to be ashamed to seek occasions of doubting from the vulgar forms of speech: instead, therefore, of doing this, I shall proceed with the matter in hand, and inquire whether I had a clearer and more perfect perception of the piece of wax when I first saw it, and when I thought I knew it by means of the external sense itself, or, at all events, by the common sense (*sensus communis*), as it is called, that is, by the imaginative faculty; or whether I rather apprehend it more clearly at present, after having examined with greater care, both what it is, and in what way it can be known. It would certainly be ridiculous to entertain any doubt on this point. For what, in that first perception, was there distinct? What did I perceive which any animal might not have perceived? But when I distinguish the wax from its exterior forms, and when, as if I had stripped it of its vestments, I consider it quite naked, it is certain, although some error may still be found in my judgment, that I cannot, nevertheless, thus apprehend it without possessing a human mind.

But finally, what shall I say of the mind itself, that is, of myself? for as yet I do not admit that I am anything but mind. What, then! I who seem to possess so distinct an apprehension of the piece of wax, do I not know myself, both with greater truth and certitude, and also much more distinctly and clearly? For if I judge that the wax exists because I see it, it assuredly follows, much more evidently, that I myself am or exist, for the same

reason: for it is possible that what I see may not in truth be wax, and that I do not even possess eyes with which to see anything; but it cannot be that when I see, or, which comes to the same thing, when I think I see, I myself who think am nothing. So likewise, if I judge that the wax exists because I touch it, it will still also follow that I am; and if I determine that my imagination, or any other cause, whatever it be, persuades me of the existence of the wax, I will still draw the same conclusion. And what is here remarked of the piece of wax, is applicable to all the other things that are external to me. And further, if the [notion or] perception of wax appeared to me more precise and distinct, after that not only sight and touch, but many other causes besides, rendered it manifest to my apprehension, with how much greater distinctness must I now know myself, since all the reasons that contribute to the knowledge of the nature of wax, or of any body whatever, manifest still better the nature of my mind? And there are besides so many other things in the mind itself that contribute to the illustration of its nature, that those dependent on the body, to which I have here referred, scarcely merit to be taken into account.

But, in conclusion, I find I have insensibly reverted to the point I desired; for, since it is now manifest to me that bodies themselves are not properly perceived by the senses nor by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone; and since they are not perceived because they are seen and touched, but only because they are understood [or rightly comprehended by thought], I readily discover that there is nothing more easily or clearly apprehended than my own mind. But because it is difficult to rid one's self so promptly of an opinion to which one has been long accustomed, it will be desirable to tarry for some time at this stage, that, by long continued meditation, I may more deeply impress upon my memory this new knowledge.

Check your Understanding

Directions: Answer the question below and check your answer. Use the arrow below on the right to move to the next question. When you have answered all four questions, click Finish.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=28#h5p-5>

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

René Descartes, *The Method, Meditations and Philosophy of Descartes*, trans. John Veitch (Washington and London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901).

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.

The *Check your Understanding* questions were added by the editor and carry the same license as the book, CC-BY-NC-SA.



This work (Cogito by René Descartes) is free of known copyright restrictions.

EMPIRICISM

John Locke

BOOK I —Neither Principles nor Ideas are Innate

CHAPTER I —No Innate Speculative Principles

1. The way shown how we come by any Knowledge, sufficient to prove it not innate.

It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain INNATE PRINCIPLES; some primary notions, KOIVAI EVVOIAI, characters, as it were stamped upon the mind of man; which the soul receives in its very first being, and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show (as I hope I shall in the following parts of this Discourse) how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles. For I imagine any one will easily grant that it would be impertinent to suppose the ideas of colours innate in a creature to whom God hath given sight, and a power to receive them by the eyes from external objects: and no less unreasonable would it be to attribute several truths to the impressions of nature, and innate characters, when we may observe in ourselves faculties fit to attain as easy and certain knowledge of them as if they were originally imprinted on the mind.

But because a man is not permitted without censure to follow his own thoughts in the search of truth, when they lead him ever so little out of the common road, I shall set down the reasons that made me doubt of the truth of that opinion, as an excuse for my mistake, if I be in one; which I leave to be considered by those who, with me, dispose themselves to embrace truth wherever they find it.

2. General Assent the great Argument.

There is nothing more commonly taken for granted than that there are certain PRINCIPLES, both SPECULATIVE and PRACTICAL, (for they speak of both), universally agreed upon by all mankind: which therefore, they argue, must needs be the constant impressions which the souls of men receive in their first

beings, and which they bring into the world with them, as necessarily and really as they do any of their inherent faculties.

3. Universal Consent proves nothing innate.

This argument, drawn from universal consent, has this misfortune in it, that if it were true in matter of fact, that there were certain truths wherein all mankind agreed, it would not prove them innate, if there can be any other way shown how men may come to that universal agreement, in the things they do consent in, which I presume may be done.

4. “What is is,” and “It is possible for the same Thing to be and not to be,” not universally assented to.

But, which is worse, this argument of universal consent, which is made use of to prove innate principles, seems to me a demonstration that there are none such: because there are none to which all mankind give an universal assent. I shall begin with the speculative, and instance in those magnified principles of demonstration, “Whatsoever is, is,” and “It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be”; which, of all others, I think have the most allowed title to innate. These have so settled a reputation of maxims universally received, that it will no doubt be thought strange if any one should seem to question it. But yet I take liberty to say, that these propositions are so far from having an universal assent, that there are a great part of mankind to whom they are not so much as known . . .

BOOK II—OF IDEAS

CHAPTER I.—OF IDEAS IN GENERAL, AND THEIR ORIGINAL.

1. Idea is the Object of Thinking.

Every man being conscious to himself that he thinks; and that which his mind is applied about whilst thinking being the IDEAS that are there, it is past doubt that men have in their minds several ideas,—such as are those expressed by the words whiteness, hardness, sweetness, thinking, motion, man, elephant, army, drunkenness, and others: it is in the first place then to be inquired, HOW HE COMES BY THEM?

I know it is a received doctrine, that men have native ideas, and original characters, stamped upon their minds in their very first being. This opinion I have at large examined already; and, I suppose what I have said in the foregoing Book will be much more easily admitted, when I have shown whence the understanding may get all

the ideas it has; and by what ways and degrees they may come into the mind;—for which I shall appeal to every one's own observation and experience.

2. All Ideas come from Sensation or Reflection.

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas:—How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the MATERIALS of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either, about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the MATERIALS of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.

3. The Objects of Sensation one Source of Ideas

First, our Senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways wherein those objects do affect them. And thus we come by those IDEAS we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities; which when I say the senses convey into the mind, I mean, they from external objects convey into the mind what produces there those perceptions. This great source of most of the ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding, I call SENSATION.

4. The Operations of our Minds, the other Source of them.

Secondly, the other fountain from which experience furnisheth the understanding with ideas is,—the perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got;—which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas, which could not be had from things without. And such are perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all the different actings of our own minds;—which we being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct ideas as we do from bodies affecting our senses. This source of ideas every man has wholly in himself; and though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects, yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called INTERNAL SENSE. But as I call the other Sensation, so I call this REFLECTION, the ideas it affords being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself. By reflection then, in the following part of this discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof there come to be ideas of these operations in the understanding. These

two, I say, viz. external material things, as the objects of SENSATION, and the operations of our own minds within, as the objects of REFLECTION, are to me the only originals from whence all our ideas take their beginnings. The term OPERATIONS here I use in a large sense, as comprehending not barely the actions of the mind about its ideas, but some sort of passions arising sometimes from them, such as is the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought.

5. All our Ideas are of the one or of the other of these.

The understanding seems to me not to have the least glimmering of any ideas which it doth not receive from one of these two. EXTERNAL OBJECTS furnish the mind with the ideas of sensible qualities, which are all those different perceptions they produce in us; and THE MIND furnishes the understanding with ideas of its own operations.

These, when we have taken a full survey of them, and their several modes, and the compositions made out of them we shall find to contain all our whole stock of ideas; and that we have nothing in our minds which did not come in one of these two ways. Let any one examine his own thoughts, and thoroughly search into his understanding; and then let him tell me, whether all the original ideas he has there, are any other than of the objects of his senses, or of the operations of his mind, considered as objects of his reflection. And how great a mass of knowledge soever he imagines to be lodged there, he will, upon taking a strict view, see that he has not any idea in his mind but what one of these two have imprinted;—though perhaps, with infinite variety compounded and enlarged by the understanding, as we shall see hereafter.

6. Observable in Children.

He that attentively considers the state of a child, at his first coming into the world, will have little reason to think him stored with plenty of ideas, that are to be the matter of his future knowledge. It is BY DEGREES he comes to be furnished with them. And though the ideas of obvious and familiar qualities imprint themselves before the memory begins to keep a register of time or order, yet it is often so late before some unusual qualities come in the way, that there are few men that cannot recollect the beginning of their acquaintance with them. And if it were worth while, no doubt a child might be so ordered as to have but a very few, even of the ordinary ideas, till he were grown up to a man. But all that are born into the world, being surrounded with bodies that perpetually and diversely affect them, variety of ideas, whether care be taken of it or not, are imprinted on the minds of children. Light and colours are busy at hand everywhere, when the eye is but open; sounds and some tangible qualities fail not to solicit their proper senses, and force an entrance to the mind;—but yet, I think, it will be granted easily, that if a child were kept in a place where he never saw any other but black and white till he were a man, he would have no more ideas of scarlet or green, than he that from his childhood never tasted an oyster, or a pine-apple, has of those particular relishes.

7. Men are differently furnished with these, according to the different Objects they converse with.

Men then come to be furnished with fewer or more simple ideas from without, according as the objects they converse with afford greater or less variety; and from the operations of their minds within, according as they more or less reflect on them. For, though he that contemplates the operations of his mind, cannot but have plain and clear ideas of them; yet, unless he turn his thoughts that way, and considers them ATTENTIVELY, he will no more have clear and distinct ideas of all the operations of his mind, and all that may be observed therein, than he will have all the particular ideas of any landscape, or of the parts and motions of a clock, who will not turn his eyes to it, and with attention heed all the parts of it. The picture, or clock may be so placed, that they may come in his way every day; but yet he will have but a confused idea of all the parts they are made up of, till he applies himself with attention, to consider them each in particular.

8. Ideas of Reflection later, because they need Attention.

And hence we see the reason why it is pretty late before most children get ideas of the operations of their own minds; and some have not any very clear or perfect ideas of the greatest part of them all their lives. Because, though they pass there continually, yet, like floating visions, they make not deep impressions enough to leave in their mind clear, distinct, lasting ideas, till the understanding turns inward upon itself, reflects on its own operations, and makes them the objects of its own contemplation. Children when they come first into it, are surrounded with a world of new things which, by a constant solicitation of their senses, draw the mind constantly to them; forward to take notice of new, and apt to be delighted with the variety of changing objects. Thus the first years are usually employed and diverted in looking abroad. Men's business in them is to acquaint themselves with what is to be found without; and so growing up in a constant attention to outward sensations, seldom make any considerable reflection on what passes within them, till they come to be of riper years; and some scarce ever at all.

9. The Soul begins to have Ideas when it begins to perceive.

To ask, at what TIME a man has first any ideas, is to ask, when he begins to perceive;—HAVING IDEAS, and PERCEPTION, being the same thing. I know it is an opinion, that the soul always thinks, and that it has the actual perception of ideas in itself constantly, as long as it exists; and that actual thinking is as inseparable from the soul as actual extension is from the body; which if true, to inquire after the beginning of a man's ideas is the same as to inquire after the beginning of his soul. For, by this account, soul and its ideas, as body and its extension, will begin to exist both at the same time.

10. The Soul thinks not always; for this wants Proofs.

But whether the soul be supposed to exist antecedent to, or coeval with, or some time after the first rudiments of organization, or the beginnings of life in the body, I leave to be disputed by those who have better thought of that matter. I confess myself to have one of those dull souls, that doth not perceive itself always to contemplate ideas; nor can conceive it any more necessary for the soul always to think, than for the body always to move: the perception of ideas being (as I conceive) to the soul, what motion is to the body; not its essence, but one of its operations. And therefore, though thinking be supposed never so much the proper action of the soul, yet it is not necessary to suppose that it should be always thinking, always in action. That, perhaps, is the privilege of the infinite Author and Preserver of all things, who “never slumbers nor sleeps”; but is not competent to any finite being, at least not to the soul of man. We know certainly, by experience, that we SOMETIMES think; and thence draw this infallible consequence,—that there is something in us that has a power to think. But whether that substance PERPETUALLY thinks or no, we can be no further assured than experience informs us. For, to say that actual thinking is essential to the soul, and inseparable from it, is to beg what is in question, and not to prove it by reason;—which is necessary to be done, if it be not a self-evident proposition. But whether this, “That the soul always thinks,” be a self-evident proposition, that everybody assents to at first hearing, I appeal to mankind. It is doubted whether I thought at all last night or no. The question being about a matter of fact, it is begging it to bring, as a proof for it, an hypothesis, which is the very thing in dispute: by which way one may prove anything, and it is but supposing that all watches, whilst the balance beats, think, and it is sufficiently proved, and past doubt, that my watch thought all last night. But he that would not deceive himself, ought to build his hypothesis on matter of fact, and make it out by sensible experience, and not presume on matter of fact, because of his hypothesis, that is, because he supposes it to be so; which way of proving amounts to this, that I must necessarily think all last night, because another supposes I always think, though I myself cannot perceive that I always do so.

But men in love with their opinions may not only suppose what is in question, but allege wrong matter of fact. How else could any one make it an inference of mine, that a thing is not, because we are not sensible of it in our sleep? I do not say there is no SOUL in a man, because he is not sensible of it in his sleep; but I do say, he cannot THINK at any time, waking or sleeping, without being sensible of it. Our being sensible of it is not necessary to anything but to our thoughts; and to them it is; and to them it always will be necessary, till we can think without being conscious of it.

11. It is not always conscious of it.

I grant that the soul, in a waking man, is never without thought, because it is the condition of being awake. But whether sleeping without dreaming be not an affection of the whole man, mind as well as body, may be worth a waking man’s consideration; it being hard to conceive that anything should think and not be conscious of it. If the soul doth think in a sleeping man without being conscious of it, I ask whether, during

such thinking, it has any pleasure or pain, or be capable of happiness or misery? I am sure the man is not; no more than the bed or earth he lies on. For to be happy or miserable without being conscious of it, seems to me utterly inconsistent and impossible. Or if it be possible that the SOUL can, whilst the body is sleeping, have its thinking, enjoyments, and concerns, its pleasures or pain, apart, which the MAN is not conscious of nor partakes in,—it is certain that Socrates asleep and Socrates awake is not the same person; but his soul when he sleeps, and Socrates the man, consisting of body and soul, when he is waking, are two persons: since waking Socrates has no knowledge of, or concernment for that happiness or misery of his soul, which it enjoys alone by itself whilst he sleeps, without perceiving anything of it; no more than he has for the happiness or misery of a man in the Indies, whom he knows not. For, if we take wholly away all consciousness of our actions and sensations, especially of pleasure and pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to place personal identity.

12. If a sleeping Man thinks without knowing it, the sleeping and waking Man are two Persons.

The soul, during sound sleep, thinks, say these men. Whilst it thinks and perceives, it is capable certainly of those of delight or trouble, as well as any other perceptions; and IT must necessarily be CONSCIOUS of its own perceptions. But it has all this apart: the sleeping MAN, it is plain, is conscious of nothing of all this. Let us suppose, then, the soul of Castor, while he is sleeping, retired from his body; which is no impossible supposition for the men I have here to do with, who so liberally allow life, without a thinking soul, to all other animals. These men cannot then judge it impossible, or a contradiction, that the body should live without the soul; nor that the soul should subsist and think, or have perception, even perception of happiness or misery, without the body. Let us then, I say, suppose the soul of Castor separated during his sleep from his body, to think apart. Let us suppose, too, that it chooses for its scene of thinking the body of another man, v. g. Pollux, who is sleeping without a soul. For, if Castor's soul can think, whilst Castor is asleep, what Castor is never conscious of, it is no matter what PLACE it chooses to think in. We have here, then, the bodies of two men with only one soul between them, which we will suppose to sleep and wake by turns; and the soul still thinking in the waking man, whereof the sleeping man is never conscious, has never the least perception. I ask, then, whether Castor and Pollux, thus with only one soul between them, which thinks and perceives in one what the other is never conscious of, nor is concerned for, are not two as distinct PERSONS as Castor and Hercules, or as Socrates and Plato were? And whether one of them might not be very happy, and the other very miserable? Just by the same reason, they make the soul and the man two persons, who make the soul think apart what the man is not conscious of. For, I suppose nobody will make identity of persons to consist in the soul's being united to the very same numerical particles of matter. For if that be necessary to identity, it will be impossible, in that constant flux of the particles of our bodies, that any man should be the same person two days, or two moments, together.

13. Impossible to convince those that sleep without dreaming, that they think.

Thus, methinks, every drowsy nod shakes their doctrine, who teach that the soul is always thinking. Those, at least, who do at any time SLEEP WITHOUT DREAMING, can never be convinced that their thoughts are sometimes for four hours busy without their knowing of it; and if they are taken in the very act, waked in the middle of that sleeping contemplation, can give no manner of account of it.

14. That men dream without remembering it, in vain urged.

It will perhaps be said,—That the soul thinks even in the soundest sleep, but the MEMORY retains it not. That the soul in a sleeping man should be this moment busy a thinking, and the next moment in a waking man not remember nor be able to recollect one jot of all those thoughts, is very hard to be conceived, and would need some better proof than bare assertion to make it be believed. For who can without any more ado, but being barely told so, imagine that the greatest part of men do, during all their lives, for several hours every day, think of something, which if they were asked, even in the middle of these thoughts, they could remember nothing at all of? Most men, I think, pass a great part of their sleep without dreaming. I once knew a man that was bred a scholar, and had no bad memory, who told me he had never dreamed in his life, till he had that fever he was then newly recovered of, which was about the five or six and twentieth year of his age. I suppose the world affords more such instances: at least every one's acquaintance will furnish him with examples enough of such as pass most of their nights without dreaming.

15. Upon this Hypothesis, the Thoughts of a sleeping Man ought to be most rational.

To think often, and never to retain it so much as one moment, is a very useless sort of thinking; and the soul, in such a state of thinking, does very little, if at all, excel that of a looking-glass, which constantly receives variety of images, or ideas, but retains none; they disappear and vanish, and there remain no footsteps of them; the looking-glass is never the better for such ideas, nor the soul for, such thoughts. Perhaps it will be said, that in a waking MAN the materials of the body are employed, and made use of, in thinking; and that the memory of thoughts is retained by the impressions that are made on the brain, and the traces there left after such thinking; but that in the thinking of the SOUL, which is not perceived in a sleeping man, there the soul thinks apart, and making no use of the organs of the body, leaves no impressions on it, and consequently no memory of such thoughts. Not to mention again the absurdity of two distinct persons, which follows from this supposition, I answer, further,—That whatever ideas the mind can receive and contemplate without the help of the body, it is reasonable to conclude it can retain without the help of the body too; or else the soul, or any separate spirit, will have but little advantage by thinking. If it has no memory of its own thoughts; if it cannot lay them up for

its own use, and be able to recall them upon occasion; if it cannot reflect upon what is past, and make use of its former experiences, reasonings, and contemplations, to what, purpose does it think? They who make the soul a thinking thing, at this rate, will not make it a much more noble being than those do whom they condemn, for allowing it to be nothing but the subtilist parts of matter. Characters drawn on dust, that the first breath of wind effaces; or impressions made on a heap of atoms, or animal spirits, are altogether as useful, and render the subject as noble, as the thoughts of a soul that perish in thinking; that, once out of sight, are gone for ever, and leave no memory of themselves behind them. Nature never makes excellent things for mean or no uses: and it is hardly to be conceived that our infinitely wise Creator should make so admirable a faculty as the power of thinking, that faculty which comes nearest the excellency of his own incomprehensible being, to be so idly and uselessly employed, at least a fourth part of its time here, as to think constantly, without remembering any of those thoughts, without doing any good to itself or others, or being any way useful to any other part of the creation. If we will examine it, we shall not find, I suppose, the motion of dull and senseless matter, any where in the universe, made so little use of and so wholly thrown away.

16. On this Hypothesis, the Soul must have Ideas not derived from Sensation or Reflection, of which there is no Appearance.

It is true, we have sometimes instances of perception whilst we are asleep, and retain the memory of those thoughts: but how extravagant and incoherent for the most part they are; how little conformable to the perfection and order of a rational being, those who are acquainted with dreams need not be told. This I would willingly be satisfied in,—whether the soul, when it thinks thus apart, and as it were separate from the body, acts less rationally than when conjointly with it, or no. If its separate thoughts be less rational, then these men must say, that the soul owes the perfection of rational thinking to the body: if it does not, it is a wonder that our dreams should be, for the most part, so frivolous and irrational; and that the soul should retain none of its more rational soliloquies and meditations.

17. If I think when I know it not, nobody else can know it.

Those who so confidently tell us that the soul always actually thinks, I would they would also tell us, what those ideas are that are in the soul of a child, before or just at the union with the body, before it hath received any by sensation. The dreams of sleeping men are, as I take it, all made up of the waking man's ideas; though for the most part oddly put together. It is strange, if the soul has ideas of its own that it derived not from sensation or reflection, (as it must have, if it thought before it received any impressions from the body,) that it should never, in its private thinking, (so private, that the man himself perceives it not,) retain any of them the very moment it wakes out of them, and then make the man glad with new discoveries. Who can find it reason that the soul should, in its retirement during sleep, have so many hours' thoughts, and yet never light on any of those ideas it borrowed not from sensation or reflection; or at least preserve the memory of none but such, which, being

occasioned from the body, must needs be less natural to a spirit? It is strange the soul should never once in a man's whole life recall over any of its pure native thoughts, and those ideas it had before it borrowed anything from the body; never bring into the waking man's view any other ideas but what have a tang of the cask, and manifestly derive their original from that union. If it always thinks, and so had ideas before it was united, or before it received any from the body, it is not to be supposed but that during sleep it recollects its native ideas; and during that retirement from communicating with the body, whilst it thinks by itself, the ideas it is busied about should be, sometimes at least, those more natural and congenial ones which it had in itself, underived from the body, or its own operations about them: which, since the waking man never remembers, we must from this hypothesis conclude either that the soul remembers something that the man does not; or else that memory belongs only to such ideas as are derived from the body, or the mind's operations about them.

18. How knows any one that the Soul always thinks? For if it be not a self-evident Proposition, it needs Proof.

I would be glad also to learn from these men who so confidently pronounce that the human soul, or, which is all one, that a man always thinks, how they come to know it; nay, how they come to know that they themselves think, when they themselves do not perceive it. This, I am afraid, is to be sure without proofs, and to know without perceiving. It is, I suspect, a confused notion, taken up to serve an hypothesis; and none of those clear truths, that either their own evidence forces us to admit, or common experience makes it impudence to deny. For the most that can be said of it is, that it is possible the soul may always think, but not always retain it in memory. And I say, it is as possible that the soul may not always think; and much more probable that it should sometimes not think, than that it should often think, and that a long while together, and not be conscious to itself, the next moment after, that it had thought.

19. That a Man should be busy in Thinking, and yet not retain it the next moment, very improbable.

To suppose the soul to think, and the man not to perceive it, is, as has been said, to make two persons in one man. And if one considers well these men's way of speaking, one should be led into a suspicion that they do so. For those who tell us that the SOUL always thinks, do never, that I remember, say that a MAN always thinks. Can the soul think, and not the man? Or a man think, and not be conscious of it? This, perhaps, would be suspected of jargon in others. If they say the man thinks always, but is not always conscious of it, they may as well say his body is extended without having parts. For it is altogether as intelligible to say that a body is extended without parts, as that anything thinks without being conscious of it, or perceiving that it does so. They who talk thus may, with as much reason, if it be necessary to their hypothesis, say that a man is always hungry, but that he does not always feel it; whereas hunger consists in that very sensation, as thinking consists in being conscious that one thinks. If they say that a man is always conscious to himself of thinking, I ask, How

they know it? Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's own mind. Can another man perceive that I am conscious of anything, when I perceive it not myself? No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience. Wake a man out of a sound sleep, and ask him what he was that moment thinking of. If he himself be conscious of nothing he then thought on, he must be a notable diviner of thoughts that can assure him that he was thinking. May he not, with more reason, assure him he was not asleep? This is something beyond philosophy; and it cannot be less than revelation, that discovers to another thoughts in my mind, when I can find none there myself. And they must needs have a penetrating sight who can certainly see that I think, when I cannot perceive it myself, and when I declare that I do not; and yet can see that dogs or elephants do not think, when they give all the demonstration of it imaginable, except only telling us that they do so. This some may suspect to be a step beyond the Rosicrucians; it seeming easier to make one's self invisible to others, than to make another's thoughts visible to me, which are not visible to himself. But it is but defining the soul to be "a substance that always thinks," and the business is done. If such definition be of any authority, I know not what it can serve for but to make many men suspect that they have no souls at all; since they find a good part of their lives pass away without thinking. For no definitions that I know, no suppositions of any sect, are of force enough to destroy constant experience; and perhaps it is the affectation of knowing beyond what we perceive, that makes so much useless dispute and noise in the world.

20. No ideas but from Sensation and Reflection, evident, if we observe Children.

I see no reason, therefore, to believe that the soul thinks before the senses have furnished it with ideas to think on; and as those are increased and retained, so it comes, by exercise, to improve its faculty of thinking in the several parts of it; as well as, afterwards, by compounding those ideas, and reflecting on its own operations, it increases its stock, as well as facility in remembering, imagining, reasoning, and other modes of thinking.

21. State of a child on the mother's womb.

He that will suffer himself to be informed by observation and experience, and not make his own hypothesis the rule of nature, will find few signs of a soul accustomed to much thinking in a new-born child, and much fewer of any reasoning at all. And yet it is hard to imagine that the rational soul should think so much, and not reason at all, And he that will consider that infants newly come into the world spend the greatest part of their time in sleep, and are seldom awake but when either hunger calls for the teat, or some pain (the most importunate of all sensations), or some other violent impression on the body, forces the mind to perceive and attend to it;—he, I say, who considers this, will perhaps find reason to imagine that a FOETUS in the mother's womb differs not much from the state of a vegetable, but passes the greatest part of its time without perception or thought; doing very little but sleep in a place where it needs not seek for food, and is surrounded with liquor, always

equally soft, and near of the same temper; where the eyes have no light, and the ears so shut up are not very susceptible of sounds; and where there is little or no variety, or change of objects, to move the senses.

22. The mind thinks in proportion to the matter it gets from experience to think about.

Follow a child from its birth, and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the mind by the senses comes more and more to be furnished with ideas, it comes to be more and more awake; thinks more, the more it has matter to think on. After some time it begins to know the objects which, being most familiar with it, have made lasting impressions. Thus it comes by degrees to know the persons it daily converses with, and distinguishes them from strangers; which are instances and effects of its coming to retain and distinguish the ideas the senses convey to it. And so we may observe how the mind, BY DEGREES, improves in these; and ADVANCES to the exercise of those other faculties of enlarging, compounding, and abstracting its ideas, and of reasoning about them, and reflecting upon all these; of which I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter.

23. A man begins to have ideas when he first has sensation. What sensation is.

If it shall be demanded then, WHEN a man BEGINS to have any ideas, I think the true answer is,—WHEN HE FIRST HAS ANY SENSATION. For, since there appear not to be any ideas in the mind before the senses have conveyed any in, I conceive that ideas in the understanding are coeval with SENSATION; WHICH IS SUCH AN IMPRESSION OR MOTION MADE IN SOME PART OF THE BODY, AS MAKES IT BE TAKEN NOTICE OF IN THE UNDERSTANDING.

24. The Original of all our Knowledge.

The impressions then that are made on our sense by outward objects that are extrinsical to the mind; and its own operations about these impressions, reflected on by itself, as proper objects to be contemplated by it, are, I conceive, the original of all knowledge. Thus the first capacity of human intellect is,—that the mind is fitted to receive the impressions made on it; either through the senses by outward objects, or by its own operations when it reflects on them. This is the first step a man makes towards the discovery of anything, and the groundwork whereon to build all those notions which ever he shall have naturally in this world. All those sublime thoughts which tower above the clouds, and reach as high as heaven itself, take their rise and footing here: in all that great extent wherein the mind wanders, in those remote speculations it may seem to be elevated with, it stirs not one jot beyond those ideas which SENSE or REFLECTION have offered for its contemplation.

25. In the Reception of simple Ideas, the Understanding is for the

most part passive.

In this part the understanding is merely passive; and whether or no it will have these beginnings, and as it were materials of knowledge, is not in its own power. For the objects of our senses do, many of them, obtrude their particular ideas upon our minds whether we will or not; and the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least, some obscure notions of them. No man can be wholly ignorant of what he does when he thinks. These simple ideas, when offered to the mind, the understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter when they are imprinted, nor blot them out and make new ones itself, than a mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the images or ideas which the objects set before it do therein produce. As the bodies that surround us do diversely affect our organs, the mind is forced to receive the impressions; and cannot avoid the perception of those ideas that are annexed to them.

Check Your Understanding

Directions: Answer the question below and check your answer before moving on. Use the arrow below on the right to move to the next question. When you have answered all four questions, click Finish.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=30#h5p-6>

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2004), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10615>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.



This work (Empiricism by John Locke) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SELECTIONS FROM A TREATISE CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

George Berkeley

Editor's Note: Below are the first 33 sections of the main body of George Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. It omits the Preface, the Introduction, and sections 34 through 156. A link to the complete text can be found below in the Citation and Use notes.

OF THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

1. OBJECTS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.—It is evident to any one who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either IDEAS actually imprinted on the senses; or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination—either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways. By sight I have the ideas of light and colours, with their several degrees and variations. By touch I perceive hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance, and of all these more and less either as to quantity or degree. Smelling furnishes me with odours; the palate with tastes; and hearing conveys sounds to the mind in all their variety of tone and composition. And as several of these are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name, and so to be reputed as one thing. Thus, for example a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name APPLE. Other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things—which as they are pleasing or disagreeable excite the passions of love, hatred, joy, grief, and so forth.

2. MIND—SPIRIT—SOUL.—But, besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them, and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering, about them. This perceiving, active being is what I call MIND, SPIRIT, SOUL, or MYSELF. By which words I do not denote any one of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them, WHEREIN THEY

EXIST, or, which is the same thing, whereby they are perceived—for the existence of an idea consists in being perceived.

3. HOW FAR THE ASSENT OF THE VULGAR CONCEDED.—That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist WITHOUT the mind, is what EVERYBODY WILL ALLOW. And it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than IN a mind perceiving them. I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this by any one that shall attend to WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM EXIST, when applied to sensible things. The table I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed—meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.[Note.] There was an odour, that is, it was smelt; there was a sound, that is, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their ESSE is PERCIPI, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.

1

4. THE VULGAR OPINION INVOLVES A CONTRADICTION.—It is indeed an opinion STRANGELY prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But, with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world, yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For, what are the fore-mentioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? and what do we PERCEIVE BESIDES OUR OWN IDEAS OR SENSATIONS? and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived?

5. CAUSE OF THIS PREVALENT ERROR.—If we thoroughly examine this tenet it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of ABSTRACT IDEAS. For can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? Light and colours, heat and cold, extension and figures—in a word the things we see and feel—what are they but so many sensations, notions, ideas, or impressions on the sense? and is it possible to separate, even in thought, any of these from perception? For my part, I might as easily divide a thing from itself. I may, indeed, divide in my thoughts, or conceive apart from each other, those things which, perhaps I never perceived by

1. [Note: First argument in support of the author's theory.]

sense so divided. Thus, I imagine the trunk of a human body without the limbs, or conceive the smell of a rose without thinking on the rose itself. So far, I will not deny, I can abstract—if that may properly be called ABSTRACTION which extends only to the conceiving separately such objects as it is possible may really exist or be actually perceived asunder. But my conceiving or imagining power does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception. Hence, as it is impossible for me to see or feel anything without an actual sensation of that thing, so is it impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it.[Note.]

2

6. Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, viz., that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their BEING (ESSE) is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other CREATED SPIRIT, they must either have no existence at all, OR ELSE SUBSIST IN THE MIND OF SOME ETERNAL SPIRIT—it being perfectly unintelligible, and involving all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit [Note.]. To be convinced of which, the reader need only reflect, and try to separate in his own thoughts the being of a sensible thing from its being perceived.

3

7. SECOND ARGUMENT.[Note.].—From what has been said it follows there is NOT ANY OTHER SUBSTANCE THAN SPIRIT, or that which perceives. But, for the fuller proof of this point, let it be considered the sensible qualities are colour, figure, motion, smell, taste, etc., i.e. the ideas perceived by sense. Now, for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing is a manifest contradiction, for TO HAVE AN IDEA IS ALL ONE AS TO PERCEIVE; that therefore wherein colour, figure, and the like qualities exist must perceive them; hence it is clear there can be no UNTHINKING substance or SUBSTRATUM of those ideas.

4

8. OBJECTION.—ANSWER.—But, say you, though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet

2. [Note: “In truth the object and the sensation are the same thing, and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other—Edit 1710.”]

3. [Note: “To make this appear with all the light and evidence of an axiom, it seems sufficient if I can but awaken the reflection of the reader, that he may take an impartial view of his own meaning, and in turn his thoughts upon the subject itself, free and disengaged from all embarrass of words and prepossession in favour of received mistakes.”—Edit 1710]

4. [Note: Vide sect. iii. and xxv.]

there may be things LIKE them, whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind in an unthinking substance. I ANSWER, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure. If we look but never so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas. Again, I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? If they are, THEN THEY ARE IDEAS and we have gained our point; but if you say they are not, I appeal to any one whether it be sense to assert a colour is like something which is invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest.

9. THE PHILOSOPHICAL NOTION OF MATTER INVOLVES A CONTRADICTION.—Some there are who make a DISTINCTION betwixt PRIMARY and SECONDARY qualities. By the former they mean extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity or impenetrability, and number; by the latter they denote all other sensible qualities, as colours, sounds, tastes, and so forth. The ideas we have of these they acknowledge not to be the resemblances of anything existing without the mind, or unperceived, but they will have our ideas of the primary qualities to be patterns or images of things which exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance which they call MATTER. By MATTER, therefore, we are to understand an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure, and motion DO ACTUALLY SUBSIST. But it is evident from what we have already shown, that extension, figure, and motion are ONLY IDEAS EXISTING IN THE MIND, and that an idea can be like nothing but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an UNPERCEIVING substance. Hence, it is plain that the very notion of what is called MATTER or CORPOREAL SUBSTANCE, involves a contradiction in it.[Note.]

5

10. ARGUMENTUM AD HOMINEM.—They who assert that figure, motion, and the rest of the primary or original qualities do exist without the mind in unthinking substances, do at the same time acknowledge that colours, sounds, heat cold, and suchlike secondary qualities, do not—which they tell us are sensations existing IN THE MIND ALONE, that depend on and are occasioned by the different size, texture, and motion of the minute particles of matter. This they take for an undoubted truth, which they can demonstrate beyond all exception. Now, if it be certain that those original qualities ARE INSEPARABLY UNITED WITH THE OTHER SENSIBLE QUALITIES, and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind. But I desire any one to reflect and try whether he can, by any

5. [Note: “Insomuch that I should not think it necessary to spend more time in exposing its absurdity. But because the tenet of the existence of matter seems to have taken so deep a root in the minds of philosophers, and draws after it so many ill consequences, I choose rather to be thought prolix and tedious, than omit anything that might conduce to the full discovery and extirpation of the prejudice.”—Edit 1710.]

abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all other sensible qualities. For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moving, but I must withal give it some colour or other sensible quality which is ACKNOWLEDGED to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where therefore the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also, to wit, in the mind and nowhere else.

11. A SECOND ARGUMENT AD HOMINEM.—Again, GREAT and SMALL, SWIFT and SLOW, ARE ALLOWED TO EXIST NOWHERE WITHOUT THE MIND, being entirely RELATIVE, and changing as the frame or position of the organs of sense varies. The extension therefore which exists without the mind is neither great nor small, the motion neither swift nor slow, that is, they are nothing at all. But, say you, they are extension in general, and motion in general: thus we see how much the tenet of extended movable substances existing without the mind depends on the strange doctrine of ABSTRACT IDEAS. And here I cannot but remark how nearly the vague and indeterminate description of Matter or corporeal substance, which the modern philosophers are run into by their own principles, resembles that antiquated and so much ridiculed notion of MATERIA PRIMA, to be met with in Aristotle and his followers. Without extension solidity cannot be conceived; since therefore it has been shown that extension exists not in an unthinking substance, the same must also be true of solidity.

12. That NUMBER is entirely THE CREATURE OF THE MIND, even though the other qualities be allowed to exist without, will be evident to whoever considers that the same thing bears a different denomination of number as the mind views it with different respects. Thus, the same extension is one, or three, or thirty-six, according as the mind considers it with reference to a yard, a foot, or an inch. Number is so visibly relative, and dependent on men's understanding, that it is strange to think how any one should give it an absolute existence without the mind. We say one book, one page, one line, etc.; all these are equally units, though some contain several of the others. And in each instance, it is plain, the unit relates to some particular combination of ideas arbitrarily put together by the mind.

13. UNITY I know some will have to be A SIMPLE OR UNCOMPOUNDED IDEA, accompanying all other ideas into the mind. That I have any such idea answering the word UNITY I do not find; and if I had, methinks I could not miss finding it: on the contrary, it should be the most familiar to my understanding, since it is said to accompany all other ideas, and to be perceived by all the ways of sensation and reflexion. To say no more, it is an ABSTRACT IDEA.

14. A THIRD ARGUMENT AD HOMINEM.—I shall farther add, that, after the same manner as modern philosophers prove certain sensible qualities to have no existence in Matter, or without the mind, the same thing may be likewise proved of all other sensible qualities whatsoever. Thus, for instance, it is said that heat and cold are affections only of the mind, and not at all patterns of real beings, existing in the corporeal substances which excite them, for that the same body which appears cold to one hand seems warm to another. Now, why may we not as well argue that figure and extension are not patterns or resemblances of qualities

existing in Matter, because to the same eye at different stations, or eyes of a different texture at the same station, they appear various, and cannot therefore be the images of anything SETTLED AND DETERMINATE WITHOUT THE MIND? Again, it is proved that SWEETNESS is not really in the sapid thing, because the thing remaining unaltered the sweetness is changed into bitter, as in case of a fever or otherwise vitiated palate. Is it not as reasonable to say that MOTION is not without the mind, since if the succession of ideas in the mind become swifter, the motion, it is acknowledged, shall appear slower without any alteration in any external object?

15. NOT CONCLUSIVE AS TO EXTENSION.—In short, let any one consider those arguments which are thought manifestly to prove that colours and taste exist only in the mind, and he shall find they may with equal force be brought to prove the same thing of extension, figure, and motion. Though it must be confessed this method of arguing does not so much prove that there is no extension or colour in an outward object, as that we do not know by SENSE which is the TRUE extension or colour of the object. But the arguments foregoing plainly show it to be impossible that any colour or extension at all, or other sensible quality whatsoever, should exist in an UNTHINKING subject without the mind, or in truth, that there should be any such thing as an outward object.

16. But let us examine a little the received opinion.—It is said EXTENSION is a MODE or accident OF MATTER, and that Matter is the SUBSTRATUM that supports it. Now I desire that you would explain to me what is meant by Matter's SUPPORTING extension. Say you, I have no idea of Matter and therefore cannot explain it. I answer, though you have no positive, yet, if you have any meaning at all, you must at least have a relative idea of Matter; though you know not what it is, yet you must be supposed to know what relation it bears to accidents, and what is meant by its supporting them. It is evident SUPPORT cannot here be taken in its usual or literal sense—as when we say that pillars support a building; in what sense therefore must it be taken? [Note.]

6

17. PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING OF “MATERIAL SUBSTANCE” DIVISIBLE INTO TWO PARTS.—If we inquire into what the most accurate philosophers declare themselves to mean by MATERIAL SUBSTANCE, we shall find them acknowledge they have no other meaning annexed to those sounds but the idea of BEING IN GENERAL, together WITH THE RELATIVE NOTION OF ITS SUPPORTING ACCIDENTS. The general idea of Being appeareth to me the most abstract and incomprehensible of all other; and as for its supporting accidents, this, as we have just now observed, cannot be understood in the common sense of those words; it must therefore be taken in some other sense, but what that is they do not

6. [Note: “For my part, I am not able to discover any sense at all that can be applicable to it.”—Edit 1710.]

explain. So that when I consider the TWO PARTS or branches which make the signification of the words MATERIAL SUBSTANCE, I am convinced there is no distinct meaning annexed to them. But why should we trouble ourselves any farther, in discussing this material SUBSTRATUM or support of figure and motion, and other sensible qualities? Does it not suppose they have an existence without the mind? And is not this a direct repugnancy, and altogether inconceivable?

18. THE EXISTENCE OF EXTERNAL BODIES WANTS PROOF.—But, though it were possible that solid, figured, movable substances may exist without the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies, yet HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO KNOW THIS? Either we must know it by sense or by reason. As for our senses, by them we have the knowledge ONLY OF OUR SENSATIONS, ideas, or those things that are immediately perceived by sense, call them what you will: but they do not inform us that things exist without the mind, or unperceived, like to those which are perceived. This the materialists themselves acknowledge. It remains therefore that if we have any knowledge at all of external things, it must be by REASON, inferring their existence from what is immediately perceived by sense. But what reason can induce us to believe the existence of bodies without the mind, from what we perceive, since the very patrons of Matter themselves do not pretend there is ANY NECESSARY CONNEXION BETWIXT THEM AND OUR IDEAS? I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, phrensies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that IT IS POSSIBLE WE MIGHT BE AFFECTED WITH ALL THE IDEAS WE HAVE NOW, THOUGH THERE WERE NO BODIES EXISTING WITHOUT RESEMBLING THEM. Hence, it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing our ideas; since it is granted they are produced sometimes, and might possibly be produced always in the same order, we see them in at present, without their concurrence.

19. THE EXISTENCE OF EXTERNAL BODIES AFFORDS NO EXPLICATION OF THE MANNER IN WHICH OUR IDEAS ARE PRODUCED.—But, though we might possibly have all our sensations without them, yet perhaps it may be thought EASIER to conceive and explain the MANNER of their production, by supposing external bodies in their likeness rather than otherwise; and so it might be at least probable there are such things as bodies that excite their ideas in our minds. But neither can this be said; for, though we give the materialists their external bodies, they by their own confession are never the nearer knowing how our ideas are produced; since they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner BODY CAN ACT UPON SPIRIT, or how it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind. Hence it is evident the production of ideas or sensations in our minds can be no reason why we should suppose Matter or corporeal substances, SINCE THAT IS ACKNOWLEDGED TO REMAIN EQUALLY INEXPLICABLE WITH OR WITHOUT THIS SUPPOSITION. If therefore it were possible for bodies to exist without the mind, yet to hold they do so, must needs be a very precarious opinion; since it is to suppose, without any reason at all, that God has created innumerable beings THAT ARE ENTIRELY USELESS, AND SERVE TO NO MANNER OF PURPOSE.

20. DILEMMA.—In short, if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and

if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now. Suppose—what no one can deny possible—an intelligence without the help of external bodies, to be affected with the same train of sensations or ideas that you are, imprinted in the same order and with like vividness in his mind. I ask whether that intelligence has not all the reason to believe the existence of corporeal substances, represented by his ideas, and exciting them in his mind, that you can possibly have for believing the same thing? Of this there can be no question—which one consideration were enough to make any reasonable person suspect the strength of whatever arguments he may think himself to have, for the existence of bodies without the mind.

21. Were it necessary to add any FURTHER PROOF AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF MATTER after what has been said, I could instance several of those errors and difficulties (not to mention impieties) which have sprung from that tenet. It has occasioned numberless controversies and disputes in philosophy, and not a few of far greater moment in religion. But I shall not enter into the detail of them in this place, as well because I think arguments A POSTERIORI are unnecessary for confirming what has been, if I mistake not, sufficiently demonstrated A PRIORI, as because I shall hereafter find occasion to speak somewhat of them.

22. I am afraid I have given cause to think I am needlessly prolix in handling this subject. For, to what purpose is it to dilate on that which may be demonstrated with the utmost evidence in a line or two, to any one that is capable of the least reflexion? It is but looking into your own thoughts, and so trying whether you can conceive it possible for a sound, or figure, or motion, or colour to exist without the mind or unperceived. This easy trial may perhaps make you see that what you contend for is a downright contradiction. Insomuch that I am content to put the whole upon this issue:—If you can but CONCEIVE it possible for one extended movable substance, or, in general, for any one idea, or anything like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause. And, as for all that COMPAGES of external bodies you contend for, I shall grant you its existence, THOUGH (1.) YOU CANNOT EITHER GIVE ME ANY REASON WHY YOU BELIEVE IT EXISTS [Vide sect. lviii.], OR (2.) ASSIGN ANY USE TO IT WHEN IT IS SUPPOSED TO EXIST [Vide sect. lx.]. I say, the bare possibility of your opinions being true shall pass for an argument that it is so. [Note: i.e. although your argument be deficient in the two requisites of an hypothesis.—Ed.]

23. But, say you, surely there is nothing easier than for me to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it; but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call BOOKS and TREES, and the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? BUT DO NOT YOU YOURSELF PERCEIVE OR THINK OF THEM ALL THE WHILE? This therefore is nothing to the purpose; it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind: but it does not show that you can conceive it possible the objects of your thought may exist without the mind. To make out this, IT IS NECESSARY THAT YOU CONCEIVE THEM EXISTING UNCONCEIVED OR UNTHOUGHT OF, WHICH IS A MANIFEST REPUGNANCY. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself,

is deluded to think it can and does conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind, though at the same time they are apprehended by or exist in itself. A little attention will discover to any one the truth and evidence of what is here said, and make it unnecessary to insist on any other proofs against the existence of material substance.

24. THE ABSOLUTE EXISTENCE OF UNTHINKING THINGS ARE WORDS WITHOUT A MEANING.—It is very obvious, upon the least inquiry into our thoughts, to know whether it is possible for us to understand what is meant by the ABSOLUTE EXISTENCE OF SENSIBLE OBJECTS IN THEMSELVES, OR WITHOUT THE MIND. To me it is evident those words mark out either a direct contradiction, or else nothing at all. And to convince others of this, I know no readier or fairer way than to entreat they would calmly attend to their own thoughts; and if by this attention the emptiness or repugnancy of those expressions does appear, surely nothing more is requisite for the conviction. It is on this therefore that I insist, to wit, that the ABSOLUTE existence of unthinking things are words without a meaning, or which include a contradiction. This is what I repeat and inculcate, and earnestly recommend to the attentive thoughts of the reader.

25. THIRD ARGUMENT.[Note: Vide sect. iii. and vii.]—REFUTATION OF LOCKE.—All our ideas, sensations, notions, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive—there is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that ONE IDEA or object of thought CANNOT PRODUCE or make ANY ALTERATION IN ANOTHER. To be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas. For, since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived: but whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is, therefore, no such thing contained in them. A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, insomuch that it is impossible for an idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything: neither can it be the resemblance or pattern of any active being, as is evident from sect. 8. Whence it plainly follows that extension, figure, and motion cannot be the cause of our sensations. To say, therefore, that these are the effects of powers resulting from the configuration, number, motion, and size of corpuscles, must certainly be false. [Note: Vide sect. cii.]

26. CAUSE OF IDEAS.—We perceive a continual succession of ideas, some are anew excited, others are changed or totally disappear. There is therefore some cause of these ideas, whereon they depend, and which produces and changes them. That this cause cannot be any quality or idea or combination of ideas, is clear from the preceding section. It must therefore be a substance; but it has been shown that there is no corporeal or material substance: it remains therefore that the CAUSE OF IDEAS is an incorporeal active substance or Spirit.

27. NO IDEA OF SPIRIT.—A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being—as it perceives ideas it is called the UNDERSTANDING, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them it is called the WILL. Hence

there can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit; for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert (vide sect. 25), they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or LIKENESS, that which acts. A little attention will make it plain to any one, that to have an idea which shall be like that active principle of motion and change of ideas is absolutely impossible. Such is the nature of SPIRIT, or that which acts, that it cannot be of itself perceived, BUT ONLY BY THE EFFECTS WHICH IT PRODUCETH. If any man shall doubt of the truth of what is here delivered, let him but reflect and try if he can frame the idea of any power or active being, and whether he has ideas of two principal powers, marked by the names WILL and UNDERSTANDING, distinct from each other as well as from a third idea of Substance or Being in general, with a relative notion of its supporting or being the subject of the aforesaid powers—which is signified by the name SOUL or SPIRIT. This is what some hold; but, so far as I can see, the words WILL [Note: “Understanding, mind.”—Edit 1710.], SOUL, SPIRIT, do not stand for different ideas, or, in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which, being an agent, cannot be like unto, or represented by, any idea whatsoever. Though it must be owned at the same time that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind: such as willing, loving, hating—inasmuch as we know or understand the meaning of these words.

28. I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straightway this or that idea arises in my fancy; and by the same power it is obliterated and makes way for another. This making and unmaking of ideas doth very properly denominate the mind active. Thus much is certain and grounded on experience; but when we think of unthinking agents or of exciting ideas exclusive of volition, we only amuse ourselves with words.

29. IDEAS OF SENSATION DIFFER FROM THOSE OF REFLECTION OR MEMORY.—But, whatever power I may have over MY OWN thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by Sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses; the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is THEREFORE SOME OTHER WILL OR SPIRIT that PRODUCES THEM.

30. LAWS OF NATURE.—The ideas of Sense are more strong, lively, and DISTINCT than those of the imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connexion whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its Author. Now THE SET RULES OR ESTABLISHED METHODS WHEREIN THE MIND WE DEPEND ON EXCITES IN US THE IDEAS OF SENSE, ARE CALLED THE LAWS OF NATURE; and these we learn by experience, which teaches us that such and such ideas are attended with such and such other ideas, in the ordinary course of things.

31. KNOWLEDGE OF THEM NECESSARY FOR THE CONDUCT OF WORLDLY AFFAIRS.—This gives us a sort of foresight which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. And without this we should be eternally at a loss; we could not know how to act anything that might procure us the least pleasure, or

remove the least pain of sense. That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us; that to sow in the seed-time is the way to reap in the harvest; and in general that to obtain such or such ends, such or such means are conducive—all this we know, NOT BY DISCOVERING ANY NECESSARY CONNEXION BETWEEN OUR IDEAS, but only by the observation of the settled laws of nature, without which we should be all in uncertainty and confusion, and a grown man no more know how to manage himself in the affairs of life than an infant just born.

32. And yet THIS consistent UNIFORM WORKING, which so evidently displays the goodness and wisdom of that Governing Spirit whose Will constitutes the laws of nature, is so far from leading our thoughts to Him, that it rather SENDS THEM A WANDERING AFTER SECOND CAUSES. For, when we perceive certain ideas of Sense constantly followed by other ideas and WE KNOW THIS IS NOT OF OUR OWN DOING, we forthwith attribute power and agency to the ideas themselves, and make one the cause of another, than which nothing can be more absurd and unintelligible. Thus, for example, having observed that when we perceive by sight a certain round luminous figure we at the same time perceive by touch the idea or sensation called HEAT, we do from thence conclude the sun to be the cause of heat. And in like manner perceiving the motion and collision of bodies to be attended with sound, we are inclined to think the latter the effect of the former.

33. OF REAL THINGS AND IDEAS OR CHIMERAS.—The ideas imprinted on the Senses by the Author of nature are called REAL THINGS; and those excited in the imagination being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly termed IDEAS, or IMAGES OF THINGS, which they copy and represent. But then our sensations, be they never so vivid and distinct, are nevertheless IDEAS, that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as the ideas of its own framing. The ideas of Sense are allowed to have more reality in them, that is, to be more (1)STRONG, (2)ORDERLY, and (3)COHERENT than the creatures of the mind; but this is no argument that they exist without the mind. They are also (4)LESS DEPENDENT ON THE SPIRIT [Note: Vide sect. xxix.—Note.], or thinking substance which perceives them, in that they are excited by the will of another and more powerful spirit; yet still they are IDEAS, and certainly no IDEA, whether faint or strong, can exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Berkeley, George, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, (Project Gutenberg, 2006), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4723/4723-h/4723-h.htm>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.



*This work (Selections from *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* by George Berkeley) is free of known copyright restrictions.*

RADICAL EMPIRICISM

David Hume

PART I.

All the objects of human reason or inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, Relations of Ideas, and Matters of Fact. Of the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic; and in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides, is a proposition which expresses a relation between these figures. That three times five is equal to the half of thirty, expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would for ever retain their certainty and evidence.

Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner; nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality. That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, that it will rise. We should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood. Were it demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction, and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind.

It may, therefore, be a subject worthy of curiosity, to inquire what is the nature of that evidence which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory. This part of philosophy, it is observable, has been little cultivated, either by the ancients or moderns; and therefore our doubts and errors, in the prosecution of so important an inquiry, may be the more excusable; while we march through such difficult paths without any guide or direction. They may even prove useful, by exciting curiosity, and destroying that implicit faith and security, which is the bane of all reasoning and free inquiry. The discovery of defects in the common philosophy, if any such there be, will not, I presume, be a discouragement, but rather an incitement, as is usual, to attempt something more full and satisfactory than has yet been proposed to the public.

All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man, why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent; for instance, that his friend is in the country, or in France;

he would give you a reason; and this reason would be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises. A man finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island, would conclude that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connection between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. The hearing of an articulate voice and rational discourse in the dark assures us of the presence of some person: Why? because these are the effects of the human make and fabric, and closely connected with it. If we anatomize all the other reasonings of this nature, we shall find that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect, and that this relation is either near or remote, direct or collateral. Heat and light are collateral effects of fire, and the one effect may justly be inferred from the other.

If we would satisfy ourselves, therefore, concerning the nature of that evidence, which assures us of matters of fact, we must inquire how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect.

I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other. Let an object be presented to a man of ever so strong natural reason and abilities; if that object be entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects. Adam, though his rational faculties be supposed, at the very first, entirely perfect, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him. No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes which produced it, or the effects which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassisted by experience, ever draw any inference concerning real existence and matter of fact.

This proposition, that causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience, will readily be admitted with regard to such objects, as we remember to have once been altogether unknown to us; since we must be conscious of the utter inability, which we then lay under, of foretelling what would arise from them. Present two smooth pieces of marble to a man who has no tincture of natural philosophy; he will never discover that they will adhere together in such a manner as to require great force to separate them in a direct line, while they make so small a resistance to a lateral pressure. Such events, as bear little analogy to the common course of nature, are also readily confessed to be known only by experience; nor does any man imagine that the explosion of gunpowder, or the attraction of a loadstone, could ever be discovered by arguments *a priori*. In like manner, when an effect is supposed to depend upon an intricate machinery or secret structure of parts, we make no difficulty in attributing all our knowledge of it to experience. Who will assert that he can give the ultimate reason, why milk or bread is proper nourishment for a man, not for a lion or a tiger?

But the same truth may not appear, at first sight, to have the same evidence with regard to events, which have become familiar to us from our first appearance in the world, which bear a close analogy to the whole course

of nature, and which are supposed to depend on the simple qualities of objects, without any secret structure of parts. We are apt to imagine that we could discover these effects by the mere operation of our reason, without experience. We fancy, that were we brought on a sudden into this world, we could at first have inferred that one billiard-ball would communicate motion to another upon impulse; and that we needed not to have waited for the event, in order to pronounce with certainty concerning it. Such is the influence of custom, that, where it is strongest, it not only covers our natural ignorance, but even conceals itself, and seems not to take place, merely because it is found in the highest degree.

But to convince us that all the laws of nature, and all the operations of bodies without exception, are known only by experience, the following reflections may, perhaps, suffice. Were any object presented to us, and were we required to pronounce concerning the effect, which will result from it, without consulting past observation; after what manner, I beseech you, must the mind proceed in this operation? It must invent or imagine some event, which it ascribes to the object as its effect; and it is plain that this invention must be entirely arbitrary. The mind can never possibly find the effect in the supposed cause, by the most accurate scrutiny and examination. For the effect is totally different from the cause, and consequently can never be discovered in it. Motion in the second billiard-ball is a quite distinct event from motion in the first; nor is there anything in the one to suggest the smallest hint of the other. A stone or piece of metal raised into the air, and left without any support, immediately falls: but to consider the matter *a priori*, is there anything we discover in this situation which can beget the idea of a downward, rather than an upward, or any other motion, in the stone or metal?

And as the first imagination or invention of a particular effect, in all natural operations, is arbitrary, where we consult not experience; so must we also esteem the supposed tie or connection between the cause and effect, which binds them together, and renders it impossible that any other effect could result from the operation of that cause. When I see, for instance, a billiard-ball moving in a straight line towards another; even suppose motion in the second ball should by accident be suggested to me, as the result of their contact or impulse; may I not conceive, that a hundred different events might as well follow from that cause? May not both these balls remain at absolute rest? May not the first ball return in a straight line, or leap off from the second in any line or direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable. Why then should we give the preference to one, which is no more consistent or conceivable than the rest? All our reasonings *a priori* will never be able to show us any foundation for this preference.

In a word, then, every effect is a distinct event from its cause. It could not, therefore, be discovered in the cause, and the first invention or conception of it, *a priori*, must be entirely arbitrary. And even after it is suggested, the conjunction of it with the cause must appear equally arbitrary; since there are always many other effects, which, to reason, must seem fully as consistent and natural. In vain, therefore, should we pretend to determine any single event, or infer any cause or effect, without the assistance of observation and experience.

Hence we may discover the reason why no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which

produces any single effect in the universe. It is confessed, that the utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them. These ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and inquiry. Elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse; these are probably the ultimate causes and principles which we shall ever discover in nature; and we may esteem ourselves sufficiently happy, if, by accurate inquiry and reasoning, we can trace up the particular phenomena to, or near to, these general principles. The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer: as perhaps the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind serves only to discover larger portions of it. Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy, and meets us at every turn, in spite of our endeavor to elude or avoid it.

Nor is geometry, when taken into the assistance of natural philosophy, ever able to remedy this defect, or lead us into the knowledge of ultimate causes, by all that accuracy of reasoning for which it is so justly celebrated. Every part of mixed mathematics proceeds upon the supposition that certain laws are established by nature in her operations; and abstract reasonings are employed, either to assist experience in the discovery of these laws, or to determine their influence in particular instances, where it depends upon any precise degree of distance and quantity. Thus, it is a law of motion, discovered by experience, that the moment or force of any body in motion is in the compound ratio or proportion of its solid contents and its velocity; and consequently, that a small force may remove the greatest obstacle or raise the greatest weight, if, by any contrivance or machinery, we can increase the velocity of that force, so as to make it an overmatch for its antagonist. Geometry assists us in the application of this law, by giving us the just dimensions of all the parts and figures which can enter into any species of machine; but still the discovery of the law itself is owing merely to experience, and all the abstract reasonings in the world could never lead us one step towards the knowledge of it. When we reason *a priori*, and consider merely any object or cause, as it appears to the mind, independent of all observation, it never could suggest to us the notion of any distinct object, such as its effect; much less, show us the inseparable and inviolable connection between them. A man must be very sagacious who could discover by reasoning that crystal is the effect of heat, and ice of cold, without being previously acquainted with the operation of these qualities.

PART II.

But we have not yet attained any tolerable satisfaction with regard to the question first proposed. Each solution still gives rise to a new question as difficult as the foregoing, and leads us on to farther enquiries. When it is asked, What is the nature of all our reasonings concerning matter of fact? the proper answer seems to be, that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect. When again it is asked, What is the foundation of

all our reasonings and conclusions concerning that relation? it may be replied in one word, Experience. But if we still carry on our sifting humor, and ask, What is the foundation of all conclusions from experience? this implies a new question, which may be of more difficult solution and explication. Philosophers, that give themselves airs of superior wisdom and sufficiency, have a hard task when they encounter persons of inquisitive dispositions, who push them from every corner to which they retreat, and who are sure at last to bring them to some dangerous dilemma. The best expedient to prevent this confusion, is to be modest in our pretensions; and even to discover the difficulty ourselves before it is objected to us. By this means, we may make a kind of merit of our very ignorance.

I shall content myself, in this section, with an easy task, and shall pretend only to give a negative answer to the question here proposed. I say then, that, even after we have experience of the operations of cause and effect, our conclusions from that experience are not founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding. This answer we must endeavour both to explain and to defend.

It must certainly be allowed, that nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets, and has afforded us only the knowledge of a few superficial qualities of objects; while she conceals from us those powers and principles on which the influence of those objects entirely depends. Our senses inform us of the color, weight, and consistence of bread; but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities which fit it for the nourishment and support of a human body. Sight or feeling conveys an idea of the actual motion of bodies; but as to that wonderful force or power, which would carry on a moving body for ever in a continued change of place, and which bodies never lose but by communicating it to others; of this we cannot form the most distant conception. But notwithstanding this ignorance of natural powers¹ and principles, we always presume, when we see like sensible qualities, that they have like secret powers, and expect that effects, similar to those which we have experienced, will follow from them. If a body of like color and consistence with that bread, which we have formerly eat, be presented to us, we make no scruple of repeating the experiment, and foresee, with certainty, like nourishment and support. Now this is a process of the mind or thought, of which I would willingly know the foundation. It is allowed on all hands that there is no known connection between the sensible qualities and the secret powers; and consequently, that the mind is not led to form such a conclusion concerning their constant and regular conjunction, by anything which it knows of their nature. As to past Experience, it can be allowed to give direct and certain information of those precise objects only, and that precise period of time, which fell under its cognizance: but why this experience should be extended to future times, and to other objects, which for aught we know, may be only in appearance similar; this is the main question on which I would insist. The bread, which I formerly eat, nourished me; that is, a body of such sensible qualities was, at that time, endued with such secret powers: but does it follow, that other bread must also nourish me at another time, and that like sensible qualities must always be attended with like secret powers? The consequence seems nowise necessary. At least, it must be acknowledged that there is here a consequence drawn by the mind; that there is a certain step taken; a process of thought, and an inference, which wants to be explained. These two propositions are far from being the same, I have found that such an object has always been attended with

such an effect, and I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects. I shall allow, if you please, that the one proposition may justly be inferred from the other: I know, in fact, that it always is inferred. But if you insist that the inference is made by a chain of reasoning, I desire you to produce that reasoning. The connection between these propositions is not intuitive. There is required a medium, which may enable the mind to draw such an inference, if indeed it be drawn by reasoning and argument. What that medium is, I must confess, passes my comprehension; and it is incumbent on those to produce it, who assert that it really exists, and is the origin of all our conclusions concerning matter of fact.

This negative argument must certainly, in process of time, become altogether convincing, if many penetrating and able philosophers shall turn their enquiries this way and no one be ever able to discover any connecting proposition or intermediate step, which supports the understanding in this conclusion. But as the question is yet new, every reader may not trust so far to his own penetration, as to conclude, because an argument escapes his inquiry, that therefore it does not really exist. For this reason it may be requisite to venture upon a more difficult task; and enumerating all the branches of human knowledge, endeavour to show that none of them can afford such an argument.

All reasonings may be divided into two kinds, namely, demonstrative reasoning, or that concerning relations of ideas, and moral reasoning, or that concerning matter of fact and existence. That there are no demonstrative arguments in the case seems evident; since it implies no contradiction that the course of nature may change, and that an object, seemingly like those which we have experienced, may be attended with different or contrary effects. May I not clearly and distinctly conceive that a body, falling from the clouds, and which, in all other respects, resembles snow, has yet the taste of salt or feeling of fire? Is there any more intelligible proposition than to affirm, that all the trees will flourish in December and January, and decay in May and June? Now whatever is intelligible, and can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction, and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning *a priori*.

If we be, therefore, engaged by arguments to put trust in past experience, and make it the standard of our future judgement, these arguments must be probable only, or such as regard matter of fact and real existence, according to the division above mentioned. But that there is no argument of this kind, must appear, if our explication of that species of reasoning be admitted as solid and satisfactory. We have said that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavour, therefore, the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question.

In reality, all arguments from experience are founded on the similarity which we discover among natural objects, and by which we are induced to expect effects similar to those which we have found to follow from such objects. And though none but a fool or madman will ever pretend to dispute the authority of experience,

or to reject that great guide of human life, it may surely be allowed a philosopher to have so much curiosity at least as to examine the principle of human nature, which gives this mighty authority to experience, and makes us draw advantage from that similarity which nature has placed among different objects. From causes which appear similar we expect similar effects. This is the sum of all our experimental conclusions. Now it seems evident that, if this conclusion were formed by reason, it would be as perfect at first, and upon one instance, as after ever so long a course of experience. But the case is far otherwise. Nothing so like as eggs; yet no one, on account of this appearing similarity, expects the same taste and relish in all of them. It is only after a long course of uniform experiments in any kind, that we attain a firm reliance and security with regard to a particular event. Now where is that process of reasoning which, from one instance, draws a conclusion, so different from that which it infers from a hundred instances that are nowise different from that single one? This question I propose as much for the sake of information, as with an intention of raising difficulties. I cannot find, I cannot imagine any such reasoning. But I keep my mind still open to instruction, if any one will vouchsafe to bestow it on me.

Should it be said that, from a number of uniform experiments, we infer a connection between the sensible qualities and the secret powers; this, I must confess, seems the same difficulty, couched in different terms. The question still recurs, on what process of argument this inference is founded? Where is the medium, the interposing ideas, which join propositions so very wide of each other? It is confessed that the color, consistence, and other sensible qualities of bread appear not, of themselves, to have any connection with the secret powers of nourishment and support. For otherwise we could infer these secret powers from the first appearance of these sensible qualities, without the aid of experience; contrary to the sentiment of all philosophers, and contrary to plain matter of fact. Here, then, is our natural state of ignorance with regard to the powers and influence of all objects. How is this remedied by experience? It only shows us a number of uniform effects, resulting from certain objects, and teaches us that those particular objects, at that particular time, were endowed with such powers and forces. When a new object, endowed with similar sensible qualities, is produced, we expect similar powers and forces, and look for a like effect. From a body of like color and consistence with bread we expect like nourishment and support. But this surely is a step or progress of the mind, which wants to be explained. When a man says, I have found, in all past instances, such sensible qualities conjoined with such secret powers; And when he says, Similar sensible qualities will always be conjoined with similar secret powers, he is not guilty of a tautology, nor are these propositions in any respect the same. You say that the one proposition is an inference from the other. But you must confess that the inference is not intuitive; neither is it demonstrative: Of what nature is it, then? To say it is experimental, is begging the question. For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities. If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion. It is impossible, therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this resemblance of the past to the future; since all these arguments are founded on the supposition of that resemblance. Let the course of things be allowed hitherto ever so regular; that alone, without some new

argument or inference, proves not that, for the future, it will continue so. In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature, and consequently all their effects and influence, may change, without any change in their sensible qualities. This happens sometimes, and with regard to some objects: Why may it not happen always, and with regard to all objects? What logic, what process of argument secures you against this supposition? My practice, you say, refutes my doubts. But you mistake the purport of my question. As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say skepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference. No reading, no inquiry has yet been able to remove my difficulty, or give me satisfaction in a matter of such importance. Can I do better than propose the difficulty to the public, even though, perhaps, I have small hopes of obtaining a solution? We shall at least, by this means, be sensible of our ignorance, if we do not augment our knowledge.

I must confess that a man is guilty of unpardonable arrogance who concludes, because an argument has escaped his own investigation, that therefore it does not really exist. I must also confess that, though all the learned, for several ages, should have employed themselves in fruitless search upon any subject, it may still, perhaps, be rash to conclude positively that the subject must, therefore, pass all human comprehension. Even though we examine all the sources of our knowledge, and conclude them unfit for such a subject, there may still remain a suspicion, that the enumeration is not complete, or the examination not accurate. But with regard to the present subject, there are some considerations which seem to remove all this accusation of arrogance or suspicion of mistake.

It is certain that the most ignorant and stupid peasants- nay infants, nay even brute beasts- improve by experience, and learn the qualities of natural objects, by observing the effects which result from them. When a child has felt the sensation of pain from touching the flame of a candle, he will be careful not to put his hand near any candle; but will expect a similar effect from a cause which is similar in its sensible qualities and appearance. If you assert, therefore, that the understanding of the child is led into this conclusion by any process of argument or ratiocination, I may justly require you to produce that argument; nor have you any pretense to refuse so equitable a demand. You cannot say that the argument is abstruse, and may possibly escape your inquiry; since you confess that it is obvious to the capacity of a mere infant. If you hesitate, therefore, a moment, or if, after reflection, you produce any intricate or profound argument, you, in a manner, give up the question, and confess that it is not reasoning which engages us to suppose the past resembling the future, and to expect similar effects from causes which are, to appearance, similar. This is the proposition which I intended to enforce in the present section. If I be right, I pretend not to have made any mighty discovery. And if I be wrong, I must acknowledge myself to be indeed a very backward scholar; since I cannot now discover an argument which, it seems, was perfectly familiar to me long before I was out of my cradle.

Check Your Understanding

Directions: Answer the question below and check your answer before moving on. Use the arrow below on the right to move to the next question. When you have answered all four questions, click Finish.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=34#h5p-7>

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

David Hume, *An inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge (Project Gutenberg, 2006), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9662>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.

The *Check your Understanding* questions were added by the editor and carry the same license as the book, CC-BY-NC-SA.



This work (Radical Empiricism by David Hume) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. The word, Power, is here used in a loose and popular sense. The more accurate explication of it would give additional

evidence to this argument. See Sect. 7.

WHY TIME IS IN YOUR MIND: TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM AND THE REALITY OF TIME

Guus Duindam

Guus Duindam is a Ph.D Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Michigan working in normative ethics, the philosophy of law, and Kant. Guus also holds a law degree from Michigan Law and currently works as a judicial law clerk at the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

In this Chapter, you will learn about **Immanuel Kant's** (1724-1804) view that time is a *category of human understanding*, not a real property of the world. According to Kant, our mind imposes time on the world. If Kant is right, there is no such thing as “time” outside of our minds. Instead, time is one of the ways the human mind organizes and understands its perceptions. (*Space* is another.) You will also read one of Kant's most famous arguments for this view: the **first antinomy of pure reason**.

How did we get here?

Where does our knowledge about the world come from? Kant's predecessors developed two different answers to this question. According to the **rationalists**, we can gain knowledge about the world by pursuing **pure** or **a-priori reasoning**. An a-priori argument is an argument that does not rely on any sensory inputs. In other words, it is an argument that relies *only* on your own reasoning and on nothing else. Here is an example of an a-priori argument:

1. The word “bachelor” means “unmarried man.”
2. Socrates is a bachelor.
3. *Therefore*: Socrates is an unmarried man.

This argument is a-priori because you do not need to go out into the world and investigate Socrates to know that the conclusion is true. Instead, you can know that the conclusion is true just by applying the definition of the words used in the argument. Rationalists tried to use complex a-priori arguments to answer **Metaphysics** questions, such as whether there is a God, or whether the world has a beginning in time.

Empiricists had the opposite view. According to empiricists, *all* of our knowledge comes from our senses. Empiricists largely thought that metaphysical questions like “Is there a God?” or “has the world always existed” *could* not be answered, because we cannot observe the answers with our senses.

Kant began his life as a rationalist, but he quickly realized that both rationalism and empiricism had fatal flaws. Rationalism is **dogmatic**: it relies on definitions and assumptions that can’t be proved themselves—at least not by rationalist arguments. That’s true even for our simple Socrates example. After all, the only way to find out if Socrates *is* a bachelor is to go out into the world and find him. We don’t really know if Socrates is unmarried except if we just assume that he’s a bachelor. So, our rationalist argument about Socrates doesn’t really tell us anything at all about Socrates.

Empiricism, in contrast, leads to **skepticism**. This was most famously demonstrated by **David Hume** (1711-1776), who was himself one of the most prominent empiricists. He argued that if all of our knowledge comes from our senses, then we ultimately can’t really know anything meaningful about the world. Hume provides a famous example of this problem. Suppose you’re at the bar playing pool. You see that one ball hits another, and the second ball starts to move. It might seem logical to assume that the first ball hitting the second ball *caused* the second ball to move. But you actually don’t *know* this—at least, not if you’re an empiricist. Because you don’t *see* that the movement of the first ball *caused* the second ball to move. You only see two subsequent events: one ball moving, another ball moving. Even if you play pool a hundred, or a thousand times in a row, all you see is that every time your ball hits another ball, that ball starts to move. You see what Hume called a **constant conjunction** (a **correlation**). But many things are correlated without being causally related. For instance *the number of people who drown in swimming pools* in a certain period of time is correlated with *the number of films Nicolas Cage appears in* during that same period.¹ But though Cage’s acting may frequently disappoint, it doesn’t cause swimming pool drownings. The point is: you can only ever see correlations in the world. Without more, we never *know* whether anything causes anything else. If you are an empiricist, the same kind of problem comes back for almost any kind of knowledge about the world. So you end up with skepticism, the view that we can’t really know anything about the world at all.

Neither skepticism nor dogmatism are happy outcomes: either we know nothing, or our knowledge comes from definitions that we just assume to be true. In an attempt to get out of this problem, Kant developed an alternative to rationalism and empiricism called **Transcendental Idealism**. Kant agrees with the skeptics that we can never know what the “real” world looks like from an objective perspective. We couldn’t know, for instance, what the world would look like to God. That is true for the simple reason that we aren’t Gods: we are

mere humans who must perceive the world through limited senses and understand it with a limited mind. But, Kant realized, we *can* know things about the world *as it appears to creatures with minds like us*.

Transcendental Idealism

The next step in Kant’s argument is a shocking one: according to Kant, **time and space** are not features of the “real world” but only features of the world as it appears to creatures like us. In other words, our brain **adds time and space** to every observation.

This is a difficult idea to wrap your mind around, so consider a simpler example first. Imagine that there are no colors in the world—only shades of gray (more than fifty!). When we see color, that is because the different shades of gray out in the world are processed differently by our eyes and brains, to create the *illusion* of colors in the world. And imagine that every human processes these shades of gray in the same way, so that we all see color the same way, even though there are no “real” colors in the world. We could still talk about colors to one another in exactly the same way as we do now. In one sense, all of the information we exchange about colors would be accurate, because it accurately reflects how we all experience the world. In another sense, the information would be inaccurate, because color is generated by our eyes and brain—it’s not actually a feature of the “real” world. An objective observer who sees the world as it really is would not see colors. To use Kant’s terminology, in this imagined world color would be **empirically real** (because we all experience it) but **transcendentally ideal** (because it’s a part of our minds, not the real world).

This is exactly the situation Kant believes us to be in, except with respect to time and space instead of color. The real world doesn’t have either time or space. Instead, the human mind adds time and space to the world—just like in our example, our minds added color to the world. This allows us to gain knowledge about how the world works—including knowledge of cause and effect—in the same sense as the people in the colorless world could gain knowledge about colors. Such knowledge would be true about the world as it’s observed by creatures like us—creatures who add space and time to all observations. But it would not be true about the world objectively speaking, because time and space are part of our minds, not part of the outside world. To use Kant’s words again, time and space are empirically real but transcendentally ideal.

Kant’s Proof of the Unreality of Time

We will now turn to one of Kant’s arguments for his view that time is imposed on the world by our minds. According to Kant, whenever we assume that time and space are real properties of the world, we commit ourselves to a contradiction. Kant calls this contradiction the **antinomy of pure reason**. This antinomy involves four contradictions, but we will focus only on the first, which is about the unreality of time.

Appropriately, this argument is called the **first antinomy**, and it is in an argumentative form called a **reductio ad absurdum** (“reduction to the absurd”).

A *reductio* argument works by starting with the assumption it intends to disprove. Then, the argument shows that if the assumption is true, something ridiculous or impossible would also have to be true. Since the impossible can’t be true, our assumption also can’t be true. We use basic reductio arguments without realizing it all the time. Someone in an argument about household chores might use a reductio like this:

1. You think I should do the dishes tonight? (*assumption*)
2. Well, we both agreed that it wouldn’t be fair for one person to do *all* the chores.
3. And I’ve already done every other chore today!
4. If I also had to do the dishes, then I would have to do all the chores today, which we agreed isn’t fair.
(*contradiction*)
5. *Therefore*, I should not have to do the dishes tonight. (*conclusion*)

This very simple argument works like a reductio because it shows that the assumption (the speaker has to do the dishes) implies something ridiculous (the speaker has to do all the chores).

Kant’s argument about the unreality of time is a complex reductio that consists of two steps—two separate arguments. We start with the assumption that time is real, because that’s what Kant wanted to disprove. If time is real, Kant points out, then *either* the world has to have had a beginning in time, *or* the world has to have always existed. In the first part of his argument (called the **thesis**) Kant shows that it is impossible that the world has existed forever. Instead, the world must have had a beginning in time. But in the second part of his argument (called the **antithesis**) Kant shows that it is *impossible* for the world to have had a beginning in time. So it must always have existed. This is how Kant arrives at the contradiction: if time is real, then it would be true *both* that the world has always existed, *and* that the world had a beginning. But that’s impossible. Therefore, the assumption that time is real leads to a contradiction. Because the assumption leads to a contradiction, it is false. Therefore, time is not a real feature of the world.

Here are Kant’s arguments in his own words:

The Antinomy of Pure Reason: First Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A247/B455—A429-B457)

Thesis

The world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries.

Proof

For if one assumes that the world has no beginning in time, then up to every given point in time an eternity has elapsed, and hence an infinite series of states of things in the world, each following another, has passed away. But now the infinity of a series consists precisely in the fact that it can never be completed through a successive synthesis. Therefore an infinitely elapsed world-series is impossible, so a beginning of the world is a necessary condition of its existence; which was the first point to be proved.

[...] [argument about space omitted].

Antithesis

The world has no beginning and no bounds in space, but is infinite with regard to both time and space.

Proof

For suppose that it has a beginning. Since the beginning is an existence preceded by a time in which the thing is not, there must be a preceding time in which the world was not, i.e., an empty time. But now no arising of any sort of thing is possible in an empty time, because no part of such a time has, in itself, prior to another part, any distinguishing condition of its existence rather than its non-existence (whether one assumes that it comes to be of itself or through another cause). Thus many series of things may begin in the world, but the world itself cannot have any beginning, and so in past time is infinite.

Parsing Kant's Argument

Kant's text is dense and difficult to understand, so let's take a careful look at the arguments he makes, beginning with the *thesis* that the world has to have a beginning in time. The key to understanding this argument is the concept that it is *impossible to complete an infinite series of steps*. That is what Kant means when he writes that "the infinity of a series consists precisely in the fact that it can never be completed through a successive synthesis."

To see Kant's point, imagine that the road leading to your college building is *infinitely long*. And imagine that you're somewhere on that road, trying to make it to class. It would be impossible for you ever to actually make it to that class, because you would have to travel an infinitely long distance. And you can't ever actually *finish* travelling an infinitely long distance.

Kant isn't saying that there is anything impossible about an infinite series. It is obvious that there can be infinite series. For instance, the series of negative whole numbers (integers) is infinite, as is the series of positive integers (and the series of all integers!). What *is* impossible, Kant thinks, is finishing a process with infinitely many steps. For instance, even though there's nothing impossible about having an infinitely long series of numbers, it would be impossible to say every negative number out loud *and finish*.

Kant's argument imagines the history of our world as a series of world states, which together form a "world-series". Consider every moment in the history of the world to be one "world state" in this "world-series." If the world has existed for ever, without any beginning in time, then there would be *infinitely many world states* before today, the present. But, right now, the world is in the present. So the world successfully underwent infinitely many world-states to arrive at today, the present. In a sense, the world *travelled an infinitely long road and arrived at the end*: the present. But we just saw that it's impossible to travel an infinitely long road and arrive at the end. It's not possible for the world, then, to have undergone an infinite number of world-states to arrive at the present world-state. If the series were truly infinite, the world would never have made it to today. But it did. So: the metaphorical road leading up to today can't have been infinitely long. It must have had a beginning. Therefore, the world must have a beginning in time. To return to the numbers analogy, if someone has been saying out loud all negative integers and then stops at "-1!", they can't actually have said *all* of them. Instead, they must have started somewhere! So too for the world.

Now let's look at the other part of Kant's argument—the one that sets out to prove the opposite. The antithesis also rests on a relatively simple idea: nothing can come from nothing. By "the world" Kant doesn't mean "the globe" or "the solar system." Instead, "world" means *literally everything that exists*. If the world has a beginning in time, then there must have been some point in time where it didn't exist. And by the world we mean "everything." So if "everything" had a beginning, then there must be a point in time where there was *literally nothing*. Kant calls this an "empty time."

Kant then notices that it is impossible for anything to come out of a genuinely *empty* time. If there were a genuinely empty time, nothing would exist in that time with any potential causal powers. So nothing would exist with the capacity to cause other things to come to exist. An empty time would stay empty, and nothing would ever come into existence. But the world *does* exist! Therefore, it's impossible that the world had a beginning in time before which there was only empty time.

You might think that positing a Creator God is a way out of this argument. Perhaps the world has a beginning because God created it out of nothing. But remember that for purposes of this argument, the word "world" means "everything that exists." Including God, if God exists. So if you believe that God always existed, you believe that part of the world has always existed. That would also mean that at least part of the world can't have had a beginning, because God has no beginning. Thus, the argument would still show that something (God) has no beginning in time, which is sufficient for Kant's purposes. Accordingly, the existence of God does not solve the contradiction Kant raises in the *antithesis* argument.

Putting Kant's thesis and antithesis together gives us an argument that shows that *if time is real*, then it is *necessary* for the world to have a beginning and also *impossible* for the world to have a beginning. So, if time is real, a contradiction follows. Therefore, Kant concludes that time is not real.

Reading Questions

1. Try to imagine a couple of things you know to be impossible. Now, try to imagine a world without time. Can you do it? Remember that time passes even if nothing is changing! Does the fact that your mind is incapable of imagining a world without time, even though it can imagine many other impossible things, support Kant's position that time is part of our mind?
2. Do you think either of Kant's arguments (the thesis or antithesis) is more persuasive than the other? Why?
3. Regarding the *thesis*: could it be possible to travel an infinitely long road and finish if you had an infinite time in which to do so?
4. Regarding the *antithesis*: what do you think of Kant's view that God doesn't solve this problem? Do you think the Big Bang theory of the beginning of the Universe provides a solution to the contradiction? Why or why not?



Why Time Is In Your Mind: Transcendental Idealism and the Reality of Time by Guus Duindam is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. See Tyler Vigen, Spurious Correlations, <https://tylervigen.com/spurious-correlations> (last accessed 01/28/2022)

SELECTED READINGS ON IMMANUEL KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

Idealism Pt. 2: Kant's Transcendental Idealism

By Addison Ellis

Editor's Note: This essay is the second of three in a series authored by Addison on the topic of philosophical idealism. Part 1 on Berkeley's Subjective Idealism can be read [here](#).

In the 18th Century, what has become known as the *empiricist* picture of knowledge took the mind to have a very specific relationship with the world. The mind, empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume thought, was largely passive, conforming to the world around it. Thus, for me to gain knowledge of the world is to have my mind shaped by the world as it interacts with my senses.

There is a problem with this [continue reading [here](#)]

Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics

By Matt McCormick

Editor's Note: This essay, found on the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP), covers Immanuel Kant's ideas, including historical background, his answer to predecessors, his Copernican revolution, and transcendental idealism. [[click here](#) to read those four sections (sections 1-4)]

TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

Immanuel Kant

Editor's Note: The following text contains all seven sections of the Introduction to Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

I. Of the difference between pure and empirical knowledge.

THAT all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare, to connect, or to separate these, and so to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.

But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impressions giving merely the *occasion*), an addition which we cannot distinguish from the original element given by sense, till long practice has made us attentive to, and skilful in separating it. It is, therefore, a question which requires close investigation, and not to be answered at first sight,—whether there exists a knowledge altogether independent of experience, and even of all sensuous impressions? Knowledge of this kind is called *a priori*, in contradistinction to empirical knowledge, which has its sources *a posteriori*, that is, in experience.

But the expression, “*a priori*,” is not as yet definite enough adequately to indicate the whole meaning of the question above started. For, in speaking of knowledge which has its sources in experience, we are wont to say, that this or that may be known *a priori*, because we do not derive this knowledge immediately from experience, but from a general rule, which, however, we have itself borrowed from experience. Thus, if a man undermined his house, we say, “he might know *a priori* that it would have fallen;” that is, he needed not to have waited for

the experience that it did actually fall. But still, *a priori*, he could not know even this much. For, that bodies are heavy, and, consequently, that they fall when their supports are taken away, must have been known to him previously, by means of experience.

By the term “knowledge *a priori*,” therefore, we shall in the sequel understand, not such as is independent of this or that kind of experience, but such as is absolutely so of *all* experience. Opposed to this is empirical knowledge, or that which is possible only *a posteriori*, that is, through experience. Knowledge *a priori* is either pure or impure. Pure knowledge *a priori* is that with which no empirical element is mixed up. For example, the proposition, “Every change has a cause,” is a proposition *a priori*, but impure, because change is a conception which can only be derived from experience.

II. The human intellect, even in an unphilosophical state, is in possession of certain cognitions *a priori*.

THE question now is as to a *criterion*, by which we may securely distinguish a pure from an empirical cognition. Experience no doubt teaches us that this or that object is constituted in such and such a manner, but not that it could not possibly exist otherwise. Now, in the first place, if we have a proposition which contains the idea of necessity in its very conception, it is a judgment *a priori*; if, moreover, it is not derived from any other proposition, unless from one equally involving the idea of necessity, it is absolutely *a priori*. Secondly, an empirical judgment never exhibits strict and absolute, but only assumed and comparative universality (by induction); therefore, the most we can say is,—so far as we have hitherto observed, there is no exception to this or that rule. If, on the other hand, a judgment carries with it strict and absolute universality, that is, admits of no possible exception, it is not derived from experience, but is valid absolutely *a priori*.

Empirical universality is, therefore, only an arbitrary extension of validity, from that which may be predicated of a proposition valid in most cases, to that which is asserted of a proposition which holds good in all; as, for example, in the affirmation, “All bodies are heavy.” When, on the contrary, strict universality characterizes a judgment, it necessarily indicates another peculiar source of knowledge, namely, a faculty of cognition *a priori*. Necessity and strict universality, therefore, are infallible tests for distinguishing pure from empirical knowledge, and are inseparably connected with each other. But as in the use of these criteria the empirical limitation is sometimes more easily detected than the contingency of the judgment, or the unlimited universality which we attach to a judgment is often a more convincing proof than its necessity, it may be advisable to use the criteria separately, each being by itself infallible.

Now, that in the sphere of human cognition we have judgments which are necessary, and in the strictest sense universal, consequently pure *a priori*, it will be an easy matter to show. If we desire an example from the sciences, we need only take any proposition in mathematics. If we cast our eyes upon the commonest

operations of the understanding, the proposition, “every change must have a cause,” will amply serve our purpose. In the latter case, indeed, the conception of a cause so plainly involves the conception of a necessity of connection with an effect, and of a strict universality of the law, that the very notion of a cause would entirely disappear, were we to derive it, like Hume, from a frequent association of what happens with that which precedes; and the habit thence originating of connecting representations—the necessity inherent in the judgment being therefore merely subjective. Besides, without seeking for such examples of principles existing *a priori* in cognition, we might easily show that such principles are the indispensable basis of the possibility of experience itself, and consequently prove their existence *a priori*. For whence could our experience itself acquire certainty, if all the rules on which it depends were themselves empirical, and consequently fortuitous? No one, therefore, can admit the validity of the use of such rules as first principles. But, for the present, we may content ourselves with having established the fact, that we do possess and exercise a faculty of pure *a priori* cognition; and, secondly, with having pointed out the proper tests of such cognition, namely, universality and necessity.

Not only in judgments, however, but even in conceptions, is an *a priori* origin manifest. For example, if we take away by degrees from our conceptions of a body all that can be referred to mere sensuous experience—colour, hardness or softness, weight, even impenetrability—the body will then vanish; but the space which it occupied still remains, and this it is utterly impossible to annihilate in thought. Again, if we take away, in like manner, from our empirical conception of any object, corporeal or incorporeal, all properties which mere experience has taught us to connect with it, still we cannot think away those through which we cogitate it as substance, or adhering to substance, although our conception of substance is more determined than that of an object. Compelled, therefore, by that necessity with which the conception of substance forces itself upon us, we must confess that it has its seat in our faculty of cognition *a priori*.

III. Philosophy stands in need of a science which shall determine the possibility, principles, and extent of human knowledge *a priori*

OF far more importance than all that has been above said, is the consideration that certain of our cognitions rise completely above the sphere of all possible experience, and by means of conceptions, to which there exists in the whole extent of experience no corresponding object, seem to extend the range of our judgments beyond its bounds. And just in this transcendental or supersensible sphere, where experience affords us neither instruction nor guidance, lie the investigations of *Reason*, which, on account of their importance, we consider far preferable to, and as having a far more elevated aim than, all that the understanding can achieve within the sphere of sensuous phenomena. So high a value do we set upon these investigations, that even at the risk of error, we persist in following them out, and permit neither doubt nor disregard nor indifference to restrain

us from the pursuit. These unavoidable problems of mere pure reason are GOD, FREEDOM (of will), and IMMORTALITY. The science which, with all its preliminaries, has for its especial object the solution of these problems is named metaphysics—a science which is at the very outset dogmatical, that is, it confidently takes upon itself the execution of this task without any previous investigation of the ability or inability of reason for such an undertaking.

Now the safe ground of experience being thus abandoned, it seems nevertheless natural that we should hesitate to erect a building with the cognitions we possess, without knowing whence they come, and on the strength of principles, the origin of which is undiscovered. Instead of thus trying to build without a foundation, it is rather to be expected that we should long ago have put the question, how the understanding can arrive at these *a priori* cognitions, and what is the extent, validity, and worth which they may possess? We say, this is natural enough, meaning by the word natural, that which is consistent with a just and reasonable way of thinking; but if we understand by the term, that which usually happens, nothing indeed could be more natural and more comprehensible than that this investigation should be left long unattempted. For one part of our pure knowledge, the science of mathematics, has been long firmly established, and thus leads us to form flattering expectations with regard to others, though these may be of quite a different nature. Besides, when we get beyond the bounds of experience, we are of course safe from opposition in that quarter; and the charm of widening the range of our knowledge is so great that, unless we are brought to a standstill by some evident contradiction, we hurry on undoubtingly in our course. This, however, may be avoided, if we are sufficiently cautious in the construction of our fictions, which are not the less fictions on that account.

Mathematical science affords us a brilliant example, how far, independently of all experience, we may carry our *a priori* knowledge. It is true that the mathematician occupies himself with objects and cognitions only in so far as they can be represented by means of intuition. But this circumstance is easily overlooked, because the said intuition can itself be given *a priori*, and therefore is hardly to be distinguished from a mere pure conception. Deceived by such a proof of the power of reason, we can perceive no limits to the extension of our knowledge. The light dove cleaving in free flight the thin air, whose resistance it feels, might imagine that her movements would be far more free and rapid in airless space. Just in the same way did Plato, abandoning the world of sense because of the narrow limits it sets to the understanding, venture upon the wings of ideas beyond it, into the void space of pure intellect. He did not reflect that he made no real progress by all his efforts; for he met with no resistance which might serve him for a support, as it were, whereon to rest, and on which he might apply his powers, in order to let the intellect acquire momentum for its progress. It is, indeed, the common fate of human reason in speculation, to finish the imposing edifice of thought as rapidly as possible, and then for the first time to begin to examine whether the foundation is a solid one or no. Arrived at this point, all sorts of excuses are sought after, in order to console us for its want of stability, or rather, indeed, to enable us to dispense altogether with so late and dangerous an investigation. But what frees us during the process of building from all apprehension or suspicion, and flatters us into the belief of its solidity, is this. A great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the business of our reason consists in the analysis of the conceptions which

we already possess of objects. By this means we gain a multitude of cognitions, which although really nothing more than elucidations or explanations of that which (though in a confused manner) was already thought in our conceptions, are, at least in respect of their form, prized as new introspections; whilst, so far as regards their matter or content, we have really made no addition to our conceptions, but only disinvolved them. But as this process does furnish real *a priori* knowledge, which has a sure progress and useful results, reason, deceived by this, slips in, without being itself aware of it, assertions of a quite different kind; in which, to given conceptions it adds others, *a priori* indeed, but entirely foreign to them, without our knowing how it arrives at these, and, indeed, without such a question ever suggesting itself. I shall therefore at once proceed to examine the difference between these two modes of knowledge.

IV. Of the difference between analytical and synthetical judgments.

IN all judgments wherein the relation of a subject to the predicate is cogitated (I mention affirmative judgments only here; the application to negative will be very easy), this relation is possible in two different ways. Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A, as somewhat which is contained (though covertly) in the conception A; or the predicate B lies completely out of the conception A, although it stands in connection with it. In the first instance, I term the judgment analytical, in the second, synthetical. Analytical judgments (affirmative) are therefore those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is cogitated through identity; those in which this connection is cogitated without identity, are called synthetical judgments. The former may be called *explicative*, the latter *augmentative* judgments; because the former add in the predicate nothing to the conception of the subject, but only analyse it into its constituent conceptions, which were thought already in the subject, although in a confused manner; the latter add to our conceptions of the subject a predicate which was not contained in it, and which no analysis could ever have discovered therein. For example, when I say, “all bodies are extended,” this is an analytical judgment. For I need not go beyond the conception of *body* in order to find extension connected with it, but merely analyse the conception, that is, become conscious of the manifold properties which I think in that conception, in order to discover this predicate in it: it is therefore an analytical judgment. On the other hand, when I say, “all bodies are heavy,” the predicate is something totally different from that which I think in the mere conception of a body. By the addition of such a predicate, therefore, it becomes a synthetical judgment.

Judgments of experience, as such, are always synthetical. For it would be absurd to think of grounding an analytical judgment on experience, because in forming such a judgment I need not go out of the sphere of my conceptions, and therefore recourse to the testimony of experience is quite unnecessary. That “bodies are extended” is not an empirical judgment, but a proposition which stands firm *a priori*. For before addressing myself to experience, I already have in my conception all the requisite conditions for the judgment, and

I have only to extract the predicate from the conception, according to the principle of contradiction, and thereby at the same time become conscious of the necessity of the judgment, a necessity which I could never learn from experience. On the other hand, though at first I do not at all include the predicate of weight in my conception of body in general, that conception still indicates an object of experience, a part of the totality of experience, to which I can still add other parts; and this I do when I recognize by observation that bodies are heavy. I can cognize beforehand by analysis the conception of body through the characteristics of extension, impenetrability, shape, etc., all which are cogitated in this conception. But now I extend my knowledge, and looking back on experience from which I had derived this conception of body, I find weight at all times connected with the above characteristics, and therefore I synthetically add to my conceptions this as a predicate, and say, “all bodies are heavy.” Thus it is experience upon which rests the possibility of the synthesis of the predicate of weight with the conception of body, because both conceptions, although the one is not contained in the other, still belong to one another (only contingently, however), as parts of a whole, namely, of experience, which is itself a synthesis of intuitions.

But to synthetical judgments *a priori*, such aid is entirely wanting. If I go out of and beyond the conception A, in order to recognize another B as connected with it, what foundation have I to rest on, whereby to render the synthesis possible? I have here no longer the advantage of looking out in the sphere of experience for what I want. Let us take, for example, the proposition, “everything that happens has a cause.” In the conception of *something that happens*, I indeed think an existence which a certain time antecedes, and from this I can derive analytical judgments. But the conception of a cause lies quite out of the above conception, and indicates something entirely different from “that which happens,” and is consequently not contained in that conception. How then am I able to assert concerning the general conception—“that which happens”—something entirely different from that conception, and to recognize the conception of cause although not contained in it, yet as belonging to it, and even necessarily? what is here the unknown = X, upon which the understanding rests when it believes it has found, out of the conception A a foreign predicate B, which it nevertheless considers to be connected with it? It cannot be experience, because the principle adduced annexes the two representations, cause and effect, to the representation existence, not only with universality, which experience cannot give, but also with the expression of necessity, therefore completely *a priori* and from pure conceptions. Upon such synthetical, that is augmentative propositions, depends the whole aim of our speculative knowledge *a priori*; for although analytical judgments are indeed highly important and necessary, they are so, only to arrive at that clearness of conceptions which is requisite for a sure and extended synthesis, and this alone is a real acquisition.

V. In all theoretical sciences of reason, synthetical judgments;*a priori* are contained as principles.

MATHEMATICAL judgments are always synthetical. Hitherto this fact, though incontestably true and very important in its consequences, seems to have escaped the analysts of the human mind, nay, to be in complete opposition to all their conjectures. For as it was found that mathematical conclusions all proceed according to the principle of contradiction (which the nature of every apodeictic certainty requires), people became persuaded that the fundamental principles of the science also were recognized and admitted in the same way. But the notion is fallacious; for although a synthetical proposition can certainly be discerned by means of the principle of contradiction, this is possible only when another synthetical proposition precedes, from which the latter is deduced, but never of itself.

Before all, be it observed, that proper mathematical propositions are always judgments *a priori*, and not empirical, because they carry along with them the conception of necessity, which cannot be given by experience. If this be demurred to, it matters not; I will then limit my assertion to *pure* mathematics, the very conception of which implies that it consists of knowledge altogether non-empirical and *a priori*.

We might, indeed at first suppose that the proposition $7 + 5 = 12$ is a merely analytical proposition, following (according to the principle of contradiction) from the conception of a sum of seven and five. But if we regard it more narrowly, we find that our conception of the sum of seven and five contains nothing more than the uniting of both sums into one, whereby it cannot at all be cogitated what this single number is which embraces both. The conception of twelve is by no means obtained by merely cogitating the union of seven and five; and we may analyse our conception of such a possible sum as long as we will, still we shall never discover in it the notion of twelve. We must go beyond these conceptions, and have recourse to an intuition which corresponds to one of the two,—our five fingers, for example, or like Segner in his “Arithmetic,” five points, and so by degrees, add the units contained in the five given in the intuition, to the conception of seven. For I first take the number 7, and, for the conception of 5 calling in the aid of the fingers of my hand as objects of intuition, I add the units, which I before took together to make up the number 5, gradually now by means of the material image my hand, to the number 7, and by this process, I at length see the number 12 arise. That 7 should be added to 5, I have certainly cogitated in my conception of a sum $= 7 + 5$, but not that this sum was equal to 12. Arithmetical propositions are therefore always synthetical, of which we may become more clearly convinced by trying large numbers. For it will thus become quite evident that, turn and twist our conceptions as we may, it is impossible, without having recourse to intuition, to arrive at the sum total or product by means of the mere analysis of our conceptions. Just as little is any principle of pure geometry analytical. “A straight line between two points is the shortest,” is a synthetical proposition. For my conception of *straight*, contains no notion of *quantity*, but is merely *qualitative*. The conception of the *shortest* is therefore fore wholly an addition, and by

no analysis can it be extracted from our conception of a straight line. Intuition must therefore here lend its aid, by means of which, and thus only, our synthesis is possible.

Some few principles preposited by geometers are, indeed, really analytical, and depend on the principle of contradiction. They serve, however, like identical propositions, as links in the chain of method, not as principles,—for example, $a = a$, the whole is equal to itself, or $(a + b) = a + b$; $a > a$, the whole is greater than its part. And yet even these principles themselves, though they derive their validity from pure conceptions, are only admitted in mathematics because they can be presented in intuition. What causes us here commonly to believe that the predicate of such apodeictic judgments is already contained in our conception, and that the judgment is therefore analytical, is merely the equivocal nature of the expression. We must join in thought a certain predicate to a given conception, and this necessity cleaves already to the conception. But the question is, not what we must join in thought to the given conception, but what we really think therein, though only obscurely, and then it becomes manifest that the predicate pertains to these conceptions, necessarily indeed, yet not as thought in the conception itself, but by virtue of an intuition, which must be added to the conception.

The science of Natural Philosophy (Physics) contains in itself synthetical judgments *a priori*, as principles. I shall adduce two propositions. For instance, the proposition, “in all changes of the material world, the quantity of matter remains unchanged;” or, that, “in all communication of motion, action and re-action must always be equal.” In both of these, not only is the necessity, and therefore their origin *a priori* clear, but also that they are synthetical propositions. For in the conception of matter, I do not cogitate its permanency, but merely its presence in space, which it fills. I therefore really go out of and beyond the conception of matter, in order to think on to it something *a priori*, which I did not think in it. The proposition is therefore not analytical, but synthetical, and nevertheless conceived *a priori*; and so it is with regard to the other propositions of the pure part of natural philosophy.

As to metaphysics, even if we look upon it merely as an attempted science, yet, from the nature of human reason, an indispensable one, we find that it must contain synthetical propositions *a priori*. It is not merely the duty of metaphysics to dissect, and thereby analytically to illustrate the conceptions which we form *a priori* of things; but we seek to widen the range of our *a priori* knowledge. For this purpose, we must avail ourselves of such principles as add something to the original conception—something not identical with, nor contained in it, and by means of synthetical judgments *a priori*, leave far behind us the limits of experience; for example, in the proposition, “the world must have a beginning,” and such like. Thus metaphysics, according to the proper aim of the science, consists merely of synthetical propositions *a priori*.

VI. The universal problem of pure reason.

IT is extremely advantageous to be able to bring a number of investigations under the formula of a single

problem. For in this manner, we not only facilitate our own labour, inasmuch as we define it clearly to ourselves, but also render it more easy for others to decide whether we have done justice to our undertaking. The proper problem of pure reason, then, is contained in the question: “How are synthetical judgments *a priori* possible?”

That metaphysical science has hitherto remained in so vacillating a state of uncertainty and contradiction, is only to be attributed to the fact that this great problem, and perhaps even the difference between analytical and synthetical judgments, did not sooner suggest itself to philosophers. Upon the solution of this problem, or upon sufficient proof of the impossibility of synthetical knowledge *a priori*, depends the existence or downfall of the science of metaphysics. Among philosophers, David Hume came the nearest of all to this problem; yet it never acquired in his mind sufficient precision, nor did he regard the question in its universality. On the contrary, he stopped short at the synthetical proposition of the connection of an effect with its cause (*principium causalitatis*), insisting that such proposition *a priori* was impossible. According to his conclusions, then, all that we term metaphysical science is a mere delusion, arising from the fancied insight of reason into that which is in truth borrowed from experience, and to which habit has given the appearance of necessity. Against this assertion, destructive to all pure philosophy, he would have been guarded, had he had our problem before his eyes in its universality. For he would then have perceived that, according to his own argument, there likewise could not be any pure mathematical science, which assuredly cannot exist without synthetical propositions *a priori*,—an absurdity from which his good understanding must have saved him.

In the solution of the above problem is at the same time comprehended the possibility of the use of pure reason in the foundation and construction of all sciences which contain theoretical knowledge *a priori* of objects, that is to say, the answer to the following questions:

1. How is pure mathematical science possible?
2. How is pure natural science possible?

Respecting these sciences, as they do certainly exist, it may with propriety be asked, *how* they are possible?—for that they must be possible is shown by the fact of their really existing.¹ But as to metaphysics, the miserable progress it has hitherto made, and the fact that of no one system yet brought forward, far as regards its true aim, can it be said that this science really exists, leaves any one at liberty to doubt with reason the very possibility of its existence.

Yet, in a certain sense, this kind of knowledge must unquestionably be looked upon as *given*; in other words, metaphysics must be considered as really existing, if not as a science, nevertheless as a natural disposition of the human mind (*metaphysica naturalis*). For human reason, without any instigations imputable to the mere vanity of great knowledge, unceasingly progresses, urged on by its own feeling of need, towards such questions as cannot be answered by any empirical application of reason, or principles derived therefrom; and so there

has ever really existed in every man some system of metaphysics. It will always exist, so soon as reason awakes to the exercise of its power of speculation. And now the question arises—How is metaphysics, as a natural disposition, possible? In other words, how, from the nature of universal human reason, do those questions arise which pure reason proposes to itself, and which it is impelled by its own feeling of need to answer as well as it can?

But as in all the attempts hitherto made to answer the questions which reason is prompted by its very nature to propose to itself, for example, whether the world had a beginning, or has existed from eternity, it has always met with unavoidable contradictions, we must not rest satisfied with the mere natural disposition of the mind to metaphysics, that is, with the existence of the faculty of pure reason, whence, indeed, some sort of metaphysical system always arises; but it must be possible to arrive at certainty in regard to the question whether we know or do not know the things of which metaphysics treats. We must be able to arrive at a decision on the subjects of its questions, or on the ability or inability of reason to form any judgment respecting them; and therefore either to extend with confidence the bounds of our pure reason, or to set strictly defined and safe limits to its action. This last question, which arises out of the above universal problem, would properly run thus: How is metaphysics possible as a science?

Thus, the critique of reason leads at last, naturally and necessarily, to science; and, on the other hand, the dogmatical use of reason without criticism leads to groundless assertions, against which others equally specious can always be set, thus ending unavoidably in scepticism.

Besides, this science cannot be of great and formidable prolixity, because it has not to do with objects of reason, the variety of which is inexhaustible, but merely with Reason herself and her problems; problems which arise out of her own bosom, and are not proposed to her by the nature of outward things, but by her own nature. And when once Reason has previously become able completely to understand her own power in regard to objects which she meets with in experience, it will be easy to determine securely the extent and limits of her attempted application to objects beyond the confines of experience.

We may and must, therefore, regard the attempts hitherto made to establish metaphysical science dogmatically as non-existent. For what of analysis, that is, mere dissection of conceptions, is contained in one or other, is not the aim of, but only a preparation for metaphysics proper, which has for its object the extension, by means of synthesis, of our *a priori* knowledge. And for this purpose, mere analysis is of course useless, because it only shows what is contained in these conceptions, but not how we arrive, *a priori*, at them; and this it is her duty to show, in order to be able afterwards to determine their valid use in regard to all objects of experience, to all knowledge in general. But little self-denial, indeed, is needed to give up these pretensions, seeing the undeniable, and in the dogmatic mode of procedure, inevitable contradictions of Reason with herself, have long since ruined the reputation of every system of metaphysics that has appeared up to this time. It will require more firmness to remain undeterred by difficulty from within, and opposition from without, from endeavouring, by a method quite opposed to all those hitherto followed, to further the growth and fruitfulness

of a science indispensable to human reason—a science from which every branch it has borne may be cut away, but whose roots remain indestructible.

VII. Idea and division of a particular science, under the name of a Critique of Pure Reason.

FROM all that has been said, there results the idea of a particular science, which may be called the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For reason is the faculty which furnishes us with the principles of knowledge *a priori*. Hence, pure reason is the faculty which contains the principles of cognizing anything absolutely *a priori*. An Organon of pure reason would be a compendium of those principles according to which alone all pure cognitions *a priori* can be obtained. The completely extended application of such an organon would afford us a system of pure reason. As this, however, is demanding a great deal, and it is yet doubtful whether any extension of our knowledge be here possible, or, if so, in what cases; we can regard a science of the mere criticism of pure reason, its sources and limits, as the *propaedeutic* to a system of pure reason. Such a science must not be called a doctrine, but only a critique of pure reason; and its use, in regard to speculation, would be only negative, not to enlarge the bounds of, but to purify, our reason, and to shield it against error,—which alone is no little gain. I apply the term *transcendental* to all knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our cognition of these objects, so far as this mode of cognition is possible *a priori*. A system of such conceptions would be called *Transcendental Philosophy*. But this, again, is still beyond the bounds of our present essay. For as such a science must contain a complete exposition not only of our synthetical *a priori*, but of our analytical *a priori* knowledge, it is of too wide a range for our present purpose, because we do not require to carry our analysis any farther than is necessary to understand, in their full extent, the principles of synthesis *a priori*, with which alone we have to do. This investigation, which we cannot properly call a doctrine, but only a transcendental critique, because it aims not at the enlargement, but at the correction and guidance, of our knowledge, and is to serve as a touchstone of the worth or worthlessness of all knowledge *a priori*, is the sole object of our present essay. Such a critique is consequently, as far as possible, a preparation for an organon; and if this new organon should be found to fail, at least for a canon of pure reason, according to which the complete system of the philosophy of pure reason, whether it extend or limit the bounds of that reason, might one day be set forth both analytically and synthetically. For that this is possible, nay, that such a system is not of so great extent as to preclude the hope of its ever being completed, is evident. For we have not here to do with the nature of outward objects, which is infinite, but solely with the mind, which judges of the nature of objects, and, again, with the mind only in respect of its cognition *a priori*. And the object of our investigations, as it is not to be sought without, but, altogether within, ourselves, cannot remain concealed, and in all probability is limited enough to be completely surveyed and fairly estimated, according to its worth or worthlessness. Still less let the reader here expect a critique of books and systems of pure reason; our present object is exclusively a critique of the faculty of pure reason itself. Only when we make this critique our foundation, do we possess

a pure touchstone for estimating the philosophical value of ancient and modern writings on this subject; and without this criterion, the incompetent historian or judge decides upon and corrects the groundless assertions of others with his own, which have themselves just as little foundation.

Transcendental philosophy is the idea of a science, for which the Critique of Pure Reason must sketch the whole plan architectonically, that is, from principles, with a full guarantee for the validity and stability of all the parts which enter into the building. It is the system of all the principles of pure reason. If this Critique itself does not assume the title of transcendental philosophy, it is only because, to be a complete system, it ought to contain a full analysis of all human knowledge *a priori*. Our critique must, indeed, lay before us a complete enumeration of all the radical conceptions which constitute the said pure knowledge. But from the complete analysis of these conceptions themselves, as also from a complete investigation of those derived from them, it abstains with reason; partly because it would be deviating from the end in view to occupy itself with this analysis, since this process is not attended with the difficulty and insecurity to be found in the synthesis, to which our critique is entirely devoted, and partly because it would be inconsistent with the unity of our plan to burden this essay with the vindication of the completeness of such an analysis and deduction, with which, after all, we have at present nothing to do. This completeness of the analysis of these radical conceptions, as well as of the deduction from the conceptions *a priori* which may be given by the analysis, we can, however, easily attain, provided only that we are in possession of all these radical conceptions, which are to serve as principles of the synthesis, and that in respect of this main purpose nothing is wanting.

To the Critique of Pure Reason, therefore, belongs all that constitutes transcendental philosophy; and it is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, but still not the science itself; because it only proceeds so far with the analysis as is necessary to the power of judging completely of our synthetical knowledge *a priori*.

The principal thing we must attend to, in the division of the parts of a science like this, is: that no conceptions must enter it which contain aught empirical; in other words, that the knowledge *a priori* must be completely pure. Hence, although the highest principles and fundamental conceptions of morality are certainly cognitions *a priori*, yet they do not belong to transcendental philosophy; because though they certainly do not lay the conceptions of pain, pleasure, desires, inclinations, (which are all of empirical origin), at the foundation of its precepts, yet still into the conception of duty,—as an obstacle to be overcome, or as an incitement which should not be made into a motive,—these empirical conceptions must necessarily enter, in the construction of a system of pure morality. Transcendental philosophy is consequently a philosophy of the pure and merely speculative reason. For all that is practical, so far as it contains motives, relates to feelings, and these belong to empirical sources of cognition.

If we wish to divide this science from the universal point of view of a science in general, it ought to comprehend, first, a *Doctrine of the Elements*, and, secondly, a *Doctrine of the Method* of pure reason. Each of these main divisions will have its subdivisions, the separate reasons for which we cannot here particularize. Only so much seems necessary, by way of introduction of premonition, that there are two sources of human

knowledge (which probably spring from a common, but to us unknown root), namely, sense and understanding. By the former, objects are *given* to us; by the latter, *thought*. So far as the faculty of sense may contain representations *a priori*, which form the conditions under which objects are given, in so far it belongs to transcendental philosophy. The transcendental doctrine of sense must form the first part of our science of elements, because the conditions under which alone the objects of human knowledge are given must precede those under which they are thought.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Project Gutenberg, 2003), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4280>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain



This work (Transcendental Idealism by Immanuel Kant) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. As to the existence of pure natural science, or physics, perhaps many may still express doubts. But we have only to look at the different propositions which are commonly treated of at the commencement of proper (empirical) physical science—those, for example, relating to the permanence of the same quantity of matter, the vis inertiae, the equality of action and reaction, etc.—to be soon convinced that they form a science of pure physics (*physica pura*, or *rationalis*), which well deserves to be separately exposed as a special science, in its whole extent, whether that be great or confined.

SELECTIONS FROM "PRAGMATISM: A NEW NAME FOR SOME OLD WAYS OF THINKING" BY WILLIAM JAMES

William James

Editor's Note: This chapter contains the first two lectures of eight by William James published as "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking." The entire text can be found using the link in the Citation and Use Note at the end of the chapter.

Preface

The lectures that follow were delivered at the Lowell Institute in Boston in November and December, 1906, and in January, 1907, at Columbia University, in New York. They are printed as delivered, without developments or notes. The pragmatic movement, so-called—I do not like the name, but apparently it is too late to change it—seems to have rather suddenly precipitated itself out of the air. A number of tendencies that have always existed in philosophy have all at once become conscious of themselves collectively, and of their combined mission; and this has occurred in so many countries, and from so many different points of view, that much unconcerted statement has resulted. I have sought to unify the picture as it presents itself to my own eyes, dealing in broad strokes, and avoiding minute controversy. Much futile controversy might have been avoided, I believe, if our critics had been willing to wait until we got our message fairly out.

If my lectures interest any reader in the general subject, he will doubtless wish to read farther. I therefore give him a few references.

In America, John Dewey's 'Studies in Logical Theory' are the foundation. Read also by Dewey the articles in the *Philosophical Review*, vol. xv, pp. 113 and 465, in *Mind*, vol. xv, p. 293, and in the *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. iv, p. 197.

Probably the best statements to begin with however, are F. C. S. Schiller's in his 'Studies in Humanism,' especially the essays numbered i, v, vi, vii, xviii and xix. His previous essays and in general the polemic literature of the subject are fully referred to in his footnotes.

Furthermore, see G. Milhaud: *le Rationnel*, 1898, and the fine articles by Le Roy in the *Revue de Metaphysique*, vols. 7, 8 and 9. Also articles by Blondel and de Saily in the *Annales de Philosophie Chretienne*, 4me Serie, vols. 2 and 3. Papini announces a book on Pragmatism, in the French language, to be published very soon.

To avoid one misunderstanding at least, let me say that there is no logical connexion between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine which I have recently set forth as 'radical empiricism.' The latter stands on its own feet. One may entirely reject it and still be a pragmatist.

Harvard University, April, 1907.

Lecture I – The Present Dilemma in Philosophy

In the preface to that admirable collection of essays of his called 'Heretics,' Mr. Chesterton writes these words: "There are some people—and I am one of them—who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy, it is important to know the enemy's numbers, but still more important to know the enemy's philosophy. We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether, in the long run, anything else affects them."

I think with Mr. Chesterton in this matter. I know that you, ladies and gentlemen, have a philosophy, each and all of you, and that the most interesting and important thing about you is the way in which it determines the perspective in your several worlds. You know the same of me. And yet I confess to a certain tremor at the audacity of the enterprise which I am about to begin. For the philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos. I have no right to assume that many of you are students of the cosmos in the class-room sense, yet here I stand desirous of interesting you in a philosophy which to no small extent has to be technically treated. I wish to fill you with sympathy with a contemporaneous tendency in which I profoundly believe, and yet I have to talk like a professor to you who are not students. Whatever universe a professor believes in must at any rate be a universe that lends itself to lengthy discourse. A universe definable in two sentences is something for which the professorial intellect has no use. No faith in anything of that cheap kind! I have heard friends and colleagues try to popularize philosophy in this very hall, but they soon grew dry, and then technical, and the results were only partially encouraging. So my enterprise is a bold one. The founder of pragmatism himself recently gave a course of lectures at the Lowell Institute with that very word in its title—flashes of brilliant light relieved against

Cimmerian darkness! None of us, I fancy, understood ALL that he said—yet here I stand, making a very similar venture.

I risk it because the very lectures I speak of DREW—they brought good audiences. There is, it must be confessed, a curious fascination in hearing deep things talked about, even tho neither we nor the disputants understand them. We get the problematic thrill, we feel the presence of the vastness. Let a controversy begin in a smoking-room anywhere, about free-will or God's omniscience, or good and evil, and see how everyone in the place pricks up his ears. Philosophy's results concern us all most vitally, and philosophy's queerest arguments tickle agreeably our sense of subtlety and ingenuity.

Believing in philosophy myself devoutly, and believing also that a kind of new dawn is breaking upon us philosophers, I feel impelled, *per fas aut nefas*, to try to impart to you some news of the situation.

Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits. It works in the minutest crannies and it opens out the widest vistas. It 'bakes no bread,' as has been said, but it can inspire our souls with courage; and repugnant as its manners, its doubting and challenging, its quibbling and dialectics, often are to common people, no one of us can get along without the far-flashing beams of light it sends over the world's perspectives. These illuminations at least, and the contrast-effects of darkness and mystery that accompany them, give to what it says an interest that is much more than professional.

The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments. Undignified as such a treatment may seem to some of my colleagues, I shall have to take account of this clash and explain a good many of the divergencies of philosophers by it. Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries when philosophizing to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would. He trusts his temperament. Wanting a universe that suits it, he believes in any representation of the universe that does suit it. He feels men of opposite temper to be out of key with the world's character, and in his heart considers them incompetent and 'not in it,' in the philosophic business, even tho they may far excel him in dialectical ability.

Yet in the forum he can make no claim, on the bare ground of his temperament, to superior discernment or authority. There arises thus a certain insincerity in our philosophic discussions: the potentest of all our premises is never mentioned. I am sure it would contribute to clearness if in these lectures we should break this rule and mention it, and I accordingly feel free to do so.

Of course I am talking here of very positively marked men, men of radical idiosyncrasy, who have set their stamp and likeness on philosophy and figure in its history. Plato, Locke, Hegel, Spencer, are such

temperamental thinkers. Most of us have, of course, no very definite intellectual temperament, we are a mixture of opposite ingredients, each one present very moderately. We hardly know our own preferences in abstract matters; some of us are easily talked out of them, and end by following the fashion or taking up with the beliefs of the most impressive philosopher in our neighborhood, whoever he may be. But the one thing that has COUNTED so far in philosophy is that a man should see things, see them straight in his own peculiar way, and be dissatisfied with any opposite way of seeing them. There is no reason to suppose that this strong temperamental vision is from now onward to count no longer in the history of man's beliefs.

Now the particular difference of temperament that I have in mind in making these remarks is one that has counted in literature, art, government and manners as well as in philosophy. In manners we find formalists and free-and-easy persons. In government, authoritarians and anarchists. In literature, purists or academicals, and realists. In art, classics and romantics. You recognize these contrasts as familiar; well, in philosophy we have a very similar contrast expressed in the pair of terms 'rationalist' and 'empiricist,' 'empiricist' meaning your lover of facts in all their crude variety, 'rationalist' meaning your devotee to abstract and eternal principles. No one can live an hour without both facts and principles, so it is a difference rather of emphasis; yet it breeds antipathies of the most pungent character between those who lay the emphasis differently; and we shall find it extraordinarily convenient to express a certain contrast in men's ways of taking their universe, by talking of the 'empiricist' and of the 'rationalist' temper. These terms make the contrast simple and massive.

More simple and massive than are usually the men of whom the terms are predicated. For every sort of permutation and combination is possible in human nature; and if I now proceed to define more fully what I have in mind when I speak of rationalists and empiricists, by adding to each of those titles some secondary qualifying characteristics, I beg you to regard my conduct as to a certain extent arbitrary. I select types of combination that nature offers very frequently, but by no means uniformly, and I select them solely for their convenience in helping me to my ulterior purpose of characterizing pragmatism. Historically we find the terms 'intellectualism' and 'sensationalism' used as synonyms of 'rationalism' and 'empiricism.' Well, nature seems to combine most frequently with intellectualism an idealistic and optimistic tendency. Empiricists on the other hand are not uncommonly materialistic, and their optimism is apt to be decidedly conditional and tremulous. Rationalism is always monistic. It starts from wholes and universals, and makes much of the unity of things. Empiricism starts from the parts, and makes of the whole a collection—is not averse therefore to calling itself pluralistic. Rationalism usually considers itself more religious than empiricism, but there is much to say about this claim, so I merely mention it. It is a true claim when the individual rationalist is what is called a man of feeling, and when the individual empiricist prides himself on being hard-headed. In that case the rationalist will usually also be in favor of what is called free-will, and the empiricist will be a fatalist—I use the terms most popularly current. The rationalist finally will be of dogmatic temper in his affirmations, while the empiricist may be more sceptical and open to discussion.

I will write these traits down in two columns. I think you will practically recognize the two types of mental make-up that I mean if I head the columns by the titles 'tender-minded' and 'tough-minded' respectively.

THE TENDER-MINDED

Rationalistic (going by 'principles'), Intellectualistic, Idealistic, Optimistic, Religious, Free-willist, Monistic, Dogmatical.

THE TOUGH-MINDED

Empiricist (going by 'facts'), Sensationalistic, Materialistic, Pessimistic, Irreligious, Fatalistic, Pluralistic, Sceptical.

Pray postpone for a moment the question whether the two contrasted mixtures which I have written down are each inwardly coherent and self-consistent or not—I shall very soon have a good deal to say on that point. It suffices for our immediate purpose that tender-minded and tough-minded people, characterized as I have written them down, do both exist. Each of you probably knows some well-marked example of each type, and you know what each example thinks of the example on the other side of the line. They have a low opinion of each other. Their antagonism, whenever as individuals their temperaments have been intense, has formed in all ages a part of the philosophic atmosphere of the time. It forms a part of the philosophic atmosphere to-day. The tough think of the tender as sentimentalists and soft-heads. The tender feel the tough to be unrefined, callous, or brutal. Their mutual reaction is very much like that that takes place when Bostonian tourists mingle with a population like that of Cripple Creek. Each type believes the other to be inferior to itself; but disdain in the one case is mingled with amusement, in the other it has a dash of fear.

Now, as I have already insisted, few of us are tender-foot Bostonians pure and simple, and few are typical Rocky Mountain toughs, in philosophy. Most of us have a hankering for the good things on both sides of the line. Facts are good, of course—give us lots of facts. Principles are good—give us plenty of principles. The world is indubitably one if you look at it in one way, but as indubitably is it many, if you look at it in another. It is both one and many—let us adopt a sort of pluralistic monism. Everything of course is necessarily determined, and yet of course our wills are free: a sort of free-will determinism is the true philosophy. The evil of the parts is undeniable; but the whole can't be evil: so practical pessimism may be combined with metaphysical optimism. And so forth—your ordinary philosophic layman never being a radical, never straightening out his system, but living vaguely in one plausible compartment of it or another to suit the temptations of successive hours.

But some of us are more than mere laymen in philosophy. We are worthy of the name of amateur athletes, and are vexed by too much inconsistency and vacillation in our creed. We cannot preserve a good intellectual conscience so long as we keep mixing incompatibles from opposite sides of the line.

And now I come to the first positively important point which I wish to make. Never were as many men of

a decidedly empiricist proclivity in existence as there are at the present day. Our children, one may say, are almost born scientific. But our esteem for facts has not neutralized in us all religiousness. It is itself almost religious. Our scientific temper is devout. Now take a man of this type, and let him be also a philosophic amateur, unwilling to mix a hodge-podge system after the fashion of a common layman, and what does he find his situation to be, in this blessed year of our Lord 1906? He wants facts; he wants science; but he also wants a religion. And being an amateur and not an independent originator in philosophy he naturally looks for guidance to the experts and professionals whom he finds already in the field. A very large number of you here present, possibly a majority of you, are amateurs of just this sort.

Now what kinds of philosophy do you find actually offered to meet your need? You find an empirical philosophy that is not religious enough, and a religious philosophy that is not empirical enough for your purpose. If you look to the quarter where facts are most considered you find the whole tough-minded program in operation, and the 'conflict between science and religion' in full blast. Either it is that Rocky Mountain tough of a Haeckel with his materialistic monism, his ether-god and his jest at your God as a 'gaseous vertebrate'; or it is Spencer treating the world's history as a redistribution of matter and motion solely, and bowing religion politely out at the front door:—she may indeed continue to exist, but she must never show her face inside the temple. For a hundred and fifty years past the progress of science has seemed to mean the enlargement of the material universe and the diminution of man's importance. The result is what one may call the growth of naturalistic or positivistic feeling. Man is no law-giver to nature, he is an absorber. She it is who stands firm; he it is who must accommodate himself. Let him record truth, inhuman tho it be, and submit to it! The romantic spontaneity and courage are gone, the vision is materialistic and depressing. Ideals appear as inert by-products of physiology; what is higher is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of 'nothing but'—nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort. You get, in short, a materialistic universe, in which only the tough-minded find themselves congenially at home.

If now, on the other hand, you turn to the religious quarter for consolation, and take counsel of the tender-minded philosophies, what do you find?

Religious philosophy in our day and generation is, among us English-reading people, of two main types. One of these is more radical and aggressive, the other has more the air of fighting a slow retreat. By the more radical wing of religious philosophy I mean the so-called transcendental idealism of the Anglo-Hegelian school, the philosophy of such men as Green, the Cairds, Bosanquet, and Royce. This philosophy has greatly influenced the more studious members of our protestant ministry. It is pantheistic, and undoubtedly it has already blunted the edge of the traditional theism in protestantism at large.

That theism remains, however. It is the lineal descendant, through one stage of concession after another, of the dogmatic scholastic theism still taught rigorously in the seminaries of the catholic church. For a long time it used to be called among us the philosophy of the Scottish school. It is what I meant by the philosophy that has the air of fighting a slow retreat. Between the encroachments of the hegelians and other philosophers of

the 'Absolute,' on the one hand, and those of the scientific evolutionists and agnostics, on the other, the men that give us this kind of a philosophy, James Martineau, Professor Bowne, Professor Ladd and others, must feel themselves rather tightly squeezed. Fair-minded and candid as you like, this philosophy is not radical in temper. It is eclectic, a thing of compromises, that seeks a *modus vivendi* above all things. It accepts the facts of darwinism, the facts of cerebral physiology, but it does nothing active or enthusiastic with them. It lacks the victorious and aggressive note. It lacks prestige in consequence; whereas absolutism has a certain prestige due to the more radical style of it.

These two systems are what you have to choose between if you turn to the tender-minded school. And if you are the lovers of facts I have supposed you to be, you find the trail of the serpent of rationalism, of intellectualism, over everything that lies on that side of the line. You escape indeed the materialism that goes with the reigning empiricism; but you pay for your escape by losing contact with the concrete parts of life. The more absolutistic philosophers dwell on so high a level of abstraction that they never even try to come down. The absolute mind which they offer us, the mind that makes our universe by thinking it, might, for aught they show us to the contrary, have made any one of a million other universes just as well as this. You can deduce no single actual particular from the notion of it. It is compatible with any state of things whatever being true here below. And the theistic God is almost as sterile a principle. You have to go to the world which he has created to get any inkling of his actual character: he is the kind of god that has once for all made that kind of a world. The God of the theistic writers lives on as purely abstract heights as does the Absolute. Absolutism has a certain sweep and dash about it, while the usual theism is more insipid, but both are equally remote and vacuous. What you want is a philosophy that will not only exercise your powers of intellectual abstraction, but that will make some positive connexion with this actual world of finite human lives.

You want a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type. And this is then your dilemma: you find the two parts of your *quaesitum* hopelessly separated. You find empiricism with inhumanism and irreligion; or else you find a rationalistic philosophy that indeed may call itself religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows.

I am not sure how many of you live close enough to philosophy to realize fully what I mean by this last reproach, so I will dwell a little longer on that unreality in all rationalistic systems by which your serious believer in facts is so apt to feel repelled.

I wish that I had saved the first couple of pages of a thesis which a student handed me a year or two ago. They illustrated my point so clearly that I am sorry I cannot read them to you now. This young man, who was a graduate of some Western college, began by saying that he had always taken for granted that when you entered a philosophic class-room you had to open relations with a universe entirely distinct from the one you left behind you in the street. The two were supposed, he said, to have so little to do with each other, that you could not

possibly occupy your mind with them at the same time. The world of concrete personal experiences to which the street belongs is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed. The world to which your philosophy-professor introduces you is simple, clean and noble. The contradictions of real life are absent from it. Its architecture is classic. Principles of reason trace its outlines, logical necessities cement its parts. Purity and dignity are what it most expresses. It is a kind of marble temple shining on a hill.

In point of fact it is far less an account of this actual world than a clear addition built upon it, a classic sanctuary in which the rationalist fancy may take refuge from the intolerably confused and gothic character which mere facts present. It is no EXPLANATION of our concrete universe, it is another thing altogether, a substitute for it, a remedy, a way of escape.

Its temperament, if I may use the word temperament here, is utterly alien to the temperament of existence in the concrete. REFINEMENT is what characterizes our intellectualist philosophies. They exquisitely satisfy that craving for a refined object of contemplation which is so powerful an appetite of the mind. But I ask you in all seriousness to look abroad on this colossal universe of concrete facts, on their awful bewilderingments, their surprises and cruelties, on the wildness which they show, and then to tell me whether 'refined' is the one inevitable descriptive adjective that springs to your lips.

Refinement has its place in things, true enough. But a philosophy that breathes out nothing but refinement will never satisfy the empiricist temper of mind. It will seem rather a monument of artificiality. So we find men of science preferring to turn their backs on metaphysics as on something altogether cloistered and spectral, and practical men shaking philosophy's dust off their feet and following the call of the wild.

Truly there is something a little ghastly in the satisfaction with which a pure but unreal system will fill a rationalist mind. Leibnitz was a rationalist mind, with infinitely more interest in facts than most rationalist minds can show. Yet if you wish for superficiality incarnate, you have only to read that charmingly written 'Theodicee' of his, in which he sought to justify the ways of God to man, and to prove that the world we live in is the best of possible worlds. Let me quote a specimen of what I mean.

Among other obstacles to his optimistic philosophy, it falls to Leibnitz to consider the number of the eternally damned. That it is infinitely greater, in our human case, than that of those saved he assumes as a premise from the theologians, and then proceeds to argue in this way. Even then, he says:

"The evil will appear as almost nothing in comparison with the good, if we once consider the real magnitude of the City of God. Coelius Secundus Curio has written a little book, 'De Amplitudine Regni Coelestis,' which was reprinted not long ago. But he failed to compass the extent of the kingdom of the heavens. The ancients had small ideas of the works of God. ... It seemed to them that only our earth had inhabitants, and even the notion of our antipodes gave them pause. The rest of the world for them consisted of some shining globes and a few crystalline spheres. But to-day, whatever be the limits that we may grant or refuse to the Universe we

must recognize in it a countless number of globes, as big as ours or bigger, which have just as much right as it has to support rational inhabitants, tho it does not follow that these need all be men. Our earth is only one among the six principal satellites of our sun. As all the fixed stars are suns, one sees how small a place among visible things our earth takes up, since it is only a satellite of one among them. Now all these suns MAY be inhabited by none but happy creatures; and nothing obliges us to believe that the number of damned persons is very great; for a VERY FEW INSTANCES AND SAMPLES SUFFICE FOR THE UTILITY WHICH GOOD DRAWS FROM EVIL. Moreover, since there is no reason to suppose that there are stars everywhere, may there not be a great space beyond the region of the stars? And this immense space, surrounding all this region, ... may be replete with happiness and glory. ... What now becomes of the consideration of our Earth and of its denizens? Does it not dwindle to something incomparably less than a physical point, since our Earth is but a point compared with the distance of the fixed stars. Thus the part of the Universe which we know, being almost lost in nothingness compared with that which is unknown to us, but which we are yet obliged to admit; and all the evils that we know lying in this almost-nothing; it follows that the evils may be almost-nothing in comparison with the goods that the Universe contains."

Leibnitz continues elsewhere: "There is a kind of justice which aims neither at the amendment of the criminal, nor at furnishing an example to others, nor at the reparation of the injury. This justice is founded in pure fitness, which finds a certain satisfaction in the expiation of a wicked deed. The Socinians and Hobbes objected to this punitive justice, which is properly vindictive justice and which God has reserved for himself at many junctures. ... It is always founded in the fitness of things, and satisfies not only the offended party, but all wise lookers-on, even as beautiful music or a fine piece of architecture satisfies a well-constituted mind. It is thus that the torments of the damned continue, even tho they serve no longer to turn anyone away from sin, and that the rewards of the blest continue, even tho they confirm no one in good ways. The damned draw to themselves ever new penalties by their continuing sins, and the blest attract ever fresh joys by their unceasing progress in good. Both facts are founded on the principle of fitness, ... for God has made all things harmonious in perfection as I have already said."

Leibnitz's feeble grasp of reality is too obvious to need comment from me. It is evident that no realistic image of the experience of a damned soul had ever approached the portals of his mind. Nor had it occurred to him that the smaller is the number of 'samples' of the genus 'lost-soul' whom God throws as a sop to the eternal fitness, the more unequivocally grounded is the glory of the blest. What he gives us is a cold literary exercise, whose cheerful substance even hell-fire does not warm.

And do not tell me that to show the shallowness of rationalist philosophizing I have had to go back to a shallow wigpated age. The optimism of present-day rationalism sounds just as shallow to the fact-loving mind. The actual universe is a thing wide open, but rationalism makes systems, and systems must be closed. For men in practical life perfection is something far off and still in process of achievement. This for rationalism is but the illusion of the finite and relative: the absolute ground of things is a perfection eternally complete.

I find a fine example of revolt against the airy and shallow optimism of current religious philosophy in a publication of that valiant anarchistic writer Morrison I. Swift. Mr. Swift's anarchism goes a little farther than mine does, but I confess that I sympathize a good deal, and some of you, I know, will sympathize heartily with his dissatisfaction with the idealistic optimisms now in vogue. He begins his pamphlet on 'Human Submission' with a series of city reporter's items from newspapers (suicides, deaths from starvation and the like) as specimens of our civilized regime. For instance:

"After trudging through the snow from one end of the city to the other in the vain hope of securing employment, and with his wife and six children without food and ordered to leave their home in an upper east side tenement house because of non-payment of rent, John Corcoran, a clerk, to-day ended his life by drinking carbolic acid. Corcoran lost his position three weeks ago through illness, and during the period of idleness his scanty savings disappeared. Yesterday he obtained work with a gang of city snow shovelers, but he was too weak from illness and was forced to quit after an hour's trial with the shovel. Then the weary task of looking for employment was again resumed. Thoroughly discouraged, Corcoran returned to his home late last night to find his wife and children without food and the notice of dispossession on the door.' On the following morning he drank the poison.

"The records of many more such cases lie before me [Mr. Swift goes on]; an encyclopedia might easily be filled with their kind. These few I cite as an interpretation of the universe. 'We are aware of the presence of God in His world,' says a writer in a recent English Review. [The very presence of ill in the temporal order is the condition of the perfection of the eternal order, writes Professor Royce ('The World and the Individual,' II, 385).] 'The Absolute is the richer for every discord, and for all diversity which it embraces,' says F. H. Bradley (Appearance and Reality, 204). He means that these slain men make the universe richer, and that is Philosophy. But while Professors Royce and Bradley and a whole host of guileless thoroughbred thinkers are unveiling Reality and the Absolute and explaining away evil and pain, this is the condition of the only beings known to us anywhere in the universe with a developed consciousness of what the universe is. What these people experience IS Reality. It gives us an absolute phase of the universe. It is the personal experience of those most qualified in all our circle of knowledge to HAVE experience, to tell us WHAT is. Now, what does THINKING ABOUT the experience of these persons come to compared with directly, personally feeling it, as they feel it? The philosophers are dealing in shades, while those who live and feel know truth. And the mind of mankind-not yet the mind of philosophers and of the proprietary class-but of the great mass of the silently thinking and feeling men, is coming to this view. They are judging the universe as they have heretofore permitted the hierophants of religion and learning to judge THEM. ...

"This Cleveland workingman, killing his children and himself [another of the cited cases], is one of the elemental, stupendous facts of this modern world and of this universe. It cannot be glozed over or minimized away by all the treatises on God, and Love, and Being, helplessly existing in their haughty monumental vacuity. This is one of the simple irreducible elements of this world's life after millions of years of divine opportunity

and twenty centuries of Christ. It is in the moral world like atoms or sub-atoms in the physical, primary, indestructible. And what it blazons to man is the ... imposture of all philosophy which does not see in such events the consummate factor of conscious experience. These facts invincibly prove religion a nullity. Man will not give religion two thousand centuries or twenty centuries more to try itself and waste human time; its time is up, its probation is ended. Its own record ends it. Mankind has not sons and eternities to spare for trying out discredited systems...." [Footnote: Morrison I. Swift, *Human Submission*, Part Second, Philadelphia, Liberty Press, 1905, pp. 4-10.]

Such is the reaction of an empiricist mind upon the rationalist bill of fare. It is an absolute 'No, I thank you.' "Religion," says Mr. Swift, "is like a sleep-walker to whom actual things are blank." And such, tho possibly less tensely charged with feeling, is the verdict of every seriously inquiring amateur in philosophy to-day who turns to the philosophy-professors for the wherewithal to satisfy the fulness of his nature's needs. Empiricist writers give him a materialism, rationalists give him something religious, but to that religion "actual things are blank." He becomes thus the judge of us philosophers. Tender or tough, he finds us wanting. None of us may treat his verdicts disdainfully, for after all, his is the typically perfect mind, the mind the sum of whose demands is greatest, the mind whose criticisms and dissatisfactions are fatal in the long run.

It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear. I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts. I hope I may be able to leave many of you with as favorable an opinion of it as I preserve myself. Yet, as I am near the end of my hour, I will not introduce pragmatism bodily now. I will begin with it on the stroke of the clock next time. I prefer at the present moment to return a little on what I have said.

If any of you here are professional philosophers, and some of you I know to be such, you will doubtless have felt my discourse so far to have been crude in an unpardonable, nay, in an almost incredible degree. Tender-minded and tough-minded, what a barbaric disjunction! And, in general, when philosophy is all compacted of delicate intellectualities and subtleties and scrupulosities, and when every possible sort of combination and transition obtains within its bounds, what a brutal caricature and reduction of highest things to the lowest possible expression is it to represent its field of conflict as a sort of rough-and-tumble fight between two hostile temperaments! What a childishly external view! And again, how stupid it is to treat the abstractness of rationalist systems as a crime, and to damn them because they offer themselves as sanctuaries and places of escape, rather than as prolongations of the world of facts. Are not all our theories just remedies and places of escape? And, if philosophy is to be religious, how can she be anything else than a place of escape from the crassness of reality's surface? What better thing can she do than raise us out of our animal senses and show us another and a nobler home for our minds in that great framework of ideal principles subtending all reality, which the intellect divines? How can principles and general views ever be anything but abstract outlines?

Was Cologne cathedral built without an architect's plan on paper? Is refinement in itself an abomination? Is concrete rudeness the only thing that's true?

Believe me, I feel the full force of the indictment. The picture I have given is indeed monstrously oversimplified and rude. But like all abstractions, it will prove to have its use. If philosophers can treat the life of the universe abstractly, they must not complain of an abstract treatment of the life of philosophy itself. In point of fact the picture I have given is, however coarse and sketchy, literally true. Temperaments with their cravings and refusals do determine men in their philosophies, and always will. The details of systems may be reasoned out piecemeal, and when the student is working at a system, he may often forget the forest for the single tree. But when the labor is accomplished, the mind always performs its big summarizing act, and the system forthwith stands over against one like a living thing, with that strange simple note of individuality which haunts our memory, like the wraith of the man, when a friend or enemy of ours is dead.

Not only Walt Whitman could write "who touches this book touches a man." The books of all the great philosophers are like so many men. Our sense of an essential personal flavor in each one of them, typical but indescribable, is the finest fruit of our own accomplished philosophic education. What the system pretends to be is a picture of the great universe of God. What it is—and oh so flagrantly!—is the revelation of how intensely odd the personal flavor of some fellow creature is. Once reduced to these terms (and all our philosophies get reduced to them in minds made critical by learning) our commerce with the systems reverts to the informal, to the instinctive human reaction of satisfaction or dislike. We grow as peremptory in our rejection or admission, as when a person presents himself as a candidate for our favor; our verdicts are couched in as simple adjectives of praise or dispraise. We measure the total character of the universe as we feel it, against the flavor of the philosophy proffered us, and one word is enough.

"Statt der lebendigen Natur," we say, "da Gott die Menschen schuf hinein"—that nebulous concoction, that wooden, that straight-laced thing, that crabbed artificiality, that musty schoolroom product, that sick man's dream! Away with it. Away with all of them! Impossible! Impossible!

Our work over the details of his system is indeed what gives us our resultant impression of the philosopher, but it is on the resultant impression itself that we react. Expertness in philosophy is measured by the definiteness of our summarizing reactions, by the immediate perceptive epithet with which the expert hits such complex objects off. But great expertness is not necessary for the epithet to come. Few people have definitely articulated philosophies of their own. But almost everyone has his own peculiar sense of a certain total character in the universe, and of the inadequacy fully to match it of the peculiar systems that he knows. They don't just cover HIS world. One will be too dapper, another too pedantic, a third too much of a job-lot of opinions, a fourth too morbid, and a fifth too artificial, or what not. At any rate he and we know offhand that such philosophies are out of plumb and out of key and out of 'whack,' and have no business to speak up in the universe's name. Plato, Locke, Spinoza, Mill, Caird, Hegel—I prudently avoid names nearer home!—I am sure that to many of you, my hearers, these names are little more than reminders of as many curious personal ways

of falling short. It would be an obvious absurdity if such ways of taking the universe were actually true. We philosophers have to reckon with such feelings on your part. In the last resort, I repeat, it will be by them that all our philosophies shall ultimately be judged. The finally victorious way of looking at things will be the most completely IMPRESSIVE way to the normal run of minds.

One word more—namely about philosophies necessarily being abstract outlines. There are outlines and outlines, outlines of buildings that are FAT, conceived in the cube by their planner, and outlines of buildings invented flat on paper, with the aid of ruler and compass. These remain skinny and emaciated even when set up in stone and mortar, and the outline already suggests that result. An outline in itself is meagre, truly, but it does not necessarily suggest a meagre thing. It is the essential meagreness of WHAT IS SUGGESTED by the usual rationalistic philosophies that moves empiricists to their gesture of rejection. The case of Herbert Spencer's system is much to the point here. Rationalists feel his fearful array of insufficiencies. His dry schoolmaster temperament, the hurdy-gurdy monotony of him, his preference for cheap makeshifts in argument, his lack of education even in mechanical principles, and in general the vagueness of all his fundamental ideas, his whole system wooden, as if knocked together out of cracked hemlock boards—and yet the half of England wants to bury him in Westminster Abbey.

Why? Why does Spencer call out so much reverence in spite of his weakness in rationalistic eyes? Why should so many educated men who feel that weakness, you and I perhaps, wish to see him in the Abbey notwithstanding?

Simply because we feel his heart to be IN THE RIGHT PLACE philosophically. His principles may be all skin and bone, but at any rate his books try to mould themselves upon the particular shape of this, particular world's carcase. The noise of facts resounds through all his chapters, the citations of fact never cease, he emphasizes facts, turns his face towards their quarter; and that is enough. It means the right kind of thing for the empiricist mind.

The pragmatistic philosophy of which I hope to begin talking in my next lecture preserves as cordial a relation with facts, and, unlike Spencer's philosophy, it neither begins nor ends by turning positive religious constructions out of doors—it treats them cordially as well.

I hope I may lead you to find it just the mediating way of thinking that you require.

Lecture II – What Pragmatism Means

Some years ago, being with a camping party in the mountains, I returned from a solitary ramble to find everyone engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute. The corpus of the dispute was a squirrel—a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree-trunk; while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the

tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught. The resultant metaphysical problem now is this: DOES THE MAN GO ROUND THE SQUIRREL OR NOT? He goes round the tree, sure enough, and the squirrel is on the tree; but does he go round the squirrel? In the unlimited leisure of the wilderness, discussion had been worn threadbare. Everyone had taken sides, and was obstinate; and the numbers on both sides were even. Each side, when I appeared, therefore appealed to me to make it a majority. Mindful of the scholastic adage that whenever you meet a contradiction you must make a distinction, I immediately sought and found one, as follows: "Which party is right," I said, "depends on what you PRACTICALLY MEAN by 'going round' the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him, for by the compensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned towards the man all the time, and his back turned away. Make the distinction, and there is no occasion for any farther dispute. You are both right and both wrong according as you conceive the verb 'to go round' in one practical fashion or the other."

Altho one or two of the hotter disputants called my speech a shuffling evasion, saying they wanted no quibbling or scholastic hair-splitting, but meant just plain honest English 'round,' the majority seemed to think that the distinction had assuaged the dispute.

I tell this trivial anecdote because it is a peculiarly simple example of what I wish now to speak of as THE PRAGMATIC METHOD. The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual?—here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right.

A glance at the history of the idea will show you still better what pragmatism means. The term is derived from the same Greek word [$\pi\rho\alpha\gamma\mu\alpha$], meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come. It was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878. In an article entitled 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear,' in the 'Popular Science Monthly' for January of that year [Footnote: Translated in the *Revue Philosophique* for January, 1879 (vol. vii).] Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all

our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.

This is the principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism. It lay entirely unnoticed by anyone for twenty years, until I, in an address before Professor Howison's philosophical union at the university of California, brought it forward again and made a special application of it to religion. By that date (1898) the times seemed ripe for its reception. The word 'pragmatism' spread, and at present it fairly spots the pages of the philosophic journals. On all hands we find the 'pragmatic movement' spoken of, sometimes with respect, sometimes with contumely, seldom with clear understanding. It is evident that the term applies itself conveniently to a number of tendencies that hitherto have lacked a collective name, and that it has 'come to stay.'

To take in the importance of Peirce's principle, one must get accustomed to applying it to concrete cases. I found a few years ago that Ostwald, the illustrious Leipzig chemist, had been making perfectly distinct use of the principle of pragmatism in his lectures on the philosophy of science, tho he had not called it by that name.

"All realities influence our practice," he wrote me, "and that influence is their meaning for us. I am accustomed to put questions to my classes in this way: In what respects would the world be different if this alternative or that were true? If I can find nothing that would become different, then the alternative has no sense."

That is, the rival views mean practically the same thing, and meaning, other than practical, there is for us none. Ostwald in a published lecture gives this example of what he means. Chemists have long wrangled over the inner constitution of certain bodies called 'tautomerous.' Their properties seemed equally consistent with the notion that an instable hydrogen atom oscillates inside of them, or that they are instable mixtures of two bodies. Controversy raged; but never was decided. "It would never have begun," says Ostwald, "if the combatants had asked themselves what particular experimental fact could have been made different by one or the other view being correct. For it would then have appeared that no difference of fact could possibly ensue; and the quarrel was as unreal as if, theorizing in primitive times about the raising of dough by yeast, one party should have invoked a 'brownie,' while another insisted on an 'elf' as the true cause of the phenomenon." [Footnote: 'Theorie und Praxis,' Zeitsch. des Oesterreichischen Ingenieur u. Architekten-Vereines, 1905, Nr. 4 u. 6. I find a still more radical pragmatism than Ostwald's in an address by Professor W. S. Franklin: "I think that the sickliest notion of physics, even if a student gets it, is that it is 'the science of masses, molecules and the ether.' And I think that the healthiest notion, even if a student does not wholly get it, is that physics is the science of the ways of taking hold of bodies and pushing them!" (Science, January 2, 1903.)]

It is astonishing to see how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence. There can be no difference any-where that doesn't

MAKE a difference elsewhere—no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere and somewhen. The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one.

There is absolutely nothing new in the pragmatic method. Socrates was an adept at it. Aristotle used it methodically. Locke, Berkeley and Hume made momentous contributions to truth by its means. Shadworth Hodgson keeps insisting that realities are only what they are 'known-as.' But these forerunners of pragmatism used it in fragments: they were preluders only. Not until in our time has it generalized itself, become conscious of a universal mission, pretended to a conquering destiny. I believe in that destiny, and I hope I may end by inspiring you with my belief.

Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant, and the rationalist temper sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth.

At the same time it does not stand for any special results. It is a method only. But the general triumph of that method would mean an enormous change in what I called in my last lecture the 'temperament' of philosophy. Teachers of the ultra-rationalistic type would be frozen out, much as the courtier type is frozen out in republics, as the ultramontane type of priest is frozen out in protestant lands. Science and metaphysics would come much nearer together, would in fact work absolutely hand in hand.

Metaphysics has usually followed a very primitive kind of quest. You know how men have always hankered after unlawful magic, and you know what a great part, in magic, WORDS have always played. If you have his name, or the formula of incantation that binds him, you can control the spirit, genie, afrite, or whatever the power may be. Solomon knew the names of all the spirits, and having their names, he held them subject to his will. So the universe has always appeared to the natural mind as a kind of enigma, of which the key must be sought in the shape of some illuminating or power-bringing word or name. That word names the universe's PRINCIPLE, and to possess it is, after a fashion, to possess the universe itself. 'God,' 'Matter,' 'Reason,' 'the Absolute,' 'Energy,' are so many solving names. You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest.

But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears

less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be CHANGED.

THEORIES THUS BECOME INSTRUMENTS, NOT ANSWERS TO ENIGMAS, IN WHICH WE CAN REST. We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one at work. Being nothing essentially new, it harmonizes with many ancient philosophic tendencies. It agrees with nominalism for instance, in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasizing practical aspects; with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions, and metaphysical abstractions.

All these, you see, are ANTI-INTELLECTUALIST tendencies. Against rationalism as a pretension and a method, pragmatism is fully armed and militant. But, at the outset, at least, it stands for no particular results. It has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method. As the young Italian pragmatist Papini has well said, it lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a body's properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms.

No particular results then, so far, but only an attitude of orientation, is what the pragmatic method means. THE ATTITUDE OF LOOKING AWAY FROM FIRST THINGS, PRINCIPLES, 'CATEGORIES,' SUPPOSED NECESSITIES; AND OF LOOKING TOWARDS LAST THINGS, FRUITS, CONSEQUENCES, FACTS.

So much for the pragmatic method! You may say that I have been praising it rather than explaining it to you, but I shall presently explain it abundantly enough by showing how it works on some familiar problems. Meanwhile the word pragmatism has come to be used in a still wider sense, as meaning also a certain theory of TRUTH. I mean to give a whole lecture to the statement of that theory, after first paving the way, so I can be very brief now. But brevity is hard to follow, so I ask for your redoubled attention for a quarter of an hour. If much remains obscure, I hope to make it clearer in the later lectures.

One of the most successfully cultivated branches of philosophy in our time is what is called inductive logic, the study of the conditions under which our sciences have evolved. Writers on this subject have begun to show a singular unanimity as to what the laws of nature and elements of fact mean, when formulated by mathematicians, physicists and chemists. When the first mathematical, logical and natural uniformities, the first LAWS, were discovered, men were so carried away by the clearness, beauty and simplification that resulted, that they believed themselves to have deciphered authentically the eternal thoughts of the Almighty. His mind also thundered and reverberated in syllogisms. He also thought in conic sections, squares and roots and ratios, and geometrized like Euclid. He made Kepler's laws for the planets to follow; he made velocity increase

proportionally to the time in falling bodies; he made the law of the sines for light to obey when refracted; he established the classes, orders, families and genera of plants and animals, and fixed the distances between them. He thought the archetypes of all things, and devised their variations; and when we rediscover any one of these his wondrous institutions, we seize his mind in its very literal intention.

But as the sciences have developed farther, the notion has gained ground that most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations. The laws themselves, moreover, have grown so numerous that there is no counting them; and so many rival formulations are proposed in all the branches of science that investigators have become accustomed to the notion that no theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point of view be useful. Their great use is to summarize old facts and to lead to new ones. They are only a man-made language, a conceptual shorthand, as someone calls them, in which we write our reports of nature; and languages, as is well known, tolerate much choice of expression and many dialects.

Thus human arbitrariness has driven divine necessity from scientific logic. If I mention the names of Sigwart, Mach, Ostwald, Pearson, Milhaud, Poincare, Duhem, Ruysen, those of you who are students will easily identify the tendency I speak of, and will think of additional names.

Riding now on the front of this wave of scientific logic Messrs. Schiller and Dewey appear with their pragmatistic account of what truth everywhere signifies. Everywhere, these teachers say, 'truth' in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing that it means in science. It means, they say, nothing but this, THAT IDEAS (WHICH THEMSELVES ARE BUT PARTS OF OUR EXPERIENCE) BECOME TRUE JUST IN SO FAR AS THEY HELP US TO GET INTO SATISFACTORY RELATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF OUR EXPERIENCE, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena. Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true INSTRUMENTALLY. This is the 'instrumental' view of truth taught so successfully at Chicago, the view that truth in our ideas means their power to 'work,' promulgated so brilliantly at Oxford.

Messrs. Dewey, Schiller and their allies, in reaching this general conception of all truth, have only followed the example of geologists, biologists and philologists. In the establishment of these other sciences, the successful stroke was always to take some simple process actually observable in operation—as denudation by weather, say, or variation from parental type, or change of dialect by incorporation of new words and pronunciations—and then to generalize it, making it apply to all times, and produce great results by summing its effects through the ages.

The observable process which Schiller and Dewey particularly singled out for generalization is the familiar one by which any individual settles into NEW OPINIONS. The process here is always the same. The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain. Somebody contradicts

them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much of it as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives. So he tries to change first this opinion, and then that (for they resist change very variously), until at last some new idea comes up which he can graft upon the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance of the latter, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently.

This new idea is then adopted as the true one. It preserves the older stock of truths with a minimum of modification, stretching them just enough to make them admit the novelty, but conceiving that in ways as familiar as the case leaves possible. An outree explanation, violating all our preconceptions, would never pass for a true account of a novelty. We should scratch round industriously till we found something less excentric. The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing. Time and space, cause and effect, nature and history, and one's own biography remain untouched. New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity. We hold a theory true just in proportion to its success in solving this 'problem of maxima and minima.' But success in solving this problem is eminently a matter of approximation. We say this theory solves it on the whole more satisfactorily than that theory; but that means more satisfactorily to ourselves, and individuals will emphasize their points of satisfaction differently. To a certain degree, therefore, everything here is plastic.

The point I now urge you to observe particularly is the part played by the older truths. Failure to take account of it is the source of much of the unjust criticism leveled against pragmatism. Their influence is absolutely controlling. Loyalty to them is the first principle—in most cases it is the only principle; for by far the most usual way of handling phenomena so novel that they would make for a serious rearrangement of our preconceptions is to ignore them altogether, or to abuse those who bear witness for them.

You doubtless wish examples of this process of truth's growth, and the only trouble is their superabundance. The simplest case of new truth is of course the mere numerical addition of new kinds of facts, or of new single facts of old kinds, to our experience—an addition that involves no alteration in the old beliefs. Day follows day, and its contents are simply added. The new contents themselves are not true, they simply COME and ARE. Truth is what we say about them, and when we say that they have come, truth is satisfied by the plain additive formula.

But often the day's contents oblige a rearrangement. If I should now utter piercing shrieks and act like a maniac on this platform, it would make many of you revise your ideas as to the probable worth of my philosophy. 'Radium' came the other day as part of the day's content, and seemed for a moment to contradict our ideas of the whole order of nature, that order having come to be identified with what is called the conservation of

energy. The mere sight of radium paying heat away indefinitely out of its own pocket seemed to violate that conservation. What to think? If the radiations from it were nothing but an escape of unsuspected 'potential' energy, pre-existent inside of the atoms, the principle of conservation would be saved. The discovery of 'helium' as the radiation's outcome, opened a way to this belief. So Ramsay's view is generally held to be true, because, altho it extends our old ideas of energy, it causes a minimum of alteration in their nature.

I need not multiply instances. A new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. It must both lean on old truth and grasp new fact; and its success (as I said a moment ago) in doing this, is a matter for the individual's appreciation. When old truth grows, then, by new truth's addition, it is for subjective reasons. We are in the process and obey the reasons. That new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying our double urgency. It makes itself true, gets itself classed as true, by the way it works; grafting itself then upon the ancient body of truth, which thus grows much as a tree grows by the activity of a new layer of cambium.

Now Dewey and Schiller proceed to generalize this observation and to apply it to the most ancient parts of truth. They also once were plastic. They also were called true for human reasons. They also mediated between still earlier truths and what in those days were novel observations. Purely objective truth, truth in whose establishment the function of giving human satisfaction in marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts played no role whatever, is nowhere to be found. The reasons why we call things true is the reason why they ARE true, for 'to be true' MEANS only to perform this marriage-function.

The trail of the human serpent is thus over everything. Truth independent; truth that we FIND merely; truth no longer malleable to human need; truth incorrigible, in a word; such truth exists indeed superabundantly—or is supposed to exist by rationalistically minded thinkers; but then it means only the dead heart of the living tree, and its being there means only that truth also has its paleontology and its 'prescription,' and may grow stiff with years of veteran service and petrified in men's regard by sheer antiquity. But how plastic even the oldest truths nevertheless really are has been vividly shown in our day by the transformation of logical and mathematical ideas, a transformation which seems even to be invading physics. The ancient formulas are reinterpreted as special expressions of much wider principles, principles that our ancestors never got a glimpse of in their present shape and formulation.

Mr. Schiller still gives to all this view of truth the name of 'Humanism,' but, for this doctrine too, the name of pragmatism seems fairly to be in the ascendant, so I will treat it under the name of pragmatism in these lectures.

Such then would be the scope of pragmatism—first, a method; and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth. And these two things must be our future topics.

What I have said of the theory of truth will, I am sure, have appeared obscure and unsatisfactory to most of you by reason of us brevity. I shall make amends for that hereafter. In a lecture on 'common sense' I shall try

to show what I mean by truths grown petrified by antiquity. In another lecture I shall expatiate on the idea that our thoughts become true in proportion as they successfully exert their go-between function. In a third I shall show how hard it is to discriminate subjective from objective factors in Truth's development. You may not follow me wholly in these lectures; and if you do, you may not wholly agree with me. But you will, I know, regard me at least as serious, and treat my effort with respectful consideration.

You will probably be surprised to learn, then, that Messrs. Schiller's and Dewey's theories have suffered a hailstorm of contempt and ridicule. All rationalism has risen against them. In influential quarters Mr. Schiller, in particular, has been treated like an impudent schoolboy who deserves a spanking. I should not mention this, but for the fact that it throws so much sidelight upon that rationalistic temper to which I have opposed the temper of pragmatism. Pragmatism is uncomfortable away from facts. Rationalism is comfortable only in the presence of abstractions. This pragmatist talk about truths in the plural, about their utility and satisfactoriness, about the success with which they 'work,' etc., suggests to the typical intellectualist mind a sort of coarse lame second-rate makeshift article of truth. Such truths are not real truth. Such tests are merely subjective. As against this, objective truth must be something non-utilitarian, haughty, refined, remote, august, exalted. It must be an absolute correspondence of our thoughts with an equally absolute reality. It must be what we OUGHT to think, unconditionally. The conditioned ways in which we DO think are so much irrelevance and matter for psychology. Down with psychology, up with logic, in all this question!

See the exquisite contrast of the types of mind! The pragmatist clings to facts and concreteness, observes truth at its work in particular cases, and generalizes. Truth, for him, becomes a class-name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience. For the rationalist it remains a pure abstraction, to the bare name of which we must defer. When the pragmatist undertakes to show in detail just WHY we must defer, the rationalist is unable to recognize the concretes from which his own abstraction is taken. He accuses us of DENYING truth; whereas we have only sought to trace exactly why people follow it and always ought to follow it. Your typical ultra-abstractionist fairly shudders at concreteness: other things equal, he positively prefers the pale and spectral. If the two universes were offered, he would always choose the skinny outline rather than the rich thicket of reality. It is so much purer, clearer, nobler.

I hope that as these lectures go on, the concreteness and closeness to facts of the pragmatism which they advocate may be what approves itself to you as its most satisfactory peculiarity. It only follows here the example of the sister-sciences, interpreting the unobserved by the observed. It brings old and new harmoniously together. It converts the absolutely empty notion of a static relation of 'correspondence' (what that may mean we must ask later) between our minds and reality, into that of a rich and active commerce (that anyone may follow in detail and understand) between particular thoughts of ours, and the great universe of other experiences in which they play their parts and have their uses.

But enough of this at present? The justification of what I say must be postponed. I wish now to add a word

in further explanation of the claim I made at our last meeting, that pragmatism may be a happy harmonizer of empiricist ways of thinking, with the more religious demands of human beings.

Men who are strongly of the fact-loving temperament, you may remember me to have said, are liable to be kept at a distance by the small sympathy with facts which that philosophy from the present-day fashion of idealism offers them. It is far too intellectualistic. Old fashioned theism was bad enough, with its notion of God as an exalted monarch, made up of a lot of unintelligible or preposterous 'attributes'; but, so long as it held strongly by the argument from design, it kept some touch with concrete realities. Since, however, darwinism has once for all displaced design from the minds of the 'scientific,' theism has lost that foothold; and some kind of an immanent or pantheistic deity working IN things rather than above them is, if any, the kind recommended to our contemporary imagination. Aspirants to a philosophic religion turn, as a rule, more hopefully nowadays towards idealistic pantheism than towards the older dualistic theism, in spite of the fact that the latter still counts able defenders.

But, as I said in my first lecture, the brand of pantheism offered is hard for them to assimilate if they are lovers of facts, or empirically minded. It is the absolutistic brand, spurning the dust and reared upon pure logic. It keeps no connexion whatever with concreteness. Affirming the Absolute Mind, which is its substitute for God, to be the rational presupposition of all particulars of fact, whatever they may be, it remains supremely indifferent to what the particular facts in our world actually are. Be they what they may, the Absolute will father them. Like the sick lion in Esop's fable, all footprints lead into his den, but *nulla vestigia retrorsum*. You cannot redescend into the world of particulars by the Absolute's aid, or deduce any necessary consequences of detail important for your life from your idea of his nature. He gives you indeed the assurance that all is well with Him, and for his eternal way of thinking; but thereupon he leaves you to be finitely saved by your own temporal devices.

Far be it from me to deny the majesty of this conception, or its capacity to yield religious comfort to a most respectable class of minds. But from the human point of view, no one can pretend that it doesn't suffer from the faults of remoteness and abstractness. It is eminently a product of what I have ventured to call the rationalistic temper. It disdains empiricism's needs. It substitutes a pallid outline for the real world's richness. It is dapper; it is noble in the bad sense, in the sense in which to be noble is to be inapt for humble service. In this real world of sweat and dirt, it seems to me that when a view of things is 'noble,' that ought to count as a presumption against its truth, and as a philosophic disqualification. The prince of darkness may be a gentleman, as we are told he is, but whatever the God of earth and heaven is, he can surely be no gentleman. His menial services are needed in the dust of our human trials, even more than his dignity is needed in the empyrean.

Now pragmatism, devoted tho she be to facts, has no such materialistic bias as ordinary empiricism labors under. Moreover, she has no objection whatever to the realizing of abstractions, so long as you get about among particulars with their aid and they actually carry you somewhere. Interested in no conclusions but those which our minds and our experiences work out together, she has no a priori prejudices against theology.

IF THEOLOGICAL IDEAS PROVE TO HAVE A VALUE FOR CONCRETE LIFE, THEY WILL BE TRUE, FOR PRAGMATISM, IN THE SENSE OF BEING GOOD FOR SO MUCH. FOR HOW MUCH MORE THEY ARE TRUE, WILL DEPEND ENTIRELY ON THEIR RELATIONS TO THE OTHER TRUTHS THAT ALSO HAVE TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED.

What I said just now about the Absolute of transcendental idealism is a case in point. First, I called it majestic and said it yielded religious comfort to a class of minds, and then I accused it of remoteness and sterility. But so far as it affords such comfort, it surely is not sterile; it has that amount of value; it performs a concrete function. As a good pragmatist, I myself ought to call the Absolute true 'in so far forth,' then; and I unhesitatingly now do so.

But what does TRUE IN SO FAR FORTH mean in this case? To answer, we need only apply the pragmatic method. What do believers in the Absolute mean by saying that their belief affords them comfort? They mean that since in the Absolute finite evil is 'overruled' already, we may, therefore, whenever we wish, treat the temporal as if it were potentially the eternal, be sure that we can trust its outcome, and, without sin, dismiss our fear and drop the worry of our finite responsibility. In short, they mean that we have a right ever and anon to take a moral holiday, to let the world wag in its own way, feeling that its issues are in better hands than ours and are none of our business.

The universe is a system of which the individual members may relax their anxieties occasionally, in which the don't-care mood is also right for men, and moral holidays in order—that, if I mistake not, is part, at least, of what the Absolute is 'known-as,' that is the great difference in our particular experiences which his being true makes for us, that is part of his cash-value when he is pragmatically interpreted. Farther than that the ordinary lay-reader in philosophy who thinks favorably of absolute idealism does not venture to sharpen his conceptions. He can use the Absolute for so much, and so much is very precious. He is pained at hearing you speak incredulously of the Absolute, therefore, and disregards your criticisms because they deal with aspects of the conception that he fails to follow.

If the Absolute means this, and means no more than this, who can possibly deny the truth of it? To deny it would be to insist that men should never relax, and that holidays are never in order. I am well aware how odd it must seem to some of you to hear me say that an idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives. That it is GOOD, for as much as it profits, you will gladly admit. If what we do by its aid is good, you will allow the idea itself to be good in so far forth, for we are the better for possessing it. But is it not a strange misuse of the word 'truth,' you will say, to call ideas also 'true' for this reason?

To answer this difficulty fully is impossible at this stage of my account. You touch here upon the very central point of Messrs. Schiller's, Dewey's and my own doctrine of truth, which I cannot discuss with detail until my sixth lecture. Let me now say only this, that truth

is ONE SPECIES OF GOOD, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and co-ordinate with it. THE TRUE IS THE NAME OF WHATEVER PROVES ITSELF TO BE GOOD IN THE WAY OF BELIEF, AND GOOD, TOO, FOR DEFINITE, ASSIGNABLE REASONS. Surely you must admit this, that if there were NO good for life in true ideas, or if the knowledge of them were positively disadvantageous and false ideas the only useful ones, then the current notion that truth is divine and precious, and its pursuit a duty, could never have grown up or become a dogma. In a world like that, our duty would be to SHUN truth, rather. But in this world, just as certain foods are not only agreeable to our taste, but good for our teeth, our stomach and our tissues; so certain ideas are not only agreeable to think about, or agreeable as supporting other ideas that we are fond of, but they are also helpful in life's practical struggles. If there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really BETTER FOR US to believe in that idea, UNLESS, INDEED, BELIEF IN IT INCIDENTALLY CLASHED WITH OTHER GREATER VITAL BENEFITS.

'What would be better for us to believe'? This sounds very like a definition of truth. It comes very near to saying 'what we OUGHT to believe': and in THAT definition none of you would find any oddity. Ought we ever not to believe what it is BETTER FOR US to believe? And can we then keep the notion of what is better for us, and what is true for us, permanently apart?

Pragmatism says no, and I fully agree with her. Probably you also agree, so far as the abstract statement goes, but with a suspicion that if we practically did believe everything that made for good in our own personal lives, we should be found indulging all kinds of fancies about this world's affairs, and all kinds of sentimental superstitions about a world hereafter. Your suspicion here is undoubtedly well founded, and it is evident that something happens when you pass from the abstract to the concrete, that complicates the situation.

I said just now that what is better for us to believe is true UNLESS THE BELIEF INCIDENTALLY CLASHES WITH SOME OTHER VITAL BENEFIT. Now in real life what vital benefits is any particular belief of ours most liable to clash with? What indeed except the vital benefits yielded by OTHER BELIEFS when these prove incompatible with the first ones? In other words, the greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths. Truths have once for all this desperate instinct of self-preservation and of desire to extinguish whatever contradicts them. My belief in the Absolute, based on the good it does me, must run the gauntlet of all my other beliefs. Grant that it may be true in giving me a moral holiday. Nevertheless, as I conceive it,—and let me speak now confidentially, as it were, and merely in my own private person,—it clashes with other truths of mine whose benefits I hate to give up on its account. It happens to be associated with a kind of logic of which I am the enemy, I find that it entangles me in metaphysical paradoxes that are unacceptable, etc., etc.. But as I have enough trouble in life already without adding the trouble of carrying these intellectual inconsistencies, I personally just give up the Absolute. I just TAKE my moral holidays; or else as a professional philosopher, I try to justify them by some other principle.

If I could restrict my notion of the Absolute to its bare holiday- giving value, it wouldn't clash with my other

truths. But we cannot easily thus restrict our hypotheses. They carry supernumerary features, and these it is that clash so. My disbelief in the Absolute means then disbelief in those other supernumerary features, for I fully believe in the legitimacy of taking moral holidays.

You see by this what I meant when I called pragmatism a mediator and reconciler and said, borrowing the word from Papini, that he unstiffens our theories. She has in fact no prejudices whatever, no obstructive dogmas, no rigid canons of what shall count as proof. She is completely genial. She will entertain any hypothesis, she will consider any evidence. It follows that in the religious field she is at a great advantage both over positivistic empiricism, with its anti-theological bias, and over religious rationalism, with its exclusive interest in the remote, the noble, the simple, and the abstract in the way of conception.

In short, she widens the field of search for God. Rationalism sticks to logic and the empyrean. Empiricism sticks to the external senses. Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses, and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact-if that should seem a likely place to find him.

Her only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas should do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence? She could see no meaning in treating as 'not true' a notion that was pragmatically so successful. What other kind of truth could there be, for her, than all this agreement with concrete reality?

In my last lecture I shall return again to the relations of pragmatism with religion. But you see already how democratic she is. Her manners are as various and flexible, her resources as rich and endless, and her conclusions as friendly as those of mother nature.

Lecture VI

... I fully expect to see the pragmatist view of truth run through the classic stages of a theory's career. First, you know, a new theory is attacked as absurd; then it is admitted to be true, but obvious and insignificant; finally it is seen to be so important that its adversaries claim that they themselves discovered it. Our doctrine of truth is at present in the first of these three stages, with symptoms of the second stage having begun in certain quarters. I wish that this lecture might help it beyond the first stage in the eyes of many of you.

Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality.' Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what may precisely be meant by the term 'agreement,' and what by the term 'reality,' when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with.

In answering these questions the pragmatists are more analytic and painstaking, the intellectualists more offhand and irreflective. The popular notion is that a true idea must copy its reality. Like other popular views, this one follows the analogy of the most usual experience. Our true ideas of sensible things do indeed copy them. Shut your eyes and think of yonder clock on the wall, and you get just such a true picture or copy of its dial. But your idea of its 'works' (unless you are a clock-maker) is much less of a copy, yet it passes muster, for it in no way clashes with the reality. Even tho it should shrink to the mere word 'works,' that word still serves you truly; and when you speak of the 'time-keeping function' of the clock, or of its spring's 'elasticity,' it is hard to see exactly what your ideas can copy.

You perceive that there is a problem here. Where our ideas cannot copy definitely their object, what does agreement with that object mean? Some idealists seem to say that they are true whenever they are what God means that we ought to think about that object. Others hold the copy-view all through, and speak as if our ideas possessed truth just in proportion as they approach to being copies of the Absolute's eternal way of thinking.

These views, you see, invite pragmatistic discussion. But the great assumption of the intellectualists is that truth means essentially an inert static relation. When you've got your true idea of anything, there's an end of the matter. You're in possession; you KNOW; you have fulfilled your thinking destiny. You are where you ought to be mentally; you have obeyed your categorical imperative; and nothing more need follow on that climax of your rational destiny. Epistemologically you are in stable equilibrium.

Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question. "Grant an idea or belief to be true," it says, "what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?"

The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer: TRUE IDEAS ARE THOSE THAT WE CAN ASSIMILATE, VALIDATE, CORROBORATE AND VERIFY. FALSE IDEAS ARE THOSE THAT WE CANNOT. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.

This thesis is what I have to defend. The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth HAPPENS to an idea. It BECOMES true, is MADE true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri- FICATION. Its validity is the process of its valid-ATION.

But what do the words verification and validation themselves pragmatically mean? They again signify certain practical consequences of the verified and validated idea. It is hard to find any one phrase that characterizes these consequences better than the ordinary agreement-formula—just such consequences being what we have in mind whenever we say that our ideas 'agree' with reality. They lead us, namely, through the acts and other

ideas which they instigate, into or up to, or towards, other parts of experience with which we feel all the while—such feeling being among our potentialities—that the original ideas remain in agreement. The connexions and transitions come to us from point to point as being progressive, harmonious, satisfactory. This function of agreeable leading is what we mean by an idea's verification. . . .

. . . Let me begin by reminding you of the fact that the possession of true thoughts means everywhere the possession of invaluable instruments of action; and that our duty to gain truth, so far from being a blank command from out of the blue, or a 'stunt' self-imposed by our intellect, can account for itself by excellent practical reasons.

The importance to human life of having true beliefs about matters of fact is a thing too notorious. We live in a world of realities that can be infinitely useful or infinitely harmful. Ideas that tell us which of them to expect count as the true ideas in all this primary sphere of verification, and the pursuit of such ideas is a primary human duty. The possession of truth, so far from being here an end in itself, is only a preliminary means towards other vital satisfactions. If I am lost in the woods and starved, and find what looks like a cow-path, it is of the utmost importance that I should think of a human habitation at the end of it, for if I do so and follow it, I save myself. The true thought is useful here because the house which is its object is useful. The practical value of true ideas is thus primarily derived from the practical importance of their objects to us. Their objects are, indeed, not important at all times. I may on another occasion have no use for the house; and then my idea of it, however verifiable, will be practically irrelevant, and had better remain latent. Yet since almost any object may some day become temporarily important, the advantage of having a general stock of extra truths, of ideas that shall be true of merely possible situations, is obvious. We store such extra truths away in our memories, and with the overflow we fill our books of reference. Whenever such an extra truth becomes practically relevant to one of our emergencies, it passes from cold-storage to do work in the world, and our belief in it grows active. You can say of it then either that 'it is useful because it is true' or that 'it is true because it is useful.' Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing, namely that here is an idea that gets fulfilled and can be verified. True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience. True ideas would never have been singled out as such, would never have acquired a class-name, least of all a name suggesting value, unless they had been useful from the outset in this way.

From this simple cue pragmatism gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worth while to have been led to. Primarily, and on the common-sense level, the truth of a state of mind means this function of A LEADING THAT IS WORTH WHILE. When a moment in our experience, of any kind whatever, inspires us with a thought that is true, that means that sooner or later we dip by that thought's guidance into the particulars of experience again and make advantageous connexion with them. This is a vague enough statement, but I beg you to retain it, for it is essential.

Our experience meanwhile is all shot through with regularities. One bit of it can warn us to get ready for

another bit, can 'intend' or b 'significant of' that remoter object. The object's advent is the significance's verification. Truth, in these cases, meaning nothing but eventual verification, is manifestly incompatible with waywardness on our part. Woe to him whose beliefs play fast and loose with the order which realities follow in his experience: they will lead him nowhere or else make false connexions.

By 'realities' or 'objects' here, we mean either things of common sense, sensibly present, or else common-sense relations, such as dates, places, distances, kinds, activities. Following our mental image of a house along the cow-path, we actually come to see the house; we get the image's full verification. SUCH SIMPLY AND FULLY VERIFIED LEADINGS ARE CERTAINLY THE ORIGINALS AND PROTOTYPES OF THE TRUTH-PROCESS. Experience offers indeed other forms of truth- process, but they are all conceivable as being primary verifications arrested, multiplied or substituted one for another

Take, for instance, yonder object on the wall. You and I consider it to be a 'clock', altho no one of us has seen the hidden works that make it one. We let our notion pass for true without attempting to verify. If truths mean verification-process essentially ought we then to call such unverified truths as this abortive? No, for they form the overwhelmingly large number of the truths we live by. Indirect as well as direct verifications pass muster. Where circumstantial evidence is sufficient, we can go without eye- witnessing. Just as we here assume Japan to exist without ever having been there, because it WORKS to do so, everything we know conspiring with the belief, and nothing interfering, so we assume that thing to be a clock. We USE it as a clock, regulating the length of our lecture by it. The verification of the assumption here means its leading to no frustration or contradiction. VerifiABILITY of wheels and weights and pendulum is as good as verification. For one truth-process completed there are a million in our lives that function in this state of nascency. They turn us TOWARDS direct verification; lead us into the SURROUNDINGS of the objects they envisage; and then, if everything runs on harmoniously, we are so sure that verification is possible that we omit it, and are usually justified by all that happens.

Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs 'pass,' so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank-notes pass so long as nobody refuses them. But this all points to direct face-to-face verifications somewhere, without which the fabric of truth collapses like a financial system with no cash-basis whatever. You accept my verification of one thing, I yours of another. We trade on each other's truth. But beliefs verified concretely by SOMEBODY are the posts of the whole superstructure.

Another great reason—beside economy of time—for waiving complete verification in the usual business of life is that all things exist in kinds and not singly. Our world is found once for all to have that peculiarity. So that when we have once directly verified our ideas about one specimen of a kind, we consider ourselves free to apply them to other specimens without verification. A mind that habitually discerns the kind of thing before it, and acts by the law of the kind immediately, without pausing to verify, will be a 'true' mind in ninety-nine out of a hundred emergencies, proved so by its conduct fitting everything it meets, and getting no refutation.

INDIRECTLY OR ONLY POTENTIALLY VERIFYING PROCESSES MAY THUS BE TRUE AS WELL AS FULL

VERIFICATION-PROCESSES. They work as true processes would work, give us the same advantages, and claim our recognition for the same reasons. . . .

. . . Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural, of processes of leading, realized in rebus, and having only this quality in common, that they PAY. They pay by guiding us into or towards some part of a system that dips at numerous points into sense- percepts, which we may copy mentally or not, but with which at any rate we are now in the kind of commerce vaguely designated as verification. Truth for us is simply a collective name for verification-processes, just as health, wealth, strength, etc., are names for other processes connected with life, and also pursued because it pays to pursue them. Truth is MADE, just as health, wealth and strength are made, in the course of experience.

Here rationalism is instantaneously up in arms against us. I can imagine a rationalist to talk as follows:

"Truth is not made," he will say; "it absolutely obtains, being a unique relation that does not wait upon any process, but shoots straight over the head of experience, and hits its reality every time. Our belief that yon thing on the wall is a clock is true already, altho no one in the whole history of the world should verify it. The bare quality of standing in that transcendent relation is what makes any thought true that possesses it, whether or not there be verification. You pragmatists put the cart before the horse in making truth's being reside in verification-processes. These are merely signs of its being, merely our lame ways of ascertaining after the fact, which of our ideas already has possessed the wondrous quality. The quality itself is timeless, like all essences and natures. Thoughts partake of it directly, as they partake of falsity or of irrelevancy. It can't be analyzed away into pragmatic consequences."

The whole plausibility of this rationalist tirade is due to the fact to which we have already paid so much attention. In our world, namely, abounding as it does in things of similar kinds and similarly associated, one verification serves for others of its kind, and one great use of knowing things is to be led not so much to them as to their associates, especially to human talk about them. The quality of truth, obtaining ante rem, pragmatically means, then, the fact that in such a world innumerable ideas work better by their indirect or possible than by their direct and actual verification. Truth ante rem means only verifiability, then; or else it is a case of the stock rationalist trick of treating the NAME of a concrete phenomenal reality as an independent prior entity, and placing it behind the reality as its explanation. . . .

. . . In the case of 'wealth' we all see the fallacy. We know that wealth is but a name for concrete processes that certain men's lives play a part in, and not a natural excellence found in Messrs. Rockefeller and Carnegie, but not in the rest of us.

Like wealth, health also lives in rebus. It is a name for processes, as digestion, circulation, sleep, etc., that go on

happily, tho in this instance we are more inclined to think of it as a principle and to say the man digests and sleeps so well BECAUSE he is so healthy

With 'strength' we are, I think, more rationalistic still, and decidedly inclined to treat it as an excellence pre-existing in the man and explanatory of the herculean performances of his muscles.

With 'truth' most people go over the border entirely and treat the rationalistic account as self-evident. But really all these words in TH are exactly similar. Truth exists ante rem just as much and as little as the other things do.

The scholastics, following Aristotle, made much of the distinction between habit and act. Health in actu means, among other things, good sleeping and digesting. But a healthy man need not always be sleeping, or always digesting, any more than a wealthy man need be always handling money, or a strong man always lifting weights. All such qualities sink to the status of 'habits' between their times of exercise; and similarly truth becomes a habit of certain of our ideas and beliefs in their intervals of rest from their verifying activities. But those activities are the root of the whole matter and the condition of there being any habit to exist in the intervals.

'The true,' to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole of course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won't necessarily meet all farther experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience, as we know, has ways of BOILING OVER, and making us correct our present formulas.

The 'absolutely' true, meaning what no farther experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge. It runs on all fours with the perfectly wise man, and with the absolutely complete experience; and, if these ideals are ever realized, they will all be realized together. Meanwhile we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day, and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood. Ptolemaic astronomy, euclidean space, Aristotelian logic, scholastic metaphysics, were expedient for centuries, but human experience has boiled over those limits, and we now call these things only relatively true, or true within those borders of experience. 'Absolutely' they are false; for we know that those limits were casual, and might have been transcended by past theorists just as they are by present thinkers. . .

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

James, William. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, (Project Gutenberg, 2002), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4723/4723-h/4723-h.htm>.

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.



This work (Selections from "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" by William James by William James) is free of known copyright restrictions.

JEAN PIAGET ON REASONING AND LOGIC

Dr. Mark A. Winstanley

*Note from chapter author, **Dr. Mark A. Winstanley**: Broadly, my interests lie in epistemology and my approach to the questions that have vexed Occidental philosophers for over two millennia is naturalistic on the one hand and in accord with a shift in style in the philosophy of science in the second half of the 20th century away from foundational concerns to the investigation of the actual production of scientific knowledge on the other. Like most post-Kuhnian philosophers of science, I acknowledge the value of the history of science for understanding the way scientific knowledge is generated; however, I also recognize that tacit assumptions concerning human cognition are made when interpreting historical record; I, therefore, believe that cognitive science should inform the history of science. I am particularly interested in genetic epistemology since it was conceived by Jean Piaget as a scientific epistemology in which both the historiogenesis and psychogenesis of knowledge are methodological pillars. Moreover, genetic epistemology aims to provide science with a scientific rather than a philosophical foundation; measured in terms of consensus among its practitioners, it thus remains true to the historical origins of science's success – emancipation from philosophy.*

In remarking that ‘Piaget’s views on logic are idiosyncratic’ (Johnson-Laird et al. 1992, p. 418), Johnson-Laird reveals his adherence to a popular assessment of Piaget’s theory of reasoning among Anglophone cognitive psychologists (Bond 1978, 2005). However, Johnson-Laird does concede that ‘[i]t is not always easy to understand Piaget’s theory’ (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 249), thereby corroborating Piaget’s own impression that his work was not well understood (Smith et al. 2009, pp. 1–10). Unfortunately, difficulties in understanding Piaget’s theory are exacerbated by the inaccessibility of his original works in a predominately Anglophone research environment. He wrote in French, and translations into English are selective and not rarely dubious in quality (Smith et al. 2009, pp. 28–44). ‘[R]easoning is nothing more than the propositional calculus itself’ (Inhelder and Piaget 1958, p. 305; in: Johnson-Laird et al. 1992, p. 418), for example, is the citation Johnson-Laird uses to support his interpretation of Piaget’s theory as a mental logic theory of reasoning. However, Lesley Smith considers ‘reasoning is nothing more than the calculus embodied in propositional operations’ (Smith 1987, p. 344) to be a more faithful rendition. The difference in the translations may appear insignificant, but it makes all the difference between correct and incorrect interpretations of Piaget’s operatory theory of reasoning.

Operatory Theory of Reasoning

Operations and their Structures

Piaget characterises operations as follows:

PSYCHOLOGICALLY, operations are actions which are internalizable, reversible, and coordinated into systems characterized by laws which apply to the system as a whole. They are actions, since they are carried out on objects before being performed on symbols. They are internalizable, since they can also be carried out in thought without losing their original character of actions. They are reversible as against simple actions which are irreversible. In this way, the operation of combining can be inverted immediately into the operation of dissociating, whereas the act of writing from left to right cannot be inverted to one of writing from right to left without a new habit being acquired differing from the first. Finally, since operations do not exist in isolation they are connected in the form of structured wholes (Piaget 1957, p. 8, see also 1971, pp. 21–2, 2001, Chapter 2; Piaget and Beth 1966, p. 172; Piaget and Grize 1972, p. 55).

Consider the affirmations and negations of two propositions, p , \overline{p} ; and q , \overline{q} . Combining them conjunctively gives rise to four different conjunctions:

1. pq
2. $p\overline{q}$
3. $\overline{p}q$
4. $\overline{p}\overline{q}$

Logically, the conjunctions cannot be true simultaneously since they are incompatible. From an operatory point of view, however, all four conjunctions play a role in determining the relation between the propositions p and q . By systematically considering the various combinations of true and false conjunctions, 16 distinct propositions about the possible combinations of truth and falsity of these conjunctions can be distinguished, and these propositions can be abbreviated by logical operators. (see Table 1).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
pq	-	pq	-	-	pq	pq	-	pq	-	pq	-	pq	-	pq	-
$p\bar{q}$	-	$p\bar{q}$	-	$p\bar{q}$	-	-	$p\bar{q}$	$p\bar{q}$	-	-	$p\bar{q}$	$p\bar{q}$	-	-	$p\bar{q}$
$\bar{p}q$	-	$\bar{p}q$	-	$\bar{p}q$	-	$\bar{p}q$	-	-	$\bar{p}q$	-	$\bar{p}q$	-	$\bar{p}q$	$\bar{p}q$	-
$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	-	-	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	-	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	-	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	-	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	-	-	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$	-	$\bar{p}\bar{q}$
$p * q$	o	$p \vee q$	$\bar{p} \bar{q}$	$p q$	pq	$p \supset q$	$q \supset p$	$q \supset p$	$p \supset q$	$p \equiv q$	$q \vee w$	$p[q]$	$p[\bar{q}]$	$q[p]$	$q[\bar{p}]$

Table 1: (Click on the table to open a PDF that can be read by a screenreader.) The 16 Logical Operators of Propositional Logic. The columns of this table are comprised of four conjunctions, but for the sake of brevity only those that are true are listed. Moreover, the columns are set out in pairs so that each pair contains the full complement of conjunctions. By connecting the conjunctions listed in each column disjunctively, the disjunctive normal form of the binary operators in the bottom row are generated. With the exception of $*$, o , w , $p[q]$, and $q[p]$ the binary operators are familiar. $*$ represents the complete affirmation; o , the complete negation; w , an exclusive disjunction, and $p[q]$ as well as $q[p]$ are affirmations of p and q conjointly with either \overline{q} or \overline{p} , respectively (After Piaget and Grize 1972, fig. 100).

The logical operators can be combined disjunctively with each other; for example, $(p \equiv q) \vee p \bar{q} = p \supset q$; $(p w q) \vee \bar{p} \bar{q} = p|q$; etc. In fact, starting from the complete negation, all 16 operators can be generated by disjunctively combining suitable conjunctions from the four possible conjunctions available; for example, $o \vee pq = pq$; $pq \vee p \bar{q} = p[q]$; $pq \vee \bar{p}q \vee \bar{p}\bar{q} = p \supset q$; etc. For Piaget (Piaget and Grize 1972, p. 335), the disjunctive composition of combinations of these conjunctions constitutes the direct operation on the logical operators. However the outcome of disjunctively combining any combination of conjunctions to the complete affirmation is again the complete affirmation. As the complete affirmation plainly illustrates, all operators cannot therefore be transformed into each other by means of the direct operations alone. Nevertheless, each operation has a dual expression; for example, $p \supset q = pq \vee \bar{p}q \vee \bar{p}\bar{q} = \overline{\bar{p}\bar{q}}$; $p \vee q = pq \vee \bar{p}q \vee p\bar{q} = \overline{\bar{p}\bar{q}}$; etc. Furthermore, $pq \vee \bar{p}q \vee \bar{p}\bar{q} = (p * q) \bullet \overline{\bar{p}\bar{q}}$ and $pq \vee \bar{p}q \vee p\bar{q} = (p * q) \bullet \overline{p\bar{q}}$; in contrast to the successive accumulation of conjunctions through the direct operation, the dual expression combined conjunctively with the complete affirmation $p * q$ reduces the conjunctions in the complete affirmation. Based on the dual expression, a second operation, the inverse operation, can now be defined as the conjunction of negations of combination of the four conjunctions (Piaget and Grize 1972, p. 335). By means of the direct and inverse

operations in combination, all 16 binary operators can be transformed into each other. Moreover, by judicious implementation of these operations any operator can be reduced to the complete negation; for example, $pq \bullet \bar{p}q = o$; $(p \supset q) \bullet \bar{p}q = \bar{p}q \bullet \bar{p}q = o$, etc. In fact, it is clear from Table 1, in which the columns are organised in complementary pairs with respect to the full complement of conjunctions, that there is an operation that transforms each of the 16 binary operators into the complete negation. Piaget (Piaget and Grize 1972, p. 335) defines the general identity operation, $\vee o$, as the transformation that is composed of the direct and inverse operation, on the one hand, and that leaves any operator it is composed with unaltered, on the other hand.

The direct inverse and identity operations are reversible operations, which the system of operations has in common with a mathematical group. However, the system also has special identities, such as $pq \vee pq = pq$; $pq \vee [pq \vee \bar{p}q] = [pq \vee \bar{p}q]$; $pq \bullet [p * q] = pq$; etc. (Piaget and Grize 1972, p. 335). These are lattice-like operations, and they are incommensurate with the operations of a group. In particular, the operations of a group are associative. Whereas associativity works for disjunctions of the conjunctions $[pq \vee \bar{p}q] \vee \bar{p}q = pq \vee [\bar{p}q \vee \bar{p}q]$, for example, it does not always hold for disjunctive-conjunctive mixtures $[pq \vee pq] \bullet \bar{p}q \neq pq \vee [pq \bullet \bar{p}q]$, since $pq \bullet \bar{p}q = o$ whereas $pq \vee o = pq$. Associativity is, therefore, limited in this system of operations due to these special identities.

In summary, the relations between propositions represented by the binary operators form a system of transformations, and the operational structure effecting these transformations incorporates reversible operations characteristic of a group as well as non-reversible operations typical of lattices.

‘Grouping’ is the term Piaget (Piaget and Grize 1972, Chapters 38–9) used to denote the structured whole constituted by these operations, and with the assistance of his co-workers he made several attempts at formalising it using the algebraic tools of logic (Piaget and Grize 1972, n. 1 p. 92); ultimately, however, the grouping resisted their efforts (Piaget and Grize 1972, p. XIV–XV).

Despite the logical garb, the operations of the grouping do not necessarily preserve truth; $p \equiv q \vee \bar{p}q = p \supset q$, for example, is an application of the direct operation $\vee \bar{p}q$, and the transformation from the equivalence to the conditional preserves truth; however, the outcome of the inverse operation $\bullet \bar{p}q$ applied to the conditional is the equivalence $p \supset q \bullet \bar{p}q = p \equiv q$. If the operational transformation were a rule of inference, a false conclusion would follow from true premises (see Table 2).

$p \supset q$			$p \equiv q$		
p	\supset	q	p	\equiv	q
T	T	T	T	T	T
T	F	F	T	F	F
F	T	T	F	F	T
F	T	F	F	T	F

Table 2: Truth conditions of equivalence and the conditional. Truth values of the conditional are set out in the left column, and those of equivalence, in the right. Whereas $p \equiv q \models p \supset q$, the shaded cells highlight the truth values that make $p \supset q \models p \equiv q$ invalid.

The fact that the operatory model of reasoning does not allow deduction is a common criticism of Piaget's theory; however, it is, as Grize (2013, pp. 153–4) points out, one of the peculiarities of Piaget's theory that a calculus of propositions from the point of view of validity does not exist, let alone rules of inference. The next section characterises the actual relationship between logic and experimental psychology Piaget had in mind.

Psycho-logic

Logic is concerned with what conclusions follow from what premises, and it develops techniques for determining the validity of inferences. Piaget's operatory theory, on the other hand, is not directly concerned with logical consequence, and it does not provide techniques for assessing the validity of arguments. Piaget understood his theory in analogy to mathematical physics. Physics investigates the physical world experimentally, and its criterium for truth is agreement with empirical facts; mathematics, on the other hand, is neither based on experiment nor does its truth depend on agreement with empirical facts. It is a formal science, whose truth depends solely on the formal consistency of the deductive systems constructed. With the aim of explaining the physical world, mathematical physics draws on both deductive and empirical sources and applies mathematics to physics to construct a deductive theory based on the experimental findings of physics. Like mathematical physics, Piaget (see also Bond 1978, 2005; 1957, p. 25) also envisages 'psycho-logic' or 'logico-psychology' as a *tertium quid*. On the one hand, psychology investigates mental life empirically, and its criterion for truth is agreement with experimental findings; on the other hand, logic, like mathematics, is a deductive science, which is not concerned with correspondence with facts, but with formal rigour, and, again like mathematics, it has developed algebraic techniques. Psycho-logic is an application of these formal algebraic tools to the findings of experimental psychology, and it aims to construct a deductive theory based on the experimental facts of psychology. In other words, psycho-logic uses of the formal algebraic tools of logic to model the structured wholes systems of operations form, namely groupings.

The Grouping as a Cognitive Tool

Psycho-logic aims to model the intellectual operations that form the foundation of reasoning. On the logical operators of propositional logic, for instance, the interpropositional grouping models the operations transforming the 16 operators into one another. However, the operations do not correspond to rules of inference and do not necessarily preserve truth. They simply describe the intellectual activity transforming one operator into another without consideration of logical consequence. Whatever its true relationship to reasoning psycho-logic is therefore not synonymous with logic.

Piaget describes how adolescents reason using the operations of the grouping when attempting to grasp the connection between phenomena as follows:

Let us take as an example the implication $p \supset q$, and let us imagine an experimental situation in which a child between twelve and fifteen tries to understand the connections between phenomena which are not familiar to him but which he analyses by means of the new propositional operations rather than by trial and error. Let us suppose then that he observes a moving object that keeps starting and stopping and he notices that the stops seem to be accompanied by lighting of an electric bulb. The first hypothesis he will make is that the light is the cause (or an indication of the cause) of the stops, or $p \supset q$ (light implies stop). There is only one way to confirm the hypothesis, and that is to find out whether the bulb ever lights up without the object stopping, or pq^- (pq^- is the inverse of or negation of $p \supset q$). But he may also wonder whether the light, instead of causing the stop, is caused by it, or $p \supset q$ (now the reciprocal and not the inverse of $p \supset q$). To confirm $p \supset q$ (stop implies light), he looks for the opposite case which would disconfirm it; that is, does the object ever stop without the light going on? This case, p^-q , is the inverse of $p \supset q$. The object stopping every time the light goes on is quite compatible with its sometimes stopping for some other reason. Similarly, pq^- , which is the inverse of $p \supset q$, is also the correlative of $q \supset p$. If every time there is a stop the bulb lights up ($q \supset p$), there can be lights without stops. Similarly, if $q \supset p$ is the reciprocal of $p \supset q$, then p^-q is also the reciprocal of pq^- (Inhelder and Piaget 1969, p. 139).

More generally, given any two observable phenomena represented by propositions p and q , it is not immediately obvious how they are related. The relation between p and q can be determined by means of the four possible coincidences of these phenomena, which are represented by the conjunctions pq , p^-q , pq^- and p^-q^- . However, individually each observation does not allow the relationship between the phenomena to be determined unequivocally. Observation of p and q always occurring together, pq , for example, could mean that p and q are related in any of the 8 ways represented by the columns in Table 1 in which pq occurs. Through observation of all four possible coincidences of the phenomena, on the other hand, the exact relationship between p and q can be determined unequivocally. Observation of pq and p^-q^- occurring without either p^-q or pq^- occurring, for example, means that the phenomena represented by p and q are equivalent; whereas observation of pq , p^-q , and pq^- but no cases of p^-q^- means that $p \vee q$ (see Table 2). Conversely,

if $p \supset q$ is postulated, pq , $p \overline{q}$, and $\overline{p} \overline{q}$ are observations that would support the hypothesis, whereas $p\overline{q}$ would falsify it. In short, the interpropositional grouping generates a framework of possible relations between phenomena in which the connection between actual phenomena can be determined rationally (Smith 1987, sec. Piaget's Logic: A Constructivist Interpretation). Although observations are necessary, the rationale for judging the relationship between phenomena is derived from the framework of possible observations, which the interpropositional grouping generates. Thus, 'reasoning is ... the calculus embodied in propositional operations' (Smith 1987, p. 344).

Logic and Reasoning

'Logic is an essential tool for all sciences, but it is not a psychological theory of reasoning' (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 17) is the conclusion Johnson-Laird comes to after enumerating the many differences between logic and reasoning. After reviewing and assessing the achievements of the German psychological school of thought known as *Denkpsychologie*, Piaget concludes:

"Thought Psychology" finished by making thought the mirror of logic, and in this lies the root of the difficulties it has found insurmountable. The question is then to ascertain whether it would not be better simply to reverse the terms and make logic the mirror of thought" (Piaget 2001, p. 27).

Without explication, the mirror metaphor is perhaps obscure, but Piaget sheds light on it in subsequent elaborations:

"logic and the psychology of thought began by being confused and not differentiated at all; Aristotle no doubt thought he was writing a natural history of the mind (as well as of physical reality itself) by stating the laws of the syllogism. When psychology was set up as an independent science, psychologists came to understand (taking a considerable time over it) that the reflections contained in text-books of logic on the concept, judgment and reasoning did not exempt them from seeking to sort out the causal mechanism of intelligence. But as a residual effect of their original failure to draw a distinction, they still continued to think of logic as a science of reality, placed, in spite of its normative character, on the same plane as psychology, but concerned exclusively with "true thought" is [sic] opposed to thought in general, freed from all norms. Hence the deluded outlook of *Denkpsychologie*, according to which thought, a psychological fact, constitutes a reflection of logical laws (Piaget 2001, pp. 28–9).

In this quotation, Piaget clearly distinguishes between causal and normative sciences. The former treats thought as a psychological fact and is a science of reality concerned with the causal mechanisms of intelligence; the latter reflects on thought, its concepts, judgments and reasoning but only from the point of view of validity. Moreover, his criticism is levelled at the paucity of differentiation between causal and normative laws that misled thought psychologists to found a science of reality on a normative science. In short, logic is no more a psychological theory of reasoning for Piaget than it is for Johnson-Laird. In fact 'logic is the mirror of thought, and not vice versa' (Piaget 2001, p. 27) according to Piaget.

Additional Resources

Piaget, J. (1957). *Logic and Psychology*. (W. Mays & F. Whitehead, Trans.). New York: Basic Books Inc.

Piaget, J. (1977). *The Stages of Intellectual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. In H. E. Guber & J. J. Vonèche (Eds.), H. E. Gruber (Trans.), *The Essential Piaget* (pp. 814–819). New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Piaget, J. (2001). *The Psychology of Intelligence*. (M. Piercy & D. E. Berlyne, Trans.). London; New York: Routledge.

Piaget, J., & Evans, R. I. (1973). *Jean Piaget, the Man and his Ideas*. (E. Duckworth, Trans.). New York: E P Dutton.

References

Bond, T. G. (1978). Propositional Logic as a Model for Adolescent Intelligence—Additional Considerations. *Interchange*, 9, 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01816518>

Bond, T. G. (2005). Piaget and Measurement II: Empirical Validation of the Piagetian Model. In L. Smith (Ed.), *Critical Readings on Piaget* (ebook., pp. 178–208). Routledge.

Grize, J.-B. (2013). Operatory Logic. In B. Inhelder, D. de Caprona, & A. Cornu-Wells (Eds.), *Piaget Today* (electronic resource., pp. 149–64). Taylor and Francis.

Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1958). *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. (A. Parsons & S. Milgram, Trans.). London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.

Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1969). *The Psychology of the Child*. (H. Weaver, Trans.). New York: Basic Books. <http://archive.org/details/psychologyofchil00jean>. Accessed 11 June 2019

Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2006). *How We Reason*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Johnson-Laird, P. N., Byrne, R. M. J., & Schaeken, W. (1992). Propositional Reasoning by Model. *Psychological Review*, 99(3), 418–439.

Piaget, J. (1957). *Logic and Psychology*. (W. Mays & F. Whitehead, Trans.). New York: Basic Books Inc.

Piaget, J. (1971). *Genetic Epistemology*. (E. Duckworth, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc.

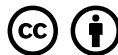
Piaget, J. (2001). *The Psychology of Intelligence*. (M. Piercy & D. E. Berlyne, Trans.). London; New York: Routledge.

Piaget, J., & Beth, E. W. (1966). *Mathematical Epistemology and Psychology*. (W. Mays, Trans.) (Softcover reprint of hardcover 1st edition., Vol. 12). Dordrecht, Holland: Springer Netherlands. DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-2193-6

Piaget, J., & Grize, J.-B. (1972). *Essai de logique opératoire* (2e éd. du Traité de logique, essai de logique opératoire (1949)., Vol. 15). Paris: Dunod.

Smith, L. (1987). A Constructivist Interpretation of Formal Operations. *Human Development*, 30(6), 341–354. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000273192>

Smith, L., Mueller, U., & Carpendale, J. I. M. (2009). Introduction. Overview. In L. Smith, U. Mueller, & J. I. M. Carpendale (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Piaget* (pp. 1–44). New York: Cambridge University Press.



Jean Piaget on Reasoning and Logic by Dr. Mark A. Winstanley is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

JOHNSON-LAIRD ON REASONING AND LOGIC

Dr. Mark A. Winstanley

*Note from chapter author, **Dr. Mark A. Winstanley**: Broadly, my interests lie in epistemology and my approach to the questions that have vexed Occidental philosophers for over two millennia is naturalistic and in accord with a shift in style in the philosophy of science in the second half of the 20th century away from foundational concerns to the investigation of the actual production of scientific knowledge. Like most post-Kuhnian philosophers of science, I acknowledge the value of the history of science for understanding the way scientific knowledge is generated; however, I also recognize that tacit assumptions concerning human cognition are made when interpreting historical record; I, therefore, believe that cognitive science should inform the history of science. I am particularly interested in genetic epistemology since it was conceived by Jean Piaget as a scientific epistemology in which both the historiogenesis and psychogenesis of knowledge are methodological pillars. Moreover, genetic epistemology aims to provide science with a scientific rather than a philosophical foundation; measured in terms of consensus among its practitioners, it thus remains true to the historical origins of science's success – emancipation from philosophy.*

Rules of Inference and Reasoning

Despite believing reasoning is much broader, Johnson-Laird (2006, p. 3) follows the trend in psychological research on reasoning that makes reasoning synonymous with inference and deduction with valid inferences. An inference can be analysed into input, premises, and output, conclusions, and a rule of inference governing the transition from premises to conclusions. Inferences are then valid if the transition from premises to conclusions occurs according to the rules of inference; deductive inferences, on the other hand, considered paradigmatic of rational thought, are those whose conclusions are necessarily true if the premises are true (Hintikka and Sandu 2007, sec. 1).

A preliminary characterisation of logic is the study of inferences (Hintikka and Sandu 2007, sec. 1); however, logic is also characterised as the study of logical truths. Logical truths differ from ordinary truth. Ordinarily, a

sentence is true if a constellation of facts verifies the proposition it expresses; logical truths, on the other hand, are not contingent on any particular constellation of facts. They are true in all possible worlds not just the actual world like ordinary truths (Hintikka and Sandu 2007, sec. 5).

Regardless of whether rules of inference or logical truth correctly characterise it, deduction is a matter of form in classical logic. Particular deductive inferences are valid if they instantiate the form of an argument deemed valid. The form itself is independent of the content involved in particular inferences; it is a relationship existing solely between the logical constants—e.g. negation, ‘if’, ‘and’, ‘or’, as well as first-order quantifiers—involved and not the particulars related by them (Read 1995, pp. 35–6). Perhaps because it realised this ideal to a large extent, first-order logic is still the paragon of logic despite logicians accepting a plurality of logics today (Restall and Beall 2000, 2001; Russell 2019). Thus logic drives an ‘irremovable wedge between form and content’ according to Johnson-Laird (2006, p. 10).

Philosophers, logicians, and psychologists alike have equated the formal rules of logic with laws of thought (e.g., George 1997; Posy 1997). However, logically, infinitely many valid conclusions can be deduced from any set of premises; given premises ‘Ali was the greatest boxer’ and ‘Today is Wednesday’, for example, ‘Ali was the greatest boxer and today is Wednesday’, ‘Ali was the greatest boxer and today is Wednesday and Ali was the greatest boxer’, ‘Ali was the greatest boxer and today is Wednesday and Ali was the greatest boxer and today is Wednesday’, etc. (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 11) can be deduced. However, when we reason, all but a few of the logically possible conclusions are actually considered (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 4). Using the surface information available, the information, that is, that can be read off without logical means, deductive inferences raise depth information to the surface. In other words, individuals employ deduction in conjunction with surface information to reveal depth information implicit in premises. As the example above shows, logically possible conclusions, on the other hand, do not necessarily reveal depth information the reasoner is not yet aware of. According to Johnson-Laird (2006, p. 11), ‘parsimony’ distinguishes actual reasoning from logic.

On the other hand, we make deductive inferences like ‘Nothing is both round and square (at the same time)’ when we reason. The inference is clearly valid, but its validity cannot be a matter of form since the logical constants ‘Nothing is both ... and ...’ remain after eliminating the particular content, and it is easy to substitute non-logical terms into the form to generate a false proposition: ‘Nothing is both a terrestrial and an aquatic animal’, for example, is clearly false since amphibians are both (Read 1995, pp. 49–50). These deductive inferences are valid by virtue of content, the meaning of the proposition, that is, constituted by the meanings of the non-logical terms substituted into the form. Collectively, such inferences are known as analytic inferences, and they are distinguished from deductive inferences based solely on logical constants. Deductive logic in the strict sense is usually confined to the latter (Hintikka and Sandu 2007, pp. 14–5; Read 1995, pp. 52–3).

Although logic is the study of inferences, the preceding paragraphs indicate a mismatch between logical inferences and how we actually reason when inferring deductively. Moreover, the mismatch is due to content and not form alone playing a role in deduction. The full extent of the role content plays in reasoning dawned

on Johnson-Laird after experimental anomalies forced him to reconsider explanations of reasoning in terms of rules of inference. The anomalies occurred in the so-called ‘selection’ task conceived by Peter Wason (1966). In it, test persons are required to determine the truth or falsity of the statement ‘If a card has an “A” on one side, then it has a “2” on its other side’ by selecting evidence from four cards laid out in front of them. A, B, 2, and 3 are on display on the cards laid out, and the test persons know that each card has a letter on one side and a number on the other. The outcome was that test persons tend to select the A-card and perhaps the 2-card but failed to recognise the significance of the 3-card. From a logical point of view, the omission is puzzling since the 3-card is the only selection besides the A-card that could falsify the statement. Initially, the anomaly did not shake the rule-based, mental-logic theory of reasoning; however, the error of omission persisted stubbornly, despite attempts to eliminate possible sources of confusion. Eventually, Wason suggested changing the content of the general claim, a heretical suggestion according to the view that laws of thought are formal rules of inference.

In order to test his hypothesis, Wason conducted the same experiment but this time the test persons were asked to determine whether ‘Every time I go to Manchester I travel by train’ is true or false. Despite the statement having the same logical form, the test persons recognised the relevance of the car-card, the equivalent to the 3-card. Johnson-Laird expresses the import of these findings as follows:

A change in content alone had a striking effect on reasoning, even though the two sorts of contents had the same logical form. These findings were embarrassing for the formal theory. On the one hand, the systematic error of omission with the letters and numbers was contrary to the laws of thought embodied in formal rules. On the other hand, a change in content alone should have no effect on performance, because by definition formal rules are blind to content (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 15).

Johnson-Laird concluded, ‘[L]ogic is an essential tool for all sciences, but it is not a psychological theory of reasoning’ (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 17). Having rejected theories of reasoning that see in the laws of thought nothing but the formal rules of logic, he conceived an alternative psychological theory of reasoning.

The Mental-Model Theory of Reasoning

Johnson-Laird (e.g., 2001, 2006, 2010; Johnson-Laird et al. 1992) proposed a mental-model theory of reasoning. A mental model is not a visual image, but like visual images it is iconic. In other words, the structure of the model corresponds to the structure of what it represents. Unlike an image, on the other hand, it is an abstraction, underlying images and representing content, even content that cannot be visualised (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 418).

Reasoning is based on mental models. Each mental model represents a possibility in as iconic a manner as possible, and the model theory does not simply claim that we often think of possibilities when we reason and take them into consideration in our deliberations; more controversially, it maintains that consideration

of possibilities is fundamental to the way we think (Johnson-Laird 2006, pp. 38–40). Experimental evidence corroborates this claim since the more possibilities reasoners have to take into account the more time they need to draw conclusions and the more mistakes they make (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 47). Moreover, the mistakes made are largely erroneous conclusions based on some possibilities while overlooking others (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 45).

Johnson-Laird (2006, p. 417) was led to the theory by our reliance on perception, the meaning of words and sentences, the significance of the propositions that they express, and our knowledge when reasoning. If reasoning were based solely on logical forms, the use, let alone reliance, on the content of arguments would be inexplicable. Consideration of content is, on the other hand, consistent with elaborating a set of possibilities compatible with a given state of affairs.

The principle of truth is a fundamental tenet of the mental-model theory (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 112). Although reasoning is based on the consideration of possibilities, our capacity to deal with them is surprisingly limited. Computational power lies in the capacity to hold the results of intermediate computations in memory; however, our working memory is very limited. In fact, holding more than one possibility in mind at any time already causes substantial mental strain. For Johnson-Laird (2006, pp. 40–1), working memory is therefore a bottle neck in intelligence, and, in order to ease the flow, mental models only represent a simple proposition contained in the premises when it is true. However, mental notes are made as reminders that not all possibilities have been represented explicitly by this heuristic (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 113).

A consequence of the principle of truth is that mental models can diverge, sometimes radically, from complete models. A complete model of a propositional connective elaborates all possibilities compatible with the truth of the complex proposition formed whereas the mental model only represents a subset of them explicitly, namely those possibilities in which the elementary propositions connected are true, while making a mental note that other possibilities are implicit. For conjunctions, such as ‘Theresa May is the PM of the UK (P) and the UK is in the European Union (U)’, the complete model $P \wedge U$ coincides with the mental model $P \wedge U$. However, the mental model of the conditional ‘If MPs vote for the Brexit agreement (B), then Theresa May will resign as Prime Minister (R)’ only represents $B \wedge R$ of the three possibilities $B \wedge R$, $\sim B \wedge R$, and $\sim B \wedge \sim R$ comprising the complete model (see Table 1) (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 115). Despite mental notes being made that additional possibilities are to be considered, mental and complete models diverge in practice and their systematic divergence explains the occurrence of common errors in reasoning. In fact, some errors are so compelling from the point of view of mental models that Johnson-Laird has dubbed them “‘illusory’ inferences’ (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 117).

Connective	Mental Model	Complete Model
P and U	P U	P U
If B then R	B R	B R
	...	~B R
	...	~B ~R

Table 1: Mental models and complete models of conjunctions and conditionals. The columns of the table contrast the mental model and the complete model of two propositional connectives. The ellipsis stands for the possibilities omitted in the mental model due to the principle of truth but whose existence has been noted mentally (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 115 Box 8.3).

According to the model theory, reasoners construct mental models of premises and draw conclusions based on them; however, premises can have several models. Johnson-Laird (2006, p. 44) calls a single model compatible with the premises ‘an example.’ For premises with several models, a single example is therefore enough to demonstrate that a conclusion is possible. However, inferences are valid if given true premises the conclusion cannot be false; to establish the validity of a conclusion, then, all models of the premises must be examples. Conversely, a single model that is not an example refutes the validity of an inference; however, to refute the possibility of a conclusion consistent with the premises no models may be examples. The model theory, therefore, reflects what Johnson-Laird holds to be the foundation of human rationality: ‘an inference is valid if its conclusion holds in all possibilities compatible with the premises, and it is invalid if there is a possibility compatible with the premises but not with the conclusion’ (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 112). The latter is a counterexample, and the search for counterexamples is an integral part of the model theory.

We grasp the force of counterexamples in rational argumentation even without training, according to (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 5); however, there do not appear to be any fixed procedures for finding counterexamples. Intellectual ability is one factor affecting their use since only reasoners with a modicum of competence search for them. But our ability to imagine counterexamples is also affected by experience and whether we draw the conclusion ourselves or are judging the inferences of others. Another factor is whether an invalid conclusion is consistent or not with the premises. For conclusions inconsistent with their premises, contradiction with the premises is usually sought; attempts to find counterexamples, on the other hand, are made for conclusions that are consistent with their premises (Johnson-Laird 2006, Chapter 16).

Mental models are not only at the heart of propositional reasoning; they also play an important role in reasoning on the innards of propositions. Since mental models are based on the meaning of the premises, they take context and knowledge into account and embody such information in iconic representations. (Johnson-Laird 2006, pp. 134–5) Implicit relations are therefore embodied in the iconic representations, and novel relational inferences emerge on the basis of this content. Although the method used in syllogistic reasoning is

controversial (Johnson-Laird 2006, p. 149), mental models also facilitate reasoning with properties, even with non-standard quantifiers that are difficult to capture with formal rules (Johnson-Laird 2006, pp. 136–7).

In summary, the model theory explains how we reason in terms of mental models, and, by virtue of the principle of truth, it also accounts for the typical errors reasoners often make when reasoning. In opposition to psychological theories of reasoning based on formal rules of inference, the content of the inferences plays a seminal role in elaborating possibilities in the mental-model theory.

Additional Resources

Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2006). *How We Reason*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2010). Mental models and human reasoning. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 107(43), 18243–18250. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1012933107>

Johnson-Laird, P. N., & Byrne, R. M. J. (1993). Mental models or formal rules? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 16(2), 368–380. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0003065X>

Johnson-Laird, P. N., Byrne, R. M. J., & Schaeken, W. (1992). Propositional Reasoning by Model. *Psychological Review*, 99(3), 418–439.

References

- Carl J. Posy. (1997). Between Leibniz and Mill: Kant's Logic and the Rhetoric of Psychologism. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, (3), 243.
- George, R. (1997). Psychologism in Logic: Bacon to Bolzano. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 30(3), 213–242.
- Hintikka, J., & Sandu, G. (2007). What is Logic? In D. Jacquette (Ed.), *Philosophy of Logic* (pp. 13–40). Netherlands: North Holland.
- Jaakko, H., & Sandu, G. (2007). What is Logic? In D. Jacquette (Ed.), *Philosophy of Logic* (pp. 13–40). Netherlands: North Holland.

- Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2001). Mental models and deduction. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 5(10), 434–442.
- Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2006). *How We Reason*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2010). Mental models and human reasoning. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 107(43), 18243–18250. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1012933107>
- Johnson-Laird, P. N., Byrne, R. M. J., & Schaeken, W. (1992). Propositional Reasoning by Model. *Psychological Review*, 99(3), 418–439.
- Posy, C. J. (1997). Between Leibniz and Mill: Kant's Logic and the Rhetoric of Psychologism. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, (3), 243.
- Read, S. (1995). *Thinking About Logic: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Logic*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Restall, G., & Beall, J. C. (2000). Logical pluralism. *Australasian journal of philosophy*, 78(4), 475–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400012349751>
- Restall, G., & Beall, J. C. (2001). Defending Logical Pluralism. In *Proceedings of the 1999 Conference of the Society of Exact Philosophy* (pp. 1–22). Presented at the Logical Consequence: Rival Approaches, Stanmore: Hermes Science Publishers.
- Russell, G. (2019). Logical Pluralism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019.). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/logical-pluralism/>. Accessed 31 January 2020
- Wason, P. C. (1966). Reasoning. In B. M. Foss (Ed.), *New Horizons in Psychology* (pp. 135–151). Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books.

UNIT 3 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

The Problems of Philosophy
by Bertrand Russell

The African Enlightenment
by Dag Herbjørnsrud

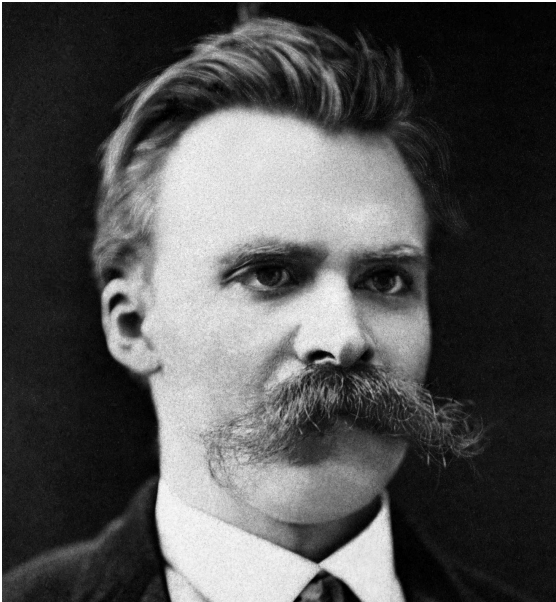
Old Gods, New Worlds
Kwame Anthony Appiah

UNIT IV

UNIT 4: HOW ONE SHOULD LIVE

SLAVE AND MASTER MORALITY (FROM CHAPTER IX OF NIETZSCHE'S BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL)

Lee Archie and John G. Archie



Portrait of
Friedrich
Nietzsche, circa
1875

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche (1844-1900 CE) detects two types of morality mixed not only in higher civilization but also in the psychology of the individual.

Master-morality values power, nobility, and independence: it stands “beyond good and evil.” Slave-morality values sympathy, kindness, and humility and is regarded by Nietzsche as “herd-morality.”

The history of society, Nietzsche believes, is the conflict between these two outlooks: the herd attempts to impose its values universally, but the noble master transcends their “mediocrity.”¹

Origin of Aristocracy

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 scale of gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings, and requiring slavery in some form or other. Without the pathos of distance, such as grows out of the incarnated

difference of classes, out of the constant out-looking and down-looking of the ruling caste on subordinates and instruments, and out of their equally constant practice of obeying and commanding, of keeping down and keeping at a distance—that other more mysterious pathos could never have arisen, the longing for an ever new widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, further, more extended, more comprehensive states, in short, just the elevation of the type “man,” the continued “self-surmounting of man,” to use a moral formula in a supermoral sense. To be sure, one must not resign oneself to any humanitarian illusions about the history of the origin of an aristocratic society (that is to say, of the preliminary condition for the elevation of the type “man”): the truth is hard. Let us acknowledge unprejudicedly how every higher civilization hitherto has originated! Men with a still natural nature, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey, still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races (perhaps trading or cattle-rearing communities), or upon old mellow civilizations in which the final vital force was flickering out in brilliant fireworks of wit and depravity. At the commencement, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their superiority did not consist first of all in their physical, but in their psychical power—they were more complete men (which at every point also implies the same as “more complete beasts”).

Higher Class of Being

Corruption—as the indication that anarchy threatens to break out among the instincts, and that the foundation of the emotions, called “life,” is convulsed—is something radically different according to the organization in which it manifests itself. When, for instance, an aristocracy like that of France at the beginning of the Revolution, flung away its privileges with sublime disgust and sacrificed itself to an excess of its moral sentiments, it was corruption:—it was really only the closing act of the corruption which had existed for centuries, by virtue of which that aristocracy had abdicated step by step its lordly prerogatives and lowered itself to a function of royalty (in the end even to its decoration and parade-dress). The essential thing, however, in a good and healthy aristocracy is that it should not regard itself as a function either of the kingship or the commonwealth, but as the significance highest justification thereof—that it should therefore accept with a good conscience the sacrifice of a legion of individuals, who, for its sake, must be suppressed and reduced to imperfect men, to slaves and instruments. Its fundamental belief must be precisely that society is not allowed to exist for its own sake, but only as a foundation and scaffolding, by means of which a select class of beings may be able to elevate themselves to their higher duties, and in general to a higher existence: like those sun-seeking climbing plants in Java—they are called Sipo Matador,—which encircle an oak so long and so often with their arms, until at last, high above it, but supported by it, they can unfold their tops in the open light, and exhibit their happiness.

Life Denial

To refrain mutually from injury, from violence, from exploitation, and put one's will on a par with that of others: this may result in a certain rough sense in good conduct among individuals when the necessary conditions are given (namely, the actual similarity of the individuals in amount of force and degree of worth, and their co-relation within one organization). As soon, however, as one wished to take this principle more generally, and if possible even as the fundamental principle of society, it would immediately disclose what it really is—namely, a Will to the denial of life, a principle of dissolution and decay.

Here one must think profoundly to the very basis and resist all sentimental weakness: life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, obtrusion of peculiar forms, incorporation, and at the least, putting it mildest, exploitation;—but why should one for ever use precisely these words on which for ages a disparaging purpose has been stamped?

Even the organization within which, as was previously supposed, the individuals treat each other as equal—it takes place in every healthy aristocracy—must itself, if it be a living and not a dying organization, do all that towards other bodies, which the individuals within it refrain from doing to each other it will have to be the incarnated Will to Power, it will endeavor to grow, to gain ground, attract to itself and acquire ascendancy—not owing to any morality or immorality, but because it lives, and because life is precisely Will to Power. On no point, however, is the ordinary consciousness of Europeans more unwilling to be corrected than on this matter, people now rave everywhere, even under the guise of science, about coming conditions of society in which “the exploiting character” is to be absent—that sounds to my ears as if they promised to invent a mode of life which should refrain from all organic functions.

“Exploitation” does not belong to a depraved, or imperfect and primitive society it belongs to the nature of the living being as a primary organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power, which is precisely the Will to Life—Granting that as a theory this is a novelty—as a reality it is the fundamental fact of all history let us be so far honest towards ourselves!

Master Morality

In a tour through the many finer and coarser moralities which have hitherto prevailed or still prevail on the earth, I found certain traits recurring regularly together, and connected with one another, until finally two primary types revealed themselves to me, and a radical distinction was brought to light.

There is master-morality and slave-morality,—I would at once add, however, that in all higher and mixed civilizations, there are also attempts at the reconciliation of the two moralities, but one finds still oftener the confusion and mutual misunderstanding of them, indeed sometimes their close juxtaposition—even in the

same man, within one soul. The distinctions of moral values have either originated in a ruling caste, pleasantly conscious of being different from the ruled—or among the ruled class, the slaves and dependents of all sorts.

In the first case, when it is the rulers who determine the conception “good,” it is the exalted, proud disposition which is regarded as the distinguishing feature, and that which determines the order of rank. The noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the opposite of this exalted, proud disposition displays itself he despises them. Let it at once be noted that in this first kind of morality the antithesis “good” and “bad” means practically the same as “noble” and “despicable”,—the antithesis “good” and “evil” is of a different origin. The cowardly, the timid, the insignificant, and those thinking merely of narrow utility are despised; moreover, also, the distrustful, with their constrained glances, the self-abasing, the dog-like kind of men who let themselves be abused, the mendicant flatterers, and above all the liars:—it is a fundamental belief of all aristocrats that the common people are untruthful. “We truthful ones”—the nobility in ancient Greece called themselves.

It is obvious that everywhere the designations of moral value were at first applied to men; and were only derivatively and at a later period applied to actions; it is a gross mistake, therefore, when historians of morals start with questions like, “Why have sympathetic actions been praised?” The noble type of man regards himself as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: What is injurious to me is injurious in itself; he knows that it is he himself only who confers honor on things; he is a creator of values. He honors whatever he recognizes in himself: such morality equals self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would fain give and bestow:—the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not—or scarcely—out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by the superabundance of power. The noble man honors in himself the powerful one, him also who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and how to keep silence, who takes pleasure in subjecting himself to severity and hardness, and has reverence for all that is severe and hard. “Wotan placed a hard heart in my breast,” says an old Scandinavian Saga: it is thus rightly expressed from the soul of a proud Viking. Such a type of man is even proud of not being made for sympathy; the hero of the Saga therefore adds warningly: “He who has not a hard heart when young, will never have one.” The noble and brave who think thus are the furthest removed from the morality which sees precisely in sympathy, or in acting for the good of others, or in *dèintèressement*, the characteristic of the moral; faith in oneself, pride in oneself, a radical enmity and irony towards “selflessness,” belong as definitely to noble morality, as do a careless scorn and precaution in presence of sympathy and the “warm heart.”

It is the powerful who know how to honour, it is their art, their domain for invention. The profound reverence for age and for tradition—all law rests on this double reverence,—the belief and prejudice in favor of ancestors and unfavorable to newcomers, is typical in the morality of the powerful; and if, reversely, men of “modern ideas” believe almost instinctively in “progress” and the “future,” and are more and more lacking in respect for old age, the ignoble origin of these “ideas” has complacently betrayed itself thereby.

A morality of the ruling class, however, is more especially foreign and irritating to present-day taste in the

sternness of its principle that one has duties only to one's equals; that one may act towards beings of a lower rank, towards all that is foreign, just as seems good to one, or "as the heart desires," and in any case "beyond good and evil": it is here that sympathy and similar sentiments can have a place. The ability and obligation to exercise prolonged gratitude and prolonged revenge—both only within the circle of equals,—artfulness in retaliation, refinement of the idea in friendship, a certain necessity to have enemies (as outlets for the emotions of envy, quarrelsomeness, arrogance—in fact, in order to be a good friend): all these are typical characteristics of the noble morality, which, as has been pointed out, is not the morality of "modern ideas," and is therefore at present difficult to realize, and also to unearth and disclose.

Slave Morality

It is otherwise with the second type of morality, slave-morality. Supposing that the abused, the oppressed, the suffering, the unemancipated, the weary, and those uncertain of themselves should moralize, what will be the common element in their moral estimates? Probably a pessimistic suspicion with regard to the entire situation of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man, together with his situation. The slave has an unfavorable eye for the virtues of the powerful; he has a skepticism and distrust, a refinement of distrust of everything "good" that is there honored—he would fain persuade himself that the very happiness there 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 that sympathy, the kind, helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness attain to honor; for here these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence. Slave-morality is essentially the morality of utility.

Here is the seat of the origin of the famous antithesis "good" and "evil":—power and dangerousness are assumed to reside in the evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety, and strength, which do not admit of being despised. According to slave-morality, therefore, the "evil" man arouses fear; according to master-morality, it is precisely the "good" man who arouses fear and seeks to arouse it, while the bad man is regarded as the despicable being.

The contrast attains its maximum when, in accordance with the logical consequences of slave-morality, a shade of depreciation—it may be slight and well-intentioned—at last attaches itself to the "good" man of this morality; because, according to the servile mode of thought, the good man must in any case be the safe man: he is good-natured, easily deceived, perhaps a little stupid, un bonhomme. Everywhere that slave-morality gains the ascendancy, language shows a tendency to approximate the significations of the words "good" and "stupid."

Creation of Values

A last fundamental difference: the desire for freedom, the instinct for happiness and the refinements of the feeling of liberty belong as necessarily to slave-morals and morality, as artifice and enthusiasm in reverence and devotion are the regular symptoms of an aristocratic mode of thinking and estimating.—Hence we can understand without further detail why love as a passion—it is our European specialty—must absolutely be of noble origin; as is well known, its invention is due to the Provencal poet-cavaliers, those brilliant, ingenious men of the “gai saber,” to whom Europe owes so much, and almost owes itself.

Vanity is one of the things which are perhaps most difficult for a noble man to understand: he will be tempted to deny it, where another kind of man thinks he sees it self-evidently. The problem for him is to represent to his mind beings who seek to arouse a good opinion of themselves which they themselves do not possess—and consequently also do not “deserve,”—and who yet believe in this good opinion afterwards. This seems to him on the one hand such bad taste and so self-disrespectful, and on the other hand so grotesquely unreasonable, that he would like to consider vanity an exception, and is doubtful about it in most cases when it is spoken of.

He will say, for instance: “I may be mistaken about my value, and on the other hand may nevertheless demand that my value should be acknowledged by others precisely as I rate it:—that, however, is not vanity (but self-conceit, or, in most cases, that which is called ‘humility,’ and also ‘modesty’).” Or he will even say: “For many reasons I can delight in the good opinion of others, perhaps because I love and honour them, and rejoice in all their joys, perhaps also because their good opinion endorses and strengthens my belief in my own good opinion, perhaps because the good opinion of others, even in cases where I do not share it, is useful to me, or gives promise of usefulness:—all this, however, is not vanity.”

The man of noble character must first bring it home forcibly to his mind, especially with the aid of history, that, from time immemorial, in all social strata in any way dependent, the ordinary man was only that which he passed for:—not being at all accustomed to fix values, he did not assign even to himself any other value than that which his master assigned to him (it is the peculiar right of masters to create values).

It may be looked upon as the result of an extraordinary atavism, that the ordinary man, even at present, is still always waiting for an opinion about himself, and then instinctively submitting himself to it; yet by no means only to a “good” opinion, but also to a bad and unjust one (think, for instance, of the greater part of the self-appreciations and self-depreciations which believing women learn from their confessors, and which in general the believing Christian learns from his Church).

In fact, conformably to the slow rise of the democratic social order (and its cause, the blending of the blood of masters and slaves), the originally noble and rare impulse of the masters to assign a value to themselves and to “think well” of themselves, will now be more and more encouraged and extended; but it has at all times an older, ampler, and more radically ingrained propensity opposed to it—and in the phenomenon of “vanity”

this older propensity overmasters the younger. The vain person rejoices over every good opinion which he hears about himself (quite apart from the point of view of its usefulness, and equally regardless of its truth or falsehood), just as he suffers from every bad opinion: for he subjects himself to both, he feels himself subjected to both, by that oldest instinct of subjection which breaks forth in him.

It is “the slave” in the vain man’s blood, the remains of the slave’s craftiness—and how much of the “slave” is still left in woman, for instance!—which seeks to seduce to good opinions of itself; it is the slave, too, who immediately afterwards falls prostrate himself before these opinions, as though he had not called them forth.—And to repeat it again: vanity is an atavism.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Nietzsche explain the origins of society? What are the essential characteristics of a healthy society?²
2. Nietzsche states that a consequence of the “Will to Power” is the exploitation of man by man, and this exploitation is the essence of life. What does he mean by this statement? Is exploitation a basic biological function of living things?
3. What does Nietzsche mean when he says that the noble type of man is “beyond good and evil” and is a creator of values?
4. Explain in some detail the differences among the master-morality and the slave-morality. Are these concepts useful in the analysis of interpersonal dynamics?
5. Explain Nietzsche’s insight into the psychology of vanity. Why is vanity essential to the slave-morality? How does it relate to the individual’s need for approval? Is Nietzsche asserting that the vanity of an individual is a direct consequence of the individual’s own sense of inferiority?
6. For questions 1-5, do you see his account helpful to explain features of today’s society or your life?

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Lee Archie and John G Archie, *Reading for Philosophical Inquiry*, 0.21, 2004.

The use of this work is governed by the GNU Free Documentation License.

Media Attributions

- Portrait of Friedrich Nietzsche, circa 1875 © Friedrich Hartmann is licensed under a Public Domain license



Slave and Master Morality (From Chapter IX of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil) by Lee Archie and John G. Archie is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Introduction is taken from the Archie text.
2. Questions 1-5 were written by Archie and are licensed under the GFDL 1.3 and Creative Commons 3.0

THE RING OF GYGES

Plato

With these words I [Socrates] thought myself released from talking, but it seems it was only a prelude, since Glaukon, ¹who is always most brave about everything, did not accept Thrasymachos' withdrawal but said, "Socrates, do you want to seem to have persuaded us, or truly persuade us, that justice is better than injustice in every respect?"

"I would prefer truly," I said, "if it were in my power."

"Well you aren't doing what you want," he said. "Tell me, do you think there is the following kind of good, which we are pleased to possess not because we desire its consequences, but which we welcome for its own sake, such as pleasant experiences and pleasures that are harmless and give rise to nothing else subsequently besides the pleasure of having them?"

"I certainly do think there is this kind of good," I said.

"And what about a kind that we love both in its own right and for what comes from it, such as thinking and seeing and being healthy? We welcome such things for both reasons, I suppose."

"Yes," I said.

"And do you see some third kind of good," he said, "which includes exercise and medical treatment when sick and medical practice and other forms of money-making, since we say these things are laborious and yet beneficial for us, and we don't want to have them for their own sakes, but for the sake of the wages and various other things that come from them."

"There is indeed this third kind," I said. "But what of it?"

"Into which of these would you put justice?" he said.

"I think," I said, "into the most fine, the one that is loved, by the person who intends to be blessed, for itself and for what comes from it."

"That's not where most people put it," he said, "but in the laborious class, which must be practiced for the sake of wages and the standing that comes from reputation, but which itself should be avoided because difficult."

“I know it’s thought of this way,” I said, “and Thrasymachos has been finding fault with it on such grounds for a long time, and praising injustice. It seems I am somewhat slow to learn.”

“Come then,” he said, “listen to me and see if it still seems so to you. For Thrasymachos appears to me to have been soothed by you, like a snake, earlier than he should. For me, the presentation on each of them was somewhat unsatisfactory and I still want to hear what each of them is and what effect each of them has, just by itself, on the soul, putting aside the wages and the things that come from them.”

“So this is what I will do, if it seems okay to you. I will revive Thrasymachos’ argument, first, by describing what kind of thing people say justice is and where it comes from, and second, how everyone who practices it does so unwilling, as a necessity rather than as a good, and, third, how they do so reasonably, since the life of the unjust man is far better than the life of the just man, or so they say.”

“It doesn’t seem this way to me at all, Socrates, but my ears have been drenched by listening to Thrasymachos and countless others and I am at a loss. I haven’t quite heard from anyone concerning the account of justice, that it is better than injustice, to my satisfaction. I want to hear it celebrated just by itself, and I think I will hear that from you most of all. That’s why I will speak positively, step by step, about the unjust life, showing you the way I want to hear you disparage injustice and praise justice. But see if what I propose is agreeable.”

“More than anything,” I said. “What else is there that an intelligent person would appreciate talking and hearing about more often?”

“Beautifully put,” he said. “And so listen to what I said would be first, what justice is and where it comes from.”

“They say that committing injustice is by nature good, while suffering it is bad, but the greater evil of suffering it outstrips the benefit of doing it, so that when they commit and suffer injustice at each other’s hands, and have experienced both, to those who are unable to escape the one and choose the other it seems profitable to promise one another to neither commit injustice or suffer it. And that’s when they begin to make their laws and contracts between one another, and they name what is commanded bylaw “lawful” and “just”.”

“This is the origin and nature of justice, midway between what’s best—to do injustice without repaying with justice—and the worst—to be done injustice without the power to avenge it. Justice is in the middle of these both, endorsed not as something good but as worthwhile, due to the inability to commit injustice. And so the person who has the power to do this and is a truly a man would never make even a single agreement not to do injustice nor suffer it; he would be mad. And this, in sum, Socrates, is the nature of justice, and it is of this kind, and it naturally arises from these things, according to this account.”

“That even those who practice it do so unwilling, from a lack of power to commit injustice, we can see especially if we imagine something like this: give each man, both the just and the unjust man, the freedom to do whatever he likes, and then follow them to see where the desire of each one will lead. We would catch the

just man in the act, going after the same things as the unjust, due to the desire to get ahead, which every natural thing inherently pursues as good, though it is led astray by the force of law to the honor of equality.”

“The freedom of which I speak would be illustrated especially if they were ever to acquire the power that they say befell the ancestor of Gyges the Lydian. He was working as a shepherd for the then-ruler of Lydia, when there was a great thunderstorm and an earthquake cracked open a part of the ground and a chasm opened up where he had been shepherding. He was amazed at the sight and went down into it and he saw, among many other marvelous objects from mythology, a bronze bull, hollow, with windows. And when he peeked inside he saw a corpse, which seemed of superhuman size, with nothing else on but a gold ring on its hand, which he removed, and he went out.”

“The usual meeting of the shepherds was taking place, in order to make the monthly report to the king about the flocks, and he went, wearing the ring. Sitting there with the others, it so happened that he turned the socket for the gem towards him, into the palm of his hand, and when he did this, he became invisible to those sitting around him, and they spoke about him as though he had departed. He was amazed and feeling again for the ring he turned the socket to the outside, and when he did so he became visible. Taking note of this, he tested the ring to see if it had this power and in this way came to this conclusion, that, with the socket turned to the inside he became invisible, while turned to the outside he was visible.”

“Perceiving this, he immediately managed to get himself appointed as one of the messengers to the king, and when he went he seduced his wife and with her help set upon the king and killed him. In this way he took possession of the throne.”

“Now if there were two such rings and one was given to the just man and one to the unjust, we would see that there was no one who would be so strong of character to stick with justice and have the resolve to stay away from the goods of others and not take them, when he is able to take whatever he wants from the market without fear, and could enter any house and have sex with whomever he wanted, and could kill, or release from bonds, anyone he wants, and anything else, since among men he is equal to a god. Acting in this way, he would be no different from the other, and they would both go after the same things.”

“This is strong evidence, someone might surely say, that no one is just willingly but by necessity. It’s not something good for the individual, since whenever someone believes he will be able to do injustice, he does it. Every man thinks that injustice is much more profitable than justice, and rightly so, or so someone giving this account would say, since if someone possessed this kind of power and did not then want to commit injustice or to take the goods of others, those who were aware of it would think him extremely pitiful and stupid, though they would praise him as the opposite to one another, persuading one another for fear of suffering injustice. And that’s how it is, on this matter.

“In deciding between the two lives we were talking about, we will be able to make a correct decision if we

juxtapose the most just man with the most unjust, and only if we do this. What, then, is this juxtaposition? This: we must take away nothing of injustice from the unjust man and nothing of justice from the just man, but will make each of them perfect in his particular practice.”

“First, then, let the unjust man act just like clever craftsmen, such as a top-class captain or doctor. He is well aware of what is impossible and what is possible in his craft, and attempts the latter and lets the former go. If he nonetheless stumbles in some way, he is sufficient to recover himself. In the same way, let the unjust man, attempting his unjust deeds, get away with them, since he must be exceedingly unjust. The person who is caught must be thought a poor specimen, since ultimate injustice is to appear just without being just. To the completely unjust man must be given the most perfect injustice. Nothing must be taken away, and it must be granted that he does the greatest injustices while having the greatest reputation for justice. And that, if he lets something slip, he corrects it, both by the force of his speech, which is sufficiently persuasive, if any of his unjust acts are revealed, and by force, wherever force is needed, since he is bold and strong and has friends and wealth.”

“Having set up the first one like this, we must in turn, according to our argument, set up the just man beside him, a simple and noble man, who wants, as Aeschylus² says, not only to appear good but to be good. And yet the appearance must be taken away, because if he appears just, he will receive awards and gifts by appearing this way and so it would be unclear whether he was like this for the sake of justice or for the sake of the awards and gifts. He must be stripped bare of everything except justice and must be made the exact opposite of the previous character. Let him have the greatest reputation for injustice, even though he does no wrong, so that he proves his justice by not being weakened by ill-repute and what comes with it. Let him carry on like this without changing until death, appearing unjust throughout life but being just, so that, with both having arrived at the ultimate state, the one of justice, the other of injustice, we can judge which of the two is happier.”

“Wow!” I said. “My dear Glaukon! How thoroughly you have scoured clean each of the men, like statues, for the judgment!”

“As much as I can,” he said. “And with these two in this state, there’ll be no further difficulty filling out the account with the kind of life that awaits each of them. So, allow me to tell it. And if I speak crudely, don’t think that it is I who is speaking, Socrates, but those who praise injustice ahead of justice. They will say the following things: that in this condition the just man will be whipped, stretched on the rack, tied up in bonds, his eyes burnt out, and at the end, when he has undergone every evil, he will be impaled, and will realize that he should want to appear just rather than be just.”

“And the saying of Aeschylus is in reality much more applicable to the unjust man, for they say of the unjust man that he really does not wish to appear unjust but to be it, because he is devoted to deeds based on reality and does not live for appearances, “Reaping a deep furrow of the mind, From which wise plans shoot forth”. First, he governs the city because he is thought to be just, and next, he marries from whatever class he wants

and marries his children to whomever he wants, and makes contracts and partnerships with whomever he likes, and that he benefits from all of this, profiting because he is untroubled by acting unjustly. When he enters into contests, whether in private or public, he is successful and out-does those he hates, and by out-doing them he grows wealthy and does good things for his friends and harms his enemies. And he makes sacrifices and sets up offerings to the gods that are abundant and magnificent, and attends to the gods and to the humans he favors far better than the just man does, so that he is also more worthy to enjoy the favor of the gods more than the just man, in all probability.”

“In this way, Socrates, they say that the unjust man is provided with a better life than the just man, both from the gods and from men.”

For Reflection and Discussion

1. If you were to obtain the ring, what would you really do? Consider both the first week as well as 5 years from now.
2. Does this account by Glaucon explain why most people act justly? Is this true for you and those you know?
3. What are the merits and problems with the claim that the unjust should remain unjust and the just should remain just?
4. Can we speak of justice and injustice apart from society?
5. Is Glaucon’s account of human nature and origins of society a helpful or unhelpful model?

Citation and Use

This text was taken from the following work.

Woods, Cathal, Glaucon’s Challenge (Republic 2) (August 19, 2010). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1661519> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1661519>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license.



This work (The Ring of Gyges by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. Glaucon is another acceptable spelling of the name.
2. or Aeschylus

A LITTLE BOOK OF STOICISM

St. George Stock

A GUIDE TO STOICISM

by St. George Stock

TEN CENT POCKET SERIES NO. 347

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius.

FOREWORD

If you strip Stoicism of its paradoxes and its wilful misuse of language, what is left is simply the moral philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, dashed with the physics of Heraclitus. Stoicism was not so much a new doctrine as the form under which the old Greek philosophy finally presented itself to the world at large. It owed its popularity in some measure to its extravagance. A great deal might be said about Stoicism as a religion and about the part it played in the formation of Christianity but these subjects were excluded by the plan of this volume which was to present a sketch of the Stoic doctrine based on the original authorities.

ST GEORGE STOCK M A Pemb. Coll. Oxford

A GUIDE TO STOICISM.

ST GEORGE STOCK

PHILOSOPHY AMONG THE GREEKS AND ROMANS.

Among the Greeks and Romans of the classical age philosophy occupied the place taken by religion among ourselves. Their appeal was to reason not to revelation. To what, asks Cicero in his Offices, are we to look for training in virtue, if not to philosophy? Now, if truth is believed to rest upon authority it is natural that it should be impressed upon the mind from the earliest age, since the essential thing is that it should be believed, but a truth which makes its appeal to reason must be content to wait till reason is developed. We are born into the Eastern, Western or Anglican communion or some other denomination, but it was of his own free choice that the serious minded young Greek or Roman embraced the tenets of one of the great sects which divided the world of philosophy. The motive which led him to do so in the first instance may have been merely the influence of a friend or a discourse from some eloquent speaker, but the choice once made was his own choice, and he adhered to it as such. Conversions from one sect to another were of quite rare occurrence. A certain Dionysius of Heraclea, who went over from the Stoics to the Cyrenaics, was ever afterward known as "the deserter." It was as difficult to be independent in philosophy as it is with us to be independent in politics. When a young man joined a school, he committed himself to all its opinions, not only as to the end of life,

which was the main point of division, but as to all questions on all subjects. The Stoic did not differ merely in his ethics from the Epicurean; he differed also in his theology and his physics and his metaphysics. Aristotle, as Shakespeare knew, thought young men “unfit to hear moral philosophy”. And yet it was a question—or rather the question—of moral philosophy, the answer to which decided the young man’s opinions on all other points. The language which Cicero sometimes uses about the seriousness of the choice made in early life and how a young man gets entrammelled by a school before he is really able to judge, reminds us of what we hear said nowadays about the danger of a young man’s taking orders before his opinions are formed. To this it was replied that a young man only exercised the right of private judgment in selecting the authority whom he should follow, and, having once done that, trusted to him for all the rest. With the analogue of this contention also we are familiar in modern times. Cicero allows that there would be something in it, if the selection of the true philosopher did not above all things require the philosophic mind. But in those days it was probably the case, as it is now, that, if a man did not form speculative opinions in youth, the pressure of affairs would not leave him leisure to do so later.

The life span of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, was from B.C. 347 to 275. He did not begin teaching till 315, at the mature age of forty. Aristotle had passed away in 322, and with him closed the great constructive era of Greek thought. The Ionian philosophers had speculated on the physical constitution of the universe, the Pythagoreans on the mystical properties of numbers; Heraclitus had propounded his philosophy of fire, Democritus and Leucippus had struck out a rude form of the atomic theory, Socrates had raised questions relating to man, Plato had discussed them with all the freedom of the dialogue, while Aristotle had systematically worked them out. The later schools did not add much to the body of philosophy. What they did was to emphasize different sides of the doctrine of their predecessors and to drive views to their logical consequences. The great lesson of Greek philosophy is that it is worth while to do right irrespective of reward and punishment and regardless of the shortness of life. This lesson the Stoics so enforced by the earnestness of their lives and the influence of their moral teaching that it has become associated more particularly with them. Cicero, though he always classed himself as an Academic, exclaims in one place that he is afraid the Stoics are the only philosophers, and whenever he is combating Epicureanism his language is that of a Stoic. Some of Vergil’s most eloquent passages seem to be inspired by Stoic speculation. Even Horace, despite his banter about the sage, in his serious moods borrows the language of the Stoics. It was they who inspired the highest flights of declamatory eloquence in Persius and Juvenal. Their moral philosophy affected the world through Roman law, the great masters of which were brought up under its influence. So all pervasive indeed was this moral philosophy of the Stoics that it was read by the Jews of Alexandria into Moses under the veil of allegory and was declared to be the inner meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures. If the Stoics then did not add much to the body of Philosophy, they did a great work in popularising it and bringing it to bear upon life.

An intense practicality was a mark of the later Greek philosophy. This was common to Stoicism with its rival Epicureanism. Both regarded philosophy as ‘the art of life,’ though they differed in their conception of what that art should be. Widely as the two schools were opposed to one another, they had also other features in

common. Both were children of an age in which the free city had given way to monarchies, and personal had taken the place of corporate life. The question of happiness is no longer, as with Aristotle, and still more with Plato, one for the state, but for the individual. In both schools the speculative interest was feeble from the first, and tended to become feebler as time went on. Both were new departures from pre-existent schools. Stoicism was bred out of Cynicism, as Epicureanism out of Cyrenaicism. Both were content to fall back for their physics upon the pre-Socratic schools, the one adopting the firm philosophy of Heraclitus, the other the atomic theory of Democritus. Both were in strong reaction against the abstractions of Plato and Aristotle, and would tolerate nothing but concrete reality. The Stoics were quite as materialistic in their own way as the Epicureans. With regard indeed to the nature of the highest god we may, with Seneca represent the difference between the two schools as a question of the senses against the intellect, but we shall see presently that the Stoics regarded the intellect itself as being a kind of body.

The Greeks were all agreed that there was an end or aim of life, and that it was to be called 'happiness,' but at that point their agreement ended. As to the nature of happiness there was the utmost variety of opinion. Democritus had made it consist in mental serenity, Anaxagoras in speculation, Socrates in wisdom, Aristotle in the practise of virtue with some amount of favour from fortune, Aristippus simply in pleasure. These were opinions of the philosophers. But, besides these, there were the opinions of ordinary men, as shown by their lives rather than by their language. Zeno's contribution to thought on the subject does not at first sight appear illuminating. He said that the end was 'to live consistently,' the implication doubtless being that no life but the passionless life of reason could ultimately be consistent with itself. Cleanthes, his immediate successor in the school, is credited with having added the words 'with nature,' thus completing the well-known Stoic formula that the end is 'to live consistently with nature.'

It was assumed by the Greeks that the ways of nature were 'the ways of pleasantness,' and that 'all her paths' were 'peace.' This may seem to us a startling assumption, but that is because we do not mean by 'nature' the same thing as they did. We connect the term with the origin of a thing, they connected it rather with the end; by the 'natural state' we mean a state of savagery, they meant the highest civilization; we mean by a thing's nature what it is or has been, they meant what it ought to become under the most favourable conditions; not the sour crab, but the mellow glory of the Hesperides worthy to be guarded by a sleepless dragon, was to the Greeks the natural apple. Hence we find Aristotle maintaining that the State is a natural product, because it is evolved out of social relations which exist by nature. Nature indeed was a highly ambiguous term to the Greeks no less than to ourselves, but in the sense with which we are now concerned, the nature of anything was defined by the Peripatetics as 'the end of its becoming.' Another definition of theirs puts the matter still more clearly. 'What each thing is when its growth has been completed, that we declare to be the nature of each thing'.

Following out this conception the Stoics identified a life in accordance with nature with a life in accordance with the highest perfection to which man could attain. Now, as man was essentially a rational animal, his work as man lay in living the rational life. And the perfection of reason was virtue. Hence the ways of nature were

no other than the ways of virtue. And so it came about that the Stoic formula might be expressed in a number of different ways which yet all amounted to the same thing. The end was to live the virtuous life, or to live consistently, or to live in accordance with nature, or to live rationally.

DIVISION OF PHILOSOPHY.

Philosophy was defined by the Stoics as ‘the knowledge of things divine and human’. It was divided into three departments; logic, ethic, and physic. This division indeed was in existence before their time, but they have got the credit of it as of some other things which they did not originate. Neither was it confined to them, but was part of the common stock of thought. Even the Epicureans, who are said to have rejected logic can hardly be counted as dissentients from this threefold division. For what they did was to substitute for the Stoic logic a logic of their own, dealing with the notions derived from sense, much in the same way as Bacon substituted his *Novum Organum* for the *Organon* of Aristotle. Cleanthes we are told recognised six parts of philosophy, namely, dialectic, rhetoric, ethic, politic, physic, and theology, but these are obviously the result of subdivision of the primary ones. Of the three departments we may say that logic deals with the form and expression of knowledge, physic with the matter of knowledge, and ethic with the use of knowledge. The division may also be justified in this way. Philosophy must study either nature (including the divine nature) or man; and, if it studies man, it must regard him either from the side of the intellect or of the feelings, that is either as a thinking (logic) or as an acting (ethic) being.

As to the order in which the different departments should be studied, we have had preserved to us the actual words of Chrysippus in his fourth book on *Lives*. ‘First of all then it seems to me that, as has been rightly said by the ancients, there are three heads under which the speculations of the philosopher fall, logic, ethic, physic; next, that of these the logical should come first, the ethical second, and the physical third, and that of the physical the treatment of the gods should come last, whence also they have given the name of “completions” to the instruction delivered on this subject’. That this order however might yield to convenience is plain from another book on the use of reason, where he says that ‘the student who takes up logic first need not entirely abstain from the other branches of philosophy, but should study them also as occasion offers.’

Plutarch twits Chrysippus with inconsistency, because in the face of this declaration as to the order of treatment, he nevertheless says that morals rest upon physics. But to this charge it may fairly be replied that the order of exposition need not coincide with the order of existence. Metaphysically speaking, morals may depend upon physics and the right conduct of man be deducible from the structure of the universe but for all that, it may be advisable to study physics later. Physics meant the nature of God and the Universe. Our nature may be deducible from that but it is better known to ourselves to start with, so that it may be well to begin from the end of the stick that we have in our hands. But that Chrysippus did teach the logical dependence of morals on physics is plain from his own words. In his third book on the Gods he says ‘for it is not possible to find any other origin of justice or mode of its generation save that from Zeus and the nature of the universe for anything we have to say about good and evil must needs derive its origin therefrom’, and again in his *Physical Theses*,

‘for there is no other or more appropriate way of approaching the subject of good and evil on the virtues or happiness than from the nature of all things and the administration of the universe—for it is to these we must attach the treatment of good and evil inasmuch as there is no better origin to which we can refer them and inasmuch as physical speculation is taken in solely with a view to the distinction between good and evil.’

The last words are worth noting as showing that even with Chrysippus who has been called the intellectual founder of Stoicism the whole stress of the philosophy of the Porch fell upon its moral teaching. It was a favourite metaphor with the school to compare philosophy to a fertile vineyard or orchard. Ethic was the good fruit, physic the tall plants, and logic the strong wall. The wall existed only to guard the trees, and the trees only to produce the fruit. Or again philosophy was likened to an egg of which ethic was the yolk containing the chick, physic the white which formed its nourishment while logic was the hard outside shell. Posidonius, a later member of the school, objected to the metaphor from the vineyard on the ground that the fruit and the trees and the wall were all separable whereas the parts of philosophy were inseparable. He preferred therefore to liken it to a living organism, logic being the bones and sinews, physic the flesh and blood, but ethic the soul.

LOGIC

The Stoics had a tremendous reputation for logic. In this department they were the successors or rather the supersessors of Aristotle. For after the death of Theophrastus the library of the Lyceum is said to have been buried underground at Scepsis until about a century before Christ, so that the *Organon* may actually have been lost to the world during that period. At all events under Strato the successor of Theophrastus who specialized in natural science the school had lost its comprehensiveness. Cicero even finds it consonant with dramatic propriety to make Cato charge the later Peripatetics with ignorance of logic! On the other hand Chrysippus became so famous for his logic as to create a general impression that if there were a logic among the gods it would be no other than the Chrysippean.

But if the Stoics were strong in logic they were weak in rhetoric. This strength and weakness were characteristic of the school at all periods. Cato is the only Roman Stoic to whom Cicero accords the praise of real eloquence. In the dying accents of the school as we hear them in Marcus Aurelius the imperial sage counts it a thing to be thankful for that he had learnt to abstain from rhetoric, poetic, and elegance of diction. The reader however cannot help wishing that he had taken some means to diminish the crabbedness of his style. If a lesson were wanted in the importance of sacrificing to the Graces it might be found in the fact that the early Stoic writers despite their logical subtlety have all perished and that their remains have to be sought for so largely in the pages of Cicero. In speaking of logic as one of the three departments of philosophy we must bear in mind that the term was one of much wider meaning than it is with us. It included rhetoric, poetic, and grammar as well as dialectic or logic proper, to say nothing of disquisitions on the senses and the intellect which we should now refer to psychology.

Logic as a whole being divided into rhetoric and dialectic: rhetoric was defined to be the knowledge of how to speak well in expository discourses and dialectic as the knowledge of how to argue rightly in matters of question

and answer. Both rhetoric and dialectic were spoken of by the Stoics as virtues for they divided virtue in its most generic sense in the same way as they divided philosophy into physical, ethical, and logical. Rhetoric and dialectic were thus the two species of logical virtue. Zeno expressed their difference by comparing rhetoric to the palm and dialectic to the fist.

Instead of throwing in poetic and grammar with rhetoric, the Stoics subdivided dialectic into the part which dealt with the meaning and the part which dealt with the sound, or as Chrysippus phrased it, concerning significant and significates. Under the former came the treatment of the alphabet, of the parts of speech, of solecism, of barbarism, of poems, of amphibolies, of metre and music—a list which seems at first sight a little mixed, but in which we can recognise the general features of grammar, with its departments of phonology, accident, and prosody. The treatment of solecism and barbarism in grammar corresponded to that of fallacies in logic. With regard to the alphabet it is worth noting that the Stoics recognised seven vowels and six mutes. This is more correct than our way of talking of nine mutes, since the aspirate consonants are plainly not mute. There were, according to the Stoics, five parts of speech—name, appellative, verb, conjunction, article. ‘Name’ meant a proper name, and ‘appellative’ a common term.

There were reckoned to be five virtues of speech—Hellenism, clearness, conciseness, propriety, distinction. By ‘Hellenism’ was meant speaking good Greek. ‘Distinction’ was defined to be ‘a diction which avoided homeliness.’ Over against these there were two comprehensive vices, barbarism and solecism, the one being an offence against accident, the other against syntax.

The famous comparison of the infant mind to a blank sheet of paper, which we connect so closely with the name of Locke, really comes from the Stoics. The earliest characters inscribed upon it were the impressions of sense, which the Greeks called “phantasies.” A phantasy was defined by Zeno as “an impression in the soul.” Cleanthes was content to take this definition in its literal sense, and believe that the soul was impressed by external objects as wax by a signet ring. Chrysippus, however, found a difficulty here, and preferred to interpret the Master’s saying to mean an alteration or change in the soul. He figured to himself the soul as receiving a modification from every external object which acts upon it just as the air receives countless strokes when many people are speaking at once. Further, he declared that in receiving an impression the soul was purely passive and that the phantasy revealed not only its own existence, but that also of its cause, just as light displays itself and the things that are in it. Thus, when through sight we receive an impression of white, an affection takes place in the soul, in virtue whereof we are able to say that there exists a white object affecting us. The power to name the object resides in the understanding. First must come the phantasy, and the understanding, having the power of utterance, expresses in speech the affection it receives from the object. The cause of the phantasy was called the “phantast,” e. g. the white or cold object. If there is no external cause, then the supposed object of the impression was a “phantasm,” such as a figure in a dream, or the Furies whom Orestes sees in his frenzy.

How then was the impression which had reality behind it to be distinguished from that which had not? “By the feel” is all that the Stoics really had to say in answer to this question. Just as Hume made the difference

between sense-impressions and ideas to lie in the greater vividness of the former, so did they; only Hume saw no necessity to go beyond the impression, whereas the Stoics did. Certain impressions, they maintained, carried with them an irresistible conviction of their own reality, and this, not merely in the sense that they existed; but also that they were referable to an external cause. These were called “gripping phantasies.” Such a phantasy did not need proof of its own existence, or of that of its object. It possessed self-evidence. Its occurrence was attended with yielding and assent on the part of the soul. For it is as natural for the soul to assent to the self-evident as it is for it to pursue its proper good. The assent to a gripping phantasy was called “comprehension,” as indicating the firm hold that the soul thus took of reality. A gripping phantasy was defined as one which was stamped and impressed from an existing object, in virtue of that object itself, in such a way as it could not be from a non-existent object. The clause “in virtue of that object itself” was put into the definition to provide against such a case as that of the mad Orestes, who takes his sister to be a Fury. There the impression was derived from an existing object, but not from that object as such, but as coloured by the imagination of the percipient.

The criterion of truth then was no other than the gripping phantasy. Such at least was the doctrine of the earlier Stoics, but the later added a saving clause, “when there is no impediment.” For they were pressed by their opponents with such imaginary cases as that of Admetus, seeing his wife before him in very deed, and yet not believing it to be her. But here there was an impediment. Admetus did not believe that the dead could rise. Again Menelaus did not believe in the real Helen when he found her on the island of Pharos. But here again there was an impediment. For Menelaus could not have been expected to know that he had been for ten years fighting for a phantom. When, however, there was no such impediment, then they said the gripping phantasy did indeed deserve its name, for it almost took men by the hair of the head and dragged them to assent.

So far we have used “phantasy” only of real or imaginary impressions of sense. But the term was not thus restricted by the Stoics, who divided phantasies into sensible and not sensible. The latter came through the understanding and were of bodiless things which could only be grasped by reason. The ideas of Plato they declared existed only in our minds. Horse, man, and animal had no substantial existence but were phantasms of the soul. The Stoics were thus what we should call Conceptualists.

Comprehension too was used in a wider sense than that in which we have so far employed it. There was comprehension by the senses as of white and black, of rough and smooth, but there was also comprehension by the reason of demonstrative conclusions such as that the gods exist and that they exercise providence. Here we are reminded of Locke’s declaration: “’Tis as certain there’s a God as that the opposite angles made by the intersection of two straight lines are equal.” The Stoics indeed had great affinities with that thinker or rather he with them. The Stoic account of the manner in which the mind arrives at its ideas might almost be taken from the first book of Locke’s *Essay*. As many as nine ways are enumerated of which the first corresponds to simple ideas—

(1) by presentation, as objects of sense

- (2) by likeness, as the idea of Socrates from his picture
- (3) by analogy, that is, by increase or decrease, as ideas of giants and pigmies from men, or as the notion of the centre of the earth, which is reached by the consideration of smaller spheres.
- (4) by transposition, as the idea of men with eyes in their breasts.
- (5) by composition, as the idea of a Centaur.
- (6) by opposition, as the idea of death from that of life.
- (7) by a kind of transition, as the meaning of words and the idea of place.
- (8) by nature, as the notion of the just and the good
- (9) by privation, as handless

The Stoics resembled Locke again in endeavoring to give such a definition of knowledge as should cover at once the reports of the senses and the relation between ideas. Knowledge was defined by them as a sure comprehension or a habit in the acceptance of phantasies which was not liable to be changed by reason. On a first hearing these definitions might seem limited to sense knowledge but if we bethink ourselves of the wider meanings of comprehension and of phantasy, we see that the definitions apply as they were meant to apply to the mind's grasp upon the force of a demonstration no less than upon the existence of a physical object.

Zeno, with that touch of oriental symbolism which characterized him, used to illustrate to his disciples the steps to knowledge by means of gestures. Displaying his right hand with the fingers outstretched he would say, "That is a phantasy," then contracting the fingers a little, "That is assent," then having closed the fist, "That is comprehension," then clasping the fist closely with the left hand, he would add, "That is knowledge."

A notion which corresponds to our word concept was defined as a phantasm of the understanding of a rational animal. For a notion was but a phantasm as it presented itself to a rational mind. In the same way so many shillings and sovereigns are in themselves but shillings and sovereigns, but when used as passage money they become fare. Notions were arrived at partly by nature, partly by teaching and study. The former kind of notions were called preconceptions; the latter went merely by the generic name.

Out of the general ideas which nature imparts to us, reason was perfected about the age of fourteen, at the time when the voice—its outward and visible sign—attains its full development, and when the human animal is complete in other respects as being able to reproduce its kind. Thus reason which united us to the gods was not, according to the Stoics, a pre-existent principal, but a gradual development out of sense. It might truly be said that with them the senses were the intellect.

Being was confined by the Stoics to body, a bold assertion of which we shall meet the consequences later. At present it is sufficient to notice what havoc it makes among the categories. Of Aristotle's ten categories it leaves only the first, Substance, and that only in its narrowest sense of Primary Substance. But a substance or body might be regarded in four ways—

(1) simply as a body (2) as a body of a particular kind (3) as a body in a particular state (4) as a body in a particular relation.

Hence result the four Stoic categories of—

substrates suchlike so disposed so related

But the bodiless would not be thus conjured out of existence. For what was to be made of such things as the meaning of words, time, place, and the infinite void? Even the Stoics did not assign body to these, and yet they had to be recognized and spoken of. The difficulty was got over by the invention of the higher category of somewhat, which should include both body and the bodiless. Time was a somewhat, and so was space, though neither of them possessed being.

In the Stoic treatment of the proposition, grammar was very much mixed up with logic. They had a wide name which applied to any part of diction, whether a word or words, a sentence, or even a syllogism. This we shall render by "dict." A dict, then, was defined as "that which subsists in correspondence with a rational phantasy." A dict was one of the things which the Stoics admitted to be devoid of body. There were three things involved when anything was said—the sound, the sense, and the external object. Of these the first and the last were bodies, but the intermediate one was not a body. This we may illustrate after Seneca, as follows: "You see Cato walking. What your eyes see and your mind attends to is a body in motion. Then you say, 'Cato is walking'." The mere sound indeed of these words is air in motion and therefore a body but the meaning of them is not a body but an enunciation about a body, which is quite a different thing.

On examining such details as are left us of the Stoic logic, the first thing which strikes one is its extreme complexity as compared with the Aristotelian. It was a scholastic age, and the Stoics refined and distinguished to their hearts' content. As regards immediate inference, a subject which has been run into subtleties among ourselves, Chrysippus estimated that the changes which could be rung on ten propositions exceeded a million, but for this assertion he was taken to task by Hipparchus the mathematician, who proved that the affirmative proposition yielded exactly 103,049 forms and the negative 310,962. With us the affirmative proposition is more prolific in consequences than the negative. But then, the Stoics were not content with so simple a thing as mere negation, but had negative assertive and privative, to say nothing of supernegative propositions. Another noticeable feature is the total absence of the three figures of Aristotle and the only moods spoken of are the moods of the complex syllogism, such as the *modus ponens* in a conjunctive. Their type of reasoning was—

If A, then B

But A

B

The important part played by conjunctive propositions in their logic led the Stoics to formulate the following rule with regard to the material quality of such propositions: Truth can only be followed by truth, but falsehood may be followed by falsehood or truth.

Thus if it be truly stated that it is day, any consequence of that statement, e.g. that it is light, must be true also. But a false statement may lead either way. For instance, if it be falsely stated that it is night then the consequence that it is dark is false also. But if we say, “The earth flies,” which was regarded as not only false but impossible¹ this involves the true consequence that the earth is. Though the simple syllogism is not alluded to in the sketch which Diogenes Laertius gives of the Stoic logic, it is of frequent occurrence in the accounts left us of their arguments. Take for instance the syllogism wherewith Zeno advocated the cause of temperance—

One does not commit a secret to a man who is drunk.

One does commit a secret to a good man.

A good man will not get drunk.

The chain argument which we wrongly call the Sorites was also a favorite resource with the Stoics. If a single syllogism did not suffice to argue men into virtue surely a condensed series must be effectual. And so they demonstrated the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness as follows—

The wise man is temperate

The temperate is constant

The constant is unperturbed

The unperturbed is free from sorrow

Whoso is free from sorrow is happy

The wise man is happy

The delight which the early Stoics took in this pure play of the intellect led them to pounce with avidity upon the abundant stock of fallacies current among the Greeks of their time. These seem—most of them—to have been invented by the Megarians and especially by Eubulides of Miletus a disciple of Euclides but they became associated with the Stoics both by friends and foes who either praise their subtlety or deride their solemnity in dealing with them. Chrysippus himself was not above propounding such sophisms as the following—

Whoever divulges the mysteries to the uninitiated commits impiety

The hierophant divulged the mysteries to the uninitiated

The hierophant commits impiety

Anything that you say passes through your mouth

You say a wagon

A wagon passes through your mouth

He is said to have written eleven books on the No-one fallacy. But what seems to have exercised most of his

ingenuity was the famous Liar, the invention of which is ascribed to Eubulides. This fallacy in its simplest form is as follows. If you say truly that you are telling a lie, are you lying or telling the truth? Chrysippus set this down as inexplicable. Nevertheless he was far from declining to discuss it. For we find in the list of his works a treatise in five books on the Inexplicables an Introduction to the Liar and Liars for Introduction, six books on the Liar itself, a work directed against those who thought that such propositions were both false and true, another against those who professed to solve the Liar by a process of division, three books on the solution of the Liar, and finally a polemic against those who asserted that the Liar had its premises false. It was well for poor Philetas of Cos that he ended his days before Chrysippus was born, though as it was he grew thin and died of the Liar, and his epitaph served as a solemn reminder to poets not to meddle with logic—

Philetas of Cos am I

‘Twas the Liar who made me die

And the bad nights caused thereby.

Perhaps we owe him an apology for the translation.

ETHIC

We have already had to touch upon the psychology of the Stoics in connection with the first principles of logic. It is no less necessary to do so now in dealing with the foundation of ethic.

The Stoics we are told reckoned that there were eight parts of the soul. These were the five senses, the organ of sound, the intellect and the reproductive principle. The passions, it will be observed, are conspicuous by their absence. For the Stoic theory was that the passions were simply the intellect in a diseased state owing to the perversions of falsehood. This is why the Stoics would not parley with passion, conceiving that if once it were let into the citadel of the soul it would supplant the rightful ruler. Passion and reason were not two things which could be kept separate in which case it might be hoped that reason would control passion, but were two states of the same thing—a worse and a better.

The unperturbed intellect was the legitimate monarch in the kingdom of man. Hence the Stoics commonly spoke of it as the leading principle. This was the part of the soul which received phantasies and it was also that in which impulses were generated with which we have now more particularly to do.

Impulse or appetite was the principle in the soul which impelled to action. In an unperturbed state it was directed only to things in accordance with nature. The negative form of this principle or the avoidance of things as being contrary to nature, we shall call repulsion.

Notwithstanding the sublime heights to which Stoic morality rose. It was professedly based on self-love, wherein the Stoics were at one with the other schools of thought in the ancient world.

The earliest impulse that appeared in a newly born animal was to protect itself and its own constitution which

were conciliated to it by nature. What tended to its survival, it sought; what tended to its destruction, it shunned. Thus self-preservation was the first law of life.

While man was still in the merely animal stage, and before reason was developed in him, the things that were in accordance with his nature were such as health, strength, good bodily condition, soundness of all the senses, beauty, swiftness—in short all the qualities that went to make up richness of physical life and that contributed to the vital harmony. These were called the first things in accordance with nature. Their opposites were all contrary to nature, such as sickness, weakness, mutilation. Under the first things in accordance with nature came also congenial advantages of soul such as quickness of intelligence, natural ability, industry, application, memory, and the like. It was a question whether pleasure was to be included among the number. Some members of the school evidently thought that it might be, but the orthodox opinion was that pleasure was a sort of aftergrowth and that the direct pursuit of it was deleterious to the organism. The after growths of virtue were joy, cheerfulness, and the like. These were the gambolings of the spirit like the frolicsomeness of an animal in the full flush of its vitality or like the blooming of a plant. For one and the same power manifested itself in all ranks of nature, only at each stage on a higher level. To the vegetative powers of the plant the animal added sense and Impulse. It was in accordance therefore with the nature of an animal to obey the Impulses of sense, but to sense and Impulse man superadded reason so that when he became conscious of himself as a rational being, it was in accordance with his nature to let all his Impulses be shaped by this new and master hand. Virtue was therefore pre-eminently in accordance with nature. What then we must now ask is the relation of reason to impulse as conceived by the Stoics? Is reason simply the guiding, and impulse the motive power? Seneca protests against this view, when impulse is identified with passion. One of his grounds for doing so is that reason would be put on a level with passion, if the two were equally necessary for action. But the question is begged by the use of the word ‘passion,’ which was defined by the Stoics as ‘an excessive impulse.’ Is it possible then, even on Stoic principles, for reason to work without something different from itself to help it? Or must we say that reason is itself a principle of action? Here Plutarch comes to our aid, who tells us on the authority of Chrysippus in his work on Law that impulse is ‘the reason of man commanding him to act,’ and similarly that repulsion is ‘prohibitive reason.’ This renders the Stoic position unmistakable, and we must accommodate our minds to it in spite of its difficulties. Just as we have seen already that reason is not something radically different from sense, so now it appears that reason is not different from impulse, but itself the perfected form of impulse. Whenever impulse is not identical with reason—at least in a rational being—it is not truly impulse, but passion.

The Stoics, it will be observed, were Evolutionists in their psychology. But, like many Evolutionists at the present day, they did not believe in the origin of mind out of matter. In all living things there existed already what they called ‘seminal reasons,’ which accounted for the intelligence displayed by plants as well as by animals. As there were four cardinal virtues, so there were four primary passions. These were delight, grief, desire and fear. All of them were excited by the presence or the prospect of fancied good or ill. What prompted desire by its prospect caused delight by its presence, and what prompted fear by its prospect caused grief by

its presence. Thus two of the primary passions had to do with good and two with evil. All were furies which infested the life of fools, rendering it bitter and grievous to them; and it was the business of philosophy to fight against them. Nor was this strife a hopeless one, since the passions were not grounded in nature, but were due to false opinion. They originated in voluntary judgements, and owed their birth to a lack of mental sobriety. If men wished to live the span of life that was allotted to them in quietness and peace, they must by all means keep clear of the passions.

The four primary passions having been formulated, it became necessary to justify the division by arranging the specific forms of feeling under these four heads. In this task the Stoics displayed a subtlety which is of more interest to the lexicographer than to the student of philosophy. They laid great stress on the derivation of words as affording a clue to their meaning; and, as their etymology was bound by no principles, their ingenuity was free to indulge in the wildest freaks of fancy.

Though all passion stood self-condemned, there were nevertheless certain ‘eupathies,’ or happy affections, which would be experienced by the ideally good and wise man. These were not perturbations of the soul, but rather ‘constancies’; they were not opposed to reason, but were rather part of reason. Though the sage would never be transported with delight, he would still feel an abiding ‘joy’ in the presence of the true and only good; he would never indeed be agitated by desire, but still he would be animated by ‘wish,’ for that was directed only to the good; and though he would never feel fear still he would be actuated in danger by a proper caution.

There was therefore something rational corresponding to three out of four primary passions—against delight was to be set joy; against grief there was nothing to be set, for that arose from the presence of ill which would rather never attach to the sage. Grief was the irrational conviction that one ought to afflict oneself where there was no occasion for it. The ideal of the Stoics was the unclouded serenity of Socrates of whom Xanthippe declared that he had always the same face whether on leaving the house in the morning or on returning to it at night.

As the motley crowd of passions followed the banners of their four leaders so specific forms of feeling sanctioned by reason were severally assigned to the three eupathies.

Things were divided by Zeno into good, bad, and indifferent. To good belonged virtue and what partook of virtue; to bad, vice and what partook of vice. All other things were indifferent.

To the third class then belonged such things as life and death, health and sickness, pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, strength and weakness, honour and dishonour, wealth and poverty, victory and defeat, nobility and baseness of birth.

Good was defined as that which benefits. To confer benefit was no less essential to good than to impart warmth was to heat. If one asked in what ‘to benefit’ lay one received the reply that it lay in producing an act or state

in accordance with virtue, and similarly it was laid down that 'to hurt' lay in producing an act or state in accordance with vice.

The indifference of things other than virtue and vice was apparent from the definition of good which made it essentially beneficial. Such things as health and wealth might be beneficial or not according to circumstances; they were therefore no more good than bad. Again, nothing could be really good of which the good or ill depended on the use made of it, but this was the case with things like health and wealth.

The true and only good then was identical with what the Greeks called 'the beautiful' and what we call 'the right'. To say that a thing was right was to say that it was good, and conversely to say that it was good was to say that it was right; this absolute identity between the good and the right and, on the other hand, between the bad and wrong, was the head and front of the Stoic ethics. The right contained in itself all that was necessary for the happy life, the wrong was the only evil, and made men miserable whether they knew it or not.

As virtue was itself the end, it was of course choiceworthy in and for itself, apart from hope or fear with regard to its consequences. Moreover, as being the highest good, it could admit of no increase from the addition of things indifferent. It did not even admit of increase from the prolongation of its own existence, for the question was not one of quantity, but of quality. Virtue for an eternity was no more virtue, and therefore no more good, than virtue for a moment. Even so one circle was no more round than another, whatever you might choose to make its diameter, nor would it detract from the perfection of a circle if it were to be obliterated immediately in the same dust in which it had been drawn.

To say that the good of men lay in virtue was another way of saying that it lay in reason, since virtue was the perfection of reason.

As reason was the only thing whereby Nature had distinguished man from other creatures, to live the rational life was to follow Nature.

Nature was at once the law of God and the law for man. For by the nature of anything was meant, not that which we actually find it to be, but that which in the eternal fitness of things it was obviously intended to become.

To be happy then was to be virtuous, to be virtuous was to be rational, to be rational was to follow Nature, and to follow Nature was to obey God. Virtue imparted to life that even flow in which Zeno declared happiness to consist. This was attained when one's own genius was in harmony with the will that disposed of all things.

Virtue having been purified from all the dross of the emotions, came out as something purely intellectual, so that the Stoics agreed with the Socratic conception that virtue is knowledge. They also took on from Plato the four cardinal virtues of Wisdom, Temperance, Courage, and Justice, and defined them as so many branches of knowledge. Against these were set four cardinal vices of Folly, Intemperance, Cowardice, and Injustice.

Under both the virtues and vices there was an elaborate classification of specific qualities. But notwithstanding the care with which the Stoics divided and subdivided the virtues, virtue, according to their doctrine, was all the time one and indivisible. For virtue was simply reason and reason, if it were there, must control every department of conduct alike. ‘He who has one virtue has all,’ was a paradox with which the Greek thought was already familiar. But Chrysippus went beyond this, declaring that he who displayed one virtue did thereby display all. Neither was the man perfect who did not possess all the virtues, nor was the act perfect which did not involve them all. Where the virtues differed from one another was merely in the order in which they put things. Each was primarily itself, secondarily all the rest. Wisdom had to determine what it was right to do, but this involved the other virtues. Temperance had to impart stability to the impulses, but how could the term ‘temperate’ be applied to a man who deserted his post through cowardice, or who failed to return a deposit through avarice, which is a form of injustice, or yet to one who misconducted affairs through rashness, which falls under folly? Courage had to face dangers and difficulties, but it was not courage unless its cause were just. Indeed one of the ways in which courage was defined was a virtue fighting on behalf of justice. Similarly justice put first the assigning to each man his due, but in the act of doing so had to bring in the other virtues. In short, it was the business of the man of virtue to know and to do what ought to be done, for what ought to be done implied wisdom in choice, courage in endurance, justice in assignment and temperance in abiding by one’s conviction. One virtue never acted by itself, but always on the advice of a committee. The obverse to this paradox—He who has one vice has all vices—was a conclusion which the Stoics did not shrink from drawing. One might lose part of one’s Corinthian ware and still retain the rest, but to lose one virtue—if virtue could be lost—would be to lose all along with it.

We have now encountered the first paradox of Stoicism, and can discern its origin in the identification of virtue with pure reason. In getting forth the novelties in Zeno’s teaching, Cicero mentions that, while his predecessors had recognized virtues due to nature and habit, he made all dependent upon reason. A natural consequence of this was the reassertion of the position which Plato held or wished to hold, namely, that virtue can be taught. But the part played by nature in virtue cannot be ignored. It was not in the power of Zeno to alter facts. All he could do was to legislate as to names. And this he did vigorously. Nothing was to be called virtue which was not of the nature of reason and knowledge, but still it had to be admitted that nature supplied the starting points for the four cardinal virtues—for the discovery of one’s impulses, for right endurances and harmonious distributions.

From things good and bad we now turn to things indifferent. Hitherto the Stoic doctrine has been stern and uncompromising. We have now to look at it under a different aspect, and to see how it tried to conciliate common sense.

By things indifferent were meant such as did not necessarily contribute to virtue, for instance health, wealth, strength, and honor. It is possible to have all these and not be virtuous, it is possible also to be virtuous without them. But we have now to learn that though these things are neither good nor evil, and are therefore not

matter for choice or avoidance, they are far from being indifferent in the sense of arousing neither impulse nor repulsion. There are things indeed that are indifferent in the latter sense, such as whether you put out your finger this way or that, whether you stoop to pick up a straw or not, whether the number of hairs on your head be odd or even. But things of this sort are exceptional. The bulk of things other than virtue and vice do arouse in us either impulse or repulsion. Let it be understood then that there are two senses of the word indifferent—

(1) neither good nor bad (2) neither awaking impulse nor repulsion

Among things indifferent in the former sense, some were in accordance with nature, some were contrary to nature and some were neither one nor the other. Health, strengths and soundness of the senses were in accordance with nature; sickness weakness and mutilation were contrary to nature, but such things as the fallibility of the soul and the vulnerability of the body were neither in accordance with nature nor yet contrary to nature, but just nature.

All things that were in accordance with nature had ‘value’ and all things that were contrary to nature had what we must call ‘disvalue’. In the highest sense indeed of the term ‘value’—namely that of absolute value or worth—things indifferent did not possess any value at all. But still there might be assigned to them what Antipater expressed by the term ‘a selective value’ or what he expressed by its barbarous privative, ‘a disselective disvalue’. If a thing possessed a selective value you took that thing rather than its contrary, supposing that circumstances allowed, for instance, health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, life rather than death. Hence such things were called takeable and their contraries untakeable. Things that possessed a high degree of value were called preferred, those that possessed a high degree of disvalue were called rejected. Such as possessed no considerable degree of either were neither preferred nor rejected. Zeno, with whom these names originated, justified their use about things really indifferent on the ground that at court “preferment” could not be bestowed upon the king himself, but only on his ministers.

Things preferred and rejected might belong to mind, body or estate. Among things preferred in the case of the mind were natural ability, art, moral progress, and the like, while their contraries were rejected. In the case of the body, life, health, strength, good condition, completeness, and beauty were preferred, while death, sickness, weakness, ill condition, mutilation and ugliness were rejected. Among things external to soul and body, wealth, reputation, and nobility were preferred, while poverty, ill repute, and baseness of birth were rejected.

In this way all mundane and marketable goods, after having been solemnly refused admittance by the Stoics at the front door, were smuggled in at a kind of tradesman’s entrance under the name of things indifferent. We must now see how they had, as it were, two moral codes, one for the sage and the other for the world in general.

The sage alone could act rightly, but other people might perform “the proprieties.” Any one might honor his parents, but the sage alone did it as the outcome of wisdom, because he alone possessed the art of life, the peculiar work of which was to do everything that was done as the result of the best disposition. All the

acts of the sage were “perfect proprieties,” which were called “rightnesses.” All acts of all other men were sins or “wrongnesses.” At their best they could only be “intermediate proprieties.” The term “propriety,” then, is a generic one. But, as often happens, the generic term got determined in use to a specific meaning, so that intermediate acts are commonly spoken of as “proprieties” in opposition to “rightnesses.” Instances of “rightnesses” are displaying wisdom and dealing justly, instances of proprieties or intermediate acts are marrying, going on an embassy, and dialectic.

The word “duty” is often employed to translate the Greek term which we are rendering by “propriety.” Any translation is no more than a choice of evils, since we have no real equivalent for the term. It was applicable not merely to human conduct, but also to the acting of the lower animals, and even to the growth of plants. Now, apart from a craze of generalization we should hardly think of the “stern daughter of the voice of God” in connection with an amoeba corresponding successfully to stimulus, yet the creature in its inchoate way is exhibiting a dim analogy to duty. The term in question was first used by Zeno, and was explained by him, in accordance with its etymology, to mean what it came to one to do, so that as far as this goes, ‘becomingness’ would be the most appropriate translation.

The sphere of propriety was confined to things indifferent, so that there were proprieties which were common to the sage and the fool. It had to do with taking the things which were in accordance with nature and rejecting those that were not. Even the propriety of living or dying was determined, not by reference to virtue or vice, but to the preponderance or deficiency of things in accordance with nature. It might thus be a propriety for the sage in spite of his happiness, to depart from life of his own accord, and for the fool notwithstanding his misery, to remain in it. Life, being in itself indifferent, the whole question was one of opportunism. Wisdom might prompt the leaving herself should occasion seem to call for it.

We pass on now another instance of accommodation. According to the high Stoic doctrine, there was no mean between virtue and vice. All men indeed received from nature the starting-points for virtue, but until perfection had been attained they rested under the condemnation of vice. It was, to employ an illustration of the poet-philosopher Cleanthes, as though Nature had begun an iambic line and left men to finish it. Until that was done they were to wear the fool’s cap. The Peripatetics, on the other hand, recognized an intermediate state between virtue and vice, to which they gave the name of progress and proficience. Yet so entirely had the Stoics, for practical purposes, to accept this lower level, that the word “proficience” has come to be spoken of as though it were of Stoic origin.

Seneca is fond of contrasting the sage with the proficient. The sage is like a man in the enjoyment of perfect health. But the proficient is like a man recovering from a severe illness, with whom an abatement of the paroxysm is equivalent to health, and who is always in danger of a relapse. It is the business of philosophy to provide for the needs of these weaker brethren. The proficient is still called a fool, but it is pointed out that he is a very different kind of fool from the rest. Further, proficientes are arranged into three classes, in a way that reminds one of the technicalities of Calvinistic theology. First of all, there are those who are near wisdom,

but, however near they may be to the door of Heaven, they are still on the wrong side of it. According to some doctors, these were already safe from backsliding, differing from the sage only in not having yet realized that they had attained to knowledge; other authorities, however, refused to admit this, and regarded the first class as being exempt only from settled diseases of the soul, but not from passing attacks of passion. Thus did the Stoics differ among themselves as to the doctrine of “final assurance”. The second class consisted of those who had laid aside the worst diseases and passions of the soul, but might at any moment relapse into them. The third class was of those who had escaped one mental malady but not another; who had conquered lust, let us say, but not ambition; who disregarded death, but dreaded pain, This third class, adds Seneca, is by no means to be despised.

From these concessions to the weakness of humanity we now pass to the Stoic paradoxes, where we shall see their doctrine in its full rigor. It is perhaps these very paradoxes which account for the puzzled fascination with which Stoicism affected the mind of antiquity, just as obscurity in a poet may prove a surer passport to fame than more strictly poetical merits.

The root of Stoicism being a paradox, it is not surprising that the offshoots should be so too. To say that “Virtue is the highest good” is a proposition to which every one who aspires to the spiritual life must yield assent with his lips, even if he has not yet learned to believe it in his heart. But alter it into “Virtue is the only good” and by that slight change it becomes at once the teeming mother of paradoxes. By a paradox is meant that which runs counter to general opinion. Now it is quite certain that men have regarded, do regard, and, we may safely add will regard things as good which are not virtue. But if we grant this initial paradox, a great many others will follow along with it—as for instance that “Virtue is sufficient of itself for happiness”. The fifth book of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* is an eloquent defense of this thesis, in which the orator combats the suggestion that a good man is not happy when he is being broken on the wheel.

Another glaring paradox of the Stoics is that “All faults are equal”. They took their stand upon a mathematical conception of rectitude. An angle must be either a right angle or not, a line must be either straight or crooked, so an act must be either right or wrong. There is no mean between the two and there are no degrees of either. To sin is to cross the line. When once that has been done it makes no difference to the offense how far you go. Trespassing at all is forbidden. This doctrine was defended by the Stoics on account of its bracing moral effect as showing the heinousness of sin. Horace gives the judgment of the world in saying that common sense and morality, to say nothing of utility, revolt against it.

Here are some other specimens of the Stoic paradoxes. “Every fool is mad”. “Only the sage is free and every fool is a slave”. “The sage alone is wealthy”. “Good men are always happy and bad men always miserable”. “All goods are equal”. “No one is wiser or happier than another”. But may not one man we ask be more nearly wise or more nearly happy than another? “That may be”, the Stoics would reply, “but the man who is only one stade from Canopus is as much not in Canopus as the man who is a hundred stades off; and the eight day old puppy

is still as blind as on the day of its birth; nor can a man who is near the surface of the sea breathe any more than if he were full five hundred fathom down”.

It is only fair to the Stoics to add that paradoxes were quite the order of the day in Greece, though they greatly outdid other schools in producing them. Socrates himself was the father of paradox. Epicurus maintained as staunchly as any Stoic that “No wise man is unhappy”, and, if he be not belied, went the length of declaring that the wise man, if put into the bull of Phalaris would exclaim: “How delightful! How little I mind this!”

It is out of keeping with common sense to draw a hard and fast distinction between good and bad. Yet this was what the Stoics did. They insisted on effecting here and now that separation between the sheep and the goats, which Christ postponed to the Day of Judgment. Unfortunately, when it came to practice, all were found to be goats, so that the division was a merely formal one.

The good man of the Stoics was variously known as ‘the sage’, or, ‘the serious man’, the latter name being inherited from the Peripatetics. We used to hear it said among ourselves that a person had become serious, when he or she had taken to religion. Another appellation which the Stoics had for the sage was ‘the urbane man’, while the fool in contradistinction was called ‘a boor’. Boorishness was defined as an inexperience of the customs and laws of the state. By the state was meant, not Athens or Sparta, as would have been the case in a former age, but the society of all rational beings into which the Stoics spiritualised the state. The sage alone had the freedom of this city and the fool was therefore not only a boor, but an alien or an exile. In this city, Justice was natural and not conventional, for the law by which it was governed was the law of right reason. The law then was spiritualised by the Stoics, just as the state was. It no longer meant the enactments of this or that community, but the mandates of the eternal reason which ruled the world and which would prevail in the ideal state. Law was defined as right reason commanding what was to be done and forbidding what was not to be done. As such, it in no way differed from the impulse of the sage himself.

As a member of a state and by nature subject to law, man was essentially a social being. Between all the wise there existed “unanimity,” which was “a knowledge of the common good,” because their views of life were harmonious. Fools, on the other hand, whose views of life were discordant, were enemies to one another and bent on mutual injury.

As a member of society the sage would play his part in public life. Theoretically this was always true, and practically he would do so, wherever the actual constitution made any tolerable approach to the ideal type. But, if the circumstances were such as to make it certain that his embarking on politics would be of no service to his country, and only a source of danger to himself, then he would refrain. The kind of constitution of which the Stoics most approved was a mixed government containing democratic, aristocratic, and monarchical elements. Where circumstances allowed the sage would act as legislator, and would educate mankind, one way of doing which was by writing books which would prove of profit to the reader.

As a member of existing society the sage would marry and beget children, both for his own sake and for that of his country, on behalf of which, if it were good, he would be ready to suffer and die. Still he would look forward to a better time when, in Zeno's as in Plato's republic, the wise would have women and children in common, when the elders would love all the rising generation equally with parental fondness, and when marital jealousy would be no more.

As being essentially a social being, the sage was endowed not only with the graver political virtues, but also with the graces of life. He was sociable, tactful and stimulating, using conversation as a means for promoting good will and friendship; so far as might be, he was all things to all men, which made him fascinating and charming, insinuating and even wily; he knew how to hit the point and to choose the right moment, yet with it all he was plain and unostentatious and simple and unaffected; in particular he never delighted in irony much less in sarcasm.

From the social characteristics of the sage we turn now to a side of his character which appears eminently anti-social. One of his most highly vaunted characteristics was his self-sufficingness. He was to be able to step out of a burning city, coming from the wreck not only of his fortunes, but of his friends and family, and to declare with a smile that he has lost nothing. All that he truly cared for was to be centered in himself. Only thus could he be sure that Fortune would not wrest it from him.

The apathy or passionlessness of the sage is another of his most salient features. The passions being, on Zeno's showing, not natural, but forms of disease, the sage, as being the perfect man, would of course be wholly free from them. They were so many disturbances of the even flow in which his bliss lay. The sage therefore would never be moved by a feeling of favour towards any one; he would never pardon a fault; he would never feel pity; he would never be prevailed upon by entreaty; he would never be stirred to anger.

As to the absence of pity in the sage, the Stoics themselves must have felt some difficulty there since we find Epictetus recommending his hearers to show grief out of sympathy for another, but to be careful not to feel it. The inexorability of the sage was a mere consequence of his calm reasonableness, which would lead him to take the right view from the first. Lastly, the sage would never be stirred to anger. For why should it stir his anger to see another in his ignorance injuring himself?

One more touch has yet to be added to the apathy of the sage. He was impervious to wonder. No miracle of nature could excite his astonishment—no mephitic caverns, which men deemed the mouths of hell, no deep-drawn ebb tides—the standing marvel of the Mediterranean dweller, no hot springs, no spouting jets of fire.

From the absence of passion it is but a step to the absence of error. So we pass now to the infallibility of the sage—a monstrous doctrine which was never broached in the schools before Zeno. The sage, it was maintained, held no opinions, he never repented of his conduct, he was never deceived in anything. Between the daylight of knowledge and darkness of nescience Plato had interposed the twilight of opinion wherein men walked for the

most part. Not so however the Stoic sage. Of him it might be said, as Charles Lamb said of the Scotchman with whom he so imperfectly sympathized: “His understanding is always at its meridian—you never see the first dawn, the early streaks.” He has no falterings of self suspicion. Surmises, guesses, misgivings, half intuitions, semiconsciousness, partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions, have no place in his brain or vocabulary. The twilight of dubiety never falls upon him. Opinion, whether in the form of an ungripped assent, or a weak supposition, was alien from the mental disposition of the serious man. With him there was no hasty or premature assent of the understanding, no forgetfulness, no distrust. He never allowed himself to be overreached or deluded, never had need of an arbiter, never was out in his reckoning nor put out by another. No urbane man ever wandered from his way, or missed his mark, or saw wrong, or heard amiss, or erred in any of his senses; he never conjectured nor thought of a better thing, for the one was a form of imperfect assent, and the other a sign of previous precipitancy. There was with him no change, no retraction, and no tripping. These things were for those whose dogmas could alter. After this it is almost superfluous for us to be assured that the sage never got drunk. Drunkenness, as Zeno pointed out, involved babbling, and of that the sage would never be guilty. He would not, however, altogether eschew banquets. Indeed, the Stoics recognized a virtue under the name of ‘conviviality,’ which consisted in the proper conduct of them. It was said of Chrysippus that his demeanor was always quiet, even if his gait were unsteady, so that his housekeeper declared that only his legs were drunk.

There were pleasantries even within the school on this subject of infallibility of the sage. Aristo of Chios, while seceding on some other matters, held fast to the dogma that the sage never opined. Whereupon Persaeus played a trick upon him. He made one of two twin brothers deposit a sum of money with him and the other call to reclaim it. The success of the trick however only went to establish that Aristo was not the sage, an admission which each of the Stoics seems to have been ready enough to make on his own part, as the responsibilities of the position were so fatiguing.

There remains one more leading characteristic of the sage, the most striking of them all, and the most important from the ethical point of view. This was his innocence or harmlessness. He would not harm others and was not to be harmed by them. For the Stoics believed with Socrates that it was not permissible by the divine law for a better man to be harmed by a worse. You could not harm the sage any more than you could harm the sunlight; he was in our world, but not of it. There was no possibility of evil for him, save in his own will, and that you could not touch. And as the sage was beyond harm, so also was he above insult. Men might disgrace themselves by their insolent attitude towards his mild majesty, but it was not in their power to disgrace him.

As the Stoics had their analogue to the tenet of final assurance, so had they also to that of sudden conversion. They held that a man might become a sage without being at first aware of it. The abruptness of the transition from folly to wisdom was in keeping with their principle that there was no medium between the two, but it was naturally a point which attracted the strictures of their opponents. That a man should be at one moment

stupid and ignorant and unjust and intemperate, a slave and poor, and destitute, at the next a king, rich, and prosperous, temperate, and just, secure in his judgements and exempt from error, was a transformation, they declared, which smacked more of the fairy tales of the nursery than of the doctrines of a sober philosophy.

PHYSIC

We have now before us the main facts with regard to the Stoic view of man's nature, but we have yet to see in what setting they were put. What was the Stoic outlook upon the universe? The answer to this question is supplied by their Physic.

There were, according to the Stoics, two first principles of all things, the active and the passive. The passive was that unqualified being which is known as Matter. The active was the Logos, or reason in it, which is God. This, it was held, eternally pervades matter and creates all things. This dogma, laid down by Zeno, was repeated after him by the subsequent heads of the school.

There were then two first principles, but there were not two causes of things. The active principle alone was cause, the other was mere material for it to work on—inert, senseless, destitute in itself of all shape and qualities, but ready to assume any qualities or shape.

Matter was defined as that out of which anything is produced. The Prime Matter, or unqualified being, was eternal and did not admit of increase or decrease, but only of change. It was the substance or being of all things that are.

The Stoics, it will be observed, used the term “matter” with the same confusing ambiguity with which we use it ourselves, now for sensible objects which have shape and other qualities, now for the abstract conception of matter, which is devoid of all qualities.

Both these first principles, it must be understood, were conceived of as bodies, though without form, the one everywhere interpenetrating the other. To say that the passive principle, or matter, is a body comes easy to us, because of the familiar confusion adverted to above. But how could the active principle, or God, be conceived of as a body? The answer to this question may sound paradoxical. It is because God is a spirit. A spirit in its original sense meant air in motion. Now the active principle was not air, but it was something which bore an analogy to it—namely aether. Aether in motion might be called a ‘spirit’ as well as air in motion. It was in this sense that Chrysippus defined the thing that is, to be a spirit moving itself into and out of itself, or spirit moving itself to and fro.

From the two first principles which are ungenerated and indestructible must be distinguished the four elements which, though ultimate for us, yet were produced in the beginning by God and are destined some day to be reabsorbed into the divine nature. These with the Stoics were the same which had been accepted since Empedocles—namely earth, air, fire and water. The elements, like the two first principles were bodies; unlike them, they were declared to have shape as well as extension.

An element was defined as that out of which things at first come into being and into which they are at last resolved. In this relation did the four elements stand to all the compound bodies which the universe contained. The terms earth, air, fire and water had to be taken in a wide sense: earth meaning all that was of the nature of earth, air all that was of the nature of air and so on. Thus, in the human frame, the bones and sinews pertained to earth.

The four qualities of matter—hot, cold, moist and dry—were indicative of the presence of the four elements. Fire was the source of heat, air of cold, water of moisture, and earth of dryness. Between them, the four elements made up the unqualified being called Matter. All animals and other compound natures on earth had in them representatives of the four great physical constituents of the universe, but the moon, according to Chrysippus, consisted only of fire and air, while the sun was pure fire.

While all compound bodies were resolvable into the four elements, there were important differences among the elements, themselves. Two of them, fire and air, were light; the other two, water and earth, were heavy. By ‘light’ was meant that which tends away from its own centre, by ‘heavy,’ that which, tends towards it. The two light elements stood to the two heavy ones in much the same relation as the active to the passive principle generally. But further, fire had such a primary as entitles it, if the definition of element were pressed, to be considered alone worthy of the name. For the three other elements arose out of it and were to be again resolved into it.

We should obtain a wholly wrong impression of what Bishop Berkeley calls ‘the philosophy of fire’ if we set before our minds in this connection, the raging element whose strength is in destruction. Let us rather picture to ourselves as the type of fire the benign and beatific solar heat, the quickener and fosterer of all terrestrial life. For according to Zeno, there were two kinds of fire, the one destructive, the other what we may call ‘constructive,’ and which he called ‘artistic’. This latter kind of fire, which was known as aether, was the substance of the heavenly bodies, as it was also of the soul of animals and of the ‘nature’ of plants. Chrysippus, following Heraclitus, taught that the elements passed into one another by a process of condensation and rarefaction. Fire first became solidified into air, then air into water and lastly water into earth. The process of dissolution took place in the reverse order, earth being rarefied into water, water into air, and air into fire. It is allowable to see in this old world doctrine an anticipation of the modern idea of different states of matter—the solid, the liquid, and the gaseous, with a fourth beyond the gaseous which science can still only guess at, and in which matter seems almost to merge into spirit.

Each of the four elements had its own abode in the universe. Outermost of all was the ethereal ‘fire’ which was divided into two spheres: first that of the fixed stars and next that of the planets. Below this lay the sphere of ‘air’, below this again that of ‘water’, and lowest or in other words, most central of all was the sphere of ‘earth’, the solid foundation of the whole structure. Water might be said to be above earth because nowhere was there water to be found without earth beneath it, but the surface of water was always equidistant from the centre, whereas earth had prominences which rose above water.

When we say that the Stoics regarded the universe as a plenum, the reader must understand by ‘the universe’ the Cosmos or ordered whole. Within this there was no emptiness owing to the pressure of the celestial upon the terrestrial sphere. But outside of this lay the infinite void without beginning, middle, or end. This occupied a very ambiguous position in their scheme. It was not being, for being was confined to body and yet it was there. It was in fact nothing, and that was why it was infinite. For as nothing cannot be bound to any thing, so neither can there be any bound to nothing. But while bodiless itself, it had the capacity to contain body, a fact which enabled it, despite its non-entity, to serve, as we shall see, a useful purpose.

Did the Stoics then regard the universe as finite or as infinite? In answering this question we must distinguish our terms, as they did. The All, they said, was infinite, but the Whole was finite. For the ‘All’ was the cosmos and the void, whereas the ‘Whole’ was the cosmos only. This distinction we may suppose to have originated with the later members of the school. For Appolodorus noted the ambiguity of the word ‘All’ as meaning,

(1) the cosmos only, (2) cosmos + void

If then by the term “universe” we understand the cosmos, or ordered whole, we must say that the Stoics regarded the universe as finite. All being and all body, which was the same thing with being, had necessarily bounds, it was only not being, which was boundless.

Another distinction, due this time to Chrysippus himself, which the Stoics found it convenient to draw, was between the three words ‘void,’ ‘place’ and ‘space’. Void was defined as ‘the absence of body’, place was that which was occupied by body, the term ‘space’ was reserved for that which was partly occupied and partly unoccupied. As there was no corner of the cosmos unfilled by body, space, it will be seen, was another name for the All. Place was compared to a vessel that was full, void to one that was empty, and space to the vast wine-cask, such as that in which Diogenes made his home, which was kept partly full, but in which there was always room for more. The last comparison must of course not be pressed. For if space be a cask, it is one without top, bottom or sides.

But while the Stoics regarded our universe as an island of being in an ocean of void, they did not admit the possibility that other such islands might exist beyond our ken. The spectacle of the starry heavens, which presented itself nightly to their gaze in all the brilliancy of a southern sky—that was all there was of being, beyond that lay nothingness. Democritus or the Epicureans might dream of other worlds, but the Stoics contended for the unity of the cosmos as staunchly as the Mahometans for the unity of God, for with them the cosmos was God.

In shape they conceived of it as spherical, on the ground that the sphere was the perfect figure and was also the best adapted for motion. Not that the universe as a whole moved. The earth lay in its centre, spherical and motionless, and round it coursed the sun, moon, and planets, fixed each in its respective sphere as in so many

concentric rings, while the outermost ring of all, which contained the fixed stars, wheeled round the rest with an inconceivable velocity.

The tendency of all things in the universe to the centre kept the earth fixed in the middle as being subject to an equal pressure on every side. The same cause also, according to Zeno, kept the universe itself at rest in the void. But in an infinite void, it could make no difference whether the whole were at rest or in motion. It may have been a desire to escape the notion of a migratory whole which led Zeno to broach the curious doctrine that the universe has no weight, as being composed of elements whereof two are heavy and two are light. Air and fire did indeed tend to the centre like everything else in the cosmos, but not till they had reached their natural home. Till then they were of an upward-growing nature. It appears then that the upward and downward tendencies of the elements were held to neutralise one another and to leave the universe devoid of weight.

The universe was the only thing which was perfect in itself, the one thing which was an end in itself. All other things were perfect indeed as parts, when considered with reference to the whole, but were none of them ends in themselves, unless man could be deemed so who was born to contemplate the universe and imitate its perfections. Thus, then, did the Stoics envisage the universe on its physical side—as one, finite, fixed in space, but revolving round its own centre, earth, beautiful beyond all things, and perfect as a whole.

But it was impossible for this order and beauty to exist without mind. The universe was pervaded by intelligence as man's body is pervaded by his soul. But as the human soul though everywhere present in the body is not present everywhere in the same degree, so it was with the world-soul. The human soul presents itself not only as intellect, but also in the lower manifestations of sense, growth, and cohesion. It is the soul which is the cause of the plant life, which displays itself more particularly in the nails and hair; it is the soul also which causes cohesion among the parts of the solid substances such as bones and sinews, that make up our frame. In the same way the world-soul displayed itself in rational beings as intellect, in the lower animals as mere souls, in plants as nature or growth, and in inorganic substances as 'holding' or cohesion. To this lowest stage add change, and you have growth or plant nature; super-add to this phantasy and impulse and you rise to the soul of irrational animals; at a yet higher stage you reach the rational and discursive intellect, which is peculiar to man among mortal natures.

We have spoken of soul as the cause of the plant life in our bodies, but plants were not admitted by the Stoics to be possessed of soul in the strict sense. What animated them was 'nature' or, as we have called it above, 'growth'. Nature, in this sense of the principle of growth, was defined by the Stoics as 'a constructive fire, proceeding in a regular way to production,' or 'a fiery spirit endowed with artistic skill'. That Nature was an artist needed no proof, since it was her handiwork that human art essayed to copy. But she was an artist who combined the useful with the pleasant, aiming at once at beauty and convenience. In the widest sense, Nature was another name for Providence, or the principle which held the universe together, but, as the term is now being employed, it stood for that degree of existence which is above cohesion and below soul. From this point of view, it was defined as "a cohesion subject to self originated change in accordance with seminal reasons

effecting and maintaining its results in definite times, and reproducing in the offspring the characteristics of the parent". This sounds about as abstract as Herbert Spencer's definition of life, but it must be borne in mind that nature was all the time a 'spirit', and as such a body. It was a body of a less subtle essence than soul. Similarly, when the Stoics spoke of cohesion, they are not to be taken as referring to some abstract principle like attraction. 'Cohesions,' said Chrysippus, 'are nothing else than airs, for it is by these that bodies are held together, and of the individual qualities of things which are held together by cohesion, it is the air which is the compressing cause which in iron is called "hardness", in stone "thickness" and in silver "whiteness"'. Not only solidarity then, but also colours, which Zeno called 'the first schematisms' of matter were regarded as due to the mysterious agency of air. In fact, qualities in general were but blasts and tensions of the air, which gave form and figure to the inert matter underlying them.

As the man is in one sense the soul, in another the body, and in a third the union of both, so it was with the cosmos. The word was used in three senses—

- (1) God
- (2) the arrangement of the stars, etc.
- (3) the combination of both.

The cosmos as identical with God was described as an individual made up of all being who is incorruptible and ungenerated, the fashioner of the ordered frame of the universe, who at certain periods of time absorbs all being into himself and again generates it from himself. Thus the cosmos on its external side was doomed to perish and the mode of its destruction was to be by fire, a doctrine which has been stamped upon the world's belief down to the present day. What was to bring about this consummation was the soul of the universe becoming too big for its body, which it would eventually swallow up altogether. In the efflagration, when everything went back to the primeval aether, the universe would be pure soul and alive equally through and through. In this subtle and attenuated state, it would require more room than before and so expand into the void, contracting again when another period of cosmic generation had set in. Hence the Stoic definition of the Void or Infinite as that into which the cosmos is resolved at the efflagration.

In this theory of the contraction of the universe out of an ethereal state and ultimate return to the same condition one sees a resemblance to the modern scientific hypothesis of the origin of our planetary system out of the solar nebula, and its predestined end in the same. Especially is this the case with the form in which the theory was held by Cleanthes, who pictured the heavenly bodies as hastening to their own destruction by dashing themselves, like so many gigantic moths, into the sun. Cleanthes however did not conceive mere mechanical force to be at work in this matter. The grand apotheosis of suicide which he foresaw was a voluntary act; for the heavenly bodies were Gods and were willing to lose their own in a larger life.

Thus all the deities except Zeus were mortal, or at all events, perishable. Gods, like men, were destined to have an end some day. They would melt in the great furnace of being as though they were made of wax or tin. Zeus then would be left alone with his own thoughts, or as the Stoics sometimes put it, Zeus would fall back

upon Providence. For by Providence they meant the leading principle or mind of the whole, and by Zeus, as distinguished from Providence, this mind together with the cosmos, which was to it as body. In the efflagration the two would be fused into one in the single substance of aether. And then in the fulness of time there would be a restitution of all things. Everything would come round regularly again exactly as it had been before.

To us who have been taught to pant for progress, this seems a dreary prospect. But the Stoics were consistent Optimists, and did not ask for a change in what was best. They were content that the one drama of existence should enjoy a perpetual run without perhaps too nice a consideration for the actors. Death intermitted life, but did not end it. For the candle of life, which was extinguished now, would be kindled again hereafter. Being and not being came round in endless succession for all save him, into whom all being was resolved, and out of whom it emerged again, as from the vortex of some aeonian Maelstrom.

CONCLUSION

When Socrates declared before his judges that “there is no evil to a good man either in life or after death, nor are his affairs neglected by the gods”, he sounded the keynote of Stoicism, with its two main doctrines of virtue as the only good, and the government of the world by Providence. Let us weigh his words, lest we interpret them by the light of a comfortable modern piety. A great many things that are commonly called evil may and do happen to a good man in this life, and therefore presumably misfortunes may also overtake him in any other life that there may be. The only evil that can never befall him is vice, because that would be a contradiction in terms. Unless therefore Socrates was uttering idle words on the most solemn occasion of his life, he must be taken to have meant that there is no evil but vice, which implies that there is no good but virtue. Thus we are landed at once in the heart of the Stoic morality. To the question why, if there be a providence, so many evils happen to good men, Seneca unflinchingly replies: “No evil can happen to a good man, contraries do not mix.” God has removed from the good all evil: because he has taken from them crimes and sins, bad thoughts and selfish designs and blind lust and grasping avarice. He has attended well to themselves, but he cannot be expected to look after their luggage: they relieve him of that care by being indifferent about it. This is the only form in which the doctrine of divine providence can be held consistently with the facts of life. Again, when Socrates on the same occasion expressed his belief that it was not “permitted by the divine law for a better man to be harmed by a worse”, he was asserting by implication the Stoic position. Neither Meletus nor Anytus could harm him, though they might have him killed or banished, or disfranchised. This passage of the Apology, in a condensed form, is adopted by Epictetus as one of the watchwords of Stoicism.

There is nothing more distinctive of Socrates than the doctrine that virtue is knowledge. Here too the Stoics followed him, ignoring all that Aristotle had done in showing the part played by the emotions and the will in virtue. Reason was with them a principle of action; with Aristotle it was a principle that guided action, but the motive power had to come from elsewhere. Socrates must even be held responsible for the Stoic paradox of the madness of all ordinary folk.

The Stoics did not owe much to the Peripatetics. There was too much balance about the master mind of

Aristotle for their narrow intensity. His recognition of the value of the passions was to them an advocacy of disease in moderation: his admission of other elements besides virtue into the conception of happiness seemed to them to be a betrayal of the citadel, to say as he did that the exercise of virtue was the highest good was no merit in their eyes, unless it were added to the confession that there was none beside it. The Stoics tried to treat man as a being of pure reason. The Peripatetics would not shut their eyes to his mixed nature, and contended that the good of such a being must also be mixed, containing in it elements which had reference to the body and its environment. The goods of the soul indeed, they said, far outweighed those of body and estate, but still the latter had a right to be considered.

Though the Stoics were religious to the point of superstition, yet they did not invoke the terrors of theology to enforce the lesson of virtue. Plato does this even in the very work, the professed object of which is to prove the intrinsic superiority of justice to injustice. But Chrysippus protested against Plato's procedure on this point, declaring that the talk about punishment by the gods was mere 'bugaboo'. By the Stoics indeed, no less than by the Epicureans, fear of the gods was discarded from philosophy. The Epicurean gods took no part in the affairs of men; the Stoic God was incapable of anger.

The absence of any appeal to rewards and punishments was a natural consequence of the central tenet of the Stoic morality: that virtue is in itself the most desirable of all things. Another corollary that flows with equal directness from the same principle is that it is better to be than to seem virtuous. Those who are sincerely convinced that happiness is to be found in wealth or pleasure or power prefer the reality to the appearance of these goods; it must be the same with him who is sincerely convinced that happiness lies in virtue.

Despite the want of feeling in which the Stoics gloried, it is yet true to say that the humanity of their system constitutes one of its most just claims on our admiration. They were the first fully to recognise the worth of man as man; they heralded the reign of peace for which we are yet waiting; they proclaimed to the world the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; they were convinced of the solidarity of mankind, and laid down that the interest of one must be subordinated to that of all. The word "philanthrop," though not unheard before their time, was brought into prominence by them as a name for a virtue among the virtues.

Aristotle's ideal state, like the Republic of Plato, is still an Hellenic city; Zeno was the first to dream of a republic which should embrace all mankind. In Plato's Republic all the material goods are contemptuously thrown to the lower classes, all the mental and spiritual reserved for the higher. In Aristotle's ideal the bulk of the population are mere conditions, not integral parts of the state. Aristotle's callous acceptance of the existing fact of slavery blinded his eyes to the wider outlook, which already in his time was beginning to be taken. His theories of the natural slave and of the natural nobility of the Greeks are mere attempts to justify practice. In the Ethics there is indeed a recognition of the rights of man, but it is faint and grudging. Aristotle there tells us that a slave, as a man, admits of justice, and therefore of friendship, but unfortunately it is not this concession which is dominant in his system, but rather the reduction of a slave to a living tool by which it is immediately preceded. In another passage Aristotle points out that men, like other animals, have a natural affection for the

members of their own species, a fact, he adds, which is best seen in travelling. This incipient humanitarianism seems to have been developed in a much more marked way by Aristotle's followers, but it is the Stoics who have won the glory of having initiated humanitarian sentiment.

Virtue, with the earlier Greek philosophers, was aristocratic and exclusive. Stoicism, like Christianity, threw it open to the meanest of mankind. In the kingdom of wisdom, as in the kingdom of Christ, there was neither barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free. The only true freedom was to serve philosophy, or, which was the same thing, to serve God; and that could be done in any station in life. The sole condition of communion with gods and good men was the possession of a certain frame of mind, which might belong equally to a gentleman, to a freedman, or to a slave. In place of the arrogant assertion of the natural nobility of the Greeks, we now hear that a good mind is the true nobility. Birth is of no importance; all are sprung from the gods. "The door of virtue is shut to no man; it is open to all, admits all, invites all—free men, freedmen, slaves, kings and exiles. Its election is not of family or fortune; it is content with the bare man." Wherever there was a human being, there Stoicism saw a field for well doing. Its followers were always to have in their mouths and hearts the well-known line—

Homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto

Closely connected with the humanitarianism of the Greeks is their cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism is a word which has contracted rather than expanded in meaning with the advance of time. We mean by it freedom from the shackles of nationality. The Stoics meant this and more. The city of which they claimed to be citizens was not merely this round world on which we dwell, but the universe at large with all the mighty life therein contained. In this city, the greatest of earth's cities—Rome, Ephesus or Alexandria, were but houses. To be exiled from one of them was only like changing your lodgings, and death but a removal from one quarter to another. The freemen of this city were all rational beings—sages on earth and the stars in heaven. Such an idea was thoroughly in keeping with the soaring genius of Stoicism. It was proclaimed by Zeno in his Republic, and after him by Chrysippus and his followers. It caught the imagination of alien writers as of the author of the Peripatetic *De Mundo* who was possibly of Jewish origin and of Philo and St Paul who were certainly so. Cicero does not fail to make of it on behalf of the Stoics; Seneca revels in it; Epictetus employs it for edification and Maucius Aurelius finds solace in his heavenly citizenship for the cares of an earthly ruler—as Antoninus indeed his city is Rome, but as a man it is the universe.

The philosophy of an age cannot perhaps be inferred from its political conditions with that certainty which some writers assume; still there are cases in which the connection is obvious. On a wide view of the matter we may say that the opening up of the East by the arms of Alexander was the cause of the shifting of the philosophic standpoint from Hellenism to cosmopolitanism. If we reflect that the Cynic and Stoic teachers were mostly foreigners in Greece we shall find a very tangible reason for the change of view. Greece had done her work in educating the world and the world was beginning to make payment in kind. Those who had been

branded as natural slaves were now giving laws to philosophy. The kingdom of wisdom was suffering violence at the hands of barbarians.

DATES AND AUTHORITIES

BC

Death of Socrates 399

Death of Plato 347

Zeno 347 275

Studied under Crates 325

Studied under Stilpo and Xenocrates 325 315

Began teaching 315

Epicurus 341 270

Death of Aristotle 322

Death of Xenocrates 315

Cleanthes succeeded Zeno 275

Chrysippus died 207

Zeno of Tarsus succeeded Chrysippus —

Decree of the Senate forbidding the
teaching of philosophy at Rome 161

Diogenes of Babylon

Embassy of the philosophers to Rome 155

Antipater of Tarsus

Panaetius Accompanied Africanus on
his mission to the East 143

His treatise on Propriety was the
basis of Cicero's *De Officiis*.

The Scipionic Circle at Rome

The coterie was deeply tinctured with
Stoicism. Its chief members were—

The younger Africanus

the younger Laelius

L. Furius Philus

Manilius

Spurius Mummius

P. Rutillus Rufus

Q. Aelius,

Tubero

Polybius and

Panaetius

Suicide of Blossius of Cumae, the adviser
of Tiberius Gracchus and a disciple
of Antipater of Tarsus 130

Mnesarchus, a disciple of Panaetius, was
teaching at Athens when the orator
Crassus visited that city 111

Hecaton of Rhodes

A great Stoic writer, a disciple of
Panaetius and a friend of Tubero

Posidonius About 128-44

Born at Apameia in Syria

Became a citizen of Rhodes

Represented the Rhodians at Rome 86

Cicero studied under him at Rhodes 78

Came to Rome again at an advanced age 51

Cicero's philosophical works 54-44

These are a main authority for our
knowledge of the Stoics.

A.D.

Philo of Alexandria came on an embassy to Rome 39

The works of Philo are saturated with Stoic
ideas and he displays an exact acquaintance
with their terminology

Seneca

Exiled to Corsica 41

Recalled from exile 49

Forced by Nero to commit suicide 65

His Moral Epistles and philosophical
works generally are written from
the Stoic standpoint though somewhat
affected by Eclecticism

Plutarch Flor. 80

The Philosophical works of Plutarch
which have most bearing upon the
Stoics are—

De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute,

De Virtute Morali,
 De Placitis Philosophorum,
 De Stoicorum Repugnantiis,
 Stoicos absurdiora poetis dicere,
 De Communibus Notitiis.
 Epictetus Flor. 90
 A freedman of Epaphroditus,
 Disciple of C Musonius Rufus,
 Lived and taught at Rome until A. D. 90
 when the philosophers were expelled by
 Domitian. Then retired to Nicopolis in
 Epirus, where he spent the rest of his life.
 Epictetus wrote nothing himself, but his
 Dissertations, as preserved by Arrian,
 from which the Encheiridion is excerpted,
 contain the most pleasing presentation that
 we have of the moral philosophy of the Stoics.
 C Musonius Rufus
 Banished to Gyarus ... 65
 Returned to Rome ... 68
 Tried to intervene between the armies
 of Vitellius and Vespasian ... 69
 Procured the condemnation of Publius Celer
 (Tac H iv 10, Juv Sat iii 116) ... —
 Q Junius Rusticus ... Cos 162
 Teacher of M Aurelius who learnt
 from him to appreciate Epictetus
 M Aurelius Antoninus Emperor ... 161-180
 Wrote the book commonly called his
 “Meditations” under the title of
 “to himself”
 He may be considered the last of the
 Stoics
 Three later authorities for the Stoic teaching are—
 Diogenes Laertius ... 200?
 Sextus Empiricus ... 225?
 Stobaeus ... 500?

Modern works—

Von Arnim's edition of the "Fragmenta Stoicorum Veterum"

Pearson's "Fragments of Zeno and Cleanthes" Pitt Press

Remains of C Musonius Rufus in the Teubner series

Zeller's "Stoics and Epicureans."

Sir Alexander Grant, "Ethics of Aristotle"

Essay VI on the Ancient Stoics

Lightfoot on the Philippians, Dissertation II,

"St. Paul and Seneca."

Citation and Use

The text for this chapter was taken from the following work:

St. George Stock, *A Little Book of Stoicism*, (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2005),
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/7514/pg7514-images.html>

The use of this work is covered by the Public Domain.



This work (A Little Book of Stoicism by St. George Stock) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. Here we may recall the warning of Arago to call nothing impossible outside the range of pure mathematics

THE SIMPLE AND HAPPY LIFE

Epicurus

Epicurus to Menoeceus: Greetings.

Let no one delay to philosophize while he is young nor weary in philosophizing when he is old, for no one is either short of the age or past the age for enjoying health of the soul. And the man who says the time for philosophizing has not yet come or is already past may be compared to the man who says the time for happiness is not yet come or is already gone by. So both the young man and the old man should philosophize, the former that while growing old he may be young in blessings because of gratitude for what has been, the latter that he may be young and old at the same time because of the fearlessness with which he faces the future. Therefore the wise plan is to practice the things that make for happiness, since possessing happiness we have everything and not possessing it we do everything to have it.

THE GODS

Both practice and study the precepts which I continuously urged upon you, discerning these to be the A B C's of the good life. First of all, believing the divine being to be blessed and incorruptible, just as the universal idea of it is outlined in our minds, associate nothing with it that is incompatible with incorruption or alien to blessedness. And cultivate every thought concerning it that can preserve its blessedness along with incorruption. Because there are gods, for the knowledge of them is plain to see. They are not, however, such as many suppose them to be, for people do not keep their accounts of them consistent with their beliefs. And it is not the man who would abolish the gods of the multitude who is impious but the man who associates the beliefs of the multitude with the gods; for the pronouncements of the multitude concerning the gods are not innate ideas but false assumptions. According to their stories the greatest injuries and indignities are said to be inflicted upon evil men, and also benefits.

THE GODS INDIFFERENT TO WICKEDNESS

[These stories are false, because the gods], being exclusively devoted to virtues that become themselves, feel an affinity for those like themselves and regard all that is not of this kind as alien.

DEATH

Habituate yourself to the belief that death is nothing to us, because all good and evil lies in consciousness and death is the loss of consciousness. Hence a right understanding of the fact that death is nothing to us renders enjoyable the mortality of life, not by adding infinite time but by taking away the yearning for immortality, for there is nothing to be feared while living by the man who has genuinely grasped the idea that there is nothing to be feared when not living.

So the man is silly who says that he fears death, not because it will pain him when it comes, but because it pains him in prospect; for nothing that occasions no trouble when present has any right to pain us in anticipation. Therefore death, the most frightening of evils, is nothing to us, for the excellent reason that while we live it is not here and when it is here we are not living. So it is nothing either to the living or to the dead, because it is of no concern to the living and the dead are no longer.

THE INCONSISTENCY OF PEOPLE

But the multitude of men at one time shun death as the greatest of evils and at another choose death as an escape from the evils of life. The wise man, however, neither asks quarter of life nor has he any fear of not living, for he has no fault to find with life nor does he think it any evil to be out of it. Just as in the case of food, he does not always choose the largest portion but rather the most enjoyable; so with time, he does not pick the longest span of it but the most enjoyable.

And the one who bids the young man 'Live well' and the old man 'Die well' is simple-minded, not only because of the pleasure of being alive, but also for the reason that the art of living well and dying well is one and the same. And far worse is he who says: 'It were well never to have been born or having been born to have passed with all speed through the gates of Hades.' For if he is saying this out of conviction, why does he not take leave of life? Because this course is open to him if he has resolutely made up his mind to it. But if he is speaking in mockery, he is trifling in the case of things that do not countenance trifling.

THE FUTURE

As for the future, we must bear in mind that it is not quite beyond our control nor yet quite within our control, so that we must neither await it as going to be quite within our control nor despair of it as going to be quite beyond our control.

THE DESIRES

As for the desires, we should reflect that some are natural and some are imaginary; and of the natural desires

some are necessary and some are natural only; and of the necessary desires some are necessary to happiness [he refers to friendship], and others to the comfort of the body [clothing and housing], and others to life itself [hunger and thirst].

Because a correct appraisal of the desires enables us to refer every decision to choose or to avoid to the test of the health of the body and the tranquility of the soul, for this is the objective of the happy life. For to this end we do everything, that we may feel neither pain nor fear. When once this boon is in our possession, every tumult of the soul is stilled, the creature having nothing to work forward to as something lacking or something additional to seek whereby the good of the soul and the body shall arrive at fullness. For only then have we need of pleasure when from the absence of pleasure we feel pain; and conversely, when we no longer feel pain we no longer feel need of pleasure.

THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE HAPPY LIFE

And for the following reason we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of the happy life: because we recognize pleasure as the first good and connate with us and to this we have recourse as to a canon, judging every good by the reaction. And for the reason that pleasure is the first good and of one nature with us we do not choose every pleasure but at one time or another forgo many pleasures when a distress that will outweigh them follows in consequence of these pleasures; and many pains we believe to be preferable to pleasures when a pleasure that will outweigh them ensues for us after enduring those pains for a long time.

Therefore every pleasure is good because it is of one nature with us but every pleasure is not to be chosen; by the same reasoning every pain is an evil but every pain is not such as to be avoided at all times.

EXPEDIENCY: THE CALCULUS OF ADVANTAGE

The right procedure, however, is to weigh them against one another and to scrutinize the advantages and disadvantages; for we treat the good under certain circumstances as an evil and conversely the evil as a good.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY OR CONTENTMENT WITH LITTLE

And self-sufficiency we believe to be a great good, not that we may live on little under all circumstances but that we may be content with little when we do not have plenty, being genuinely convinced that they enjoy luxury most who feel the least need of it; that every natural appetite is easily gratified but the unnatural appetite difficult to gratify; and that plain foods bring a pleasure equal to that of a luxurious diet when all the pain originating in need has been removed; and that bread and water bring the most utter pleasure when one in need of them brings them to his lips.

Thus habituation to simple and inexpensive diets not only contributes to perfect health but also renders a man unshrinking in face of the inevitable emergencies of life; and it disposes us better toward the times of abundance that ensue after intervals of scarcity and renders us fearless in the face of Fortune. When therefore we say that pleasure is the end we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in high living, as certain people think, either not understanding us and holding to different views or willfully misrepresenting us; but we mean freedom from pain in the body and turmoil in the soul. For it is not protracted drinking bouts and revels nor yet sexual pleasures with boys and women nor rare dishes of fish and the rest – all the delicacies that the luxurious table bears – that beget the happy life but rather sober calculation, which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and expels the false opinions, the source of most of the turmoil that seizes upon the souls of men.

THE PRACTICAL REASON

Of all these virtues the source is the practical reason, the greatest good of all – and hence more precious than philosophy itself – teaching us the impossibility of living pleasantly without living according to reason, honor, and justice, and conversely, of living according to reason, honor, and justice without living pleasantly; for the virtues are of one nature with the pleasant life and conversely, the pleasant life is inseparable from the virtues.

DESCRIPTION OF THE HAPPY MAN

“Because who do you think is in better case than the man who holds pious beliefs concerning the gods and is invariably fearless of death; and has included in his reckoning the end of life as ordained by Nature; and concerning the utmost of things good discerns this to be easy to enjoy to the full and easy of procurement, while the utmost of things evil is either brief in duration or brief in suffering.

He has abolished the Necessity that is introduced by some thinkers as the mistress of all things, for it were better to subscribe to the myths concerning the gods than to be a slave to the Destiny of the physicists, because the former presumes a hope of mercy through worship but the latter assumes Necessity to be inexorable.

As for Fortune, he does not assume that she is a goddess, as the multitude believes, for nothing is done at random by a god; neither does he think her a fickle cause, for he does not suppose that either good or evil is dealt out to men by her to affect life’s happiness; yet he does believe the starting points for great good or evil to originate with her, thinking it better to plan well and fail than to plan badly and succeed, for in the conduct of life it profits more for good judgment to miscarry than for misjudgment to prosper by chance.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Meditate therefore by day and by night upon these precepts and upon the others that go with these, whether by yourself or in the company of another like yourself, and never will your soul be in turmoil either sleeping or waking but you will be living like a god among men, for in no wise does a man resemble a mortal creature who lives among immortal blessings.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Why does Epicurus counsel his student to disregard the gods?
2. What is Epicurus' notion of true happiness? How does it differ from other notions of happiness from other philosophers, pop culture, your family or religion of origin, etc?
3. How should we confront the aspects of life we find unsavory?
4. What role does practical reason play in the good life for Epicurus?
5. If you were an Epicurean, how would your outlook and behaviors change?

Citation and Use

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Diogenes Laertius. R.D. Hicks. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1972 (First published 1925). 187–93, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0004.tlg001.perseus-eng1:10.1>.

The work is in the Public Domain.



This work (The Simple and Happy Life by Epicurus) is free of known copyright restrictions.

AN INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN ETHICAL THOUGHT: ARISTOTLE, KANT, UTILITARIANISM

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

While there are many approaches to ethics in the west, here we will look at three distinct theories. Aristotle's approach is agent-centered in that it focuses on the development of the individual, which in turn, benefits society as a whole. Kant's approach is duty-based, which means that there are certain duties that we have as human beings and these duties are absolutely binding for us. Utilitarianism is the final approach we will address here and this is the view that consequences are the most important thing for resolving ethical dilemmas. Here we will look at the basics for two utilitarians, Bentham and J.S. Mill.

ARISTOTLE'S VIRTUE ETHICS:

For Aristotle, happiness is the only good that we desire for its own sake. All of our other goods/goals/ends are for the sake of achieving happiness. His notion of happiness is not simply a feeling of contentment or satisfaction, but an activity for human beings. This should be understood in terms of the function of human beings (activity of the soul in accordance with reason). Human beings are unique insofar as we have the capacity to reason. Thus, a human life, in order to be happy and flourish, must be lived in accordance with reason. This would mean that we have a balance between reason and emotion, in which reason is the guiding aspect.

According to Aristotle, it is the function of human beings to live a certain type of life and this life is to be an activity of the soul in accordance with reason. Therefore, the function of a human being (i.e. a good human being) is the excellent performance of these actions.

Happiness, then, for Aristotle, is an activity of the human soul in accordance with excellence and virtue and this is manifested over an entire lifetime. Happiness as the ethical end does not simply consist of moral virtue, but, rather, includes intellectual virtue as well. Complete happiness is both a contemplative and practical activity.

So, what kinds of things make us happy (or fulfilled)?

Aristotle does not exclude the various common sense notions of happiness that we might think of and, for him, it is not some single instance. Instead, it is an activity of virtue that depends on certain external and internal goods (i.e. friends, money, health, good luck, family, etc) and it includes all the various goods that allow us to flourish. It is also an activity that is undergone internally but that also benefits and depends upon one's community.

The final good that human beings aim at is happiness. All other things that human beings aim at are subordinate goods (wealth or power) for the sake of happiness. In other words, we always choose actions that will get us closer to happiness. Happiness is not a stepping-stone to some other good. It is self-sufficient insofar as when taken by itself it makes life desirable and not lacking.

Happiness involves the ability to move toward the final end of developing oneself intellectually, emotionally, and physically as well as using the capacities that are distinctly human with excellence.

Virtue:

Aristotle's ideas regarding virtue are based upon human characteristics that he found to be universal to all human beings across all times. Aristotle examines the behavior and moral judgments of men who would be considered good and virtuous as well as qualified to judge in matters of virtue. Overall, he claims that virtue is a mean and he describes the virtuous person as one whose behavior is neither excessive nor deficient in regard to desires, emotions, and appetites.

According to Aristotle, the master of any art seeks the intermediate between two extremes of excess and deficiency and the intermediate will depend upon us as individuals. For instance, eating one pound of food per day may be enough for one person while another person may need five pounds. So, the intermediate is relative to us as individuals.

The same holds for the virtues. For example, fear may be felt either too little or too much, but when we feel fear at the right time, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is intermediate and best, which is characteristic of virtue. To miss the mark is easy and to hit it is difficult.

The good life, for Aristotle, does not consist of a series of unrelated good actions. Good acts are intentional and they lead to other good acts—they form patterns of conduct that reveal the true character of a happy/flourishing person.

Excellence, for him, is concerned with passions and actions and the character of the agent is to be revealed by

the voluntary choices she makes. Human choice aims at the good, or at the perceived good, and the ability to make excellent choices requires accurate knowledge of a particular situation, good reasoning skills, and a well-developed virtuous character. Becoming a virtuous person depends upon one's habituation and practice of the various virtues. Thus, if you want to become temperate then practice of self-moderation and if you want to become courageous then practice actions that challenge your fears.

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit” (Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. 2).

This means that we are not born virtuous; yet, we are born with the potential to become virtuous. The virtues must be cultivated. Virtues need to be consciously developed and sustained both by the people whose character traits they are and by others around them: parents, teachers, role models, and the community at large.

By acting ethically we express our excellence as rational creatures.

For Aristotle, becoming a virtuous person entails developing the virtues in such a way that we are developing a stable pattern of character. Practice is crucial. In other words, if we think of a character trait as a reliable disposition to act in certain ways in certain situations, we must practice or habituate ourselves to solidify that character trait. We cannot just say that we are honest, we cannot just commit to being honest—we must BE honest. Make it a habit to be honest, to not talk about people behind their backs, to not be selfish, etc. Moral character is an ongoing project.

Let's consider a specific virtue: courage. The virtuous person is courageous, the person who is excessively fearful is a coward, and the person deficient in fear is reckless. Acting virtuously in a given situation depends to some degree upon the individual characteristics and training of the agent. Courage is always a mean with regard to things that inspire fear or confidence. However, while running into a burning building to search for survivors may be courageous for a firefighter, it is likely reckless for a physically weak person or an elderly person.

In this sense, the morality of the action also involves the examination—the rational examination—of whether or not the action was done to the right person, at the right time, and in the right way.

“Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean” (Nicomachean Ethics, Bk 2, section 6).

Here are some of the virtues that Aristotle identified:

Excess:	Virtue:	Deficiency:
Recklessness	Courage	Cowardice
Unrestrained	Temperate	Insensible
Wasteful	Generous	Stingy
Vanity	Humility	Timid
Impatience	Patience	Lack of Spirit
Boastfulness	Truthfulness	Understatement
Clownish	Witty	Boring
Flattery	Friendly	Surly
Shameless	Modesty	Shyness

Here is a video summarizing some key points of virtue ethics:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=487#oembed-1>

UTILITARIANISM:

Utilitarianism is a widely popular approach to morality that focuses on the consequences of one's actions. The idea put forth by Bentham and then Mill rests on the idea that the morally correct action is the one that generates the most happiness, pleasure, and/or well-being in the world OR alternatively, reduces the most pain and suffering in the world. This is a compelling approach to moral reasoning and typically comes in two basic varieties:

1. **Act utilitarianism**—This version is about the consequences of specific acts. So, in one situation A may be the morally correct option, but in another situation it might be B. It really depends upon the amount of happiness or pleasure produced or pain reduced. This version of utilitarianism is most often attributed to Bentham, who is thought to be the founder of utilitarianism. Bentham argued that to make the best decisions we must consider a few elements to determine the most optimal outcome. These elements include factors such as: scope (how many people will be affected by the action); whether or not the pleasure obtained will lead to optimal long term effects or not; and whether or not the pleasure obtained will itself produce more pleasure in the end. Essentially, Bentham thought that all pleasure was equal in a democratic sense, so, whatever brings you happiness or pleasure might differ from what brings me happiness.
2. **Rule utilitarianism**—This version is about the consequences of general rules. So, if lying tends to reduce well being in the world there ought to be a general rule against it. If persecuting innocent people results in bad outcomes, there ought to be a rule against it. Mill is the author that is thought to introduce rule utilitarianism in his attempt to defend individual rights and protect the nature of justice. As you can imagine, one major problem with Act Utilitarianism is that it would be very difficult to protect the nature of justice if persecuting an innocent person happens to bring about optimal results for the greater good. His defense of individual rights is referred to as Mill's Harm Principle, which is located in his book, *On Liberty*. This states that one cannot restrict another's behavior unless one is harming others. So, individual freedom and autonomy is important because if everyone's rights and liberties are protected, the overall good will be promoted.

Another factor that distinguishes Mill from Bentham is that Mill does not believe that all pleasures are equal. Mill holds the view that humans have certain qualities that make us human, which ought to be the basis for the type of pleasures we pursue. This is noted in his famous quote: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool dissatisfied. And, if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion it is because they only know their side of the question."

Some Notable Attractions of Utilitarianism:

1. **Impartiality:** everyone's interests and well-being are equally important, regardless of class, sex, race, sexual orientation, or any other arbitrary characteristic.
2. **Justifies Conventional Moral Wisdom:** can justify our basic moral beliefs, condemning the kinds of acts that we typically condemn: slavery, bigotry, and killing innocent people while commending things we typically believe are morally right: helping the poor, keeping our promises, being honest, etc. Can also explain our shared view about virtues and vices.
3. **Conflict Resolution:** one ultimate rule, so it is pretty easy to figure out which action is the right one. Take debates about the most just way to tax citizens. Should everyone be taxed the same amount, the

same percentage, or should we have a graduated tax system where those who make more pay more taxes? Tough question, but from the utilitarian perspective we have one principle to work with to figure it out.

4. **Flexibility:** no moral rule is absolute; it is not a free for all or anything goes, but it is not absolute. Even Rule Utilitarianism would have to be somewhat flexible if a rule was found NOT to contribute to the greater good.
5. **Scope of the Moral Community:** First, what is a moral community? For utilitarians, entrance into the moral community only depends upon whether the entity can suffer. Animals are included here. Traditional and alternative accounts are based on things like the ability to reason, communicate, to have emotions, to be self-aware, or to be able to self-govern. However, for the utilitarian, it's simple: if the being can experience pain and pleasure, it counts in our moral calculations.

Some Notable Difficulties with Utilitarianism:

1. It's too demanding:
 - **Deliberation:** lots of information may be needed to determine value of options, then weigh it all out. Mill argued that in most cases we know what is going to promote well being in the world or harm in the world. There may be rare situations where we have to stop and really think about the best option, but that's okay; sometimes, we need to do that.
 - **Action:** Does utilitarianism require us to be saints? Perhaps it calls us beyond what we typically think of as our moral obligations.
2. **Impartiality:** Typically this is seen as a strength, but sometimes it seems partiality is okay. Utilitarians can argue that giving preferences to our loved ones is a good idea, but not because they deserve it. Instead, this justification would have to be based on what's most beneficial.
3. **No intrinsic wrong or right:** Many of us believe that some actions are just always wrong (rape, torturing innocents, enslavement), but utilitarianism doesn't accept this. The morality of an act always depends upon the results. Any action is permitted, provided it is necessary to prevent an even worse outcome. Sometimes our options are not good and we have to choose between two evils.
4. **The problem of injustice: The Big Problem**

If it is ever optimific to violate rights, then it seems that utilitarianism will require us to do so.

- Sometimes we let the guilty go free for a benefit they can offer.
- Peeping Tom cases (unknowing victims)
- Persecuting innocent people for the security and peace of a community

Possible utilitarian responses to the problem of injustice:

1. Justice is intrinsically valuable: can we just add justice to the principle—we should maximize well being and maximize justice? Problem is when we have to choose one or the other. It also does not seem plausible to always give priority to justice.
2. Injustice is never optimific: This was Mill's line of reasoning. Long term effects of injustice outweigh possible benefits.
3. Sometimes justice must be sacrificed: depends on the situation

Here is a video covering some key elements of consequentialism:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=487#oembed-2>

KANTIAN ETHICS (DEONTOLOGY):

Kant is a deontologist, which means that duty is the basis for morality. For Kant there is a strong connection between freedom and morality. The human faculty that marks our freedom is our ability to reason and to be autonomous. This means that we are able to give ourselves the moral law. This ability is what allows us to be morally responsible. If we were not capable of acting freely we could not be held accountable for our actions. So, Kant believes that it is through our capacity for reason and autonomy that we are moral agents. These capacities are also what makes each of us unique and irreplaceable. As such, Kant is a solid defender of individual rights.

Once again, we have the capacity to give ourselves the moral law, which is the process in which we determine what duties we have as moral agents. Morality, for Kant, has nothing to do with consequences; instead, it is about fulfilling our duties. So, how do we determine what duties we have? Through what Kant calls the categorical imperative—the supreme principle of morality.

Kant's Categorical Imperative:

Kant's moral theory has two formulas for the categorical imperative. So, if you're facing a moral dilemma you must determine whether or not your action is permissible according to the formulations of the Categorical Imperative. The first formula states that we ought to act in a way such that the maxim, or principle, of our act can be willed a universal law. If your maxim cannot be universalized then that act is morally off limits. For

example, if I am considering stealing a loaf of bread, I have to ask myself if my maxim can be made a universal law. This would look something like this: Is it okay for all people to steal all the time? The answer is no; the maxim itself would be self-defeating because if everyone stole all the time there would be no private property and stealing would no longer be possible. The key is to formulate maxims that everyone could support (even if some don't). The rules are fair. So, what you are essentially doing with the test is ensuring that your maxim is logically consistent and can be used without it being self-defeating.

The second formula states that we ought to treat humanity (self and others) as an end and never as a mere means. Essentially, this entails that I treat all persons with respect and dignity; I help others achieve their goals when possible, and I avoid using them as tools or objects to further my own goals. For Kant, since humans have the capacity for autonomy and rationality, it is crucial that we treat humans with respect and dignity. With these two formulas of Kant's categorical imperative, we can see that the focal points of his moral theory include: fairness, justice, individual rights, and consistency.

Some Notable Strengths of Kant's Approach:

1. Explains why actions like slavery and rape are always wrong.
2. Explains why we do not like paternalistic laws or behavior.
3. Universal human rights are backed.
4. Explains why humans are morally responsible agents.

Some Notable Problems with Kant's Approach:

1. Justice is important, but is it always the most important factor?
2. Autonomy is complicated. Many factors influence the choices we make and there may be blurred lines about whether an individual is capable of being autonomous.
3. Is it true that consequences don't matter?
4. Moral community is restricted to those that are autonomous and rational.

Here is a video summarizing some key elements of deontology:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=487#oembed-3>

Now that we have laid out the theoretical approaches to morality in the Western World, let's think about how we might apply the theories. Take a look at this video, which explains a famous ethical dilemma:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=487#oembed-4>

Here's another that demonstrates ethical reasoning:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=487#oembed-5>



An Introduction to Western Ethical Thought: Aristotle, Kant, Utilitarianism by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS

Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock

To seek virtue for the sake of reward is to dig for iron with a spade of gold.

– Ivan Panin ¹

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Introduction

Aristotle (384–322 BC) was a scholar in disciplines such as ethics, metaphysics, biology and botany, among others. It is fitting, therefore, that his moral philosophy is based around assessing the broad characters of human beings rather than assessing singular acts in isolation. Indeed, this is what separates Aristotelian Virtue Ethics from both Utilitarianism and Kantian Ethics.

The Function Argument

Aristotle was a teleologist, a term related to, but not to be confused with, the label “teleological” as applied to normative ethical theories such as Utilitarianism. Aristotle was a **teleologist** because he believed that every object has what he referred to as a final cause. The Greek term **telos** refers to what we might call a purpose, goal, end or true final function of an object. Indeed, those of you studying Aristotle in units related to the Philosophy of Religion may recognize the link between Aristotle’s general teleological worldview and his study of ethics.

Aristotle claims that “...for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the ‘well’ is thought to reside in the function”.² Aristotle’s claim is essentially that in achieving its function, goal or end, an object achieves its own good. Every object has this type of a true function and so every object has a way of achieving goodness. The telos of a chair, for example, may be to provide a seat and a chair is a good chair when it supports the curvature of the human bottom without collapsing under the strain. Equally, says Aristotle, what makes good sculptors, artists and flautists is the successful and appropriate performance of their functions as sculptors, artists and flautists.

This teleological (function and purpose) based worldview is the necessary backdrop to understanding Aristotle's ethical reasoning. For, just as a chair has a true function or end, so Aristotle believes human beings have a telos. Aristotle identifies what the good for a human being is in virtue of working out what the function of a human being is, as per his Function Argument.

Function Argument

1. All objects have a telos.
2. An object is good when it properly secures its telos.

Given the above, hopefully these steps of the argument are clear so far. At this point, Aristotle directs his thinking towards human beings specifically.

3. The telos of a human being is to reason.
4. The good for a human being is, therefore, acting in accordance with reason.

In working out our true function, Aristotle looks to that feature that separates humanity from other living animals. According to Aristotle, what separates humankind from the rest of the world is our ability not only to reason but to act on reasons. Thus, just as the function of a chair can be derived from its uniquely differentiating characteristic, so the function of a human being is related to our uniquely differentiating characteristic and we achieve the good when we act in accordance with this true function or telos.

The notion that humanity has a true function may sound odd, particularly if you do not have a religious worldview of your own. However, to you especially Aristotle wrote that "...as eye, hand, foot and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these?"³

On the basis that we would ascribe a function to our constituent parts — we know what makes a good kidney for example — so too Aristotle thinks it far from unreasonable that we have a function as a whole. Indeed, this may be plausible if we consider other objects. The component parts of a car, for example, have individual functions but a car itself, as a whole, has its own function that determines whether or not it is a good car.

Aristotelian Goodness

On the basis of the previous argument, the good life for a human being is achieved when we act in accordance with our telos. However, rather than leaving the concept of goodness as general and abstract we can say more specifically what the good for a human involves. Aristotle uses the Greek term *eudaimonia* to capture

the state that we experience if we fully achieve a good life. According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is the state that all humans should aim for as it is the aim and end of human existence. To reach this state, we must ourselves act in accordance with reason. Properly understanding what Aristotle means by eudaimonia is crucial to understanding his Virtue Ethical moral position.

Eudaimonia has been variously translated and no perfect translation has yet been identified. While all translations have their own issues, eudaimonia understood as flourishing is perhaps the most helpful translation and improves upon a simple translation of happiness. The following example may make this clearer.

Naomi is an extremely talented pianist. Some days, she plays music that simply makes her happy, perhaps the tune from the television soap opera “Neighbors” or a rendition of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”. On other days, she plays complex music such as the supremely difficult Chopin-Godowsky Études. These performances may also make Naomi happy, but she seems to be flourishing as a pianist only with the latter performances rather than the former. If we use the language of function, both performances make Naomi happy but she fulfils her function as a pianist (and is a good pianist) only when she flourishes with the works of greater complexity.

Flourishing in life may make us happy but happiness itself is not necessarily well aligned with acting in accordance with our telos. Perhaps, if we prefer the term happiness as a translation for eudaimonia we mean really or truly happy, but it may be easier to stay with the understanding of eudaimonia as flourishing when describing the state of acting in accordance with our true function.

Aristotle concludes that a life is eudaimon (adjective of eudaimonia) when it involves “...the active exercise of the mind in conformity with perfect goodness or virtue”.⁴ Eudaimonia is secured not as the result exercising of our physical or animalistic qualities but as the result of the exercise of our distinctly human rational and cognitive aspects.

Eudaimonia and Virtue

The quotation provided at the end of section three was the first direct reference to virtue in the explanatory sections of this chapter. With Aristotle’s theoretical presuppositions now laid out, we can begin to properly explain and evaluate his conception of the virtues and their link to moral thinking.

According to Aristotle, virtues are character **dispositions** or personality traits. This focus on our dispositions and our character, rather than our actions in isolation, is what earns Aristotelian Virtue Ethics the label of being an agent-centered moral theory rather than an act-centered moral theory.

Act-Centered Moral Theories

Utilitarianism and Kantian Ethics are two different examples of act-centered moral theories due to their focus on actions when it comes to making moral assessments and judgments. Act-centered moral theories may be teleological or deontological, absolutist or relativist, but they share a common worldview in that particular actions are bearers of moral value — either being right or wrong.

Agent-Centered Moral Theories

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics is an agent-centered theory in virtue of a primary focus on people and their characters rather than singular actions. For Aristotle, morality has more to do with the question “how should I be?” rather than “what should I do?” If we answer the first question then, as we see later in this chapter, the second question may begin to take care of itself. When explaining and evaluating Aristotelian Virtue Ethics you must keep in mind this focus on character rather than specific comments on the morality of actions.

Aristotle refers to virtues as character traits or psychological dispositions. Virtues are those particular dispositions that are appropriately related to the situation and, to link back to our function, encourage actions that are in accordance with reason. Again, a more concrete example will make clear how Aristotle identifies virtues in practice.

All of us, at one time or another, experience feelings of anger. For example, I may become angry when my stepson thoughtlessly eats through the remaining crisps without saving any for others, or he may feel anger when he has to wait an extra minute or two to be picked up at work because his step- father is juggling twenty-six different tasks and momentarily loses track of time (how totally unfair of him...). Anyway, as I was saying, back to Aristotle, “Anyone can become angry — that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way — that is not easy”.⁵

For Aristotle, virtue is not a feeling itself but an appropriate psychological disposition in response to that feeling; the proper response. The correct response to a feeling is described as acting on the basis of the Golden Mean, a response that is neither excessive nor deficient. The table below makes this more apparent.

Feeling/Emotion	Vice of Deficiency	Virtuous Disposition (Golden Mean)	Vice of Excess
Anger	Lack of spirit	Patience	Irascibility
Shame	Shyness	Modesty	Shamefulness
Fear	Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Indignation	Spitefulness	Righteousness	Envy

Anger is a feeling and therefore is neither a virtue nor a vice. However, the correct response to anger — the Golden Mean between two extremes — is patience, rather than a lack of spirit or irascibility. Virtues are not feelings, but characteristic dispositional responses that, when viewed holistically, define our characters and who we are.

The Golden Mean ought not to be viewed as suggesting that a virtuous disposition is always one that gives rise to a “middling” action. If someone puts their life on the line, when unarmed, in an attempt to stop a would-be terrorist attack, then their action may be rash rather than courageous. However, if armed with a heavy, blunt instrument their life-risking action may be courageously virtuous rather than rash. The Golden Mean is not to be understood as suggesting that we always act somewhere between complete inaction and breathless exuberance, but as suggesting that we act between the vices of excess and deficiency; such action may well involve extreme courage or exceptional patience.

In addition to feelings, Aristotle also suggests that we may virtuously respond to situations. He suggests the following examples.

Feeling/Emotion	Vice of Deficiency	Virtuous Disposition (Golden Mean)	Vice of Excess
Social conduct	Cantankerousness	Friendliness	Self-serving flattery
Conversation	Boorishness	Wittiness	Buffoonery
Giving money	Stinginess	Generosity	Profligacy

We must keep in mind the agent-centered nature of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics when considering these examples. A person does not cease to have a witty disposition in virtue of a single joke that might err on the side of buffoonery, or cease to be generous because they fail to donate to charity on one occasion. Our psychological dispositions, virtuous or not, are only to be assessed by judgment of a person’s general character and observation over more than single-act situations. If we act in accordance with reason and fulfil our function as human beings, our behavior will generally reflect our virtuous personality traits and dispositions.

Developing the Virtues

In a quote widely attributed to Aristotle, Will Durrant (1885–1981) sums up the Aristotelian view by saying that “...we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit”.⁶ It is fairly obvious that we cannot become excellent at something overnight. Making progress in any endeavor is always a journey that requires both effort and practice over time. Aristotle holds that the same is true for human beings attempting to develop their virtuous character traits in attempt to live the good life. You may feel yourself coming to an Aristotelian Virtue Ethical view after reading this chapter and therefore be moved to become wittier, more

courageous and more generous but you cannot simply acquire these traits by decision; rather, you must live these traits in order to develop them.

Cultivating a virtuous character is something that happens by practice. Aristotle compares the development of the skill of virtue to the development of other skills. He says that “...men become builders by building” and “...we become just by doing just acts”.⁷ We might know that a brick must go into a particular place but we are good builders only when we know how to place that brick properly. Building requires practical skill and not merely intellectual knowledge and the same applies to developing virtuous character traits. Ethical characters are developed by practical learning and habitual action and not merely by intellectual teaching.

In the end, the virtuous individual will become comfortable in responding to feelings/situations virtuously just as the good builder becomes comfortable responding to the sight of various tools and a set of plans. A skilled builder will not need abstract reflection when it comes to knowing how to build a wall properly, and nor will a skilled cyclist need abstract reflection on how to balance his speed correctly as he goes around a corner.

Analogously, a person skilled in the virtues will not need abstract reflection when faced with a situation in which friendliness and generosity are possibilities; they will simply know on a more intuitive level how to act. This is not to say that builders, cyclists and virtuous people will not sometimes need to reflect specifically on what to do in abnormal or difficult situations (e.g. moral dilemmas, in the case of ethics) but in normal situations appropriate responses will be natural for those who are properly skilled.

It is the need to become skilled when developing virtuous character traits that leads Aristotle to suggest that becoming virtuous will require a lifetime of work. Putting up a single bookshelf does not make you a skilled builder any more than a single act of courage makes you a courageous and virtuous person. It is the repetition of skill that determines your status and the development of virtuous characters requires a lifetime of work rather than a single week at a Virtue Ethics Bootcamp.

Practical Wisdom (Phronesis)

Aristotle does offer some specifics regarding how exactly we might, to use a depressingly modern phrase, “upskill” in order to become more virtuous. Aristotle suggests that the aim of an action will be made clear by the relevant virtuous characteristic as revealed by the Golden Mean; for example, our aim in a situation may be to respond courageously or generously. It is by developing our skill of **practical wisdom** (translation of “phronesis”) that we become better at ascertaining what exactly courage or generosity amounts to in a specific situation and how exactly we might achieve it.

By developing the skill of practical wisdom, we can properly put our virtuous character traits into practice. For the Aristotelian, practical wisdom may actually be the most important virtuous disposition or character trait

to develop as without the skill of practical wisdom it may be difficult to actually practice actions that are witty rather than boorish, or courageous rather than cowardly. Imagine trying to be a philosopher without an acute sense of logical reasoning; you would struggle because this seems to be a foundational good on which other philosophical skills rely. So too it may be with the virtues, practical wisdom supports our instinctive knowledge of how to respond virtuously to various feelings, emotions and situations.

If this still seems to be somewhat opaque, then we may develop our sense of practical wisdom by looking at the actions of others who we do take to be virtuous. A child, for example, will most certainly need to learn how to be virtuous by following examples of others. If we are unsure in our own ability to discern what a courageous response in a given situation is, then we may be guided by the behavior of Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi, Mandela or King, as examples. If we learn from the wisdom and virtue of others, then just as a building apprentice learns from a master so too virtue apprentices can learn from those more skilled than they in practicing virtue. Hopefully, such virtue apprentices will eventually reach a point where they can stand on their own two feet, with their personally developed sense of practical wisdom.

Voluntary Actions, Involuntary Actions and Moral Responsibility

Despite the focus on agents and not actions, Aristotle does have something to contribute when it comes to discussions of potential moral responsibility as associated with particular actions. We can separate actions into two obvious categories:

1. Voluntary actions
2. Involuntary actions

Very broadly, an action is voluntary when it is freely chosen and involuntary when it is not — these terms are more precisely defined next, in line with Aristotle's ideas. These distinctions matter in ethics because a person might be held to be morally responsible for their voluntary actions but not for their involuntary actions. According to Aristotle, an action is voluntary unless it is affected by force or ignorance, as understood in the following ways.

Physical Force

Imagine that Reuben is driving his car on his way home from work. Out of the blue, his passenger grabs his hand and forces him to turn the steering wheel, sending the car into oncoming traffic. Without this physical force, Reuben would not have turned the wheel and he very much regrets the damage that is caused. According

to Aristotle, Reuben's action is involuntary because of this external physical force and so he is not morally responsible for the crash.

Psychological Force

Think of David, working at a bank when a group of thieves break in armed with guns. David is told that if he does not open the safe then he will be killed. Under this extreme psychological pressure, Aristotle would accept that David's opening of the safe is involuntary, because David would not have opened the safe otherwise and he very much regrets doing so. On this basis, David is not morally responsible in any way for the theft.

In addition to force, ignorance of a certain type can also support an action being labelled as involuntary.

Action from Ignorance

Rhys, a talented musician, wishes to perform a surprise concert for a friend and has been practicing songs from the Barry Manilow back catalogue for weeks. However, in the days before the surprise concert his friend, unbeknown to Rhys, develops an intense and very personal dislike for Manilow. Thus, when Rhys takes to the stage and blasts out his rendition of the classic tune "Copacabana" his friend storms off in much distress. In this situation, Aristotle would accept that Rhys acted involuntarily when causing offence because he was unaware of the changed circumstances; he acted from ignorance when performing the song rather than from malice. Without this epistemic (or knowledge-related) barrier, Rhys would not have acted as he did and he very much regrets the distress caused. For these reasons, Rhys bears no moral responsibility for the upset resulting from his song choice.

Crucially, Aristotle does not allow that all action that involves ignorance can be classed as involuntary, thereby blocking associated claims of moral responsibility.

Action in Ignorance

Laurence has had too much to drink and chooses to climb a traffic light with a traffic cone on his head. Laurence's alcohol consumption has made him ignorant, at least temporarily, of the consequences of this action in terms of social relationships, employment and police action. However, for Aristotle this would not mean that his action was involuntary because Laurence acts in ignorance rather than from ignorance due to an external epistemic (or knowledge-based) barrier. Laurence does not, therefore, escape moral responsibility as a result of his self-created ignorance.

Finally, Aristotle also identifies a third form of action — non-voluntary action — that is also related to ignorant action.

Action from Ignorance with No Regret

Return to the case of Rhys and his Manilow performance but remove any sense of regret on Rhys' part for the distress caused. If, at the moment that the epistemic gap is bridged and Rhys learns of his friend's newly acquired musical views, he feels no regret for his action, then Aristotle would class it as a non-voluntary rather than involuntary action. The action cannot be voluntary as Rhys acted from ignorance, but it is not obviously involuntary as, without a sense of regret, it may have been that Rhys would have performed the action even if he knew what was going to happen.

The detail above is important and your own examples will help your understanding and explanations. The summary, however, is refreshingly simple. If an action is voluntary, then it is completed free from force and ignorance and we can hold the actor morally responsible. However, if the action is involuntary then the actor is not morally responsible as they act on the basis of force or from ignorance.

Objections to Virtue Ethics and Responses

Objection: Unclear Guidance

Consider yourself caught in the middle of a moral dilemma. Wanting to know what to do you may consult the guidance offered by Utilitarianism or Kantian Ethics and discover that various specific actions you could undertake are morally right or morally wrong. Moving to seek the advice of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, you may find cold comfort from suggestions that you act generously, patiently and modestly whilst avoiding self-serving flattery and envy. Rather than knowing how to live in general, you may seek knowledge of what to actually do in this case. Virtue Ethics may therefore be accused of being a theory, not of helpful moral guidance, but of unhelpful and non-specific moral platitudes.

In response, the virtue ethicist may remind us that we can learn how to act from considering how truly virtuous people might respond in this situation, but this response raises its own worry — how can we identify who is virtuous, or apply their actions to a potentially novel situation? Although a defender of Virtue Ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse (1943–) gives a voice to this common objection, putting forward the worry directly by saying that “Virtue Ethics does not, because it cannot, tell us what we should do... It gives us no guidance whatsoever. Who are the virtuous agents [that we should look to for guidance]?”⁸ If all the virtue ethicist can offer to a person wondering how to act — perhaps wondering whether or not to report a friend to the police, or

whether or not to change careers to work in the charity sector — is “look to the moral exemplars of Socrates and Gandhi and how they would act in this situation”, then we might well sympathize with the objector since very often our moral dilemmas are new situations, not merely old ones repeated. Asking “what would Jesus do”, if we deem Jesus to be a morally virtuous role model, might not seem very helpful for an MP trying to determine whether or not to vote for an increase in subsidies for renewable energy technologies at huge expense, and potential financial risk, to the tax-payer (to take a deliberately specific example).

Despite her statement of the objection, Hursthouse thinks that this is an unfair characterization of Virtue Ethics. Hursthouse suggests that Virtue Ethics provides guidance in the form of “v-rules”. These are guiding rules of the form “do what is honest” or “avoid what is envious”.⁹ These rules may not be specific, but they do stand as guidance across lots of different moral situations. Whether or not you believe that this level of guidance is suitable for a normative moral theory is a judgment that you should make yourself and then defend.

Objection: Clashing Virtues

Related to the general objection from lack of guidance, a developed objection may question how we are supposed to cope with situations in which virtues seem to clash. Courageous behaviour may, in certain cases, mean a lack of friendliness; generosity may threaten modesty. In these situations, the suggestion to “be virtuous” may again seem to be unhelpfully vague.

To this particular objection, the Aristotelian virtue ethicist can invoke the concept of practical wisdom and suggest that the skilled and virtuous person will appropriately respond to complex moral situations. A Formula One car, for example, will be good when it has both raw speed and delicate handling and it is up to the skilled engineer to steer a path between these two virtues. So too a person with practical wisdom can steer a path between apparently clashing virtues in any given situation. Virtue ethicists have no interest in the creation of a codified moral rule book covering all situations and instead put the onus on the skill of the virtuous person when deciding how to act. Again, whether this is a strength or weakness is for you to decide and defend.

Objection: Circularity

An entirely different objection to Aristotelian Virtue Ethics is based on a concern regarding logical circularity. According to Aristotle, the following statements seem to be correct:

1. An act is virtuous if it is an act that a virtuous person would commit in that circumstance.
2. A person is virtuous when they act in virtuous ways.

This, however, looks to be circular reasoning. If virtuous actions are understood in terms of virtuous people, but virtuous people are understood in terms of virtuous actions, then we have unhelpfully circular reasoning.

Julia Annas (1946–) responds to this apparent problem by arguing that there is nothing dangerously circular in this reasoning because it is simply a reflection of how we learn to develop our virtuous dispositions.¹⁰ Annas suggests the analogy of piano-playing:

1. Great piano playing is what great pianists do.
2. A pianist is great when he “does” great piano playing.

In this case, there does not seem to be any troubling circularity in reasoning. It is not the case that whatever a great pianist plays will be great, but rather that great pianists have the skills to make great music. So too it is with virtues, for virtuous people are not virtuous just because of their actual actions but because of who they are and how their actions are motivated. It is their skills and character traits that mean that, in practice, they provide a clear guide as to which actions are properly aligned with virtues. Thus, if we wish to decide whether or not an act is virtuous we can assess what a virtuous person would do in that circumstance, but this does not mean that what is virtuous is determined by the actions of a specifically virtuous individual. The issue is whether or not a person, with virtuous characteristics in the abstract, would actually carry that action out. Virtuous people are living and breathing concrete guides, helping us to understand the actions associated with abstract virtuous character dispositions.

Objection: Contribution to Eudaimonia

The final distinct objection to Aristotelian Virtue Ethics considered in this chapter stems from the Aristotelian claim that living virtuously will contribute to our ability to secure a eudaimon life. A challenge to this view may be based on the fact that certain dispositions may seem to be virtuous but may not actually seem to contribute to our flourishing or securing the good life.

As an example of this possible objection in practice, consider the following. Shelley is often described as generous to a fault and regularly dedicates large amounts of her time to helping others to solve problems at considerable cost, in terms of both time and effort, to herself. Working beyond the limits that can reasonably be expected of her, we may wish to describe Shelley as virtuous given her generous personality. However, by working herself so hard for others, we may wonder if Shelley is unduly limiting her own ability to flourish.

Responses to this initial statement of the objection are not hard to imagine. We may say that Shelley has either succumbed to a vice of excess and is profligate with her time rather than generous, or we may accept that she is generous rather than profligate and accept the uncomfortable conclusion and say that this virtuous character

trait is helping her to flourish. This second claim may seem more plausible if we ruled out a description of Shelley wasting her time.

Still, this objection may stand up if you can envisage a situation in which someone could be properly described as rash rather than courageous or wasteful rather than generous and, because of these traits, actually be contributing to their own flourishing. You should consider your own possible cases if you seek to support this general objection.

Moral Good and Individual Good

For Aristotle, moral goodness and individual goodness may seem to be intimately linked. After all, a virtuous person will be charitable and friendly etc. and as a result of these characteristics and dispositions will both advance their own journey towards eudaimonia and make life better for others. Hedonism (which claims that pleasure is the only source of well-being — see Chapter 1), as a rival theory attempting to outline what is required for well-being, might be thought to fail because it downplays the importance of acting in accordance with reason, so hedonists do not therefore live according to their telos or true function.

Aristotle says of his ideally virtuous person that they will have a unified psychology — that their rational and non-rational psychologies will speak with one voice. On the contrary, the non-virtuous person will have a psychology in conflict between their rational and non-rational elements. In considering who has the better life from their own individual perspectives — the happy Hedonist or the Aristotelian virtuous person — you should again form your own reasoned judgment.

It is important to note, as we conclude this chapter, that Aristotle does not suggest that living a virtuous life is sufficient to guarantee a state of eudaimonia for a person. External factors such as poverty, disease or untimely death may scupper a person's advance towards eudaimonia. However, for Aristotle, being virtuous is necessary for the achievement of eudaimonia; without the development of virtues it is impossible for a person to flourish even if they avoid poverty, disease, loneliness etc.

Summary

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics is very different in nature to the other act-centered normative moral theories considered in this book. Whether this, in itself, is a virtue or a vice is an issue for your own judgment. The lack of a codified and fixed moral rule book is something many view as a flaw, while others perceive it as the key strength of the theory. Some, meanwhile, will feel uncomfortable with Aristotle's teleological claims, differing from those who are happy to accept that there is an objectively good life that is possible for human beings.

Regardless, there is little doubt that Aristotelian Virtue Ethics offers a distinct normative moral picture and that it is a theory worthy of your reflections.

Some Common Student Misconceptions

- Understanding virtues as feelings.
- Misunderstanding the function of a human being (eudaimonia).
- Thinking that the Golden Mean always suggests “neutral” or “middling” actions.
- Incorrect differentiation between voluntary, involuntary and non- voluntary actions.
- Claiming that Virtue Ethics offers no guidance whatsoever in moral situations.
- Claiming that Virtue Ethics is uninterested in actions.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Who has the better life — the happy hedonist or the virtuous individual?
2. Are the virtues fixed and absolute? Or can virtues be relative to culture and time?
3. Is becoming moral a skill? Is morality based on “knowing that” or “knowing how”?
4. Can Virtue Ethics offer useful ?
5. Is the Golden Mean a useful way of working out virtuous characteristics?
6. Are some virtues more important than others? Why?
7. Can you think of a virtue that does not contribute to eudaimonia?
8. Can you think of something that contributes to eudaimonia that is not a virtue?
9. If there is no purpose to life, is there any point in subscribing to Aristotelian Virtue Ethics?
10. What should you do if virtues seem to clash when faced with different possible actions?
11. Who might count as virtuous role models and why?
12. Do human beings have a telos or proper function?

Key Terminology

Act-centered

Agent-centered

Dispositions

Eudaimonia

Phronesis

Virtue

Telos

Golden mean

References and Notes

Annas, Julia, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by William David Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), freely available at <http://sacred-texts.com/cla/ari/nico/index.htm>

Hursthouse, Rosalind, 'Normative Virtue Ethics', in *Ethical Theory*, ed. by Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 701–09.

Panin, Ivan, *Thoughts* (Grafton: Ivan Panin, 1887), freely available at <https://ia601405.us.archive.org/8/items/thoughts00panigoog/thoughts00panigoog.pdf>



Aristotelian Virtue Ethics by Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Ivan Panin, *Thoughts* (Grafton, MA: Ivan Panin, 1890), 92.
2. Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2,” in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, trans. H Rackham, vol. 19, 23 vols. (London: Harvard University Press, 1934), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg010.perseus-eng1:2>.
3. Aristotle.
4. Aristotle.
5. Aristotle.
6. William James Durant, *The Story of Philosophy the Lives and Opinions of the Great Philosophers of the Western World* (Simon & Schuster, 1967), 76.
7. Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2.”
8. Rosalind Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics,” in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (Second Edition: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), 645–52.
9. Hursthouse.
10. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

REASON AND EMOTION IN THE MORAL LIFE

Scott O'Leary

Scott O'Leary received his Ph.D and M.A. in philosophy from Fordham University and his undergraduate degree in philosophy and history from Boston College. He is currently Director of the Honors and Scholars Village at North Carolina State University. Previously, he was an Associate Professor of Philosophy and the Honors Director at the University of Saint Mary (Kansas). Dr. O'Leary's work focuses on human lived experience and examines the way emotional experience frames consciousness and decision-making. This has led to interests in food ethics and human-technology relations. His work has been published in *The American Philosophy Quarterly*, *Balkan Journal of Philosophy*, and *Elements*, and he received a Templeton Foundation Cluster Grant to create an international working group studying emotion and religious experience. Beyond his academic interests, he spends his free time teaching yoga and mindfulness, herding his cats, and learning about music from his partner, who is a classical pianist.

It may seem puzzling that given the numerous debates in philosophy over the justification of different ethical theories, moral *experience* often seems to disappear. In reality, this is less of an omission and more a question of focus. Many canonical moral philosophers like Aristotle, the Stoics, Hume, Kant, Bentham, and Mill have much to say about the motivations, reasoning, and development of moral agents.

Topics like these are the task of the area of philosophy called **moral psychology**. Many of the central questions in moral psychology require clarifying the roles reason and emotion play in moral experience. These questions involve three interrelated topics: moral motivation, judgment, and development.

Moral Motivation

Philosophical ethics often places reason at the center of ethical life and views emotion at odds with reason or a source of error. David Hume comments upon this picture of Western moral philosophy:

“Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to

give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, it is said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason...” (Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book III, Part III, Section III: Of the Influencing Motives of the Will.)

Hume challenges this priority of reason over emotion. While reason seems central to moral life, emotions are what actually “move us”. Just as fear leads to fight or flight, indignation can lead us to rectify injustice, anger to correct an offense, or shame to avoid wrongdoing. Hume argues further that not only *can* passions motivate action, but reason is impotent and cannot motivate action:

“Abstract or demonstrative reasoning, therefore, never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment concerning causes and effects....We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.” (Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book III, Part III, Section III: Of the Influencing Motives of the Will.)

Inspired by Hume, several scholars have argued for a Humean Theory of all motivation, including moral motivation (Smith, 1998). On this account, human actions are caused by a belief-desire pair. The belief component, such as “I believe stealing from the store is wrong” leads to the action of resisting the temptation to steal if I also have the desire “to not harm the business owner”. Similarly, my sympathy to “help Kevin” combined with the belief “he needs money to pay his bills” is what prompts me to lend him money to make ends meet.

Others challenge this emotion-based theory of moral motivation, most famously Immanuel Kant. In the *Grounding for the Metaphysics for Morals*, Kant argues that when we act “for the sake of duty”, we *can* be motivated by reason. Kant makes the stronger claim that when we act based on practical reason and not from inclination – his term for desires and emotions – this shows the motive of duty most clearly. Let’s modify the example above. Suppose I cannot feel any sympathy to help Kevin, *but loan him money anyway because it’s the right thing to do*. Kant argues this shows that action can be motivated by practical reason alone.

“Suppose that, when no longer moved by any inclination, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth. [G398].”

What Kant calls genuine moral worth is doing an action *because we believe it is the right thing*, not because certain feelings motivate us to act. If ethics is to be universal, then we have to have a source of motivation that is itself universal, and this Kant identifies with the will – that is, practical reason. Since desires and emotions are subject to each of our own psychological histories, they are too variable and unstable to morally motivate.

This presents two perspectives on moral motivation based on different roles assigned to emotion compared to that of reason. Hume’s view aligns with our basic intuitions about the motivating capacity of emotion. Kant’s

view points to the contingency of emotional life and gains plausibility when we examine the role of emotion and reason in moral judgment.

Moral Judgment

A widespread view in popular culture suggests emotions distort our judgment (see Disney’s “Emotion and Reason” linked below). Characters like Data and Spock in *Star Trek* are shown judging situations more clearly and objectively than others because they are unclouded by emotion. This position is put forward by Stoic philosophers who argued that emotions were “excessive impulses which are disobedient to reason” (Arius Didymus, 65A). Kant’s ethics also often appear hostile to emotion and desire, separating these two sources of inclination from reason. Given such critical views of emotion, it may seem surprising that Aristotle places emotion at the center of the virtuous life:

“For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way...[that] is characteristic of virtue.”(Book VI Nicomachean Ethics, emphasis added)

Rather than emotions distorting judgment, Aristotle argues that to be virtuous, one must feel emotions at the *right* times, toward the *right* object, for the *right* reason and *in the right way*. The courageous person is not fearless, but rather feels the appropriate amount of fear. In many situations, virtue requires us to feel fear and to feel unafraid is to be rash, falling short of the mark of virtue.

Both positions can be supported by the empirical literature on moral judgment. For instance, the phenomenon of *emotional priming* suggests seemingly insignificant emotional cues may affect how harsh or lenient we judge moral failures in others. In an experiment with subjects playing the role of a sentencing judge, people judged crimes more harshly when sitting at messy and cluttered desks (Schnall, Haidt, et al 2008). A similar phenomenon has been observed in other settings such as parole hearings occurring before a judge has lunch. Should crimes or parole hearings be judged differently just because the judge was hungry, frustrated, or sat at a messy desk? If this is emotion’s role in moral judgment, then the Stoics position seems correct.

Other studies show emotions provide a crucial role in determining *salience* and solving what’s called “the frame problem” in philosophy and artificial intelligence research. Humans constantly and intuitively filter many sources of information. Setting up an AI algorithm or robot – such as a bomb defusing robot – to do the same is extremely difficult, if not impossible. How do we filter and determine what is salient in a situation?

Recent studies have shown that our emotional experience provides just such a role (Faucher and Tappolet 2002). As Dylan Evans summarizes in *Emotion: The Science of Sentiment*, “[e]motions are often blamed for distracting us....[but] emotions distract us from one thought only in order to make us pay attention to

another,” (Evans 2002, p. 114). Therefore, while the effects of emotion in moral experience may be contested, research suggests that emotions significantly *impact* our moral judgments and ought to be incorporated into theories of moral judgment.

Moral Development

In this final section, we will examine the relationship of emotion and reason in moral development. Each of us should be concerned about the development of our moral character from children to adults and from those who waiver in their ethical commitments to those who remain steadfast. Rather than pose ways past thinkers or contemporary research might answer these questions, we can examine why these positions in moral psychology are so important for our understanding of the good life itself.

According to Aristotle, to feel the right emotions in the right way is “*characteristic of virtue*.” The virtuous person is one whose moral development includes the cultivation of the right emotional sensitivity and feels the right emotions. For Kant, what is essential is to do the right thing for the right reason, and whether emotions coincide with this or not is generally irrelevant. In both Bentham and Mill’s accounts of Utilitarianism, the value of emotional experience depends solely on whether emotions promote utility or not.

Such diversity in positions reflects different views on what emotions are and different conceptions of morality itself. For Aristotle, emotions provide important information about ourselves and the world and so their cultivation is an important part of moral development. One is not fully virtuous if one’s emotions and feelings do not align with one’s reasoning and beliefs. Thus Kant’s unsympathetic benefactor does the right thing but falls short of virtue because there is a conflict between his action and his feelings.

Is it too demanding to think that our motivations, moral judgments, and feelings will always or typically align? Does that require a degree of control over early stages of moral development that we in fact do not possess? To what degree should the cultivation of our own moral character and how we raise our children be centered in our emotional life? The answer to these questions remains contested; what is not contested is the need to study the relation between emotion and reason in moral experience.

Additional Resources

Cooper, John. “The Emotional Life of the Wise,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 43(S1); 176-218

(2005).*

*(TCC students may access the full text online at <http://199.245.164.25/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=18645621&site=ehost-live&scope=site.>)

Disney's *Inside Out*:

- Sadness
- Disgust and Anger

Disney's wartime film "Reason and Emotion."

Emotional reasoning presented as a cognitive distortion

Evans, Dylan. *Emotion: The Science of Sentiment* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Faucher, Luc and Christine Tappolet, "Fear and the Focus of Attention," *Consciousness and Emotion* 3(2), (2002): 105-144.

Cooper, John "The Emotional Life of the Wise" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43 (S1):176-218 (2005) and Online copy

Schnall, Simone, Jonathan Haidt, et. al *Personality Psychology Bulletin* 34 (2008):1096-1109

Smith, Michael. "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *Mind* 96 (1987):36-61.

Stocker, Michael. "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1986): 453-66.

Short video lecture on Stocker's "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories"

Yale's Open Course Psychology "11. Evolution, Emotion, and Reason: Emotions, Part I" taught by Paul Bloom

VIRTUE

Aristotle

Editor's Note: The following text includes parts of various chapters from books I, II, and VIII of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Book I

Chapter VII

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or an artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought. And, as 'life of the rational element' also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term. Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say 'so-and-so-and 'a good so-and-so' have a function which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre, and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well): if this is the case, and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a

rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case, human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

But we must add 'in a complete life.' For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy...

Chapter VIII

We must consider it, however, in the light not only of our conclusion and our premises, but also of what is commonly said about it; for with a true view all the data harmonize, but with a false one the facts soon clash. Now goods have been divided into three classes, and some are described as external, others as relating to soul or to body; we call those that relate to soul most properly and truly goods, and psychical actions and activities we class as relating to soul. Therefore our account must be sound, at least according to this view, which is an old one and agreed on by philosophers. It is correct also in that we identify the end with certain actions and activities; for thus it falls among goods of the soul and not among external goods. Another belief which harmonizes with our account is that the happy man lives well and does well; for we have practically defined happiness as a sort of good life and good action. The characteristics that are looked for in happiness seem also, all of them, to belong to what we have defined happiness as being. For some identify happiness with virtue, some with practical wisdom, others with a kind of philosophic wisdom, others with these, or one of these, accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure; while others include also external prosperity. Now some of these views have been held by many men and men of old, others by a few eminent persons; and it is not probable that either of these should be entirely mistaken, but rather that they should be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects.

With those who identify happiness with virtue or some one virtue our account is in harmony; for to virtue belongs virtuous activity. But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting, and acting well. And as in the Olympic Games it is not the most beautiful and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for it is some of these that are victorious), so those who act win, and rightly win, the noble and good things in life.

Their life is also in itself pleasant. For pleasure is a state of soul, and to each man that which he is said to be a lover of is pleasant; e.g. not only is a horse pleasant to the lover of horses, and a spectacle to the lover of sights, but also in the same way just acts are pleasant to the lover of justice and in general virtuous acts to the lover of virtue. Now for most men their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by

nature pleasant, but the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature. Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has its pleasure in itself. For, besides what we have said, the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases. If this is so, virtuous actions must be in themselves pleasant. But they are also good and noble, and have each of these attributes in the highest degree, since the good man judges well about these attributes; his judgement is such as we have described. Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, and these attributes are not severed as in the inscription at Delos-

Most noble is that which is justest, and best is health;
But pleasantest is it to win what we love.

For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one- the best- of these, we identify with happiness.

Yet evidently, as we said, it needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death. As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition; for which reason some identify happiness with good fortune, though others identify it with virtue...

Chapter X

...When then should we not say that he is happy who is active in accordance with complete virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life? Or must we add 'and who is destined to live thus and die as befits his life'? Certainly the future is obscure to us, while happiness, we claim, is an end and something in every way final. If so, we shall call happy those among living men in whom these conditions are, and are to be, fulfilled- but happy men. So much for these questions....

Book II

Chapter I

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (ethike) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word ethos (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.

Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.

This is confirmed by what happens in states; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.

Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced. And the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether

we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference...

II

...First, then, let us consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health (for to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the evidence of sensible things); both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean...

VI

...If it is thus, then, that every art does its work well- by looking to the intermediate and judging its works by this standard (so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art, while the mean preserves it; and good artists, as we say, look to this in their work), and if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being successful are both characteristics of virtue. Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate.

Again, it is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult- to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue;

For men are good in but one way, but bad in many.

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme.

But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency; for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of deficiency. But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong; for in general there is neither a mean of excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency of a mean.

Book VIII

Chapter I

After what we have said, a discussion of friendship would naturally follow, since it is a virtue or implies virtue, and is besides most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends most of all; for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? Or how can prosperity be guarded and preserved without friends? The greater it is, the more exposed is it to risk. And in poverty and in other misfortunes men think friends are the only refuge. It helps the young, too, to keep from error; it aids older people by ministering to their needs and supplementing the activities that are failing from weakness; those in the prime of life it stimulates to noble actions—‘two going together’—for with friends men are more able both to think and to act. Again, parent seems by nature to feel it for offspring and offspring for parent, not only among men but among birds and among most animals; it is felt mutually by members of the same race, and

especially by men, whence we praise lovers of their fellowmen. We may even in our travels how near and dear every man is to every other. Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality.

But it is not only necessary but also noble; for we praise those who love their friends, and it is thought to be a fine thing to have many friends; and again we think it is the same people that are good men and are friends.

Not a few things about friendship are matters of debate. Some define it as a kind of likeness and say like people are friends, whence come the sayings 'like to like', 'birds of a feather flock together', and so on; others on the contrary say 'two of a trade never agree'. On this very question they inquire for deeper and more physical causes, Euripides saying that 'parched earth loves the rain, and stately heaven when filled with rain loves to fall to earth', and Heraclitus that 'it is what opposes that helps' and 'from different tones comes the fairest tune' and 'all things are produced through strife'; while Empedocles, as well as others, expresses the opposite view that like aims at like. The physical problems we may leave alone (for they do not belong to the present inquiry); let us examine those which are human and involve character and feeling, e.g. whether friendship can arise between any two people or people cannot be friends if they are wicked, and whether there is one species of friendship or more than one. Those who think there is only one because it admits of degrees have relied on an inadequate indication; for even things different in species admit of degree. We have discussed this matter previously.

Chapter II

The kinds of friendship may perhaps be cleared up if we first come to know the object of love. For not everything seems to be loved but only the lovable, and this is good, pleasant, or useful; but it would seem to be that by which some good or pleasure is produced that is useful, so that it is the good and the useful that are lovable as ends. Do men love, then, the good, or what is good for them? These sometimes clash. So too with regard to the pleasant. Now it is thought that each loves what is good for himself, and that the good is without qualification lovable, and what is good for each man is lovable for him; but each man loves not what is good for him but what seems good. This however will make no difference; we shall just have to say that this is 'that which seems lovable'. Now there are three grounds on which people love; of the love of lifeless objects we do not use the word 'friendship'; for it is not mutual love, nor is there a wishing of good to the other (for it would surely be ridiculous to wish wine well; if one wishes anything for it, it is that it may keep, so that one may have it oneself); but to a friend we say we ought to wish what is good for his sake. But to those who thus wish good we ascribe only goodwill, if the wish is not reciprocated; goodwill when it is reciprocal being friendship. Or must we add 'when it is recognized'? For many people have goodwill to those whom they have not seen but judge to be good or useful; and one of these might return this feeling. These people seem to bear goodwill to each other; but how could one call them friends when they do not know their mutual feelings? To be friends, then,

the must be mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other for one of the aforesaid reasons.

Chapter III

Now these reasons differ from each other in kind; so, therefore, do the corresponding forms of love and friendship. There are therefore three kinds of friendship, equal in number to the things that are lovable; for with respect to each there is a mutual and recognized love, and those who love each other wish well to each other in that respect in which they love one another. Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. So too with those who love for the sake of pleasure; it is not for their character that men love ready-witted people, but because they find them pleasant. Therefore those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for themselves, and those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the other is the person loved but in so far as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only incidental; for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved, but as providing some good or pleasure. Such friendships, then, are easily dissolved, if the parties do not remain like themselves; for if the one party is no longer pleasant or useful the other ceases to love him.

Now the useful is not permanent but is always changing. Thus when the motive of the friendship is done away, the friendship is dissolved, inasmuch as it existed only for the ends in question. This kind of friendship seems to exist chiefly between old people (for at that age people pursue not the pleasant but the useful) and, of those who are in their prime or young, between those who pursue utility. And such people do not live much with each other either; for sometimes they do not even find each other pleasant; therefore they do not need such companionship unless they are useful to each other; for they are pleasant to each other only in so far as they rouse in each other hopes of something good to come. Among such friendships people also class the friendship of a host and guest. On the other hand the friendship of young people seems to aim at pleasure; for they live under the guidance of emotion, and pursue above all what is pleasant to themselves and what is immediately before them; but with increasing age their pleasures become different. This is why they quickly become friends and quickly cease to be so; their friendship changes with the object that is found pleasant, and such pleasure alters quickly. Young people are amorous too; for the greater part of the friendship of love depends on emotion and aims at pleasure; this is why they fall in love and quickly fall out of love, changing often within a single day. But these people do wish to spend their days and lives together; for it is thus that they attain the purpose of their friendship.

Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good-and goodness is an enduring thing. And each is good without qualification and to his friend, for the good are both good without qualification and useful to each other. So too they are pleasant; for

the good are pleasant both without qualification and to each other, since to each his own activities and others like them are pleasurable, and the actions of the good are the same or like. And such a friendship is as might be expected permanent, since there meet in it all the qualities that friends should have. For all friendship is for the sake of good or of pleasure-good or pleasure either in the abstract or such as will be enjoyed by him who has the friendly feeling-and is based on a certain resemblance; and to a friendship of good men all the qualities we have named belong in virtue of the nature of the friends themselves; for in the case of this kind of friendship the other qualities also are alike in both friends, and that which is good without qualification is also without qualification pleasant, and these are the most lovable qualities. Love and friendship therefore are found most and in their best form between such men.

But it is natural that such friendships should be infrequent; for such men are rare. Further, such friendship requires time and familiarity; as the proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have 'eaten salt together'; nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends till each has been found lovable and been trusted by each. Those who quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they both are lovable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not.

Chapter IV

This kind of friendship, then, is perfect both in respect of duration and in all other respects, and in it each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives; which is what ought to happen between friends. Friendship for the sake of pleasure bears a resemblance to this kind; for good people too are pleasant to each other. So too does friendship for the sake of utility; for the good are also useful to each other. Among men of these inferior sorts too, friendships are most permanent when the friends get the same thing from each other (e.g. pleasure), and not only that but also from the same source, as happens between readywitted people, not as happens between lover and beloved. For these do not take pleasure in the same things, but the one in seeing the beloved and the other in receiving attentions from his lover; and when the bloom of youth is passing the friendship sometimes passes too (for the one finds no pleasure in the sight of the other, and the other gets no attentions from the first); but many lovers on the other hand are constant, if familiarity has led them to love each other's characters, these being alike. But those who exchange not pleasure but utility in their amour are both less truly friends and less constant. Those who are friends for the sake of utility part when the advantage is at an end; for they were lovers not of each other but of profit.

For the sake of pleasure or utility, then, even bad men may be friends of each other, or good men of bad, or one who is neither good nor bad may be a friend to any sort of person, but for their own sake clearly only good men can be friends; for bad men do not delight in each other unless some advantage come of the relation.

The friendship of the good too and this alone is proof against slander; for it is not easy to trust any one talk about a man who has long been tested by oneself; and it is among good men that trust and the feeling that 'he

would never wrong me' and all the other things that are demanded in true friendship are found. In the other kinds of friendship, however, there is nothing to prevent these evils arising. For men apply the name of friends even to those whose motive is utility, in which sense states are said to be friendly (for the alliances of states seem to aim at advantage), and to those who love each other for the sake of pleasure, in which sense children are called friends. Therefore we too ought perhaps to call such people friends, and say that there are several kinds of friendship—firstly and in the proper sense that of good men qua good, and by analogy the other kinds; for it is in virtue of something good and something akin to what is found in true friendship that they are friends, since even the pleasant is good for the lovers of pleasure. But these two kinds of friendship are not often united, nor do the same people become friends for the sake of utility and of pleasure; for things that are only incidentally connected are not often coupled together.

Friendship being divided into these kinds, bad men will be friends for the sake of pleasure or of utility, being in this respect like each other, but good men will be friends for their own sake, i.e. in virtue of their goodness. These, then, are friends without qualification; the others are friends incidentally and through a resemblance to these.

Chapter V

As in regard to the virtues some men are called good in respect of a state of character, others in respect of an activity, so too in the case of friendship; for those who live together delight in each other and confer benefits on each other, but those who are asleep or locally separated are not performing, but are disposed to perform, the activities of friendship; distance does not break off the friendship absolutely, but only the activity of it. But if the absence is lasting, it seems actually to make men forget their friendship; hence the saying 'out of sight, out of mind'. Neither old people nor sour people seem to make friends easily; for there is little that is pleasant in them, and no one can spend his days with one whose company is painful, or not pleasant, since nature seems above all to avoid the painful and to aim at the pleasant. Those, however, who approve of each other but do not live together seem to be well-disposed rather than actual friends. For there is nothing so characteristic of friends as living together (since while it people who are in need that desire benefits, even those who are supremely happy desire to spend their days together; for solitude suits such people least of all); but people cannot live together if they are not pleasant and do not enjoy the same things, as friends who are companions seem to do.

The truest friendship, then, is that of the good, as we have frequently said; for that which is without qualification good or pleasant seems to be lovable and desirable, and for each person that which is good or pleasant to him; and the good man is lovable and desirable to the good man for both these reasons. Now it looks as if love were a feeling, friendship a state of character; for love may be felt just as much towards lifeless things, but mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character; and men wish well to those whom they love, for their sake, not as a result of feeling but as a result of a state of character. And in loving a friend men love what is good for themselves; for the good man in becoming a friend becomes a good to his friend. Each, then, both loves what is good for himself, and makes an equal return in goodwill and in

pleasantness; for friendship is said to be equality, and both of these are found most in the friendship of the good.

Chapter VI

Between sour and elderly people friendship arises less readily, inasmuch as they are less good-tempered and enjoy companionship less; for these are thou to be the greatest marks of friendship productive of it. This is why, while men become friends quickly, old men do not; it is because men do not become friends with those in whom they do not delight; and similarly sour people do not quickly make friends either. But such men may bear goodwill to each other; for they wish one another well and aid one another in need; but they are hardly friends because they do not spend their days together nor delight in each other, and these are thought the greatest marks of friendship.

One cannot be a friend to many people in the sense of having friendship of the perfect type with them, just as one cannot be in love with many people at once (for love is a sort of excess of feeling, and it is the nature of such only to be felt towards one person); and it is not easy for many people at the same time to please the same person very greatly, or perhaps even to be good in his eyes. One must, too, acquire some experience of the other person and become familiar with him, and that is very hard. But with a view to utility or pleasure it is possible that many people should please one; for many people are useful or pleasant, and these services take little time.

Of these two kinds that which is for the sake of pleasure is the more like friendship, when both parties get the same things from each other and delight in each other or in the things, as in the friendships of the young; for generosity is more found in such friendships. Friendship based on utility is for the commercially minded. People who are supremely happy, too, have no need of useful friends, but do need pleasant friends; for they wish to live with some one and, though they can endure for a short time what is painful, no one could put up with it continuously, nor even with the Good itself if it were painful to him; this is why they look out for friends who are pleasant. Perhaps they should look out for friends who, being pleasant, are also good, and good for them too; for so they will have all the characteristics that friends should have.

People in positions of authority seem to have friends who fall into distinct classes; some people are useful to them and others are pleasant, but the same people are rarely both; for they seek neither those whose pleasantness is accompanied by virtue nor those whose utility is with a view to noble objects, but in their desire for pleasure they seek for ready-witted people, and their other friends they choose as being clever at doing what they are told, and these characteristics are rarely combined. Now we have said that the good man is at the same time pleasant and useful; but such a man does not become the friend of one who surpasses him in station, unless he is surpassed also in virtue; if this is not so, he does not establish equality by being proportionally exceeded in both respects. But people who surpass him in both respects are not so easy to find.

However that may be, the aforesaid friendships involve equality; for the friends get the same things from one

another and wish the same things for one another, or exchange one thing for another, e.g. pleasure for utility; we have said, however, that they are both less truly friendships and less permanent.

But it is from their likeness and their unlikeness to the same thing that they are thought both to be and not to be friendships. It is by their likeness to the friendship of virtue that they seem to be friendships (for one of them involves pleasure and the other utility, and these characteristics belong to the friendship of virtue as well); while it is because the friendship of virtue is proof against slander and permanent, while these quickly change (besides differing from the former in many other respects), that they appear not to be friendships; i.e. it is because of their unlikeness to the friendship of virtue.

Chapter VII

But there is another kind of friendship, viz. that which involves an inequality between the parties, e.g. that of father to son and in general of elder to younger, that of man to wife and in general that of ruler to subject. And these friendships differ also from each other; for it is not the same that exists between parents and children and between rulers and subjects, nor is even that of father to son the same as that of son to father, nor that of husband to wife the same as that of wife to husband. For the virtue and the function of each of these is different, and so are the reasons for which they love; the love and the friendship are therefore different also. Each party, then, neither gets the same from the other, nor ought to seek it; but when children render to parents what they ought to render to those who brought them into the world, and parents render what they should to their children, the friendship of such persons will be abiding and excellent. In all friendships implying inequality the love also should be proportional, i.e. the better should be more loved than he loves, and so should the more useful, and similarly in each of the other cases; for when the love is in proportion to the merit of the parties, then in a sense arises equality, which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship.

But equality does not seem to take the same form in acts of justice and in friendship; for in acts of justice what is equal in the primary sense is that which is in proportion to merit, while quantitative equality is secondary, but in friendship quantitative equality is primary and proportion to merit secondary. This becomes clear if there is a great interval in respect of virtue or vice or wealth or anything else between the parties; for then they are no longer friends, and do not even expect to be so. And this is most manifest in the case of the gods; for they surpass us most decisively in all good things. But it is clear also in the case of kings; for with them, too, men who are much their inferiors do not expect to be friends; nor do men of no account expect to be friends with the best or wisest men. In such cases it is not possible to define exactly up to what point friends can remain friends; for much can be taken away and friendship remain, but when one party is removed to a great distance, as God is, the possibility of friendship ceases. This is in fact the origin of the question whether friends really wish for their friends the greatest goods, e.g. that of being gods; since in that case their friends will no longer be friends to them, and therefore will not be good things for them (for friends are good things). The answer is that if we were right in saying that friend wishes good to friend for his sake, his friend must remain the sort of being he is, whatever that may be; therefore it is for him only so long as he remains a man that he will wish

the greatest goods. But perhaps not all the greatest goods; for it is for himself most of all that each man wishes what is good.

Chapter VIII

Most people seem, owing to ambition, to wish to be loved rather than to love; which is why most men love flattery; for the flatterer is a friend in an inferior position, or pretends to be such and to love more than he is loved; and being loved seems to be akin to being honoured, and this is what most people aim at. But it seems to be not for its own sake that people choose honour, but incidentally. For most people enjoy being honoured by those in positions of authority because of their hopes (for they think that if they want anything they will get it from them; and therefore they delight in honour as a token of favour to come); while those who desire honour from good men, and men who know, are aiming at confirming their own opinion of themselves; they delight in honour, therefore, because they believe in their own goodness on the strength of the judgement of those who speak about them. In being loved, on the other hand, people delight for its own sake; whence it would seem to be better than being honoured, and friendship to be desirable in itself. But it seems to lie in loving rather than in being loved, as is indicated by the delight mothers take in loving; for some mothers hand over their children to be brought up, and so long as they know their fate they love them and do not seek to be loved in return (if they cannot have both), but seem to be satisfied if they see them prospering; and they themselves love their children even if these owing to their ignorance give them nothing of a mother's due. Now since friendship depends more on loving, and it is those who love their friends that are praised, loving seems to be the characteristic virtue of friends, so that it is only those in whom this is found in due measure that are lasting friends, and only their friendship that endures.

It is in this way more than any other that even unequals can be friends; they can be equalized. Now equality and likeness are friendship, and especially the likeness of those who are like in virtue; for being steadfast in themselves they hold fast to each other, and neither ask nor give base services, but (one may say) even prevent them; for it is characteristic of good men neither to go wrong themselves nor to let their friends do so. But wicked men have no steadfastness (for they do not remain even like to themselves), but become friends for a short time because they delight in each other's wickedness. Friends who are useful or pleasant last longer; i.e. as long as they provide each other with enjoyments or advantages. Friendship for utility's sake seems to be that which most easily exists between contraries, e.g. between poor and rich, between ignorant and learned; for what a man actually lacks he aims at, and one gives something else in return. But under this head, too, might bring lover and beloved, beautiful and ugly. This is why lovers sometimes seem ridiculous, when they demand to be loved as they love; if they are equally lovable their claim can perhaps be justified, but when they have nothing lovable about them it is ridiculous. Perhaps, however, contrary does not even aim at contrary by its own nature, but only incidentally, the desire being for what is intermediate; for that is what is good, e.g. it is good for the dry not to become wet but to come to the intermediate state, and similarly with the hot and in all other cases. These subjects we may dismiss; for they are indeed somewhat foreign to our inquiry.

Chapter IX

Friendship and justice seem, as we have said at the outset of our discussion, to be concerned with the same objects and exhibited between the same persons. For in every community there is thought to be some form of justice, and friendship too; at least men address as friends their fellow-voyagers and fellow-soldiers, and so too those associated with them in any other kind of community. And the extent of their association is the extent of their friendship, as it is the extent to which justice exists between them. And the proverb ‘what friends have is common property’ expresses the truth; for friendship depends on community. Now brothers and comrades have all things in common, but the others to whom we have referred have definite things in common—some more things, others fewer; for of friendships, too, some are more and others less truly friendships. And the claims of justice differ too; the duties of parents to children, and those of brothers to each other are not the same, nor those of comrades and those of fellow-citizens, and so, too, with the other kinds of friendship. There is a difference, therefore, also between the acts that are unjust towards each of these classes of associates, and the injustice increases by being exhibited towards those who are friends in a fuller sense; e.g. it is a more terrible thing to defraud a comrade than a fellow-citizen, more terrible not to help a brother than a stranger, and more terrible to wound a father than any one else. And the demands of justice also seem to increase with the intensity of the friendship, which implies that friendship and justice exist between the same persons and have an equal extension.

Now all forms of community are like parts of the political community; for men journey together with a view to some particular advantage, and to provide something that they need for the purposes of life; and it is for the sake of advantage that the political community too seems both to have come together originally and to endure, for this is what legislators aim at, and they call just that which is to the common advantage. Now the other communities aim at advantage bit by bit, e.g. sailors at what is advantageous on a voyage with a view to making money or something of the kind, fellow-soldiers at what is advantageous in war, whether it is wealth or victory or the taking of a city that they seek, and members of tribes and demes act similarly (Some communities seem to arise for the sake or pleasure, viz. religious guilds and social clubs; for these exist respectively for the sake of offering sacrifice and of companionship. But all these seem to fall under the political community; for it aims not at present advantage but at what is advantageous for life as a whole), offering sacrifices and arranging gatherings for the purpose, and assigning honours to the gods, and providing pleasant relaxations for themselves. For the ancient sacrifices and gatherings seem to take place after the harvest as a sort of firstfruits, because it was at these seasons that people had most leisure. All the communities, then, seem to be parts of the political community; and the particular kinds friendship will correspond to the particular kinds of community.

Chapter X

There are three kinds of constitution, and an equal number of deviation-forms—perversions, as it were, of them. The constitutions are monarchy, aristocracy, and thirdly that which is based on a property qualification, which it seems appropriate to call timocratic, though most people are wont to call it polity. The best of these

is monarchy, the worst timocracy. The deviation from monarchy is tyranny; for both are forms of one-man rule, but there is the greatest difference between them; the tyrant looks to his own advantage, the king to that of his subjects. For a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things; and such a man needs nothing further; therefore he will not look to his own interests but to those of his subjects; for a king who is not like that would be a mere titular king. Now tyranny is the very contrary of this; the tyrant pursues his own good. And it is clearer in the case of tyranny that it is the worst deviation-form; but it is the contrary of the best that is worst. Monarchy passes over into tyranny; for tyranny is the evil form of one-man rule and the bad king becomes a tyrant. Aristocracy passes over into oligarchy by the badness of the rulers, who distribute contrary to equity what belongs to the city—all or most of the good things to themselves, and office always to the same people, paying most regard to wealth; thus the rulers are few and are bad men instead of the most worthy. Timocracy passes over into democracy; for these are coterminous, since it is the ideal even of timocracy to be the rule of the majority, and all who have the property qualification count as equal. Democracy is the least bad of the deviations; for in its case the form of constitution is but a slight deviation. These then are the changes to which constitutions are most subject; for these are the smallest and easiest transitions.

One may find resemblances to the constitutions and, as it were, patterns of them even in households. For the association of a father with his sons bears the form of monarchy, since the father cares for his children; and this is why Homer calls Zeus ‘father’; it is the ideal of monarchy to be paternal rule. But among the Persians the rule of the father is tyrannical; they use their sons as slaves. Tyrannical too is the rule of a master over slaves; for it is the advantage of the master that is brought about in it. Now this seems to be a correct form of government, but the Persian type is perverted; for the modes of rule appropriate to different relations are diverse. The association of man and wife seems to be aristocratic; for the man rules in accordance with his worth, and in those matters in which a man should rule, but the matters that befit a woman he hands over to her. If the man rules in everything the relation passes over into oligarchy; for in doing so he is not acting in accordance with their respective worth, and not ruling in virtue of his superiority. Sometimes, however, women rule, because they are heiresses; so their rule is not in virtue of excellence but due to wealth and power, as in oligarchies. The association of brothers is like timocracy; for they are equal, except in so far as they differ in age; hence if they differ much in age, the friendship is no longer of the fraternal type. Democracy is found chiefly in masterless dwellings (for here every one is on an equality), and in those in which the ruler is weak and every one has licence to do as he pleases.

Chapter XI

Each of the constitutions may be seen to involve friendship just in so far as it involves justice. The friendship between a king and his subjects depends on an excess of benefits conferred; for he confers benefits on his subjects if being a good man he cares for them with a view to their well-being, as a shepherd does for his sheep (whence Homer called Agamemnon ‘shepherd of the peoples’). Such too is the friendship of a father, though

this exceeds the other in the greatness of the benefits conferred; for he is responsible for the existence of his children, which is thought the greatest good, and for their nurture and upbringing.

These things are ascribed to ancestors as well. Further, by nature a father tends to rule over his sons, ancestors over descendants, a king over his subjects. These friendships imply superiority of one party over the other, which is why ancestors are honoured. The justice therefore that exists between persons so related is not the same on both sides but is in every case proportioned to merit; for that is true of the friendship as well. The friendship of man and wife, again, is the same that is found in an aristocracy; for it is in accordance with virtue the better gets more of what is good, and each gets what befits him; and so, too, with the justice in these relations. The friendship of brothers is like that of comrades; for they are equal and of like age, and such persons are for the most part like in their feelings and their character. Like this, too, is the friendship appropriate to timocratic government; for in such a constitution the ideal is for the citizens to be equal and fair; therefore rule is taken in turn, and on equal terms; and the friendship appropriate here will correspond.

But in the deviation-forms, as justice hardly exists, so too does friendship. It exists least in the worst form; in tyranny there is little or no friendship. For where there is nothing common to ruler and ruled, there is not friendship either, since there is not justice; e.g. between craftsman and tool, soul and body, master and slave; the latter in each case is benefited by that which uses it, but there is no friendship nor justice towards lifeless things. But neither is there friendship towards a horse or an ox, nor to a slave qua slave. For there is nothing common to the two parties; the slave is a living tool and the tool a lifeless slave. Qua slave then, one cannot be friends with him. But qua man one can; for there seems to be some justice between any man and any other who can share in a system of law or be a party to an agreement; therefore there can also be friendship with him in so far as he is a man. Therefore while in tyrannies friendship and justice hardly exist, in democracies they exist more fully; for where the citizens are equal they have much in common.

Chapter XII

Every form of friendship, then, involves association, as has been said. One might, however, mark off from the rest both the friendship of kindred and that of comrades. Those of fellow-citizens, fellow-tribesmen, fellow-voyagers, and the like are more like mere friendships of association; for they seem to rest on a sort of compact. With them we might class the friendship of host and guest. The friendship of kinsmen itself, while it seems to be of many kinds, appears to depend in every case on parental friendship; for parents love their children as being a part of themselves, and children their parents as being something originating from them. Now (1) parents know their offspring better than their children know that they are their children, and (2) the originator feels his offspring to be his own more than the offspring do their begetter; for the product belongs to the producer (e.g. a tooth or hair or anything else to him whose it is), but the producer does not belong to the product, or belongs in a less degree. And (3) the length of time produces the same result; parents love their children as soon as these are born, but children love their parents only after time has elapsed and they have acquired understanding or the power of discrimination by the senses. From these considerations it is also plain

why mothers love more than fathers do. Parents, then, love their children as themselves (for their issue are by virtue of their separate existence a sort of other selves), while children love their parents as being born of them, and brothers love each other as being born of the same parents; for their identity with them makes them identical with each other (which is the reason why people talk of ‘the same blood’, ‘the same stock’, and so on). They are, therefore, in a sense the same thing, though in separate individuals. Two things that contribute greatly to friendship are a common upbringing and similarity of age; for ‘two of an age take to each other’, and people brought up together tend to be comrades; whence the friendship of brothers is akin to that of comrades. And cousins and other kinsmen are bound up together by derivation from brothers, viz. by being derived from the same parents. They come to be closer together or farther apart by virtue of the nearness or distance of the original ancestor.

The friendship of children to parents, and of men to gods, is a relation to them as to something good and superior; for they have conferred the greatest benefits, since they are the causes of their being and of their nourishment, and of their education from their birth; and this kind of friendship possesses pleasantness and utility also, more than that of strangers, inasmuch as their life is lived more in common. The friendship of brothers has the characteristics found in that of comrades (and especially when these are good), and in general between people who are like each other, inasmuch as they belong more to each other and start with a love for each other from their very birth, and inasmuch as those born of the same parents and brought up together and similarly educated are more akin in character; and the test of time has been applied most fully and convincingly in their case.

Between other kinsmen friendly relations are found in due proportion. Between man and wife friendship seems to exist by nature; for man is naturally inclined to form couples-even more than to form cities, inasmuch as the household is earlier and more necessary than the city, and reproduction is more common to man with the animals. With the other animals the union extends only to this point, but human beings live together not only for the sake of reproduction but also for the various purposes of life; for from the start the functions are divided, and those of man and woman are different; so they help each other by throwing their peculiar gifts into the common stock. It is for these reasons that both utility and pleasure seem to be found in this kind of friendship. But this friendship may be based also on virtue, if the parties are good; for each has its own virtue and they will delight in the fact. And children seem to be a bond of union (which is the reason why childless people part more easily); for children are a good common to both and what is common holds them together.

How man and wife and in general friend and friend ought mutually to behave seems to be the same question as how it is just for them to behave; for a man does not seem to have the same duties to a friend, a stranger, a comrade, and a schoolfellow.

Chapter XIII

There are three kinds of friendship, as we said at the outset of our inquiry, and in respect of each some are

friends on an equality and others by virtue of a superiority (for not only can equally good men become friends but a better man can make friends with a worse, and similarly in friendships of pleasure or utility the friends may be equal or unequal in the benefits they confer). This being so, equals must effect the required equalization on a basis of equality in love and in all other respects, while unequals must render what is in proportion to their superiority or inferiority. Complaints and reproaches arise either only or chiefly in the friendship of utility, and this is only to be expected. For those who are friends on the ground of virtue are anxious to do well by each other (since that is a mark of virtue and of friendship), and between men who are emulating each other in this there cannot be complaints or quarrels; no one is offended by a man who loves him and does well by him-if he is a person of nice feeling he takes his revenge by doing well by the other. And the man who excels the other in the services he renders will not complain of his friend, since he gets what he aims at; for each man desires what is good. Nor do complaints arise much even in friendships of pleasure; for both get at the same time what they desire, if they enjoy spending their time together; and even a man who complained of another for not affording him pleasure would seem ridiculous, since it is in his power not to spend his days with him.

But the friendship of utility is full of complaints; for as they use each other for their own interests they always want to get the better of the bargain, and think they have got less than they should, and blame their partners because they do not get all they 'want and deserve'; and those who do well by others cannot help them as much as those whom they benefit want.

Now it seems that, as justice is of two kinds, one unwritten and the other legal, one kind of friendship of utility is moral and the other legal. And so complaints arise most of all when men do not dissolve the relation in the spirit of the same type of friendship in which they contracted it. The legal type is that which is on fixed terms; its purely commercial variety is on the basis of immediate payment, while the more liberal variety allows time but stipulates for a definite quid pro quo. In this variety the debt is clear and not ambiguous, but in the postponement it contains an element of friendliness; and so some states do not allow suits arising out of such agreements, but think men who have bargained on a basis of credit ought to accept the consequences. The moral type is not on fixed terms; it makes a gift, or does whatever it does, as to a friend; but one expects to receive as much or more, as having not given but lent; and if a man is worse off when the relation is dissolved than he was when it was contracted he will complain. This happens because all or most men, while they wish for what is noble, choose what is advantageous; now it is noble to do well by another without a view to repayment, but it is the receiving of benefits that is advantageous. Therefore if we can we should return the equivalent of what we have received (for we must not make a man our friend against his will; we must recognize that we were mistaken at the first and took a benefit from a person we should not have taken it from-since it was not from a friend, nor from one who did it just for the sake of acting so-and we must settle up just as if we had been benefited on fixed terms). Indeed, one would agree to repay if one could (if one could not, even the giver would not have expected one to do so); therefore if it is possible we must repay. But at the outset we must consider the man by whom we are being benefited and on what terms he is acting, in order that we may accept the benefit on these terms, or else decline it.

It is disputable whether we ought to measure a service by its utility to the receiver and make the return with a view to that, or by the benevolence of the giver. For those who have received say they have received from their benefactors what meant little to the latter and what they might have got from others-minimizing the service; while the givers, on the contrary, say it was the biggest thing they had, and what could not have been got from others, and that it was given in times of danger or similar need. Now if the friendship is one that aims at utility, surely the advantage to the receiver is the measure. For it is he that asks for the service, and the other man helps him on the assumption that he will receive the equivalent; so the assistance has been precisely as great as the advantage to the receiver, and therefore he must return as much as he has received, or even more (for that would be nobler). In friendships based on virtue on the other hand, complaints do not arise, but the purpose of the doer is a sort of measure; for in purpose lies the essential element of virtue and character.

Chapter XIV

Differences arise also in friendships based on superiority; for each expects to get more out of them, but when this happens the friendship is dissolved. Not only does the better man think he ought to get more, since more should be assigned to a good man, but the more useful similarly expects this; they say a useless man should not get as much as they should, since it becomes an act of public service and not a friendship if the proceeds of the friendship do not answer to the worth of the benefits conferred. For they think that, as in a commercial partnership those who put more in get more out, so it should be in friendship. But the man who is in a state of need and inferiority makes the opposite claim; they think it is the part of a good friend to help those who are in need; what, they say, is the use of being the friend of a good man or a powerful man, if one is to get nothing out of it?

At all events it seems that each party is justified in his claim, and that each should get more out of the friendship than the other-not more of the same thing, however, but the superior more honour and the inferior more gain; for honour is the prize of virtue and of beneficence, while gain is the assistance required by inferiority.

It seems to be so in constitutional arrangements also; the man who contributes nothing good to the common stock is not honoured; for what belongs to the public is given to the man who benefits the public, and honour does belong to the public. It is not possible to get wealth from the common stock and at the same time honour. For no one puts up with the smaller share in all things; therefore to the man who loses in wealth they assign honour and to the man who is willing to be paid, wealth, since the proportion to merit equalizes the parties and preserves the friendship, as we have said. This then is also the way in which we should associate with unequals; the man who is benefited in respect of wealth or virtue must give honour in return, repaying what he can. For friendship asks a man to do what he can, not what is proportional to the merits of the case; since that cannot always be done, e.g. in honours paid to the gods or to parents; for no one could ever return to them the equivalent of what he gets, but the man who serves them to the utmost of his power is thought to be a good man. This is why it would not seem open to a man to disown his father (though a father may disown his son); being in debt, he should repay, but there is nothing by doing which a son will have done the equivalent

of what he has received, so that he is always in debt. But creditors can remit a debt; and a father can therefore do so too. At the same time it is thought that presumably no one would repudiate a son who was not far gone in wickedness; for apart from the natural friendship of father and son it is human nature not to reject a son's assistance. But the son, if he is wicked, will naturally avoid aiding his father, or not be zealous about it; for most people wish to get benefits, but avoid doing them, as a thing unprofitable.-So much for these questions.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What is the “golden mean” and why is it important for Aristotle's ethics?
2. What are some virtues that you think are important and why?
3. Can someone ever be *too* rational? Why or why not? What would Aristotle say?

Citation and Use

Aristotle. (1925). *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* (W.D. Ross, Trans.). (Original work published circa 350 BCE).

This work is in the Public Domain.



This work (Virtue by Aristotle) is free of known copyright restrictions.

AN INTRODUCTION TO KANT'S MORAL THEORY

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D.

Morally speaking, Kant is a deontologist; from the Greek, this is the science of duties. For Kant, morality is not defined by the consequences of our actions, our emotions, or an external factor. Morality is defined by duties and one's action is moral if it is an act motivated by duty.

According to Kant the only thing that is good in itself is the "good will." The will is what drives our actions and grounds the intention of our act. It is good when it acts from duty. To clarify, Kant thinks the good will is the only thing that is intrinsically valuable. If we think about the other goods and things that we value, such are not good without qualification. For example, we value knowledge, but such can be used to commit atrocities in the world, so knowledge is good sometimes. The same can be said of courage. We value courage, but a suicide bomber also exhibits courage. So, courage can only be good sometimes. We can think of other examples as well. This leads Kant to claim that the good will is the only thing good without qualification—or the only thing that is intrinsically good. Accordingly, the will is a good will provided it acts from duty.

Kant recognizes that it is difficult to determine one's intentions, so he makes a distinction between acting in conformity with duty and acting from duty. To illustrate this distinction, let's take the example of three young men who see an elderly woman needing help across the street. Man A decides he will help the woman across the street because if he didn't he would feel guilty all day. Man B decides he will help the woman across the street because he recognizes her as his neighbor, Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Wilson makes the best cookies in the neighborhood. So, Man B helps her because he reasons that he will be rewarded. Man C decides he will help the woman across the street because it is the right thing to do; he understands that he has a moral obligation to help others in need when he can.

The results of all three individuals are the same—the woman is helped across the street. If we were looking at this from a utilitarian perspective, all three of the young men would be morally praiseworthy because in all three cases, happiness or well-being is increased (or pain is relieved). However, for Kant, only one of the young men's actions have moral worth and it is Man C; he understands what his moral duty is and he acts from it. The other two act only in conformity with duty—they are driven by some other goal or desire aside from duty itself.

Duties are principles that guide our actions. Duties are imperatives in the sense that they tell us what to do. Kant recognizes that there are different types of imperatives in his distinction between a hypothetical and a categorical imperative. An imperative is essentially a ought; something I ought to do. Hypothetical imperatives

are the oughts that direct my actions provided I have certain goals or interests. In fact, these oughts are entirely dependent upon my goals or interests. For example, if I want to be a good basketball player I ought to practice free throws or if I want to go to law school I ought to take a logic class. If I change my goal and decide to be a baseball player or a welder instead then my oughts may also change. Hypothetical imperatives have nothing to do with morality. However a categorical imperative does not depend upon my desires or wants. These are necessary and always binding and are the oughts that determine what our moral duties are. Even if I don't want to help the elderly person across the street, if I have a duty to do so, my ought is binding. We should all be familiar enough with feeling we must do something even if we'd rather do something else.

Kant's moral theory has three formulas for the categorical imperative. So, if you're facing a moral dilemma you must determine whether or not your action is permissible according to the formulas. Simply put, think of the formulas as tests that have to be passed in order for a principle or act to be moral.

Formula one states that we ought to act in a way such that the maxim, or principle, of our act can be willed a universal law. If your maxim cannot be universalized then that act is morally off limits. For example, if I am considering stealing a loaf of bread, I have to ask myself if my maxim can be made a universal law. This would look something like this: Is it okay for all people to steal all the time? The answer is no; the maxim itself would be self-defeating because if everyone stole all the time there would be no private property and stealing would no longer be possible.

The second formula states that we ought to treat humanity (self and others) as an end and never as a mere means. Essentially, this entails that I treat all persons with respect and dignity; I help others achieve their goals when possible, and I avoid using them as tools or objects to further my own goals. For Kant, since humans have the capacity for autonomy and rationality, it is crucial that we treat humans with respect and dignity.

The third formula states that we act on principles that could be accepted within a community of other rational agents. The third formula, "the kingdom of ends," moves us from the individual level to the social level.

In brief, Kant's moral philosophy focuses on fairness and the value of the individual. His method rests on our ability to reason, our autonomy (i.e. our ability to give ourselves moral law and govern our own lives), and logical consistency. He also offers an objective sense of morality in the form of absolute duties—duties that are binding regardless of our desires, goals, or outcomes.



KANTIAN ETHICS

Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock

In spite of its horrifying title Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals is one of the small books which are truly great; it has exercised on human thought an influence almost ludicrously disproportionate to its size.

– H. J. Paton, 'Preface' in I. Kant, Moral Law, p. 7.

An Introduction to Kantian Ethics

Immanuel Kant was born in 1724 in Königsberg in East Prussia, where he died in 1804. Kant is famous for revolutionising how we think about just about every aspect of the world — including science, art, ethics, religion, the self and reality. He is one of the most important thinkers of all time, which is even more remarkable by the fact that Kant is a truly awful writer. His sentences are full of technical language, are very long, and are incredibly dense. You have been warned!

Kant is a rationalist writing during the Enlightenment (1685–1815). He thinks that we can gain knowledge from our senses and through our rational capacities. This means his general philosophical approach starts by asking what we can know *a priori*. This is key to understanding his work but also makes his writing on ethics seem a bit odd. We think the study of ethics — unlike say maths — ought to direct our eye to what is going on around us in the world. Yet Kant starts by turning his eyes “inward” to thinking about ethical ideas.

Kant believes that in doing this people will come to recognize that certain actions are right and wrong irrespective of how we might feel and irrespective of any consequences. For Kant, actions are right if they respect what he calls the Categorical Imperative. For example, because lying fails to respect the Categorical Imperative it is wrong and is wrong irrespective of how we might feel about lying or what might happen if we did lie; it is actions that are right and wrong rather than consequences. This means that Kant's theory is deontological rather than teleological. It focuses on our duties rather than our ends/goals/consequences.

There is, however, something intuitive about the idea that morality is based on reason rather than feelings

or consequences. Consider my pet cat Spartan. He performs certain actions like scrabbling under bed covers, meowing at birds and chasing his tail. Now consider my daughter Beth, she performs certain actions like caring for her sister and helping the homeless.

Spartan's actions are not moral whereas Beth's actions are. Spartan's thinking and actions are driven by his desires and inclination. He eats and plays and sleeps when he desires to do so, there is no reasoning on his part. Beth, in contrast, can reflect on the various reasons she has, reasons to care for her sister and the homeless.

We might think then that humans are moral beings not because we have certain desires but precisely because we are rational. We have an ability to “stand back” and consider what we are doing and why. Kant certainly thought so and he takes this insight as his starting point.

Some Key Ideas

Duty

Kant's main works in ethics are his *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). Neither give practical advice about particular situations but rather through rational reflection, Kant seeks to establish the supreme principle of morality.

He starts from the notion of “duty” and although this is a rather old-fashioned term, the idea behind it should sound familiar. Imagine, your friend has told you that she is pregnant but asks you to promise to keep her secret. Through the coming weeks this juicy bit of gossip is on the tip of your tongue but you do not tell anyone because of your promise. There are things we recognize as being required of us irrespective of what we (really) desire to do. This is what Kant means by duty.

But this raises the question. If it is not desires that move us to do what is right (even really strong desires), what does? In our example, why is it that we keep our promise despite the strong desire to gossip? Kant's answer is “the good will”.

Good Will

Kant gives the following characterization of the good will. It is something that is good irrespective of effects:

A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes — because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end: it is good through its willing alone — that is, good in itself.¹

It is also good without qualification.

It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will.²

What does Kant mean? Well, pick anything you like which you think might make an action good — for example, happiness, pleasure, courage, and then ask yourself if there are any situations you can think of where an action having those features makes those actions worse?

It seems there are. Imagine someone who is happy when kicking a cat; or someone taking pleasure in torture; or a serial killer whose courage allows her to abduct children in broad daylight. In such cases the happiness, pleasure and courage make the actions worse. Kant thinks we can repeat this line of thinking for anything and everything, except one thing — the good will.

The good will unlike anything else is good unconditionally and what makes a good will good is willing alone; not other attitudes, or consequences, or characteristics of the agent. Even Kant thinks this sounds like a rather strange idea. So how can he (and we) be confident that the good will even exists?

Consider **Mahatma Gandhi's** (1869–1948) non-violent protest for Indian independence. He stood peacefully whilst the British police beat him. Here is a case where there must have been an overwhelming desire to fight back. But he did not. In this type of action Kant would claim that we “see” the good will — as he says — “shining like a jewel”.³ Seeing such resilience in the face of such awful violence we are humbled and can recognize, what Kant calls, its moral worth. Obviously not all actions are as significant as Gandhi's! However, Kant thinks that any acts like this, which are performed despite conflicting desires, are due to the good will. Considering such actions (can you think of any?) means we can recognize that the good will exists.

Acting for the Sake of Duty and Acting in Accordance with Duty

From what we have said above about the nature of duty and good will we can see why Kant says that to act from good will is acting for the sake of duty. We act despite our desires to do otherwise. For Kant this means that acting for the sake of duty is the only way that an action can have moral worth. We will see below what we have to do for our actions to be carried out for the sake of duty. However, before we do this, we need to be really clear on this point about moral worth.

Imagine that you are walking with a friend. You pass someone begging on the street. Your friend starts to weep, fumbles in his wallet and gives the beggar some money and tells you that he feels such an empathy with the poor man that he just has to help him.

For Kant, your friend's action has no moral worth because what is moving him to give money is *empathy rather*

than duty! He is acting in accordance with duty. However, Kant does think your friend should be applauded as such an action is something that is of value although it wouldn't be correct to call it a moral action.

To make this point clearer, Kant asks us to consider someone who has no sympathy for the suffering of others and no inclination to help them. But despite this:

...he nevertheless tears himself from his deadly insensibility and performs the action without any inclination at all, but solely from duty then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.⁴

In contrast to our friend, this person is acting for the sake of duty and hence their action is moral. We must be careful though. Kant is not telling us to become emotionally barren robots! He is not saying that before we can act morally we need to get rid of sympathy, empathy, desires, love, and inclinations. This would make Kant's moral philosophy an absurd non-starter.

Let us see why Kant is not saying this. Consider an action such as giving to others. We should ask whether an action of giving to others would have been performed even if the agent lacked the desire to do so. If the answer is "yes" then the act has moral worth. This though is consistent with the agent actually having those desires. The question for Kant is not whether an agent has desires but what moved the agent to act. If they acted because of those desires they acted in accordance with duty and their action had no moral worth. If they acted for the sake of duty, and just happened to have those desires, then their action has moral worth.

Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives

If we agree with Kant and want to act for the sake of duty what should we do? His answer is that we have to act out of respect for the moral law. He has two examples of how this works in practice: lying and suicide. We look at the former in Chapter 13, we will consider Kant's example of suicide at the end of this chapter. However, before doing this we need to get a sense of what Kant has in mind when he talks about acting out of respect for the moral law.

The moral law is what he calls the "Categorical Imperative". He thinks there are three formulations of this.

Formulation	Shorthand	Imperative
First Formulation	C-1	...act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. ⁵
Second Formulation	C-2	So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. ⁶
Third Formulation	C-3	...every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends. ⁷

We will consider these in turn, showing how they are linked. Consider then, CI-1. Kant's idea is that we use this "test" to see what maxims are morally permissible. If we act in accordance with those then we are acting from duty and our actions have moral worth. Let us look at what this means.

Initially it is worth considering what "categorical" and "imperative" mean. An imperative is just a command. "Clean your room!" is an imperative I give my daughter every Saturday. "Do not park in front of these gates!" is a command on my neighbor's gate. "Love your God with all your heart, mind and soul" is a command from the Bible.

What about the "categorical" part? If a command is categorical then people ought to follow it irrespective of how they feel about following it, irrespective of what consequences might follow, or who may or may not have told them to follow it. For example, the command "do not peel the skin of babies" is categorical. You ought not to do this and the fact that this might be your life's ambition, or that you really want to do it, or that your teacher has told you to do it, is completely irrelevant.

Contrast this with Hypothetical Imperatives. If I tell my daughter to clean her room, this is hypothetical. This is because whether she ought to clean her room is dependent on conditions about her and me. If she does not care about a clean room and about what her dad thinks, then it is not true that she ought to clean her room. Most commands are hypothetical. For example, "study!" You ought to study only if certain things are true about you; for example, that you care about doing well, that you want to succeed in the test etc.

Kant thinks that moral "oughts" — for example, "you ought not lie" — are categorical. They apply to people irrespective of how they feel about them.

The next thing we need is the idea of a "maxim". This is relatively simple and is best seen through the following examples. Imagine I'm considering whether to make a false promise. Perhaps I think that by falsely promising you that I will pay you back I will be more likely to get a loan from you. In that case my maxim is something like "whenever I can benefit from making a false promise I should do so".

Imagine I decide to exercise because I feel depressed, then I may be said to be acting on the maxim "Whenever I feel depressed I will exercise". **A maxim is a general principle or rule upon which we act.** We do not decide on a set of maxims, perhaps writing them down, and then try to live by them but rather a maxim is the principle or rule that can make sense of an action whether or not we have thought about it in these terms.

The First Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

Let's put these bits together in relation to CI-1

...act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.⁸

The “test” that CI-1 prescribes is the following. Consider the maxim on which you are thinking about acting, and ask whether you can either

- i. conceive that it become a universal law, or
- ii. will that it become a universal law.

If a maxim fails on either (i) or (ii) then there is no good reason for you to act on that maxim and it is morally impermissible to do so. If it passes the CI test, then it is morally permissible.

Kant is not saying that the CI-1 test is a way of working out what is and what is not moral. Presumably we can think of lots of maxims, which are non-moral, which pass the test, for example, “whenever I am bored I will watch TV”.

Equally he is not saying that if a maxim cannot be universalized then it is morally impermissible. Some maxims are just mathematically impossible. For example, “whenever I am going to exercise I will do it for an above the average amount of time”. This maxim cannot be universalized because we cannot conceive that everyone does something above “average”.

Finally, it is worth remembering that the maxim must be able to be willed as a universal law. This is important because maxims such as “if your name is Jill and you are 5ft 11, you can lie” will fail to be universalized because you cannot will that your name is Jill or that your height is 5ft11. It has to be possible to will as a universal law and for this to be true it must be at least possible for it actually to come about. This shows that the common concern that we can get any maxim to pass the CI-1 test by simply adding more and more specific details, such as names, heights or locations, fails. This is very abstract (what did we tell you about Kant’s work!). Let us consider an example.

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

Recall the example of making a false promise to secure a loan. The maxim is “whenever I can benefit from doing so, I should make a false promise”. The question is whether I could conceive or will that this become a universal law.

I could not. If everyone followed this maxim then we would all believe everyone else could make a false promise if it would benefit them to do so. Kant thinks such a situation is not conceivable because the very idea of making a promise relies on trust. But if “whenever it is of benefit to you, you can make false promises” was to become a universal law then there would be no trust and hence no promising. So, by simply thinking about the idea of promising and lying we see the maxim will fail the test and, because we cannot universalize the

maxim, then making a false promise becomes morally impermissible. This is true universally for all people in all circumstances for anyone can, in principle, go through the same line of reasoning.

A maxim failing at (i) is what Kant calls a **contradiction in conception**, and succeeding at (i) means we are dealing with what Kant calls a **perfect duty**. In our example we have shown we have a perfect duty not to make false promises.

Consider another example. Imagine that someone in need asks us for money but we decide not to help them. In this case our maxim is “whenever someone is in need and asks for money do not give them money”. Does this pass the CI-1 test?

No it fails the CI-1 test. Although it is true that the maxim passes (i) not giving to the needy does not threaten the very idea of giving money away. Kant thinks that anyone thinking about this will see that that maxim will fail at (ii) and hence it is morally impermissible. Here is why.

You cannot know if you will be in need in the future and presumably you would want to be helped if you were in need. In which case you are being inconsistent if you willed that “people should not help those in need” should become a universal law. For you might want people to help those in need in the future, namely, you.

So we cannot will the maxim “whenever someone is in need do not help them” to become a universal moral law. Again this is a thought process that anyone can go through and it means that this moral claim is true universally for all people in all circumstances. Failing at (ii) is what Kant calls a contradiction in will, and failing at (ii) means we are dealing with what Kant calls an imperfect duty.

It is absolutely key to recognize that CI-1 is not simply asking “what if everyone did that?” CI-1 is not a form of Utilitarianism. (See Part I: Moral Theories Utilitarianism.) Kant is not saying that it is wrong to make false promises because if people did then the world would be a horrible place. Rather Kant is asking about whether we can conceive or will the maxim to become a universal law.

Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

The second formulation CI-2 is the following:

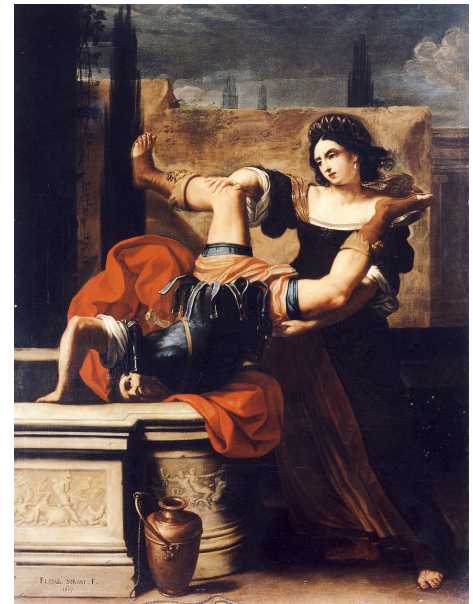
So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.

Kant thinks that CI-1 and CI-2 are two sides of the same coin, though precisely how they are related is a matter of scholarly debate. Put very simply CI-2 says you should not use people, because if you do, you are failing to treat them as a rational agent and this is morally wrong.

For example, if I use your essay without your knowledge then I have not treated you as a rational agent. I would have done had I asked you for your essay and you had freely chosen to let me have it. But given that I did not ask you, I was in a sense making choices on your behalf and thus did not treat you as a rational agent. So according to Kant I should always treat you as an end not a means. I should always treat you as a free rational agent.

Kant's theory then has a way of respecting the dignity of people. We should treat people with respect and with dignity purely on the basis that they are rational agents, and not because of their race, gender, education, upbringing etc. From this you can also see that Kant's theory allows us to speak about "rights". If someone has a right then they have this right irrespective of gender, education, upbringing etc. For example, Jill has a right to free speech because she is a person, consequently that right will not disappear if she changes her location, personal circumstances, relationship status, political viewpoint etc. After all she does not stop being a person.

Importantly, CI-2 does not say that you either treat someone as a means or an end. I could treat someone as an end by treating them as a means. Suppose that you have freely decided to become a taxi driver. If I use you as a means by asking you to take me to the airport I am also treating you as an end. But Kant does not believe this to be morally wrong because I am respecting you as a rational agent; after all, you chose to be a taxi driver. Of course, if I get into your car and point a gun at your head and ask to be taken to the airport then I am not treating you as an end but rather solely as a means, which is wrong.



Timoclea Kills the Captain of Alexander the Great by Elisabetta Sirani (1659). Timoclea threw the captain down a well, actually. Kant would say that Timoclea is not treating the captain as an end-in-himself and only as a means to her own end.

The Third Formulation of the Categorical Imperative and Summary

The final formulation of the Categorical Imperative is a combination of CI-1 and CI-2. It asks us to imagine a kingdom which consists of only those people who act on CI-1. They never act on a maxim which cannot become a universal law. In such a kingdom people would treat people as ends, because CI-2 passes CI-1. This is why CI-3 is often called the "Kingdom of Ends" formulation:

...every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends.

In summary, we have seen that Kant thinks that acts have moral worth only if they are carried out for the sake of duty. Agents act for the sake of duty if they act out of respect for the moral law, which they do by following the Categorical Imperative in one of its formulations.

Consequently, Kant thinks that acts are wrong and right universally, irrespective of consequences and desires. If lying is wrong then it is wrong in all instances. From all this, it follows that we cannot be taught a set of moral rules for each and every situation and Kant believes that it is up to us to work it out for ourselves by thinking rationally.

There have been, and continue to be, many books and journal articles written about Kant's ethics. He has a profound and deep insight into the nature of morality and he raises some fundamental questions about what it is to be human. Kant's moral theory is radically Egalitarian as his theory is blind to individual personal circumstances, race, gender and ethnicity. Everyone is equal before the moral law!

Related to this, his theory respects the rights of individuals and, relatedly, their dignity. Any theory that is to have a hope of capturing our notion of rights needs to be able to respect the thought that a right is not something that disappears if circumstances change. Jill has a right to life, period; we do not say Jill has a right to life "if..." and then have to fill in the blanks. This is precisely something that Kant's theory can give us. CI-1 generates maxims which do not have exceptions and CI-2 tells us that we should always treat everyone as an end in themselves and never solely as a means to an end. It tells us, for example, that we ought not to kill Jill, and this holds true in all circumstances.

There are, though, a number of tough questions that Kant's work raises. We consider some of these below. However, as with all the philosophical ideas we discuss in this book, Kant's work is still very much alive and has defenders across the world. Before we turn to these worries, we work through an example that Kant gives regarding suicide.

Kant on Suicide

Kant is notoriously stingy with examples. One he does mention is suicide. This is an emotive topic and linked to questions about mental health and religion. An attraction of Kant's view is the ability to apply his Categorical Imperatives in a dispassionate way. His framework should allow us to "plug in" the issue and "get out" an answer. Let's see how this might work.

Kant thinks that suicide is always wrong and has very harsh words for someone who attempts suicide:

He who so behaves, who has no respect for human nature and makes a thing of himself, becomes for everyone an Object of freewill. We are free to treat him as a beast, as a thing, and to use him for our sport as we do a horse or a dog, for he is no longer a human being; he has made a thing of himself, and, having himself discarded his humanity, he cannot expect that others should respect humanity in him.⁹

But why does he think this? How does this fit with Kant's Categorical Imperatives? We will look at the first two formulations.

Fundamental to remember is that for Kant the motive that drives all suicide is "avoid evil". By which he means avoiding suffering, pain, and other negative outcomes in one's life. All suicide attempts are due to the fact that we love ourselves and thus want to "avoid evils" that may befall us.

Imagine then that I decide to commit suicide. Given what we have just said about my motives this means I will be acting on this maxim: "From self-love I make as my principle to shorten my life when its continued duration threatens more evil than it promises satisfaction".¹³

Following CI-1 the question then is whether it is possible to universalize this maxim? Kant thinks not. For him it is unclear how we could will it that all rational agents as the result of self-love can destroy themselves when their continued existence threatens more evil than it promises satisfaction. For Kant self-love leading to the destruction of the self is a contradiction. Thus he thinks that we have a perfect (rather than an imperfect) duty to ourselves not to commit suicide. To do so is morally wrong. This is how Kant puts it:

One sees at once a contradiction in a system of nature whose law would destroy life [suicide] by means of the very same feeling that acts so as to stimulate the furtherance of life [self-love], and hence there could be no existence as a system of nature. Therefore, such a maxim cannot possibly hold as a universal law of nature and is, consequently, wholly opposed to the supreme principle of all duty.¹⁰

Notice a few odd things here in relation to CI-1. The point about universalization seems irrelevant. Kant could have just said it is a contradiction to will from self-love the destruction of oneself. It seems that there is nothing added by asking us to consider this point universalized. It does not add weight to the claim that it is a contradiction.

Second, it is not really a "contradiction" at all! It is different to the lying promise example. In this it seems that the very concept of a promise relies on trust, which lying would destroy. In contrast in the suicide case the "contradiction" seems more like a by-product of Kant's assumption regarding the motivation of suicidal people. So we can avoid the "contradiction" if we allow for the possibility that suicide need not be driven by self-love. If this were true then there would be no "contradiction". Hence, it seems wrong to call the duty not to kill oneself — if such a duty exists — a "perfect" duty. So the first formulation does not give Kant the conclusion that suicide is morally wrong.

Moving to the second formulation. This helps us understand Kant's harsh assessment of people attempting

suicide. Remember he calls such people “objects” or “beasts” or “things”. So, what is the difference between beasts or objects or things, and humans? The answer is that we are rational. Recall, that for Kant our rationality is of fundamental value. If anyone’s actions do not recognize someone else’s rationality then they have done something morally wrong. This amounts to treating them as merely means to our own end. Given all this you can see what Kant is getting at. For him committing suicide is treating yourself as a mere means to some end — namely the end of avoiding pain and suffering etc. — and not an end in itself. You are treating yourself as a “beast” a “thing” an “object”, not as a human being with the gift of reason. This is morally wrong.

Moreover, if you do this, then others treating you with respect as a rational person can conclude that you also want others to treat you in this way. Because if you are rational then you must think that it is OK to universalize the maxim that we can treat others as objects, beast and thing. They can thus treat you as a beast, object, and thing and still be treating you with respect as a rational agent. With regard to attempting suicide your action is wrong because you have ignored your own rationality. You have treated yourself as a mere means to an end.

But, like the first formulation this is very weak. It is unclear why in attempting suicide you are treating yourself as a mere means to an end. You might think you are respecting your rationality by considering suicide. Recall, Kant says that it is sometimes fine to treat people as a means to an end, e.g. a taxi driver. It is fine where people have given consent for you to treat them that way. In that case, suicide might be like the taxi driver case. We have freely decided to treat ourselves as a means to an end. We are, then, treating ourselves as a rational agent and not doing something morally wrong by committing suicide. There are some other things that Kant says about the wrongness of suicide that do not link to the Categorical Imperatives. For example, he talks about humans being the property of God and hence our lives not being something we can choose to extinguish. However, we need not discuss this here.

There is a consensus between Kant scholars that, as it stands, Kant’s argument against suicide fails. There are some though who use Kant’s ideas as a starting point for a more convincing argument against suicide. For example, see J. David Velleman (1999) and Michael Cholbi (2000).

Problems and Responses

Conflicting Duties

If moral duties apply in all circumstances, then what happens when we have duties which conflict? Imagine that you have hidden some Jewish people in your basement in Nazi Germany. Imagine then that an SS officer knocks at your door and asks if you are hiding Jews? What might Kant’s theory tell us to do? Our duty is to refrain from lying so does this mean we are morally required to tell the SS officer our secret? If this is the conclusion then it makes Kant’s theory morally repugnant.

However, there is no requirement in Kant's theory to tell the truth, there is just a requirement not to lie. Lying is about intentional deceit, so maybe in this example there is a way not to lie. For example, if we simply stayed silent.

Even if we respond in this sort of way in this example, presumably we can engineer an example that would not allow for this. For example, perhaps we are in a law court and the SS officer asks us under oath. In that example, silence would not be an option. This certainly would seem to count against Kant's theory for it does seem morally wrong to reveal the location of the Jewish people.

The main point though is that Kant thinks we need to take the features of each individual situation into account. He does not just want us to mindlessly apply generic rules whilst paying no attention to what is before us. Peter Rickman writes regarding these types of cases:

...it should be plain that more than one imperative/moral principle is relevant to the situation. Certainly we should tell the truth; but do we not also have a duty to protect an innocent man from harm? Further, do we not have an obligation to fight evil? We are confronted with a conflict of values here. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there is no explicit discussion of this issue in Kant. One could assume, however, that his general approach of distinguishing the lesser from the greater evil should be applied. I think Kant might say that although lying is never right, it might be the lesser evil in some cases.¹¹

The point is not that these sorts of examples are “knock down” criticisms of Kant's theory but rather that Kant's theory is underspecified and fails to give guidance with these specific sorts of cases. In fact, we might think that this is an advantage of his theory that has given us the supreme principle of morality and the general way of proceeding but has left it up to us to work out what to do in each situation. We will leave the reader to see if this can be done and in particular, whether it can be done in a way consistent with the other aspects of his moral theory.

Problems and Responses: The Role of Intuitions

One of the most common criticisms leveled at Kant's theory is that it is simply counter intuitive. For example, lying, for him, is morally impermissible in all instances irrespective of the consequences. Yet we seem to be able to generate thought experiments that show that this is a morally repugnant position.

However, in Kant's defense we might ask why we should use our intuitions as any form of test for a moral theory. Intuitions are notoriously fickle and unreliable. Even if you pick the oddest view you can think of, you would probably find some people at some point in time that would find this view “intuitive”. So how worried should we be if Kant's theory leads to counter intuitive consequences? This then raises a more general methodological question to keep at the forefront of your mind when reading this book. What role, if any, should intuitions have in the formation and the testing of moral theory?

Problem and Responses: Categorical Imperatives and Etiquette

Kant argues that what we are morally required to do is a matter of reason. If people reason in the right way then they will recognize, for example, that lying is wrong. However, some philosophers, for example Philippa Foot (1920–2010), have worried about this link to reason. The strength of Foot’s challenge is that she agrees that morality is a system of Categorical Imperatives but says that this need not be due to reason.

Foot uses the example of etiquette to motivate her argument.¹² Rules of etiquette seem to be Categorical Imperatives but are not grounded in reason. Consider an example. I had a friend at university who was a sportsman. He was in many teams, his degree was in sports and exercise and if there were ever a spare minute he would be running, on his bike or in the pool. Unsurprisingly he wore a tracksuit and trainers all the time!

During our second year at university a mutual friend died. There was a big formal funeral arranged. My friend decided to go to this funeral in his tracksuit and trainers. I asked him about this and his response was that it was what he liked wearing. However, to my mind at least, this reason, which was based on his desire, did not change the fact that he really ought not have worn a tracksuit. Foot would agree and thinks that rules of etiquette are categorical because they are not dependent on any particular desires someone would have.

However, even if they are categorical, Foot thinks that rules of etiquette are not rules of reason. We do not think that if we reasoned correctly we would recognize that we ought not to wear tracksuits to funerals, or (to think of some other rules of etiquette) we ought not to reply to a letter written in the third person in the first person, or we ought not to put our feet on the dinner table during a meal etc. It is not simply a matter of thinking in the right way but rather to recognize these “oughts” as part of a shared cultural practice.

So although this does not show that Kant is wrong, it does throw down a challenge to him. That is, we need independent reasons to think that the categorical nature of moral “oughts” are based on reason and not just part of a shared cultural practice. To respond to this challenge, the Kantian would have to put forward the argument that in the particular case of moral “oughts”, we have a good argument to ground the categorical nature in reason rather than institutional practices.

Problems and Responses: The Domain of Morality

Kant thinks that the domain of morality is merely the domain of reasons and as far as we are agents who can reason then we have duties and rights and people ought to treat us with dignity. The flip side of this is that non-rational agents, such as non-human animals, do not have rights and we can, according to Kant, treat them as we like!

The challenge to Kant's theory is that the scope of morality seems bigger than the scope of reasons. People do think that we have moral obligations toward non-rational agents. Consider someone kicking a cat. We might think that morally they ought not to do this. However, Kant's theory does not back this up because, as far as we know, cats are not rational agents. Despite it not being wrong to treat animals in this way, Kant still thinks that we should not, because if we did, then we would be more likely to treat humans in this way.

Summary

Kant's moral theory is extremely complicated and badly expressed. However, it is hugely influential and profound. As a system builder Kant's work starts with rational reflection from which he attempts to develop a complete moral system.

He starts from the notion of duty. He shows that what allows us to act for the sake of duty is the good will, and that the good will is unconditionally good. If we want to act for the sake of duty we need to act out of respect for the moral law and this amounts to following the Categorical Imperative. Kant argues that in following the Categorical Imperative, agents will converge on what is morally permissible. Hence Kant can talk about absolute and objective moral truths.

Common Student Mistakes

- Confusing acting in accordance with duty and acting for the sake of duty.
- Thinking that Kant's theory has no room for emotions.
- Thinking that Kant's Categorical Imperative can be summed up in the question: "how would you like it if everyone did that"?
- Thinking that the Categorical Imperative is a form of Utilitarianism.
- Thinking Kant believes you can never treat someone as a means to an end.

Topics of Discussion

1. Think about your life. Do you think there are things you “ought to do”?
2. Do you think that there are things you ought to do irrespective of your desires and inclinations?
3. What are Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives? Do you think that rules of etiquette are categorical or hypothetical?
4. How might Kant respond to the SS officer example?
5. Can you think of some examples where you might be treating someone solely as means-to-an-end?
6. Would capital punishment pass the CI-2 test?
7. How might CI-2 relate to prostitution? Do you think that Kant would say that it is morally permissible?
8. Why might Kant’s theory be well placed to respect people’s rights?
9. Do you think we have any moral obligations towards animals? What would Kant say?
10. What role do you think intuitions should have in assessing moral theories?

Key Terminology

- A priori
- Categorical Imperative
- Deontological
- Duty
- Egalitarian
- Good will
- Hypothetical Imperative
- Maxim
- Rationalist
- Rights

Media Attributions

Timoclea Kills the Captain of Alexander the Great by Elisabetta Sirani 1659 © Elisabetta Sirani is licensed under a Public Domain license

Media Attributions

- Timoclea Kills the Captain of Alexander the Great by Elisabetta Sirani 1659 © Elisabetta Sirani is licensed under a Public Domain license



Kantian Ethics by Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, ed. Jonathan Bennett (Early Modern Texts, 2008), 39, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171002211626/http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/kant1785.pdf>.
2. Kant, 40.
3. Kant, 40.
4. Kant, 43.
5. Kant, 15.
6. Kant, 66.
7. Kant, 21.
8. Kant, 21.
9. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (Methuen & Co., 1930), pt. 27, p. 373.
10. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*.
11. Peter Rickman, "Having Trouble With Kant? | Issue 86 | Philosophy Now," Magazine, Philosophy Now, July 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20170724103219/https://philosophynow.org/issues/86/Having_Trouble_With_Kant.
12. Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972): 305–16.

SELECTED READINGS FROM KANT'S FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE METAPHYSIC OF MORALS

Immanuel Kant

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals

Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting *according to* the *conception* of laws, that is according to principles, *i.e.*, have a *will*. Since the deduction of actions from principles requires *reason*, the will is nothing but practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, then the actions of such a being which are recognised as objectively necessary are subjectively necessary also, *i.e.*, the will is a faculty to choose *that only* which reason independent of inclination recognises as practically necessary, *i.e.*, as good. But if reason of itself does not sufficiently determine the will, if the latter is subject also to subjective conditions (particular impulses) which do not always coincide with the objective conditions; in a word, if the will does not *in itself* completely accord with reason (which is actually the case with men), then the actions which objectively are recognised as necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will according to objective laws is *obligation*, that is to say, the relation of the objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is conceived as the determination of the will of a rational being by principles of reason, but which the will from its nature does not of necessity follow.

The conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is obligatory for a will, is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an **Imperative**.

All imperatives are expressed by the word *ought* [or *shall*], and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will, which from its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (an obligation). They say that something would be good to do or to forbear, but they say it to a will which does not always do a thing because it is conceived to be good to do it. That is practically *good*, however, which determines the will by means of the conceptions of reason, and consequently not from subjective causes, but objectively, that is on principles which are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the pleasant, as that which influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, valid only for the sense of this or that one, and not as a principle of reason, which holds for every one.¹

A perfectly good will would therefore be equally subject to objective laws (*viz.*, laws of good), but could not

be conceived as *obliged* thereby to act lawfully, because of itself from its subjective constitution it can only be determined by the conception of good. Therefore no imperatives hold for the *Divine* will, or in general for a *holy* will; *ought* is here out of place, because the *volition* is already of itself necessarily in unison with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulae to express the relation of objective laws of all volition to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, *e.g.*, the human will.

Now all *imperatives* command either *hypothetically* or *categorically*. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, *i.e.*, as objectively necessary.

Since every practical law represents a possible action as good and, on this account, for a subject who is practically determinable by reason, necessary, all imperatives are formulae determining an action which is necessary according to the principle of a will good in some respects. If now the action is good only as a means *to something else*, then the imperative is *hypothetical*; if it is conceived as *good in itself* and consequently as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, then it is *categorical*.

Thus the imperative declares what action possible by me would be good and presents the practical rule in relation to a will which does not forthwith perform an action simply because it is good, whether because the subject does not always know that it is good, or because, even if it know this, yet its maxims might be opposed to the objective principles of practical reason.

Accordingly the hypothetical imperative only says that the action is good for some purpose, *possible* or *actual*. In the first case it is a **Problematical**, in the second an **Assertorial** practical principle. The categorical imperative which declares an action to be objectively necessary in itself without reference to any purpose, *i.e.*, without any other end, is valid as an **Apodictic** (practical) principle.

Whatever is possible only by the power of some rational being may also be conceived as a possible purpose of some will; and therefore the principles of action as regards the means necessary to attain some possible purpose are in fact infinitely numerous. All sciences have a practical part, consisting of problems expressing that some end is possible for us and of imperatives directing how it may be attained. These may, therefore, be called in general imperatives of **Skill**. Here there is no question whether the end is rational and good, but only what one must do in order to attain it. The precepts for the physician to make his patient thoroughly healthy, and for a poisoner to ensure certain death, are of equal value in this respect, that each serves to effect its purpose perfectly. Since in early youth it cannot be known what ends are likely to occur to us in the course of life, parents seek to have their children taught a *great many things*, and provide for their *skill* in the use of means for all sorts of *arbitrary* ends, of none of which can they determine whether it may not perhaps hereafter be an object to their pupil, but which it is at all events *possible* that he might aim at; and this anxiety is so great that they commonly neglect to form and correct their judgement on the value of the things which may be chosen as ends.

There is *one* end, however, which may be assumed to be actually such to all rational beings (so far as imperatives apply to them, viz., as dependent beings), and, therefore, one purpose which they not merely *may* have, but which we may with certainty assume that they all actually *have* by a natural necessity, and this is *happiness*. The hypothetical imperative which expresses the practical necessity of an action as means to the advancement of happiness is **Assertorial**. We are not to present it as necessary for an uncertain and merely possible purpose, but for a purpose which we may presuppose with certainty and *à priori* in every man, because it belongs to his being. Now skill in the choice of means to his own greatest well-being may be called *prudence*,^[6] in the narrowest sense. And thus the imperative which refers to the choice of means to one's own happiness, *i.e.*, the precept of prudence, is still always *hypothetical*; the action is not commanded absolutely, but only as means to another purpose.

Finally, there is an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This imperative is **Categorical**. It concerns not the matter of the action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what it may. This imperative may be called that of **Morality**.

There is a marked distinction also between the *volitions* on these three sorts of principles in the *dissimilarity* of the obligation of the will. In order to mark this difference more clearly, I think they would be most suitably named in their order if we said they are either *rules* of skill, or *counsels* of prudence, or *commands* (*laws*) of morality. For it is *law* only that involves the conception of an *unconditional* and objective *necessity*, which is consequently universally valid; and commands are laws which must be obeyed, that is, must be followed, even in opposition to inclination. *Counsels*, indeed, involve necessity, but one which can only hold under a contingent subjective condition, viz., they depend on whether this or that man reckons this or that as part of his happiness; the categorical imperative, on the contrary, is not limited by any condition, and as being absolutely, although practically, necessary, may be quite properly called a command. We might also call the first kind of imperatives *technical* (belonging to art), the second *pragmatic*^[7] (to welfare), the third *moral* (belonging to free conduct generally, that is, to morals).

Now arises the question, how are all these imperatives possible? This question does not seek to know how we can conceive the accomplishment of the action which the imperative ordains, but merely how we can conceive the obligation of the will which the imperative expresses. No special explanation is needed to show how an imperative of skill is possible. Whoever wills the end, wills also (so far as reason decides his conduct) the means in his power which are indispensably necessary thereto. This proposition is, as regards the volition, analytical; for, in willing an object as my effect, there is already thought the causality of myself as an acting cause, that is to say, the use of the means; and the imperative educes from the conception of volition of an end the conception of actions necessary to this end. Synthetical propositions must no doubt be employed in defining the means to a proposed end; but they do not concern the principle, the act of the will, but the object and its realization. *Ex.*

gr., that in order to bisect a line on an unerring principle I must draw from its extremities two intersecting arcs; this no doubt is taught by mathematics only in synthetical propositions; but if I know that it is only by this process that the intended operation can be performed, then to say that, if I fully will the operation, I also will the action required for it, is an analytical proposition; for it is one and the same thing to conceive something as an effect which I can produce in a certain way, and to conceive myself as acting in this way.

If it were only equally easy to give a definite conception of happiness, the imperatives of prudence would correspond exactly with those of skill, and would likewise be analytical. For in this case as in that, it could be said: "Whoever wills the end, wills also (according to the dictate of reason necessarily) the indispensable means thereto which are in his power." But, unfortunately, the notion of happiness is so indefinite that although every man wishes to attain it, yet he never can say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills. The reason of this is that all the elements which belong to the notion of happiness are altogether empirical, *i.e.*, they must be borrowed from experience, and nevertheless the idea of happiness requires an absolute whole, a maximum of welfare in my present and all future circumstances. Now it is impossible that the most clear-sighted and at the same time most powerful being (supposed finite) should frame to himself a definite conception of what he really wills in this. Does he will riches, how much anxiety, envy, and snares might he not thereby draw upon his shoulders? Does he will knowledge and discernment, perhaps it might prove to be only an eye so much the sharper to show him so much the more fearfully the evils that are now concealed from him, and that cannot be avoided, or to impose more wants on his desires, which already give him concern enough. Would he have long life? who guarantees to him that it would not be a long misery? would he at least have health? how often has uneasiness of the body restrained from excesses into which perfect health would have allowed one to fall? and so on. In short, he is unable, on any principle, to determine with certainty what would make him truly happy; because to do so he would need to be omniscient. We cannot therefore act on any definite principles to secure happiness, but only on empirical counsels, *ex. gr.* of regimen, frugality, courtesy, reserve, etc., which experience teaches do, on the average, most promote well-being. Hence it follows that the imperatives of prudence do not, strictly speaking, command at all, that is, they cannot present actions objectively as practically *necessary*; that they are rather to be regarded as counsels (*consilia*) than precepts (*praecepta*) of reason, that the problem to determine certainly and universally what action would promote the happiness of a rational being is completely insoluble, and consequently no imperative respecting it is possible which should, in the strict sense, command to do what makes happy; because happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting solely on empirical grounds, and it is vain to expect that these should define an action by which one could attain the totality of a series of consequences which is really endless. This imperative of prudence would however be an analytical proposition if we assume that the means to happiness could be certainly assigned; for it is distinguished from the imperative of skill only by this, that in the latter the end is merely possible, in the former it is given; as however both only ordain the means to that which we suppose to be willed as an end, it follows that the imperative which ordains the willing of the means to him who wills the end is in both cases analytical. Thus there is no difficulty in regard to the possibility of an imperative of this kind either.

On the other hand, the question how the imperative of *morality* is possible, is undoubtedly one, the only one, demanding a solution, as this is not at all hypothetical, and the objective necessity which it presents cannot rest on any hypothesis, as is the case with the hypothetical imperatives. Only here we must never leave out of consideration that we *cannot* make out *by any example*, in other words empirically, whether there is such an imperative at all, but it is rather to be feared that all those which seem to be categorical may yet be at bottom hypothetical. For instance, when the precept is: "Thou shalt not promise deceitfully"; and it is assumed that the necessity of this is not a mere counsel to avoid some other evil, so that it should mean: "Thou shalt not make a lying promise, lest if it become known thou shouldst destroy thy credit," but that an action of this kind must be regarded as evil in itself, so that the imperative of the prohibition is categorical; then we cannot show with certainty in any example that the will was determined merely by the law, without any other spring of action, although it may appear to be so. For it is always possible that fear of disgrace, perhaps also obscure dread of other dangers, may have a secret influence on the will. Who can prove by experience the non-existence of a cause when all that experience tells us is that we do not perceive it? But in such a case the so-called moral imperative, which as such appears to be categorical and unconditional, would in reality be only a pragmatic precept, drawing our attention to our own interests and merely teaching us to take these into consideration.

We shall therefore have to investigate *à priori* the possibility of a *categorical* imperative, as we have not in this case the advantage of its reality being given in experience, so that [the elucidation of] its possibility should be requisite only for its explanation, not for its establishment. In the meantime it may be discerned beforehand that the categorical imperative alone has the purport of a practical **Law**: all the rest may indeed be called *principles* of the will but not laws, since whatever is only necessary for the attainment of some arbitrary purpose may be considered as in itself contingent, and we can at any time be free from the precept if we give up the purpose; on the contrary, the unconditional command leaves the will no liberty to choose the opposite; consequently it alone carries with it that necessity which we require in a law.

Secondly, in the case of this categorical imperative or law of morality, the difficulty (of discerning its possibility) is a very profound one. It is an *à priori* synthetical practical proposition;[8] and as there is so much difficulty in discerning the possibility of speculative propositions of this kind, it may readily be supposed that the difficulty will be no less with the practical.

In this problem we will first inquire whether the mere conception of a categorical imperative may not perhaps supply us also with the formula of it, containing the proposition which alone can be a categorical imperative; for even if we know the tenor of such an absolute command, yet how it is possible will require further special and laborious study, which we postpone to the last section.

When I conceive a *hypothetical* imperative, in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain until I am given the condition. But when I conceive a *categorical* imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that the maxims[9] shall conform to this law, while the law contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim

of the action should conform to a universal law, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary.

There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: *Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*

Now if all imperatives of duty can be deduced from this one imperative as from their principle, then, although it should remain undecided what is called duty is not merely a vain notion, yet at least we shall be able to show what we understand by it and what this notion means.

Since the universality of the law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called *nature* in the most general sense (as to form), that is the existence of things so far as it is determined by general laws, the imperative of duty may be expressed thus: *Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a Universal Law of Nature.*

We will now enumerate a few duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and ourselves and to others, and into perfect and imperfect duties.[10]

A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is: "From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction." It is asked then simply whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature. Now we see at once that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself and, therefore, could not exist as a system of nature; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty.

Another finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself

would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretences.

A third finds in himself a talent which with the help of some culture might make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rest and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species- in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly **will** that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him and have been given him, for all sorts of possible purposes.

A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: "What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress!" Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to **will** that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires.

These are a few of the many actual duties, or at least what we regard as such, which obviously fall into two classes on the one principle that we have laid down. We must be *able to will* that a maxim of our action should be a universal law. This is the canon of the moral appreciation of the action generally. Some actions are of such a character that their maxim cannot without contradiction be even *conceived* as a universal law of nature, far from it being possible that we should *will* that it *should* be so. In others this intrinsic impossibility is not found, but still it is impossible to *will* that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, since such a will would contradict itself. It is easily seen that the former violate strict or rigorous (inflexible) duty; the latter only laxer (meritorious) duty. Thus it has been completely shown how all duties depend as regards the nature of the obligation (not the object of the action) on the same principle.

If now we attend to ourselves on occasion of any transgression of duty, we shall find that we in fact do not will that our maxim should be a universal law, for that is impossible for us; on the contrary, we will that the opposite should remain a universal law, only we assume the liberty of making an *exception* in our own favour

or (just for this time only) in favour of our inclination. Consequently if we considered all cases from one and the same point of view, namely, that of reason, we should find a contradiction in our own will, namely, that a certain principle should be objectively necessary as a universal law, and yet subjectively should not be universal, but admit of exceptions. As however we at one moment regard our action from the point of view of a will wholly conformed to reason, and then again look at the same action from the point of view of a will affected by inclination, there is not really any contradiction, but an antagonism of inclination to the precept of reason, whereby the universality of the principle (*universalitas*) is changed into a mere generality, so that the practical principle of reason shall meet the maxim half way. Now, although this cannot be justified in our own impartial judgement, yet it proves that we do really recognise the validity of the categorical imperative and (with all respect for it) only allow ourselves a few exceptions, which we think unimportant and forced from us.

We have thus established at least this much, that if duty is a conception which is to have any import and real legislative authority for our actions, it can only be expressed in categorical and not at all in hypothetical imperatives. We have also, which is of great importance, exhibited clearly and definitely for every practical application the content of the categorical imperative, which must contain the principle of all duty if there is such a thing at all. We have not yet, however, advanced so far as to prove *à priori* that there actually is such an imperative, that there is a practical law which commands absolutely of itself and without any other impulse, and that the following of this law is duty.

With the view of attaining to this, it is of extreme importance to remember that we must not allow ourselves to think of deducing the reality of this principle from the *particular attributes of human nature*. For duty is to be a practical, unconditional necessity of action; it must therefore hold for all rational beings (to whom an imperative can apply at all), and *for this reason only* be also a law for all human wills. On the contrary, whatever is deduced from the particular natural characteristics of humanity, from certain feelings and propensions, nay, even, if possible, from any particular tendency proper to human reason, and which need not necessarily hold for the will of every rational being; this may indeed supply us with a maxim, but not with a law; with a subjective principle on which we may have a propension and inclination to act, but not with an objective principle on which we should be *enjoined* to act, even though all our propensions, inclinations, and natural dispositions were opposed to it. In fact, the sublimity and intrinsic dignity of the command in duty are so much the more evident, the less the subjective impulses favour it and the more they oppose it, without being able in the slightest degree to weaken the obligation of the law or to diminish its validity.

Here then we see philosophy brought to a critical position, since it has to be firmly fixed, notwithstanding that it has nothing to support it in heaven or earth. Here it must show its purity as absolute director of its own laws, not the herald of those which are whispered to it by an implanted sense or who knows what tutelary nature. Although these may be better than nothing, yet they can never afford principles dictated by reason, which must have their source wholly *à priori* and thence their commanding authority, expecting everything from the

supremacy of the law and the due respect for it, nothing from inclination, or else condemning the man to self-contempt and inward abhorrence.

Thus every empirical element is not only quite incapable of being an aid to the principle of morality, but is even highly prejudicial to the purity of morals, for the proper and inestimable worth of an absolutely good will consists just in this, that the principle of action is free from all influence of contingent grounds, which alone experience can furnish. We cannot too much or too often repeat our warning against this lax and even mean habit of thought which seeks for its principle amongst empirical motives and laws; for human reason in its weariness is glad to rest on this pillow, and in a dream of sweet illusions (in which, instead of Juno, it embraces a cloud) it substitutes for morality a bastard patched up from limbs of various derivation, which looks like anything one chooses to see in it, only not like virtue to one who has once beheld her in her true form.[11]

The question then is this: “Is it a necessary law *for all rational beings* that they should always judge of their actions by maxims of which they can themselves will that they should serve as universal laws?” If it is so, then it must be connected (altogether *à priori*) with the very conception of the will of a rational being generally. But in order to discover this connexion we must, however reluctantly, take a step into metaphysic, although into a domain of it which is distinct from speculative philosophy, namely, the metaphysic of morals. In a practical philosophy, where it is not the reasons of what *happens* that we have to ascertain, but the laws of what *ought to happen*, even although it never does, *i.e.*, objective practical laws, there it is not necessary to inquire into the reasons why anything pleases or displeases, how the pleasure of mere sensation differs from taste, and whether the latter is distinct from a general satisfaction of reason; on what the feeling of pleasure or pain rests, and how from it desires and inclinations arise, and from these again maxims by the co-operation of reason: for all this belongs to an empirical psychology, which would constitute the second part of physics, if we regard physics as the *philosophy of nature*, so far as it is based on *empirical laws*. But here we are concerned with objective practical laws and, consequently, with the relation of the will to itself so far as it is determined by reason alone, in which case whatever has reference to anything empirical is necessarily excluded; since if *reason of itself alone* determines the conduct (and it is the possibility of this that we are now investigating), it must necessarily do so *a priori*.

The will is conceived as a faculty of determining oneself to action in accordance with the *conception of certain laws*. And such a faculty can be found only in rational beings. Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the *end*, and, if this is assigned by reason alone, it must hold for all rational beings. On the other hand, that which merely contains the ground of possibility of the action of which the effect is the end, this is called the *means*. The subjective ground of the desire is the *spring*, the objective ground of the volition is the *motive*; hence the distinction between subjective ends which rest on springs, and objective ends which depend on motives valid for every rational being. Practical principles are *formal* when they abstract from all subjective ends; they are *material* when they assume these, and therefore particular springs of action. The ends which a rational being proposes to himself at pleasure as effects of his actions

(material ends) are all only relative, for it is only their relation to the particular desires of the subject that gives them their worth, which therefore cannot furnish principles universal and necessary for all rational beings and for every volition, that is to say practical laws. Hence all these relative ends can give rise only to hypothetical imperatives. Supposing, however, that there were something *whose existence has in itself* an absolute worth, something which, being *an end in itself*, could be a source of definite laws; then in this and this alone would lie the source of a possible categorical imperative, *i.e.*, a practical law.

Now I say: man and generally any rational being *exists* as an end in himself, *not merely as a means* to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be always regarded *at the same time as an end*. All objects of the inclinations have only a conditional worth, for if the inclinations and the wants founded on them did not exist, then their object would be without value. But the inclinations, themselves being sources of want, are so far from having an absolute worth for which they should be desired that on the contrary it must be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them. Thus the worth of any object *which is to be acquired* by our action is always conditional. Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature's, have nevertheless, if they are irrational beings, only a relative value as means, and are therefore called *things*; rational beings, on the contrary, are called *persons*, because their very nature points them out as ends in themselves, that is as something which must not be used merely as means, and so far therefore restricts freedom of action (and is an object of respect). These, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence has a worth *for us* as an effect of our action, but *objective ends*, that is, things whose existence is an end in itself; an end moreover for which no other can be substituted, which they should subserve *merely* as means, for otherwise nothing whatever would possess *absolute* worth; but if all worth were conditioned and therefore contingent, then there would be no supreme practical principle of reason whatever.

If then there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is *an end in itself*, constitutes an *objective* principle of will, and can therefore serve as a universal practical law. The foundation of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself*. Man necessarily conceives his own existence as being so; so far then this is a *subjective* principle of human actions. But every other rational being regards its existence similarly, just on the same rational principle that holds for me:[12] so that it is at the same time an *objective* principle, from which as a supreme practical law all laws of the will must be capable of being deduced. Accordingly the practical imperative will be as follows: *So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only*. We will now inquire whether this can be practically carried out.

To abide by the previous examples:

Firstly, under the head of necessary duty to oneself: He who contemplates suicide should ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the idea of humanity *as an end in itself*. If he destroys himself in order to

escape from painful circumstances, he uses a person merely as *a mean* to maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life. But a man is not a thing, that is to say, something which can be used *merely* as means, but must in all his actions be always considered as an end in himself. I cannot, therefore, dispose in any way of a man in my own person so as to mutilate him, to damage or kill him. (It belongs to ethics proper to define this principle more precisely, so as to avoid all misunderstanding, *e.g.*, as to the amputation of the limbs in order to preserve myself, as to exposing my life to danger with a view to preserve it, etc. This question is therefore omitted here.)

Secondly, as regards necessary duties, or those of strict obligation, towards others: He who is thinking of making a lying promise to others will see at once that he would be using another man *merely as a mean*, without the latter containing at the same time the end in himself. For he whom I propose by such a promise to use for my own purposes cannot possibly assent to my mode of acting towards him and, therefore, cannot himself contain the end of this action. This violation of the principle of humanity in other men is more obvious if we take in examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others. For then it is clear that he who transgresses the rights of men intends to use the person of others merely as a means, without considering that as rational beings they ought always to be esteemed also as ends, that is, as beings who must be capable of containing in themselves the end of the very same action.[13]

Thirdly, as regards contingent (meritorious) duties to oneself: It is not enough that the action does not violate humanity in our own person as an end in itself, it must also *harmonize with it*. Now there are in humanity capacities of greater perfection, which belong to the end that nature has in view in regard to humanity in ourselves as the subject: to neglect these might perhaps be consistent with the *maintenance* of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the *advancement* of this end.

Fourthly, as regards meritorious duties towards others: The natural end which all men have is their own happiness. Now humanity might indeed subsist, although no one should contribute anything to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally withdraw anything from it; but after all this would only harmonize negatively not positively with *humanity as an end in itself*, if every one does not also endeavour, as far as in him lies, to forward the ends of others. For the ends of any subject which is an end in himself ought as far as possible to be *my* ends also, if that conception is to have its *full* effect with me.

This principle, that humanity and generally every rational nature is *an end in itself* (which is the supreme limiting condition of every man's freedom of action), is not borrowed from experience, firstly, because it is universal, applying as it does to all rational beings whatever, and experience is not capable of determining anything about them; secondly, because it does not present humanity as an end to men (subjectively), that is as an object which men do of themselves actually adopt as an end; but as an objective end, which must as a law constitute the supreme limiting condition of all our subjective ends, let them be what we will; it must therefore spring from pure reason. In fact the *objective* principle of all practical legislation lies (according to the first principle) *in the rule* and its form of universality which makes it capable of being a law (say, *e.g.*, a law of nature); but the *subjective* principle is in the *end*; now by the second principle the subject of all ends is each

rational being, inasmuch as it is an end in itself. Hence follows the third practical principle of the will, which is the ultimate condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, viz.: the idea *of the will of every rational being as a universally legislative will*.

On this principle all maxims are rejected which are inconsistent with the will being itself universal legislator. Thus the will is not subject simply to the law, but so subject that it must be regarded *as itself giving the law* and, on this ground only, subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author).

In the previous imperatives, namely, that based on the conception of the conformity of actions to general laws, as in a physical *system of nature*, and that based on the universal *prerogative* of rational beings as *ends* in themselves- these imperatives, just because they were conceived as categorical, excluded from any share in their authority all admixture of any interest as a spring of action; they were, however, only *assumed* to be categorical, because such an assumption was necessary to explain the conception of duty. But we could not prove independently that there are practical propositions which command categorically, nor can it be proved in this section; one thing, however, could be done, namely, to indicate in the imperative itself, by some determinate expression, that in the case of volition from duty all interest is renounced, which is the specific criterion of categorical as distinguished from hypothetical imperatives. This is done in the present (third) formula of the principle, namely, in the idea of the will of every rational being as a *universally legislating will*.

For although a will *which is subject to laws* may be attached to this law by means of an interest, yet a will which is itself a supreme lawgiver so far as it is such cannot possibly depend on any interest, since a will so dependent would itself still need another law restricting the interest of its self-love by the condition that it should be valid as universal law.

Thus the *principle* that every human will is *a will which in all its maxims gives universal laws*,^[14] provided it be otherwise justified, would be *very well adapted* to be the categorical imperative, in this respect, namely, that just because of the idea of universal legislation it *is not based on interest*, and therefore it alone among all possible imperatives can be *unconditional*. Or still better, converting the proposition, if there is a categorical imperative (*i.e.*, a law for the will of every rational being), it can only command that everything be done from maxims of one's will regarded as a will which could at the same time will that it should itself give universal laws, for in that case only the practical principle and the imperative which it obeys are unconditional, since they cannot be based on any interest.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided**

by: BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY:

Attribution

Footnotes

1. A *maxim* is the subjective principle of volition. The objective principle (*i.e.*, that which would also serve subjectively as a practical principle to all rational beings if reason had full power over the faculty of desire) is the practical *law*.
2. It might be here objected to me that I take refuge behind the word *respect* in an obscure feeling, instead of giving a distinct solution of the question by a concept of the reason. But although respect is a feeling, it is not a feeling *received* through influence, but is *self-wrought* by a rational concept, and, therefore, is specifically distinct from all feelings of the former kind, which may be referred either to inclination or fear. What I recognise immediately as a law for me, I recognise with respect. This merely signifies the consciousness that my will is *subordinate* to a law, without the intervention of other influences on my sense. The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness of this, is called *respect*, so that this is regarded as an *effect* of the law on the subject, and not as the *cause* of it. Respect is properly the conception of a worth which thwarts my self-love. Accordingly it is something which is considered neither as an object of inclination nor of fear, although it has something analogous to both. The *object* of respect is the *law* only, and that the law which we impose on *ourselves* and yet recognise as necessary in itself. As a law, we are subjected too it without consulting self-love; as imposed by us on ourselves, it is a result of our will. In the former aspect it has an analogy to fear, in the latter to inclination. Respect for a person is properly only respect for the law (of honesty, etc.) of which he gives us an example. Since we also look on the improvement of our talents as a duty, we consider that we see in a person of talents, as it were, the *example of a law* (*viz.*, to become like him in this by exercise), and this constitutes our respect. All so-called moral *interest* consists simply in *respect* for the law.
3. Just as pure mathematics are distinguished from applied, pure logic from applied, so if we choose we may also distinguish pure philosophy of morals (metaphysic) from applied (*viz.*, applied to human nature). By this designation we are also at once reminded that moral principles are not based on properties of human nature, but must subsist *à priori* of themselves, while from such principles practical rules must be capable of being deduced for every rational nature, and accordingly for that of man.
4. I have a letter from the late excellent Sulzer, in which he asks me what can be the reason that moral instruction, although containing much that is convincing for the reason, yet accomplishes so little? My answer was postponed in order that I might make it complete. But it is simply this: that the teachers themselves have not got their own notions clear, and when they endeavour to make up for this by raking up motives of moral goodness from every quarter, trying to make their physic right strong, they spoil it. For the commonest understanding shows that if we imagine, on the one hand, an act of honesty done with steadfast mind, apart from every view to advantage of any kind in this world or another, and even

under the greatest temptations of necessity or allurements, and, on the other hand, a similar act which was affected, in however low a degree, by a foreign motive, the former leaves far behind and eclipses the second; it elevates the soul and inspires the wish to be able to act in like manner oneself. Even moderately young children feel this impression, and one should never represent duties to them in any other light.

5. The dependence of the desires on sensations is called inclination, and this accordingly always indicates a *want*. The dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason is called an *interest*. This therefore, is found only in the case of a dependent will which does not always of itself conform to reason; in the Divine will we cannot conceive any interest. But the human will can also *take an interest* in a thing without therefore acting *from interest*. The former signifies the *practical* interest in the action, the latter the *pathological* in the object of the action. The former indicates only dependence of the will on principles of reason in themselves; the second, dependence on principles of reason for the sake of inclination, reason supplying only the practical rules how the requirement of the inclination may be satisfied. In the first case the action interests me; in the second the object of the action (because it is pleasant to me). We have seen in the first section that in an action done from duty we must look not to the interest in the object, but only to that in the action itself, and in its rational principle (viz., the law).
6. The word prudence is taken in two senses: in the one it may bear the name of knowledge of the world, in the other that of private prudence. The former is a man's ability to influence others so as to use them for his own purposes. The latter is the sagacity to combine all these purposes for his own lasting benefit. This latter is properly that to which the value even of the former is reduced, and when a man is prudent in the former sense, but not in the latter, we might better say of him that he is clever and cunning, but, on the whole, imprudent.
7. It seems to me that the proper signification of the word *pragmatic* may be most accurately defined in this way. For *sanctions* are called pragmatic which flow properly not from the law of the states as necessary enactments, but from *precaution* for the general welfare. A *history* is composed pragmatically when it teaches *prudence*, i.e., instructs the world how it can provide for its interests better, or at least as well as, the men of former time.
8. I connect the act with the will without presupposing any condition resulting from any inclination, but *a priori*, and therefore necessarily (though only objectively, i.e., assuming the idea of a reason possessing full power over all subjective motives). This is accordingly a practical proposition which does not deduce the willing of an action by mere analysis from another already presupposed (for we have not such a perfect will), but connects it immediately with the conception of the will of a rational being, as something not contained in it.
9. A **Maxim** is a subjective principle of action, and must be distinguished from the *objective principle*, namely, practical law. The former contains the practical rule set by reason according to the conditions of the subject (often its ignorance or its inclinations), so that it is the principle on which the subject *acts*; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and is the principle on which it *ought to act*, that is, an imperative.

10. It must be noted here that I reserve the division of duties for a future *metaphysic of morals*; so that I give it here only as an arbitrary one (in order to arrange my examples). For the rest, I understand by a perfect duty one that admits no exception in favour of inclination and then I have not merely external but also internal *perfect duties*. This is contrary to the use of the word adopted in the schools; but I do not intend to justify there, as it is all one for my purpose whether it is admitted or not.
11. To behold virtue in her proper form is nothing else but to contemplate morality stripped of all admixture of sensible things and of every spurious ornament of reward or self-love. How much she then eclipses everything else that appears charming to the affections, every one may readily perceive with the least exertion of his reason, if it be not wholly spoiled for abstraction.
12. This proposition is here stated as a postulate. The grounds of it will be found in the concluding section.
13. Let it not be thought that the common "*quod tibi non vis fieri* , etc.", could serve here as the rule or principle. For it is only a deduction from the former, though with several limitations; it cannot be a universal law , for it does not contain the principle of duties to oneself, nor of the duties of benevolence to others (for many a one would gladly consent that others should not benefit him, provided only that he might be excused from showing benevolence to them), nor finally that of duties of strict obligation to one another, for on this principle the criminal might argue against the judge who punishes him, and so on.
14. I may be excused from adducing examples to elucidate this principle, as those which have already been used to elucidate the categorical imperative and its formula would all serve for the like purpose here.



This work (Selected Readings from Kant's Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals by Immanuel Kant) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. The dependence of the desires on sensations is called inclination, and this accordingly always indicates a want. The dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason is called an interest. This therefore, is found only in the case of a dependent will which does not always of itself conform to reason; in the Divine will we cannot conceive any interest. But the human will can also take an interest in a thing without therefore acting from interest. The former signifies the practical interest in the action, the latter the pathological in the object of the action. The former indicates only dependence of the will on principles of reason in themselves; the second, dependence on principles of reason for the sake of inclination, reason supplying only the practical rules how the requirement of the inclination may be satisfied. In the first case the action interests me; in the second the object of the action (because it is pleasant to me). We have seen in the first section that in an action done from duty we must look not to the interest in the object, but only to that in the action itself, and in its rational principle (viz., the law).

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Immanuel Kant



Illustrated portrait
of Immanuel Kant
(1924) by Heinrich
Wolff

Ethics, for Kant (1724 – 1804 CE), is primarily concerned with acting in accordance with the Good Will, actions that we can discover through the Categorical Imperative. Kant has three formulations of this principle:

1. ...act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.
2. So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.
3. ...every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends.

In this short passage, Kant explores the first formulation, first justifying it and then applies it to several cases: suicide, lying, self development, and charity.

...Now all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, i. e., as objectively necessary...Finally, there is an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This

imperative is categorical. It concerns not the matter of the action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what it may. This imperative may be called that of morality. There is a marked distinction also between the volitions on these three sorts of principles in the dissimilarity of the obligation of the will. In order to mark this difference more clearly, I think they would be most suitably named in their order if we said they are either rules of skill, or counsels of prudence, or commands (laws) of morality. For it is law only that involves the conception of an unconditional and objective necessity, which is consequently universally valid; and commands are laws which must be obeyed, that is, must be followed, even in opposition to inclination...

There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this:

Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Now if all imperatives of duty can be deduced from this one imperative as from their principle, then, although it should remain undecided what is called duty is not merely a vain notion, yet at least we shall be able to show what we understand by it and what this notion means. Since the universality of the law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form), that is the existence of things so far as it is determined by general laws, the imperative of duty may be expressed thus: Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature.

We will now enumerate a few duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and ourselves and to others, and into perfect and imperfect duties...

Case: Suicide

A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is: "From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction." It is asked then simply whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature. Now we see at once that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself and, therefore, could not exist as a system of nature; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty.

Case: Lying (Borrowing Money without the Intention to Repay)

Another finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretenses.

Case: Self Development

A third finds in himself a talent which with the help of some culture might make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rest and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species- in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him and have been given him, for all sorts of possible purposes.

Case: Charity

A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: "What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress!" Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law,

the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires. These are a few of the many actual duties, or at least what we regard as such, which obviously fall into two classes on the one principle that we have laid down.

We must be able to will that a maxim of our action should be a universal law. This is the canon of the moral appreciation of the action generally. Some actions are of such a character that their maxim cannot without contradiction be even conceived as a universal law of nature, far from it being possible that we should will that it should be so. In others this intrinsic impossibility is not found, but still it is impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, since such a will would contradict itself. It is easily seen that the former violate strict or rigorous (inflexible) duty; the latter only laxer (meritorious) duty. Thus it has been completely shown how all duties depend as regards the nature of the obligation (not the object of the action) on the same principle. If now we attend to ourselves on occasion of any transgression of duty, we shall find that we in fact do not will that our maxim should be a universal law, for that is impossible for us; on the contrary, we will that the opposite should remain a universal law, only we assume the liberty of making an exception in our own favor or (just for this time only) in favor of our inclination.

Consequently if we considered all cases from one and the same point of view, namely, that of reason, we should find a contradiction in our own will, namely, that a certain principle should be objectively necessary as a universal law, and yet subjectively should not be universal, but admit of exceptions. As however we at one moment regard our action from the point of view of a will wholly conformed to reason, and then again look at the same action from the point of view of a will affected by inclination, there is not really any contradiction, but an antagonism of inclination to the precept of reason, whereby the universality of the principle is changed into a mere generality, so that the practical principle of reason shall meet the maxim half way. Now, although this cannot be justified in our own impartial judgement, yet it proves that we do really recognize the validity of the categorical imperative and (with all respect for it) only allow ourselves a few exceptions, which we think unimportant and forced from us. We have thus established at least this much, that if duty is a conception which is to have any import and real legislative authority for our actions, it can only be expressed in categorical and not at all in hypothetical imperatives. We have also, which is of great importance, exhibited clearly and definitely for every practical application the content of the categorical imperative, which must contain the principle of all duty if there is such a thing at all.

For Review and Discussion:

1. Do you think Kant is right that we should ignore the consequences of our actions when determining what the right thing to do is? Why or why not?
2. Does the formulation of the Categorical Imperative listed here make for a good top-level moral principle? Explain by way of an example.
3. Kant refers to markets as a means of arguing for his position in the lying case. What do you think lies behind this, does his reasoning work, and are there better examples he might have used?
4. Evaluate Kant's claim that there are never exceptions to moral rules. Can you think of an example which either showcase the truth or falsity of his claim (including the ax murderer case from the chapter on Kantian Ethics)?

Citation and Use

This reading was taken from the following source:

Kant, I. (1883). *GROUNDWORK FOR THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS* (T.K. Abbott, Trans.). (Original work published 1785).

The work is in the Public Domain.

Media Attributions

- Illustrated portrait of Immanuel Kant (1924) © Heinrich Wolff is licensed under a Public Domain license



This work (The Categorical Imperative by Immanuel Kant) is free of known copyright restrictions.

UTILITARIANISM

Andrew Fisher; Mark Dimmock; and Henry Imler

Pleasure is the beginning and the end of the happy life: because we recognize pleasure as the first good and connate with us and to this we have recourse as to a canon, judging every good by the reaction.

[...]

Therefore every pleasure is good because it is of one nature with us but every pleasure is not to be chosen; by the same reasoning every pain is an evil but every pain is not such as to be avoided at all times.

– Epicurus from *Letter to Menoeceus*

Some things appear to be straightforwardly good for people. Winning the lottery, marrying your true love or securing a desired set of qualifications all seem to be examples of events that improve a person's life. As a normative ethical theory, **Utilitarianism** suggests that we can decide what is morally right or morally wrong by weighing up which of our future possible actions promotes such goodness in our lives and the lives of people more generally.

Consequentialism(s)

Consequentialism is the notion that it is the *outcomes* of our actions that matter the most in moral analysis, not the action themselves nor our motivations.¹ When we start to do this sort of analysis, we must ask ourselves two questions:

1. What is **the good** we are trying to maximize?
2. For **whom** are we trying to maximize the good?

There are multiple ways we can answer those questions. For instance, we might say that the good is “any and all pleasures” or “only long-term rational well being”. You can imagine how different the moral analysis would be

depending upon the definition of the good. Let's imagine you receive a fifty-dollar bill for your birthday and want to go out for a nice steak dinner. If we hold all pleasures to be equal, we could form a strong argument for going to that steak dinner instead of putting it towards a class you need to graduate, earning a degree which will develop your character, widen your awareness of the world, and better prepare you to navigate our society successfully. However, if we use long-term rational well-being as the good we are trying to maximize, we would choose to value paying for college and attending sometimes difficult classes instead of the more immediate pleasure of the steak dinner.

Likewise, there are various ways we could answer the "for whom?" question. Perhaps we should only maximize happiness for ourselves only, or maybe we maximize the good of all humans. Perhaps we expand the maximization of the good for all beings who can experience pleasure and suffering. This would widen our pool to include at least some of the animals. See the chapter on Animal Rights by Eduardo Salazar. Each of these possible answers to the "for whom" question will dramatically change our moral analysis. Take the notion of preparing a steak dinner. If we only take into moral account ourselves, we should eat the steak, tip our server zero dollars. If we expand the morally relevant community to include all humans, we should eat the steak and tip our server generously. If we include animals in the moral analysis, we would not eat the steak and tip our server generously.

We've mentioned **maximization** in our discussion so far. Some, but not all, versions of consequentialism² hold that it is not good enough to merely have a net positive of pleasure through our actions, but rather we must choose the action that will bring about the *greatest amount of overall pleasure*. This gives us guidance in a situation with no good options, like the trolley case where we have to choose between allowing 5 innocents to die on a runaway trolley or saving the 5, but killing 1 innocent bystander in the process.

When we put various combinations of the above together, we get distinct, but similar versions of consequentialism.

Approach	Philosopher	The Good	For Whom	Primary Relation
Capitalist Mode of Production	Freidrich Hayek	Profit	Shareholders	Competition
Epicureanism	Epicurus	Simple pleasures & avoidance of anxiety	Self first, then others	Self-Sufficiency and then Cooperation
Ethical Egoism	Ayn Rand	Long-term well being	Self	Competition
Hedonistic Utilitarianism	Jeremy Bentham	All that a person considers to be pleasurable	All that can suffer ³	Cooperation
Utilitarianism	John Stewart Mill	Higher-order pleasures of the mind	Everyone	Cooperation

Hedonism, the Case for Pleasure as a Good

Hedonism is a theory of well-being — a theory of how well a life is going for the person living that life.⁴ What separates Hedonism from other theories of well-being is that the hedonist believes that what defines a successful life is directly related to the amount of pleasure in that life; no other factors are relevant at all. Therefore, the more pleasure that a person experiences in their life then the better their life goes, and vice versa. Whereas other theories might focus on fulfilling desires people have, or an objective list of things such as friendship and health.

The roots of Hedonism can be traced back at least as far as **Epicurus** (341–270 BC) and Ancient Greece. Epicurus held the hedonistic view that the primary intrinsic good for a person is pleasure; meaning that pleasure is always good for a person in and of itself, irrespective of the cause or context of the pleasure. According to this theory pleasure is always intrinsically good for a person and less pleasure is always intrinsically bad. Not all things we might think of as pleasure count as true pleasure for Epicurus. Check out the reading “Letter to Menoeceus” in Part II: Readings in Ethics for a more complete discussion of Epicurus’ notions of pleasure.

Hedonism is a relatively simple theory of what makes your life better. If you feel that your life would be better if you won the lottery, married your true love or achieved your desired qualifications, then the hedonistic explanation of these judgments is that these things are good for you only if they provide you with pleasure.

Many pleasures may be physical, but **Fred Feldman** (1941–) is a defender of a theory known as **Attitudinal Hedonism**. According to this theory, psychological pleasures can themselves count as intrinsically good for a person. So, while reading a book would not seem to produce pleasure in a physical way, a hedonist may value the psychological pleasure associated with that act of reading and thus accept that it can improve a person’s well-being. This understanding of hedonistic pleasure may help to explain why, for example, one person can gain so much pleasure from a Lady Gaga album while another gains nothing at all; the psychological responses to the music differ.

Nozick’s Experience Machine, a criticism of hedonism

One important problem for Hedonism is that our well-being seems to be affected by more than just the total pleasure in our lives. It may be the case that you enjoy gaining a new qualification, but there seems to be more to the value of this event than merely the pleasure produced. Many people agree that success in gaining a meaningful qualification improves your life even if no pleasure is obtained from it. Certainly, many believe that the relationship between what improves your life and what gives pleasure is not directly proportional, as

the hedonist would claim. **Robert Nozick** (1938–2002) attacked the hedonistic idea that pleasure is the only good by testing our intuitions via a now famous thought-experiment. Nozick asks:

Suppose there was an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired.

Super- duper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book.

All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, pre-programming your life experiences? [...]

Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think that it's all actually happening [...] would you plug in? ⁵

Nozick's challenge to Hedonism is based on the thought that most people who consider this possible situation would opt not to plug in. Indeed, if you ask yourself if you would actually choose to leave behind your real friends, family and life in favor of a pre-programmed existence you also might conclude that plugging into the experience machine would not be desirable.

However, if Hedonism is correct and our well-being is determined entirely by the amount of pleasure that we experience, then Nozick wonders "what else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside?"⁶ The experience machine guarantees us pleasure yet we find it unappealing compared to a real life where pleasure is far from assured. This may suggest that our well-being is determined by other factors in addition to how much pleasure we secure, perhaps knowledge or friendships.

The hedonists need not give way entirely on this point, of course, as they may feel that the experience machine is desirable just because it guarantees experiences of pleasure. Or, you might believe that our suspicions about the machine are misplaced. After all, once inside the machine we would not suspect that things were not real. You may feel that the hedonist could bite-the- bullet (accept the apparently awkward conclusion as a non-fatal implication of the theory) and say that any reticence to enter the machine is irrational. Perhaps the lives of those choosing to be plugged in to the machine would go extraordinary well, especially given the level of misery so many people in the world experience on a day-to-day basis. A life of autonomy and pleasure might be preferable — especially if the machines were networked together — to the sort of lives we are able to live today.

The Foundations of Bentham's Hedonistic Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was the first of the “classical utilitarians”. Driven by a genuine desire for social reform, Bentham wanted to be as much involved in law, politics and economics as abstract philosophizing. Bentham developed his moral theory of Utilitarianism on the foundation of the type of hedonistic thinking described in section two.

Nature has placed humanity
under the governance of two
sovereign masters, pain and
pleasure.
– Jeremy Bentham

For Bentham, the only thing that determines the value of a life, or indeed the value of an event or action, is the amount of pleasure contained in that life, or the amount of pleasure produced as a result of that event or action. Bentham is a **hedonistic utilitarian**. This belief in Hedonism, however, was not something that Bentham took to be unjustified or arbitrary; for him Hedonism could be empirically justified by evidence in the world in its favor. According to Bentham:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.⁷

Bentham moves from this empirical claim about the factors that guide our behavior to a normative claim about how we ought to live. He creates a moral theory based on the bringing about of more pleasure and less pain. When first understanding Utilitarianism, it is also crucial to understand what is meant by the term “utility”. Bentham defined it as

“[...] that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness [...] or [...] to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness”.⁸

Utility is thus promoted when pleasure is promoted and when unhappiness is avoided. Bentham's commitment to Hedonism means for him that goodness is just an increase in pleasure, and evil or unhappiness is just an increase in pain or decrease in pleasure. With this understanding of utility in mind, Bentham commits himself to the **Principle of Utility**:

By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness.⁹

In effect, this principle simply says that promoting utility, defined in terms of pleasure, is to be approved of and reducing utility is to be disapproved of. The Principle of Utility, backed by a commitment to Hedonism,

underpins the central utilitarian claim made by Bentham. Based on a phrase that he wrongly attributed to Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), Bentham suggests that the measure of right and wrong is the extent to which an action produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Of course, what counts as good, for Bentham, is pleasure. We can then rephrase what Bentham himself call his fundamental axiom as a requirement to promote the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people, in order to act morally.

The Structure of Bentham's Utilitarianism

In addition to being hedonistic, Bentham's Utilitarianism is also:

1. Consequentialist/Teleological
2. Relativist
3. Maximizing
4. Impartial

Bentham's Utilitarianism is consequentialist because the moral value of an action or event is determined entirely by the consequences of that event. The theory is also described as teleological for the same reason, based on the Greek word *telos* that means “end” or “purpose”. If more pleasure follows as a consequence of “Action A” rather than “Action B”, then according to the fundamental axiom of Utilitarianism “Action A” should be undertaken and is morally right; choosing “Action B” would be morally wrong. In addition, Bentham's Utilitarianism is Relativistic rather than Absolutist. Absolutist moral views hold that certain actions will always be morally wrong irrespective of context or consequences. For example, many campaigning groups suggest that torture is always morally unacceptable whether it is carried out by vindictive dictators seeking to instill fear in a population or whether it is authorized by democratically elected governments seeking to obtain information in order to stop a terrorist attack. For absolutists then, the act of torture is absolutely wrong in all cases and situations.

Clearly, Bentham cannot hold this type of view because sometimes the pain involved in torture may lead to the promotion of greater pleasure (or less intense pain) overall, such as in the case where torture stops a terrorist atrocity. On this basis, the Benthamite utilitarian must believe that whether a certain action is right or wrong is always relative to the situation in which the action takes place. Bentham's Utilitarianism is maximizing because it does not merely require that pleasure is promoted, but that the greatest pleasure for the greatest number is secured. This means that some actions that lead to pleasure will still not be morally good acts if another action that could have produced even more pleasure in that setting was rejected. Thus, for example, if you gain some pleasure from spending money on a new book, but that money could have produced more pleasure had it been donated to a local charity for the homeless, then buying a new book would be morally wrong even

though it led to some pleasure because it did not maximize the total amount of pleasure that was possible in that circumstance.

Finally, Bentham's Utilitarianism is also impartial in the sense that what matters is simply securing the maximum amount of pleasure for the maximum number of people; the theory does not give special preference regarding which people are supposed to have access to, or share in, that total pleasure. Bentham's utilitarian theory is associated with the idea of equal consideration of interests; as long as total pleasure is maximized then it does not matter if that pleasure is experienced by royalty, presidents, siblings, children, friends or enemies. In the total calculation of pleasure, we are all equal regardless of our status, behavior or any other social factor.

Hedonic Calculus

Hopefully it is now clear that for Bentham the consequences in terms of pleasure production of any action are what determine the morality of that action, and that no other factors are relevant. However, it is not clear how exactly we should go about working out what to do in specific cases. For example:

Killing the Passengers or Allowing the City to be Attacked?

You are a military airman flying a fighter jet that is about to intercept a passenger airliner that seems to have been hijacked by an as yet unknown figure. The plane appears to be on a path that could take it either to an airport or, potentially, directly to a major and highly populated city.

You are tasked with deciding how to act and must, therefore, choose whether or not to fire a missile at the plane.

Firing at the plane would kill the passengers but save all lives on the ground, yet not firing may save the passengers, or it may give the passengers only a few more minutes before the plane is flown into a city full of innocents and they are killed in any case.

Suggesting that the pilot weigh up the options and choose the action that secures the greatest

pleasure for the greatest number is not obviously helpful in making such a difficult decision with so many variables.

Bentham recognized that such **Problems of Calculation** relating to the pleasure associated with future actions needed addressing in order for Utilitarianism to be a workable moral theory. Bentham therefore created the **Hedonic Calculus** (sometimes known as the **Felicific Calculus**) in order to help an individual work out how much pleasure would be created by differing possible actions. The **Hedonic Calculus**, as suggested by Bentham, is based on assessing possible pleasures according to their:

1. Intensity
2. Duration
3. Certainty
4. Remoteness (i.e. how far into the future the pleasure is)
5. Fecundity (i.e. how likely it is that pleasure will generate other related pleasures)
6. Purity (i.e. if any pain will be felt alongside that pleasure)
7. Extent (i.e. how many people might be able to share in that pleasure)¹⁰

The Hedonic Calculus is therefore supposed to provide a decision-procedure for a utilitarian who is confused as to how to act in a morally tricky situation. Thus, our fighter-pilot might consider the intensity of the pleasure of surviving versus the duration of the pain of death, while also needing to balance these factors against the relative certainty of the possible pains or pleasures. No doubt, the fighter pilot would still face an agonizing moral choice but it seems that he would at least have some methodology for working out what Utilitarianism morally requires of him.

Problems with Bentham's Utilitarianism

However, whether or not measuring possible actions in terms of “units of pleasure” associated with them is actually plausible is very much an open question and so the problem of calculation is not necessarily solved simply by the existence of the Hedonic Calculus. Some philosophers use the following terms to name discreet units of pain and pleasure:

- **hedon** – one unit of pleasure, and
- **dolor** – one unit of pain.

Consider the most recent highly pleasurable experience that you enjoyed and compare it to a highly pleasurable

experience from earlier in your life. It may be that you cannot say confidently that one provided more pleasure than the other, especially if the experiences were extremely varied; perhaps winning a sporting trophy versus going on your first holiday.

Pleasures that are so fundamentally different in nature may simply be incommensurable — they may be incapable of being measured by a common standard such as the Hedonic Calculus. In addition, the problem of calculation can be extended beyond the issues raised above. Remember that Bentham's Utilitarianism is impartial in the sense that all individuals who gain pleasure as a result of a certain action count towards the total amount of pleasure. However, the following case raises the Problem of Relevant Beings:

Problem of Relevant Beings

You are considering whether or not to approve a new housing development on a piece of unoccupied land outside the current boundary of your town.

You are clear that, if approved, the development will create a great deal of pleasure for both new residents and construction workers without any pain being experienced by others.

You are aware, however, that the development will require the culling of several badgers and the removal of a habitat currently supporting many birds, stray cats and rodents of various types.

On the surface, this case should be obvious for the utilitarian without any special problem of calculation; the greatest good for the greatest number would be secured if the development were permitted to go ahead. However, this assumes that non-human animals are not relevant to the calculation of pleasures and pains. Yet, if pleasure is all that matters for how well a life goes then it is not clear why animals, that may be able to experience some form of pleasure and can almost certainly experience pain, should be excluded from the calculation process. Indeed, Bentham, when referring to the moral value of animals, noted that:

The question (for deciding moral relevance) is not 'Can they reason?', nor 'Can they talk?', but 'Can they suffer?'¹¹

If the suffering and pain of humans is relevant to moral calculations then surely it is at least plausible that so should the suffering and pain of non-human animals.

Being a maximizing ethical theory, Utilitarianism is also open to a **Demandingness Objection**. If it is not the case that pleasure needs to be merely promoted but actually maximized at all opportunities, then the

standard for acting morally appears to be set extremely high. For example, did you buy a doughnut at some point this year or treat yourself to a magazine? Live the life of a high-roller and treat yourself to a taxi ride rather than walking to your destination? While your actions certainly brought about differing degrees of pleasure to both yourself and to those who gained economic benefit from your decision, it seems that you could have created much more pleasure by saving up your money and ensuring it reached those suffering extreme financial hardships or residing in poverty around the world. As a result of being a maximizing moral theory, Utilitarianism seems to make immorality very hard to avoid as it is so utterly demanding on our behavior.

A further problem for Utilitarianism relates to the **Tyranny of the Majority**. Remember that as a relativistic moral theory, Utilitarianism does not allow for any moral absolutes — such as the absolute right to democracy, or absolute legal or basic human rights. Indeed, Bentham himself dismissed the idea of “natural rights” as a nonsensical concept masqueraded as a meaningful one. However, if we accept that absolute rights are simply “nonsense upon stilts” as Bentham put it, then Utilitarianism seems to be open to cases where the majority are morally required to exploit the minority for the greater good of maximizing total pleasure. For example, imagine that total pleasure would be maximized if the resources of a small country were forcibly taken from them to be used freely and exploited by the people of a much larger country (this is hardly unrealistic). However, such forceful theft — only justified by the fact that a greater majority of people would gain pleasure — does not seem to be morally justifiable.

Yet, according to Utilitarianism’s commitment to maximizing pleasure, such an action would not only be morally acceptable but it would be morally required. As a consequentialist/teleological moral theory Utilitarianism is also open to the **Problem of Wrong Intentions**. This problem can be highlighted by considering the cases of Dominic and Callum.

Dominic and Callum – Version 1

Dominic is sitting in a coffee shop when a masked intruder bursts in threatening to rob the shop. Dominic, with the intention of saving lives, attempts to stop the intruder but sadly, in the ensuing struggle, the intruder’s gun is accidentally fired and an innocent person is killed.

Now, consider a second case.

Dominic and Callum – Version 2

An intruder bursts in with a gun but Callum, rather than trying to intervene, immediately ducks for cover with the intention of saving himself and leaving the rest of the customers to fend for themselves.

Luckily for Callum, when he ducks for cover he accidentally trips into the would-be thief, knocking him unconscious thus allowing his peaceful detention until police arrive.

According to the utilitarian calculation, Callum acted in a way that maximized pleasure while Dominic acted wrongly because the consequence of his act was tragic pain. However, it seems unfair and wrong to suggest that Callum acted rightly when he had just intended to save himself, although he had a lucky outcome, while Dominic acted wrongly when his intention was to save others but was unlucky in his outcome. Utilitarianism, as a consequentialist theory, ignores intentions and focuses only on consequences.

Utilitarianism also faces the **Problem of Partiality**. This is clear if we consider the familiar moral dilemma of being stuck on a life raft with three other people but with only enough supplies for two people. On the raft with you is a doctor who is confident that he can pass on a cure for cancer if he survives, a world class violinist who brings pleasure to millions each year, and one of your parents or siblings. I am afraid to report that, for the purposes of this example, your parent or sibling is nothing special in comparison to other individuals on the raft. In this circumstance, Utilitarianism would seem to require you not only to give up your own space on the raft but ensure that your parent or sibling joins you in the freezing water with no hope of survival; this is the way of maximizing total pleasure in such a scenario. Yet, even if you believe that the morality might call for your own self-sacrifice, it seems extremely unfair not to allow you to give extra moral weight to the life of a loved one. Unfortunately for the utilitarian, perhaps, the status as a beloved family member should make no special difference to your judgment regarding how to act. This seems to be not only over-demanding but also overly cold and calculating.

Utilitarianism requires **Agent-Neutrality** — you must look at the situation as any neutral observer would and not give special preference to anyone irrespective of your emotional attachments, because each individual must count for one and no more than one.

Finally, Bentham's Utilitarianism also comes under attack from the related **Integrity Objection**, framed most prominently by Bernard Williams (1929– 2003). As an agent-neutral theory, no person can give up

impartiality when it comes to judgements about the impact of a potential action upon their family or loved ones. In addition, no person can give up impartiality when it comes to the impact of an action upon their own feelings, character and general sense of integrity. In order to make clear the potential worry associated with this, Williams describes the fictional case of Jim and the Indians.

Jim is an explorer who stumbles upon an Indian leader who is about to execute twenty people. Jim knows nothing of their possible crimes or any other factors involved, but he is offered a difficult choice by the Indian chief who is eager to impress his foreign traveler. Jim can either shoot one of the prisoners himself and then the rest will be set free as a mark of celebration, or he can refuse the offer in which case all twenty prisoners will be executed as was planned. It is key to note that Jim does not have control of the situation in the sense that he is powerless to bargain or negotiate with anyone, and nor can he use a weapon to successfully free any prisoners. He has only the two options laid out.¹²

The point of this example is not to establish what the right action is. You may find yourself in agreement with utilitarians who suggest Jim must shoot one prisoner in order to save the lives of the rest. Rather, the purpose of the example is to show that Utilitarianism forces us to reach this conclusion too quickly. Given the commitment to Agent-Neutrality, Jim must treat himself as a neutral observer working out which action will produce the greatest good for the greatest number. Morally, he is not entitled to give more weight to his own feelings than he would give to the feelings of any other and therefore it does not matter whether Jim is a pacifist and has been a lifelong advocate for prisoner reform and rehabilitation.

If the utilitarian calculation suggests that he must shoot one of the prisoners, then he must shoot with no regard to any compromising of his integrity and self-identity. You may accept this as an unfortunate consequence of a terrible situation, but it may be a problem for a moral theory if it fails to recognize or respect a person's most sincere and deepest convictions.

Mill's Utilitarian Proof

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was concerned by many of the problems facing the utilitarian theory put forward by Bentham, but as a hedonist he did not wish to see the theory rejected. Mill sought to refine and improve the Benthamite utilitarian theory in order to create a successful version of Hedonistic Utilitarianism.

Mill was so confident about the prospects for a version of Hedonistic Utilitarianism because he believed that there was an empirically backed proof available to support the principle that the greatest happiness/pleasure should always be secured for the greatest number. Mill's proof, much like Bentham's empirical defense of

Hedonism, relies on the evidence from observation that people desire their own happiness. This observation of fact supports Mill's claim that since people desire their own happiness, this is evidence that such happiness is desirable. Mill says "...each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons".¹³

– Mill

Since our happiness is good for us, and general happiness is just the total of the happiness of all persons, then general happiness is also good. To put it another way, if individual happiness is a good worth pursuing, then happiness in general must be worth pursuing. In order to justify Hedonism, Mill sought to justify the claim that the good of happiness is the only thing that makes our lives go better. Mill defends this claim by suggesting that knowledge, health and freedom etc. (as other plausible goods that might make a life go better) are only valuable in so far as they bring about happiness. Knowledge is desired only because it provides happiness when acquired, not because it, by itself and in isolation, makes life go better.

Mill's proof of Utilitarianism in terms of the general desirability of maximizing total happiness is, however, open to criticism. For one thing, the fact that something is desired does not seem to justify the claim that it is desirable. **G. E. Moore** (1873–1958) points out that Mill moves from the factual sense that something is desirable if it is desired to the normative sense that it should be desired without any justification. It is possible, for example, to desire to kill another person. This is desirable in the sense people could and do desire it (it is possible to do so — it is an action that is desire-able), but not in the sense that we would want them to desire it.

In addition, the idea that other apparent goods, such as knowledge and health, are only valuable in so far as they promote happiness/pleasure is extremely controversial; can you imagine a situation in which you gained value from knowledge without any associated pleasure or happiness? If so, you may have a counter example to Mill's claim.

Possible Counter

Can you imagine a situation in which you gained value from knowledge without any associated pleasure or happiness?

Mill's Qualitative Utilitarianism

In attempting to redraw Bentham's Utilitarianism, Mill's most substantial thought was to move away from Bentham's idea that all that mattered was the quantity of total pleasure. Instead, Mill thought that quality of pleasure was also crucial to deciding what is moral. Bentham's Utilitarianism is quantitative in the sense that all Bentham focuses on is the maximization of hedonically calculated quantities of total pleasure.

Thus, he says that "Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music

and poetry”.¹⁴ All that matters for Bentham is producing pleasure and the way this is achieved is unimportant. If playing on a console affords you more pleasure than reading Shakespeare, then Bentham would view your life as going better if you play the console. However, Mill introduces a quality criterion for pleasure. Mill says that:

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is only because they only know their own side of the question.¹⁵

Bentham could not admit that the unhappy Socrates would be living a life with more value than the happier fool. Mill, on the other hand, believes that quality, not merely quantity, of pleasure matters and can therefore defend the claim that Socrates has the better life even by hedonistic standards. According to Mill, higher pleasures are worth more than lower pleasures. Higher pleasures are those pleasures of the intellect brought about via activities like poetry, reading or attending the theater. Lower pleasures are animalistic and base; pleasures associated with drinking beer, having sex or lazing on a sun-lounger.

What we should seek to maximize are the higher quality pleasures even if the total pleasure (hedonically calculated via Bentham’s calculus) turns out to be quantitatively lower as a result. Justifying this distinction between higher and lower quality pleasures as non-arbitrary and not just an expression of his own tastes, Mill says that competent judges, those people who have experienced both types of pleasure, are best placed to select which pleasures are higher and lower. Such competent judges, says Mill, would and do favor pleasures of the intellect over the base pleasures of the body.

On this basis, Mill is open to the criticism that many people have both read books and drunk beer and that if given the choice would choose the latter. Whether or not Mill’s defense of his supposedly non-prejudiced distinction of higher and lower pleasures is successful is an open question for your evaluation and analysis.

Mill’s Rule Utilitarianism versus Bentham’s Act Utilitarianism

In addition to a difference in views regarding the importance of the quality of a pleasure, Mill and Bentham are also separated by reference to Act and Rule Utilitarianism and although such terms emerged only after Mill’s death, Mill is typically considered a rule utilitarian and Bentham an act utilitarian. An act utilitarian, such as Bentham, focuses only on the consequences of individual actions when making moral judgments. However, this focus on the outcome of individual acts can sometimes lead to odd and objection- raising examples. Judith Jarvis Thomson (1929–) raised the problem of the “transplant surgeon”.

Problem of the “Transplant Surgeon”

Imagine a case where a doctor had five patients requiring new organs to stop their death and one healthy patient undergoing a routine check. In this case, it would seem that total pleasure is best promoted by killing the one healthy patient, harvesting his organs and saving the other five lives; their pleasure outweighs the cost to the formerly healthy patient.¹⁶

While Bentham does suggest that we should have “rules of thumb” against such actions, for typically they will lead to unforeseen painful consequences, in the case as simply described the act utilitarian appears powerless to deny that such a killing is required in order to maximize total pleasure (just add your own details to secure this conclusion for the act utilitarian).

Rule utilitarians, in whose camp we can place Mill, adopt a different moral decision-procedure. Their view is that we should create a set of rules that, if followed, would produce the greatest amount of total happiness. In the transplant case, killing the healthy man would not seem to be part of the best set of utilitarian-justified rules since a rule allowing the killing of healthy patients would not seem to promote total happiness; one outcome, for example, would be that people would very likely stop coming to hospitals for fear for their life! Therefore, if a rule permitting killing was allowed then the maximization of total happiness would not be promoted overall. It is through Rule Utilitarianism that we can make sense of Mill’s **Harm Principle**. According to Mill, there is:

One very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control.

That principle is: The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.¹⁷

Even if a particular act of harming another person might bring about an increase in total pleasure on a single occasion, that act may not be condoned by the set of rules that best promotes total pleasure overall. As such, the action would not be morally permitted.

Strong versus Weak Rule Utilitarianism

Rule utilitarians may seem to avoid troubling cases like the transplant surgeon and be able to support and

uphold individual human and legal rights based on rules that reflect the harm principle. This fact would also help rule utilitarians overcome objections based on the treatment of minorities because exploitation of minority groups would, perhaps, fail to be supported by the best utilitarian-justified set of rules. Yet, rule utilitarians face a troubling dilemma:

1. **Strong Rule Utilitarianism:** Guidance from the set of rules that, if followed, would promote the greatest amount of total happiness must always be followed.
2. **Weak Rule Utilitarianism:** Guidance from the set of rules that, if followed, would promote the greatest amount of total happiness can be ignored in circumstances where more happiness would be produced by breaking the rule.

The strong rule utilitarian appears to suffer from what **J. J. C. Smart** (1920–2012) described as **Rule Worship**. No longer focusing on the consequences of the action before them, the strong rule utilitarian appears to ignore the option to maximize total happiness in favor of following a general and non-relative rule regarding how to act. The strong rule utilitarian may be able to avoid problems based on treatment of minorities or a lack of absolute legal and human rights, but it is not clear that they survive these problems holding on to a teleological, relativistic utilitarian theory. Utilitarianism seems to be saved from troubling implications only by denying core features.

On the other hand, while Weak Rule Utilitarianism retains a teleological nature it appears to collapse into Act Utilitarianism. The rules provide guidelines that can be broken, and given that the act utilitarian can also offer “rules of thumb” against actions that tend not to produce maximum goodness or utility in general, such as killing healthy patients, it is not clear where this version of Rule Utilitarianism gains a unique identity. In what cases would Act Utilitarianism and Weak Rule Utilitarianism actually provide different moral guidance? This is something you should consider in the light of your own examples or previous examples in this chapter.

Non-Hedonistic Contemporary Utilitarianism

Peter Singer and Preference Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is not a dead theory and it did not end with Mill. **Henry Sidgwick** (1838–1900) is considered to have taken over the baton after Mill, and **R. M. Hare** (1919–2002) was perhaps chief advocate in the mid-twentieth century. However, few contemporary philosophers can claim as much influence in public life outside philosophy as can the preference utilitarian, **Peter Singer** (1946–). Singer advocates a non-hedonistic version of Utilitarianism. His utilitarian theory is teleological, maximizing, impartial and relativistic but he does not claim that the greatest good for the greatest number can be reduced to pleasure in either raw or higher forms.

Instead, Singer believes that what improves a person's life is entirely determined by the satisfaction of their preferences. If you satisfy your preference to achieve a good qualification your life goes better in virtue of satisfying that preference. If someone else desires to get a job rather than continue in education, their life goes better for them if they secure their preference and gain employment. Individuals, according to Singer, must be at the core of moral thinking:

There would be something incoherent about living a life where the conclusions you came to in ethics did not make any difference to your life. It would make it an academic exercise. The whole point about doing ethics is to think about the way to live. My life has a kind of harmony between my ideas and the way I live. It would be highly discordant if that was not the case.¹⁸

On this basis, when making moral decisions we should consider how best to ensure the maximization of total preference satisfaction — it does not matter if our preference satisfaction fails to provide pleasure for us. Continuing to follow Bentham's commitment to impartiality, Singer also supports equal weighing of preferences when deciding which action better promotes greater preference satisfaction; all preferences are to weigh equally.

This potentially leaves Singer open to the same issues that plagued Bentham. Namely, regarding circumstances where partiality seems desirable, or when the preferences of the majority seem to threaten a minority group, or require us to sacrifice our integrity. Further, the problem of calculation also seems to be relevant because it is not obvious how you could work out the preferences of others in at least some difficult moral cases (let alone the preferences of animals, if they are also relevant). In response to a concern regarding the moral relevance of satisfying bloodthirsty or apparently immoral preferences and counting such satisfaction as a moral achievement (consider the preferences of a nation of pedophiles, for example), we might look to the ideas of **Richard Brandt** (1910–1997). Brandt, writing about the rationality of certain preferences, suggested that rational preferences were those that might survive cognitive psychotherapy.¹⁹ However, there is a question as to how arbitrary this requirement is and whether or not some unnerving preferences might form the core of certain individual characters therefore being sustained even after such therapy.

Summary

Utilitarianism remains a living theory and retains hedonistic and non-hedonistic advocates, as well as supporters of both act and rule formulations. The core insight that consequences matter gives the theory some intuitive support even in the light of hypothetical cases that pose serious problems for utilitarians. The extent to which the different versions of Utilitarianism survive their objections is very much up to you as a critically-minded philosopher to decide.

Some Common Student Misconceptions

- Not reflecting the attitudinal aspect of pleasure that Bentham's theory may account for.
- Minimizing the long-term impact of actions when it comes to pleasure/ pain production.
- Imprecise understanding of the hedonic/non-hedonic split in Utilitarianism.
- Imprecision in use of examples to defend/challenge Utilitarianism.
- Suggesting that "Jim and the Indians" is not a counterexample to Utilitarianism simply because you judge killing the fewer number of people is ultimately the morally right thing to do.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Is there anything that would improve your life that cannot be reduced to either pleasure or preference satisfaction?
2. Would you enter Nozick's experience machine if you knew you would not come out? Would you put someone you care about into the machine while they were asleep, so that they never had to make the decision?
3. Can pleasure be measured? Does Bentham go about this task correctly?
4. Which is the most serious problem facing Bentham's Act Utilitarianism? Can it be overcome?
5. Does Mill successfully improve Bentham's Act Utilitarianism in any way?
6. Are you ever told to stop watching television and do something else? Is this good for you? Why?
7. Look at the quote at the start of the chapter by Dara Ó Briain — is it possible that some pleasures are inferior in value to others?
8. Do you have convictions or beliefs you would not want to sacrifice for the greater good, should you ever be forced to?

9. Why do utilitarians not give up on the idea of maximizing pleasure and just talk in terms of promoting sufficient pleasure? Would this solve or raise problems?
10. Is Weak Rule Utilitarianism merely Act Utilitarianism by another name?
11. Does Strong Rule Utilitarianism deserve to be labelled as a utilitarian theory?
12. If your preferences change after psychotherapy, did the original preferences ever matter?

Key Terminology

Normative

Relativistic

Teleological

Consequentialist

Principle of Utility

Agent-Neutrality

Hedonic Calculus

Utility

Intrinsic

Notes



Utilitarianism by Andrew Fisher; Mark Dimmock; and Henry Imler is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. This selection was written by Henry Imler
2. For more on this, see the section on "Classical Consequentialism" on entry on consequentialism in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, "Consequentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/consequentialism/>>.
3. While Bentham was primarily concerned with persons only, animal rights philosophers have emphasized the notion of any being that can suffer.
4. This section was primarily written by Dimmok and Fisher.
5. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1974), 42.
6. Nozick, 42.
7. Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Prometheus Books, 1781).
8. Bentham, 66.
9. Bentham, 65.
10. Bentham, 87.
11. Jeremy Bentham, "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, ed. Alan Ryan (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England ; New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Classics, 1987).
12. J. J. C. Smart: and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism, For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 98.
13. John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, ed. Alan Ryan (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England ; New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Classics, 1987), 308.
14. J. Bentham and E. Dumont, *The Rationale of Reward* (R. Heward, 1830), 206, <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6igN9srLgg8C>.
15. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, West Strand, 1863), 281.
16. Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem," *The Yale Law Journal* 94, no. 6 (1985): 1396, <https://doi.org/10.2307/796133>.
17. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York and Melborne: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd, 1863)
18. Kevin Toolis, "The Most Dangerous Man in the World," *the Guardian*, November 6, 1999, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/1999/nov/06/weekend.kevintoolis>.
19. Richard B. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, vol. 70 (Prentice-Hall, 1959).

A PIG, A FOOL, AND SOCRATES

John Stuart Mill

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

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

Higher and Lower Pleasures

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic, as well as Christian elements require to be included.

But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc., of the former that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes.

A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable: we may refer it to the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which do really enter into and

contribute to it: but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.

Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

It may be objected, that many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

It may be further objected, that many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble, as they advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do not believe that those who undergo this very common change, voluntarily choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher. I believe that before they devote themselves exclusively to the one, they have already become incapable of the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise.

Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying. It may be questioned whether any one who has remained equally susceptible to both classes of pleasures, ever knowingly and calmly preferred the lower; though many, in all ages, have broken down in an ineffectual attempt to combine both.

From this verdict of the only competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final. And there needs be the less hesitation to accept this judgment respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity.

What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgment of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgment declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable in kind, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.

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

Happiness as an Aim

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

[...]

A state of exalted pleasure lasts only moments, or in some cases, and with some intermissions, hours or days, and is the occasional brilliant flash of enjoyment, not its permanent and steady flame. Of this the philosophers who have taught that happiness is the end of life were as fully aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate enough to obtain it, has always appeared worthy of the name of happiness. And such an existence is even now the lot of many, during some considerable portion of their lives. The present wretched education, and wretched social arrangements, are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by almost all.

[...]

I must again repeat, what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbor as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.

As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole; especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being's sentient existence. If the, impugners of the utilitarian morality represented it to their own minds in this its, true character, I know not what recommendation possessed by any other morality they could possibly affirm to be wanting to it; what more beautiful or more exalted developments of human nature any other ethical system can be supposed to foster, or what springs of action, not accessible to the utilitarian, such systems rely on for giving effect to their mandates.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What objections did Mill list and what was his reply to each?
2. In your informed judgement, does Mill do a good job answering each objection?
3. Is Mill's distinction between upper and lower pleasures a meaningful one? Should we take into account Mill's class and education when analyzing this?
4. How does Mill's account of happiness and general approach compare to Epicurus' account?
5. At first glance, Mill appears to make a lot of assumptions about other people. Does Mill allow for people choosing what makes them happy?
6. If a utilitarian does allow for different people preferring different pleasures, is Utilitarianism (as Mill discusses it) a universal or subjectivist / relativist theory?

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, West Strand, 1863).

The use of this work is governed by the Public Domain.



This work (A Pig, a Fool, and Socrates by John Stuart Mill) is free of known copyright restrictions.

RELIGIOUS ETHICAL SYSTEMS

Andrew Fisher; Mark Dimmock; Henry Imler; and Kristin Whaley

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

– “Moral Injunctions,” in *T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien*

They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them.

– Paul of Tarsus, Letter to the Romans 2:15, NRSV

Religion and Ethics

A great many people around the world are religious and look to their religion for moral guidance. See the graphic “Religions by a Percentage of Population” to get a sense of how many people are religiously affiliated around the globe. If this many people are religious, then it is worth taking a moment to look at how their religion informs their ethics. We can only speak in the broadest of strokes here. Consider these next few sections as representative artifacts rather than a systematic, thick description.

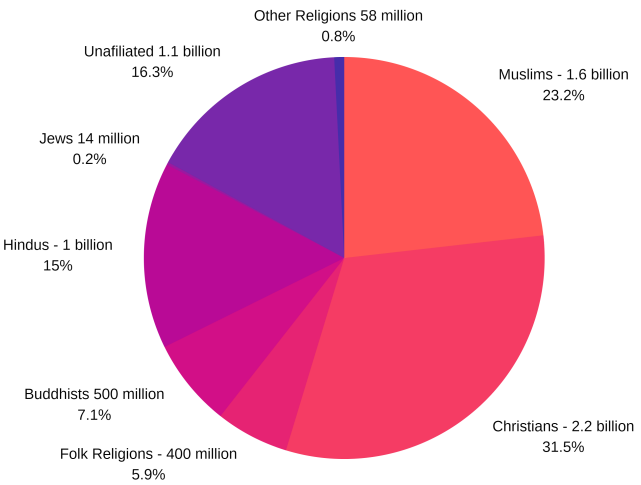
A Common Ethic?

Religion scholars will sometimes claim that the only thing all the religions have in common are their core ethical principles.¹ To a certain extent, this is true. In all of the major religious traditions, there is the **principle of reciprocity**, the idea that one should treat others as one would like to be treated. We might attribute this to Jesus’ golden rule, but Jesus himself was paraphrasing Rabbi Hillel, as he sometimes did.²

But this commonality is not limited to Judaism and Christianity. Below is a table that lists the principle of reciprocity in a variety of sacred texts belonging to various religious traditions.

Table: Principle of Reciprocity in the texts of World Religions

Religion	Ethical Rule	Source
Buddhism	Look where you will, there is nothing dearer to man than himself; therefore, as it is the same thing that is dear to you and to others, hurt not others with what pains yourself.	Udana-Varga 5:18
Daoism	Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.	“Moral Injunctions,” in <i>T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien</i>
Hinduism	This is the sum of duty: do not to other what would cause pain if done to you.	Mahabharata 5:1517
Christianity	In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.	Matthew 7:12
Islam	Not one of you believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.	Hadith 40 of al-Nawawi 13
Judaism	What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.	Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a
Sikhism	No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with everyone.	Guru Granth Sahib, Page 1299
Jainism	Indifferent to worldly objects, a man should wander about treating all creatures in the world so as he himself would be treated.	<i>Sutrakritanga</i> Book 1, Lecture 11, Verse 33



Religions by Percentage of Population.
[footnote]Data taken from the Pew-Templeton
Global Religious Futures report from 2015.[/footnote]

Religions also seem to be united on the subject of human worth and the corresponding duty we have towards others. They describe us as having immense value and our value corresponds to an obligation to look after one another. The answer to Cain's question to God is "Yes, we are our sister and brother's keeper."³ In some religions, humanity reflects the divine. For instance, in Hinduism, at the core of a person is an *atman*, or a drop of Brahman. In the Western monotheisms, humans are made in the image of God, sometimes called the *imago dei*.⁴ In Buddhism, there are multiple prohibitions of killing persons, from the third *pāṇātika* to the fourteen precepts of the *Order of Interbeing*.⁵ In that order, we see stark imperatives, including

11) Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans or nature.

12) Do not kill. Do not let others kill.⁶

In Islam, the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights declares that all human beings are loved by God, have equal worth, and that no one is superior to another on the basis of religion or deeds.⁷ In other religions of the world there are also directives to ensure the poor and other vulnerable members of society are taken care of.

Additionally, many religious texts and traditions also see the Earth as something which needs to be tended as a garden. This is most clearly stated in the "Islamic Declaration on Nature":

For the Muslim, humankind's role on earth is that of a Khalifah – vicegerent or trustee of God. We are God's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping.⁸

And so, in the major religious traditions there is an ethical demand to treat other adherents and all of humanity with dignity, respect, and compassion. We also see humanity as the stewards of the Earth.

So far, so good, right?

Baptizing Violence?

Ethical theories allow for violence in certain situations and religious ethical systems are no different. Within each of the religious traditions above, there are occasions, primarily in the defense of innocents, where violence against another person is allowed, either by individuals or by agents of the state.

Additionally, human history is rife with religiously tinged violence. And so, some claim that because of

- a. the theoretical allowance of violence and
- b. the history of violence by religious adherents;

that religion is fundamentally violence-inducing and therefore should be excluded from serious ethical consideration. However, humans are plenty violent outside of religious considerations. Additionally, there is a

tendency to *mask* political, ethnic, class, colonial, post-colonial, nationalist, and other strife under the guise of religious pretenses. Today this is seen most starkly in the reciprocal, but dramatically uneven, political violence between the state of Israel and various Palestinian groups. But we can also see this in the violence towards Muslims by Hindu nationalists in India in the name of *Hindutva*.⁹ We also see this in the Buddhist mob violence against Muslims in Sri Lanka¹⁰ and state sanctioned religiously and ethnically coded violence in Buddhist Myanmar.¹¹

Given the human tendency to find self and group worth through the creation of and subsequent negation of the Other, we should not be surprised to find these moral-political moves justified in certain instances of religious logics. For instance, Christian colonial Europe (the Occidental world) constructed (through literature, paintings, colonial records, armchair anthropology, theology, contracts, missionary accounts, ethnography, et cetera) what they called “the Orient,” a great swath of lands and peoples extending from North Africa through the Middle East, onto India, Persia, and finally China. All of the individual cultures, religions, ethnic groups, and so on were flattened into the Great Other and ascribed all of the character and cultural traits Europe wished it did not have. In naming the Orient as evil, hyper-sexual, immoral, deceitful, exotic, Europe was named as good, pious, moral, trustworthy, and so forth.¹² Such moves were not unique to Christian Europe during the colonial era, but this is a representative sample of the process occurring with religious difference as a core component.



Occident (grey) and Orient (black) as constructed and mapped onto the world by European colonialists.

Theo-Political Religious Violence

Direct violence by religious groups can be discussed from at least two perspectives:

1. Theocracy and
2. Agent Apocalypticism.

In both of these perspectives, religious groups morally map the world according to their religious stories and see it as imperative that they either usher in the divine restoration of the world or police the world to maintain the divine order. For these groups, violence is one useful tool among others. State violence in theocratic societies are often fascistic to some degree. They hold that the organic harmonious whole is threatened by impiety or the Religious Other and the social fabric then needs to be policed — violently if need be.

Agent Apocalypticism is almost the inverse of theocratic societies. Here there is a persecuted minority (or a perceived persecuted minority) that sees themselves as agents in the divine plan to radically reorient the world. When apocalyptic groups see themselves as powerless to effect change (as is often the case), they are commonly pacifist in practice. It is God alone who can wield violence for God's own ends. — “Vengeance is mine, says the LORD.”¹³ God is justified in using whatever violence is necessary to achieve the radical reorientation of a world fundamentally rebelling from God. *However*, when the apocalyptic group sees themselves as agents of either *instituting* or *triggering* the start of God's cleansing the Cosmos, then nearly any action, violent or nonviolent is justified.¹⁴ A great many of the instances of religiously motivated terrorism is rooted in apocalypticism. We see this in Jihadi-Salafism¹⁵ (vs. quietist Salafism and political Salafism) and Christian Reconstructionist terrorist groups. Perhaps the most dramatic and extended example of this process is found in the leadup to and aftermath of the Münster Rebellion.¹⁶

Religion and Sexual Violence

So far, we have talked about theo-political violence. We also want to look briefly at *sexual violence*. Note that structures we describe as allowing sexual violence to exist and persist are *not innate to religion*. They are true for any insular and opaque group. The paradox is that the more conservative a religious group is on sexual mores, the more likely the group is to have cases of sexual abuse go unchecked. We have seen this in Judaic,¹⁷ Christian,^{18 19} Muslim,²⁰ and Buddhist²¹ communities. What these communities *seem* to have in common are

- a. hierarchical power relations,
- b. strict sexual mores, and
- c. opaque power structures.

These attributes do not cause sexual abuse, but they create spaces and power disparities that allow abuse to happen and incentivize the hiding of abuse when it does occur.²²

Conclusion: Embodied Religion and Morality

In this brief survey, we've seen that embodied religion and lived morality is a mixed bag. There are, in the lived traditions, beliefs and practices of adherents and the hearts of religious texts, tremendous potential and historical actuality of the concern for and material well being of people and our shared environment. We have also seen that expressions of religious traditions, either in by individuals or groups, logics that allow or demand harm of persons, communities, and our shared environment. The common facts appear to be humanity and our foibles rather than religion itself or any particular religious traditions.



Religion and Ethics – Two Theories

The rest of this chapter explores two approaches to religious ethics. One, represented here by **Divine Command Theory** (DCT), focuses upon the divine as the creator and communicator of morality. The other, **Natural Law Theory** (NLT), places more of an emphasis upon rational investigation into the divine's construction of the universe, including morality, which can be discovered independently from religious revelation.

Magnificat by Ben Wildflower. The woodcut is based upon quotes from Mary's song found in Luke 1:46-55, one of the four canonical gospels in the Christian tradition. Used with permission of the artist.

Divine Command Theory²³

Religion and morality seem to go hand-in-hand, and specific moral codes are often grounded in specific religious traditions. Identifying the nature of the relationship between religion and morality may therefore seem straightforward: the right thing to do is whatever is right according to religious tradition. Justification for this claim derives support from the idea that religious moral codes have origins in divine will: "Morality is whatever God commands." The theory that identifies the morally right with what God commands is called, unsurprisingly, 'Divine Command Theory'. Divine Command Theory, or 'DCT', is attractive to religious practitioners for a couple reasons. One is that it captures the sense that religion provides guidance for living an

ethical life; God provides this guidance through giving commands and shaping religious moral codes. Another is that DCT seems to provide a moral theory according to which there are objective moral facts; morality isn't susceptible to subjective preferences or impermanent social consciousness. If the morally right is what God commands, there is a true measure of our actions and a genuine responsibility for our behavior.

Despite this attraction, DCT is subject to a *dilemma*, a style of argument that requires commitment to either of two possible, and unfavorable, options. The Divine Command Theorist is forced to make a choice: if the moral is whatever God commands, then either God commands things because they are right, or they are right because God commands them. As we will see, taking either option requires serious theological concessions.

But first, let's look at several quotes, two from purported religious revelations, and one from a contemporary divine command theorist.

But as for the towns of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them [...] just as the Lord your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord your God.

– Deuteronomy 20:16-18, NRSV

You shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it—even putting its livestock to the sword. All of its spoil you shall gather into its public square; then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It shall remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt.

– Deuteronomy 13:15-16, NRSV²⁴

How can divine command theorists make sense of purported commands from God that would seriously harm the innocent? Evangelical philosopher **William Craig** answers with the following.

According to the version of divine command ethics which I've defended, our moral duties are constituted by the commands of a holy and loving God. Since God doesn't issue commands to Himself, He has no moral duties to fulfill. He is certainly not subject to the same moral obligations and prohibitions that we are. For example, I have no right to take an innocent life. For me to do so would be murder. But God has no such prohibition. He can give and take life as He chooses. We all recognize this when we accuse some authority who presumes to take life as "playing God." Human authorities arrogate to themselves rights which belong only to God. God is under no obligation whatsoever to extend my life for another second. If He wanted to strike me dead right now, that's His prerogative.

– William Craig, contemporary Divine Command Theorist, defending his understanding of God's command to the Israelites to systematically exterminate the Canaanites in Deuteronomy 7 and 20.²⁵

Understandably, this can easily give us pause. Biting the bullet and accepting a God that is beyond good and

evil which issues commands that are moral *because* God issued them has been a recipe for all manner of violence towards the innocent across the world.

A similar dilemma is found in Plato's *Euthyphro*, a dialogue in which Socrates inquires about the nature of piety, or holiness. Euthyphro begins by proposing that whatever the gods love is pious or holy, and that which they hate is impious or unholy. Socrates presses Euthyphro by raising the dilemma of whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or whether the pious is holy because it is loved by the gods. Euthyphro replies that the pious is loved by the gods because it is holy; the pious is pious for a reason independent of the relationship between piety and the gods. The gods, then, love the pious for this reason, whatever the reason ends up being. But whatever is beloved of the gods is beloved because the gods love it; being beloved by the gods is entirely dependent on the relationship between the beloved and the gods. Socrates cites this difference in dependence as a reason to reject 'whatever the gods love' as a legitimate definition of 'piety'. There must be something else about piety, independent of its relationship to the gods, that establishes its true nature. Socrates is asking Euthyphro for this independent reason, which Euthyphro fails to provide.

We can instantiate the same kind of dilemma for Divine Command Theory, inquiring about the nature of morality. In what follows, we will address each option, or *horn* of the dilemma, in turn. In taking the first horn, that God commands things because they are right, the Divine Command Theorist will be required to concede that God is not unlimited in power. In taking the second horn, that things are right because God commands them, the Divine Command Theorist will be required to concede that God is not truly good. Since the Divine Command Theorist likely views unlimited power and unlimited goodness to be essential divine features, neither of these options is acceptable. Since it was the assumption that DCT is true that generated the dilemma, the Divine Command Theorist is forced to conclude that DCT is false.

The Dilemma

Divine Command Theory seems to be an attempt to ground morality theistically; the morally right is whatever God commands. As a background commitment, the Divine Command Theorist is likely motivating the theory in the context of a religious tradition that accepts the *divine perfections*, or attributes of God. The perfections include

- **omnipotence:** God is all-powerful,
- **omniscience:** God is all-knowing, and
- **omnibenevolence:** God is all-good.

It is certainly fair to question whether there is such a being that has, or necessarily has, the divine perfections. But the dilemma does not hinge on successfully arguing against the perfections. Instead, it is because the Divine Command Theorist likely accepts the divine perfections that the dilemma arises in the first place.

A being with the divine perfections, God, seems to be the kind of being that is capable of commanding actions that are morally right. Plausibly, God knows what is right, God desires for the right to be done, and God is powerful enough to effectively command the right. Therefore, DCT is a natural extension of this variety of theism.

But, given the divine perfections, we can construct the dilemma for the Divine Command Theorist:

- A1. If DCT is true, then morality is whatever God commands.
- A2. If morality is whatever God commands, then either God commands things because they are morally right, or things are morally right because God commands them.
- A3. If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent.
- A4. If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent.
- A5. God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent.
- ∴ AC. DCT is false. (‘∴’ means ‘therefore’)

The argument begins in premise A1 by citing the definition of Divine Command Theory: the morally right is what God commands. The Divine Command Theorist will accept this premise, since it provides an accurate statement of what DCT is. Premise A2 sketches options for the relationship between morality and God’s commands: either God’s commands are grounded by moral facts or moral facts are grounded by God’s commands. If there is an explanatory relationship between God and morality, then it has to be one or the other. In the first case, God looks to the moral facts to determine what should be commanded, ensuring that God is commanding what is indeed right. In the second case, God’s commands establish the moral facts; whatever God decides is right becomes right in virtue of God’s command.

More work needs to be done to establish premises A3 and A4, and we will see auxiliary arguments for these premises shortly. But before we do so, note that even if you don’t agree with premise A5, the Divine Command Theorist almost certainly does. Premise A5 affirms a background commitment that the Divine Command Theorist likely accepts: God has the divine perfections. So, since accepting DCT yields two unacceptable options, the argument concludes with AC that DCT is false.

The First Horn: The Argument for A3

Premise A3 represents the first horn of the dilemma for the Divine Command Theorist: If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent. Premise A3 can be established by appealing to an auxiliary argument:

- B1. If God commands things because they are morally right, then morality is outside God’s control.
- B2. If morality is outside God’s control, then God is not omnipotent.

- ∴ A3. If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent.

B1, the first premise of the auxiliary argument highlights the relationship between morality and God's commands in taking the first horn of the dilemma. According to the first horn, God will guarantee that any command given fits with what's morally right. God will look to the moral facts and then make commands on their basis. So, suppose God is about to issue the Ten Commandments. God will investigate the nature of morality, identify the moral facts, and issue the commandments accordingly: Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, etc. God makes these commands because murder and stealing are wrong. The commandments should be followed, then, because the commandments accord with the moral facts. Since God is omnibenevolent, God will only issue commands that fit with the moral facts, and God defers to the moral facts in order to make moral commands. So, although God will command things that are morally right, the moral facts cannot be determined by God. Otherwise, they would be right because God commands them, and not the other way around.

Having deferred to the moral facts, God's commands are therefore somewhat restricted, and we arrive at B2. God cannot decide to command just anything; God will command only what is right. Accordingly, morality is independent of God, and God's commands are restricted to only what is right. Morality is not affected or changed by God's will. If this is the case, then a whole range of facts, moral facts, are outside the scope of God's control, and God has no power to change them. But if this is the case, then God is not omnipotent; God is not all-powerful.

Some argue that being restricted by moral facts does not threaten God's omnipotence. God is also restricted, plausibly, by logical facts. God cannot, for instance, make a round square, but this may not seem to be much of a threat to God's power. Unlike logical facts, however, one might argue that moral facts, like natural facts or physical facts, seem to be exactly the kinds of facts that *should* be within God's power. But, in taking this horn of the dilemma, the moral facts instead have power over God.

So, we arrive at A3: If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent. This is an unfortunate result for the Divine Command Theorist, who will consider rejecting God's omnipotence to be unacceptable. The first horn may then prod the Divine Command Theorist to consider the other option. Instead, perhaps things are morally right because God commands them.

The Second Horn: The Argument for A4

Premise A4 represents the second horn of the dilemma for the Divine Command Theorist: If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent. Premise A4 can be established by appealing to an auxiliary argument:

- C1. If things are morally right because God commands them, then God's commands are morally arbitrary.
- C2. If God's commands are morally arbitrary, then God is not omnibenevolent.
- ∴ A4. If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent.

C1, the first premise of this auxiliary argument illustrates the challenge of taking the second horn of the dilemma. This relationship between God's commands and morality makes it the case that God could command anything whatsoever and it would be morally right simply because God commanded it. So, when God issues the commandment, 'Thou shalt not murder', a class of actions, particular kinds of killing, became morally wrong. If God never gave the command, then these kinds of killing would be morally acceptable. If God had not prohibited it, then it would not be morally wrong, for instance, to kill an innocent person for no reason, despite any apparently-bad consequences or apparently-bad intentions.

Since, according to the second horn, the moral facts depend entirely on God's commands, there is no objective standard that God must look to before making commands. God could command, 'Thou shalt put on thy right shoe before thy left shoe except on every third Thursday of the month, in which case thou shalt put on thy left shoe before thy right.', and it would become immoral to put on your left shoe before your right on a Monday. Such a command is totally unprincipled, and we should feel no moral pull toward either shoe. This is because such a command would be *morally arbitrary*, or without principle or moral reason. There is no external standard by which we could measure the legitimacy of the command and no recourse to appeal to if we broke it. So, C1, if things are right because God commands them, then God's commands are morally arbitrary.

Even worse, if God's commands are morally arbitrary, then God could command things that we consider to be morally reprehensible, and these things would become right. For instance, God could command 'Thou shalt torture thy children', and it would be morally right to torture your children. Any complaints that this is wrong would fall on deaf ears, for, according to the second horn, if God commanded it, it is not wrong. The fact that the second horn allows that God could command things like the torture of children negates any lingering plausibility concerning God's omnibenevolence.

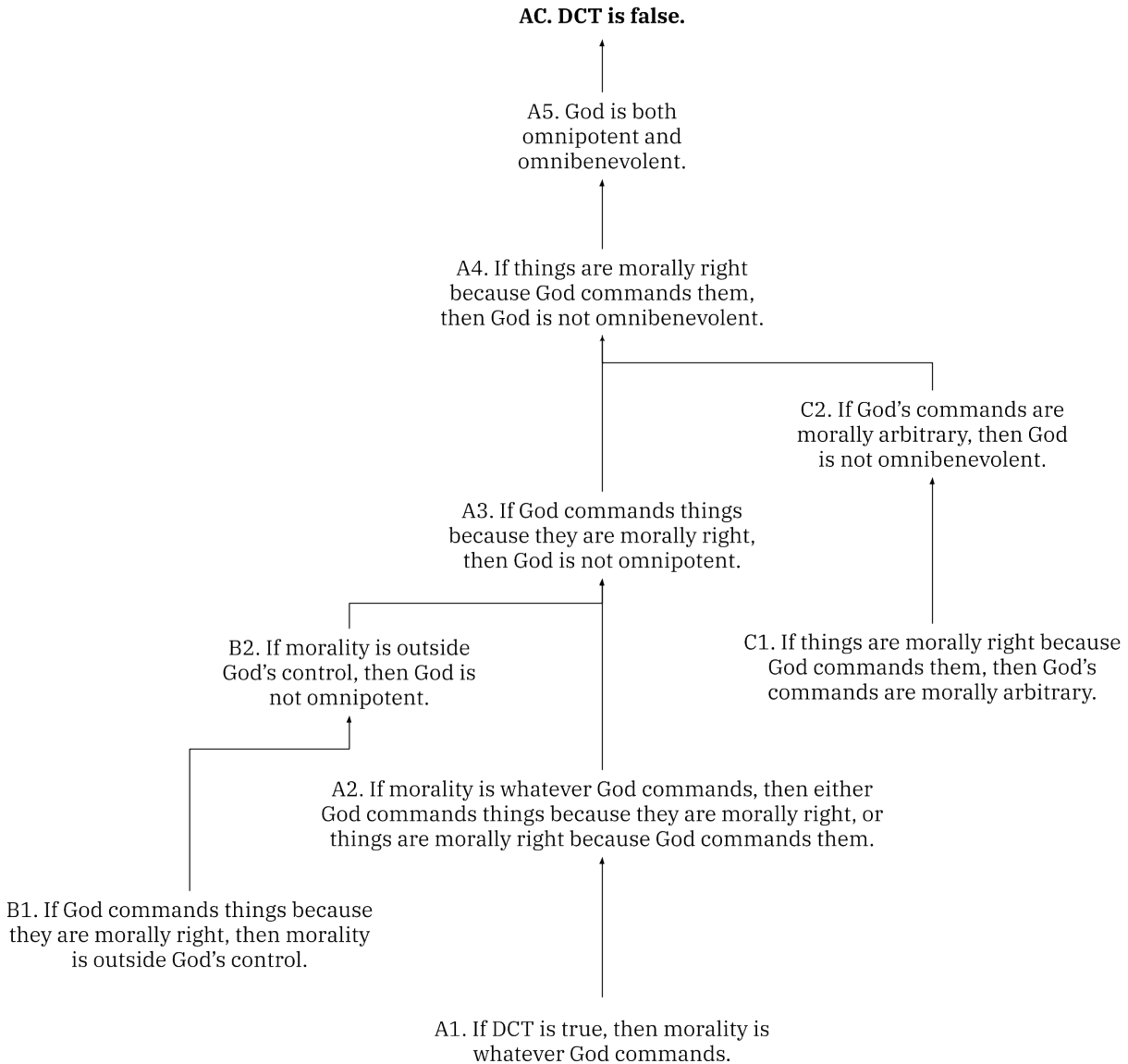
It is very tempting at this point to think, "Well, God would never command the torture of children, because torturing children is wrong, and God would not command something that is wrong." But note that in making this move, we find ourselves again facing the first horn. If God would not command something that is wrong, then this is possible only if God looks to the moral facts in order to determine what to command. But, if God does so, then morality is outside God's control. The Divine Command Theorist can make this move, but then they must give up on God's omnipotence.

The moral arbitrariness of God's commands is a serious problem for the Divine Command Theorist, which we see in C2. Recall that God is supposed to be omnibenevolent. When omnibenevolence is attributed to God, it is supposed to highlight a perfection or a laudable divine quality. But if morality is arbitrary, then saying that

God is good becomes trivial. It would be analogous to saying that God is divine, or, like Euthyphro, saying that whatever is beloved by the gods is loved by the gods. It may be true, but it does not provide any reason to think that divinity is a good-making feature or a perfection; it is true simply because anything that is God is divine. Likewise, anything that God commands would be morally right. So, saying that God is omnibenevolent is merely another way of saying that God meets the moral standard that God establishes. This is not praiseworthy; it is trivial.

We arrive at A4: If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent. Like rejecting God's omnipotence, rejecting God's omnibenevolence is likely to be considered unacceptable. In taking the second horn, the Divine Command Theorist fares just as poorly as in taking the first. Both options require conceding divine perfections, but this is inconsistent with what the Divine Command Theorist is trying to accomplish.

Below is how the argument as a whole operates.



The complete argument tree for the argument against DCT. Support runs from the bottom up.

Remaining Options

Having established the auxiliary arguments, we now see the dilemma completed. If DCT is true, then either

- God commands things because they are morally right, or
- they are morally right because God commands them.

If God commands things because they are right, then God is not omnipotent. If things are right because God

commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent. Since God is (according to the divine perfections) both omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then we must conclude that DCT is false.

DCT has attraction given certain religious commitments. It is unlikely that an atheist, for instance, would endorse DCT. The dilemma is therefore forceful because it is contingent on a theological understanding that attributes the divine perfections to God. It is logically possible, however, for the Divine Command Theorist to reject A5 and deny that God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. An objection could take the form of arguing that it is theologically acceptable to say that God is not omnipotent or that God is not omnibenevolent. A Divine Command Theorist might prioritize the connection between God and morality over the divine perfections, and they may consider this to be necessary, albeit unpalatable, concession.

Another option is to deny the explanatory relationship between morality and God's commands. Perhaps what God commands is morally right but not *because* it is morally right, and whatever is morally right is morally right but not *because* God commands it. On this option, the class of actions that God commands is identical to the class of actions that are morally right, but there is no dependence in either direction.

In reply, we might grant that these options are possible. They are not, however, desirable. While there may be theists willing to concede the divine perfections, we suggest that in doing so we likewise concede attraction to grounding morality theistically. The connection between God and morality seems attractive because of the divine perfections, and conceding the divine perfections weakens the case to think that God and morality are inextricably linked. Further, if one thinks that God and morality are inextricably linked, it is implausible to argue that there is no explanatory relationship between them.

Conclusion

So, while it is natural for religious practitioners to see religion as authoritative in matters of morality. But if DCT is true, and morality is whatever God commands, then a dilemma arises. Either way we try to define the relationship between the morally right and the commands of God, an unacceptable result follows. Either morality is outside God's control, in which case God is not omnipotent, or God's commands are morally arbitrary, in which case God is not omnibenevolent. Since omnipotence and omnibenevolence are divine perfections that cannot be simply subtracted from God's nature, both horns of the dilemma are unacceptable. As a result, we, and the Divine Command Theorist, should conclude that DCT is false.

It is for this reason that religious ethicists shy away from Divine Command Theory and opt for other religious approaches to ethics. And here we introduce Thomas Aquinas and Natural Law Theory.

Natural Law Theory²⁶

Introduction to Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was an intellectual and religious revolutionary, living at a time of great philosophical, theological and scientific development. He was a member of the Dominican Friars and taught by one of the greatest intellects of the age, Albert the Great (1208–1280). In a nutshell Aquinas wanted to move away from Plato's thinking, which was hugely influential at the time, and instead introduce Aristotelian ideas to science, nature and theology.

Aquinas wrote an incredible amount — in fact one of the miracles accredited to him was the amount he wrote! His most famous work is *Summa Theologica* and this runs to some three and half thousand pages and contains many fascinating and profound insights, such as proofs for God's existence. The book remained a fundamental basis for Catholic thinking right up to the 1960s! But do not worry we will only be focusing on a few key ideas! Specifically books I–II, questions 93–95.

For Aquinas, what role, if any at all, does God have when it comes to morality? For him, God's commands are there to help us to come to see what is right and wrong rather than determine what is right and wrong. That is, Aquinas opts for the Option A in the Euthyphro dilemma as stated above. But then this raises the obvious question: if it is not God's commands that make something right and wrong, then what does? Does not God just fall out of the picture? This is where his Natural Law Theory comes in.

Law

Aquinas's Natural Law Theory contains four different types of law:

1. Eternal Law,
2. Natural Law,
3. Human Law and
4. Divine Law.

The way to understand these four laws and how they relate to one another is via the Eternal Law, so we'd better start there...

By **Eternal Law** Aquinas means God's rational purpose and plan for all things. And because the Eternal Law is part of God's mind then it has always, and will always, exist. The Eternal Law is not simply something that God decided at some point to write.

Aquinas thinks that everything has a purpose and follows a plan. He, like Aristotle, is a teleologist²⁷ and believes that every object has a telos; the acorn has the telos of growing into an oak; the eye a telos of seeing; a rat of eating and reproducing etc. If something fulfills its purpose/plan then it is following the Eternal Law.

For Aquinas, there is an element of Eternal Law which intersects with how we are live and relate to others. This is what's known as **Natural Law**. Aquinas thinks that something is good in as far as it fulfills its purpose/plan. This fits with common sense. A "good" eye is one which sees well, an acorn is a good if it grows into a strong oak tree. But what about humans? Just as a good eye is to see, and a good acorn is to grow then a good human is to...? Is to what? How are we going to finish this sentence? What do you think?

Aquinas thinks that the answer is reason and that it is this that makes us distinct from rats and rocks. What is right for me and you as humans is to act according to reason. If we act according to reason then we are partaking in the Natural Law.

If we all act according to reason, then we will all agree to some overarching general rules (what Aquinas calls primary precepts). These are absolute and binding on all rational agents and because of this Aquinas rejects relativism.

The first primary precept is that good is to be pursued and done and evil avoided. Aquinas reasons this is the guiding principle for all our decision making.

Before unpacking this, it is worth clarifying something about what "law" means. Imagine that we are playing Clued and we are trying to work out the identity of the murderer. There are certain rules about how to move around the board, how to deal out cards, how to reveal the murderer etc. These rules are all written down and can be consulted.

However, in playing the game there are other rules that operate which are so obvious that they are neither written down nor spoken. One such rule is that a claim made in the game cannot both be true and false; if it is Professor Plum who is the murderer then it cannot be true that it is not Professor Plum who is the murderer. These are internal rules which any rational person can come to recognize by simply thinking and are not external like the other rules — such as you can only have one guess as to the identity of the murderer. When Aquinas talks of Natural Laws, he means internal rules and not external ones.

Natural Law does not generate an external set of rules that are written down for us to consult but rather it generates general rules that any rational agent can come to recognize simply in virtue of being rational. For example, for Aquinas it is not as if we need to check whether we should pursue good and avoid evil, as it is just part of how we already think about things. Aquinas gives some more examples of primary precepts:

1. Protect and preserve human life.
2. Reproduce and educate one's offspring.

3. Know and worship God.
4. Live in a society.

These precepts are primary because they are true for all people in all instances and are consistent with Natural Law.

Aquinas also introduces what he calls the Human Law which gives rise to what he calls “Secondary Precepts”. These might include such things as do not drive above 70mph on a motorway, do not kidnap people, always wear a helmet when riding a bike, do not hack into someone’s bank account. Secondary precepts are not generated by our reason but rather they are imposed by governments, groups, clubs, societies etc.

It is not always morally acceptable to follow secondary precepts. It is only morally acceptable if they are consistent with the Natural Law. If they are, then we ought to follow them, if they are not, then we ought not. To see why think through an example.

Consider the secondary precept that “if you are a woman and you live in Saudi Arabia then you are not allowed to drive”. Aquinas would argue that this secondary precept is practically irrational because it treats people differently based on an arbitrary difference (gender). He would reason that if the men in power in Saudi actually really thought hard then they too would recognize that this law is morally wrong. This in turn means that Aquinas would think that this human law does not fit with the Natural Law. Hence, it is morally wrong to follow a law that says that men can, and women cannot, drive. So although it is presented as a secondary precept, because it is not in accordance with Natural Law, it is what Aquinas calls an apparent good. This is in contrast with those secondary precepts which are in accordance with the Natural Law and which he calls the real goods.

Unlike primary precepts, Aquinas is not committed to there being only one set of secondary precepts for all people in all situations. It is consistent with Aquinas’s thinking to have a law to drive on the right in the US and on the left in the UK as there is no practical reason to think that there is one correct side of the road on which to drive.

It is clear that on our own we are not very good at discovering primary precepts and consequently Aquinas thinks that what we ought to do is talk and interact with people. To discover our real goods — our secondary precepts which accord with Natural Law — we need to be part of a society. For example, we might think that “treat Christians as secondary citizens” is a good secondary precept until we talk and live with Christians. The more we can think and talk with others in society the better and it is for this reason that “live in society” is itself a primary precept.

But looking at what we have said already about Natural Laws and primary and secondary precepts, we might

think that there is no need for God. If we can learn these primary precepts by rational reflection then God simply drops out of the story (recall the Euthyphro dilemma above).

Just to recap as there are a lot of moving parts to the story. We now have Eternal Law (God's plans/purpose for all things), Natural Laws (our partaking in the Eternal Law which leads to primary precepts), Human Laws (humans making specific laws to capture the truths of the Natural Laws which lead to secondary precepts) and now finally Aquinas introduces the Divine Law.

The **Divine Law**, which is discovered through revelation, should be thought of as the Divine equivalent of the Human Law (those discovered through rational reflection and created by people). Divine laws are those that God has, in His grace, seen fit to give us and are those “mysteries”, those rules given by God which we find in scripture; for example, the ten commandments. But why introduce the Divine Law at all? It certainly feels we have enough Laws. Here is a story to illustrate Aquinas's answer.

A number of years ago I was talking to a minister of a church. He told me about an instance where a married man came to ask his advice about whether to finish an affair he was having. The man's reasoning went as follows — “I am having an affair which just feels so right, we are both very much in love and surely God would want what is best for me! How could it be wrong if we are so happy?”

In response, the minister opened the Bible to the Ten Commandments and pointed out the commandment that it says that it is wrong to commit adultery. Case closed. The point of this story is simple. We can be confused and mistaken about what we think we have most reason to do and because of this we need someone who actually knows the mind of God to guide us, and who better to know this than God Himself. This then is precisely what is revealed in the Divine Law.

Or consider another example. We recognize that we find it hard to forgive our friends and nearly always impossible to forgive our enemies. We tell ourselves we have the right to be angry, to bear grudges, etc. Isn't this just human? However, these human reasons are distortions of the Eternal Law. We need some guidance when it comes to forgiveness and it is where the Divine Law which tells us that we should forgive others — including our enemies. Following the Human Laws and the Divine Laws will help us to fulfill our purposes and plans and be truly happy.

Summary of Aquinas's Natural Law Theory

For Aquinas everything has a function (a *telos*) and the good thing(s) to do are those acts that fulfill that function. Some things such as acorns, and eyes, just do that naturally. However, humans are free and hence need guidance to find the right path. That right path is found through reasoning and generates the “internal” Natural Law. By following the Natural Law we participate in God's purpose for us in the Eternal Law.

However, the primary precepts that derive from the Natural Law are quite general, such as, pursue good and shun evil. So we need to create secondary precepts which can actually guide our day-to-day behavior. But we are fallible so sometimes we get these secondary precepts wrong, sometimes we get them right. When they are wrong they only reflect our apparent goods. When they are right they reflect our real goods.

Finally, however good we are because we are finite and sinful, we can only get so far with rational reflection. We need some revealed guidance and this comes in the form of Divine Law. So to return to the Euthyphro dilemma. God's commands through the Divine Law are ways of illuminating what is in fact morally acceptable and not what determines what is morally acceptable. Aquinas rejects the Divine Command Theory.

Putting this into Practice: The Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE)

Let's consider some examples to show that what we have said so far might actually work. Imagine someone considering suicide. Is this morally acceptable or not? Recall, it is part of the Natural Law to preserve and protect human life. Clearly suicide is not preserving and protecting human life. It is therefore irrational to kill oneself and cannot be part of God's plan for our life; hence it is morally unacceptable.

Imagine that someone is considering having an abortion after becoming pregnant due to rape. The same reasoning is going to apply. We ought to preserve and protect human life and hence an abortion in this case is morally wrong.

However, as we will see, Aquinas thinks that there are some instances where it is morally acceptable to kill an innocent person and therefore there may be occasions when it is morally acceptable to kill a fetus. But how can this be correct? Will this not violate the primary precept about preserving life? The answer is to understand that for Aquinas, an action is not just about what we do externally but is also about what we do internally (i.e. our motivations). With this distinction he can show that, for example, killing an innocent can be morally acceptable.

To make this clear, Aquinas introduces one of his most famous ideas: the “**Doctrine of Double Effect**”. Let's see how this works.

Imagine a child brought up in a physically, sexually and emotionally abusive family. He is frequently scared for his life and is locked in the house for days at a time.

One day when his father is drunk and ready to abuse him again he quickly grabs a kitchen knife and slashes his father's artery.

His father bleeds out and dies in a matter of minutes. Do you think the son did anything wrong?

Many people would say that he did nothing morally wrong and in fact, some might even go as far as to say that he should get a pat on the back for his actions. What about Aquinas? What would he say?

We might think that given the Natural Law to “preserve and protect life” he would say that this action is morally wrong. But, in fact, he would say the son’s action was not morally wrong (Aquinas discusses self-defense in the *Summa Theologica* (II-II, Qu. 64)).

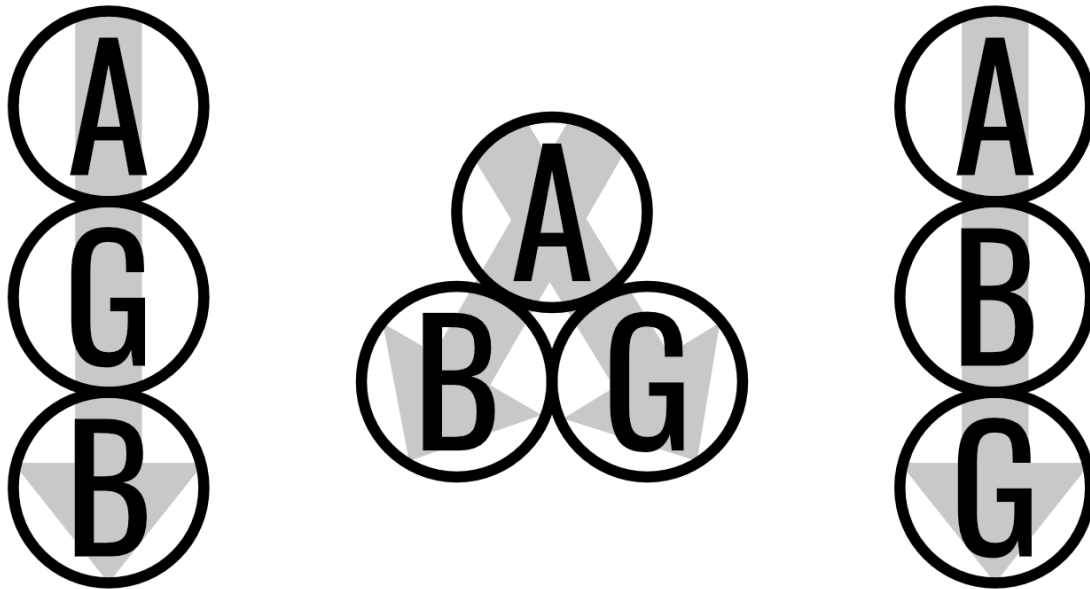
So why is the son killing the father not in direct contradiction with the primary precept? Aquinas asks us to consider the difference between the external act — the fact that the father was killed, and the internal act — the motive.

In our example, the action is one of self-defense because of the son’s internal action and because of this, Aquinas would think the killing is morally acceptable. This distinction and conclusion is possible because of Aquinas’s Doctrine of Double Effect which states that if an act fulfils four conditions then it is morally acceptable. If not, then it is not.

1. The first principle is that the act must be a good one.
2. The second principle is that the act must come about before the consequences.
3. The third is that the intention must be good.
4. The fourth, it must be for serious reasons.

This is abstract so let’s go back to our example.

- The act of the son was performed to save his own life so that is good — we can tick (1).
- Moreover, the act to save his life came about first — we can tick (2).
- The son did not first act to kill his father in order to save his own life. That would be doing evil to bring about good and that is never morally acceptable. The intention of the son was to preserve and protect his life, so the intention was good — tick (3).
- Finally, the reasons were serious as it was his life or his father’s life — tick (4).



Three possible relations of an action (A) which has a good (G) and bad effect (B). The second principle of the doctrine of double effect allows for the first two relations, but not the third, where the good effect comes about as a result of bad effect.

So given that the act meets all four principles, it is in line with the DDE and hence the action is morally acceptable, even though it caused someone to die and hence seems contrary to the primary precept of preserving life.

We can draw a contrasting case. Imagine that instead of slashing his father in self-defense, the son plans the killing. He works out the best time, the best day and then sets up a trip wire causing his father to fall from his flat window to his death. Does this action meet the four criteria of the DDE? Well, no, because the son's intention is to kill the father rather than save his own life — we must put a cross at (3).

We have already seen that suicide is morally impermissible for Aquinas, so does that mean that any action you take that leads knowingly to your own death is morally wrong? No. Because even though the external act of your own death is the same, the internal act — the intention — might be different. An action is judged via the Natural Law both externally and internally.

Imagine a case where a soldier sees a grenade thrown into her barracks. Knowing that she does not have time to defuse it or throw it away, she throws herself on the grenade. It blows up, killing her but saving other soldiers

in her barracks. Is this wrong or right? Aquinas says this is morally acceptable given DDE. If we judge this act both internally and externally we'll see why.

The intention — the internal act — was not to kill herself even though she could foresee that this was certainly what was going to happen.

- The act itself is good, to save her fellow soldiers (1).
- The order is right, she is not doing evil so good will happen (2).
- The intention is good, it is to save her fellow soldiers (3).
- The reason is serious, it concerns people's lives (4).

Contrast this with a soldier who decides to kill herself by blowing herself up. The intention is not good and hence the DDE does not permit this suicidal action.

Finally, imagine that a woman is pregnant and also has inoperable uterine cancer. The doctors have two choices; to take out the uterus and save the mother, but the fetus will die; or leave the fetus to develop and be born healthy, but the woman will die. What would Aquinas say in this instance? Well using the DDE he would say that it is morally acceptable to remove the cancer.

The action is to remove the cancer; it has the foreseeable consequences of the fetus dying but that is not what is intended.

- The action — to remove the cancer — is good (1).
- The act of removing the cancer comes before the death of the fetus (2).
- The intention to save the woman's life is also good (3).
- Finally, the reasons are serious as they are about the life and death of the woman and the fetus (4).

So even though this is a case where the doctor's actions bring about the death of the fetus it would be acceptable for Aquinas through his Natural Law Theory, as is shown via the DDE.

Some Thoughts about Natural Law Theory

There are many things we might consider when thinking through Aquinas's Natural Law Theory. There are some obvious problems we could raise, such as the problem about whether or not God exists. If God does not exist then the Eternal Law does not exist and therefore the whole theory comes tumbling down. However, as good philosophers we ought always to operate with a principle of charity and grant our opponent is rational and give the strongest possible interpretation of their argument. So, let's assume for the sake of argument that God exists. How plausible is Aquinas's theory? There are a number of things that we can pick up on.

Aquinas's theory works on the idea that if something is "natural", that is, if it fulfills its function, then it is morally acceptable, but there are a number of unanswered questions relating to natural.

We might ask, **why does "natural" matter?** We can think of things that are not "natural" but which are perfectly acceptable, and things which are natural which are not. For example, wearing clothes, taking medication and body piercing certainly are not natural, but we would not want to say such things are morally wrong.

For Natural law theory:

- Natural ≠ what occurs in nature
- Natural = what fulfills a thing's purpose, or telos.

On the other hand, we might consider that violence is a natural response to an unfaithful partner, but also think that such violence is morally unacceptable. So, it is not true that we can discover what is morally acceptable or not simply by discovering what is natural and what is not.

Put this worry aside. Recall, Aquinas thinks that reproduction is natural and hence reproduction is morally acceptable. This means that sex that does not lead to reproduction is morally unacceptable. Notice that Aquinas is not saying that if sex does not lead to pregnancy it is wrong. After all, sometimes the timing is not right. His claim is rather that if there is no potential for sex to lead to pregnancy then it is wrong. However, even with this qualification this would mean a whole host of things such as homosexuality and contraception are morally wrong. We might take this as a reason to rethink Aquinas's moral framework. There is, though, a more fundamental worry at the heart of this approach (and Aristotle's) to ethics. Namely, they think that everything has a goal (telos). Now, with some things this might be plausible. Things such as the eye or an acorn have a clear function — to grow, to see — but what about humans? This seems a bit less obvious! Do humans (rather than our individual parts) really have a telos? There are certainly some philosophers — such as the existentialists, for example **Simone de Beauvoir** (1908–1986) — who think that there is no such thing as human nature and no such thing as a human function or goal.

But if we are unconvinced that humans have a goal, then this whole approach to ethics seems flawed.

Next we might raise questions about DDE. Go back to our example about abortion. For Aquinas it is morally acceptable to remove the uterus even if we know that in doing so the fetus will die. What is not morally acceptable is to intend to kill the fetus by removing the uterus. On first reading this seems to make sense; we have an intuitive feel for what DDE is getting at. However, when we consider it in more detail it is far from clear.

Imagine two doctors who (apparently) do exactly the same thing, they both remove the uterus and the fetus dies. The one intends to take out the uterus — in full knowledge that the fetus will die — the other intends to kill the fetus. For the DDE to work in the way that Aquinas understands it, this difference in intention makes the moral difference between the two doctors. However, is there really a moral difference? To put pressure on

the answer that there is, ask yourself what you think it means to intend to do something. If the first doctor says “I did not intend to kill the fetus” can we make sense of this? After all, if you asked her “did you know that in taking out the uterus the fetus would die?” she would say “yes, of course”. But if she did this and the fetus died, did not she intend (in some sense) to kill the fetus? So, this issue raises some complex question about the nature of the mind, and how we might understand intentions.

Finally, we might wonder how easy it is to work out what actually to do using the Natural Law. We would hope our moral theory gives us direction in living our lives. That, we might think, is precisely the role of a moral theory. But how might it work in this case?

For Aquinas, if we rationally reflect then we arrive at the right way of proceeding. If this is in line with the Natural Law and the Divine Law then it is morally acceptable. If it is out of line, then it is not. The assumption is that the more we think, the more rational we become, the more convergence there will be. We’ll all start to have similar views on what is right and wrong. But is this too optimistic? Very often, even after extensive reflection and cool deliberation with friends and colleagues, it is not obvious to us what we as rational agents should do. We all know people we take to be rational, but we disagree with them on moral issues. And even in obviously rational areas such as mathematics, the best mathematicians are not able to agree. We might then be skeptical that as rational agents we will come to be in line with the Natural and Divine Laws.

Summary

Aquinas is an intellectual giant. He wrote an incredible amount covering a vast array of topics. His influence has been immense. His central idea is that humans are created by God to reason — that is our function. Humans do the morally right thing if we act in accordance with reason, and the morally wrong thing if we don’t. Aquinas is an incredibly subtle and complex thinker. For example, his Doctrine of Double Effect makes us to reflect on what we actually mean by “actions”, “intentions” and “consequences”. His work remains much discussed and researched and typically still plays a central role in a Christian Ethics that rejects Divine Command Theory.

Common Student Mistakes

- Thinking that Aquinas is a Divine Command Theorist.

- Thinking that Eternal Law is something that God decided to write.
- Thinking that Natural Laws are laws of science — e.g. law of thermodynamics.
- Thinking that all the “laws” are absolute.
- Thinking that it is always morally required of us to follow secondary precepts.
- Thinking that Aquinas is committed to there being only one set of secondary precepts for all people in all situations.

Issues to Consider

1. If God exists, then what — if anything — do you think that has to do with what is right and wrong?
2. We might answer the “arbitrariness” dilemma by citing God’s nature. Why might this answer be problematic?
3. What is the point of the Euthyphro dilemma and how can this create problems for DCT?
4. What are the reasons some people believe religion is necessary in order to have morality? Do you think they are right? Why or why not?
5. If God is perfect, does DCT still make sense? Why or why not?
6. What is the Eternal Law?
7. What are Natural Laws and primary precepts?
8. What are Human Laws and secondary precepts?
9. What are Divine Laws?
10. Just as a good eye is to see, and a good acorn is to grow then a good human is to...? Is to what? How are we going to finish this sentence?
11. People often talk about what is “natural”? What do you think they mean by this? How useful is the notion of “natural” in a moral theory?
12. Think of a descriptive claim. Think of a prescriptive claim. Why might it be problematic moving from one to the other?
13. If people thought long enough, do you think there would be convergence on what is morally

right and wrong?

14. What is the doctrine of double effect?
15. What is the difference, if anything, between intending to bring about some end and acting where you know your action will bring about that end?

Key Terminology

Key Terminology

- Apparent goods
- A priori
- A posteriori
- Eternal Law
- External acts
- Natural Law
- Primary precepts
- Real goods
- Secondary precepts
- Internal acts
- Doctrine of Double Effect

References and Notes

Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, freely available at <http://www.summatheologica.info/summa/parts/?p=1>

Plato, *Euthyphro*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, freely available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html>

Media Attributions

- Religions by Percentage of Population © Henry Imler, using Pew Forum's Data Tables is licensed under a CC0 (Creative Commons Zero) license
- Occident and Orient as construed and mapped onto the world by European colonialists. is licensed under a CC0 (Creative Commons Zero) license
- Magnificat by Ben Wildflower © Ben Wildflower is licensed under a All Rights Reserved license
- DDE-Relations © Henry Imler is licensed under a CC0 (Creative Commons Zero) license



Religious Ethical Systems by Andrew Fisher; Mark Dimmock; Henry Imler; and Kristin Whaley is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. See the introduction to Stephen Prothero's *God is Not One*.
2. Compare Jesus' summary of the Law and the Prophets in Matthew 22:40 with Hillel's summary of the Torah in Shabbat 31a.
3. In the opening chapters of the book of Genesis there is the myth of the first murder. YHWH asks Cain where his brother Abel is (Cain had killed him a few verses before). Cain responds by asking YHWH whether or not he is his brother's keeper.
4. The Desert Monotheisms are those religions that follow the God of Abraham as the one true god and arose in what is now known as the Middle East. The exact meaning of the phrase is contested, but we will use the term to denote the idea that the God of Abraham has created humanity with a special purpose, place, and role in creation.
5. Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 108.
6. Keown, 36.
7. The Nineteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Minister, "Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam," University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, 1990, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instree/cairodeclaration.html>.
8. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, "The Muslim Declaration on Nature," in *The Assisi Declarations* (Assisi, 1986), 10–12, http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/THE_ASSISI_DECLARATIONS.pdf.
9. Dibyesh Anand, "The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing 'the Muslim' as a Danger," *The Round Table* 94, no. 379 (April 1, 2005): 203–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358530500099076>.
10. Matthew Gindin, "Sri Lanka Struggles to Contain Its Violent Buddhist Extremists," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, March 9, 2018, <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/sri-lanka-buddhist-violence/>.
11. Matthew Gindin, "Rohingya in 'Last Stages of Genocide,'" *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, April 25, 2018, <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/rohingya-genocide/>.
12. The best introduction to this historical phenomenon is E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Group, 2006), <https://books.google.com/books?id=66sIH2VTmoC>.
13. Here we use allusions to Deuteronomy 32:35 and Romans 12:17-19 to stand in for the religious claim (found in most

- religions of the world) that violence is prohibited, particularly retributive violence. The scales of justice are balanced by God, not by the followers of God.
14. Jamel Velji, "Apocalyptic Religion and Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Michael Jerryson, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Margo Kitts, 2013, <http://oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199759996.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199759996-e-14>.
 15. Joas Wagemakers, *Salafism* (Interactive Factory, n.d.), <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-255>.
 16. Waite Gary K., "From Apocalyptic Crusaders to Anabaptist Terrorists: Anabaptist Radicalism after Münster, 1535-1544," *Archiv Für Reformationsgeschichte - Archive for Reformation History* 80, no. jg (1989): 173, <https://doi.org/10.14315/arg-1989-jg10>.
 17. Sara Zalcborg, "The Place of Culture and Religion in Patterns of Disclosure and Reporting Sexual Abuse of Males: A Case Study of Ultra Orthodox Male Victims," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 5 (July 2017): 590–607, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2017.1316335>.
 18. Elizabeth B. Ludwin King, "Transitional Justice and The Legacy Of Child Sexual Abuse in The Catholic Church" 81, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 121–43.
 19. Andrew S. Denney, Kent R. Kerley, and Nickolas G. Gross, "Child Sexual Abuse in Protestant Christian Congregations: A Descriptive Analysis of Offense and Offender Characteristics" 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 27–27.
 20. Henna Budhwani and Kristine R. Hearld, "Muslim Women's Experiences with Stigma, Abuse, and Depression: Results of a Sample Study Conducted in the United States.," *Journal of Women's Health (15409996)* 26, no. 5 (May 2017): 435–41, <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2016.5886>.
 21. "Fears Mount over Scale of Buddhist Sect Sexual Abuse; Followers Allege They Were Coerced into Sex in 1970s and 80s with Elders of UK's Triratna Order," *The Observer (London, England)*, 2017, edsgbe, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/avalon.searchmobius.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgbe&AN=edsgcl.481755225&site=eds-live>.
 22. Zalcborg, "The Place of Culture and Religion in Patterns of Disclosure and Reporting Sexual Abuse of Males: A Case Study of Ultra Orthodox Male Victims."
 23. The bulk of this section on the problems with Divine Command Theory was written by Kristin Seemuth Whaley. She is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Graceland University. She specializes in metaphysics and philosophy of religion, and she is a recipient of the AAPT Grant for Innovations in Teaching. You can find more information about Dr. Seemuth Whaley's work at kristinseemuthwhaley.com. This work was originally published in *Introduction to Ethics* put out by NGE Far Press. The whole work was released under a CC-BY license. Edits primarily consist of quotes and diagrams.
 24. Note that this command is conditional, only to be done when the people of the town propose worshipping gods other than YHWH.
 25. Quoted from Craig's post "Slaughter of the Canaanites" published through *Reasonable Faith*, founded by Craig.
 26. This section is primarily written by Dimmok and Fisher.
 27. Stems from the Greek term "telos," which refers to what we might call a purpose, goal, end/or the true final function of an object & not to be confused with a teleological ethical theory such as Utilitarianism.

GOD, MORALITY, AND RELIGION

Kristin Whaley

Kristin Seemuth Whaley is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Graceland University. She specializes in metaphysics and philosophy of religion, and she is a recipient of the AAPT Grant for Innovations in Teaching. You can find more information about Dr. Seemuth Whaley's work at kristinseemuthwhaley.com. This work released under a CC-BY license.

Introduction

Religion and morality seem to go hand-in-hand, and specific moral codes are often grounded in specific religious traditions. Identifying the nature of the relationship between religion and morality may therefore seem straightforward: the right thing to do is whatever is right according to religious tradition. Justification for this claim derives support from the idea that religious moral codes have origins in divine will: "Morality is whatever God commands." The theory that identifies the morally right with what God commands is called, unsurprisingly, 'Divine Command Theory'. Divine Command Theory, or 'DCT', is attractive to religious practitioners for a couple reasons. One is that it captures the sense that religion provides guidance for living an ethical life; God provides this guidance through giving commands and shaping religious moral codes. Another is that DCT seems to provide a moral theory according to which there are objective moral facts; morality isn't susceptible to subjective preferences or impermanent social consciousness. If the morally right is what God commands, there is a true measure of our actions and a genuine responsibility for our behavior.

Despite this attraction, DCT is subject to a *dilemma*, a style of argument that requires commitment to either of two possible, and unfavorable, options. The Divine Command Theorist is forced to make a choice: if the moral is whatever God commands, then either God commands things because they are right, or they are right because God commands them. As we will see, taking either option requires serious theological concessions.

A similar dilemma is found in Plato's *Euthyphro*, a dialogue in which Socrates inquires about the nature of piety, or holiness. Euthyphro begins by proposing that whatever the gods love is pious or holy, and that which they hate is impious or unholy. Socrates presses Euthyphro by raising the dilemma of whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or whether the pious is holy because it is loved by the gods. Euthyphro

replies that the pious is loved by the gods because it is holy; the pious is pious for a reason independent of the relationship between piety and the gods. The gods, then, love the pious for this reason, whatever the reason ends up being. But whatever is beloved of the gods is beloved because the gods love it; being beloved by the gods is entirely dependent on the relationship between the beloved and the gods. Socrates cites this difference in dependence as a reason to reject ‘whatever the gods love’ as a legitimate definition of ‘piety’. There must be something else about piety, independent of its relationship to the gods, that establishes its true nature. Socrates is asking Euthyphro for this independent reason, which Euthyphro fails to provide.

We can instantiate the same kind of dilemma for Divine Command Theory, inquiring about the nature of morality. In what follows, we will address each option, or *horn* of the dilemma, in turn. In taking the first horn, that God commands things because they are right, the Divine Command Theorist will be required to concede that God is not unlimited in power. In taking the second horn, that things are right because God commands them, the Divine Command Theorist will be required to concede that God is not truly good. Since the Divine Command Theorist likely views unlimited power and unlimited goodness to be essential divine features, neither of these options is acceptable. Since it was the assumption that DCT is true that generated the dilemma, the Divine Command Theorist is forced to conclude that DCT is false.

The Dilemma

Divine Command Theory seems to be an attempt to ground morality theistically; the morally right is whatever God commands. As a background commitment, the Divine Command Theorist is likely motivating the theory in the context of a religious tradition that accepts the *divine perfections*, or attributes of God. The perfections include

- *omnipotence*: God is all-powerful,
- *omniscience*: God is all-knowing, and
- *omnibenevolence*: God is all-good.

It is certainly fair to question whether there is such a being that has, or necessarily has, the divine perfections. But the dilemma does not hinge on successfully arguing against the perfections. Instead, it is because the Divine Command Theorist likely accepts the divine perfections that the dilemma arises in the first place.

A being with the divine perfections, God, seems to be the kind of being that is capable of commanding actions that are morally right. Plausibly, God knows what is right, God desires for the right to be done, and God is powerful enough to effectively command the right. Therefore, DCT is a natural extension of this variety of theism.

But, given the divine perfections, we can construct the dilemma for the Divine Command Theorist:

- A1. If DCT is true, then morality is whatever God commands.
- A2. If morality is whatever God commands, then either God commands things because they are morally right, or things are morally right because God commands them.
- A3. If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent.
- A4. If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent.
- A5. God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent.
- \therefore AC. DCT is false. (' \therefore ' means 'therefore')

The argument begins in premise A1 by citing the definition of Divine Command Theory: the morally right is what God commands. The Divine Command Theorist will accept this premise, since it provides an accurate statement of what DCT is. Premise A2 sketches options for the relationship between morality and God's commands: either God's commands are grounded by moral facts or moral facts are grounded by God's commands. If there is an explanatory relationship between God and morality, then it has to be one or the other. In the first case, God looks to the moral facts to determine what should be commanded, ensuring that God is commanding what is indeed right. In the second case, God's commands establish the moral facts; whatever God decides is right becomes right in virtue of God's command.

More work needs to be done to establish premises A3 and A4, and we will see auxiliary arguments for these premises shortly. But before we do so, note that even if you don't agree with premise A5, the Divine Command Theorist almost certainly does. Premise A5 affirms a background commitment that the Divine Command Theorist likely accepts: God has the divine perfections. So, since accepting DCT yields two unacceptable options, the argument concludes with AC that DCT is false.

The First Horn: The Argument for A3

Premise A3 represents the first horn of the dilemma for the Divine Command Theorist: If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent. Premise A3 can be established by appealing to an auxiliary argument:

- B1. If God commands things because they are morally right, then morality is outside God's control.
- B2. If morality is outside God's control, then God is not omnipotent.
- \therefore A3. If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent.

B1, the first premise of the auxiliary argument highlights the relationship between morality and God's commands in taking the first horn of the dilemma. According to the first horn, God will guarantee that any

command given fits with what's morally right. God will look to the moral facts and then make commands on their basis. So, suppose God is about to issue the Ten Commandments. God will investigate the nature of morality, identify the moral facts, and issue the commandments accordingly: Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, etc. God makes these commands because murder and stealing are wrong. The commandments should be followed, then, because the commandments accord with the moral facts. Since God is omnibenevolent, God will only issue commands that fit with the moral facts, and God defers to the moral facts in order to make moral commands. So, although God will command things that are morally right, the moral facts cannot be determined by God. Otherwise, they would be right because God commands them, and not the other way around.

Having deferred to the moral facts, God's commands are therefore somewhat restricted, and we arrive at B2. God cannot decide to command just anything; God will command only what is right. Accordingly, morality is independent of God, and God's commands are restricted to only what is right. Morality is not affected or changed by God's will. If this is the case, then a whole range of facts, moral facts, are outside the scope of God's control, and God has no power to change them. But if this is the case, then God is not omnipotent; God is not all-powerful.

Some argue that being restricted by moral facts does not threaten God's omnipotence. God is also restricted, plausibly, by logical facts. God cannot, for instance, make a round square, but this may not seem to be much of a threat to God's power. Unlike logical facts, however, one might argue that moral facts, like natural facts or physical facts, seem to be exactly the kinds of facts that *should* be within God's power. But, in taking this horn of the dilemma, the moral facts instead have power over God.

So, we arrive at A3: If God commands things because they are morally right, then God is not omnipotent. This is an unfortunate result for the Divine Command Theorist, who will consider rejecting God's omnipotence to be unacceptable. The first horn may then prod the Divine Command Theorist to consider the other option. Instead, perhaps things are morally right because God commands them.

The Second Horn: The Argument for A4

Premise A4 represents the second horn of the dilemma for the Divine Command Theorist: If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent. Premise A4 can be established by appealing to an auxiliary argument:

- C1. If things are morally right because God commands them, then God's commands are morally arbitrary.
- C2. If God's commands are morally arbitrary, then God is not omnibenevolent.

- ∴ A4. If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent.

C1, the first premise of this auxiliary argument illustrates the challenge of taking the second horn of the dilemma. This relationship between God's commands and morality makes it the case that God could command anything whatsoever and it would be morally right simply because God commanded it. So, when God issues the commandment, 'Thou shalt not murder', a class of actions, particular kinds of killing, became morally wrong. If God never gave the command, then these kinds of killing would be morally acceptable. If God had not prohibited it, then it would not be morally wrong, for instance, to kill an innocent person for no reason, despite any apparently-bad consequences or apparently-bad intentions.

Since, according to the second horn, the moral facts depend entirely on God's commands, there is no objective standard that God must look to before making commands. God could command, 'Thou shalt put on thy right shoe before thy left shoe except on every third Thursday of the month, in which case thou shalt put on thy left shoe before thy right.', and it would become immoral to put on your left shoe before your right on a Monday. Such a command is totally unprincipled, and we should feel no moral pull toward either shoe. This is because such a command would be *morally arbitrary*, or without principle or moral reason. There is no external standard by which we could measure the legitimacy of the command and no recourse to appeal to if we broke it. So, C1, if things are right because God commands them, then God's commands are morally arbitrary.

Even worse, if God's commands are morally arbitrary, then God could command things that we consider to be morally reprehensible, and these things would become right. For instance, God could command 'Thou shalt torture thy children', and it would be morally right to torture your children. Any complaints that this is wrong would fall on deaf ears, for, according to the second horn, if God commanded it, it is not wrong. The fact that the second horn allows that God could command things like the torture of children negates any lingering plausibility concerning God's omnibenevolence.

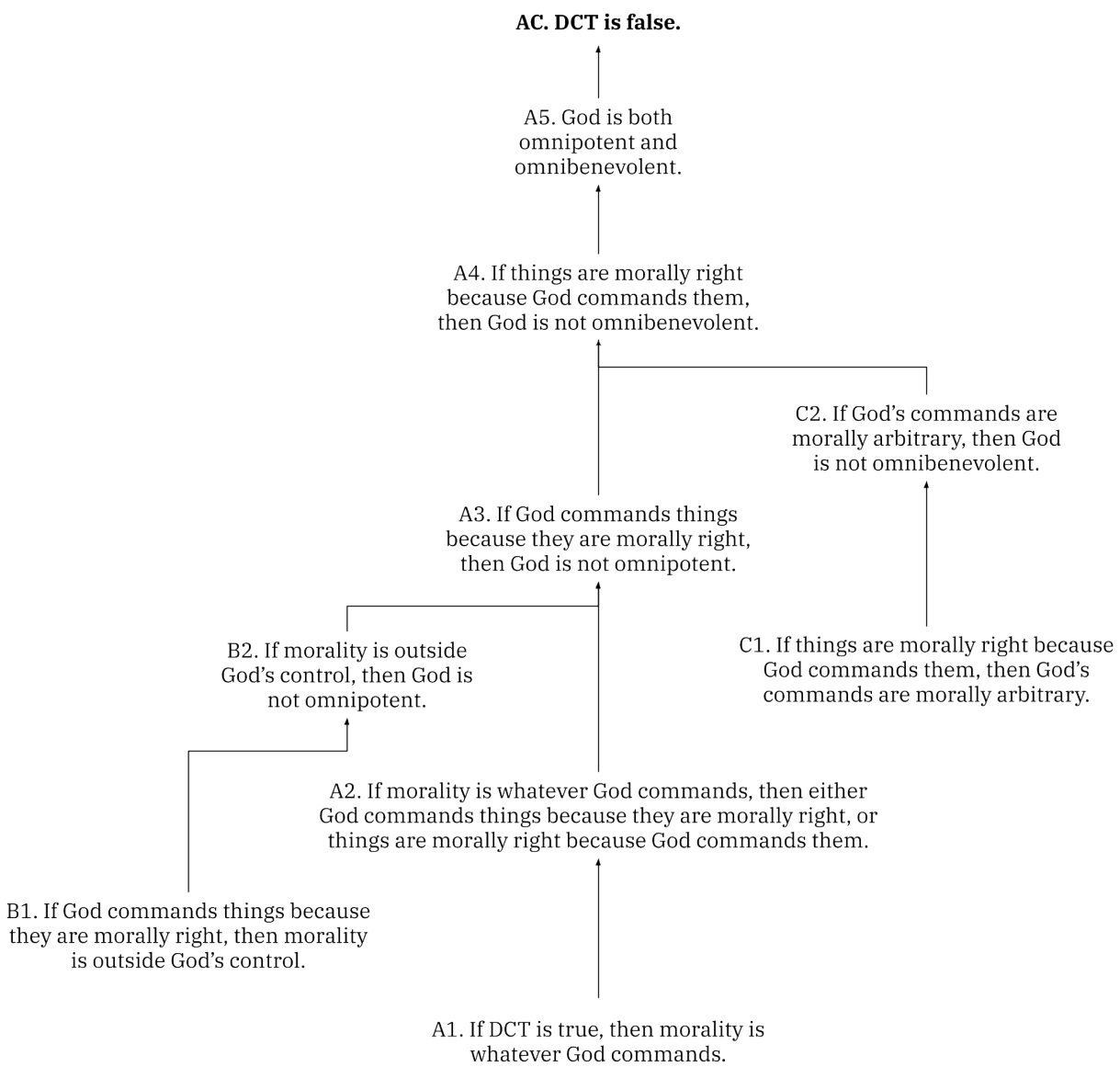
It is very tempting at this point to think, "Well, God would never command the torture of children, because torturing children is wrong, and God would not command something that is wrong." But note that in making this move, we find ourselves again facing the first horn. If God would not command something that is wrong, then this is possible only if God looks to the moral facts in order to determine what to command. But, if God does so, then morality is outside God's control. The Divine Command Theorist can make this move, but then they must give up on God's omnipotence.

The moral arbitrariness of God's commands is a serious problem for the Divine Command Theorist, which we see in C2. Recall that God is supposed to be omnibenevolent. When omnibenevolence is attributed to God, it is supposed to highlight a perfection or a laudable divine quality. But if morality is arbitrary, then saying that God is good becomes trivial. It would be analogous to saying that God is divine, or, like Euthyphro, saying that whatever is beloved by the gods is loved by the gods. It may be true, but it does not provide any reason to think that divinity is a good-making feature or a perfection; it is true simply because anything that is God is

divine. Likewise, anything that God commands would be morally right. So, saying that God is omnibenevolent is merely another way of saying that God meets the moral standard that God establishes. This is not praiseworthy; it is trivial.

We arrive at A4: If things are morally right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent. Like rejecting God's omnipotence, rejecting God's omnibenevolence is likely to be considered unacceptable. In taking the second horn, the Divine Command Theorist fares just as poorly as in taking the first. Both options require conceding divine perfections, but this is inconsistent with what the Divine Command Theorist is trying to accomplish.

Below is how the argument as a whole operates.



The complete argument tree for the argument against DCT. Support runs from the bottom up.

Remaining Options

Having established the auxiliary arguments, we now see the dilemma completed. If DCT is true, then either God commands things because they are morally right, or they are morally right because God commands them. If God commands things because they are right, then God is not omnipotent. If things are right because God commands them, then God is not omnibenevolent. Since God is (according to the divine perfections) both omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then we must conclude that DCT is false.

DCT has attraction given certain religious commitments. It is unlikely that an atheist, for instance, would endorse DCT. The dilemma is therefore forceful because it is contingent on a theological understanding that attributes the divine perfections to God. It is logically possible, however, for the Divine Command Theorist to reject A5 and deny that God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. An objection could take the form of arguing that it is theologically acceptable to say that God is not omnipotent or that God is not omnibenevolent. A Divine Command Theorist might prioritize the connection between God and morality over the divine perfections, and they may consider this to be necessary, albeit unpalatable, concession.

Another option is to deny the explanatory relationship between morality and God's commands. Perhaps what God commands is morally right but not *because* it is morally right, and whatever is morally right is morally right but not *because* God commands it. On this option, the class of actions that God commands is identical to the class of actions that are morally right, but there is no dependence in either direction.

In reply, I grant that these options are possible. They are not, however, desirable. While there may be theists willing to concede the divine perfections, I suggest that in doing so we likewise concede attraction to grounding morality theistically. The connection between God and morality seems attractive because of the divine perfections, and conceding the divine perfections weakens the case to think that God and morality are inextricably linked. Further, if one thinks that God and morality are inextricably linked, it is implausible to argue that there is no explanatory relationship between them.

Conclusion

It is natural for religious practitioners to see religion as authoritative in matters of morality. But if DCT is true, and morality is whatever God commands, then a dilemma arises. Either way we try to define the relationship between the morally right and the commands of God, an unacceptable result follows. Either morality is outside God's control, in which case God is not omnipotent, or God's commands are morally arbitrary, in which case God is not omnibenevolent. Since omnipotence and omnibenevolence are divine perfections that cannot be

simply subtracted from God's nature, both horns of the dilemma are unacceptable. As a result, we, and the Divine Command Theorist, should conclude that DCT is false.

For Reflection and Discussion

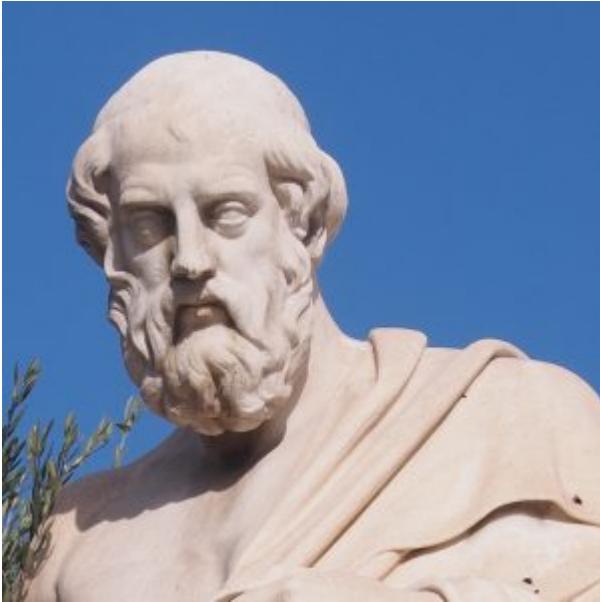
1. What is the point of the Euthyphro dilemma and how can this create problems for DCT?
2. What are the reasons some people believe religion is necessary in order to have morality? Do you think they are right? Why or why not?
3. If God is perfect, does DCT still make sense? Why or why not?



God, Morality, and Religion by Kristin Whaley is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

EUTHYPHRO

Plato



Statue of Plato by
Leonidas Drosis.

The following is a dialogue written by Plato (424-348 BCE) between his teacher and mentor of Plato and Euthyphro, considered to be the most pious (religious) person in all of Athens. Socrates questions him on whether it is possible for morality to be rooted in religion, here described as those things “which [all] the gods love.”

But the question at the heart of this readings is “**Why do the gods love what they love?**” If the gods love what they love because he thing is worthy of being loved, then the gods are merely following a higher rationale than their own choices. On the other hand, if they love whatever they happen to choose to love, then there is no rhyme or reason to what’s moral.

Euthyphro: What strange thing has happened, Socrates, that you have left your accustomed haunts in the Lyceum and are now haunting the portico where the king Archon sits? For it cannot be that you have an action before the king, as I have.

Socrates: Our Athenians, Euthyphro, do not call it an action, but an indictment.

Euthyphro: What? Somebody has, it seems, brought an indictment against you; for I don’t accuse you of having brought one against anyone else.

Socrates: Certainly not.

Euthyphro: But someone else against you?

Socrates: Quite so.

Euthyphro: Who is he?

Socrates: I don't know the man very well myself, Euthyphro, for he seems to be a young and unknown person. His name, however, is Meletus, I believe. And he is of the deme of Pitthus, if you remember any Pitthian Meletus, with long hair and only a little beard, but with a hooked nose.

Euthyphro: I don't remember him, Socrates. But what sort of an indictment has he brought against you?

Socrates: What sort? No mean one, it seems to me; for the fact that, young as he is, he has apprehended so important a matter reflects no small credit upon him. For he says he knows how the youth are corrupted and who those are who corrupt them. He must be a wise man; who, seeing my lack of wisdom and that I am corrupting his fellows, comes to the State, as a boy runs to his mother, to accuse me.

And he seems to me to be the only one of the public men who begins in the right way; for the right way is to take care of the young men first, to make them as good as possible, just as a good husbandman will naturally take care of the young plants first and afterwards of the rest.

And so Meletus, perhaps, is first clearing away us who corrupt the young plants, as he says; then after this, when he has turned his attention to the older men, he will bring countless most precious blessings upon the State,—at least, that is the natural outcome of the beginning he has made.

Euthyphro: I hope it may be so, Socrates; but I fear the opposite may result. For it seems to me that he begins by injuring the State at its very heart, when he undertakes to harm you. Now tell me, what does he say you do that corrupts the young?

Socrates: Absurd things, my friend, at first hearing. For he says I am a maker of gods; and because I make new gods and do not believe in the old ones, he indicted me for the sake of these old ones, as he says.

Euthyphro: I understand, Socrates; it is because you say the divine monitor keeps coming to you. So he has brought the indictment against you for making innovations in religion, and he is going into court to slander you, knowing that slanders on such subjects are readily accepted by the people.

Why, they even laugh at me and say I am crazy when I say anything in the assembly about divine things and foretell the future to them.

And yet there is not one of the things I have foretold that is not true; but they are jealous of all such men as you and I are. However, we must not be disturbed, but must come to close quarters with them.

Socrates: My dear Euthyphro, their ridicule is perhaps of no consequence. For the Athenians, I fancy, are not much concerned, if they think a man is clever, provided he does not impart his clever notions to others; but when they think he makes others to be like himself, they are angry with him, either through jealousy, as you say, or for some other reason.

Euthyphro: I don't much desire to test their sentiments toward me in this matter.

Socrates: No, for perhaps they think that you are reserved and unwilling to impart your wisdom. But I fear that because of my love of men they think that I not only pour myself out copiously to anyone and everyone without payment, but that I would even pay something myself, if anyone would listen to me.

Now if, as I was saying just now, they were to laugh at me, as you say they do at you, it would not be at all unpleasant to pass the time in the court with jests and laughter; but if they are in earnest, then only soothsayers like you can tell how this will end.

Euthyphro: Well, Socrates, perhaps it won't amount to much, and you will bring your case to a satisfactory ending, as I think I shall mine.

Socrates: What is your case, Euthyphro? Are you defending or prosecuting?

Euthyphro: Prosecuting.

Socrates: Whom?

Euthyphro: Such a man that they think I am insane because I am prosecuting him.

Socrates: Why? Are you prosecuting one who has wings to fly away with?

Euthyphro: No flying for him at his ripe old age.

Socrates: Who is he?

Euthyphro: My father.

Socrates: Your father, my dear man?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: But what is the charge, and what is the suit about?

Euthyphro: Murder, Socrates.

Socrates : Heracles! Surely, Euthyphro, most people do not know where the right lies; for I fancy it is not everyone who can rightly do what you are doing, but only one who is already very far advanced in wisdom.

Euthyphro: Very far, indeed, Socrates, by Zeus.

Socrates: Is the one who was killed by your father a relative? But of course he was; for you would not bring a charge of murder against him on a stranger's account.

Euthyphro: It is ridiculous, Socrates, that you think it matters whether the man who was killed was a stranger or a relative, and do not see that the only thing to consider is whether the action of the slayer was justified or not, and that if it was justified one ought to let him alone, and if not, one ought to proceed against him, even if he share one's hearth and eat at one's table.

For the pollution is the same if you associate knowingly with such a man and do not purify yourself and him by proceeding against him. In this case, the man who was killed was a hired workman of mine, and when we were farming at Naxos, he was working there on our land.

Now he got drunk, got angry with one of our house slaves, and butchered him. So my father bound him hand and foot, threw him into a ditch, and sent a man here to Athens to ask the religious adviser what he ought to do.

In the meantime he paid no attention to the man as he lay there bound, and neglected him, thinking that he was a murderer and it did not matter if he were to die. And that is just what happened to him. For he died of hunger and cold and his bonds before the messenger came back from the adviser.

Now my father and the rest of my relatives are angry with me, because for the sake of this murderer I am prosecuting my father for murder. For they say he did not kill him, and if he had killed him never so much, yet since the dead man was a murderer, I ought not to trouble myself about such a fellow, because it is unholy for a son to prosecute his father for murder. Which shows how little they know what the divine law is in regard to holiness and unholiness.

Socrates: But, in the name of Zeus, Euthyphro, do you think your knowledge about divine laws and holiness and unholiness is so exact that, when the facts are as you say, you are not afraid of doing something unholy yourself in prosecuting your father for murder?

Euthyphro: I should be of no use, Socrates, and Euthyphro would be in no way different from other men, if I did not have exact knowledge about all such things.

Socrates: Then the best thing for me, my admirable Euthyphro, is to become your pupil and, before the suit

with Meletus comes on, to challenge him and say that I always thought it very important before to know about divine matters and that now, since he says I am doing wrong by acting carelessly and making innovations in matters of religion, I have become your pupil.

And “Meletus,” I should say, “if you acknowledge that Euthyphro is wise in such matters, then believe that I also hold correct opinions, and do not bring me to trial; and if you do not acknowledge that, then bring a suit against him, my teacher, rather than against me, and charge him with corrupting the old, namely, his father and me, which he does by teaching me and by correcting and punishing his father.”

And if he does not do as I ask and does not release me from the indictment or bring it against you in my stead, I could say in the court the same things I said in my challenge to him, could I not?

Euthyphro: By Zeus, Socrates, if he should undertake to indict me, I fancy I should find his weak spot, and it would be much more a question about him in court than about me.

Socrates: And I, my dear friend, perceiving this, wish to become your pupil; for I know that neither this fellow Meletus, nor anyone else, seems to notice you at all, but he has seen through me so sharply and so easily that he has indicted me for impiety.

Now in the name of Zeus, tell me what you just now asserted that you knew so well.

What do you say is the nature of piety and impiety, both in relation to murder and to other things?

Is not holiness always the same with itself in every action and, on the other hand, is not unholiness the opposite of all holiness, always the same with itself and whatever is to be unholy possessing some one characteristic quality?

Euthyphro: Certainly, Socrates.

Socrates: Tell me then, what do you say holiness is, and what unholiness?

Euthyphro: Well then, I say that holiness is doing what I am doing now, prosecuting the wrongdoer who commits murder or steals from the temples or does any such thing, whether he be your father, or your mother or anyone else, and not prosecuting him is unholy.

And, Socrates, see what a sure proof I offer you,—a proof I have already given to others,—that this is established and right and that we ought not to let him who acts impiously go unpunished, no matter who he may be.

Men believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, and they acknowledge that he put his father in bonds because he wickedly devoured his children, and he in turn had mutilated his father for similar reasons; but they are incensed against me because I proceed against my father when he has done wrong, and so they are inconsistent in what they say about the gods and about me.

Socrates: Is not this, Euthyphro, the reason why I am being prosecuted, because when people tell such stories about the gods I find it hard to accept them? And therefore, probably, people will say I am wrong.

Now if you, who know so much about such things, accept these tales, I suppose I too must give way. For what am I to say, who confess frankly that I know nothing about them?

But tell me, in the name of Zeus, the god of friendship, do you really believe these things happened?

Euthyphro: Yes, and still more wonderful things than these, Socrates, which most people do not know.

Socrates: And so you believe that there was really war between the gods, and fearful enmities and battles and other things of the sort, such as are told of by the poets and represented in varied designs by the great artists in our sacred places and especially on the robe which is carried up to the Acropolis at the great Panathenaea? for this is covered with such representations. Shall we agree that these things are true, Euthyphro?

Euthyphro: Not only these things, Socrates; but, as I said just now, I will, if you like, tell you many other things about the gods, which I am sure will amaze you when you hear them.

Socrates: I dare say. But you can tell me those things at your leisure some other time. At present try to tell more clearly what I asked you just now. For, my friend, you did not give me sufficient information before, when I asked what holiness was, but you told me that this was holy which you are now doing, prosecuting your father for murder.

Euthyphro: Well, what I said was true, Socrates.

Socrates: Perhaps. But, Euthyphro, you say that many other things are holy, do you not?

Euthyphro: Why, so they are.

Socrates: Now call to mind that this is not what I asked you, to tell me one or two of the many holy acts, but to tell the essential aspect, by which all holy acts are holy; for you said that all unholy acts were unholy and all holy ones holy by one aspect. Or don't you remember?

Euthyphro: I remember.

Socrates: Tell me then what this aspect is, that I may keep my eye fixed upon it and employ it as a model and, if anything you or anyone else does agrees with it, may say that the act is holy, and if not, that it is unholy.

Euthyphro: If you wish me to explain in that way, I will do so.

Socrates: I do wish it.

Euthyphro: Well then, what is dear to the gods is holy, and what is not dear to them is unholy.

Socrates: Excellent, Euthyphro, now you have answered as I asked you to answer. However, whether it is true, I am not yet sure; but you will, of course, show that what you say is true.

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: Come then, let us examine our words. The thing and the person that are dear to the gods are holy, and the thing and the person that are hateful to the gods are unholy; and the two are not the same, but the holy and the unholy are the exact opposites of each other. Is not this what we have said?

Euthyphro: Yes, just this.

Socrates: And it seems to be correct?

Euthyphro: I think so, Socrates.

Socrates: Well then, have we said this also, that the gods, Euthyphro, quarrel and disagree with each other, and that there is enmity between them?

Euthyphro: Yes, we have said that.

Socrates: But what things is the disagreement about, which causes enmity and anger? Let us look at it in this way. If you and I were to disagree about number, for instance, which of two numbers were the greater, would the disagreement about these matters make us enemies and make us angry with each other, or should we not quickly settle it by resorting to arithmetic?

Euthyphro: Of course we should.

Socrates: Then, too, if we were to disagree about the relative size of things, we should quickly put an end to the disagreement by measuring?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: And we should, I suppose, come to terms about relative weights by weighing?

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: But about what would a disagreement be, which we could not settle and which would cause us to be enemies and be angry with each other? Perhaps you cannot give an answer offhand; [7d] but let me suggest it. Is it not about right and wrong, and noble and disgraceful, and good and bad? Are not these the questions about which you and I and other people become enemies, when we do become enemies, because we differ about them and cannot reach any satisfactory agreement?

Euthyphro: Yes, Socrates, these are the questions about which we should become enemies.

Socrates: And how about the gods, Euthyphro, if they disagree, would they not disagree about these questions?

Euthyphro: Necessarily.

Socrates: Then, my noble Euthyphro, according to what you say, some of the gods too think some things are right or wrong and noble or disgraceful, and good or bad, and others disagree; for they would not quarrel with each other if they did not disagree about these matters. Is that the case?

Euthyphro: You are right.

Socrates: Then the gods in each group love the things which they consider good and right and hate the opposites of these things?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: But you say that the same things are considered right by some of them and wrong by others; and it is because they disagree about these things [8a] that they quarrel and wage war with each other. Is not this what you said?

Euthyphro: It is.

Socrates: Then, as it seems, the same things are hated and loved by the gods, and the same things would be dear and hateful to the gods.

Euthyphro: So it seems.

Socrates: And then the same things would be both holy and unholy, Euthyphro, according to this statement.

Euthyphro: I suppose so.

Socrates: Then you did not answer my question, my friend. For I did not ask you what is at once holy and

unholy; but, judging from your reply, what is dear to the gods is also hateful to the gods. And so, Euthyphro, it would not be surprising if, in punishing your father as you are doing, you were performing an act that is pleasing to Zeus, but hateful to Cronus and Uranus, and pleasing to Hephaestus, but hateful to Hera, and so forth in respect to the other gods, if any disagree with any other about it.

Euthyphro: But I think, Socrates, that none of the gods disagrees with any other about this, or holds that he who kills anyone wrongfully ought not to pay the penalty.

Socrates: Well, Euthyphro, to return to men, did you ever hear anybody arguing that he who had killed anyone wrongfully, or had done anything else whatever wrongfully, ought not to pay the penalty?

Euthyphro: Why, they are always arguing these points, especially in the law courts. For they do very many wrong things; and then there is nothing they will not do or say, in defending themselves, to avoid the penalty.

Socrates: Yes, but do they acknowledge, Euthyphro, that they have done wrong and, although they acknowledge it, nevertheless say that they ought not to pay the penalty?

Euthyphro: Oh, no, they don't do that.

Socrates: Then there is something they do not do and say. For they do not, I fancy, dare to say and argue that, if they have really done wrong, they ought not to pay the penalty; but, I think, they say they have not done wrong; do they not?

Euthyphro: You are right.

Socrates: Then they do not argue this point, that the wrongdoer must not pay the penalty; but perhaps they argue about this, who is a wrongdoer, and what he did, and when.

Euthyphro: That is true.

Socrates: Then is not the same thing true of the gods, if they quarrel about right and wrong, as you say, and some say others have done wrong, and some say they have not? For surely, my friend, no one, either of gods or men, has the face to say that he who does wrong ought not to pay the penalty.

Euthyphro: Yes, you are right about this, Socrates, in the main.

Socrates: But I think, Euthyphro, those who dispute, both men and gods, if the gods do dispute, dispute about each separate act. When they differ with one another about any act, some say it was right and others that it was wrong. Is it not so?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: Come now, my dear Euthyphro, inform me, that I may be made wiser, what proof you have that all the gods think that the man lost his life wrongfully, who, when he was a servant, committed murder, was bound by the master of the man he killed, and died as a result of his bonds before the master who had bound him found out from the advisers what he ought to do with him, and that it is right on account of such a man for a son to proceed against his father and accuse him of murder. Come, try to show me clearly about this, that [9b] the gods surely believe that this conduct is right; and if you show it to my satisfaction, I will glorify your wisdom as long as I live.

Euthyphro: But perhaps this is no small task, Socrates; though I could show you quite clearly.

Socrates: I understand; it is because you think I am slower to understand than the judges; since it is plain that you will show them that such acts are wrong and that all the gods hate them.

Euthyphro: Quite clearly, Socrates; that is, if they listen to me.

Socrates: They will listen, if they find that you are a good speaker. [9c] But this occurred to me while you were talking, and I said to myself: “If Euthyphro should prove to me no matter how clearly that all the gods think such a death is wrongful, what have I learned from Euthyphro about the question, what is holiness and what is unholiness? For this act would, as it seems, be hateful to the gods; but we saw just now that holiness and its opposite are not defined in this way; for we saw that what is hateful to the gods is also dear to them; and so I let you off any discussion of this point, Euthyphro. If you like, all the gods may think it wrong and may hate it. But shall we now emend our definition and say that whatever all the gods hate is unholy and whatever they all love is holy, and what some love and others hate is neither or both? Do you wish this now to be our definition of holiness and unholiness?

Euthyphro: What is to hinder, Socrates?

Socrates: Nothing, so far as I am concerned, Euthyphro, but consider your own position, whether by adopting this definition you will most easily teach me what you promised. [9e]

Euthyphro: Well, I should say that what all the gods love is holy and, on the other hand, what they all hate is unholy.

Socrates: Then shall we examine this again, Euthyphro, to see if it is correct, or shall we let it go and accept our own statement, and those of others, agreeing that it is so, if anyone merely says that it is? Or ought we to inquire into the correctness of the statement?

Euthyphro: We ought to inquire. However, I think this is now correct.

Socrates: We shall soon know more about this, my friend. Just consider this question:—**Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?**

Euthyphro: I don't know what you mean, Socrates.

Socrates: Then I will try to speak more clearly. We speak of being carried and of carrying, of being led and of leading, of being seen and of seeing; and you understand—do you not?—that in all such expressions the two parts differ one from the other in meaning, and how they differ.

Euthyphro: I think I understand.

Socrates: Then, too, we conceive of a thing being loved and of a thing loving, and the two are different?

Euthyphro: Of course. Socrates. Now tell me, is a thing which is carried a carried thing because one carries it, or for some other reason?

Euthyphro: No, for that reason.

Socrates: And a thing which is led –is it led because one leads it, and a thing which is seen is so because one sees it?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: Then one does not see it because its a seen thing, but, on the contrary, it is a seen thing because one sees it; and one does not lead it because it is a led thing, but it is a led thing because one leads it; and one does not carry it because it is a carried thing, but it is a carried thing because one carries it.

Is it clear, Euthyphro, what I am trying to say? I am trying to say this, that if anything becomes or undergoes, it does not become because it is in a state of becoming, but it is in a state of becoming because it becomes, and it does not undergo because it is a thing which undergoes, but because it undergoes it is a thing which undergoes; or do you not agree to this?

Euthyphro: I agree.

Socrates: Is not that which is beloved a thing which is either becoming or undergoing something?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: And is this case like the former ones: those who love it do not love it because it is a bad thing, but it is a beloved thing because they love it?

Euthyphro: Obviously.

Socrates: Now what do you say about that which is holy, Euthyphro, it is loved by all the gods, is it not, according to what you said?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: For this reason, because it is holy, or for some other reason?

Euthyphro: No, for this reason.

Socrates: It is loved because it is holy, not holy because it is loved?

Euthyphro: I think so.

Socrates: But that which is dear to the gods is dear to them and beloved by them because they love it.

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: Then that which is dear to the gods and that which is holy are not identical, but differ one from the other.

Euthyphro: How so, Socrates?

Socrates: Because we are agreed that the holy is loved because it is holy and that it is not holy because it is loved; are we not?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: But we are agreed that what is dear to the gods is dear to them because they love it, that is, by reason of this love, not that they love it because it is dear.

Euthyphro: Very true.

Socrates: But if that which is dear to the gods and that which is holy were identical, my dear Euthyphro, then if the holy were loved because it is holy, that which is dear to the gods would be loved because it is dear, and if that which is dear to the gods is dear because it is loved, then that which is holy would be holy because it is loved; but now you see that the opposite is the case, showing that the two are different from each other.

For the one becomes lovable from the fact that it is loved, whereas the other is loved because it is in itself lovable.

And, Euthyphro, it seems that when you were asked what holiness is you were unwilling to make plain its essence, but you mentioned something that has happened to this holiness, namely, that it is loved by the gods. But you did not tell as yet what it really is.

So, if you please, do not hide it from me, but begin over again and tell me what holiness is, no matter whether

it is loved by the gods or anything else happens it; for we shall not quarrel about that. But tell me frankly, What is holiness, and what is unholiness?

Euthyphro: But, Socrates, I do not know how to say what I mean. For whatever statement we advance, somehow or other it moves about and won't stay where we put it.

Socrates: Your statements, Euthyphro, are like works of my² ancestor Daedalus, and if I were the one who made or advanced them, you might laugh at me and say that on account of my relationship to him my works in words run away and won't stay where they are put. But now—well, the statements are yours; so some other jest is demanded; for they stay fixed, as you yourself see.

Euthyphro: I think the jest does very well as it is; for I am not the one who makes these statements move about and not stay in the same place, but you are the Daedalus; for they would have stayed, so far as I am concerned.

Socrates: Apparently then, my friend, I am a more clever artist than Daedalus, inasmuch as he made only his own works move, whereas I, as it seems, give motion to the works of others as well as to my own. And the most exquisite thing about my art is that I am clever against my will; for I would rather have my words stay fixed and stable than possess the wisdom of Daedalus and the wealth of Tantalus besides. But enough of this. Since you seem to be indolent, I will aid you myself, so that you may instruct me about holiness. And do not give it up beforehand. Just see whether you do not think that everything that is holy is right.

Euthyphro: I do.

Socrates: But is everything that is right also holy? Or is all which is holy right, and not all which is right holy, but part of it holy and part something else?

Euthyphro: I can't follow you, Socrates.

Socrates: And yet you are as much younger than I as you are wiser; but, as I said, you are indolent on account of your wealth of wisdom. But exert yourself, my friend; for it is not hard to understand what I mean. What I mean is the opposite of what the poet said, who wrote:

“Zeus the creator, him who made all things,
thou wilt not name; for where fear is, there also is reverence.”

– Stasinus, author of the *Cypria*

Socrates: Now I disagree with the poet. Shall I tell you how?

Euthyphro: By all means.

Socrates: It does not seem to me true that where fear is, there also is reverence; for many who fear diseases and

poverty and other such things seem to me to fear, but not to reverence at all these things which they fear. Don't you think so, too?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: But I think that where reverence is, there also is fear; for does not everyone who has a feeling of reverence and shame about any act also dread and fear the reputation for wickedness?

Euthyphro: Yes, he does fear.

Socrates: Then it is not correct to say "where fear is, there also is reverence." On the contrary, where reverence is, there also is fear; but reverence is not everywhere where fear is, since, as I think, fear is more comprehensive than reverence; for reverence is a part of fear, just as the odd is a part of number, so that it is not true that where number is, there also is the odd, but that where the odd is, there also is number. Perhaps you follow me now?

Euthyphro: Perfectly.

Socrates: It was something of this sort that I meant before, when I asked whether where the right is, there also is holiness, or where holiness is, there also is the right; but holiness is not everywhere where the right is, for holiness is a part of the right. Do we agree to this, or do you dissent?

Euthyphro: No, I agree; for I think the statement is correct.

Socrates: Now observe the next point. If holiness is a part of the right, we must, apparently, find out what part of the right holiness is. Now if you asked me about one of the things I just mentioned, as, for example, what part of number the even was, and what kind of a number it was I should say, "that which is not indivisible by two, but divisible by two"; or don't you agree?

Euthyphro: I agree. Socrates. Now try in your turn to teach me what part of the right holiness is, that I may tell Meletus not to wrong me any more or bring suits against me for impiety, since I have now been duly instructed by you about what is, and what is not, pious and holy.

Euthyphro: This then is my opinion, Socrates, that the part of the right which has to do with attention to the gods constitutes piety and holiness, and that the remaining part of the right is that which has to do with the service of men.

Socrates: I think you are correct, Euthyphro; [13a] but there is one little point about which I still want information, for I do not yet understand what you mean by "attention." I don't suppose you mean the same kind of attention to the gods which is paid to other things. We say, for example, that not everyone knows how to attend to horses, but only he who is skilled in horsemanship, do we not?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: Then horsemanship is the art of attending to horses?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: And not everyone knows how to attend to dogs, but only the huntsman?

Euthyphro: That is so.

Socrates: Then the huntsman's art is the art of attending to dogs?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: And the oxherd's art is that of attending to oxen?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: And holiness and piety is the art of attending to the gods? Is that what you mean, Euthyphro?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: Now does attention always aim to accomplish the same end? I mean something like this: It aims at some good or benefit to the one to whom it is given, as you see that horses, when attended to by the horseman's art are benefited and made better; or don't you think so?

Euthyphro: Yes, I do.

Socrates: And dogs are benefited by the huntsman's art and oxen by the oxherd's and everything else in the same way? Or do you think care and attention are ever meant for the injury of that which is cared for?

Euthyphro: No, by Zeus, I do not.

Socrates: But for its benefit?

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: Then holiness, since it is the art of attending to the gods, is a benefit to the gods, and makes them better? And you would agree that when you do a holy or pious act you are making one of the gods better?

Euthyphro: No, by Zeus, not I.

Socrates: Nor do I, Euthyphro, think that is what you meant. Far from it. But I asked what you meant by [13d] "attention to the gods" just because I did not think you meant anything like that.

Euthyphro: You are right, Socrates; that is not what I mean.

Socrates: Well, what kind of attention to the gods is holiness?

Euthyphro: The kind, Socrates, that servants pay to their masters.

Socrates: I understand. It is, you mean, a kind of service to the gods?

Euthyphro: Exactly.

Socrates: Now can you tell me what result the art that serves the physician serves to produce? Is it not health?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: Well then; what is it which the art that serves shipbuilders serves to produce?

Euthyphro: Evidently, Socrates, a ship.

Socrates: And that which serves housebuilders serves to build a house?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: Then tell me, my friend; what would the art which serves the gods serve to accomplish? For it is evident that you know, since you say you know more than any other man about matters which have to do with the gods.

Euthyphro: And what I say is true, Socrates.

Socrates: Then, in the name of Zeus, tell me, what is that glorious result which the gods accomplish by using us as servants?

Euthyphro: They accomplish many fine results, Socrates.

Socrates: Yes, and so do generals, my friend; but nevertheless, you could easily tell the chief of them, namely, that they bring about victory in war. Is that not the case?

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: And farmers also, I think, accomplish many fine results; but still the chief result of their work is food from the land?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: But how about the many fine results the gods accomplish? What is the chief result of their work?

Euthyphro: I told you a while ago, Socrates, that it is a long task to learn accurately all about these things. However, I say simply that when one knows how to say and do what is gratifying to the gods, in praying and sacrificing, that is holiness, and such things bring salvation to individual families and to states; and the opposite of what is gratifying to the gods is impious, and that overturns and destroys everything.

Socrates: You might, if you wished, Euthyphro, have answered much more briefly the chief part of my question. But it is plain that you do not care to instruct me. [14c] For now, when you were close upon it you turned aside; and if you had answered it, I should already have obtained from you all the instruction I need about holiness. But, as things are, the questioner must follow the one questioned wherever he leads. What do you say the holy, or holiness, is? Do you not say that it is a kind of science of sacrificing and praying?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: And sacrificing is making gifts to the gods and praying is asking from them?

Euthyphro: Exactly, Socrates.

Socrates: Then holiness, according to this definition, would be a science of giving and asking.

Euthyphro: You understand perfectly what I said, Socrates.

Socrates: Yes, my friend, for I am eager for your wisdom, and give my mind to it, so that nothing you say shall fall to the ground. But tell me, what is this service of the gods? Do you say that it consists in asking from them and giving to them?

Euthyphro: Yes.

Socrates: Would not the right way of asking be to ask of them what we need from them?

Euthyphro: What else?

Socrates: And the right way of giving, to present them with what they need from us? For it would not be scientific giving to give anyone what he does not need.

Euthyphro: You are right, Socrates.

Socrates: Then holiness would be an art of barter between gods and men?

Euthyphro: Yes, of barter, if you like to call it so.

Socrates: I don't like to call it so, if it is not true. But tell me, what advantage accrues to the gods from the gifts they get from us? For everybody knows what they give, [15a] since we have nothing good which they do not

give. But what advantage do they derive from what they get from us? Or have we so much the better of them in our bartering that we get all good things from them and they nothing from us?

Euthyphro: Why you don't suppose, Socrates, that the gods gain any advantage from what they get from us, do you?

Socrates: Well then, what would those gifts of ours to the gods be?

Euthyphro: What else than honor and praise, and, as I said before, gratitude?

Socrates: Then, Euthyphro, holiness is grateful to the gods, but not advantageous or precious to the gods?

Euthyphro: I think it is precious, above all things.

Socrates: Then again, it seems, holiness is that which is precious to the gods.

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: Then will you be surprised, since you say this, if your words do not remain fixed but walk about, and will you accuse me of being the Daedalus who makes them walk, when you are yourself much more skillful than Daedalus and make them go round in a circle? Or do you not see that our definition has come round to the point from which it started? For you remember, I suppose, that a while ago we found that holiness and what is dear to the gods were not the same, but different from each other; or do you not remember?

Euthyphro: Yes, I remember.

Socrates: Then don't you see that now you say that what is precious to the gods is holy? And is not this what is dear to the gods?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: Then either our agreement a while ago was wrong, or if that was right, we are wrong now.

Euthyphro: So it seems.

Socrates: Then we must begin again at the beginning and ask what holiness is. Since I shall not willingly give up until I learn. And do not scorn me, but by all means apply your mind now to the utmost and tell me the truth; for you know, if anyone does, and like Proteus, you must be held until you speak. For if you had not clear knowledge of holiness and unholiness, you would surely not have undertaken to prosecute your aged father for murder for the sake of a servant. You would have been afraid to risk the anger of the gods, in case your conduct should be wrong, and would have been ashamed in the sight of men. But now I am sure you think you know what is holy and what is not. So tell me, most excellent Euthyphro, and do not conceal your thought.

Euthyphro: Some other time, Socrates. Now I am in a hurry and it is time for me to go.

Socrates: Oh my friend, what are you doing? You go away and leave me cast down from the high hope I had that I should learn from you what is holy, and what is not, and should get rid of Meletus's indictment by showing him that I have been made wise by Euthyphro about divine matters and am no longer through ignorance acting carelessly and making innovations in respect to them, and that I shall live a better life henceforth.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Why is Euthyphro considered the most pious person in all of Athens? What would signal a comparative level of religious commitment in our day and age?
2. For polytheists like the ancient Athenians, conflicting commands or loves of the gods present a problem. What might be an analog today to this problem and can we apply Socrates' and Euthyphro's solution to it?
3. Euthyphro and Socrates talk a bit about Socrates' "innovations in religion". What were these and what might be an analog today?
4. Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?

Citation and Use

This text is taken from the following work found at Perseus.

Plato, "Euthyphro," in *Plato in 12 Volumes, Vol 1*, trans. Howard North Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1966), <https://web.archive.org/save/http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0170:text=Euthyphr>.

The text as hosted by TUFS on Perseus is governed by the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License.

Media Attributions

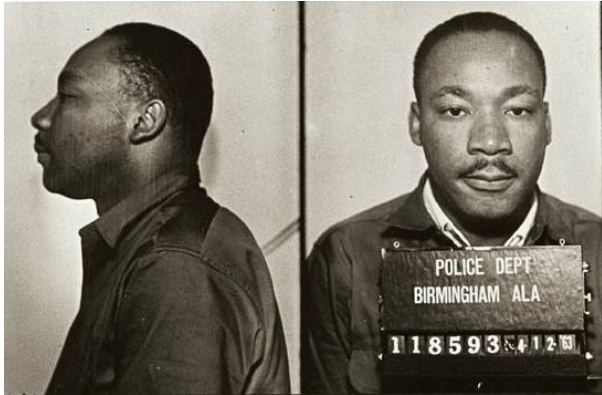
- Statue of Plato by Leonidas Drosis © Leonidas Drosis adapted by Henry Imler is licensed under a Public Domain license



This work (Euthyphro by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

LETTER FROM THE BIRMINGHAM CITY JAIL

Martin King



Martin Luther King Jr.'s mugshot while he was jailed in Birmingham in 1963.

In this classic American text, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 – 1968 CE), one of the most hated people in the US at the time, outlines three major ideas. First, he discusses the purpose and method of non-violent direct action. Then he identifies white moderates as the principle roadblock in the struggle for equal rights, who hem and haw over civility and advise them to take things slow.

Finally, he sketches out the moral duty people have to adhere to Natural Law when it conflicts with human law. In so doing, he canonizes civil disobedience in USA cultural memory as a crucial method on the path to reforming society.

Birmingham City Jail

April 16, 1963

My dear Fellow Clergymen, While confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities “unwise and untimely.” Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would be engaged in little else in the course of the day and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine goodwill and your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms. I think I should give the reason for my being in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the argument of “outsiders coming in.” I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every Southern state with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliate organizations all across the South — one being the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Whenever necessary

and possible we share staff, educational, and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented and when the hour came we lived up to our promises. So I am here, along with several members of my staff, because we were invited here. I am here because I have basic organizational ties here. Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth century prophets left their little villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home town, and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid. Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere in this country. You deplore the demonstrations that are presently taking place in Birmingham. But I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being. I am sure that each of you would want to go beyond the superficial social analyst who looks merely at effects, and does not grapple with underlying causes. I would not hesitate to say that it is unfortunate that so-called demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham at this time, but I would say in more emphatic terms that it is even more unfortunate that the white power structure of this city left the Negro community with no other alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps:

1. Collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive;
2. Negotiation;
3. Self-purification; and
4. Direct action.

We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying of the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of this country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than any city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts. On the basis of these conditions Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.

Then came the opportunity last September to talk with some of the leaders of the economic community. In

these negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants — such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of these promises Rev. Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstrations. As the weeks and months unfolded we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. As in so many experiences of the past we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through a process of self-purification. We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, “Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?” “Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?”

We decided to set our direct-action program around the Easter season, realizing that with the exception of Christmas, this was the largest shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this was the best time to bring pressure on the merchants for the needed changes. Then it occurred to us that the March election was ahead, and so we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that Mr. Connor was in the run-off, we decided again to postpone action so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. At this time we agreed to begin our nonviolent witness the day after the run-off.

This reveals that we did not move irresponsibly into direct action. We too wanted to see Mr. Connor defeated; so we went through postponement after postponement to aid in this community need. After this we felt that direct action could be delayed no longer.

You may well ask, Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word tension. I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. So the purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. We, therefore, concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. Some have asked, “Why didn’t you give the new administration time to act?” The only answer that I can give to this inquiry is that the new administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one before it acts. We will be sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Mr. Boutwell will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is much more articulate and gentle than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists dedicated to the task of maintaining the status quo. The hope I see in Mr. Boutwell is that he will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from the devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups are more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly I have never yet engaged in a direct action movement that was “well timed,” according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This “wait” has almost always meant “never.” It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.

I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say wait. But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos: “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?”; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” men and “colored”; when your first name becomes “nigger” and your middle name becomes “boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John,” and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title

“Mrs.”; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness” — then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court’s decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask: “How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?” The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: There are just laws and there are unjust laws. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with Saint Augustine that “An unjust law is no law at all.”

Now what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. To use the words of Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an “I-it” relationship for an “I-thou” relationship, and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Isn’t segregation an existential expression of man’s tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.

Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.

Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama all types of conniving methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote despite the fact that the Negro constitutes a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?

These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws. There are some instances when a law is just on its face but unjust in its application. For instance, I was arrested Friday on a charge of parading without a permit. Now there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust.

I hope you can see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law as the rabid segregationist would do. This would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do it openly, lovingly (not hatefully as the white mothers did in New Orleans when they were seen on television screaming “nigger, nigger, nigger”) and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law.

Of course there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks, before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.

We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was “illegal.” It was “illegal” to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. But I am sure that, if I had lived in Germany during that time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negroes’ great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s “Counciler” or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South

is merely a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, where the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substance-filled positive peace, where all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But can this assertion be logically made? Isn't this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical delvings precipitated the misguided popular mind to make him drink the hemlock? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because His unique God consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see, as federal courts have consistently affirmed, that it is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth of time. I received a letter this morning from a white brother in Texas which said: "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but is it possible that you are in too great of a religious hurry? It has taken Christianity almost 2,000 years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." All that is said here grows out of a tragic misconception of time. It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively. I am coming to feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.

We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

You spoke of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of the extremist. I started thinking about the fact that I stand in

the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency made up of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect and a sense of “somebodiness” that they have adjusted to segregation, and of a few Negroes in the middle class who, because of a degree of academic and economic security, and because at points they profit by segregation, have unconsciously become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred and comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad’s Muslim movement. This movement is nourished by the contemporary frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. It is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable “devil.” I have tried to stand between these two forces saying that we need not follow the “do-nothingism” of the complacent or the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. There is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I’m grateful to God that, through the Negro church, the dimension of nonviolence entered our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged I am convinced that by now many streets of the South would be flowing with floods of blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss us as “rabble rousers” and “outside agitators” — those of us who are working through the channels of nonviolent direct action — and refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes, out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideologies, a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come. This is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom; something without has reminded him that he can gain it. Consciously and unconsciously, he has been swept in by what the Germans call the *Zeitgeist*, and with his black brothers of Africa, and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. Recognizing this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand public demonstrations. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometime; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history. So I have not said to my people, “Get rid of your discontent.” But I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled through the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. Now this approach is being dismissed as extremist. I must admit that I was initially disappointed in being so categorized.

But as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love? “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you.” Was not Amos an extremist for justice — “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ — “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” Was not Martin Luther an extremist — “Here I stand; I can do none other

so help me God.” Was not John Bunyan an extremist — “I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.” Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist — “This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.” Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist — “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” So the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice — or will we be extremists for the cause of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary’s hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime — the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness, and thereby rose above His environment. So, after all, maybe the South, the nation, and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

I had hoped that the white moderate would see this. Maybe I was too optimistic. Maybe I expected too much. I guess I should have realized that few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those that have been oppressed, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too small in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some like Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, and James Dabbs have written about our struggle in eloquent, prophetic, and understanding terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach-infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of angry policemen who see them as “dirty nigger lovers.” They, unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful “action” antidotes to combat the disease of segregation.

Let me rush on to mention my other disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white Church and its leadership. Of course there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue. I commend you, Rev. Stallings, for your Christian stand on this past Sunday, in welcoming Negroes to your worship service on a non-segregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Spring Hill College several years ago.

But despite these notable exceptions I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the Church. I do not say that as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the Church. I say it as a minister of the gospel, who loves the Church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

I had the strange feeling when I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery several years ago that we would have the support of the white Church. I felt that the white ministers, priests, and rabbis of the South would be some of our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been

more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of the stained glass windows.

In spite of my shattered dreams of the past, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and with deep moral concern, serve as the channel through which our just grievances could get to the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshippers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother. In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, "Those are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern," and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular.

So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a tail-light behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice.

I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at her beautiful churches with their spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlay of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over again I have found myself asking: "Who worships here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave the clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when tired, bruised, and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?"

Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment, I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the Church; I love her sacred walls. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson, and the great-grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the Church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and fear of being nonconformist.

There was a time when the Church was very powerful. It was during that period when the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the Church was

not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being “disturbers of the peace” and “outside agitators.” But they went on with the conviction that they were “a colony of heaven” and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be “astronomically intimidated.” They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary Church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch-supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the Church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the Church’s silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the Church as never before. If the Church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early Church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. I am meeting young people every day whose disappointment with the Church has risen to outright disgust.

Maybe again I have been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Maybe I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual Church, the church within the Church, as the true ecclesia and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia, with us. They have gone through the highways of the South on torturous rides for freedom. Yes, they have gone to jail with us. Some have been kicked out of their churches and lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have gone with the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. These men have been the leaven in the lump of the race. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the Gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment.

I hope the Church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the Church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are presently misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. For more than two centuries our foreparents labored in this country without wages; they made cotton “king”; and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation — and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our

freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

I must close now. But before closing I am impelled to mention one other point in your statement that troubled me profoundly. You warmly commend the Birmingham police force for keeping “order” and “preventing violence.” I don’t believe you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its angry violent dogs literally biting six unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I don’t believe you would so quickly commend the policemen if you would observe their ugly and inhuman treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you would watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you would see them slap and kick old Negro men and young Negro boys; if you will observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I’m sorry that I can’t join you in your praise for the police department.

It is true that they have been rather disciplined in their public handling of the demonstrators. In this sense they have been rather publicly “nonviolent.” But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the last few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. So I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong or even more so to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Maybe Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather publicly nonviolent, as Chief Pritchett was in Albany, Georgia, but they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of flagrant injustice. T. S. Eliot has said that there is no greater treason than to do the right deed for the wrong reason.

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their amazing discipline in the midst of the most inhuman provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, courageously and with a majestic sense of purpose, facing jeering and hostile mobs and the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two year old woman of Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride the segregated buses, and responded to one who inquired about her tiredness with ungrammatical profundity: “My feets is tired, but my soul is rested.” They will be the young high school and college students, young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders courageously and nonviolently sitting-in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, and thus carrying our whole nation back to great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Never before have I written a letter this long (or should I say a book?). I’m afraid it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a

comfortable desk, but what else is there to do when you are alone for days in the dull monotony of a narrow jail cell other than write long letters, think strange thoughts, and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that is an overstatement of the truth and is indicative of an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything in this letter that is an understatement of the truth and is indicative of my having a patience that makes me patient with anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader, but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

Martin Luther King, Jr.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. King claims that one of the greatest obstacles for racial justice was the hang-wringing white moderate. Evaluate this claim.
2. Research King's popularity during the Civil Rights Movement as compared to today. What does this tell us about figures calling a community to embody a higher moral ideal in general and today?
3. What is King's rationale for disobeying the laws of the land. Evaluate his reasoning.
4. What is the direct action and how is it different from more common forms of protest?
5. King outlines the 4 steps in any non-violent direct action. Name a problem in your society which you think direct action would be necessary to solve and work through the 4 steps. What would that look like for you?
6. Would you be involved with a non-violent protest or engage in civil disobedience? Why or why not and for what causes?

Citation and Use

King, M.L., Jr. (1963). *Letter from The Birmingham City Jail*.

This version, originally released without copyright in 1963 and disseminated widely, is assumed to be in the Public Domain.

Media Attributions

- Martin Luther King Jr.'s mugshot while he was jailed in Birmingham. © Birmingham AL Police Department is licensed under a Public Domain license



This work (Letter from the Birmingham City Jail by Martin King) is free of known copyright restrictions.

UNIT 4 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

On the Genealogy of Morality
by Friedrich Nietzsche

Buddhist Well-Being
by Christopher Gowans

Bhagavad-Gita, I. The First Teaching: Arjuna's Dejection
trans. by Barbara Stoler Miller

Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture
by Hannah Arendt

UNIT V

UNIT 5: JUSTICE

PLATO'S REPUBLIC - BOOK II

Plato

Republic

Book II

SOCRATES – GLAUCON

WITH these words I was thinking that I had made an end of the discussion; but the end, in truth, proved to be only a beginning. For Glaucon, who is always the most pugnacious of men, was dissatisfied at Thrasymachus' retirement; he wanted to have the battle out. So he said to me: Socrates, do you wish really to persuade us, or only to seem to have persuaded us, that to be just is always better than to be unjust?

I should wish really to persuade you, I replied, if I could.

Then you certainly have not succeeded. Let me ask you now:—How would you arrange goods—are there not some which we welcome for their own sakes, and independently of their consequences, as, for example, harmless pleasures and enjoyments, which delight us at the time, although nothing follows from them?

I agree in thinking that there is such a class, I replied.

Is there not also a second class of goods, such as knowledge, sight, health, which are desirable not only in themselves, but also for their results?

Certainly, I said.

And would you not recognize a third class, such as gymnastic, and the care of the sick, and the physician's art; also the various ways of money-making—these do us good but we regard them as disagreeable; and no one would choose them for their own sakes, but only for the sake of some reward or result which flows from them?

There is, I said, this third class also. But why do you ask?

Because I want to know in which of the three classes you would place justice?

In the highest class, I replied,—among those goods which he who would be happy desires both for their own sake and for the sake of their results.

Then the many are of another mind; they think that justice is to be reckoned in the troublesome class, among goods which are to be pursued for the sake of rewards and of reputation, but in themselves are disagreeable and rather to be avoided.

I know, I said, that this is their manner of thinking, and that this was the thesis which Thrasymachus was maintaining just now, when he censured justice and praised injustice. But I am too stupid to be convinced by him.

I wish, he said, that you would hear me as well as him, and then I shall see whether you and I agree. For Thrasymachus seems to me, like a snake, to have been charmed by your voice sooner than he ought to have been; but to my mind the nature of justice and injustice have not yet been made clear. Setting aside their rewards and results, I want to know what they are in themselves, and how they inwardly work in the soul. If you, please, then, I will revive the argument of Thrasymachus. And first I will speak of the nature and origin of justice according to the common view of them. Secondly, I will show that all men who practise justice do so against their will, of necessity, but not as a good. And thirdly, I will argue that there is reason in this view, for the life of the unjust is after all better far than the life of the just—if what they say is true, Socrates, since I myself am not of their opinion. But still I acknowledge that I am perplexed when I hear the voices of Thrasymachus and myriads of others dinning in my ears; and, on the other hand, I have never yet heard the superiority of justice to injustice maintained by any one in a satisfactory way. I want to hear justice praised in respect of itself; then I shall be satisfied, and you are the person from whom I think that I am most likely to hear this; and therefore I will praise the unjust life to the utmost of my power, and my manner of speaking will indicate the manner in which I desire to hear you too praising justice and censuring injustice. Will you say whether you approve of my proposal?

Indeed I do; nor can I imagine any theme about which a man of sense would oftener wish to converse.

I am delighted, he replied, to hear you say so, and shall begin by speaking, as I proposed, of the nature and origin of justice.

GLAUCON

They say that to do injustice is, by nature, good; to suffer injustice, evil; but that the evil is greater than the good. And so when men have both done and suffered injustice and have had experience of both, not being able to avoid the one and obtain the other, they think that they had better agree among themselves to have neither; hence there arise laws and mutual covenants; and that which is ordained by law is termed by them lawful and just. This they affirm to be the origin and nature of justice;—it is a mean or compromise, between the best of all, which is to do injustice and not be punished, and the worst of all, which is to suffer injustice without the power of retaliation; and justice, being at a middle point between the two, is tolerated not as a good, but as the

lesser evil, and honoured by reason of the inability of men to do injustice with impunity. For no man who is worthy to be called a man would ever submit to such an agreement if he were able to resist; he would be mad if he did. Such is the received account, Socrates, of the nature and origin of justice.

Now, that those who practise justice do so involuntarily and because they have not the power to be unjust will best appear if we imagine something of this kind: having given both to the just and the unjust power to do what they will, let us watch and see whither desire will lead them; then we shall discover in the very act the just and unjust man to be proceeding along the same road, following their interest, which all natures deem to be their good, and are only diverted into the path of justice by the force of law. The liberty which we are supposing may be most completely given to them in the form of such a power as is said to have been possessed by Gyges the ancestor of Croesus the Lydian. According to the tradition, Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia; there was a great storm, and an earthquake made an opening in the earth at the place where he was feeding his flock. Amazed at the sight, he descended into the opening, where, among other marvels, he beheld a hollow brazen horse, having doors, at which he, stooping and looking in, saw a dead body of stature, as appeared to him, more than human, and having nothing on but a gold ring; this he took from the finger of the dead and reascended. Now the shepherds met together, according to custom, that they might send their monthly report about the flocks to the king; into their assembly he came having the ring on his finger, and, as he was sitting among them, he chanced to turn the collet of the ring inside his hand, when instantly he became invisible to the rest of the company and they began to speak of him as if he were no longer present. He was astonished at this, and again touching the ring he turned the collet outwards and reappeared; he made several trials of the ring, and always with the same result: when he turned the collet inwards, he became invisible; when outwards, he reappeared. Whereupon he contrived to be chosen one of the messengers who were sent to the court; where as soon as he arrived he seduced the queen, and with her help conspired against the king and slew him, and took the kingdom.

Suppose now that there were two such magic rings, and the just put on one of them and the unjust the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice. No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a god among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point. And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for, wherever any one thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice, and he who argues as I have been supposing, will say that they are right. If you could imagine any one obtaining this power of becoming invisible, and never doing any wrong or touching what was another's, he would be thought by the lookers-on to be a most wretched idiot, although they would praise him to one another's faces and keep up appearances with one another from a fear that they too might suffer injustice. Enough of this.

Now, if we are to form a real judgement of the life of the just and unjust, we must isolate them; there is no other way; and how is the isolation to be effected? I answer: let the unjust man be entirely unjust, and the just man entirely just; nothing is to be taken away from either of them, and both are to be perfectly furnished for the work of their respective lives. First, let the unjust be like other distinguished masters of craft; like the skilful captain or physician, who knows intuitively his own powers and keeps within their limits, and who, if he fails at any point, is able to recover himself. So let the unjust make his unjust attempts in the right way, and lie hidden if he means to be great in his injustice (he who is found out is nobody): for the highest reach of injustice is: to be deemed just when you are not. Therefore, I say that, in the perfectly unjust man, we must assume the most perfect injustice; there is to be no deduction, but we must allow him, while doing the most unjust acts, to have acquired the greatest reputation for justice. If he has taken a false step, he must be able to recover himself; he must be one who can speak with effect if any of his deeds come to light; and, where force is required, he must have the aid of courage, strength and the abundance of money and friends that he has accumulated.

And, at his side, let us place the just man in his nobleness and simplicity, wishing, as Aeschylus says, to be and not to seem good. There must be no seeming, for, if he seems to be just, he will be honoured and rewarded, and then we shall not know whether he is just for the sake of justice or for the sake of honours and rewards; therefore, let him be clothed in justice only, and have no other covering; and he must be imagined in a state of life the opposite of the former. Let him be the best of men, and let him be thought the worst; then he will have been put to the proof; and we shall see whether he will be affected by the fear of infamy and its consequences. And let him continue thus to the hour of death; being just and seeming to be unjust. When both have reached the uttermost extreme, the one of justice and the other of injustice, let judgement be given which of them is the happier of the two.

SOCRATES – GLAUCON

Heavens! My dear Glaucon, I said, how energetically you polish them up for the decision, first one and then the other, as if they were two statues.

I do my best, he said. And, now that we know what they are like, there is no difficulty in tracing out the sort of life that awaits either of them. This I will proceed to describe, but, as you may think the description a little too coarse, I ask you to suppose, Socrates, that the words which follow are not mine; let me put them instead into the mouths of the eulogists of injustice: they will tell you that the just man who is thought unjust will be scourged, racked, bound; will have his eyes burnt out; and, at last, after suffering every kind of evil, he will be impaled; then he will understand that he ought to seem only, and not to be, just. The words of Aeschylus may be more truly spoken of the unjust than of the just, for the unjust is pursuing a reality; he does not live with a view to appearances; he wants to be really unjust and not merely to seem so:

His mind has a soil deep and fertile,

Out of which spring his prudent counsels. [*Septem* 592 sq]

In the first place, he is thought just and therefore bears rule in the city. He can marry whom he will and give in marriage to whom he will; also, he can trade and deal where he likes and always to his own advantage, because he has no misgivings about injustice; and, at every contest, whether in public or in private, he gets the better of his antagonists and gains at their expense, and is rich; and, out of his gains, he can benefit his friends and harm his enemies; moreover, he can offer sacrifices and dedicate gifts to the gods abundantly and magnificently, and can honour the gods or any man whom he wants to honour in a style far better than the just and, therefore, is likely to be dearer than they are to the gods. And thus, Socrates, gods and men are said to unite in making the life of the unjust better than the life of the just.

ADEIMANTUS – SOCRATES

I was going to say something in answer to Glaucon when Adeimantus, his brother, interposed: Socrates, he said, you do not suppose that there is nothing more to be urged?

Why, what else is there? I answered.

The strongest point of all has not even been mentioned, he replied.

Well, then, according to the proverb “Let brother help brother”, if he fails in any part, you assist him; although I must confess that Glaucon has already said quite enough to lay me in the dust and take from me the power of helping justice.

ADEIMANTUS

Nonsense, he replied. But let me add something more: there is another side to Glaucon’s argument about the praise and censure of justice and injustice, which is equally required in order to bring out what I believe to be his meaning. Parents and tutors are always telling their sons and their wards that they are to be just, but why? Not for the sake of justice but for the sake of character and reputation, in the hope of obtaining for him who is reputed just some of those offices, marriages and the like, which Glaucon has enumerated among the advantages accruing to the unjust from the reputation of justice. More, however, is made of appearances by this class of persons than by the others, for they throw in the good opinion of the gods and will tell you of a shower of benefits which the heavens, as they say, rain upon the pious, and this accords with the testimony of the noble Hesiod and Homer, the first of whom says, that the gods make the oaks of the just

To hear acorns at their summit and bees in the middle

And make fleecy sheep heavy-laden with wool [Hesiod, *Works and Days* 232 sq]

and many other blessings of a like kind are provided for them. Homer has a very similar strain, for he speaks of one whose fame is

When a blameless king, in his piety,

Upholds justice, the black earth brings forth

Wheat and barley for him, whose trees are bowed with fruit;

His sheep never fail to bear, and the sea yields to him its fish. [Homer, *Odyssey* 19.109 sq]

Still grander are the gifts of heaven which Musaeus and his son vouchsafe to the just: they take them down into the world below, where they have the saints lying on couches at a feast, everlastingly drunk and crowned with garlands; their idea seems to be that an immortality of drunkenness is the highest meed of virtue. Some extend their rewards yet further: they say that the posterity of the faithful and just shall survive to the third and fourth generation.

This is the style in which they praise justice, but about the impious and unjust there is another strain: they bury them in a slough in Hades and make them carry water in a sieve; also, while they are yet living, they bring them to infamy and inflict upon them the punishments which Glaucon described as the portion of the just who are reputed to be unjust. Nothing else does their invention supply, such is their manner of praising the one and censuring the other.

Besides this, Socrates, I will ask you to consider another way of speaking about justice and injustice, which is not confined to the poets but is found in prose writers. The universal voice of mankind is always declaring that justice and virtue are honourable but grievous and toilsome, and that the pleasures of vice and injustice are easy of attainment and only censured by law and opinion. They say also that honesty is, for the most part, less profitable than dishonesty, and they are quite ready to call wicked men happy and to honour them both in public and in private when they are rich or in any other way influential, while they despise and overlook those who may be weak and poor, even though acknowledging them to be better than the others.

But most extraordinary of all is their mode of speaking about virtue and the gods: they say that the gods apportion calamity and misery to many good men, and good and happiness to the wicked. And mendicant prophets go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power committed to them by the gods of making atonement for a man's own or his ancestor's sins by sacrifices or charms, with rejoicings and feasts, and they promise to harm an enemy, whether just or unjust, at a small cost, with magic arts and incantations, binding heaven, as they say, to execute their will. And the poets are the authorities to whom they appeal, now smoothing the path of vice with the words of Hesiod:

Vice in abundance is easy to get.

The road is smooth and begins beside you,

But the gods have put sweat between us and virtue, [Hesiod, *Works and Days* 287 sq]

and a tedious and uphill road. Others cite Homer as a witness that the gods may be influenced by men, for he also says:

The gods themselves can be swayed by prayer,

And, with sacrifices and soothing promises,

Incense and libations, humans turn them from their purpose

When someone has transgressed and sinned. [Homer, *Iliad* 9.497 sq]

And they produce a host of books written by Musaeus and Orpheus, who were children of the Moon and the Muses — that is what they say —, according to which they perform their ritual and persuade not only individuals but whole cities that expiations for sin may be made by sacrifices and amusements which fill a vacant hour and are equally at the service of the living and the dead. The latter sort they call mysteries, and they redeem us from the pains of hell, but, if we neglect them, no-one knows what horrors await us.

He proceeded: And now, when the young hear all this said about virtue and vice, and the way in which gods and men regard them, how are their minds likely to be affected, my dear Socrates — those of them, I mean, who are quick-witted and, like bees on the wing, light on every flower and, from all that they hear, prone to draw conclusions as to what manner of persons they should be and in what way they should walk if they would make the best of life? Probably the youth will say to himself, in the words of Pindar, “Should I, by justice or by crooked ways, ascend a loftier tower which may be a fortress to me for all my days?” For what men say is that, if I am really just and am not also thought just, of profit there is none, but the pain and loss on the other hand are unmistakable. But, if, although unjust, I acquire the reputation of justice, a heavenly life is promised me.

Since, then, as philosophers prove, “appearance looses truth” and “is lord of happiness”, to appearance I must surely devote myself. I will describe around me a picture and a shadow of virtue to be the vestibule and exterior of my house. Behind I will trail, the subtle and crafty fox, as Archilochus, greatest of sages, recommends.

But I hear someone exclaiming that the concealment of wickedness is often difficult, to which I answer, Nothing great is easy. Nevertheless, the argument indicates that this, if we would be happy, is the path along which we should proceed. With a view to concealment, we will establish secret brotherhoods and political clubs. And there are professors of rhetoric who teach the art of persuading courts and assemblies. And so, partly by persuasion and partly by force, I shall make unlawful gains and not be punished.

Still I hear a voice say that the gods cannot be deceived; nor can they be compelled. But what if there are

no gods? Or suppose them to have no care of human things. Why, in either case, should we mind about concealment? And, even if there are gods, and they do care about us, we know of them only from tradition and the genealogies of the poets — nowhere else. These poets are the very persons who say that they may be influenced and turned by “sacrifices and soothing entreaties and offerings”. Let us be consistent then and believe both or neither. If the poets speak truly, why, we had better be unjust and offer of the fruits of injustice: for, if we are just, although we may escape the vengeance of heaven, we shall lose the gains of injustice; but, if we are unjust, we shall keep the gains and, by our sinning and our praying, and our praying and our sinning, the gods will be propitiated and we will not be punished.

“But there is a world below in which either we or our posterity will suffer for our unjust deeds.” Yes, my friend, will come the calculated reflection, but there are mysteries and atoning deities, and these have great power. That is what mighty cities declare, and the children of the gods, who were their poets and prophets, bear a like testimony.

On what principle, then, shall we any longer choose justice rather than the worst injustice? Many luminaries concur that, if only we unite the latter with a deceitful regard to appearance, we shall fare to our mind both with gods and men, in life and after death, as the most numerous and the highest authorities tell us. Knowing all this, Socrates, how can a man who has any superiority of mind, person, rank or wealth be willing to honour justice or, indeed, to refrain from laughing when he hears justice praised? And, even if there be someone who is able to disprove the truth of my words, and who is satisfied that justice is best, still he is not angry with the unjust but very ready to forgive them, because he also knows that men are not just of their own free will — unless, peradventure, there be someone whom the divinity within him may have inspired with a hatred of injustice or who has attained knowledge of the truth — but no other man. He only blames injustice who, owing to cowardice or age or some weakness, has not the power of being unjust. And this is proved by the fact that, when he obtains the power, he immediately becomes unjust as far as he can be.

The cause of all this, Socrates, was indicated by us at the beginning of the argument, when my brother and I told you how astonished we were to find that of all the professing panegyrists of justice, beginning with the ancient heroes of whom any memorial has come down to us and ending with the men of our own time, no-one has ever blamed injustice or praised justice except with a view to the glories, honours and benefits which flow from them. No-one has ever adequately described, either in verse or in prose, the true essential nature of either of them abiding in the soul and invisible to any human or divine eye, or shown that, of all the things of a man's soul which he has within him, justice is the greatest good and injustice the greatest evil. Had this been the universal strain, and had you sought to persuade us of this from our youth upwards, we should not have been on the watch to keep one another from doing wrong, but every one would have been his own watchman, afraid, if he did wrong, of harbouring in himself the greatest of evils.

I dare say Thrasyarchus and others would seriously hold the language which I have been merely repeating and words even stronger about justice and injustice — grossly, as I conceive, perverting their true nature. But I

speak in this vehement manner, as I must frankly confess to you, because I want to hear from you the opposite side, and I would ask you to show not only the superiority which justice has over injustice but what effect they have on the possessor of them which makes the one a good and the other an evil unto him. And please, as Glaucon requested of you, exclude reputations, for, unless you take away from each his true reputation and add on the false, we shall say that you do not praise justice but rather the appearance of it; we shall think that you are only exhorting us to keep injustice dark and that you really agree with Thrasymachus in thinking that justice is another's good and the interest of the stronger, and that injustice is a man's own profit and interest, albeit injurious to the weaker.

Now, as you have admitted that justice is one of that highest class of goods which are desired indeed for their results, but in a far greater degree for their own sakes, like sight or hearing or knowledge or health or any other real and natural and not merely conventional good, I would ask you in your praise of justice to regard one point only: I mean the essential good and evil which justice and injustice work in the possessors of them. Let others praise justice and censure injustice, magnifying the rewards and honours of the one and abusing and slandering the other. That is a manner of arguing which, coming from them, I am ready to tolerate, but, from you who have spent your whole life in contemplation of this question, unless I hear the contrary from your own lips, I expect something better. And, therefore, I say, do not only prove to us that justice is better than injustice but show what they either of them do to the possessor of them which makes the one a good and the other an evil, whether seen or unseen by gods and men.

SOCRATES – ADEIMANTUS

I had always admired the genius of Glaucon and Adeimantus, but on hearing these words I was quite delighted, and said: Sons of an illustrious father, that was not a bad beginning of the Elegiac verses which the admirer of Glaucon made in honour of you after you had distinguished yourselves at the battle of Megara:

'Sons of Ariston,' he sang, 'divine offspring of an illustrious hero.'

The epithet is very appropriate, for there is something truly divine in being able to argue as you have done for the superiority of injustice, and remaining unconvinced by your own arguments. And I do believe that you are not convinced—this I infer from your general character, for had I judged only from your speeches I should have mistrusted you. But now, the greater my confidence in you, the greater is my difficulty in knowing what to say. For I am in a strait between two; on the one hand I feel that I am unequal to the task; and my inability is brought home to me by the fact that you were not satisfied with the answer which I made to Thrasymachus, proving, as I thought, the superiority which justice has over injustice. And yet I cannot refuse to help, while breath and speech remain to me; I am afraid that there would be an impiety in being present when justice is evil spoken of and not lifting up a hand in her defence. And therefore I had best give such help as I can.

Glaucón and the rest entreated me by all means not to let the question drop, but to proceed in the investigation. They wanted to arrive at the truth, first, about the nature of justice and injustice, and secondly, about their relative advantages. I told them, what I— really thought, that the enquiry would be of a serious nature, and would require very good eyes. Seeing then, I said, that we are no great wits, I think that we had better adopt a method which I may illustrate thus; suppose that a short-sighted person had been asked by some one to read small letters from a distance; and it occurred to some one else that they might be found in another place which was larger and in which the letters were larger— if they were the same and he could read the larger letters first, and then proceed to the lesser—this would have been thought a rare piece of good fortune.

Very true, said Adeimantus; but how does the illustration apply to our enquiry?

I will tell you, I replied; justice, which is the subject of our enquiry, is, as you know, sometimes spoken of as the virtue of an individual, and sometimes as the virtue of a State.

True, he replied.

And is not a State larger than an individual?

It is.

Then in the larger the quantity of justice is likely to be larger and more easily discernible. I propose therefore that we enquire into the nature of justice and injustice, first as they appear in the State, and secondly in the individual, proceeding from the greater to the lesser and comparing them.

That, he said, is an excellent proposal.

And if we imagine the State in process of creation, we shall see the justice and injustice of the State in process of creation also.

I dare say.

When the State is completed there may be a hope that the object of our search will be more easily discovered.

Yes, far more easily.

But ought we to attempt to construct one? I said; for to do so, as I am inclined to think, will be a very serious task. Reflect therefore.

I have reflected, said Adeimantus, and am anxious that you should proceed.

A State, I said, arises, as I conceive, out of the needs of mankind; no one is self-sufficing, but all of us have many wants. Can any other origin of a State be imagined?

There can I be no other.

Then, as we have many wants, and many persons are needed to supply them, one takes a helper for one purpose and another for another; and when these partners and helpers are gathered together in one habitation the body of inhabitants is termed a State.

True, he said.

And they exchange with one another, and one gives, and another receives, under the idea that the exchange will be for their good.

Very true.

Then, I said, let us begin and create in idea a State; and yet the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention.

Of course, he replied.

Now the first and greatest of necessities is food, which is the condition of life and existence.

Certainly.

The second is a dwelling, and the third clothing and the like.

True.

And now let us see how our city will be able to supply this great demand: We may suppose that one man is a husbandman, another a builder, some one else a weaver—shall we add to them a shoemaker, or perhaps some other purveyor to our bodily wants?

Quite right.

The barest notion of a State must include four or five men.

Clearly.

And how will they proceed? Will each bring the result of his labours into a common stock?—the individual husbandman, for example, producing for four, and labouring four times as long and as much as he need in the provision of food with which he supplies others as well as himself; or will he have nothing to do with others and not be at the trouble of producing for them, but provide for himself alone a fourth of the food in a fourth of the time, and in the remaining three-fourths of his time be employed in making a house or a coat or a pair of shoes, having no partnership with others, but supplying himself all his own wants?

Adeimantus thought that he should aim at producing food only and not at producing everything.

Probably, I replied, that would be the better way; and when I hear you say this, I am myself reminded that we are not all alike; there are diversities of natures among us which are adapted to different occupations.

Very true.

And will you have a work better done when the workman has many occupations, or when he has only one?

When he has only one.

Further, there can be no doubt that a work is spoilt when not done at the right time?

No doubt.

For business is not disposed to wait until the doer of the business is at leisure; but the doer must follow up what he is doing, and make the business his first object.

He must.

And if so, we must infer that all things are produced more plentifully and easily and of a better quality when one man does one thing which is natural to him and does it at the right time, and leaves other things.

Undoubtedly.

Then more than four citizens will be required; for the husbandman will not make his own plough or mattock, or other implements of agriculture, if they are to be good for anything. Neither will the builder make his tools—and he too needs many; and in like manner the weaver and shoemaker.

True.

Then carpenters, and smiths, and many other artisans, will be sharers in our little State, which is already beginning to grow? True.

Yet even if we add neatherds, shepherds, and other herdsmen, in order that our husbandmen may have oxen to plough with, and builders as well as husbandmen may have draught cattle, and curriers and weavers fleeces and hides,—still our State will not be very large.

That is true; yet neither will it be a very small State which contains all these.

Then, again, there is the situation of the city—to find a place where nothing need be imported is well-nigh impossible.

Impossible.

Then there must be another class of citizens who will bring the required supply from another city? There must.

But if the trader goes empty-handed, having nothing which they require who would supply his need, he will come back empty-handed.

That is certain.

And therefore what they produce at home must be not only enough for themselves, but such both in quantity and quality as to accommodate those from whom their wants are supplied.

Very true.

Then more husbandmen and more artisans will be required? They will.

Not to mention the importers and exporters, who are called merchants? Yes.

Then we shall want merchants? We shall.

And if merchandise is to be carried over the sea, skilful sailors will also be needed, and in considerable numbers? Yes, in considerable numbers.

Then, again, within the city, how will they exchange their productions? To secure such an exchange was, as you will remember, one of our principal objects when we formed them into a society and constituted a State.

Clearly they will buy and sell.

Then they will need a market-place, and a money-token for purposes of exchange. Certainly.

Suppose now that a husbandman, or an artisan, brings some production to market, and he comes at a time when there is no one to exchange with him,—is he to leave his calling and sit idle in the market-place?

Not at all; he will find people there who, seeing the want, undertake the office of salesmen. In well-ordered States they are commonly those who are the weakest in bodily strength, and therefore of little use for any other purpose; their duty is to be in the market, and to give money in exchange for goods to those who desire to sell and to take money from those who desire to buy.

This want, then, creates a class of retail-traders in our State. Is not 'retailer' the term which is applied to those who sit in the market-place engaged in buying and selling, while those who wander from one city to another are called merchants?

Yes, he said.

And there is another class of servants, who are intellectually hardly on the level of companionship; still they have plenty of bodily strength for labour, which accordingly they sell, and are called, if I do not mistake, hirelings, hire being the name which is given to the price of their labour.

True.

Then hirelings will help to make up our population?

Yes.

And now, Adeimantus, is our State matured and perfected?

I think so.

Where, then, is justice, and where is injustice, and in what part of the State did they spring up?

Probably in the dealings of these citizens with one another. cannot imagine that they are more likely to be found anywhere else.

I dare say that you are right in your suggestion, I said; we had better think the matter out, and not shrink from the enquiry.

Let us then consider, first of all, what will be their way of life, now that we have thus established them. Will they not produce corn, and wine, and clothes, and shoes, and build houses for themselves? And when they are housed, they will work, in summer, commonly, stripped and barefoot, but in winter substantially clothed and shod. They will feed on barley-meal and flour of wheat, baking and kneading them, making noble cakes and loaves; these they will serve up on a mat of reeds or on clean leaves, themselves reclining the while upon beds strewn with yew or myrtle. And they and their children will feast, drinking of the wine which they have made, wearing garlands on their heads, and hymning the praises of the gods, in happy converse with one another. And they will take care that their families do not exceed their means; having an eye to poverty or war.

SOCRATES – GLAUCON

But, said Glaucon, interposing, you have not given them a relish to their meal.

True, I replied, I had forgotten; of course they must have a relish-salt, and olives, and cheese, and they will boil roots and herbs such as country people prepare; for a dessert we shall give them figs, and peas, and beans; and they will roast myrtle-berries and acorns at the fire, drinking in moderation. And with such a diet they may be expected to live in peace and health to a good old age, and bequeath a similar life to their children after them.

Yes, Socrates, he said, and if you were providing for a city of pigs, how else would you feed the beasts? But what would you have, Glaucon? I replied.

Why, he said, you should give them the ordinary conveniences of life. People who are to be comfortable are accustomed to lie on sofas, and dine off tables, and they should have sauces and sweets in the modern style.

Yes, I said, now I understand: the question which you would have me consider is, not only how a State, but how a luxurious State is created; and possibly there is no harm in this, for in such a State we shall be more likely to see how justice and injustice originate. In my opinion the true and healthy constitution of the State is the one which I have described. But if you wish also to see a State at fever heat, I have no objection. For I suspect that many will not be satisfied with the simpler way of life. They will be for adding sofas, and tables, and other furniture; also dainties, and perfumes, and incense, and courtesans, and cakes, all these not of one sort only, but in every variety; we must go beyond the necessities of which I was at first speaking, such as houses, and clothes, and shoes: the arts of the painter and the embroiderer will have to be set in motion, and gold and ivory and all sorts of materials must be procured.

True, he said.

Then we must enlarge our borders; for the original healthy State is no longer sufficient. Now will the city have to fill and swell with a multitude of callings which are not required by any natural want; such as the whole tribe of hunters and actors, of whom one large class have to do with forms and colours; another will be the votaries of music—poets and their attendant train of rhapsodists, players, dancers, contractors; also makers of divers kinds of articles, including women's dresses. And we shall want more servants. Will not tutors be also in request, and nurses wet and dry, tirewomen and barbers, as well as confectioners and cooks; and swineherds, too, who were not needed and therefore had no place in the former edition of our State, but are needed now? They must not be forgotten: and there will be animals of many other kinds, if people eat them.

Certainly.

And living in this way we shall have much greater need of physicians than before?

Much greater.

And the country which was enough to support the original inhabitants will be too small now, and not enough?

Quite true.

Then a slice of our neighbours' land will be wanted by us for pasture and tillage, and they will want a slice of ours, if, like ourselves, they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth?

That, Socrates, will be inevitable.

And so we shall go to war, Glaucon. Shall we not?

Most certainly, he replied.

Then without determining as yet whether war does good or harm, thus much we may affirm, that now we have discovered war to be derived from causes which are also the causes of almost all the evils in States, private as well as public.

Undoubtedly.

And our State must once more enlarge; and this time the will be nothing short of a whole army, which will have to go out and fight with the invaders for all that we have, as well as for the things and persons whom we were describing above.

Why? he said; are they not capable of defending themselves?

No, I said; not if we were right in the principle which was acknowledged by all of us when we were framing the State: the principle, as you will remember, was that one man cannot practise many arts with success.

Very true, he said.

But is not war an art?

Certainly.

And an art requiring as much attention as shoemaking?

Quite true.

And the shoemaker was not allowed by us to be husbandman, or a weaver, a builder—in order that we might have our shoes well made; but to him and to every other worker was assigned one work for which he was by nature fitted, and at that he was to continue working all his life long and at no other; he was not to let opportunities slip, and then he would become a good workman. Now nothing can be more important than that the work of a soldier should be well done. But is war an art so easily acquired that a man may be a warrior who is also a husbandman, or shoemaker, or other artisan; although no one in the world would be a good dice or draught player who merely took up the game as a recreation, and had not from his earliest years devoted himself to this and nothing else?

No tools will make a man a skilled workman, or master of defence, nor be of any use to him who has not learned how to handle them, and has never bestowed any attention upon them. How then will he who takes up a shield

or other implement of war become a good fighter all in a day, whether with heavy-armed or any other kind of troops?

Yes, he said, the tools which would teach men their own use would be beyond price.

And the higher the duties of the guardian, I said, the more time, and skill, and art, and application will be needed by him?

No doubt, he replied.

Will he not also require natural aptitude for his calling?

Certainly.

Then it will be our duty to select, if we can, natures which are fitted for the task of guarding the city?

It will.

And the selection will be no easy matter, I said; but we must be brave and do our best.

We must.

Is not the noble youth very like a well-bred dog in respect of guarding and watching?

What do you mean?

I mean that both of them ought to be quick to see, and swift to overtake the enemy when they see him; and strong too if, when they have caught him, they have to fight with him.

All these qualities, he replied, will certainly be required by them.

Well, and your guardian must be brave if he is to fight well?

Certainly.

And is he likely to be brave who has no spirit, whether horse or dog or any other animal? Have you never observed how invincible and unconquerable is spirit and how the presence of it makes the soul of any creature to be absolutely fearless and indomitable?

I have.

Then now we have a clear notion of the bodily qualities which are required in the guardian. True.

And also of the mental ones; his soul is to be full of spirit? Yes.

But are not these spirited natures apt to be savage with one another, and with everybody else?

A difficulty by no means easy to overcome, he replied.

Whereas, I said, they ought to be dangerous to their enemies, and gentle to their friends; if not, they will destroy themselves without waiting for their enemies to destroy them.

True, he said.

What is to be done then? I said; how shall we find a gentle nature which has also a great spirit, for the one is the contradiction of the other?

True.

He will not be a good guardian who is wanting in either of these two qualities; and yet the combination of them appears to be impossible; and hence we must infer that to be a good guardian is impossible.

I am afraid that what you say is true, he replied.

Here feeling perplexed I began to think over what had preceded. My friend, I said, no wonder that we are in a perplexity; for we have lost sight of the image which we had before us.

What do you mean? he said.

I mean to say that there do exist natures gifted with those opposite qualities.

And where do you find them?

Many animals, I replied, furnish examples of them; our friend the dog is a very good one: you know that well-bred dogs are perfectly gentle to their familiars and acquaintances, and the reverse to strangers.

Yes, I know.

Then there is nothing impossible or out of the order of nature in our finding a guardian who has a similar combination of qualities?

Certainly not.

Would not he who is fitted to be a guardian, besides the spirited nature, need to have the qualities of a philosopher?

I do not apprehend your meaning.

The trait of which I am speaking, I replied, may be also seen in the dog, and is remarkable in the animal.

What trait?

Why, a dog, whenever he sees a stranger, is angry; when an acquaintance, he welcomes him, although the one has never done him any harm, nor the other any good. Did this never strike you as curious?

The matter never struck me before; but I quite recognise the truth of your remark.

And surely this instinct of the dog is very charming;—your dog is a true philosopher.

Why?

Why, because he distinguishes the face of a friend and of an enemy only by the criterion of knowing and not knowing. And must not an animal be a lover of learning who determines what he likes and dislikes by the test of knowledge and ignorance?

Most assuredly.

And is not the love of learning the love of wisdom, which is philosophy?

They are the same, he replied.

And may we not say confidently of man also, that he who is likely to be gentle to his friends and acquaintances, must by nature be a lover of wisdom and knowledge?

That we may safely affirm.

Then he who is to be a really good and noble guardian of the State will require to unite in himself philosophy and spirit and swiftness and strength?

Undoubtedly.

Then we have found the desired natures; and now that we have found them, how are they to be reared and educated? Is not this enquiry which may be expected to throw light on the greater enquiry which is our final end—How do justice and injustice grow up in States? for we do not want either to omit what is to the point or to draw out the argument to an inconvenient length.

SOCRATES – ADEIMANTUS

Adeimantus thought that the enquiry would be of great service to us.

Then, I said, my dear friend, the task must not be given up, even if somewhat long.

Certainly not.

Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in story-telling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes.

By all means.

And what shall be their education? Can we find a better than the traditional sort?—and this has two divisions, gymnastic for the body, and music for the soul.

True.

Shall we begin education with music, and go on to gymnastic afterwards?

By all means.

And when you speak of music, do you include literature or not?

I do.

And literature may be either true or false?

Yes.

And the young should be trained in both kinds, and we begin with the false?

I do not understand your meaning, he said.

You know, I said, that we begin by telling children stories which, though not wholly destitute of truth, are in the main fictitious; and these stories are told them when they are not of an age to learn gymnastics.

Very true.

That was my meaning when I said that we must teach music before gymnastics.

Quite right, he said.

You know also that the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.

Quite true.

And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up?

We cannot.

Then the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorised ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales, even more fondly than they mould the body with their hands; but most of those which are now in use must be discarded.

Of what tales are you speaking? he said.

You may find a model of the lesser in the greater, I said; for they are necessarily of the same type, and there is the same spirit in both of them.

Very likely, he replied; but I do not as yet know what you would term the greater.

Those, I said, which are narrated by Homer and Hesiod, and the rest of the poets, who have ever been the great story-tellers of mankind.

But which stories do you mean, he said; and what fault do you find with them?

A fault which is most serious, I said; the fault of telling a lie, and, what is more, a bad lie.

But when is this fault committed?

Whenever an erroneous representation is made of the nature of gods and heroes,—as when a painter paints a portrait not having the shadow of a likeness to the original.

Yes, he said, that sort of thing is certainly very blamable; but what are the stories which you mean?

First of all, I said, there was that greatest of all lies, in high places, which the poet told about Uranus, and which was a bad lie too,— I mean what Hesiod says that Uranus did, and how Cronus retaliated on him. The doings of Cronus, and the sufferings which in turn his son inflicted upon him, even if they were true, ought certainly not to be lightly told to young and thoughtless persons; if possible, they had better be buried in silence. But if there is an absolute necessity for their mention, a chosen few might hear them in a mystery, and they should sacrifice not a common [Eleusinian] pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim; and then the number of the hearers will be very few indeed.

Why, yes, said he, those stories are extremely objectionable.

Yes, Adeimantus, they are stories not to be repeated in our State; the young man should not be told that in committing the worst of crimes he is far from doing anything outrageous; and that even if he chastises his father when does wrong, in whatever manner, he will only be following the example of the first and greatest among the gods.

I entirely agree with you, he said; in my opinion those stories are quite unfit to be repeated.

Neither, if we mean our future guardians to regard the habit of quarrelling among themselves as of all things the basest, should any word be said to them of the wars in heaven, and of the plots and fightings of the gods against one another, for they are not true. No, we shall never mention the battles of the giants, or let them be embroidered on garments; and we shall be silent about the innumerable other quarrels of gods and heroes with their friends and relatives. If they would only believe us we would tell them that quarrelling is unholy, and that never up to this time has there been any quarrel between citizens; this is what old men and old women should begin by telling children; and when they grow up, the poets also should be told to compose for them in a similar spirit. But the narrative of Hephaestus binding Here his mother, or how on another occasion Zeus sent him flying for taking her part when she was being beaten, and all the battles of the gods in Homer—these tales must not be admitted into our State, whether they are supposed to have an allegorical meaning or not. For a young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts.

There you are right, he replied; but if any one asks where are such models to be found and of what tales are you speaking—how shall we answer him?

I said to him, You and I, Adeimantus, at this moment are not poets, but founders of a State: now the founders of a State ought to know the general forms in which poets should cast their tales, and the limits which must be observed by them, but to make the tales is not their business.

Very true, he said; but what are these forms of theology which you mean?

Something of this kind, I replied:—God is always to be represented as he truly is, whatever be the sort of poetry, epic, lyric or tragic, in which the representation is given.

Right.

And is he not truly good? and must he not be represented as such?

Certainly.

And no good thing is hurtful?

No, indeed.

And that which is not hurtful hurts not?

Certainly not.

And that which hurts not does no evil?

No.

And can that which does no evil be a cause of evil?

Impossible.

And the good is advantageous?

Yes.

And therefore the cause of well-being?

Yes.

It follows therefore that the good is not the cause of all things, but of the good only?

Assuredly.

Then God, if he be good, is not the author of all things, as the many assert, but he is the cause of a few things only, and not of most things that occur to men. For few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils, and the good is to be attributed to God alone; of the evils the causes are to be sought elsewhere, and not in him.

That appears to me to be most true, he said.

Then we must not listen to Homer or to any other poet who is guilty of the folly of saying that two casks:

Lie at the threshold of Zeus, full of lots, one of good, the other of evil lots, and that he to whom Zeus gives a mixture of the two

Sometimes meets with evil fortune, at other times with good; but that he to whom is given the cup of unmingled ill,

Him wild hunger drives o'er the beauteous earth.[*Iliad* 24.527 sq]

And again:

Zeus, who is the dispenser of good and evil to us.

And if any one asserts that the violation of oaths and treaties, which was really the work of Pandarus, was brought about by Athene and Zeus, or that the strife and contention of the gods was instigated by Themis and Zeus, he shall not have our approval; neither will we allow our young men to hear the words of Aeschylus, that:

God plants guilt among men when he desires utterly to destroy a house.

And if a poet writes of the sufferings of Niobe—the subject of the tragedy in which these iambic verses occur—or of the house of Pelops, or of the Trojan war or on any similar theme, either we must not permit him to say that these are the works of God, or if they are of God, he must devise some explanation of them such as we are seeking; he must say that God did what was just and right, and they were the better for being punished; but that those who are punished are miserable, and that God is the author of their misery— the poet is not to be permitted to say; though he may say that the wicked are miserable because they require to be punished, and are benefited by receiving punishment from God; but that God being good is the author of evil to any one is to be strenuously denied, and not to be said or sung or heard in verse or prose by any one whether old or young in any well-ordered commonwealth. Such a fiction is suicidal, ruinous, impious.

I agree with you, he replied, and am ready to give my assent to the law.

Let this then be one of our rules and principles concerning the gods, to which our poets and reciters will be expected to conform— that God is not the author of all things, but of good only.

That will do, he said.

And what do you think of a second principle? Shall I ask you whether God is a magician, and of a nature to appear insidiously now in one shape, and now in another—sometimes himself changing and passing into many forms, sometimes deceiving us with the semblance of such transformations; or is he one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image?

I cannot answer you, he said, without more thought.

Well, I said; but if we suppose a change in anything, that change must be effected either by the thing itself, or by some other thing?

Most certainly.

And things which are at their best are also least liable to be altered or discomposed; for example, when healthiest and strongest, the human frame is least liable to be affected by meats and drinks, and the plant which is in the fullest vigour also suffers least from winds or the heat of the sun or any similar causes.

Of course.

And will not the bravest and wisest soul be least confused or deranged by any external influence? True.

And the same principle, as I should suppose, applies to all composite things—furniture, houses, garments; when good and well made, they are least altered by time and circumstances.

Very true.

Then everything which is good, whether made by art or nature, or both, is least liable to suffer change from without? True.

But surely God and the things of God are in every way perfect?

Of course they are.

Then he can hardly be compelled by external influence to take many shapes?

He cannot.

But may he not change and transform himself?

Clearly, he said, that must be the case if he is changed at all.

And will he then change himself for the better and fairer, or for the worse and more unsightly?

If he change at all he can only change for the worse, for we cannot suppose him to be deficient either in virtue or beauty.

Very true, Adeimantus; but then, would any one, whether God or man, desire to make himself worse?

Impossible.

Then it is impossible that God should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every god remains absolutely and for ever in his own form.

That necessarily follows, he said, in my judgment.

Then, I said, my dear friend, let none of the poets tell us that “The gods, taking the disguise of strangers from other lands, walk up and down cities in all sorts of forms;” [Odyssey 17.485 sq] and let no one slander Proteus and Thetis, neither let any one, either in tragedy or in any other kind of poetry, introduce Here disguised in the likeness of a priestess asking an alms “for the life-giving daughters of Inachus the river of Argos”; [Aeschylus, *Xanthians* fr. 159]

–let us have no more lies of that sort. Neither must we have mothers under the influence of the poets scaring their children with a bad version of these myths–telling how certain gods, as they say, ‘Go about by night in the likeness of so many strangers and in divers forms’; but let them take heed lest they make cowards of their children, and at the same time speak blasphemy against the gods.

Heaven forbid, he said.

But although the gods are themselves unchangeable, still by witchcraft and deception they may make us think that they appear in various forms?

Perhaps, he replied.

Well, but can you imagine that God will be willing to lie, whether in word or deed, or to put forth a phantom of himself?

I cannot say, he replied.

Do you not know, I said, that the true lie, if such an expression may be allowed, is hated of gods and men?

What do you mean? he said.

I mean that no one is willingly deceived in that which is the truest and highest part of himself, or about the truest and highest matters; there, above all, he is most afraid of a lie having possession of him.

Still, he said, I do not comprehend you.

The reason is, I replied, that you attribute some profound meaning to my words; but I am only saying that deception, or being deceived or uninformed about the highest realities in the highest part of themselves, which is the soul, and in that part of them to have and to hold the lie, is what mankind least like;—that, I say, is what they utterly detest.

There is nothing more hateful to them.

And, as I was just now remarking, this ignorance in the soul of him who is deceived may be called the true lie; for the lie in words is only a kind of imitation and shadowy image of a previous affection of the soul, not pure unadulterated falsehood. Am I not right?

Perfectly right.

The true lie is hated not only by the gods, but also by men?

Yes.

Whereas the lie in words is in certain cases useful and not hateful; in dealing with enemies—that would be an instance; or again, when those whom we call our friends in a fit of madness or illusion are going to do some harm, then it is useful and is a sort of medicine or preventive; also in the tales of mythology, of which we were just now speaking—because we do not know the truth about ancient times, we make falsehood as much like truth as we can, and so turn it to account.

Very true, he said.

But can any of these reasons apply to God? Can we suppose that he is ignorant of antiquity, and therefore has recourse to invention?

That would be ridiculous, he said.

Then the lying poet has no place in our idea of God?

I should say not.

Or perhaps he may tell a lie because he is afraid of enemies?

That is inconceivable.

But he may have friends who are senseless or mad?

But no mad or senseless person can be a friend of God.

Then no motive can be imagined why God should lie?

None whatever.

Then the superhuman and divine is absolutely incapable of falsehood?

Yes.

Then is God perfectly simple and true both in word and deed; he changes not; he deceives not, either by sign or word, by dream or waking vision.

Your thoughts, he said, are the reflection of my own.

You agree with me then, I said, that this is the second type or form in which we should write and speak about divine things. The gods are not magicians who transform themselves, neither do they deceive mankind in any way.

I grant that.

Then, although we are admirers of Homer, we do not admire the lying dream which Zeus sends to Agamemnon; neither will we praise the verses of Aeschylus in which Thetis says that Apollo at her nuptials

Was celebrating in song her fair progeny whose days were to be long, and to know no sickness. And when he had spoken of my lot as in all things blessed of heaven he raised a note of triumph and cheered my soul. And I thought that the word of Phoebus being divine and full of prophecy, would not fail. And now he himself who uttered the strain, he who was present at the banquet, and who said this—he it is who has slain my son.

These are the kind of sentiments about the gods which will arouse our anger; and he who utters them shall be refused a chorus; neither shall we allow teachers to make use of them in the instruction of the young, meaning, as we do, that our guardians, as far as men can be, should be true worshippers of the gods and like them.

I entirely agree, he said, in these principles, and promise to make them my laws.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided by:** BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY: *Attribution*
- Translated by Benjamin Jowett



This work (Plato's Republic - Book II by Plato) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SELECTED READINGS FROM THOMAS HOBBES' "LEVIATHAN"

Thomas Hobbes

Leviathan

The First Part: Of Man

Chapter XIII: Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery

Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself.

And as to the faculties of the mind, setting aside the arts grounded upon words, and especially that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules, called science, which very few have and but in few things, as being not a native faculty born with us, nor attained, as prudence, while we look after somewhat else, I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength. For prudence is but experience, which equal time equally bestows on all men in those things they equally apply themselves unto. That which may perhaps make such equality incredible is but a vain conceit of one's own wisdom, which almost all men think they have in a greater degree than the vulgar; that is, than all men but themselves, and a few others, whom by fame, or for concurring with themselves, they approve. For such is the nature of men that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent or more learned, yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves; for they see their own wit at hand, and other men's at a distance. But this proveth rather that men are in that point equal, than unequal. For there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of anything than that every man is contented with his share.

From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to

destroy or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass that where an invader hath no more to fear than another man's single power, if one plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united to dispossess and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life or liberty. And the invader again is in the like danger of another.

And from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself so reasonable as anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can so long till he see no other power great enough to endanger him: and this is no more than his own conservation requireth, and is generally allowed. Also, because there be some that, taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security requires, if others, that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds, should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by standing only on their defence, to subsist. And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion over men being necessary to a man's conservation, it ought to be allowed him.

Again, men have no pleasure (but on the contrary a great deal of grief) in keeping company where there is no power able to overawe them all. For every man looketh that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself, and upon all signs of contempt or undervaluing naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power to keep them in quiet is far enough to make them destroy each other), to extort a greater value from his contemners, by damage; and from others, by the example.

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.

The first maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace.

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof

is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

It may seem strange to some man that has not well weighed these things that Nature should thus dissociate and render men apt to invade and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this inference, made from the passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him therefore consider with himself: when taking a journey, he arms himself and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse man's nature in it. The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions that proceed from those passions till they know a law that forbids them; which till laws be made they cannot know, nor can any law be made till they have agreed upon the person that shall make it.

It may peradventure be thought there was never such a time nor condition of war as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places where they live so now. For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small families, the concord whereof dependeth on natural lust, have no government at all, and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before. Howsoever, it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, where there were no common power to fear, by the manner of life which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government use to degenerate into a civil war.

But though there had never been any time wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another, yet in all times kings and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbours, which is a posture of war. But because they uphold thereby the industry of their subjects, there does not follow from it that misery which accompanies the liberty of particular men.

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues. Justice and injustice are none of the faculties neither of the body nor mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world, as well as his senses and passions. They are qualities that relate to men in society, not in solitude. It is consequent also to the same condition that there be no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct; but only that to be every man's that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it. And thus much for the ill condition which

man by mere nature is actually placed in; though with a possibility to come out of it, consisting partly in the passions, partly in his reason.

The passions that incline men to peace are: fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles are they which otherwise are called the laws of nature, whereof I shall speak more particularly in the two following chapters.

Chapter XIV: Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contracts

The right of nature, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man hath to use his own power as he will himself for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life; and consequently, of doing anything which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.

By liberty is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external impediments; which impediments may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him according as his judgement and reason shall dictate to him.

A law of nature, *lex naturalis*, is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same, and to omit that by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. For though they that speak of this subject use to confound *jus* and *lex*, right and law, yet they ought to be distinguished, because right consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; whereas law determineth and bindeth to one of them: so that law and right differ as much as obligation and liberty, which in one and the same matter are inconsistent.

And because the condition of man (as hath been declared in the precedent chapter) is a condition of war of every one against every one, in which case every one is governed by his own reason, and there is nothing he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life against his enemies; it followeth that in such a condition every man has a right to every thing, even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, how strong or wise soever he be, of living out the time which nature ordinarily alloweth men to live.

And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason: that every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war. The first branch of which rule containeth the first and fundamental law of nature, which is: to seek peace and follow it. The second, the sum of the right of nature, which is: by all means we can to defend ourselves.

From this fundamental law of nature, by which men are commanded to endeavour peace, is derived this second

law: that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself. For as long as every man holdeth this right, of doing anything he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of war. But if other men will not lay down their right, as well as he, then there is no reason for anyone to divest himself of his: for that were to expose himself to prey, which no man is bound to, rather than to dispose himself to peace. This is that law of the gospel: Whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them. And that law of all men, *quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*.

To lay down a man's right to anything is to divest himself of the liberty of hindering another of the benefit of his own right to the same. For he that renounceth or passeth away his right giveth not to any other man a right which he had not before, because there is nothing to which every man had not right by nature, but only standeth out of his way that he may enjoy his own original right without hindrance from him, not without hindrance from another. So that the effect which redoundeth to one man by another man's defect of right is but so much diminution of impediments to the use of his own right original.

Right is laid aside, either by simply renouncing it, or by transferring it to another. By simply renouncing, when he cares not to whom the benefit thereof redoundeth. By transferring, when he intendeth the benefit thereof to some certain person or persons. And when a man hath in either manner abandoned or granted away his right, then is he said to be obliged, or bound, not to hinder those to whom such right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it: and that he ought, and it is duty, not to make void that voluntary act of his own: and that such hindrance is injustice, and injury, as being *sine jure*; the right being before renounced or transferred. So that injury or injustice, in the controversies of the world, is somewhat like to that which in the disputations of scholars is called absurdity. For as it is there called an absurdity to contradict what one maintained in the beginning; so in the world it is called injustice, and injury voluntarily to undo that which from the beginning he had voluntarily done. The way by which a man either simply renounceth or transferreth his right is a declaration, or signification, by some voluntary and sufficient sign, or signs, that he doth so renounce or transfer, or hath so renounced or transferred the same, to him that accepteth it. And these signs are either words only, or actions only; or, as it happeneth most often, both words and actions. And the same are the bonds, by which men are bound and obliged: bonds that have their strength, not from their own nature (for nothing is more easily broken than a man's word), but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.

Whensoever a man transferreth his right, or renounceth it, it is either in consideration of some right reciprocally transferred to himself, or for some other good he hopeth for thereby. For it is a voluntary act: and of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself. And therefore there be some rights which no man can be understood by any words, or other signs, to have abandoned or transferred. As first a man cannot lay down the right of resisting them that assault him by force to take away his life, because he cannot be understood to aim thereby at any good to himself. The same may be said of wounds, and chains, and imprisonment, both because there is no benefit consequent to such patience, as there is to the patience of

suffering another to be wounded or imprisoned, as also because a man cannot tell when he seeth men proceed against him by violence whether they intend his death or not. And lastly the motive and end for which this renouncing and transferring of right is introduced is nothing else but the security of a man's person, in his life, and in the means of so preserving life as not to be weary of it. And therefore if a man by words, or other signs, seem to despoil himself of the end for which those signs were intended, he is not to be understood as if he meant it, or that it was his will, but that he was ignorant of how such words and actions were to be interpreted.

The mutual transferring of right is that which men call contract.

There is difference between transferring of right to the thing, and transferring or tradition, that is, delivery of the thing itself. For the thing may be delivered together with the translation of the right, as in buying and selling with ready money, or exchange of goods or lands, and it may be delivered some time after.

Again, one of the contractors may deliver the thing contracted for on his part, and leave the other to perform his part at some determinate time after, and in the meantime be trusted; and then the contract on his part is called pact, or covenant: or both parts may contract now to perform hereafter, in which cases he that is to perform in time to come, being trusted, his performance is called keeping of promise, or faith, and the failing of performance, if it be voluntary, violation of faith.

When the transferring of right is not mutual, but one of the parties transferreth in hope to gain thereby friendship or service from another, or from his friends; or in hope to gain the reputation of charity, or magnanimity; or to deliver his mind from the pain of compassion; or in hope of reward in heaven; this is not contract, but gift, free gift, grace: which words signify one and the same thing.

Signs of contract are either express or by inference. Express are words spoken with understanding of what they signify: and such words are either of the time present or past; as, I give, I grant, I have given, I have granted, I will that this be yours: or of the future; as, I will give, I will grant, which words of the future are called promise.

Signs by inference are sometimes the consequence of words; sometimes the consequence of silence; sometimes the consequence of actions; sometimes the consequence of forbearing an action: and generally a sign by inference, of any contract, is whatsoever sufficiently argues the will of the contractor.

Words alone, if they be of the time to come, and contain a bare promise, are an insufficient sign of a free gift and therefore not obligatory. For if they be of the time to come, as, tomorrow I will give, they are a sign I have not given yet, and consequently that my right is not transferred, but remaineth till I transfer it by some other act. But if the words be of the time present, or past, as, I have given, or do give to be delivered tomorrow, then is my tomorrow's right given away today; and that by the virtue of the words, though there were no other argument of my will. And there is a great difference in the signification of these words, *volo hoc tuum esse cras*, and *cras dabo*; that is, between I will that this be thine tomorrow, and, I will give it thee tomorrow: for the word I will, in the former manner of speech, signifies an act of the will present; but in the latter, it signifies a promise of

an act of the will to come: and therefore the former words, being of the present, transfer a future right; the latter, that be of the future, transfer nothing. But if there be other signs of the will to transfer a right besides words; then, though the gift be free, yet may the right be understood to pass by words of the future: as if a man propound a prize to him that comes first to the end of a race, the gift is free; and though the words be of the future, yet the right passeth: for if he would not have his words so be understood, he should not have let them run.

In contracts the right passeth, not only where the words are of the time present or past, but also where they are of the future, because all contract is mutual translation, or change of right; and therefore he that promiseth only, because he hath already received the benefit for which he promiseth, is to be understood as if he intended the right should pass: for unless he had been content to have his words so understood, the other would not have performed his part first. And for that cause, in buying, and selling, and other acts of contract, a promise is equivalent to a covenant, and therefore obligatory.

He that performeth first in the case of a contract is said to merit that which he is to receive by the performance of the other, and he hath it as due. Also when a prize is propounded to many, which is to be given to him only that winneth, or money is thrown amongst many to be enjoyed by them that catch it; though this be a free gift, yet so to win, or so to catch, is to merit, and to have it as due. For the right is transferred in the propounding of the prize, and in throwing down the money, though it be not determined to whom, but by the event of the contention. But there is between these two sorts of merit this difference, that in contract I merit by virtue of my own power and the contractor's need, but in this case of free gift I am enabled to merit only by the benignity of the giver: in contract I merit at the contractor's hand that he should depart with his right; in this case of gift, I merit not that the giver should part with his right, but that when he has parted with it, it should be mine rather than another's. And this I think to be the meaning of that distinction of the Schools between *meritum congrui* and *meritum condigni*. For God Almighty, having promised paradise to those men, hoodwinked with carnal desires, that can walk through this world according to the precepts and limits prescribed by him, they say he that shall so walk shall merit paradise *ex congruo*. But because no man can demand a right to it by his own righteousness, or any other power in himself, but by the free grace of God only, they say no man can merit paradise *ex condigno*. This, I say, I think is the meaning of that distinction; but because disputers do not agree upon the signification of their own terms of art longer than it serves their turn, I will not affirm anything of their meaning: only this I say; when a gift is given indefinitely, as a prize to be contended for, he that winneth meriteth, and may claim the prize as due.

If a covenant be made wherein neither of the parties perform presently, but trust one another, in the condition of mere nature (which is a condition of war of every man against every man) upon any reasonable suspicion, it is void: but if there be a common power set over them both, with right and force sufficient to compel performance, it is not void. For he that performeth first has no assurance the other will perform after, because the bonds of words are too weak to bridle men's ambition, avarice, anger, and other passions, without the fear

of some coercive power; which in the condition of mere nature, where all men are equal, and judges of the justness of their own fears, cannot possibly be supposed. And therefore he which performeth first does but betray himself to his enemy, contrary to the right he can never abandon of defending his life and means of living.

But in a civil estate, where there is a power set up to constrain those that would otherwise violate their faith, that fear is no more reasonable; and for that cause, he which by the covenant is to perform first is obliged so to do.

The cause of fear, which maketh such a covenant invalid, must be always something arising after the covenant made, as some new fact or other sign of the will not to perform, else it cannot make the covenant void. For that which could not hinder a man from promising ought not to be admitted as a hindrance of performing.

He that transferreth any right transferreth the means of enjoying it, as far as lieth in his power. As he that selleth land is understood to transfer the herbage and whatsoever grows upon it; nor can he that sells a mill turn away the stream that drives it. And they that give to a man the right of government in sovereignty are understood to give him the right of levying money to maintain soldiers, and of appointing magistrates for the administration of justice.

To make covenants with brute beasts is impossible, because not understanding our speech, they understand not, nor accept of any translation of right, nor can translate any right to another: and without mutual acceptation, there is no covenant.

To make covenant with God is impossible but by mediation of such as God speaketh to, either by revelation supernatural or by His lieutenants that govern under Him and in His name: for otherwise we know not whether our covenants be accepted or not. And therefore they that vow anything contrary to any law of nature, vow in vain, as being a thing unjust to pay such vow. And if it be a thing commanded by the law of nature, it is not the vow, but the law that binds them.

The matter or subject of a covenant is always something that falleth under deliberation, for to covenant is an act of the will; that is to say, an act, and the last act, of deliberation; and is therefore always understood to be something to come, and which judged possible for him that covenanteth to perform.

And therefore, to promise that which is known to be impossible is no covenant. But if that prove impossible afterwards, which before was thought possible, the covenant is valid and bindeth, though not to the thing itself, yet to the value; or, if that also be impossible, to the unfeigned endeavour of performing as much as is possible, for to more no man can be obliged.

Men are freed of their covenants two ways; by performing, or by being forgiven. For performance is the natural

end of obligation, and forgiveness the restitution of liberty, as being a retransferring of that right in which the obligation consisted.

Covenants entered into by fear, in the condition of mere nature, are obligatory. For example, if I covenant to pay a ransom, or service for my life, to an enemy, I am bound by it. For it is a contract, wherein one receiveth the benefit of life; the other is to receive money, or service for it, and consequently, where no other law (as in the condition of mere nature) forbiddeth the performance, the covenant is valid. Therefore prisoners of war, if trusted with the payment of their ransom, are obliged to pay it: and if a weaker prince make a disadvantageous peace with a stronger, for fear, he is bound to keep it; unless (as hath been said before) there ariseth some new and just cause of fear to renew the war. And even in Commonwealths, if I be forced to redeem myself from a thief by promising him money, I am bound to pay it, till the civil law discharge me. For whatsoever I may lawfully do without obligation, the same I may lawfully covenant to do through fear: and what I lawfully covenant, I cannot lawfully break.

A former covenant makes void a later. For a man that hath passed away his right to one man today hath it not to pass tomorrow to another: and therefore the later promise passeth no right, but is null.

A covenant not to defend myself from force, by force, is always void. For (as I have shown before) no man can transfer or lay down his right to save himself from death, wounds, and imprisonment, the avoiding whereof is the only end of laying down any right; and therefore the promise of not resisting force, in no covenant transferreth any right, nor is obliging. For though a man may covenant thus, unless I do so, or so, kill me; he cannot covenant thus, unless I do so, or so, I will not resist you when you come to kill me. For man by nature chooseth the lesser evil, which is danger of death in resisting, rather than the greater, which is certain and present death in not resisting. And this is granted to be true by all men, in that they lead criminals to execution, and prison, with armed men, notwithstanding that such criminals have consented to the law by which they are condemned.

A covenant to accuse oneself, without assurance of pardon, is likewise invalid. For in the condition of nature where every man is judge, there is no place for accusation: and in the civil state the accusation is followed with punishment, which, being force, a man is not obliged not to resist. The same is also true of the accusation of those by whose condemnation a man falls into misery; as of a father, wife, or benefactor. For the testimony of such an accuser, if it be not willingly given, is presumed to be corrupted by nature, and therefore not to be received: and where a man's testimony is not to be credited, he is not bound to give it. Also accusations upon torture are not to be reputed as testimonies. For torture is to be used but as means of conjecture, and light, in the further examination and search of truth: and what is in that case confessed tendeth to the ease of him that is tortured, not to the informing of the torturers, and therefore ought not to have the credit of a sufficient testimony: for whether he deliver himself by true or false accusation, he does it by the right of preserving his own life.

The force of words being (as I have formerly noted) too weak to hold men to the performance of their covenants, there are in man's nature but two imaginable helps to strengthen it. And those are either a fear of the consequence of breaking their word, or a glory or pride in appearing not to need to break it. This latter is a generosity too rarely found to be presumed on, especially in the pursuers of wealth, command, or sensual pleasure, which are the greatest part of mankind. The passion to be reckoned upon is fear; whereof there be two very general objects: one, the power of spirits invisible; the other, the power of those men they shall therein offend. Of these two, though the former be the greater power, yet the fear of the latter is commonly the greater fear. The fear of the former is in every man his own religion, which hath place in the nature of man before civil society. The latter hath not so; at least not place enough to keep men to their promises, because in the condition of mere nature, the inequality of power is not discerned, but by the event of battle. So that before the time of civil society, or in the interruption thereof by war, there is nothing can strengthen a covenant of peace agreed on against the temptations of avarice, ambition, lust, or other strong desire, but the fear of that invisible power which they every one worship as God, and fear as a revenger of their perfidy. All therefore that can be done between two men not subject to civil power is to put one another to swear by the God he feareth: which swearing, or oath, is a form of speech, added to a promise, by which he that promiseth signifieth that unless he perform he renounceth the mercy of his God, or calleth to him for vengeance on himself. Such was the heathen form, Let Jupiter kill me else, as I kill this beast. So is our form, I shall do thus, and thus, so help me God. And this, with the rites and ceremonies which every one useth in his own religion, that the fear of breaking faith might be the greater.

By this it appears that an oath taken according to any other form, or rite, than his that sweareth is in vain and no oath, and that there is no swearing by anything which the swearer thinks not God. For though men have sometimes used to swear by their kings, for fear, or flattery; yet they would have it thereby understood they attributed to them divine honour. And that swearing unnecessarily by God is but profaning of his name: and swearing by other things, as men do in common discourse, is not swearing, but an impious custom, gotten by too much vehemence of talking.

It appears also that the oath adds nothing to the obligation. For a covenant, if lawful, binds in the sight of God, without the oath, as much as with it; if unlawful, bindeth not at all, though it be confirmed with an oath.

Chapter XV: Of Other Laws of Nature

From that law of nature by which we are obliged to transfer to another such rights as, being retained, hinder the peace of mankind, there followeth a third; which is this: that men perform their covenants made; without which covenants are in vain, and but empty words; and the right of all men to all things remaining, we are still in the condition of war.

And in this law of nature consisteth the fountain and original of justice. For where no covenant hath preceded,

there hath no right been transferred, and every man has right to everything and consequently, no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is unjust and the definition of injustice is no other than the not performance of covenant. And whatsoever is not unjust is just.

But because covenants of mutual trust, where there is a fear of not performance on either part (as hath been said in the former chapter), are invalid, though the original of justice be the making of covenants, yet injustice actually there can be none till the cause of such fear be taken away; which, while men are in the natural condition of war, cannot be done. Therefore before the names of just and unjust can have place, there must be some coercive power to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants, by the terror of some punishment greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant, and to make good that propriety which by mutual contract men acquire in recompense of the universal right they abandon: and such power there is none before the erection of a Commonwealth. And this is also to be gathered out of the ordinary definition of justice in the Schools, for they say that justice is the constant will of giving to every man his own. And therefore where there is no own, that is, no propriety, there is no injustice; and where there is no coercive power erected, that is, where there is no Commonwealth, there is no propriety, all men having right to all things: therefore where there is no Commonwealth, there nothing is unjust. So that the nature of justice consisteth in keeping of valid covenants, but the validity of covenants begins not but with the constitution of a civil power sufficient to compel men to keep them: and then it is also that propriety begins.

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no such thing as justice, and sometimes also with his tongue, seriously alleging that every man's conservation and contentment being committed to his own care, there could be no reason why every man might not do what he thought conduced thereunto: and therefore also to make, or not make; keep, or not keep, covenants was not against reason when it conduced to one's benefit. He does not therein deny that there be covenants; and that they are sometimes broken, sometimes kept; and that such breach of them may be called injustice, and the observance of them justice: but he questioneth whether injustice, taking away the fear of God (for the same fool hath said in his heart there is no God), may not sometimes stand with that reason which dictateth to every man his own good; and particularly then, when it conduceth to such a benefit as shall put a man in a condition to neglect not only the dispraise and revilings, but also the power of other men. The kingdom of God is gotten by violence: but what if it could be gotten by unjust violence? Were it against reason so to get it, when it is impossible to receive hurt by it? And if it be not against reason, it is not against justice: or else justice is not to be approved for good. From such reasoning as this, successful wickedness hath obtained the name of virtue: and some that in all other things have disallowed the violation of faith, yet have allowed it when it is for the getting of a kingdom. And the heathen that believed that Saturn was deposed by his son Jupiter believed nevertheless the same Jupiter to be the avenger of injustice, somewhat like to a piece of law in Coke's Commentaries on Littleton; where he says if the right heir of the crown be attainted of treason, yet the crown shall descend to him, and eo instante the attainder be void: from which instances a man will be very prone to infer that when the heir apparent of a kingdom shall kill him that is in possession, though his father, you may call it injustice, or by what other name you will; yet it can never be

against reason, seeing all the voluntary actions of men tend to the benefit of themselves; and those actions are most reasonable that conduce most to their ends. This specious reasoning is nevertheless false.

For the question is not of promises mutual, where there is no security of performance on either side, as when there is no civil power erected over the parties promising; for such promises are no covenants: but either where one of the parties has performed already, or where there is a power to make him perform, there is the question whether it be against reason; that is, against the benefit of the other to perform, or not. And I say it is not against reason. For the manifestation whereof we are to consider; first, that when a man doth a thing, which notwithstanding anything can be foreseen and reckoned on tendeth to his own destruction, howsoever some accident, which he could not expect, arriving may turn it to his benefit; yet such events do not make it reasonably or wisely done. Secondly, that in a condition of war, wherein every man to every man, for want of a common power to keep them all in awe, is an enemy, there is no man can hope by his own strength, or wit, to himself from destruction without the help of confederates; where every one expects the same defence by the confederation that any one else does: and therefore he which declares he thinks it reason to deceive those that help him can in reason expect no other means of safety than what can be had from his own single power. He, therefore, that breaketh his covenant, and consequently declareth that he thinks he may with reason do so, cannot be received into any society that unite themselves for peace and defence but by the error of them that receive him; nor when he is received be retained in it without seeing the danger of their error; which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security: and therefore if he be left, or cast out of society, he perisheth; and if he live in society, it is by the errors of other men, which he could not foresee nor reckon upon, and consequently against the reason of his preservation; and so, as all men that contribute not to his destruction forbear him only out of ignorance of what is good for themselves.

As for the instance of gaining the secure and perpetual felicity of heaven by any way, it is frivolous; there being but one way imaginable, and that is not breaking, but keeping of covenant.

And for the other instance of attaining sovereignty by rebellion; it is manifest that, though the event follow, yet because it cannot reasonably be expected, but rather the contrary, and because by gaining it so, others are taught to gain the same in like manner, the attempt thereof is against reason. Justice therefore, that is to say, keeping of covenant, is a rule of reason by which we are forbidden to do anything destructive to our life, and consequently a law of nature.

There be some that proceed further and will not have the law of nature to be those rules which conduce to the preservation of man's life on earth, but to the attaining of an eternal felicity after death; to which they think the breach of covenant may conduce, and consequently be just and reasonable; such are they that think it a work of merit to kill, or depose, or rebel against the sovereign power constituted over them by their own consent. But because there is no natural knowledge of man's estate after death, much less of the reward that is then to be given to breach of faith, but only a belief grounded upon other men's saying that they know it supernaturally

or that they know those that knew them that knew others that knew it supernaturally, breach of faith cannot be called a precept of reason or nature.

Others, that allow for a law of nature the keeping of faith, do nevertheless make exception of certain persons; as heretics, and such as use not to perform their covenant to others; and this also is against reason. For if any fault of a man be sufficient to discharge our covenant made, the same ought in reason to have been sufficient to have hindered the making of it.

The names of just and unjust when they are attributed to men, signify one thing, and when they are attributed to actions, another. When they are attributed to men, they signify conformity, or inconformity of manners, to reason. But when they are attributed to action they signify the conformity, or inconformity to reason, not of manners, or manner of life, but of particular actions. A just man therefore is he that taketh all the care he can that his actions may be all just; and an unjust man is he that neglecteth it. And such men are more often in our language styled by the names of righteous and unrighteous than just and unjust though the meaning be the same. Therefore a righteous man does not lose that title by one or a few unjust actions that proceed from sudden passion, or mistake of things or persons, nor does an unrighteous man lose his character for such actions as he does, or forbears to do, for fear: because his will is not framed by the justice, but by the apparent benefit of what he is to do. That which gives to human actions the relish of justice is a certain nobleness or gallantness of courage, rarely found, by which a man scorns to be beholding for the contentment of his life to fraud, or breach of promise. This justice of the manners is that which is meant where justice is called a virtue; and injustice, a vice.

But the justice of actions denominates men, not just, but guiltless: and the injustice of the same (which is also called injury) gives them but the name of guilty.

Again, the injustice of manners is the disposition or aptitude to do injury, and is injustice before it proceed to act, and without supposing any individual person injured. But the injustice of an action (that is to say, injury) supposeth an individual person injured; namely him to whom the covenant was made: and therefore many times the injury is received by one man when the damage redoundeth to another. As when the master commandeth his servant to give money to stranger; if it be not done, the injury is done to the master, whom he had before covenanted to obey; but the damage redoundeth to the stranger, to whom he had no obligation, and therefore could not injure him. And so also in Commonwealths private men may remit to one another their debts, but not robberies or other violences, whereby they are endamaged; because the detaining of debt is an injury to themselves, but robbery and violence are injuries to the person of the Commonwealth.

Whatsoever is done to a man, conformable to his own will signified to the doer, is not injury to him. For if he that doeth it hath not passed away his original right to do what he please by some antecedent covenant, there is no breach of covenant, and therefore no injury done him. And if he have, then his will to have it done, being signified, is a release of that covenant, and so again there is no injury done him.

Justice of actions is by writers divided into commutative and distributive: and the former they say consisteth in proportion arithmetical; the latter in proportion geometrical. Commutative, therefore, they place in the equality of value of the things contracted for; and distributive, in the distribution of equal benefit to men of equal merit. As if it were injustice to sell dearer than we buy, or to give more to a man than he merits. The value of all things contracted for is measured by the appetite of the contractors, and therefore the just value is that which they be contented to give. And merit (besides that which is by covenant, where the performance on one part meriteth the performance of the other part, and falls under justice commutative, not distributive) is not due by justice, but is rewarded of grace only. And therefore this distinction, in the sense wherein it useth to be expounded, is not right. To speak properly, commutative justice is the justice of a contractor; that is, a performance of covenant in buying and selling, hiring and letting to hire, lending and borrowing, exchanging, bartering, and other acts of contract.

And distributive justice, the justice of an arbitrator; that is to say, the act of defining what is just. Wherein, being trusted by them that make him arbitrator, if he perform his trust, he is said to distribute to every man his own: and this is indeed just distribution, and may be called, though improperly, distributive justice, but more properly equity, which also is a law of nature, as shall be shown in due place.

As justice dependeth on antecedent covenant; so does gratitude depend on antecedent grace; that is to say, antecedent free gift; and is the fourth law of nature, which may be conceived in this form: that a man which receiveth benefit from another of mere grace endeavour that he which giveth it have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will. For no man giveth but with intention of good to himself, because gift is voluntary; and of all voluntary acts, the object is to every man his own good; of which if men see they shall be frustrated, there will be no beginning of benevolence or trust, nor consequently of mutual help, nor of reconciliation of one man to another; and therefore they are to remain still in the condition of war, which is contrary to the first and fundamental law of nature which commandeth men to seek peace. The breach of this law is called ingratitude, and hath the same relation to grace that injustice hath to obligation by covenant.

A fifth law of nature is complaisance; that is to say, that every man strive to accommodate himself to the rest. For the understanding whereof we may consider that there is in men's aptness to society a diversity of nature, rising from their diversity of affections, not unlike to that we see in stones brought together for building of an edifice. For as that stone which by the asperity and irregularity of figure takes more room from others than itself fills, and for hardness cannot be easily made plain, and thereby hindereth the building, is by the builders cast away as unprofitable and troublesome: so also, a man that by asperity of nature will strive to retain those things which to himself are superfluous, and to others necessary, and for the stubbornness of his passions cannot be corrected, is to be left or cast out of society as cumbersome thereunto. For seeing every man, not only by right, but also by necessity of nature, is supposed to endeavour all he can to obtain that which is necessary for his conservation, he that shall oppose himself against it for things superfluous is guilty of the war that thereupon is to follow, and therefore doth that which is contrary to the fundamental law of nature, which commandeth

to seek peace. The observers of this law may be called sociable, (the Latins call them *commodi*); the contrary, stubborn, insociable, forward, intractable.

A sixth law of nature is this: that upon caution of the future time, a man ought to pardon the offences past of them that, repenting, desire it. For pardon is nothing but granting of peace; which though granted to them that persevere in their hostility, be not peace, but fear; yet not granted to them that give caution of the future time is sign of an aversion to peace, and therefore contrary to the law of nature.

A seventh is: that in revenges (that is, retribution of evil for evil), men look not at the greatness of the evil past, but the greatness of the good to follow. Whereby we are forbidden to inflict punishment with any other design than for correction of the offender, or direction of others. For this law is consequent to the next before it, that commandeth pardon upon security of the future time. Besides, revenge without respect to the example and profit to come is a triumph, or glorying in the hurt of another, tending to no end (for the end is always somewhat to come); and glorying to no end is vain-glory, and contrary to reason; and to hurt without reason tendeth to the introduction of war, which is against the law of nature, and is commonly styled by the name of cruelty.

And because all signs of hatred, or contempt, provoke to fight; insomuch as most men choose rather to hazard their life than not to be revenged, we may in the eighth place, for a law of nature, set down this precept: that no man by deed, word, countenance, or gesture, declare hatred or contempt of another. The breach of which law is commonly called contumely.

The question who is the better man has no place in the condition of mere nature, where (as has been shown before) all men are equal. The inequality that now is has been introduced by the laws civil. I know that Aristotle in the first book of his *Politics*, for a foundation of his doctrine, maketh men by nature, some more worthy to command, meaning the wiser sort, such as he thought himself to be for his philosophy; others to serve, meaning those that had strong bodies, but were not philosophers as he; as master and servant were not introduced by consent of men, but by difference of wit: which is not only against reason, but also against experience. For there are very few so foolish that had not rather govern themselves than be governed by others: nor when the wise, in their own conceit, contend by force with them who distrust their own wisdom, do they always, or often, or almost at any time, get the victory. If nature therefore have made men equal, that equality is to be acknowledged: or if nature have made men unequal, yet because men that think themselves equal will not enter into conditions of peace, but upon equal terms, such equality must be admitted. And therefore for the ninth law of nature, I put this: that every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature. The breach of this precept is pride. On this law dependeth another: that at the entrance into conditions of peace, no man require to reserve to himself any right which he is not content should he reserved to every one of the rest. As it is necessary for all men that seek peace to lay down certain rights of nature; that is to say, not to have liberty to do all they list, so is it necessary for man's life to retain some: as right to govern their own bodies; enjoy air, water, motion, ways to go from place to place; and all things else without which a man cannot live, or not live

well. If in this case, at the making of peace, men require for themselves that which they would not have to be granted to others, they do contrary to the precedent law that commandeth the acknowledgement of natural equality, and therefore also against the law of nature. The observers of this law are those we call modest, and the breakers arrogant men. The Greeks call the violation of this law *pleonexia*; that is, a desire of more than their share.

Also, if a man be trusted to judge between man and man, it is a precept of the law of nature that he deal equally between them. For without that, the controversies of men cannot be determined but by war. He therefore that is partial in judgement, doth what in him lies to deter men from the use of judges and arbitrators, and consequently, against the fundamental law of nature, is the cause of war.

The observance of this law, from the equal distribution to each man of that which in reason belonged to him, is called equity, and (as I have said before) distributive justice: the violation, acception of persons, *prosopolepsia*.

And from this followeth another law: that such things as cannot be divided be enjoyed in common, if it can be; and if the quantity of the thing permit, without stint; otherwise proportionably to the number of them that have right. For otherwise the distribution is unequal, and contrary to equity.

But some things there be that can neither be divided nor enjoyed in common. Then, the law of nature which prescribeth equity requireth: that the entire right, or else (making the use alternate) the first possession, be determined by lot. For equal distribution is of the law of nature; and other means of equal distribution cannot be imagined. Of lots there be two sorts, arbitrary and natural. Arbitrary is that which is agreed on by the competitors; natural is either primogeniture (which the Greek calls *kleronomia*, which signifies, given by lot), or first seizure.

And therefore those things which cannot be enjoyed in common, nor divided, ought to be adjudged to the first possessor; and in some cases to the first born, as acquired by lot.

It is also a law of nature: that all men that mediate peace be allowed safe conduct. For the law that commandeth peace, as the end, commandeth intercession, as the means; and to intercession the means is safe conduct.

And because, though men be never so willing to observe these laws, there may nevertheless arise questions concerning a man's action; first, whether it were done, or not done; secondly, if done, whether against the law, or not against the law; the former whereof is called a question of fact, the latter a question of right; therefore unless the parties to the question covenant mutually to stand to the sentence of another, they are as far from peace as ever. This other, to whose sentence they submit, is called an arbitrator. And therefore it is of the law of nature that they that are at controversy submit their right to the judgement of an arbitrator.

And seeing every man is presumed to do all things in order to his own benefit, no man is a fit arbitrator in his own cause: and if he were never so fit, yet equity allowing to each party equal benefit, if one be admitted to be

judge, the other is to be admitted also; and so the controversy, that is, the cause of war, remains, against the law of nature.

For the same reason no man in any cause ought to be received for arbitrator to whom greater profit, or honour, or pleasure apparently ariseth out of the victory of one party than of the other: for he hath taken, though an unavoidable bribe, yet a bribe; and no man can be obliged to trust him. And thus also the controversy and the condition of war remaineth, contrary to the law of nature.

And in a controversy of fact, the judge being to give no more credit to one than to the other, if there be no other arguments, must give credit to a third; or to a third and fourth; or more: for else the question is undecided, and left to force, contrary to the law of nature.

These are the laws of nature, dictating peace, for a means of the conservation of men in multitudes; and which only concern the doctrine of civil society. There be other things tending to the destruction of particular men; as drunkenness, and all other parts of intemperance, which may therefore also be reckoned amongst those things which the law of nature hath forbidden, but are not necessary to be mentioned, nor are pertinent enough to this place.

And though this may seem too subtle a deduction of the laws of nature to be taken notice of by all men, whereof the most part are too busy in getting food, and the rest too negligent to understand; yet to leave all men inexcusable, they have been contracted into one easy sum, intelligible even to the meanest capacity; and that is: Do not that to another which thou wouldest not have done to thyself, which sheweth him that he has no more to do in learning the laws of nature but, when weighing the actions of other men with his own they seem too heavy, to put them into the other part of the balance, and his own into their place, that his own passions and self-love may add nothing to the weight; and then there is none of these laws of nature that will not appear unto him very reasonable.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. **Authored by:** Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . **Provided by:** BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY:

Attribution



This work (Selected Readings from Thomas Hobbes' "Leviathan" by Thomas Hobbes) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SELECTED READINGS FROM JOHN LOCKE'S "SECOND TREATISE OF GOVERNMENT"

John Locke

Chapter II: On the State of Nature

Sect. 4. TO understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.

A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.

Sect. 6. But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure: and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for our's. Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.

Sect. 7. And that all men may be restrained from invading others rights, and from doing hurt to one another,

and the law of nature be observed, which willeth the peace and preservation of all mankind, the execution of the law of nature is, in that state, put into every man's hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree, as may hinder its violation: for the law of nature would, as all other laws that concern men in this world be in vain, if there were no body that in the state of nature had a power to execute that law, and thereby preserve the innocent and restrain offenders. And if any one in the state of nature may punish another for any evil he has done, every one may do so: for in that state of perfect equality, where naturally there is no superiority or jurisdiction of one over another, what any may do in prosecution of that law, every one must needs have a right to do.

Sect. 8. And thus, in the state of nature, one man comes by a power over another; but yet no absolute or arbitrary power, to use a criminal, when he has got him in his hands, according to the passionate heats, or boundless extravagancy of his own will; but only to retribute to him, so far as calm reason and conscience dictate, what is proportionate to his transgression, which is so much as may serve for reparation and restraint: for these two are the only reasons, why one man may lawfully do harm to another, which is that we call punishment. In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of men, for their mutual security; and so he becomes dangerous to mankind, the tie, which is to secure them from injury and violence, being slighted and broken by him. Which being a trespass against the whole species, and the peace and safety of it, provided for by the law of nature, every man upon this score, by the right he hath to preserve mankind in general, may restrain, or where it is necessary, destroy things noxious to them, and so may bring such evil on any one, who hath transgressed that law, as may make him repent the doing of it, and thereby deter him, and by his example others, from doing the like mischief. And in the case, and upon this ground, EVERY MAN HATH A RIGHT TO PUNISH THE OFFENDER, AND BE EXECUTIONER OF THE LAW OF NATURE.

Chapter V: On Property

Sect. 25. Whether we consider natural reason, which tells us, that men, being once born, have a right to their preservation, and consequently to meat and drink, and such other things as nature affords for their subsistence: or revelation, which gives us an account of those grants God made of the world to Adam, and to Noah, and his sons, it is very clear, that God, as king David says, Psal. cxv. 16. has given the earth to the children of men; given it to mankind in common. But this being supposed, it seems to some a very great difficulty, how any one should ever come to have a property in any thing: I will not content myself to answer, that if it be difficult to make out property, upon a supposition that God gave the world to Adam, and his posterity in common, it is impossible that any man, but one universal monarch, should have any property upon a supposition, that God gave the world to Adam, and his heirs in succession, exclusive of all the rest of his posterity. But I shall endeavour to shew, how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common, and that without any express compact of all the commoners.

Sect. 26. God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And tho' all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. The fruit, or venison, which nourishes the wild Indian, who knows no enclosure, and is still a tenant in common, must be his, and so his, i.e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his life.

Sect. 27. Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others.

Sect. 28. He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. No body can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then, when did they begin to be his? when he digested? or when he eat? or when he boiled? or when he brought them home? or when he picked them up? and it is plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That labour put a distinction between them and common: that added something to them more than nature, the common mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right. And will any one say, he had no right to those acorns or apples, he thus appropriated, because he had not the consent of all mankind to make them his? Was it a robbery thus to assume to himself what belonged to all in common? If such a consent as that was necessary, man had starved, notwithstanding the plenty God had given him. We see in commons, which remain so by compact, that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in, which begins the property; without which the common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners. Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.

Sect. 29. By making an explicit consent of every commoner, necessary to any one's appropriating to himself any part of what is given in common, children or servants could not cut the meat, which their father or master had provided for them in common, without assigning to every one his peculiar part. Though the water running in

the fountain be every one's, yet who can doubt, but that in the pitcher is his only who drew it out? His labour hath taken it out of the hands of nature, where it was common, and belonged equally to all her children, and hath thereby appropriated it to himself.

Sect. 30. Thus this law of reason makes the deer that Indian's who hath killed it; it is allowed to be his goods, who hath bestowed his labour upon it, though before it was the common right of every one. And amongst those who are counted the civilized part of mankind, who have made and multiplied positive laws to determine property, this original law of nature, for the beginning of property, in what was before common, still takes place; and by virtue thereof, what fish any one catches in the ocean, that great and still remaining common of mankind; or what ambergrise any one takes up here, is by the labour that removes it out of that common state nature left it in, made his property, who takes that pains about it. And even amongst us, the hare that any one is hunting, is thought his who pursues her during the chase: for being a beast that is still looked upon as common, and no man's private possession; whoever has employed so much labour about any of that kind, as to find and pursue her, has thereby removed her from the state of nature, wherein she was common, and hath begun a property.

Sect. 31. It will perhaps be objected to this, that if gathering the acorns, or other fruits of the earth, &c. makes a right to them, then any one may ingross as much as he will. To which I answer, Not so. The same law of nature, that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too. God has given us all things richly, 1 Tim. vi. 12. is the voice of reason confirmed by inspiration. But how far has he given it us? To enjoy. As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy. And thus, considering the plenty of natural provisions there was a long time in the world, and the few spenders; and to how small a part of that provision the industry of one man could extend itself, and ingross it to the prejudice of others; especially keeping within the bounds, set by reason, of what might serve for his use; there could be then little room for quarrels or contentions about property so established.

Sect. 46. The greatest part of things really useful to the life of man, and such as the necessity of subsisting made the first commoners of the world look after, as it doth the Americans now, are generally things of short duration; such as, if they are not consumed by use, will decay and perish of themselves: gold, silver and diamonds, are things that fancy or agreement hath put the value on, more than real use, and the necessary support of life. Now of those good things which nature hath provided in common, every one had a right (as hath been said) to as much as he could use, and property in all that he could effect with his labour; all that his industry could extend to, to alter from the state nature had put it in, was his. He that gathered a hundred bushels of acorns or apples, had thereby a property in them, they were his goods as soon as gathered. He was only to look, that he used them before they spoiled, else he took more than his share, and robbed others. And indeed it was a foolish thing, as well as dishonest, to hoard up more than he could make use of. If he gave away a part to any body else, so that it perished not uselessly in his possession, these he also made use of. And if he also

bartered away plums, that would have rotted in a week, for nuts that would last good for his eating a whole year, he did no injury; he wasted not the common stock; destroyed no part of the portion of goods that belonged to others, so long as nothing perished uselessly in his hands. Again, if he would give his nuts for a piece of metal, pleased with its colour; or exchange his sheep for shells, or wool for a sparkling pebble or a diamond, and keep those by him all his life he invaded not the right of others, he might heap up as much of these durable things as he pleased; the exceeding of the bounds of his just property not lying in the largeness of his possession, but the perishing of any thing uselessly in it.

Sect. 47. And thus came in the use of money, some lasting thing that men might keep without spoiling, and that by mutual consent men would take in exchange for the truly useful, but perishable supports of life.

Sect. 48. And as different degrees of industry were apt to give men possessions in different proportions, so this invention of money gave them the opportunity to continue and enlarge them: for supposing an island, separate from all possible commerce with the rest of the world, wherein there were but an hundred families, but there were sheep, horses and cows, with other useful animals, wholesome fruits, and land enough for corn for a hundred thousand times as many, but nothing in the island, either because of its commonness, or perishableness, fit to supply the place of money; what reason could any one have there to enlarge his possessions beyond the use of his family, and a plentiful supply to its consumption, either in what their own industry produced, or they could barter for like perishable, useful commodities, with others? Where there is not some thing, both lasting and scarce, and so valuable to be hoarded up, there men will not be apt to enlarge their possessions of land, were it never so rich, never so free for them to take: for I ask, what would a man value ten thousand, or an hundred thousand acres of excellent land, ready cultivated, and well stocked too with cattle, in the middle of the inland parts of America, where he had no hopes of commerce with other parts of the world, to draw money to him by the sale of the product? It would not be worth the enclosing, and we should see him give up again to the wild common of nature, whatever was more than would supply the conveniencies of life to be had there for him and his family.

Sect. 49. Thus in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as money was any where known. Find out something that hath the use and value of money amongst his neighbours, you shall see the same man will begin presently to enlarge his possessions.

Chapter VII: Of Political or Civil Society

Sect. 87. Man being born, as has been proved, with a title to perfect freedom, and an uncontrouled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of nature, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, hath by nature a power, not only to preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men; but to judge of, and punish the breaches of that law in others, as he

is persuaded the offence deserves, even with death itself, in crimes where the heinousness of the fact, in his opinion, requires it. But because no political society can be, nor subsist, without having in itself the power to preserve the property, and in order thereunto, punish the offences of all those of that society; there, and there only is political society, where every one of the members hath quitted this natural power, resigned it up into the hands of the community in all cases that exclude him not from appealing for protection to the law established by it. And thus all private judgment of every particular member being excluded, the community comes to be umpire, by settled standing rules, indifferent, and the same to all parties; and by men having authority from the community, for the execution of those rules, decides all the differences that may happen between any members of that society concerning any matter of right; and punishes those offences which any member hath committed against the society, with such penalties as the law has established: whereby it is easy to discern, who are, and who are not, in political society together. Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another: but those who have no such common appeal, I mean on earth, are still in the state of nature, each being, where there is no other, judge for himself, and executioner; which is, as I have before shewed it, the perfect state of nature.

Sect. 88. And thus the commonwealth comes by a power to set down what punishment shall belong to the several transgressions which they think worthy of it, committed amongst the members of that society, (which is the power of making laws) as well as it has the power to punish any injury done unto any of its members, by any one that is not of it, (which is the power of war and peace;) and all this for the preservation of the property of all the members of that society, as far as is possible. But though every man who has entered into civil society, and is become a member of any commonwealth, has thereby quitted his power to punish offences, against the law of nature, in prosecution of his own private judgment, yet with the judgment of offences, which he has given up to the legislative in all cases, where he can appeal to the magistrate, he has given a right to the commonwealth to employ his force, for the execution of the judgments of the commonwealth, whenever he shall be called to it; which indeed are his own judgments, they being made by himself, or his representative. And herein we have the original of the legislative and executive power of civil society, which is to judge by standing laws, how far offences are to be punished, when committed within the commonwealth; and also to determine, by occasional judgments founded on the present circumstances of the fact, how far injuries from without are to be vindicated; and in both these to employ all the force of all the members, when there shall be need.

Sect. 89. Where-ever therefore any number of men are so united into one society, as to quit every one his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there only is a political, or civil society. And this is done, where-ever any number of men, in the state of nature, enter into society to make one people, one body politic, under one supreme government; or else when any one joins himself to, and incorporates with any government already made: for hereby he authorizes the society, or which is all one, the legislative thereof, to make laws for him, as the public good of the society shall require; to the execution

whereof, his own assistance (as to his own decrees) is due. And this puts men out of a state of nature into that of a commonwealth, by setting up a judge on earth, with authority to determine all the controversies, and redress the injuries that may happen to any member of the commonwealth; which judge is the legislative, or magistrates appointed by it. And where-ever there are any number of men, however associated, that have no such decisive power to appeal to, there they are still in the state of nature.

Sect. 90. Hence it is evident, that absolute monarchy, which by some men is counted the only government in the world, is indeed inconsistent with civil society, and so can be no form of civil-government at all: for the end of civil society, being to avoid, and remedy those inconveniencies of the state of nature, which necessarily follow from every man's being judge in his own case, by setting up a known authority, to which every one of that society may appeal upon any injury received, or controversy that may arise, and which every one of the society ought to obey;* where-ever any persons are, who have not such an authority to appeal to, for the decision of any difference between them, there those persons are still in the state of nature; and so is every absolute prince, in respect of those who are under his dominion.

Chapter VIII: Of the Beginning of Political Societies

Sect. 95. MEN being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent. The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it. This any number of men may do, because it injures not the freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the liberty of the state of nature. When any number of men have so consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest.

Sect. 96. For when any number of men have, by the consent of every individual, made a community, they have thereby made that community one body, with a power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the majority: for that which acts any community, being only the consent of the individuals of it, and it being necessary to that which is one body to move one way; it is necessary the body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the consent of the majority: or else it is impossible it should act or continue one body, one community, which the consent of every individual that united into it, agreed that it should; and so every one is bound by that consent to be concluded by the majority. And therefore we see, that in assemblies, impowered to act by positive laws, where no number is set by that positive law which impowers them, the act of the majority passes for the act of the whole, and of course determines, as having, by the law of nature and reason, the power of the whole.

Sect. 97. And thus every man, by consenting with others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation, to every one of that society, to submit to the determination of the majority, and to be concluded by it; or else this original compact, whereby he with others incorporates into one society, would signify nothing, and be no compact, if he be left free, and under no other ties than he was in before in the state of nature. For what appearance would there be of any compact? what new engagement if he were no farther tied by any decrees of the society, than he himself thought fit, and did actually consent to? This would be still as great a liberty, as he himself had before his compact, or any one else in the state of nature hath, who may submit himself, and consent to any acts of it if he thinks fit.

Sect. 98. For if the consent of the majority shall not, in reason, be received as the act of the whole, and conclude every individual; nothing but the consent of every individual can make any thing to be the act of the whole: but such a consent is next to impossible ever to be had, if we consider the infirmities of health, and avocations of business, which in a number, though much less than that of a commonwealth, will necessarily keep many away from the public assembly. To which if we add the variety of opinions, and contrariety of interests, which unavoidably happen in all collections of men, the coming into society upon such terms would be only like Cato's coming into the theatre, only to go out again. Such a constitution as this would make the mighty Leviathan of a shorter duration, than the feeblest creatures, and not let it outlast the day it was born in: which cannot be supposed, till we can think, that rational creatures should desire and constitute societies only to be dissolved: for where the majority cannot conclude the rest, there they cannot act as one body, and consequently will be immediately dissolved again.

Sect. 99. Whosoever therefore out of a state of nature unite into a community, must be understood to give up all the power, necessary to the ends for which they unite into society, to the majority of the community, unless they expressly agreed in any number greater than the majority. And this is done by barely agreeing to unite into one political society, which is all the compact that is, or needs be, between the individuals, that enter into, or make up a commonwealth. And thus that, which begins and actually constitutes any political society, is nothing but the consent of any number of freemen capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a society. And this is that, and that only, which did, or could give beginning to any lawful government in the world.

Chapter IX: Of the Ends of Political Society and Government

Sect. 123. IF man in the state of nature be so free, as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to no body, why will he part with his freedom? why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and controul of any other power? To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others: for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and

continual dangers: and it is not without reason, that he seeks out, and is willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property.

Sect. 124. The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting.

First, There wants an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide all controversies between them: for though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures; yet men being biassed by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a law binding to them in the application of it to their particular cases.

Sect. 125. Secondly, In the state of nature there wants a known and indifferent judge, with authority to determine all differences according to the established law: for every one in that state being both judge and executioner of the law of nature, men being partial to themselves, passion and revenge is very apt to carry them too far, and with too much heat, in their own cases; as well as negligence, and unconcernedness, to make them too remiss in other men's.

Sect. 126. Thirdly, In the state of nature there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution, They who by any injustice offended, will seldom fail, where they are able, by force to make good their injustice; such resistance many times makes the punishment dangerous, and frequently destructive, to those who attempt it.

Sect. 127. Thus mankind, notwithstanding all the privileges of the state of nature, being but in an ill condition, while they remain in it, are quickly driven into society. Hence it comes to pass, that we seldom find any number of men live any time together in this state. The inconveniencies that they are therein exposed to, by the irregular and uncertain exercise of the power every man has of punishing the transgressions of others, make them take sanctuary under the established laws of government, and therein seek the preservation of their property. It is this makes them so willingly give up every one his single power of punishing, to be exercised by such alone, as shall be appointed to it amongst them; and by such rules as the community, or those authorized by them to that purpose, shall agree on. And in this we have the original right and rise of both the legislative and executive power, as well as of the governments and societies themselves.

Sect. 128. For in the state of nature, to omit the liberty he has of innocent delights, a man has two powers.

The first is to do whatsoever he thinks fit for the preservation of himself, and others within the permission of the law of nature: by which law, common to them all, he and all the rest of mankind are one community, make up one society, distinct from all other creatures. And were it not for the corruption and viciousness of

degenerate men, there would be no need of any other; no necessity that men should separate from this great and natural community, and by positive agreements combine into smaller and divided associations.

The other power a man has in the state of nature, is the power to punish the crimes committed against that law. Both these he gives up, when he joins in a private, if I may so call it, or particular politic society, and incorporates into any commonwealth, separate from the rest of mankind.

Sect. 129. The first power, viz. of doing whatsoever he thought for the preservation of himself, and the rest of mankind, he gives up to be regulated by laws made by the society, so far forth as the preservation of himself, and the rest of that society shall require; which laws of the society in many things confine the liberty he had by the law of nature.

Sect. 130. Secondly, The power of punishing he wholly gives up, and engages his natural force, (which he might before employ in the execution of the law of nature, by his own single authority, as he thought fit) to assist the executive power of the society, as the law thereof shall require: for being now in a new state, wherein he is to enjoy many conveniencies, from the labour, assistance, and society of others in the same community, as well as protection from its whole strength; he is to part also with as much of his natural liberty, in providing for himself, as the good, prosperity, and safety of the society shall require; which is not only necessary, but just, since the other members of the society do the like.

Sect. 131. But though men, when they enter into society, give up the equality, liberty, and executive power they had in the state of nature, into the hands of the society, to be so far disposed of by the legislative, as the good of the society shall require; yet it being only with an intention in every one the better to preserve himself, his liberty and property; (for no rational creature can be supposed to change his condition with an intention to be worse) the power of the society, or legislative constituted by them, can never be supposed to extend farther, than the common good; but is obliged to secure every one's property, by providing against those three defects above mentioned, that made the state of nature so unsafe and uneasy. And so whoever has the legislative or supreme power of any commonwealth, is bound to govern by established standing laws, promulgated and known to the people, and not by extemporary decrees; by indifferent and upright judges, who are to decide controversies by those laws; and to employ the force of the community at home, only in the execution of such laws, or abroad to prevent or redress foreign injuries, and secure the community from inroads and invasion. And all this to be directed to no other end, but the peace, safety, and public good of the people.

Chapter XIX: Of the Dissolution of Government

Sect. 222. The reason why men enter into society, is the preservation of their property; and the end why they chuse and authorize a legislative, is, that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the members of the society, to limit the power, and moderate the dominion, of every part

and member of the society: for since it can never be supposed to be the will of the society, that the legislative should have a power to destroy that which every one designs to secure, by entering into society, and for which the people submitted themselves to legislators of their own making; whenever the legislators endeavour to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge, which God hath provided for all men, against force and violence. Whensoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people; by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society. What I have said here, concerning the legislative in general, holds true also concerning the supreme executor, who having a double trust put in him, both to have a part in the legislative, and the supreme execution of the law, acts against both, when he goes about to set up his own arbitrary will as the law of the society. He acts also contrary to his trust, when he either employs the force, treasure, and offices of the society, to corrupt the representatives, and gain them to his purposes; or openly preengages the electors, and prescribes to their choice, such, whom he has, by solicitations, threats, promises, or otherwise, won to his designs; and employs them to bring in such, who have promised beforehand what to vote, and what to enact. Thus to regulate candidates and electors, and new-model the ways of election, what is it but to cut up the government by the roots, and poison the very fountain of public security? for the people having reserved to themselves the choice of their representatives, as the fence to their properties, could do it for no other end, but that they might always be freely chosen, and so chosen, freely act, and advise, as the necessity of the commonwealth, and the public good should, upon examination, and mature debate, be judged to require. This, those who give their votes before they hear the debate, and have weighed the reasons on all sides, are not capable of doing. To prepare such an assembly as this, and endeavour to set up the declared abettors of his own will, for the true representatives of the people, and the law-makers of the society, is certainly as great a breach of trust, and as perfect a declaration of a design to subvert the government, as is possible to be met with. To which, if one shall add rewards and punishments visibly employed to the same end, and all the arts of perverted law made use of, to take off and destroy all that stand in the way of such a design, and will not comply and consent to betray the liberties of their country, it will be past doubt what is doing. What power they ought to have in the society, who thus employ it contrary to the trust went along with it in its first institution, is easy to determine; and one cannot but see, that he, who has once attempted any such thing as this, cannot any longer be trusted.

Sect. 243. To conclude, The power that every individual gave the society, when he entered into it, can never revert to the individuals again, as long as the society lasts, but will always remain in the community; because

without this there can be no community, no commonwealth, which is contrary to the original agreement: so also when the society hath placed the legislative in any assembly of men, to continue in them and their successors, with direction and authority for providing such successors, the legislative can never revert to the people whilst that government lasts; because having provided a legislative with power to continue for ever, they have given up their political power to the legislative, and cannot resume it. But if they have set limits to the duration of their legislative, and made this supreme power in any person, or assembly, only temporary; or else, when by the miscarriages of those in authority, it is forfeited; upon the forfeiture, or at the determination of the time set, it reverts to the society, and the people have a right to act as supreme, and continue the legislative in themselves; or erect a new form, or under the old form place it in new hands, as they think good.



This work (Selected Readings from John Locke's "Second Treatise of Government" by John Locke) is free of known copyright restrictions.

ORIGINAL ACQUISITION

John Locke

25. Whether we consider natural reason, which tells us, that men, being once born, have a right to their preservation, and consequently to meat and drink, and such other things as nature affords for their subsistence: or revelation, which gives us an account of those grants God made of the world to Adam, and to Noah, and his sons, it is very clear, that God, as king David says, Psal. cxv. 16. has given the earth to the children of men; given it to mankind in common. But this being supposed, it seems to some a very great difficulty, how any one should ever come to have a property in any thing: I will not content myself to answer, that if it be difficult to make out property, upon a supposition that God gave the world to Adam, and his posterity in common, it is impossible that any man, but one universal monarch, should have any property upon a supposition, that God gave the world to Adam, and his heirs in succession, exclusive of all the rest of his posterity. But I shall endeavor to show, how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common, and that without any express compact of all the commoners.**26.** God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And tho' all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. The fruit, or venison, which nourishes the wild Indian, who knows no enclosure, and is still a tenant in common, must be his, and so his, i.e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his life.

27. Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labor of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labor something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this labor being the unquestionable property of the laborer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others.

28. He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. No body can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then,

when did they begin to be his? when he digested? or when he eat? or when he boiled? or when he brought them home? or when he picked them up? and it is plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That labor put a distinction between them and common: that added something to them more than nature, the common mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right. And will any one say, he had no right to those acorns or apples, he thus appropriated, because he had not the consent of all mankind to make them his? Was it a robbery thus to assume to himself what belonged to all in common? If such a consent as that was necessary, man had starved, notwithstanding the plenty God had given him. We see in commons, which remain so by compact, that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in, which begins the property; without which the common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners. Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body. The labor that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.

29. By making an explicit consent of every commoner, necessary to any one's appropriating to himself any part of what is given in common, children or servants could not cut the meat, which their father or master had provided for them in common, without assigning to every one his peculiar part. Though the water running in the fountain be every one's, yet who can doubt, but that in the pitcher is his only who drew it out? His labor hath taken it out of the hands of nature, where it was common, and belonged equally to all her children, and hath thereby appropriated it to himself.

30. Thus this law of reason makes the deer that Indian's who hath killed it; it is allowed to be his goods, who hath bestowed his labor upon it, though before it was the common right of every one. And among those who are counted the civilized part of mankind, who have made and multiplied positive laws to determine property, this original law of nature, for the beginning of property, in what was before common, still takes place; and by virtue thereof, what fish any one catches in the ocean, that great and still remaining common of mankind; or what ambergris any one takes up here, is by the labor that removes it out of that common state nature left it in, made his property, who takes that pains about it. And even among us, the hare that any one is hunting, is thought his who pursues her during the chase: for being a beast that is still looked upon as common, and no man's private possession; whoever has employed so much labor about any of that kind, as to find and pursue her, has thereby removed her from the state of nature, wherein she was common, and hath begun a property.

31. It will perhaps be objected to this, that if gathering the acorns, or other fruits of the earth, &c. makes a right to them, then any one may engross as much as he will. To which I answer, Not so. The same law of nature, that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too. God has given us all things richly, 1 Tim. vi. 12. is the voice of reason confirmed by inspiration. But how far has he given it us? To enjoy. As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labor fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man

to spoil or destroy. And thus, considering the plenty of natural provisions there was a long time in the world, and the few spenders; and to how small a part of that provision the industry of one man could extend itself, and engross it to the prejudice of others; especially keeping within the bounds, set by reason, of what might serve for his use; there could be then little room for quarrels or contentions about property so established.

32. But the chief matter of property being now not the fruits of the earth, and the beasts that subsist on it, but the earth itself; as that which takes in and carries with it all the rest; I think it is plain, that property in that too is acquired as the former. As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labor does, as it were, **enclose it from the common**. Nor will it invalidate his right, to say every body else has an equal title to it; and therefore he cannot appropriate, he cannot enclose, without the consent of all his fellow-commoners, all mankind. God, when he gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labor, and the penury of his condition required it of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, i.e. improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labor. He that in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him.

33. Nor was this appropriation of any parcel of land, by improving it, any prejudice to any other man, since there was still enough, and as good left; and more than the yet unprovided could use. So that, in effect, there was never the less left for others because of his enclosure for himself: for he that leaves as much as another can make use of, does as good as take nothing at all. No body could think himself injured by the drinking of another man, though he took a good draught, who had a whole river of the same water left him to quench his thirst: and the case of land and water, where there is enough of both, is perfectly the same.

34. God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, (and labor was to be his title to it;) not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious. He that had as good left for his improvement, as was already taken up, needed not complain, ought not to meddle with what was already improved by another's labor: if he did, it is plain he desired the benefit of another's pains, which he had no right to, and not the ground which God had given him in common with others to labor on, and whereof there was as good left, as that already possessed, and more than he knew what to do with, or his industry could reach to.

35. It is true, in land that is common in England, or any other country, where there is plenty of people under government, who have money and commerce, no one can enclose or appropriate any part, without the consent of all his fellow commoners; because this is left common by compact, i.e. by the law of the land, which is not to be violated. And though it be common, in respect of some men, it is not so to all mankind; but is the joint property of this country, or this parish. Besides, the remainder, after such enclosure, would not be

as good to the rest of the commoners, as the whole was when they could all make use of the whole; whereas in the beginning and first peopling of the great common of the world, it was quite otherwise. The law man was under, was rather for appropriating. God commanded, and his wants forced him to labor. That was his property which could not be taken from him where-ever he had fixed it. And hence subduing or cultivating the earth, and having dominion, we see are joined together. The one gave title to the other. So that God, by commanding to subdue, gave authority so far to appropriate: and the condition of human life, which requires labor and materials to work on, necessarily introduces private possessions.

36. The measure of property nature has well set by the extent of men's labor and the conveniences of life: no man's labor could subdue, or appropriate all; nor could his enjoyment consume more than a small part; so that it was impossible for any man, this way, to entrench upon the right of another, or acquire to himself a property, to the prejudice of his neighbor, who would still have room for as good, and as large a possession (after the other had taken out his) as before it was appropriated. This measure did confine every man's possession to a very moderate proportion, and such as he might appropriate to himself, without injury to any body, in the first ages of the world, when men were more in danger to be lost, by wandering from their company, in the then vast wilderness of the earth, than to be straitened for want of room to plant in. And the same measure may be allowed still without prejudice to any body, as full as the world seems: for supposing a man, or family, in the state they were at first peopling of the world by the children of Adam, or Noah; let him plant in some inland, vacant places of America, we shall find that the possessions he could make himself, upon the measures we have given, would not be very large, nor, even to this day, prejudice the rest of mankind, or give them reason to complain, or think themselves injured by this man's encroachment, though the race of men have now spread themselves to all the corners of the world, and do infinitely exceed the small number was at the beginning. Nay, the extent of ground is of so little value, without labor, that I have heard it affirmed, that in Spain itself a man may be permitted to plough, sow and reap, without being disturbed, upon land he has no other title to, but only his making use of it. But, on the contrary, the inhabitants think themselves beholden to him, who, by his industry on neglected, and consequently waste land, has increased the stock of corn, which they wanted. But be this as it will, which I lay no stress on; this I dare boldly affirm, that the same rule of propriety, (*viz.*) that every man should have as much as he could make use of, would hold still in the world, without straitening any body; since there is land enough in the world to suffice double the inhabitants, had not the invention of money, and the tacit agreement of men to put a value on it, introduced (by consent) larger possessions, and a right to them; which, how it has done, I shall by and by shew more at large.

37. This is certain, that in the beginning, before the desire of having more than man needed had altered the intrinsic value of things, which depends only on their usefulness to the life of man; or had agreed, that a little piece of yellow metal, which would keep without wasting or decay, should be worth a great piece of flesh, or a whole heap of corn; though men had a right to appropriate, by their labor, each one of himself, as much of the things of nature, as he could use: yet this could not be much, nor to the prejudice of others, where the same plenty was still left to those who would use the same industry. To which let me add, that he who appropriates

land to himself by his labor, does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind: for the provisions serving to the support of human life, produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land, are (to speak much within compass) ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of an equal richness lying waste in common. And therefore he that encloses land, and has a greater plenty of the conveniences of life from ten acres, than he could have from an hundred left to nature, may truly be said to give ninety acres to mankind: for his labor now supplies him with provisions out of ten acres, which were but the product of an hundred lying in common. I have here rated the improved land very low, in making its product but as ten to one, when it is much nearer an hundred to one: for I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated?

Before the appropriation of land, he who gathered as much of the wild fruit, killed, caught, or tamed, as many of the beasts, as he could; he that so employed his pains about any of the spontaneous products of nature, as any way to alter them from the state which nature put them in, by placing any of his labor on them, did thereby acquire a propriety in them: but if they perished, in his possession, without their due use; if the fruits rotted, or the venison putrefied, before he could spend it, he offended against the common law of nature, and was liable to be punished; he invaded his neighbor's share, for he had no right, farther than his use called for any of them, and they might serve to afford him conveniences of life.

38. The same measures governed the possession of land too: whatsoever he tilled and reaped, laid up and made use of, before it spoiled, that was his peculiar right; whatsoever he enclosed, and could feed, and make use of, the cattle and product was also his. But if either the grass of his enclosure rotted on the ground, or the fruit of his planting perished without gathering, and laying up, this part of the earth, notwithstanding his enclosure, was still to be looked on as waste, and might be the possession of any other. Thus, at the beginning, Cain might take as much ground as he could till, and make it his own land, and yet leave enough to Abel's sheep to feed on; a few acres would serve for both their possessions. But as families increased, and industry enlarged their stocks, their possessions enlarged with the need of them; but yet it was commonly without any fixed property in the ground they made use of, till they incorporated, settled themselves together, and built cities; and then, by consent, they came in time, to set out the bounds of their distinct territories, and agree on limits between them and their neighbors; and by laws within themselves, settled the properties of those of the same society: for we see, that in that part of the world which was first inhabited, and therefore like to be best peopled, even as low down as Abraham's time, they wandered with their flocks, and their herds, which was their substance, freely up and down; and this Abraham did, in a country where he was a stranger. Whence it is plain, that at least a great part of the land lay in common; that the inhabitants valued it not, nor claimed property in any more than they made use of. But when there was not room enough in the same place, for their herds to feed together, they by consent, as Abraham and Lot did, Gen. xiii. 5. separated and enlarged their pasture, where it

best liked them. And for the same reason Esau went from his father, and his brother, and planted in Mount Seir, Gen. xxxvi. 6.

39. And thus, without supposing any private dominion, and property in Adam, over all the world, exclusive of all other men, which can no way be proved, nor any one's property be made out from it; but supposing the world given, as it was, to the children of men in common, we see how labor could make men distinct titles to several parcels of it, for their private uses; wherein there could be no doubt of right, no room for quarrel.

40. Nor is it so strange, as perhaps before consideration it may appear, that the property of labor should be able to over-balance the community of land: for it is labor indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing; and let any one consider what the difference is between an acre of land planted with tobacco or sugar, sown with wheat or barley, and an acre of the same land lying in common, without any husbandry upon it, and he will find, that the improvement of labor makes the far greater part of the value. I think it will be but a very modest computation to say, that of the products of the earth useful to the life of man nine tenths are the effects of labor: nay, if we will rightly estimate things as they come to our use, and cast up the several expenses about them, what in them is purely owing to nature, and what to labor, we shall find, that in most of them ninety-nine hundredths are wholly to be put on the account of labor.

41. There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land, and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty, i.e. a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet for want of improving it by labor, have not one hundredth part of the conveniences we enjoy: and a king of a large and fruitful territory there, feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-laborer in England.

42. To make this a little clearer, let us but trace some of the ordinary provisions of life, through their several progresses, before they come to our use, and see how much they receive of their value from human industry. Bread, wine and cloth, are things of daily use, and great plenty; yet notwithstanding, acorns, water and leaves, or skins, must be our bread, drink and clothing, did not labor furnish us with these more useful commodities: for whatever bread is more worth than acorns, wine than water, and cloth or silk, than leaves, skins or moss, that is wholly owing to labor and industry; the one of these being the food and raiment which unassisted nature furnishes us with; the other, provisions which our industry and pains prepare for us, which how much they exceed the other in value, when any one hath computed, he will then see how much labor makes the far greatest part of the value of things we enjoy in this world: and the ground which produces the materials, is scarce to be reckoned in, as any, or at most, but a very small part of it; so little, that even among us, land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing.

This shews how much numbers of men are to be preferred to largeness of dominions; and that the increase of

lands, and the right employing of them, is the great art of government: and that prince, who shall be so wise and godlike, as by established laws of liberty to secure protection and encouragement to the honest industry of mankind, against the oppression of power and narrowness of party, will quickly be too hard for his neighbors: but this by the by. To return to the argument in hand,

43. An acre of land, that bears here twenty bushels of wheat, and another in America, which, with the same husbandry, would do the like, are, without doubt, of the same natural intrinsic value: but yet the benefit mankind receives from the one in a year, is worth 5l. and from the other possibly not worth a penny, if all the profit an Indian received from it were to be valued, and sold here; at least, I may truly say, not one thousandth. It is labor then which puts the greatest part of value upon land, without which it would scarcely be worth any thing: it is to that we owe the greatest part of all its useful products; for all that the straw, bran, bread, of that acre of wheat, is more worth than the product of an acre of as good land, which lies waste, is all the effect of labor: for it is not barely the plough-man's pains, the reaper's and thresher's toil, and the baker's sweat, is to be counted into the bread we eat; the labor of those who broke the oxen, who digged and wrought the iron and stones, who felled and framed the timber employed about the plough, mill, oven, or any other utensils, which are a vast number, requisite to this corn, from its being feed to be sown to its being made bread, must all be charged on the account of labor, and received as an effect of that: nature and the earth furnished only the almost worthless materials, as in themselves. It would be a strange catalog of things, that industry provided and made use of, about every loaf of bread, before it came to our use, if we could trace them; iron, wood, leather, bark, timber, stone, bricks, coals, lime, cloth, dying drugs, pitch, tar, masts, ropes, and all the materials made use of in the ship, that brought any of the commodities made use of by any of the workmen, to any part of the work; all which it would be almost impossible, at least too long, to reckon up.

44. From all which it is evident, that though the things of nature are given in common, yet man, by being master of himself, and proprietor of his own person, and the actions or labor of it, had still in himself the great foundation of property; and that, which made up the great part of what he applied to the support or comfort of his being, when invention and arts had improved the conveniences of life, was perfectly his own, and did not belong in common to others.

45. Thus labor, in the beginning, gave a right of property, wherever any one was pleased to employ it upon what was common, which remained a long while the far greater part, and is yet more than mankind makes use of. Men, at first, for the most part, contented themselves with what unassisted nature offered to their necessities: and though afterwards, in some parts of the world, (where the increase of people and stock, with the use of money, had made land scarce, and so of some value) the several communities settled the bounds of their distinct territories, and by laws within themselves regulated the properties of the private men of their society, and so, by compact and agreement, settled the property which labor and industry began; and the leagues that have been made between several states and kingdoms, either expressly or tacitly disowning all claim and right to the land in the others possession, have, by common consent, given up their pretenses to their natural common

right, which originally they had to those countries, and so have, by positive agreement, settled a property among themselves, in distinct parts and parcels of the earth; yet there are still great tracts of ground to be found, which (the inhabitants thereof not having joined with the rest of mankind, in the consent of the use of their common money) lie waste, and are more than the people who dwell on it do, or can make use of, and so still lie in common; tho' this can scarce happen among that part of mankind that have consented to the use of money.

Money

46. The greatest part of things really useful to the life of man, and such as the necessity of subsisting made the first commoners of the world look after, as it does the Americans now, are generally things of short duration; such as, if they are not consumed by use, will decay and perish of themselves: gold, silver and diamonds, are things that fancy or agreement hath put the value on, more than real use, and the necessary support of life. Now of those good things which nature hath provided in common, every one had a right (as hath been said) to as much as he could use, and property in all that he could effect with his labor; all that his industry could extend to, to alter from the state nature had put it in, was his. He that gathered a hundred bushels of acorns or apples, had thereby a property in them, they were his goods as soon as gathered. He was only to look, that he used them before they spoiled, else he took more than his share, and robbed others. And indeed it was a foolish thing, as well as dishonest, to hoard up more than he could make use of. If he gave away a part to any body else, so that it perished not uselessly in his possession, these he also made use of. And if he also bartered away plums, that would have rotted in a week, for nuts that would last good for his eating a whole year, he did no injury; he wasted not the common stock; destroyed no part of the portion of goods that belonged to others, so long as nothing perished uselessly in his hands. Again, if he would give his nuts for a piece of metal, pleased with its colour; or exchange his sheep for shells, or wool for a sparkling pebble or a diamond, and keep those by him all his life he invaded not the right of others, he might heap up as much of these durable things as he pleased; the exceeding of the bounds of his just property not lying in the largeness of his possession, but the perishing of any thing uselessly in it.

47. And thus came in the use of money, some lasting thing that men might keep without spoiling, and that by mutual consent men would take in exchange for the truly useful, but perishable supports of life.

48. And as different degrees of industry were apt to give men possessions in different proportions, so this invention of money gave them the opportunity to continue and enlarge them: for supposing an island, separate from all possible commerce with the rest of the world, wherein there were but an hundred families, but there were sheep, horses and cows, with other useful animals, wholesome fruits, and land enough for corn for a hundred thousand times as many, but nothing in the island, either because of its commonness, or perishableness, fit to supply the place of money; what reason could any one have there to enlarge his possessions beyond the use of his family, and a plentiful supply to its consumption, either in what their own industry

produced, or they could barter for like perishable, useful commodities, with others? Where there is not some thing, both lasting and scarce, and so valuable to be hoarded up, there men will not be apt to enlarge their possessions of land, were it never so rich, never so free for them to take: for I ask, what would a man value ten thousand, or an hundred thousand acres of excellent land, ready cultivated, and well stocked too with cattle, in the middle of the inland parts of America, where he had no hopes of commerce with other parts of the world, to draw money to him by the sale of the product? It would not be worth the enclosing, and we should see him give up again to the wild common of nature, whatever was more than would supply the conveniences of life to be had there for him and his family.

49. Thus in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as money was any where known. Find out something that hath the use and value of money among his neighbors, you shall see the same man will begin presently to enlarge his possessions.

50. But since gold and silver, being little useful to the life of man in proportion to food, raiment, and carriage, has its value only from the consent of men, whereof labor yet makes, in great part, the measure, it is plain, that men have agreed to a disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth, they having, by a tacit and voluntary consent, found out, a way how a man may fairly possess more land than he himself can use the product of, by receiving in exchange for the overplus gold and silver, which may be hoarded up without injury to any one; these metals not spoiling or decaying in the hands of the possessor. This partage of things in an inequality of private possessions, men have made practicable out of the bounds of society, and without compact, only by putting a value on gold and silver, and tacitly agreeing in the use of money: for in governments, the laws regulate the right of property, and the possession of land is determined by positive constitutions.

51. And thus, I think, it is very easy to conceive, without any difficulty, how labor could at first begin a title of property in the common things of nature, and how the spending it upon our uses bounded it. So that there could then be no reason of quarreling about title, nor any doubt about the largeness of possession it gave. Right and conveniency went together; for as a man had a right to all he could employ his labor upon, so he had no temptation to labor for more than he could make use of. This left no room for controversy about the title, nor for encroachment on the right of others; what portion a man carved to himself, was easily seen; and it was useless, as well as dishonest, to carve himself too much, or take more than he needed.

Citation and Use

The reading was taken from the following work.

Locke, John. "On Property and the Formation of Societies." Online Book. *The Originals: Classic Readings in*

Western Philosophy, 2019. <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/chapter/john-locke-on-property-and-the-formation-of-societies/>.

Use of this work is covered by Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



This work (Original Acquisition by John Locke) is free of known copyright restrictions.

ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Luke Tucker

Luke Tucker is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the University of Oklahoma. He is mainly interested in political philosophy. The topic of his dissertation is the epistemological roots of conservatism.

“Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains.”¹ Thus begins Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s classic political treatise, *The Social Contract*, the aim of which is to offer a solution to the puzzle so memorably stated in its opening line.

Human beings are free beings, not just in the superficial political sense of desiring not to be dominated by tyrants, but also in the deep metaphysical sense of living as the will in each of us leads. Unlike other organisms found in nature, we are not under the full control of instinct or appetite or any other automatic biological force. On the contrary, we choose for ourselves what our ends will be and how we will pursue them. Indeed, Rousseau thinks our species is distinguished from all other animals not by our rationality or compassion, both of which animals also possess to a degree, but by our possessing free will.

Yet despite this capacity for deep freedom, we find ourselves living in societies that everywhere impose constraints on our exercise of freedom. Not only do our societies prohibit certain acts, such as trespassing, driving too fast, and smoking in restaurants, they also compel us to do certain acts we would otherwise have no desire for, such as paying taxes, serving on juries, and registering for the draft. We nevertheless obey, because we must, for anyone who does not willingly obey is either coerced into obedience or punished.

Whatever inconvenience such constraints may inflict on us, however, we typically do not view all constraints on human freedom as illegitimate. Lawlessness is an evil, same as tyranny. But some laws are indeed unjust. What factor, then, separates the just from the unjust? For Rousseau, the answer is consent. The only legitimate constraints on my choices, and likewise the only duties, obligations, and authorities that I am morally required to respect, are those which I have willingly accepted for myself. Without consent, constraints, duties, and authority lack all legitimacy.

If there is any exception to this rule for Rousseau, it may be within the family, where the authority of parents and the duty of children to obey arise naturally, from the total dependence of the latter on the former, not

from consensual agreement. Still, even these natural obligations have an expiration date, when the child reaches maturity and becomes his or her own master. Beyond this crucial point, consent becomes a necessary condition for legitimate authority.

Thus, Rousseau parts with his modern predecessors, Hobbes and Locke, in important ways. First, against Hobbes, Rousseau does not recognize any 'right of the strongest.' A right is a claim that deserves respect even absent force. But if you subjugate me to your will by force, not by consent, I am only obligated to respect your command as long as your powers exceed mine. If at any moment I sense I can overpower you, or simply escape, my doing so is permitted. Your command is entirely contingent upon your strength and so is not a true right.

Second, against Locke, Rousseau rejects that people can ever legitimately forfeit their rights and be submitted to the arbitrary will of another. Whereas Locke argues that people can lose their rights – even those as precious as the right to life – if they willingly instigate an unjust war and suffer defeat, Rousseau argues to the contrary that our freedom makes us human and, as a matter of logic, cannot be traded away. The very idea is contradictory. Hence, even losers of war retain their rights.

So, for Rousseau, consent is a necessary condition for legitimate authority over human beings. Notice, though, that we have not solved our original puzzle so much as articulated it with more clarity. Human beings are free beings, over whom the exercise of legitimate authority absolutely and without exception requires consent, yet we find ourselves everywhere encumbered with constraints and duties imposed on us by coercive governments. How can these joint facts, the one moral and the other empirical, be reconciled theoretically, without denying the truth of either and without conceding the unintuitive conclusion that all our encumbrances are illegitimate?

This, according to Rousseau, is the fundamental question confronting the political philosopher. As he puts it, the task of the political philosopher is to “find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before.”²

Rousseau has a ready answer to this fundamental question. He argues that a society can exercise an authority over citizens that is simultaneously legitimate and absolute, provided two conditions obtain. First, the society must have been founded upon unanimous consent, with all founding members giving equal approval to the terms. Consent is necessary here because, as previously established, it alone can legitimize authority, and the consent must be unanimous because no one can grant consent on anyone else's behalf. Second, not just any pact will do but, crucially, only one that recognizes the general will to be absolutely sovereign over the society and its laws.

While the first of these conditions aligns Rousseau with a long social contract tradition, spanning from Hobbes to Rawls and which holds the concept of a social contract to be the ultimate standard of political

legitimacy, the second condition is a unique contribution and so distinguishes Rousseau from other theorists. It is here where students of Rousseau will want to focus their attention.

What is the general will? In short, it is the will of the people considered as a unified whole. When the social contract is ratified, the wills of many individuals are incorporated into one, and what emerges, as though by a chemical reaction, is a new collective entity, a *republic*, in the original Latin sense of the word. It is more than the sum of its parts. It is like an organism, with a will of its own, and like all organisms it wills its own good. So, the notion of the general will, the will of the republic, is completely conceptually distinct from the private wills of individual citizens, which prioritize those citizens' particular interests, and also from the 'will of all', which is just those private wills amassed in a messy, heterogenous clump. The general will is oriented not to any private interest, but to the common interest shared by all.

As an analogy it might help to think of a football team. Each of the players on the team has a private will as a player. Each may want to be a starter or the team captain or the quarterback's favored passing target. But the team itself, as a unified whole, also has its own, general will, in which each player, in his or her capacity as a teammate, shares. Given no one can win the game solo, the questions of who should start, who should be team captain, and who the quarterback should target are questions for the general will, not any private will.

Why must the general will, in a republic, serve as the sovereign, the one power that decides what laws are enacted? The simple reason is that, for Rousseau, consent alone can confer legitimate authority. But again, not all consensual agreements are valid. No one can consent to the arbitrary rule of another, for instance. The very idea involves trading away your capacity as a human being to will things, and so is a contradiction. Again, Rousseau's view here contrasts with Hobbes and Locke, both of whom suggest that mere consent is sufficient to legitimize, within certain bounds, almost any political arrangement. Individuals begin in the state of nature as their own sovereigns, but upon entering society they transfer their sovereignty either to the will of a single ruler, as in Hobbes, or to the will of the majority, as in Locke.

Rousseau, in contrast, rejects that such a transfer of sovereignty can legitimately occur. Only your own will can govern you. No democratic majority, and certainly no single ruler, can rightfully enact laws over you of which you disapprove. The genius, then, of the notion of the general will is that it allows society to coercively execute laws without encroaching on any citizen's liberty. When the general will is sovereign, any law that you are forced to obey is a law that you commanded for yourself, to the extent that you, as with all other citizens, have a share in the general will. Even when coerced, therefore, you "remain as free as before."

But why, if the general will is to be sovereign, must its sovereignty be absolute? Rousseau gives a few reasons, of which I will discuss the two most interesting. First, for the general will to place a legal limit on its power would require it to make a contract with itself. But contracts necessarily involve more than one party. No singular entity, whether private or collective, with a singular, unified will can be bound by a contract with itself. The

very idea is incomprehensible. Thus, because the general will belongs to a singular entity, i.e. the republic, it cannot be bound by any contract with itself.

Second, it is vital to the very existence of the republic that each citizen's private will be completely subordinate to the general will. Think again about the football team. If any player prizes his or her own private will over the general will of the team, they are not really a teammate in the proper sense, given to be a teammate is to commit oneself to the team's common good. Further, if every player on the team prizes his or her will over the team's general will, there is no team at all, just a mass of disunited players. Likewise, in the context of a republic, if anyone prioritizes his or her own will, they are not a citizen in the proper sense, and if all citizens prioritize their own wills, there is literally no republic, just a mass of disunited individuals.

Thus, Rousseau thinks, forming a republic requires each citizen to surrender all claims of liberty and place "all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will." This may sound extreme, but again, because each citizen shares in the general will, all laws are commands given to themselves by themselves. No claims of liberty are needed.

Some readers may remain uneasy about the idea of surrendering all of one's rights to an absolute sovereign. Why would anyone willingly bind themselves to such a society? This question may be better asked another way. What, on Rousseau's account, do people gain by leaving the state of nature and entering society? The answer is that they exchange their natural liberty for a more advantageous form of liberty. In the state of nature, an imagined pre-political situation where no government exists to regulate behavior, you have no rights to anything that you cannot take, and keep, by your own powers. As such, no one has very much stuff, given the natural limitations of individual effort, and the stuff people do have is insecure, constantly at risk of being stolen by a stronger, smarter, sneakier or simply luckier competitor.

Of course, unlike Hobbes, Rousseau does not think the lives of pre-political people are miserable. He does, however, believe that life in the republic is better. Whereas in the state of nature there are only mere possessions, in civil society there is property, which is what one's possessions become upon receiving the collective recognition and protection of the body politic. Thus, upon entering society, each person "recovers the equivalent of everything he loses, and in the bargain he acquires more power to preserve what he has."³

To conclude, while Rousseau's political theory has fascinated and inspired many readers through the centuries, it has also garnered fierce criticism. Scholars from Bertrand Russell to Karl Popper to Isaiah Berlin have labeled Rousseau an advocate of totalitarianism, given his emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of the general will. A cursory reading of *The Social Contract* may support this interpretation. Still, many scholars, such as Philip Pettit, regard Rousseau as a champion of classical republican and egalitarian values and principles, so the question of how to assess Rousseau is far from settled. Curious students will want to read Rousseau's political texts and judge their value for themselves.

Check Your Understanding

Directions: Answer the question below and check your answer. Use the arrow below on the right to move to the next question. When you have answered all five questions, click Finish.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=962#h5p-10>

Additional Resources

- “The Enlightenment” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnoFj2cMRLY>
A video on the history Enlightenment ideas, including discussions of Rousseau’s *Emile* and *The Social Contract*.
- “The Social Contract” <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0IE5GTU03vpNHYvavGuGR7>
A podcast on the social contract tradition, with a heavy emphasis on Rousseau.
- “Jean-Jacques Rousseau” <https://iep.utm.edu/rousseau/>
An encyclopedic entry on Rousseau’s major ideas and texts.

References

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1968. Print.



Rousseau's Social Contract Theory by Luke Tucker is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 49.
2. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 60.
3. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 61.

SELECTED READINGS FROM JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S "THE SOCIAL CONTRACT & DISCOURSES"

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

BOOK I

I mean to inquire if, in the civil order, there can be any sure and legitimate rule of administration, men being taken as they are and laws as they might be. In this inquiry I shall endeavour always to unite what right sanctions with what is prescribed by interest, in order that justice and utility may in no case be divided.

I enter upon my task without proving the importance of the subject I shall be asked if I am a prince or a legislator, to write on politics. I answer that I am neither, and that is why I do so. If I were a prince or a legislator, I should not waste time in saying what wants doing; I should do it, or hold my peace.

As I was born a citizen of a free State, and a member of the Sovereign, I feel that, however feeble the influence my voice can have on public affairs, the right of voting on them makes it my duty to study them: and I am happy, when I reflect upon governments, to find my inquiries always furnish me with new reasons for loving that of my own country.

CHAPTER I

SUBJECT OF THE FIRST BOOK

Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer.

If I took into account only force, and the effects derived from it, I should say: "As long as a people is compelled to obey, and obeys, it does well; as soon as it can shake off the yoke, and shakes it off, it does still better; for, regaining its liberty by the same right as took it away, either it is justified in resuming it, or there was no justification for those who took it away." But the social order is a sacred right which is the basis of all other

rights. Nevertheless, this right does not come from nature, and must therefore be founded on conventions. Before coming to that, I have to prove what I have just asserted.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL COMPACT

I suppose men to have reached the point at which the obstacles in the way of their preservation in the state of nature show their power of resistance to be greater than the resources at the disposal of each individual for his maintenance in that state. That primitive condition can then subsist no longer; and the human race would perish unless it changed its manner of existence.

But, as men cannot engender new forces, but only unite and direct existing ones, they have no other means of preserving themselves than the formation, by aggregation, of a sum of forces great enough to overcome the resistance. These they have to bring into play by means of a single motive power, and cause to act in concert.

This sum of forces can arise only where several persons come together: but, as the force and liberty of each man are the chief instruments of his self-preservation, how can he pledge them without harming his own interests, and neglecting the care he owes to himself? This difficulty, in its bearing on my present subject, may be stated in the following terms—

“The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.” This is the fundamental problem of which the *Social Contract* provides the solution.

The clauses of this contract are so determined by the nature of the act that the slightest modification would make them vain and ineffective; so that, although they have perhaps never been formally set forth, they are everywhere the same and everywhere tacitly admitted and recognised, until, on the violation of the social compact, each regains his original rights and resumes his natural liberty, while losing the conventional liberty in favour of which he renounced it.

These clauses, properly understood, may be reduced to one—the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community for, in the first place, as each gives himself absolutely, the conditions are the same for all; and, this being so, no one has any interest in making them burdensome to others.

Moreover, the alienation being without reserve, the union is as perfect as it can be, and no associate has anything more to demand: for, if the individuals retained certain rights, as there would be no common superior

to decide between them and the public, each, being on one point his own judge, would ask to be so on all; the state of nature would thus continue, and the association would necessarily become inoperative or tyrannical.

Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has.

If then we discard from the social compact what is not of its essence, we shall find that it reduces itself to the following terms—

“Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.”

At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains votes, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life and its will. This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of *city*,¹ and now takes that of *Republic* or *body politic*; it is called by its members *State* when passive, *Sovereign* when active, and *Power* when compared with others like itself. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of *people*, and severally are called *citizens*, as sharing in the sovereign power, and *subjects*, as being under the laws of the State. But these terms are often confused and taken one for another: it is enough to know how to distinguish them when they are being used with precision.

1

1. BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

THAT THE GENERAL WILL IS INDESTRUCTIBLE

As long as several men in assembly regard themselves as a single body, they have only a single will which is concerned with their common preservation and general well-being. In this case, all the springs of the State are vigorous and simple and its rules clear and luminous; there are no embroilments or conflicts of interests; the common good is everywhere clearly apparent, and only good sense is needed to perceive it. Peace, unity and equality are the enemies of political subtleties. Men who are upright and simple are difficult to deceive because of their simplicity; lures and ingenious pretexts fail to impose upon them, and they are not even subtle enough to be dupes. When, among the happiest people in the world, bands of

peasants are seen regulating affairs of State under an oak, and always acting wisely, can we help scorning the ingenious methods of other nations, which make themselves illustrious and wretched with so much art and mystery?

A State so governed needs very few laws; and, as it becomes necessary to issue new ones, the necessity is universally seen. The first man to propose them merely says what all have already felt, and there is no question of factions or intrigues or eloquence in order to secure the passage into law of what every one has already decided to do, as soon as he is sure that the rest will act with him.

Theorists are led into error because, seeing only States that have been from the beginning wrongly constituted, they are struck by the impossibility of applying such a policy to them. They make great game of all the absurdities a clever rascal or an insinuating speaker might get the people of Paris or London to believe. They do not know that Cromwell would have been put to “the bells” by the people of Berne, and the Due de Beaufort on the treadmill by the Genevese.

But when the social bond begins to be relaxed and the State to grow weak, when particular interests begin to make themselves felt and the smaller societies to exercise an influence over the larger, the common interest changes and finds opponents: opinion is no longer unanimous; the general will ceases to be the will of all; contradictory views and debates arise; and the best advice is not taken without question.

Finally, when the State, on the eve of ruin, maintains only a vain, illusory and formal existence, when in every heart the social bond is broken, and the meanest interest brazenly lays hold of the sacred name of “public good,” the general will becomes mute: all men, guided by secret motives, no more give their views as citizens than if the State had never been; and iniquitous decrees directed solely to private interest get passed under the name of laws.

Does it follow from this that the general will is exterminated or corrupted? Not at all: it is always constant, unalterable and pure; but it is subordinated to other wills which encroach upon its sphere. Each man, in detaching, his interest from the common interest, sees clearly that he cannot entirely separate them; but his share in the public mishaps seems to him negligible beside the exclusive good he aims at making his own. Apart from this particular good, he wills the general good in his own interest, as strongly as any one else. Even in selling his vote for money, he does not extinguish in himself the general will, but only eludes it. The fault he commits is that of changing the state of the question, and answering something different from what he is asked. Instead of saying, by his vote, “It is to the advantage of the State,” he says, “It is of advantage to this or that man or party that this or that view should prevail.” Thus the law of public order in assemblies is not so much to maintain in them the general will as to secure that the question be always put to it, and the answer always given by it.

I could here set down many reflections on the simple right of voting in every act of Sovereignty—a right which no-one can take from the citizens—and also on the right of stating views, making proposals, dividing and discussing, which the government is always most careful to leave solely to its members; but this important subject would need a treatise to itself, and it is impossible to say everything in a single work.

CHAPTER II

VOTING

It may be seen, from the last chapter, that the way in which general business is managed may give a clear enough indication of the actual state of morals and the health of the body politic. The more concert reigns in the assemblies, that is, the nearer opinion approaches unanimity, the greater is the dominance of the general will. On the other hand, long debates, dissensions and tumult proclaim the ascendancy of particular interests and the decline of the State.

This seems less clear when two or more orders enter into the constitution, as patricians and plebeians did at Rome; for quarrels between these two orders often disturbed the comitia, even in the best days of the Republic. But the exception is rather apparent than real; for then, through the defect that is inherent in the body politic, there were, so to speak, two States in one, and what is not true of the two together is true of either separately. Indeed, even in the most stormy times, the plebiscita of the people, when the Senate did not interfere with them, always went through quietly and by large majorities. The citizens having but one interest, the people had but a single will.

At the other extremity of the circle, unanimity recurs; this is the case when the citizens, having fallen into servitude, have lost both liberty and will. Fear and flattery then change votes into acclamation; deliberation ceases, and only worship or malediction is left. Such was the vile manner in which the senate expressed its views under the Emperors. It did so sometimes with absurd precautions. Tacitus observes that, under Otho, the senators, while they heaped curses on Vitellius, contrived at the same time to make a deafening noise, in order that, should he ever become their master, he might not know what each of them had said.

On these various considerations depend the rules by which the methods of counting votes and comparing opinions should be regulated, according as the general will is more or less easy to discover, and the State more or less in its decline.

There is but one law which, from its nature, needs unanimous consent. This is the social compact; for civil association is the most voluntary of all acts. Every man being born free and his own master, no-one, under any pretext whatsoever, can make any man subject without his consent. To decide that the son of a slave is born a slave is to decide that he is not born a man.

If then there are opponents when the social compact is made, their opposition does not invalidate the contract, but merely prevents them from being included in it. They are foreigners among citizens. When the State is instituted, residence constitutes consent; to dwell within its territory is to submit to the Sovereign.²

Apart from this primitive contract, the vote of the majority always binds all the rest. This follows from the contract itself. But it is asked how a man can be both free and forced to conform to wills that are not his own. How are the opponents at once free and subject to laws they have not agreed to?

I retort that the question is wrongly put. The citizen gives his consent to all the laws, including those which are passed in

spite of his opposition, and even those which punish him when he dares to break any of them. The constant will of all the members of the State is the general will; by virtue of it they are citizens and free.³ When in the popular assembly a law is proposed, what the people is asked is not exactly whether it approves or rejects the proposal, but whether it is in conformity with the general will, which is their will. Each man, in giving his vote, states his opinion on that point; and the general will is found by counting votes. When therefore the opinion that is contrary to my own prevails, this proves neither more nor less than that I was mistaken, and that what I thought to be the general will was not so. If my particular opinion had carried the day I should have achieved the opposite of what was my will and it is in that case that I should not have been free.

This presupposes, indeed, that all the qualities of the general will still reside in the majority: when they cease to do so, whatever side a man may take, liberty is no longer possible.

In my earlier demonstration of how particular wills are substituted for the general will in public deliberation, I have adequately pointed out the practicable methods of avoiding this abuse; and I shall have more to say of them later on. I have also given the principles for determining the proportional number of votes for declaring that will. A difference of one vote destroys equality; a single opponent destroys unanimity; but between equality and unanimity, there are several grades of unequal division, at each of which this proportion may be fixed in accordance with the condition and the needs of the body politic.

There are two general rules that may serve to regulate this relation. First, the more grave and important the questions discussed, the nearer should the opinion that is to prevail approach unanimity. Secondly, the more the matter in hand calls for speed, the smaller the prescribed difference in the numbers of votes may be allowed to become: where an instant decision has to be reached, a majority of one vote should be enough. The first of these two rules seems more in harmony with the laws, and the second with practical affairs. In any case, it is the combination of them that gives the best proportions for determining the majority necessary.

2

CIVIL RELIGION

At first men had no kings save the gods, and no government save theocracy. They reasoned like Caligula, and, at that period, reasoned aright. It takes a long time for feeling so to change that men can make up their minds to take their equals as masters, in the hope that they will profit by doing so.

From the mere fact that God was set over every political society, it followed that there were as many gods as peoples. Two peoples that were strangers the one to the other, and almost always enemies, could not long recognise the same master: two armies giving battle could not obey the same leader. National divisions thus led to polytheism, and this in turn gave rise to theological and civil intolerance, which, as we shall see hereafter, are by nature the same.

The fancy the Greeks had for rediscovering their gods among the barbarians arose from the way they had of regarding themselves as the natural Sovereigns of such peoples. But there is nothing so absurd as the erudition which in our days

identifies and confuses gods of different nations. As if Moloch, Saturn and Chronos could be the same god! As if the Phœnician Baal, the Greek Zeus, and the Latin Jupiter could be the same! As if there could still be anything common to imaginary beings with different names!

If it is asked how in pagan times, where each State had its cult and its gods, there were no wars of religion, I answer that it was precisely because each State, having its own cult as well as its own government, made no distinction between its gods and its laws. Political war was also theological; the provinces of the gods were, so to speak, fixed by the boundaries of nations. The god of one people had no right over another. The gods of the pagans were not jealous gods; they shared among themselves the empire of the world: even Moses and the Hebrews sometimes lent themselves to this view by speaking of the God of Israel. It is true, they regarded as powerless the gods of the Canaanites, a proscribed people condemned to destruction, whose place they were to take; but remember how they spoke of the divisions of the neighbouring peoples they were forbidden to attack! "Is not the possession of what belongs to your god Chamos lawfully your due?" said Jephthah to the Ammonites. "We have the same title to the lands our conquering God has made his own."⁴ Here, I think, there is a recognition that the rights of Chamos and those of the God of Israel are of the same nature.

But when the Jews, being subject to the kings of Babylon, and, subsequently, to those of Syria, still obstinately refused to recognise any god save their own, their refusal was regarded as rebellion against their conqueror, and drew down on them the persecutions we read of in their history, which are without parallel till the coming of Christianity.⁵

Every religion, therefore, being attached solely to the laws of the State which prescribed it, there was no way of converting a people except by enslaving it, and there could be no missionaries save conquerors. The obligation to change cults being the law to which the vanquished yielded, it was necessary to be victorious before suggesting such a change. So far from men fighting for the gods, the gods, as in Homer, fought for men; each asked his god for victory, and repayed him with new altars. The Romans, before taking a city, summoned its gods to quit it; and, in leaving the Tarentines their outraged gods, they regarded them as subject to their own and compelled to do them homage. They left the vanquished their gods as they left them their laws. A wreath to the Jupiter of the Capitol was often the only tribute they imposed.

Finally, when, along with their empire, the Romans had spread their cult and their gods, and had themselves often adopted those of the vanquished, by granting to both alike the rights of the city, the peoples of that vast empire insensibly found themselves with multitudes of gods and cults, everywhere almost the same; and thus paganism throughout the known world finally came to be one and the same religion.

It was in these circumstances that Jesus came to set up on earth a spiritual kingdom, which, by separating the theological from the political system, made the State no longer one, and brought about the internal divisions which have never ceased to trouble Christian peoples. As the new idea of a kingdom of the other world could never have occurred to pagans, they always looked on the Christians as really rebels, who, while feigning to submit, were only waiting for the chance to make themselves independent and their masters, and to usurp by guile the authority they pretended in their weakness to respect. This was the cause of the persecutions.

What the pagans had feared took place. Then everything changed its aspect: the humble Christians changed their language, and soon this so-called kingdom of the other world turned, under a visible leader, into the most violent of earthly despotisms.

However, as there have always been a prince and civil laws, this double power and conflict of jurisdiction have made all good polity impossible in Christian States; and men have never succeeded in finding out whether they were bound to obey the master or the priest.

Several peoples, however, even in Europe and its neighbourhood, have desired without success to preserve or restore the old system: but the spirit of Christianity has everywhere prevailed. The sacred cult has always remained or again become independent of the Sovereign, and there has been no necessary link between it and the body of the State. Mahomet held very sane views, and linked his political system well together; and, as long as the form of his government continued under the caliphs who succeeded him, that government was indeed one, and so far good. But the Arabs, having grown prosperous, lettered, civilised, slack and cowardly, were conquered by barbarians: the division between the two powers began again; and, although it is less apparent among the Mahometans than among the Christians, it none the less exists, especially in the sect of Ali, and there are States, such as Persia, where it is continually making itself felt.

Among us, the Kings of England have made themselves heads of the Church, and the Czars have done the same: but this title has made them less its masters than its ministers; they have gained not so much the right to change it, as the power to maintain it: they are not its legislators, but only its princes. Wherever the clergy is a corporate body, ⁶it is master and legislator in its own country. There are thus two powers, two Sovereigns, in England and in Russia, as well as elsewhere.

Of all Christian writers, the philosopher Hobbes alone has seen the evil and how to remedy it, and has dared to propose the reunion of the two heads of the eagle, and the restoration throughout of political unity, without which no State or government will ever be rightly constituted. But he should have seen that the masterful spirit of Christianity is incompatible with his system, and that the priestly interest would always be stronger than that of the State. It is not so much what is false and terrible in his political theory, as what is just and true, that has drawn down hatred on it.⁷

I believe that if the study of history were developed from this point of view, it would be easy to refute the contrary opinions of Bayle and Warburton, one of whom holds that religion can be of no use to the body politic, while the other, on the contrary, maintains that Christianity is its strongest support. We should demonstrate to the former that no State has ever been founded without a religious basis, and to the latter, that the law of Christianity at bottom does more harm by weakening than good by strengthening the constitution of the State. To make myself understood, I have only to make a little more exact the too vague ideas of religion as relating to this subject.

Religion, considered in relation to society, which is either general or particular, may also be divided into two kinds: the religion of man, and that of the citizen. The first, which has neither temples, nor altars, nor rites, and is confined to the purely internal cult of the supreme God and the eternal obligations of morality, is the religion of the Gospel pure and simple, the true theism, what may be called natural divine right or law. The other, which is codified in a single country,

gives it its gods, its own tutelary patrons; it has its dogmas, its rites, and its external cult prescribed by law; outside the single nation that follows it, all the world is in its sight infidel, foreign and barbarous; the duties and rights of man extend for it only as far as its own altars. Of this kind were all the religions of early peoples, which we may define as civil or positive divine right or law.

There is a third sort of religion of a more singular kind, which gives men two codes of legislation, two rulers, and two countries, renders them subject to contradictory duties, and makes it impossible for them to be faithful both to religion and to citizenship. Such are the religions of the Lamas and of the Japanese, and such is Roman Christianity, which may be called the religion of the priest. It leads to a sort of mixed and anti-social code which has no name.

In their political aspect, all these three kinds of religion have their defects. The third is so clearly bad, that it is waste of time to stop to prove it such. All that destroys social unity is worthless; all institutions that set man in contradiction to himself are worthless.

The second is good in that it unites the divine cult with love of the laws, and, making country the object of the citizens' adoration, teaches them that service done to the State is service done to its tutelary god. It is a form of theocracy, in which there can be no pontiff save the prince, and no priests save the magistrates. To die for one's country then becomes martyrdom; violation of its laws, impiety; and to subject one who is guilty to public execration is to condemn him to the anger of the gods: *Sacer est od.*

On the other hand, it is bad in that, being founded on lies and error, it deceives men, makes them credulous and superstitious, and drowns the true cult of the Divinity in empty ceremonial. It is bad, again, when it becomes tyrannous and exclusive, and makes a people bloodthirsty and intolerant, so that it breathes fire and slaughter, and regards as a sacred act the killing of every one who does not believe in its gods. The result is to place such a people in a natural state of war with all others, so that its security is deeply endangered.

There remains therefore the religion of man or Christianity—not the Christianity of to-day, but that of the Gospel, which is entirely different. By means of this holy, sublime, and real religion all men, being children of one God, recognise one another as brothers, and the society that unites them is not dissolved even at death.

But this religion, having no particular relation to the body politic, leaves the laws in possession of the force they have in themselves without making any addition to it; and thus one of the great bonds that unite society considered in severalty fails to operate. Nay, more, so far from binding the hearts of the citizens to the State, it has the effect of taking them away from all earthly things. I know of nothing more contrary to the social spirit.

We are told that a people of true Christians would form the most perfect society imaginable. I see in this supposition only one great difficulty: that a society of true Christians would not be a society of men.

I say further that such a society, with all its perfection, would be neither the strongest nor the most lasting: the very fact that it was perfect would rob it of its bond of union; the flaw that would destroy it would lie in its very perfection.

Every one would do his duty; the people would be law-abiding, the rulers just and temperate; the magistrates upright and incorruptible; the soldiers would scorn death; there would be neither vanity nor luxury. So far, so good; but let us hear more.

Christianity as a religion is entirely spiritual, occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christian is not of this world. He does his duty, indeed, but does it with profound indifference to the good or ill success of his cares. Provided he has nothing to reproach himself with, it matters little to him whether things go well or ill here on earth. If the State is prosperous, he hardly dares to share in the public happiness, for fear he may grow proud of his country's glory; if the State is languishing, he blesses the hand of God that is hard upon His people.

For the State to be peaceable and for harmony to be maintained, all the citizens without exception would have to be good Christians; if by ill hap there should be a single self-seeker or hypocrite, a Catiline or a Cromwell, for instance, he would certainly get the better of his pious compatriots. Christian charity does not readily allow a man to think hardly of his neighbours. As soon as, by some trick, he has discovered the art of imposing on them and getting hold of a share in the public authority, you have a man established in dignity; it is the will of God that he be respected: very soon you have a power; it is God's will that it be obeyed: and if the power is abused by him who wields it, it is the scourge wherewith God punishes His children. There would be scruples about driving out the usurper: public tranquillity would have to be disturbed, violence would have to be employed, and blood spilt; all this accords ill with Christian meekness; and after all, in this vale of sorrows, what does it matter whether we are free men or serfs? The essential thing is to get to heaven, and resignation is only an additional means of doing so.

If war breaks out with another State, the citizens march readily out to battle; not one of them thinks of flight; they do their duty, but they have no passion for victory; they know better how to die than how to conquer. What does it matter whether they win or lose? Does not Providence know better than they what is meet for them? Only think to what account a proud, impetuous and passionate enemy could turn their stoicism! Set over against them those generous peoples who were devoured by ardent love of glory and of their country, imagine your Christian republic face to face with Sparta or Rome: the pious Christians will be beaten, crushed and destroyed, before they know where they are, or will owe their safety only to the contempt their enemy will conceive for them. It was to my mind a fine oath that was taken by the soldiers of Fabius, who swore, not to conquer or die, but to come back victorious—and kept their oath. Christians, would never have taken such an oath; they would have looked on it as tempting God.

But I am mistaken in speaking of a Christian republic; the terms are mutually exclusive. Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence. Its spirit is so favourable to tyranny that it always profits by such a *régime*. True Christians are made to be slaves, and they know it and do not much mind: this short life counts for too little in their eyes.

I shall be told that Christian troops are excellent. I deny it. Show me an instance. For my part, I know of no Christian troops. I shall be told of the Crusades. Without disputing the valour of the Crusaders, I answer that, so far from being Christians, they were the priests' soldiery, citizens of the Church. They fought for their spiritual country, which the Church

had, somehow or other, made temporal. Well understood, this goes back to paganism: as the Gospel sets up no national religion, a holy war is impossible among Christians.

Under the pagan emperors, the Christian soldiers were brave; every Christian writer affirms it, and I believe it: it was a case of honourable emulation of the pagan troops. As soon as the emperors were Christian, this emulation no longer existed, and, when the Cross had driven out the eagle, Roman valour wholly disappeared.

But, setting aside political considerations, let us come back to what is right, and settle our principles on this important point. The right which the social compact gives the Sovereign over the subjects does not, we have seen, exceed the limits of public expediency.⁸ The subjects then owe the Sovereign an account of their opinions only to such an extent as they matter to the community. Now, it matters very much to the community that each citizen should have a religion. That will make him love his duty; but the dogmas of that religion concern the State and its members only so far as they have reference to morality and to the duties which he who professes them is bound to do to others. Each man may have, over and above, what opinions he pleases, without it being the Sovereign's business to take cognisance of them; for, as the Sovereign has no authority in the other world, whatever the lot of its subjects may be in the life to come, that is not its business, provided they are good citizens in this life.

There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject.⁹ While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish from the State whoever does not believe them—it can banish him, not for impiety, but as an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, at need, his life to his duty. If any one, after publicly recognising these dogmas, behaves as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death: he has committed the worst of all crimes, that of lying before the law.

The dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary. The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas. Its negative dogmas I confine to one, intolerance, which is a part of the cults we have rejected.

Those who distinguish civil from theological intolerance are, to my mind, mistaken. The two forms are inseparable. It is impossible to live at peace with those we regard as damned; to love them would be to hate God who punishes them: we positively must either reclaim or torment them. Wherever theological intolerance is admitted, it must inevitably have some civil effect;¹⁰ and as soon as it has such an effect, the Sovereign is no longer Sovereign even in the temporal sphere: thenceforth priests are the real masters, and kings only their ministers.

Now that there is and can be no longer an exclusive national religion, tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship. But whoever dares to say: *Outside the Church is no salvation*, ought to be driven from the State, unless the State is the Church, and the prince the pontiff. Such a dogma is good only in a theocratic government; in any other, it is fatal. The reason for which Henry IV is said to



This work (Selected Readings from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "The Social Contract & Discourses" by Jean-Jacques Rousseau) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. The real meaning of this word has been almost wholly lost in modern times; most people mistake a town for a city, and a townsman for a citizen. They do not know that houses make a town, but citizens a city. The same mistake long ago cost the Carthaginians dear. I have never read of the title of citizens being given to the subjects of any prince, not even the ancient Macedonians or the English of to-day, though they are nearer liberty than any one else. The French alone everywhere familiarly adopt the name of citizens, because, as can be seen from their dictionaries, they have no idea of its

have embraced the Roman religion ought to make every honest man leave it, and still more any prince who knows how to reason.

3 4

Citation and Use

The reading was taken from the following work.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," In *The Social Contract & Discourses*, 1920. Available from Project Gutenberg at <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/chapter/jean-jacques-rousseau-on-inequality/>.

This work is in the public domain.

2. CHAPTER VIII

3.

4.

meaning; otherwise they would be guilty in usurping it, of the crime of *lèse-majesté*: among them, the name expresses a virtue, and not a right. When Bodin spoke of our citizens and townsmen, he fell into a bad blunder in taking the one class for the other. M. d'Alembert has avoided the error, and, in his article on Geneva, has clearly distinguished the four orders of men (or even five, counting mere foreigners) who dwell in our town, of which two only compose the Republic. No other French writer, to my knowledge, has understood the real meaning of the word citizen.

2. This should of course be understood as applying to a free State; for elsewhere family, goods, lack of a refuge, necessity, or violence may detain a man in a country against his will; and then his dwelling there no longer by itself implies his consent to the contract or to its violation.
3. At Genoa, the word Liberty may be read over the front of the prisons and on the chains of the galley-slaves. This application of the device is good and just. It is indeed only malefactors of all estates who prevent the citizen from being free. In the country in which all such men were in the galleys, the most perfect liberty would be enjoyed.
4. *Nonne ea quæ possidet Chamos deus tuus, tibi jure debentur?* (Judges xi. 24). Such is the text in the Vulgate. Father de Carrières translates: "Do you not regard yourselves as having a right to what your god possesses?" I do not know the force of the Hebrew text: but I perceive that, in the Vulgate, Jephthah positively recognises the right of the god Chamos, and that the French translator weakened this admission by inserting an "according to you," which is not in the Latin.
5. It is quite clear that the Phocian war, which was called "the Sacred War," was not a war of religion. Its object was the punishment of acts of sacrilege, and not the conquest of unbelievers.
6. It should be noted that the clergy find their bond of union not so much in formal assemblies, as in the communion of Churches. Communion and ex-communication are the social compact of the clergy, a compact which will always make them masters of peoples and kings. All priests who communicate together are fellow-citizens, even if they come from opposite ends of the earth. This invention is a masterpiece of statesmanship: there is nothing like it among pagan priests; who have therefore never formed a clerical corporate body.
7. See, for instance, in a letter from Grotius to his brother (April 11, 1643), what that learned man found to praise and to blame in the *De Cive*. It is true that, with a bent for indulgence, he seems to pardon the writer the good for the sake of the bad; but all men are not so forgiving.
8. "In the republic," says the Marquis d'Argenson, "each man is perfectly free in what does not harm others." This is the invariable limitation, which it is impossible to define more exactly. I have not been able to deny myself the pleasure of occasionally quoting from this manuscript, though it is unknown to the public, in order to do honour to the memory of a good and illustrious man, who had kept even in the Ministry the heart of a good citizen, and views on the government of his country that were sane and right.
9. Cæsar, pleading for Catiline, tried to establish the dogma that the soul is mortal: Cato and Cicero, in refutation, did not waste time in philosophising. They were content to show that Cæsar spoke like a bad citizen, and brought forward a doctrine that would have a bad effect on the State. This, in fact, and not a problem of theology, was what the Roman senate had to judge.
10. Marriage, for instance, being a civil contract, has civil effects without which society cannot even subsist. Suppose a body of clergy should claim the sole right of permitting this act, a right which every intolerant religion must of necessity claim, is it not clear that in establishing the authority of the Church in this respect, it will be destroying that of the prince, who will have thenceforth only as many subjects as the clergy choose to allow him? Being in a position to marry or not to marry people, according to their acceptance of such and such a doctrine, their admission or rejection of such and such a formula, their greater or less piety, the Church alone, by the exercise of prudence and firmness, will dispose of all inheritances, offices and citizens, and even of the State itself, which could not subsist if it were composed entirely of bastards? But, I shall be told, there will be appeals on the ground of abuse, summonses and decrees; the temporalities will be seized. How sad! The clergy, however little, I will not say courage, but sense it has, will take no notice and go its way: it will quietly allow appeals, summonses, decrees and seizures, and, in the end, will remain the master. It is not, I think, a great sacrifice to give up a part, when one is sure of securing all.

A DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN OF INEQUALITY

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Editor's note: This is "The Second Part" of Rousseau's appendix to his work *The Social Contract & Discourses*.

Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men

THE first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying This is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows, "Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody." But there is great probability that things had then already come to such a pitch, that they could no longer continue as they were; for the idea of property depends on many prior ideas, which could only be acquired successively, and cannot have been formed all at once in the human mind. Mankind must have made very considerable progress, and acquired considerable knowledge and industry which they must also have transmitted and increased from age to age, before they arrived at this last point of the state of nature. Let us then go farther back, and endeavour to unify under a single point of view that slow succession of events and discoveries in the most natural order.

Man's first feeling was that of his own existence, and his first care that of self-preservation. The produce of the earth furnished him with all he needed, and instinct told him how to use it. Hunger and other appetites made him at various times experience various modes of existence; and among these was one which urged him to propagate his species — a blind propensity that, having nothing to do with the heart, produced a merely animal act. The want once gratified, the two sexes knew each other no more; and even the offspring was nothing to its mother, as soon as it could do without her.

Such was the condition of infant man; the life of an animal limited at first to mere sensations, and hardly

profiting by the gifts nature bestowed on him, much less capable of entertaining a thought of forcing anything from her. But difficulties soon presented themselves, and it became necessary to learn how to surmount them: the height of the trees, which prevented him from gathering their fruits, the competition of other animals desirous of the same fruits, and the ferocity of those who needed them for their own preservation, all obliged him to apply himself to bodily exercises. He had to be active, swift of foot, and vigorous in fight. Natural weapons, stones and sticks, were easily found: he learnt to surmount the obstacles of nature, to contend in case of necessity with other animals, and to dispute for the means of subsistence even with other men, or to indemnify himself for what he was forced to give up to a stronger.

In proportion as the human race grew more numerous, men's cares increased. The difference of soils, climates and seasons, must have introduced some differences into their manner of living. Barren years, long and sharp winters, scorching summers which parched the fruits of the earth, must have demanded a new industry. On the seashore and the banks of rivers, they invented the hook and line, and became fishermen and eaters of fish. In the forests they made bows and arrows, and became huntsmen and warriors. In cold countries they clothed themselves with the skins of the beasts they had slain. The lightning, a volcano, or some lucky chance acquainted them with fire, a new resource against the rigours of winter: they next learned how to preserve this element, then how to reproduce it, and finally how to prepare with it the flesh of animals which before they had eaten raw.

This repeated relevance of various beings to himself, and one to another, would naturally give rise in the human mind to the perceptions of certain relations between them. Thus the relations which we denote by the terms, great, small, strong, weak, swift, slow, fearful, bold, and the like, almost insensibly compared at need, must have at length produced in him a kind of reflection, or rather a mechanical prudence, which would indicate to him the precautions most necessary to his security.

The new intelligence which resulted from this development increased his superiority over other animals, by making him sensible of it. He would now endeavour, therefore, to ensnare them, would play them a thousand tricks, and though many of them might surpass him in swiftness or in strength, would in time become the master of some and the scourge of others. Thus, the first time he looked into himself, he felt the first emotion of pride; and, at a time when he scarce knew how to distinguish the different orders of beings, by looking upon his species as of the highest order, he prepared the way for assuming pre-eminence as an individual.

Other men, it is true, were not then to him what they now are to us, and he had no greater intercourse with them than with other animals; yet they were not neglected in his observations. The conformities, which he would in time discover between them, and between himself and his female, led him to judge of others which were not then perceptible; and finding that they all behaved as he himself would have done in like circumstances, he naturally inferred that their manner of thinking and acting was altogether in conformity with his own. This important truth, once deeply impressed on his mind, must have induced him, from an

intuitive feeling more certain and much more rapid than any kind of reasoning, to pursue the rules of conduct, which he had best observe towards them, for his own security and advantage.

Taught by experience that the love of well-being is the sole motive of human actions, he found himself in a position to distinguish the few cases, in which mutual interest might justify him in relying upon the assistance of his fellows; and also the still fewer cases in which a conflict of interests might give cause to suspect them. In the former case, he joined in the same herd with them, or at most in some kind of loose association, that laid no restraint on its members, and lasted no longer than the transitory occasion that formed it. In the latter case, every one sought his own private advantage, either by open force, if he thought himself strong enough, or by address and cunning, if he felt himself the weaker.

In this manner, men may have insensibly acquired some gross ideas of mutual undertakings, and of the advantages of fulfilling them: that is, just so far as their present and apparent interest was concerned: for they were perfect strangers to foresight, and were so far from troubling themselves about the distant future, that they hardly thought of the morrow. If a deer was to be taken, every one saw that, in order to succeed, he must abide faithfully by his post: but if a hare happened to come within the reach of any one of them, it is not to be doubted that he pursued it without scruple, and, having seized his prey, cared very little, if by so doing he caused his companions to miss theirs.

It is easy to understand that such intercourse would not require a language much more refined than that of rooks or monkeys, who associate together for much the same purpose. Inarticulate cries, plenty of gestures and some imitative sounds, must have been for a long time the universal language; and by the addition, in every country, of some conventional articulate sounds (of which, as I have already intimated, the first institution is not too easy to explain) particular languages were produced; but these were rude and imperfect, and nearly such as are now to be found among some savage nations.

Hurried on by the rapidity of time, by the abundance of things I have to say, and by the almost insensible progress of things in their beginnings, I pass over in an instant a multitude of ages; for the slower the events were in their succession, the more rapidly may they be described.

These first advances enabled men to make others with greater rapidity. In proportion as they grew enlightened, they grew industrious. They ceased to fall asleep under the first tree, or in the first cave that afforded them shelter; they invented several kinds of implements of hard and sharp stones, which they used to dig up the earth, and to cut wood; they then made huts out of branches, and afterwards learnt to plaster them over with mud and clay. This was the epoch of a first revolution, which established and distinguished families, and introduced a kind of property, in itself the source of a thousand quarrels and conflicts. As, however, the strongest were probably the first to build themselves huts which they felt themselves able to defend, it may be concluded that the weak found it much easier and safer to imitate, than to attempt to dislodge them: and of those who were once provided with huts, none could have any inducement to appropriate that of his

neighbour; not indeed so much because it did not belong to him, as because it could be of no use, and he could not make himself master of it without exposing himself to a desperate battle with the family which occupied it.

The first expansions of the human heart were the effects of a novel situation, which united husbands and wives, fathers and children, under one roof. The habit of living together soon gave rise to the finest feelings known to humanity, conjugal love and paternal affection. Every family became a little society, the more united because liberty and reciprocal attachment were the only bonds of its union. The sexes, whose manner of life had been hitherto the same, began now to adopt different ways of living. The women became more sedentary, and accustomed themselves to mind the hut and their children, while the men went abroad in search of their common subsistence. From living a softer life, both sexes also began to lose something of their strength and ferocity: but, if individuals became to some extent less able to encounter wild beasts separately, they found it, on the other hand, easier to assemble and resist in common.

The simplicity and solitude of man's life in this new condition, the paucity of his wants, and the implements he had invented to satisfy them, left him a great deal of leisure, which he employed to furnish himself with many conveniences unknown to his fathers: and this was the first yoke he inadvertently imposed on himself, and the first source of the evils he prepared for his descendants. For, besides continuing thus to enervate both body and mind, these conveniences lost with use almost all their power to please, and even degenerated into real needs, till the want of them became far more disagreeable than the possession of them had been pleasant. Men would have been unhappy at the loss of them, though the possession did not make them happy.

We can here see a little better how the use of speech became established, and insensibly improved in each family, and we may form a conjecture also concerning the manner in which various causes may have extended and accelerated the progress of language, by making it more and more necessary. Floods or earthquakes surrounded inhabited districts with precipices or waters: revolutions of the globe tore off portions from the continent, and made them islands. It is readily seen that among men thus collected and compelled to live together, a common idiom must have arisen much more easily than among those who still wandered through the forests of the continent. Thus it is very possible that after their first essays in navigation the islanders brought over the use of speech to the continent: and it is at least very probable that communities and languages were first established in islands, and even came to perfection there before they were known on the mainland.

Everything now begins to change its aspect. Men, who have up to now been roving in the woods, by taking to a more settled manner of life, come gradually together, form separate bodies, and at length in every country arises a distinct nation, united in character and manners, not by regulations or laws, but by uniformity of life and food, and the common influence of climate. Permanent neighbourhood could not fail to produce, in time, some connection between different families. Among young people of opposite sexes, living in neighbouring huts, the transient commerce required by nature soon led, through mutual intercourse, to another kind not less agreeable, and more permanent. Men began now to take the difference between objects into account, and

to make comparisons; they acquired imperceptibly the ideas of beauty and merit, which soon gave rise to feelings of preference. In consequence of seeing each other often, they could not do without seeing each other constantly. A tender and pleasant feeling insinuated itself into their souls, and the least opposition turned it into an impetuous fury: with love arose jealousy; discord triumphed, and human blood was sacrificed to the gentlest of all passions.

As ideas and feelings succeeded one another, and heart and head were brought into play, men continued to lay aside their original wildness; their private connections became every day more intimate as their limits extended. They accustomed themselves to assemble before their huts round a large tree; singing and dancing, the true offspring of love and leisure, became the amusement, or rather the occupation, of men and women thus assembled together with nothing else to do. Each one began to consider the rest, and to wish to be considered in turn; and thus a value came to be attached to public esteem. Whoever sang or danced best, whoever was the handsomest, the strongest, the most dexterous, or the most eloquent, came to be of most consideration; and this was the first step towards inequality, and at the same time towards vice. From these first distinctions arose on the one side vanity and contempt and on the other shame and envy: and the fermentation caused by these new leavens ended by producing combinations fatal to innocence and happiness.

As soon as men began to value one another, and the idea of consideration had got a footing in the mind, every one put in his claim to it, and it became impossible to refuse it to any with impunity. Hence arose the first obligations of civility even among savages; and every intended injury became an affront; because, besides the hurt which might result from it, the party injured was certain to find in it a contempt for his person, which was often more insupportable than the hurt itself.

Thus, as every man punished the contempt shown him by others, in proportion to his opinion of himself, revenge became terrible, and men bloody and cruel. This is precisely the state reached by most of the savage nations known to us: and it is for want of having made a proper distinction in our ideas, and see how very far they already are from the state of nature, that so many writers have hastily concluded that man is naturally cruel, and requires civil institutions to make him more mild; whereas nothing is more gentle than man in his primitive state, as he is placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes, and the fatal ingenuity of civilised man. Equally confined by instinct and reason to the sole care of guarding himself against the mischiefs which threaten him, he is restrained by natural compassion from doing any injury to others, and is not led to do such a thing even in return for injuries received. For, according to the axiom of the wise Locke, There can be no injury, where there is no property.

But it must be remarked that the society thus formed, and the relations thus established among men, required of them qualities different from those which they possessed from their primitive constitution. Morality began to appear in human actions, and every one, before the institution of law, was the only judge and avenger of the injuries done him, so that the goodness which was suitable in the pure state of nature was no longer proper in the new-born state of society. Punishments had to be made more severe, as opportunities of offending became

more frequent, and the dread of vengeance had to take the place of the rigour of the law. Thus, though men had become less patient, and their natural compassion had already suffered some diminution, this period of expansion of the human faculties, keeping a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our egoism, must have been the happiest and most stable of epochs. The more we reflect on it, the more we shall find that this state was the least subject to revolutions, and altogether the very best man could experience; so that he can have departed from it only through some fatal accident, which, for the public good, should never have happened. The example of savages, most of whom have been found in this state, seems to prove that men were meant to remain in it, that it is the real youth of the world, and that all subsequent advances have been apparently so many steps towards the perfection of the individual, but in reality towards the decrepitude of the species.

So long as men remained content with their rustic huts, so long as they were satisfied with clothes made of the skins of animals and sewn together with thorns and fish-bones, adorned themselves only with feathers and shells, and continued to paint their bodies different colours, to improve and beautify their bows and arrows and to make with sharp-edged stones fishing boats or clumsy musical instruments; in a word, so long as they undertook only what a single person could accomplish, and confined themselves to such arts as did not require the joint labour of several hands, they lived free, healthy, honest and happy lives, so long as their nature allowed, and as they continued to enjoy the pleasures of mutual and independent intercourse. But from the moment one man began to stand in need of the help of another; from the moment it appeared advantageous to any one man to have enough provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, work became indispensable, and vast forests became smiling fields, which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow up with the crops.

Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts which produced this great revolution. The poets tell us it was gold and silver, but, for the philosophers, it was iron and corn, which first civilised men, and ruined humanity. Thus both were unknown to the savages of America, who for that reason are still savage: the other nations also seem to have continued in a state of barbarism while they practised only one of these arts. One of the best reasons, perhaps, why Europe has been, if not longer, at least more constantly and highly civilised than the rest of the world, is that it is at once the most abundant in iron and the most fertile in corn.

It is difficult to conjecture how men first came to know and use iron; for it is impossible to suppose they would of themselves think of digging the ore out of the mine, and preparing it for smelting, before they knew what would be the result. On the other hand, we have the less reason to suppose this discovery the effect of any accidental fire, as mines are only formed in barren places, bare of trees and plants; so that it looks as if nature had taken pains to keep that fatal secret from us. There remains, therefore, only the extraordinary accident of some volcano which, by ejecting metallic substances already in fusion, suggested to the spectators the idea of imitating the natural operation. And we must further conceive them as possessed of uncommon courage and foresight, to undertake so laborious a work, with so distant a prospect of drawing advantage from it; yet these

qualities are united only in minds more advanced than we can suppose those of these first discoverers to have been.

With regard to agriculture, the principles of it were known long before they were put in practice; and it is indeed hardly possible that men, constantly employed in drawing their subsistence from plants and trees, should not readily acquire a knowledge of the means made use of by nature for the propagation of vegetables. It was in all probability very long, however, before their industry took that turn, either because trees, which together with hunting and fishing afforded them food, did not require their attention; or because they were ignorant of the use of corn, or without instruments to cultivate it; or because they lacked foresight to future needs; or lastly, because they were without means of preventing others from robbing them of the fruit of their labour.

When they grew more industrious, it is natural to believe that they began, with the help of sharp stones and pointed sticks, to cultivate a few vegetables or roots around their huts; though it was long before they knew how to prepare corn, or were provided with the implements necessary for raising it in any large quantity; not to mention how essential it is, for husbandry, to consent to immediate loss, in order to reap a future gain — a precaution very foreign to the turn of a savage's mind; for, as I have said, he hardly foresees in the morning what he will need at night.

The invention of the other arts must therefore have been necessary to compel mankind to apply themselves to agriculture. No sooner were artificers wanted to smelt and forge iron, than others were required to maintain them; the more hands that were employed in manufactures, the fewer were left to provide for the common subsistence, though the number of mouths to be furnished with food remained the same: and as some required commodities in exchange for their iron, the rest at length discovered the method of making iron serve for the multiplication of commodities. By this means the arts of husbandry and agriculture were established on the one hand, and the art of working metals and multiplying their uses on the other.

[...]

The cultivation of the earth necessarily brought about its distribution; and property, once recognised, gave rise to the first rules of justice; for, to secure each man his own, it had to be possible for each to have something. Besides, as men began to look forward to the future, and all had something to lose, every one had reason to apprehend that reprisals would follow any injury he might do to another. This origin is so much the more natural, as it is impossible to conceive how property can come from anything but manual labour: for what else can a man add to things which he does not originally create, so as to make them his own property? It is the husbandman's labour alone that, giving him a title to the produce of the ground he has tilled, gives him a claim also to the land itself, at least till harvest, and so, from year to year, a constant possession which is easily transformed into property. When the ancients, says Grotius, gave to Ceres the title of *Legislatrix*, and to a festival celebrated in her honour the name of *Thesmophoria*, they meant by that that the distribution of

lands had produced a new kind of right: that is to say, the right of property, which is different from the right deducible from the law of nature.

In this state of affairs, equality might have been sustained, had the talents of individuals been equal, and had, for example, the use of iron and the consumption of commodities always exactly balanced each other; but, as there was nothing to preserve this balance, it was soon disturbed; the strongest did most work; the most skilful turned his labour to best account; the most ingenious devised methods of diminishing his labour: the husbandman wanted more iron, or the smith more corn, and, while both laboured equally, the one gained a great deal by his work, while the other could hardly support himself. Thus natural inequality unfolds itself insensibly with that of combination, and the difference between men, developed by their different circumstances, becomes more sensible and permanent in its effects, and begins to have an influence, in the same proportion, over the lot of individuals.

Matters once at this pitch, it is easy to imagine the rest. I shall not detain the reader with a description of the successive invention of other arts, the development of language, the trial and utilisation of talents, the inequality of fortunes, the use and abuse of riches, and all the details connected with them which the reader can easily supply for himself. I shall confine myself to a glance at mankind in this new situation.

Behold then all human faculties developed, memory and imagination in full play, egoism interested, reason active, and the mind almost at the highest point of its perfection. Behold all the natural qualities in action, the rank and condition of every man assigned him; not merely his share of property and his power to serve or injure others, but also his wit, beauty, strength or skill, merit or talents: and these being the only qualities capable of commanding respect, it soon became necessary to possess or to affect them.

It now became the interest of men to appear what they really were not. To be and to seem became two totally different things; and from this distinction sprang insolent pomp and cheating trickery, with all the numerous vices that go in their train. On the other hand, free and independent as men were before, they were now, in consequence of a multiplicity of new wants, brought into subjection, as it were, to all nature, and particularly to one another; and each became in some degree a slave even in becoming the master of other men: if rich, they stood in need of the services of others; if poor, of their assistance; and even a middle condition did not enable them to do without one another. Man must now, therefore, have been perpetually employed in getting others to interest themselves in his lot, and in making them, apparently at least, if not really, find their advantage in promoting his own. Thus he must have been sly and artful in his behaviour to some, and imperious and cruel to others; being under a kind of necessity to ill-use all the persons of whom he stood in need, when he could not frighten them into compliance, and did not judge it his interest to be useful to them. Insatiable ambition, the thirst of raising their respective fortunes, not so much from real want as from the desire to surpass others, inspired all men with a vile propensity to injure one another, and with a secret jealousy, which is the more dangerous, as it puts on the mask of benevolence, to carry its point with greater security. In a word, there arose rivalry and competition on the one hand, and conflicting interests on the other, together with a secret desire on

both of profiting at the expense of others. All these evils were the first effects of property, and the inseparable attendants of growing inequality.

Before the invention of signs to represent riches, wealth could hardly consist in anything but lands and cattle, the only real possessions men can have. But, when inheritances so increased in number and extent as to occupy the whole of the land, and to border on one another, one man could aggrandise himself only at the expense of another; at the same time the supernumeraries, who had been too weak or too indolent to make such acquisitions, and had grown poor without sustaining any loss, because, while they saw everything change around them, they remained still the same, were obliged to receive their subsistence, or steal it, from the rich; and this soon bred, according to their different characters, dominion and slavery, or violence and rapine. The wealthy, on their part, had no sooner begun to taste the pleasure of command, than they disdained all others, and, using their old slaves to acquire new, thought of nothing but subduing and enslaving their neighbours; like ravenous wolves, which, having once tasted human flesh, despise every other food and thenceforth seek only men to devour.

Thus, as the most powerful or the most miserable considered their might or misery as a kind of right to the possessions of others, equivalent, in their opinion, to that of property, the destruction of equality was attended by the most terrible disorders.

Usurpations by the rich, robbery by the poor, and the unbridled passions of both, suppressed the cries of natural compassion and the still feeble voice of justice, and filled men with avarice, ambition and vice. Between the title of the strongest and that of the first occupier, there arose perpetual conflicts, which never ended but in battles and bloodshed. The new-born state of society thus gave rise to a horrible state of war; men thus harassed and depraved were no longer capable of retracing their steps or renouncing the fatal acquisitions they had made, but, labouring by the abuse of the faculties which do them honour, merely to their own confusion, brought themselves to the brink of ruin.

*Attonitus novitate mali, divesque miserque, Effugere optat opes; et quæ modo voverat odit*¹.

It is impossible that men should not at length have reflected on so wretched a situation, and on the calamities that overwhelmed them. The rich, in particular, must have felt how much they suffered by a constant state of war, of which they bore all the expense; and in which, though all risked their lives, they alone risked their property. Besides, however speciously they might disguise their usurpations, they knew that they were founded on precarious and false titles; so that, if others took from them by force what they themselves had gained by force, they would have no reason to complain. Even those who had been enriched by their own industry, could hardly base their proprietorship on better claims. It was in vain to repeat, "I built this well; I gained this spot by my industry." Who gave you your standing, it might be answered, and what right have you to demand payment of us for doing what we never asked you to do? Do you not know that numbers of your fellow-creatures are starving, for want of what you have too much of? You ought to have had the express and universal consent of

mankind, before appropriating more of the common subsistence than you needed for your own maintenance. Destitute of valid reasons to justify and sufficient strength to defend himself, able to crush individuals with ease, but easily crushed himself by a troop of bandits, one against all, and incapable, on account of mutual jealousy, of joining with his equals against numerous enemies united by the common hope of plunder, the rich man, thus urged by necessity, conceived at length the profoundest plan that ever entered the mind of man: this was to employ in his favour the forces of those who attacked him, to make allies of his adversaries, to inspire them with different maxims, and to give them other institutions as favourable to himself as the law of nature was unfavourable.

With this view, after having represented to his neighbours the horror of a situation which armed every man against the rest, and made their possessions as burdensome to them as their wants, and in which no safety could be expected either in riches or in poverty, he readily devised plausible arguments to make them close with his design. “Let us join,” said he, “to guard the weak from oppression, to restrain the ambitious, and secure to every man the possession of what belongs to him: let us institute rules of justice and peace, to which all without exception may be obliged to conform; rules that may in some measure make amends for the caprices of fortune, by subjecting equally the powerful and the weak to the observance of reciprocal obligations. Let us, in a word, instead of turning our forces against ourselves, collect them in a supreme power which may govern us by wise laws, protect and defend all the members of the association, repulse their common enemies, and maintain eternal harmony among us.”

Far fewer words to this purpose would have been enough to impose on men so barbarous and easily seduced; especially as they had too many disputes among themselves to do without arbitrators, and too much ambition and avarice to go long without masters. All ran headlong to their chains, in hopes of securing their liberty; for they had just wit enough to perceive the advantages of political institutions, without experience enough to enable them to foresee the dangers. The most capable of foreseeing the dangers were the very persons who expected to benefit by them; and even the most prudent judged it not inexpedient to sacrifice one part of their freedom to ensure the rest; as a wounded man has his arm cut off to save the rest of his body.

Such was, or may well have been, the origin of society and law, which bound new fetters on the poor, and gave new powers to the rich; which irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the law of property and inequality, converted clever usurpation into unalterable right, and, for the advantage of a few ambitious individuals, subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery and wretchedness. It is easy to see how the establishment of one community made that of all the rest necessary, and how, in order to make head against united forces, the rest of mankind had to unite in turn. Societies soon multiplied and spread over the face of the earth, till hardly a corner of the world was left in which a man could escape the yoke, and withdraw his head from beneath the sword which he saw perpetually hanging over him by a thread. Civil right having thus become the common rule among the members of each community, the law of nature maintained its place only between different communities, where, under the name of the right of nations, it was qualified by certain tacit

conventions, in order to make commerce practicable, and serve as a substitute for natural compassion, which lost, when applied to societies, almost all the influence it had over individuals, and survived no longer except in some great cosmopolitan spirits, who, breaking down the imaginary barriers that separate different peoples, follow the example of our Sovereign Creator, and include the whole human race in their benevolence.

But bodies politic, remaining thus in a state of nature among themselves, presently experienced the inconveniences which had obliged individuals to forsake it; for this state became still more fatal to these great bodies than it had been to the individuals of whom they were composed. Hence arose national wars, battles, murders, and reprisals, which shock nature and outrage reason; together with all those horrible prejudices which class among the virtues the honour of shedding human blood. The most distinguished men hence learned to consider cutting each other's throats a duty; at length men massacred their fellow-creatures by thousands without so much as knowing why, and committed more murders in a single day's fighting, and more violent outrages in the sack of a single town, than were committed in the state of nature during whole ages over the whole earth. Such were the first effects which we can see to have followed the division of mankind into different communities. But let us return to their institutions.

I know that some writers have given other explanations of the origin of political societies, such as the conquest of the powerful, or the association of the weak. It is, indeed, indifferent to my argument which of these causes we choose. That which I have just laid down, however, appears to me the most natural for the following reasons. First: because, in the first case, the right of conquest, being no right in itself, could not serve as a foundation on which to build any other; the victor and the vanquished people still remained with respect to each other in the state of war, unless the vanquished, restored to the full possession of their liberty, voluntarily made choice of the victor for their chief. For till then, whatever capitulation may have been made being founded on violence, and therefore ipso facto void, there could not have been on this hypothesis either a real society or body politic, or any law other than that of the strongest. Secondly: because the words strong and weak are, in the second case, ambiguous; for during the interval between the establishment of a right of property, or prior occupancy, and that of political government, the meaning of these words is better expressed by the terms rich and poor: because, in fact, before the institution of laws, men had no other way of reducing their equals to submission, than by attacking their goods, or making some of their own over to them. Thirdly: because, as the poor had nothing but their freedom to lose, it would have been in the highest degree absurd for them to resign voluntarily the only good they still enjoyed, without getting anything in exchange: whereas the rich having feelings, if I may so express myself, in every part of their possessions, it was much easier to harm them, and therefore more necessary for them to take precautions against it; and, in short, because it is more reasonable to suppose a thing to have been invented by those to whom it would be of service, than by those whom it must have harmed.

Government had, in its infancy, no regular and constant form. The want of experience and philosophy prevented men from seeing any but present inconveniences, and they thought of providing against others only

as they presented themselves. In spite of the endeavours of the wisest legislators, the political state remained imperfect, because it was little more than the work of chance; and, as it had begun ill, though time revealed its defects and suggested remedies, the original faults were never repaired. It was continually being patched up, when the first task should have been to get the site cleared and all the old materials removed, as was done by Lycurgus at Sparta, if a stable and lasting edifice was to be erected. Society consisted at first merely of a few general conventions, which every member bound himself to observe; and for the performance of covenants the whole body went security to each individual. Experience only could show the weakness of such a constitution, and how easily it might be infringed with impunity, from the difficulty of convicting men of faults, where the public alone was to be witness and judge: the laws could not but be eluded in many ways; disorders and inconveniences could not but multiply continually, till it became necessary to commit the dangerous trust of public authority to private persons, and the care of enforcing obedience to the deliberations of the people to the magistrate. For to say that chiefs were chosen before the confederacy was formed, and that the administrators of the laws were there before the laws themselves, is too absurd a supposition to consider seriously.

It would be as unreasonable to suppose that men at first threw themselves irretrievably and unconditionally into the arms of an absolute master, and that the first expedient which proud and unsubdued men hit upon for their common security was to run headlong into slavery. For what reason, in fact, did they take to themselves superiors, if it was not in order that they might be defended from oppression, and have protection for their lives, liberties and properties, which are, so to speak, the constituent elements of their being? Now, in the relations between man and man, the worst that can happen is for one to find himself at the mercy of another, and it would have been inconsistent with common-sense to begin by bestowing on a chief the only things they wanted his help to preserve. What equivalent could he offer them for so great a right? And if he had presumed to exact it under pretext of defending them, would he not have received the answer recorded in the fable: “What more can the enemy do to us?” It is therefore beyond dispute, and indeed the fundamental maxim of all political right, that people have set up chiefs to protect their liberty, and not to enslave them. If we have a prince, said Pliny to Trajan, it is to save ourselves from having a master.

Politicians indulge in the same sophistry about the love of liberty as philosophers about the state of nature. They judge, by what they see, of very different things, which they have not seen; and attribute to man a natural propensity to servitude, because the slaves within their observation are seen to bear the yoke with patience; they fail to reflect that it is with liberty as with innocence and virtue; the value is known only to those who possess them, and the taste for them is forfeited when they are forfeited themselves. “I know the charms of your country,” said Brasidas to a satrap, who was comparing the life at Sparta with that at Persepolis, “but you cannot know the pleasures of mine.”

An unbroken horse erects his mane, paws the ground and starts back impetuously at the sight of the bridle; while one which is properly trained suffers patiently even whip and spur: so savage man will not bend his

neck to the yoke to which civilised man submits without a murmur, but prefers the most turbulent state of liberty to the most peaceful slavery. We cannot therefore, from the servility of nations already enslaved, judge of the natural disposition of mankind for or against slavery; we should go by the prodigious efforts of every free people to save itself from oppression. I know that the former are for ever holding forth in praise of the tranquillity they enjoy in their chains, and that they call a state of wretched servitude a state of peace: *miserrimam servitutem pacem appellant*². But when I observe the latter sacrificing pleasure, peace, wealth, power and life itself to the preservation of that one treasure, which is so disdained by those who have lost it; when I see free-born animals dash their brains out against the bars of their cage, from an innate impatience of captivity; when I behold numbers of naked savages, that despise European pleasures, braving hunger, fire, the sword and death, to preserve nothing but their independence, I feel that it is not for slaves to argue about liberty.

With regard to paternal authority, from which some writers have derived absolute government and all society, it is enough, without going back to the contrary arguments of Locke and Sidney, to remark that nothing on earth can be further from the ferocious spirit of despotism than the mildness of that authority which looks more to the advantage of him who obeys than to that of him who commands; that, by the law of nature, the father is the child's master no longer than his help is necessary; that from that time they are both equal, the son being perfectly independent of the father, and owing him only respect and not obedience. For gratitude is a duty which ought to be paid, but not a right to be exacted: instead of saying that civil society is derived from paternal authority, we ought to say rather that the latter derives its principal force from the former. No individual was ever acknowledged as the father of many, till his sons and daughters remained settled around him. The goods of the father, of which he is really the master, are the ties which keep his children in dependence, and he may bestow on them, if he pleases, no share of his property, unless they merit it by constant deference to his will. But the subjects of an arbitrary despot are so far from having the like favour to expect from their chief, that they themselves and everything they possess are his property, or at least are considered by him as such; so that they are forced to receive, as a favour, the little of their own he is pleased to leave them. When he despoils them, he does but justice, and mercy in that he permits them to live.

By proceeding thus to test fact by right, we should discover as little reason as truth in the voluntary establishment of tyranny. It would also be no easy matter to prove the validity of a contract binding on only one of the parties, where all the risk is on one side, and none on the other; so that no one could suffer but he who bound himself. This hateful system is indeed, even in modern times, very far from being that of wise and good monarchs, and especially of the kings of France; as may be seen from several passages in their edicts; particularly from the following passage in a celebrated edict published in 1667 in the name and by order of Louis XIV.

“Let it not, therefore, be said that the Sovereign is not subject to the laws of his State; since the contrary is a true proposition of the right of nations, which flattery has sometimes attacked but good princes have always

defended as the tutelary divinity of their dominions. How much more legitimate is it to say with the wise Plato, that the perfect felicity of a kingdom consists in the obedience of subjects to their prince, and of the prince to the laws, and in the laws being just and constantly directed to the public good!”³

I shall not stay here to inquire whether, as liberty is the noblest faculty of man, it is not degrading our very nature, reducing ourselves to the level of the brutes, which are mere slaves of instinct, and even an affront to the Author of our being, to renounce without reserve the most precious of all His gifts, and to bow to the necessity of committing all the crimes He has forbidden, merely to gratify a mad or a cruel master; or if this sublime craftsman ought not to be less angered at seeing His workmanship entirely destroyed than thus dishonoured. I will waive (if my opponents please) the authority of Barbeyrac, who, following Locke, roundly declares that no man can so far sell his liberty as to submit to an arbitrary power which may use him as it likes. For, he adds, this would be to sell his own life, of which he is not master. I shall ask only what right those who were not afraid thus to debase themselves could have to subject their posterity to the same ignominy, and to renounce for them those blessings which they do not owe to the liberality of their progenitors, and without which life itself must be a burden to all who are worthy of it.

Puffendorf says that we may divest ourselves of our liberty in favour of other men, just as we transfer our property from one to another by contracts and agreements. But this seems a very weak argument. For in the first place, the property I alienate becomes quite foreign to me, nor can I suffer from the abuse of it; but it very nearly concerns me that my liberty should not be abused, and I cannot without incurring the guilt of the crimes I may be compelled to commit, expose myself to become an instrument of crime. Besides, the right of property being only a convention of human institution, men may dispose of what they possess as they please: but this is not the case with the essential gifts of nature, such as life and liberty, which every man is permitted to enjoy, and of which it is at least doubtful whether any have a right to divest themselves. By giving up the one, we degrade our being; by giving up the other, we do our best to annul it; and, as no temporal good can indemnify us for the loss of either, it would be an offence against both reason and nature to renounce them at any price whatsoever. But, even if we could transfer our liberty, as we do our property, there would be a great difference with regard to the children, who enjoy the father’s substance only by the transmission of his right; whereas, liberty being a gift which they hold from nature as being men, their parents have no right whatever to deprive them of it. As then, to establish slavery, it was necessary to do violence to nature, so, in order to perpetuate such a right, nature would have to be changed. Jurists, who have gravely determined that the child of a slave comes into the world a slave, have decided, in other words, that a man shall come into the world not a man.

I regard it then as certain, that government did not begin with arbitrary power, but that this is the depravation, the extreme term, of government, and brings it back, finally, to just the law of the strongest, which it was originally designed to remedy.

Supposing, however, it had begun in this manner, such power, being in itself illegitimate, could not have served as a basis for the laws of society, nor, consequently, for the inequality they instituted.

Without entering at present upon the investigations which still remain to be made into the nature of the fundamental compact underlying all government, I content myself with adopting the common opinion concerning it, and regard the establishment of the political body as a real contract between the people and the chiefs chosen by them: a contract by which both parties bind themselves to observe the laws therein expressed, which form the ties of their union. The people having in respect of their social relations concentrated all their wills in one, the several articles, concerning which this will is explained, become so many fundamental laws, obligatory on all the members of the State without exception, and one of these articles regulates the choice and power of the magistrates appointed to watch over the execution of the rest. This power extends to everything which may maintain the constitution, without going so far as to alter it. It is accompanied by honours, in order to bring the laws and their administrators into respect. The ministers are also distinguished by personal prerogatives, in order to recompense them for the cares and labour which good administration involves. The magistrate, on his side, binds himself to use the power he is entrusted with only in conformity with the intention of his constituents, to maintain them all in the peaceable possession of what belongs to them, and to prefer on every occasion the public interest to his own.

Before experience had shown, or knowledge of the human heart enabled men to foresee, the unavoidable abuses of such a constitution, it must have appeared so much the more excellent, as those who were charged with the care of its preservation had themselves most interest in it; for magistracy and the rights attaching to it being based solely on the fundamental laws, the magistrates would cease to be legitimate as soon as these ceased to exist; the people would no longer owe them obedience; and as not the magistrates, but the laws, are essential to the being of a State, the members of it would regain the right to their natural liberty.

If we reflect with ever so little attention on this subject, we shall find new arguments to confirm this truth, and be convinced from the very nature of the contract that it cannot be irrevocable: for, if there were no superior power capable of ensuring the fidelity of the contracting parties, or compelling them to perform their reciprocal engagements, the parties would be sole judges in their own cause, and each would always have a right to renounce the contract, as soon as he found that the other had violated its terms, or that they no longer suited his convenience. It is upon this principle that the right of abdication may possibly be founded. Now, if, as here, we consider only what is human in this institution, it is certain that, if the magistrate, who has all the power in his own hands, and appropriates to himself all the advantages of the contract, has none the less a right to renounce his authority, the people, who suffer for all the faults of their chief, must have a much better right to renounce their dependence. But the terrible and innumerable quarrels and disorders that would necessarily arise from so dangerous a privilege, show, more than anything else, how much human government stood in need of a more solid basis than mere reason, and how expedient it was for the public tranquillity that the divine will should interpose to invest the sovereign authority with a sacred and inviolable character, which

might deprive subjects of the fatal right of disposing of it. If the world had received no other advantages from religion, this would be enough to impose on men the duty of adopting and cultivating it, abuses and all, since it has been the means of saving more blood than fanaticism has ever spilt. But let us follow the thread of our hypothesis.

The different forms of government owe their origin to the differing degrees of inequality which existed between individuals at the time of their institution. If there happened to be any one man among them pre-eminent in power, virtue, riches or personal influence, he became sole magistrate, and the State assumed the form of monarchy. If several, nearly equal in point of eminence, stood above the rest, they were elected jointly, and formed an aristocracy. Again, among a people who had deviated less from a state of nature, and between whose fortune or talents there was less disproportion, the supreme administration was retained in common, and a democracy was formed. It was discovered in process of time which of these forms suited men the best. Some peoples remained altogether subject to the laws; others soon came to obey their magistrates. The citizens laboured to preserve their liberty; the subjects, irritated at seeing others enjoying a blessing they had lost, thought only of making slaves of their neighbours. In a word, on the one side arose riches and conquests, and on the other happiness and virtue.

In these different governments, all the offices were at first elective; and when the influence of wealth was out of the question, the preference was given to merit, which gives a natural ascendancy, and to age, which is experienced in business and deliberate in council. The Elders of the Hebrews, the Gerontes at Sparta, the Senate at Rome, and the very etymology of our word Seigneur, show how old age was once held in veneration. But the more often the choice fell upon old men, the more often elections had to be repeated, and the more they became a nuisance; intrigues set in, factions were formed, party feeling grew bitter, civil wars broke out; the lives of individuals were sacrificed to the pretended happiness of the State; and at length men were on the point of relapsing into their primitive anarchy. Ambitious chiefs profited by these circumstances to perpetuate their offices in their own families: at the same time the people, already used to dependence, ease, and the conveniences of life, and already incapable of breaking its fetters, agreed to an increase of its slavery, in order to secure its tranquillity. Thus magistrates, having become hereditary, contracted the habit of considering their offices as a family estate, and themselves as proprietors of the communities of which they were at first only the officers, of regarding their fellow-citizens as their slaves, and numbering them, like cattle, among their belongings, and of calling themselves the equals of the gods and kings of kings.

If we follow the progress of inequality in these various revolutions, we shall find that the establishment of laws and of the right of property was its first term, the institution of magistracy the second, and the conversion of legitimate into arbitrary power the third and last; so that the condition of rich and poor was authorised by the first period; that of powerful and weak by the second; and only by the third that of master and slave, which is the last degree of inequality, and the term at which all the rest remain, when they have got so far, till the government is either entirely dissolved by new revolutions, or brought back again to legitimacy.

To understand this progress as necessary we must consider not so much the motives for the establishment of the body politic, as the forms it assumes in actuality, and the faults that necessarily attend it: for the flaws which make social institutions necessary are the same as make the abuse of them unavoidable. If we except Sparta, where the laws were mainly concerned with the education of children, and where Lycurgus established such morality as practically made laws needles — for laws as a rule, being weaker than the passions, restrain men without altering them — it would not be difficult to prove that every government, which scrupulously complied with the ends for which it was instituted, and guarded carefully against change and corruption, was set up unnecessarily. For a country, in which no one either evaded the laws or made a bad use of magisterial power, could require neither laws nor magistrates.

Political distinctions necessarily produce civil distinctions. The growing equality between the chiefs and the people is soon felt by individuals, and modified in a thousand ways according to passions, talents and circumstances. The magistrate could not usurp any illegitimate power, without giving distinction to the creatures with whom he must share it. Besides, individuals only allow themselves to be oppressed so far as they are hurried on by blind ambition, and, looking rather below than above them, come to love authority more than independence, and submit to slavery, that they may in turn enslave others. It is no easy matter to reduce to obedience a man who has no ambition to command; nor would the most adroit politician find it possible to enslave a people whose only desire was to be independent. But inequality easily makes its way among cowardly and ambitious minds, which are ever ready to run the risks of fortune, and almost indifferent whether they command or obey, as it is favourable or adverse. Thus, there must have been a time, when the eyes of the people were so fascinated, that their rulers had only to say to the least of men, “Be great, you and all your posterity,” to make him immediately appear great in the eyes of every one as well as in his own. His descendants took still more upon them, in proportion to their distance from him; the more obscure and uncertain the cause, the greater the effect: the greater the number of idlers one could count in a family, the more illustrious it was held to be.

If this were the place to go into details, I could readily explain how, even without the intervention of government, inequality of credit and authority became unavoidable among private persons, as soon as their union in a single society made them compare themselves one with another, and take into account the differences which they found out from the continual intercourse every man had to have with his neighbours⁴. These differences are of several kinds; but riches, nobility or rank, power and personal merit being the principal distinctions by which men form an estimate of each other in society, I could prove that the harmony or conflict of these different forces is the surest indication of the good or bad constitution of a State. I could show that among these four kinds of inequality, personal qualities being the origin of all the others, wealth is the one to which they are all reduced in the end; for, as riches tend most immediately to the prosperity of individuals, and are easiest to communicate, they are used to purchase every other distinction. By this observation we are enabled to judge pretty exactly how far a people has departed from its primitive constitution, and of its progress towards the extreme term of corruption. I could explain how much this universal desire for reputation,

honours and advancement, which inflames us all, exercises and holds up to comparison our faculties and powers; how it excites and multiplies our passions, and, by creating universal competition and rivalry, or rather enmity, among men, occasions numberless failures, successes and disturbances of all kinds by making so many aspirants run the same course. I could show that it is to this desire of being talked about, and this unremitting rage of distinguishing ourselves, that we owe the best and the worst things we possess, both our virtues and our vices, our science and our errors, our conquerors and our philosophers; that is to say, a great many bad things, and a very few good ones. In a word, I could prove that, if we have a few rich and powerful men on the pinnacle of fortune and grandeur, while the crowd grovels in want and obscurity, it is because the former prize what they enjoy only in so far as others are destitute of it; and because, without changing their condition, they would cease to be happy the moment the people ceased to be wretched.

These details alone, however, would furnish matter for a considerable work, in which the advantages and disadvantages of every kind of government might be weighed, as they are related to man in the state of nature, and at the same time all the different aspects, under which inequality has up to the present appeared, or may appear in ages yet to come, according to the nature of the several governments, and the alterations which time must unavoidably occasion in them, might be demonstrated. We should then see the multitude oppressed from within, in consequence of the very precautions it had taken to guard against foreign tyranny. We should see oppression continually gain ground without it being possible for the oppressed to know where it would stop, or what legitimate means was left them of checking its progress. We should see the rights of citizens, and the freedom of nations slowly extinguished, and the complaints, protests and appeals of the weak treated as seditious murmurings. We should see the honour of defending the common cause confined by statecraft to a mercenary part of the people. We should see taxes made necessary by such means, and the disheartened husbandman deserting his fields even in the midst of peace, and leaving the plough to gird on the sword. We should see fatal and capricious codes of honour established; and the champions of their country sooner or later becoming its enemies, and for ever holding their daggers to the breasts of their fellow-citizens. The time would come when they would be heard saying to the oppressor of their country —

Pectore si fratris gladium juguloque parentis

Condere me jubeas, gravidæque in viscera partu Conjugis, invita peragam tamen omnia dextrâ.

Lucan, i. 376

From great inequality of fortunes and conditions, from the vast variety of passions and of talents, of useless and pernicious arts, of vain sciences, would arise a multitude of prejudices equally contrary to reason, happiness and virtue. We should see the magistrates fomenting everything that might weaken men united in society, by promoting dissension among them; everything that might sow in it the seeds of actual division, while it gave society the air of harmony; everything that might inspire the different ranks of people with mutual hatred and

distrust, by setting the rights and interests of one against those of another, and so strengthen the power which comprehended them all.

It is from the midst of this disorder and these revolutions, that despotism, gradually raising up its hideous head and devouring everything that remained sound and untainted in any part of the State, would at length trample on both the laws and the people, and establish itself on the ruins of the republic. The times which immediately preceded this last change would be times of trouble and calamity; but at length the monster would swallow up everything, and the people would no longer have either chiefs or laws, but only tyrants. From this moment there would be no question of virtue or morality; for despotism *cui ex honesto nulla est spes*, wherever it prevails, admits no other master; it no sooner speaks than probity and duty lose their weight and blind obedience is the only virtue which slaves can still practise.

This is the last term of inequality, the extreme point that closes the circle, and meets that from which we set out. Here all private persons return to their first equality, because they are nothing; and, subjects having no law but the will of their master, and their master no restraint but his passions, all notions of good and all principles of equity again vanish. There is here a complete return to the law of the strongest, and so to a new state of nature, differing from that we set out from; for the one was a state of nature in its first purity, while this is the consequence of excessive corruption. There is so little difference between the two states in other respects, and the contract of government is so completely dissolved by despotism, that the despot is master only so long as he remains the strongest; as soon as he can be expelled, he has no right to complain of violence. The popular insurrection that ends in the death or deposition of a Sultan is as lawful an act as those by which he disposed, the day before, of the lives and fortunes of his subjects. As he was maintained by force alone, it is force alone that overthrows him. Thus everything takes place according to the natural order; and, whatever may be the result of such frequent and precipitate revolutions, no one man has reason to complain of the injustice of another, but only of his own ill-fortune or indiscretion.

If the reader thus discovers and retraces the lost and forgotten road, by which man must have passed from the state of nature to the state of society; if he carefully restores, along with the intermediate situations which I have just described, those which want of time has compelled me to suppress, or my imagination has failed to suggest, he cannot fail to be struck by the vast distance which separates the two states. It is in tracing this slow succession that he will find the solution of a number of problems of politics and morals, which philosophers cannot settle. He will feel that, men being different in different ages, the reason why Diogenes could not find a man was that he sought among his contemporaries a man of an earlier period. He will see that Cato died with Rome and liberty, because he did not fit the age in which he lived; the greatest of men served only to astonish a world which he would certainly have ruled, had he lived five hundred years sooner. In a word, he will explain how the soul and the passions of men insensibly change their very nature; why our wants and pleasures in the end seek new objects; and why, the original man having vanished by degrees, society offers to us only an assembly of artificial men and factitious passions, which are the work of all these new relations, and

without any real foundation in nature. We are taught nothing on this subject, by reflection, that is not entirely confirmed by observation. The savage and the civilised man differ so much in the bottom of their hearts and in their inclinations, that what constitutes the supreme happiness of one would reduce the other to despair. The former breathes only peace and liberty; he desires only to live and be free from labour; even the ataraxia of the Stoic falls far short of his profound indifference to every other object. Civilised man, on the other hand, is always moving, sweating, toiling and racking his brains to find still more laborious occupations: he goes on in drudgery to his last moment, and even seeks death to put himself in a position to live, or renounces life to acquire immortality. He pays his court to men in power, whom he hates, and to the wealthy, whom he despises; he stops at nothing to have the honour of serving them; he is not ashamed to value himself on his own meanness and their protection; and, proud of his slavery, he speaks with disdain of those, who have not the honour of sharing it. What a sight would the perplexing and envied labours of a European minister of State present to the eyes of a Caribbean! How many cruel deaths would not this indolent savage prefer to the horrors of such a life, which is seldom even sweetened by the pleasure of doing good! But, for him to see into the motives of all this solicitude, the words power and reputation, would have to bear some meaning in his mind; he would have to know that there are men who set a value on the opinion of the rest of the world; who can be made happy and satisfied with themselves rather on the testimony of other people than on their own. In reality, the source of all these differences is, that the savage lives within himself, while social man lives constantly outside himself, and only knows how to live in the opinion of others, so that he seems to receive the consciousness of his own existence merely from the judgment of others concerning him. It is not to my present purpose to insist on the indifference to good and evil which arises from this disposition, in spite of our many fine works on morality, or to show how, everything being reduced to appearances, there is but art and mummery in even honour, friendship, virtue, and often vice itself, of which we at length learn the secret of boasting; to show, in short, how, always asking others what we are, and never daring to ask ourselves, in the midst of so much philosophy, humanity and civilisation, and of such sublime codes of morality, we have nothing to show for ourselves but a frivolous and deceitful appearance, honour without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness. It is sufficient that I have proved that this is not by any means the original state of man, but that it is merely the spirit of society, and the inequality which society produces, that thus transform and alter all our natural inclinations.

I have endeavoured to trace the origin and progress of inequality, and the institution and abuse of political societies, as far as these are capable of being deduced from the nature of man merely by the light of reason, and independently of those sacred dogmas which give the sanction of divine right to sovereign authority. It follows from this survey that, as there is hardly any inequality in the state of nature, all the inequality which now prevails owes its strength and growth to the development of our faculties and the advance of the human mind, and becomes at last permanent and legitimate by the establishment of property and laws. Secondly, it follows that moral inequality, authorised by positive right alone, clashes with natural right, whenever it is not proportionate to physical inequality; a distinction which sufficiently determines what we ought to think of that species of inequality which prevails in all civilised, countries; since it is plainly contrary to the law of

nature, however defined, that children should command old men, fools wise men, and that the privileged few should gorge themselves with superfluities, while the starving multitude are in want of the bare necessities of life.

Citation and Use

The reading was taken from the following work.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” In *The Social Contract & Discourses*, 1920. Available from Project Gutenberg at <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/chapter/jean-jacques-rousseau-on-inequality/>.

This work is in the public domain.



This work (A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality by Jean-Jacques Rousseau) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xi. 127. Both rich and poor, shocked at their new-found ills, Would fly from wealth, and lose what they had sought.
2. Tacitus, *Hist.* iv. 17. The most wretched slavery they call peace.
3. *Of the Rights of the Most Christian Queen over Various States of the Monarchy of Spain*, 1667.
4. Distributive justice would oppose this rigorous equality of the state of nature, even were it practicable in civil society; as all the members of the State owe it their services in proportion to their talents and abilities, they ought, on their side, to be distinguished and favoured in proportion to the services they have actually rendered. It is in this sense we must understand that passage of Isocrates, in which he extols the primitive Athenians, for having determined which of the two kinds of equality was the most useful, viz., that which consists in dividing the same advantages indiscriminately among all the citizens, or that which consists in distributing them to each according to his deserts. These able politicians, adds the orator, banishing that unjust inequality which makes no distinction between good and bad men, adhered inviolably to that which rewards and punishes every man according to his deserts. But in the first place, there never existed a society, however corrupt some may have become, where no difference was made between the good and the bad; and with regard to morality, where no measures can be prescribed by law exact enough to serve as a practical rule for a magistrate, it is with great prudence that, in order not to leave the fortune or quality of the citizens to his discretion, it prohibits him from passing judgment on persons and confines his judgment to actions. Only morals such as those of the ancient Romans can bear censors, and such a tribunal among us would throw everything into confusion. The difference between good and bad men is determined by public esteem; the magistrate being strictly a judge of right alone; whereas the public is the truest judge of morals, and is of such integrity and penetration on this head, that although it may be sometimes deceived, it can never be corrupted. The rank of citizens ought, therefore, to be regulated, not according to their personal merit — for this would put it in the power

of the magistrate to apply the law almost arbitrarily — but according to the actual services done to the State, which are capable of being more exactly estimated.

JOHN RAWLS AND THE “VEIL OF IGNORANCE”

Ben Davies

Ben Davies is a Research Fellow at the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics at the University of Oxford. His work focuses mainly on health care justice, but he also has interests in human enhancement, animal ethics and well-being. Email benjamin.davies@philosophy.ac.uk. This work released under a CC-BY license.

John Rawls's Veil of Ignorance is probably one of the most influential philosophical ideas of the 20th century. The Veil of Ignorance is a way of working out the basic institutions and structures of a just society. According to Rawls,¹ working out what justice requires demands that we think as if we are building society from the ground up, in a way that everyone who is reasonable can accept. We therefore need to imagine ourselves in a situation before any particular society exists; Rawls calls this situation the Original Position. To be clear, Rawls does not think we can actually return to this original position, or even that it ever existed. It is a purely hypothetical idea: our job in thinking about justice is to imagine that we are designing a society from scratch. The idea is that social justice will be whatever reasonable people would agree to in such a situation. We can then start thinking about how to make our actual society look more like the ideal picture we have imagined.

Of course, if we were designing a society in the Original Position, people might try to ensure that it works in their favour. The process is thus vulnerable to biases, disagreements, and the potential for majority groups ganging up on minority groups. Rawls's solution to this problem comes in two parts. Firstly, he makes some assumptions about the people designing their own society. People in the Original Position are assumed to be free and equal, and to have certain motivations: they want to do well for themselves, but they are prepared to adhere to reasonable terms of cooperation, so long as others do too. Rawls also simplifies his discussion by imagining that people in the Original Position do not have total freedom to design society as they see fit. Rather, they must choose from a menu of views taken from traditional Western philosophy on what justice involves.

The second part of the solution is the Veil of Ignorance. This involves a further leap of imagination. When we are thinking about justice, Rawls suggests that we imagine that we do not know many of the facts – both about ourselves

and the society we currently live in – that typically influence our thinking in biased ways. By intentionally ignoring these facts, Rawls hoped that we would be able to avoid the biases that might otherwise come into a group decision. For instance, if I were helping to design a society, I might be tempted to try to make sure that society is set up to benefit philosophers, or men, or people who love science fiction novels. But if I don't know any of those facts about myself, I can't be tempted. The Veil is meant to ensure that people's concern for their personal benefit could translate into a set of arrangements that were fair for everyone, assuming that they had to stick to those choices once the Veil of Ignorance 'lifts', and they are given full information again.

One set of facts hidden from you behind the Veil are what we might call 'demographic' facts. You do not know your gender, race, wealth, or facts about your personal strengths and weaknesses, such as their intelligence or physical prowess. Rawls thought these facts are morally arbitrary: individuals do not earn or deserve these features, but simply have them by luck. As such, they do not deserve any benefits or harms that come from them. By removing knowledge of the natural inequalities that give people unfair advantages, it becomes irrational to choose principles that discriminate against any particular group. The Veil also hides facts about society. You do not know anything other than general facts about human life, and in particular you do not know how their society is organised. Finally, the Veil hides facts about your "view of the good": your values, preferences about how your own life should go, and specific moral and political beliefs. Rawls was a political liberal. That meant, among other things, that he thought the state should be neutral between different views about value. So, Rawls isn't afraid to make several significant assumptions about the people involved in making decisions behind the Veil. Some of his assumptions aim to turn the conflicts that arise between self-interested people into a fair decision procedure. As we'll see, however, others might be more fairly criticised as unreasonably narrowing the possible outcomes that people can reach behind the Veil.

I will outline Rawls's justification for the Veil of Ignorance, raise some potential challenges for the conclusions he thinks people will reach from behind it, and lastly consider three criticisms of the Veil of Ignorance as a theoretical device. While these criticisms differ in their substance, they are united by a common feature: their scepticism of the way the Veil abstracts from real life in order to reach conclusions about justice. I'll conclude that these criticisms have merit; the Veil of Ignorance, considered by itself, does lead us to ignore the real world too much. However, I'll suggest that, at least in their strongest versions, these criticisms miss an important benefit of the Veil: quite simply, the fact that our own personal concerns and values can bias our thinking about justice, and that we can make important progress by considering things from different points of view.

The principles of justice

Imagine that you find yourself behind the Veil of Ignorance. You might want to make sure that your life will go well. If you had to design a good life for yourself, you'd go for the specific things you care about. But behind the Veil you don't know those specifics; you only know things that generally make people's lives go well. Rawls calls these

'Primary Goods'. They include things like money and other resources; basic rights and freedoms; and finally, the "social bases of self-respect": the things you need to feel like an equal member of society.

In Rawls's view, a central challenge behind the Veil is the lack of probabilities available. If you knew that your society was 90% Catholic, you could set things up so that the rewards associated with being Catholic were much higher. That would be personally rational, since you are very likely to end up in the better off group. The Veil prevents this type of reasoning because it hides the information. In the complete absence of probabilities, Rawls thinks you should play it safe and maximise the minimum you could get (a policy he calls Maximin). Translated into a society, that means that we should ensure that the worst-off people in society do as well as possible.

Rawls suggests two principles will emerge from discussion behind the Veil:

First Principle: Each person has the same inalienable claim to a fully adequate scheme of *equal basic liberties*, compatible with the same liberties for all;

Second Principle: Social and economic inequalities must be:

1. Attached to offices and positions open to all under *fair equality of opportunity*;
2. To the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the *difference principle*).

Rawls opts for equality of basic liberties in the First Principle because he thinks this is essential for seeing yourself as a moral equal in society. For other Primary Goods, though, equality is less important. By allowing some inequality, we could make life better for everyone. If we attach higher salaries to certain jobs, they may attract the hardest working people, producing greater economic benefits for everyone. The two parts of Rawls's second principle of justice set limits on when inequalities are allowed. Fair equality of opportunity says that positions which bring unequal payoffs must be open to people of equal talents and equal willingness to use them on an equal basis. If two people are just as capable of doing a job, and just as hardworking and willing to apply themselves, neither should have a greater chance of securing the position because they are wealthier, or because of their race or religion. Of course, we might wonder (and Rawls does not give a clear answer about this) when we are supposed to judge whether two people are equally hardworking and talented. The talents you choose to develop, and the amount of effort you put in, are heavily affected by education; so it might seem unfair to judge people if they have had very different educational experiences. Rawls's argument therefore seems to support ensuring broad equality of education, encouraging people to find and develop their talents to the fullest, even if this isn't a conclusion he explicitly draws.

Finally, the Difference Principle sets a further restriction on inequalities. Even if a particular inequality does not affect equality of opportunities, the Difference Principle tells us that it must be beneficial for the very worst off. For instance, it might be that by allowing inequalities, we motivate people to work harder, generating more Primary

Goods overall. If these then benefit the worst off in society, making them better off than they would have been in a more equal distribution, the Difference Principle will allow that inequality.

Criticisms

As with any influential philosopher, Rawls has been the subject of much criticism and disagreement. In this final section, we consider three objections to Rawls's reasoning around the Veil of Ignorance.

Ownership and rights

We have already noted that Rawls explicitly makes several assumptions that shape the nature of the discussion behind the Veil of Ignorance, and the outcomes that are likely to come out of it. However, one might challenge Rawls by disputing the fairness or intuitiveness of one or more of his assumptions.

Probably the most famous example of this comes from Robert Nozick.² Recall that Rawls's principles establish rules to govern the institutions and principles that distribute goods. He thinks that if we work out what those institutions would look like in a perfectly just society, using the Veil of Ignorance, we can then start to move our current society in that direction. Nozick notes that in reality, most goods are already owned. Rawls's view establishes a pattern that looks fair; but Nozick argues that we also need to look at the history of how various goods came to be owned. In some cases, we find that the person who owns those goods worked for them. In other cases, the individual will have inherited those goods, but they will have come from an ancestor who worked for them. In both cases, we cannot simply redistribute these goods to fit our pattern, because people have rights.

In Nozick's view, once you have ownership rights, you can do pretty much what you want with it, so long as you do not violate anyone else's rights. The fact that taking money you earned would benefit someone else cannot be the basis for government forcibly taking your money. One possible basis for this is the idea of 'self-ownership'. Nozick thinks we will all agree that it would be wrong to force you to work if you didn't want to. The reason for this is that your body is owned by you and nobody else. That principle extends, Nozick says, to what you do with your body: your labour. If you make something, or work for money, that thing is yours and nobody else's. Just as the state has no right to force you to do things with your body that you don't want to do, it also has no right to force you to do things with your other property, like giving it away to the less fortunate. That might be a nice thing to do, but it isn't something others can force you to do.

One problem with this argument, to which Rawls might appeal, is that my ability to work (and therefore gain property) depends on many other things:

- *my education,*

- *my health that was guaranteed by a public health system,*
- *a stable society that affords me opportunities for employment, or*
- *for employing others.*

So it's not quite true that everything I produce comes from me alone.

Identity and 'Neutrality'

A second criticism also concerns the fact that, behind the Veil, various facts are hidden from you. Rather than worrying about the substantive conclusions Rawls reaches, as Nozick does, this criticism worries about the very coherence of reasoned discussion behind the Veil of Ignorance.

Rawls's Veil of Ignorance is an example of a theory of justice that has universal aspirations. Since one of the facts that is hidden by the veil is the nature of the society you live in, we may assume that the resulting principles are supposed to be applicable in all societies, though this is a view that Rawls attempted to reject in later work. In addition, people behind the Veil are supposed to come up with a view of how society should be structured while knowing almost nothing about themselves, and their lives.

One broad group who criticise these ideas are the so-called 'communitarian' philosophers, which includes Charles Taylor,³ Michael Walzer⁴, and Alasdair MacIntyre.⁵ While their views differ, they tend to agree that what justice requires cannot be decided abstractly, but must instead be informed by local considerations and culture. Communitarians also suggest that Rawls's conception of the individuals behind the Veil of Ignorance is problematic because they have so few defining features. Even if Rawls is right that people behind the Veil would agree on his two principles, communitarians think that the hypothetical agreement ignores much that is important.

Individuals behind the Veil are assumed to be largely self-interested, and to have a strong interest in retaining the ability to abandon their current social roles and pursuits and take up new ones. According to the communitarians, however, we are born with existing social connections to particular people, cultures and social roles. Whereas Rawls emphasises our active engagement in shaping our own lives, communitarians want to remind us that our lives are unavoidably shaped by existing attachments that we do not choose. For instance, if you are born into a particular religious community, you can of course still renounce that religion. But your life will still be shaped by the fact that you are a member, or former member, of that community. It is worth noting, though, that this accusation is somewhat unfair on Rawls. While it is true that individuals behind the Veil do not know about their defining features, Rawls does not think that real people are like this. His interest is in trying to formulate a neutral way to decide between competing groups.

Certainly, it is a plausible worry that what justice requires may depend in part on the values of the society in

question. As a liberal, Rawls is particularly worried about protecting individuals whose preferred lives go against the grain of the society in which they find themselves. Communitarians will object that the Veil of Ignorance goes beyond this protection, and rules out the possibility of different ideas of justice, informed by local values. Perhaps we should acknowledge that people behind the Veil of Ignorance would recognise the possibility that their society will turn out to be strongly attached to a particular set of values. A rational person behind the Veil might want to try to find a way to give a special place to such values, while protecting dissenters.

Ideal justice?

Our final challenge also concerns the real-world applicability of Rawls's principles. In brief, the claim from scholars of race and of gender is that Rawls's abstract Veil of Ignorance ends up ignoring much that is relevant to justice.

The central criticism we consider here concerns the motivation of Rawls's overall project. Rawls's aim is to outline a theory of 'ideal' justice, or what a perfectly just society would look like. This ignores, purposefully, the many injustices that have happened and continue to happen, including the fact that most societies continue to exhibit racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.⁶ As critics argue, we then get at best an incomplete theory, which does not tell us how to fix existing injustice or, as it is sometimes called, 'non-ideal' justice (an issue that Rawls himself describes as a "pressing and urgent matter"). For instance, people disagree about the idea of 'reparations' for racial slavery that shaped the United States. Yet because this is an issue of non-ideal justice (how should we respond to the fact that the United States and many of its citizens failed to comply with the basic requirements of justice?), the idealisation of the Veil of Ignorance seems to give us no way to determine this important question.

This maps onto a more general question in political philosophy: if a theory of justice does not tell us how to act in our actual societies, does it have any value? While some⁷ argue that Rawls's work can be used to draw concrete conclusions about issues such as racial profiling and affirmative action, critics who reject this view may also argue that a theory of justice that is concerned only with the ideal ignores the most pressing issues of the day. In Rawls's case, we may wonder whether we can accommodate such concerns by making small changes to his assumptions, or whether more radical changes (or even abandonment of the theory) are required.

Conclusion

The three criticisms outlined above all take issue, in different ways, with Rawls's idealisation away from the real world. Much of the value of Rawls's work will depend on whether it is useful to construct ideal views of justice before, or at the same time as, thinking about the messier real world. Even a pessimistic conclusion on this issue, though, should recognise the following insight from Rawls: that what seems just or fair or right to any person is influenced not just by our background but by our own selfish interests. Even if the details face problems, Rawls's

Veil of Ignorance shows us that it can be valuable to imagine things from opposing points of view. While the criticisms from communitarians, scholars of race, and feminist scholars demonstrate the importance of considering the concrete features of our societies and lives, the basic idea of abstracting away from potential biases is an important one.

Nonetheless, this conclusion is consistent with recognising two mistakes in making use of the Veil of Ignorance. Firstly, recognising the importance of abstraction should not come at the cost of considering the real, concrete impact of policies we adopt, or of the social and historical context they are part of. Much political philosophy, at least in the USA and UK, can be criticised for neglecting these latter issues. Secondly, acknowledging the importance of the Veil of Ignorance does not mean that Rawls, and later philosophers, are right to have established an order of priority, where we first abstractly establish a view of ideal justice, and only then move on to non-ideal justice. It may be more productive to consider issues of justice from both the kind of abstracted view represented by the Veil of Ignorance, and from the more concrete view advocated by its critics.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. The Difference Principle only allows inequalities if they benefit the worst off in society. Is this practical? Is it what people would agree to behind the Veil of Ignorance?
2. 'The Veil of Ignorance hides information that makes us who we are. Behind the Veil, we are not individuals, and so any decision we reach is meaningless.' Do you agree? Why/why not?
3. Since our talents and inclinations depend on what happens to us even before we are born, can we make sense of the idea of Rawls's idea of 'fair equality of opportunity'?

Citation and Use

This reading was taken from the following work.

Davies, Ben. "John Rawls and the 'Veil of Ignorance.'" In INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS: AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE, 92–97. Golden West College, Huntington Beach, CA: NGE Far Press, 2019.

This work released under a CC-BY license.



John Rawls and the "Veil of Ignorance" by Ben Davies is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. *John Rawls (1999) A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press*
2. *Robert Nozick (1974) Anarchy, State and Utopia Blackwell Publishing (Oxford) pp.149-232*
3. *Charles Taylor (1989) Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity Cambridge: CUP*
4. *Michael Walzer (1983) Spheres of Justice Oxford: Blackwell*
5. *Alasdair MacIntyre (1988) Whose Justice? Which Rationality? Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.*
6. *Carol Pateman and Charles Mills (2007) Contract and Domination Cambridge: Polity Press*
7. *Tommie Shelby (2004) 'Race and Social Justice: Rawlsian Considerations' Fordham Law Review 72: pp.1697-1714.*

JOHN STUART MILL – ON THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN

Jeff McLaughlin

The Subjection of Women

CHAPTER I.

THE object of this Essay is to explain as clearly as I am able, the grounds of an opinion which I have held from the very earliest period when I had formed any opinions at all on social or political matters, and which, instead of being weakened or modified, has been constantly growing stronger by the progress of reflection and the experience of life: That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.

The very words necessary to express the task I have undertaken, show how arduous it is. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the difficulty of the case must lie in the insufficiency or obscurity of the grounds of reason on which my conviction rests. The difficulty is that which exists in all cases in which there is a mass of feeling to be contended against. So long as an opinion is strongly rooted in the feelings, it gains rather than loses in stability by having a preponderating weight of argument against it. For if it were accepted as a result of argument, the refutation of the argument might shake the solidity of the conviction; but when it rests solely on feeling, the worse it fares in argumentative contest, the more persuaded its adherents are that their feeling must have some deeper ground, which the arguments do not reach; and while the feeling remains, it is always throwing up fresh intrenchments of argument to repair any breach made in the old. And there are so many causes tending to make the feelings connected with this subject the most intense and most deeply-rooted of all those which gather round and protect old institutions and customs, that we need not wonder to find them as yet less undermined and loosened than any of the rest by the progress of the great modern spiritual and social transition; nor suppose that the barbarisms to which men cling longest must be less barbarisms than those which they earlier shake off.

In every respect the burthen is hard on those who attack an almost universal opinion. They must be very fortunate as well as unusually capable if they obtain a hearing at all. They have more difficulty in obtaining a trial, than any other litigants have in getting a verdict. If they do extort a hearing, they are subjected to a set of logical requirements totally different from those exacted from other people. In all other cases, the burthen of proof is

supposed to lie with the affirmative. If a person is charged with a murder, it rests with those who accuse him to give proof of his guilt, not with himself to prove his innocence. If there is a difference of opinion about the reality of any alleged historical event, in which the feelings of men in general are not much interested, as the Siege of Troy for example, those who maintain that the event took place are expected to produce their proofs, before those who take the other side can be required to say anything; and at no time are these required to do more than show that the evidence produced by the others is of no value. Again, in practical matters, the burthen of proof is supposed to be with those who are against liberty; who contend for any restriction or prohibition; either any limitation of the general freedom of human action, or any disqualification or disparity of privilege affecting one person or kind of persons, as compared with others. The à priori presumption is in favour of freedom and impartiality. It is held that there should be no restraint not required by the general good, and that the law should be no respecter of persons, but should treat all alike, save where dissimilarity of treatment is required by positive reasons, either of justice or of policy. But of none of these rules of evidence will the benefit be allowed to those who maintain the opinion I profess. It is useless for me to say that those who maintain the doctrine that men have a right to command and women are under an obligation to obey, or that men are fit for government and women unfit, are on the affirmative side of the question, and that they are bound to show positive evidence for the assertions, or submit to their rejection. It is equally unavailing for me to say that those who deny to women any freedom or privilege rightly allowed to men, having the double presumption against them that they are opposing freedom and recommending partiality, must be held to the strictest proof of their case, and unless their success be such as to exclude all doubt, the judgment ought to go against them. These would be thought good pleas in any common case; but they will not be thought so in this instance. Before I could hope to make any impression, I should be expected not only to answer all that has ever been said by those who take the other side of the question, but to imagine all that could be said by them—to find them in reasons, as well as answer all I find: and besides refuting all arguments for the affirmative, I shall be called upon for invincible positive arguments to prove a negative. And even if I could do all this, and leave the opposite party with a host of unanswered arguments against them, and not a single unrefuted one on their side, I should be thought to have done little; for a cause supported on the one hand by universal usage, and on the other by so great a preponderance of popular sentiment, is supposed to have a presumption in its favour, superior to any conviction which an appeal to reason has power to produce in any intellects but those of a high class.

I do not mention these difficulties to complain of them; first, because it would be useless; they are inseparable from having to contend through people's understandings against the hostility of their feelings and practical tendencies: and truly the understandings of the majority of mankind would need to be much better cultivated than has ever yet been the case, before they can be asked to place such reliance in their own power of estimating arguments, as to give up practical principles in which they have been born and bred and which are the basis of much of the existing order of the world, at the first argumentative attack which they are not capable of logically resisting. I do not therefore quarrel with them for having too little faith in argument, but for having too much faith in custom and the general feeling. It is one of the characteristic prejudices of the reaction of the nineteenth century against the eighteenth, to accord to the unreasoning elements in human nature the infallibility which the eighteenth century is supposed to have ascribed to the reasoning elements. For the apotheosis of Reason we have substituted that of

Instinct; and we call everything instinct which we find in ourselves and for which we cannot trace any rational foundation. This idolatry, infinitely more degrading than the other, and the most pernicious of the false worships of the present day, of all of which it is now the main support, will probably hold its ground until it gives way before a sound psychology, laying bare the real root of much that is bowed down to as the intention of Nature and the ordinance of God. As regards the present question, I am willing to accept the unfavourable conditions which the prejudice assigns to me. I consent that established custom, and the general feeling, should be deemed conclusive against me, unless that custom and feeling from age to age can be shown to have owed their existence to other causes than their soundness, and to have derived their power from the worse rather than the better parts of human nature. I am willing that judgment should go against me, unless I can show that my judge has been tampered with. The concession is not so great as it might appear; for to prove this, is by far the easiest portion of my task.

The generality of a practice is in some cases a strong presumption that it is, or at all events once was, conducive to laudable ends. This is the case, when the practice was first adopted, or afterwards kept up, as a means to such ends, and was grounded on experience of the mode in which they could be most effectually attained. If the authority of men over women, when first established, had been the result of a conscientious comparison between different modes of constituting the government of society; if, after trying various other modes of social organization—the government of women over men, equality between the two, and such mixed and divided modes of government as might be invented—it had been decided, on the testimony of experience, that the mode in which women are wholly under the rule of men, having no share at all in public concerns, and each in private being under the legal obligation of obedience to the man with whom she has associated her destiny, was the arrangement most conducive to the happiness and well being of both; its general adoption might then be fairly thought to be some evidence that, at the time when it was adopted, it was the best: though even then the considerations which recommended it may, like so many other primeval social facts of the greatest importance, have subsequently, in the course of ages, ceased to exist. But the state of the case is in every respect the reverse of this. In the first place, the opinion in favour of the present system, which entirely subordinates the weaker sex to the stronger, rests upon theory only; for there never has been trial made of any other: so that experience, in the sense in which it is vulgarly opposed to theory, cannot be pretended to have pronounced any verdict. And in the second place, the adoption of this system of inequality never was the result of deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideas, or any notion whatever of what conduced to the benefit of humanity or the good order of society. It arose simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man. Laws and systems of polity always begin by recognising the relations they find already existing between individuals. They convert what was a mere physical fact into a legal right, give it the sanction of society, and principally aim at the substitution of public and organized means of asserting and protecting these rights, instead of the irregular and lawless conflict of physical strength. Those who had already been compelled to obedience became in this manner legally bound to it. Slavery, from being a mere affair of force between the master and the slave, became regularized and a matter of compact among the masters, who, binding themselves to one another for common protection, guaranteed by their collective strength the private possessions of each, including his slaves. In early times, the great majority of

the male sex were slaves, as well as the whole of the female. And many ages elapsed, some of them ages of high cultivation, before any thinker was bold enough to question the rightfulness, and the absolute social necessity, either of the one slavery or of the other. By degrees such thinkers did arise: and (the general progress of society assisting) the slavery of the male sex has, in all the countries of Christian Europe at least (though, in one of them, only within the last few years) been at length abolished, and that of the female sex has been gradually changed into a milder form of dependence. But this dependence, as it exists at present, is not an original institution, taking a fresh start from considerations of justice and social expediency—it is the primitive state of slavery lasting on, through successive mitigations and modifications occasioned by the same causes which have softened the general manners, and brought all human relations more under the control of justice and the influence of humanity. It has not lost the taint of its brutal origin. No presumption in its favour, therefore, can be drawn from the fact of its existence. The only such presumption which it could be supposed to have, must be grounded on its having lasted till now, when so many other things which came down from the same odious source have been done away with. And this, indeed, is what makes it strange to ordinary ears, to hear it asserted that the inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest.

That this statement should have the effect of a paradox, is in some respects creditable to the progress of civilization, and the improvement of the moral sentiments of mankind. We now live—that is to say, one or two of the most advanced nations of the world now live—in a state in which the law of the strongest seems to be entirely abandoned as the regulating principle of the world's affairs: nobody professes it, and, as regards most of the relations between human beings, nobody is permitted to practise it. When any one succeeds in doing so, it is under cover of some pretext which gives him the semblance of having some general social interest on his side. This being the ostensible state of things, people flatter themselves that the rule of mere force is ended; that the law of the strongest cannot be the reason of existence of anything which has remained in full operation down to the present time. However any of our present institutions may have begun, it can only, they think, have been preserved to this period of advanced civilization by a well-grounded feeling of its adaptation to human nature, and conduciveness to the general good. They do not understand the great vitality and durability of institutions which place right on the side of might; how intensely they are clung to; how the good as well as the bad propensities and sentiments of those who have power in their hands, become identified with retaining it; how slowly these bad institutions give way, one at a time, the weakest first, beginning with those which are least interwoven with the daily habits of life; and how very rarely those who have obtained legal power because they first had physical, have ever lost their hold of it until the physical power had passed over to the other side. Such shifting of the physical force not having taken place in the case of women; this fact, combined with all the peculiar and characteristic features of the particular case, made it certain from the first that this branch of the system of right founded on might, though softened in its most atrocious features at an earlier period than several of the others, would be the very last to disappear. It was inevitable that this one case of a social relation grounded on force, would survive through generations of institutions grounded on equal justice, an almost solitary exception to the general character of their laws and customs; but which, so long as it does not proclaim its own origin, and as discussion has not brought out its true character, is not felt to jar with

modern civilization, any more than domestic slavery among the Greeks jarred with their notion of themselves as a free people.

The truth is, that people of the present and the last two or three generations have lost all practical sense of the primitive condition of humanity; and only the few who have studied history accurately, or have much frequented the parts of the world occupied by the living representatives of ages long past, are able to form any mental picture of what society then was. People are not aware how entirely, in former ages, the law of superior strength was the rule of life; how publicly and openly it was avowed, I do not say cynically or shamelessly—for these words imply a feeling that there was something in it to be ashamed of, and no such notion could find a place in the faculties of any person in those ages, except a philosopher or a saint. History gives a cruel experience of human nature, in shewing how exactly the regard due to the life, possessions, and entire earthly happiness of any class of persons, was measured by what they had the power of enforcing; how all who made any resistance to authorities that had arms in their hands, however dreadful might be the provocation, had not only the law of force but all other laws, and all the notions of social obligation against them; and in the eyes of those whom they resisted, were not only guilty of crime, but of the worst of all crimes, deserving the most cruel chastisement which human beings could inflict. The first small vestige of a feeling of obligation in a superior to acknowledge any right in inferiors, began when he had been induced, for convenience, to make some promise to them. Though these promises, even when sanctioned by the most solemn oaths, were for many ages revoked or violated on the most trifling provocation or temptation, it is probable that this, except by persons of still worse than the average morality, was seldom done without some twinges of conscience. The ancient republics, being mostly grounded from the first upon some kind of mutual compact, or at any rate formed by an union of persons not very unequal in strength, afforded, in consequence, the first instance of a portion of human relations fenced round, and placed under the dominion of another law than that of force. And though the original law of force remained in full operation between them and their slaves, and also (except so far as limited by express compact) between a commonwealth and its subjects, or other independent commonwealths; the banishment of that primitive law even from so narrow a field, commenced the regeneration of human nature, by giving birth to sentiments of which experience soon demonstrated the immense value even for material interests, and which thenceforward only required to be enlarged, not created. Though slaves were no part of the commonwealth, it was in the free states that slaves were first felt to have rights as human beings. The Stoics were, I believe, the first (except so far as the Jewish law constitutes an exception) who taught as a part of morality that men were bound by moral obligations to their slaves. No one, after Christianity became ascendant, could ever again have been a stranger to this belief, in theory; nor, after the rise of the Catholic Church, was it ever without persons to stand up for it. Yet to enforce it was the most arduous task which Christianity ever had to perform. For more than a thousand years the Church kept up the contest, with hardly any perceptible success. It was not for want of power over men's minds. Its power was prodigious. It could make kings and nobles resign their most valued possessions to enrich the Church. It could make thousands, in the prime of life and the height of worldly advantages, shut themselves up in convents to work out their salvation by poverty, fasting, and prayer. It could send hundreds of thousands across land and sea, Europe and Asia, to give their lives for the deliverance of the Holy Sepulchre. It could make kings relinquish wives who were the object of their passionate attachment, because

the Church declared that they were within the seventh (by our calculation the fourteenth) degree of relationship. All this it did; but it could not make men fight less with one another, nor tyrannize less cruelly over the serfs, and when they were able, over burgesses. It could not make them renounce either of the applications of force; force militant, or force triumphant. This they could never be induced to do until they were themselves in their turn compelled by superior force. Only by the growing power of kings was an end put to fighting except between kings, or competitors for kingship; only by the growth of a wealthy and warlike bourgeoisie in the fortified towns, and of a plebeian infantry which proved more powerful in the field than the undisciplined chivalry, was the insolent tyranny of the nobles over the bourgeoisie and peasantry brought within some bounds. It was persisted in not only until, but long after, the oppressed had obtained a power enabling them often to take conspicuous vengeance; and on the Continent much of it continued to the time of the French Revolution, though in England the earlier and better organization of the democratic classes put an end to it sooner, by establishing equal laws and free national institutions.

If people are mostly so little aware how completely, during the greater part of the duration of our species, the law of force was the avowed rule of general conduct, any other being only a special and exceptional consequence of peculiarities—and from how very recent a date it is that the affairs of society in general have been even pretended to be regulated according to any moral law; as little do people remember or consider, how institutions and customs which never had any ground but the law of force, last on into ages and states of general opinion which never would have permitted their first establishment. Less than forty years ago, Englishmen might still by law hold human beings in bondage as saleable property: within the present century they might kidnap them and carry them off, and work them literally to death. This absolutely extreme case of the law of force, condemned by those who can tolerate almost every other form of arbitrary power, and which, of all others, presents features the most revolting to the feelings of all who look at it from an impartial position, was the law of civilized and Christian England within the memory of persons now living: and in one half of Anglo-Saxon America three or four years ago, not only did slavery exist, but the slave trade, and the breeding of slaves expressly for it, was a general practice between slave states. Yet not only was there a greater strength of sentiment against it, but, in England at least, a less amount either of feeling or of interest in favour of it, than of any other of the customary abuses of force: for its motive was the love of gain, unmixed and undisguised; and those who profited by it were a very small numerical fraction of the country, while the natural feeling of all who were not personally interested in it, was unmitigated abhorrence. So extreme an instance makes it almost superfluous to refer to any other: but consider the long duration of absolute monarchy. In England at present it is the almost universal conviction that military despotism is a case of the law of force, having no other origin or justification. Yet in all the great nations of Europe except England it either still exists, or has only just ceased to exist, and has even now a strong party favourable to it in all ranks of the people, especially among persons of station and consequence. Such is the power of an established system, even when far from universal; when not only in almost every period of history there have been great and well-known examples of the contrary system, but these have almost invariably been afforded by the most illustrious and most prosperous communities. In this case, too, the possessor of the undue power, the person directly interested in it, is only one person, while those who are subject to it and suffer from it are literally all the rest. The yoke is naturally and necessarily humiliating to all persons, except the one who is on the throne, together with, at most, the one who expects to succeed

to it. How different are these cases from that of the power of men over women! I am not now prejudging the question of its justifiableness. I am showing how vastly more permanent it could not but be, even if not justifiable, than these other dominations which have nevertheless lasted down to our own time. Whatever gratification of pride there is in the possession of power, and whatever personal interest in its exercise, is in this case not confined to a limited class, but common to the whole male sex. Instead of being, to most of its supporters, a thing desirable chiefly in the abstract, or, like the political ends usually contended for by factions, of little private importance to any but the leaders; it comes home to the person and hearth of every male head of a family, and of every one who looks forward to being so. The clodhopper exercises, or is to exercise, his share of the power equally with the highest nobleman. And the case is that in which the desire of power is the strongest: for every one who desires power, desires it most over those who are nearest to him, with whom his life is passed, with whom he has most concerns in common, and in whom any independence of his authority is oftenest likely to interfere with his individual preferences. If, in the other cases specified, powers manifestly grounded only on force, and having so much less to support them, are so slowly and with so much difficulty got rid of, much more must it be so with this, even if it rests on no better foundation than those. We must consider, too, that the possessors of the power have facilities in this case, greater than in any other, to prevent any uprising against it. Every one of the subjects lives under the very eye, and almost, it may be said, in the hands, of one of the masters—in closer intimacy with him than with any of her fellow-subjects; with no means of combining against him, no power of even locally overmastering him, and, on the other hand, with the strongest motives for seeking his favour and avoiding to give him offence. In struggles for political emancipation, everybody knows how often its champions are bought off by bribes, or daunted by terrors. In the case of women, each individual of the subject-class is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined. In setting up the standard of resistance, a large number of the leaders, and still more of the followers, must make an almost complete sacrifice of the pleasures or the alleviations of their own individual lot. If ever any system of privilege and enforced subjection had its yoke tightly riveted on the necks of those who are kept down by it, this has. I have not yet shown that it is a wrong system: but every one who is capable of thinking on the subject must see that even if it is, it was certain to outlast all other forms of unjust authority. And when some of the grossest of the other forms still exist in many civilized countries, and have only recently been got rid of in others, it would be strange if that which is so much the deepest-rooted had yet been perceptibly shaken anywhere. There is more reason to wonder that the protests and testimonies against it should have been so numerous and so weighty as they are.

Some will object, that a comparison cannot fairly be made between the government of the male sex and the forms of unjust power which I have adduced in illustration of it, since these are arbitrary, and the effect of mere usurpation, while it on the contrary is natural. But was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it? There was a time when the division of mankind into two classes, a small one of masters and a numerous one of slaves, appeared, even to the most cultivated minds, to be a natural, and the only natural, condition of the human race. No less an intellect, and one which contributed no less to the progress of human thought, than Aristotle, held this opinion without doubt or misgiving; and rested it on the same premises on which the same assertion in regard to the dominion of men over women is usually based, namely that there are different natures among mankind, free natures, and slave natures; that the Greeks were of a free nature, the barbarian

races of Thracians and Asiatics of a slave nature. But why need I go back to Aristotle? Did not the slaveowners of the Southern United States maintain the same doctrine, with all the fanaticism with which men cling to the theories that justify their passions and legitimate their personal interests? Did they not call heaven and earth to witness that the dominion of the white man over the black is natural, that the black race is by nature incapable of freedom, and marked out for slavery? some even going so far as to say that the freedom of manual labourers is an unnatural order of things anywhere. Again, the theorists of absolute monarchy have always affirmed it to be the only natural form of government; issuing from the patriarchal, which was the primitive and spontaneous form of society, framed on the model of the paternal, which is anterior to society itself, and, as they contend, the most natural authority of all. Nay, for that matter, the law of force itself, to those who could not plead any other, has always seemed the most natural of all grounds for the exercise of authority. Conquering races hold it to be Nature's own dictate that the conquered should obey the conquerors, or, as they euphoniously paraphrase it, that the feebler and more unwarlike races should submit to the braver and manlier. The smallest acquaintance with human life in the middle ages, shows how supremely natural the dominion of the feudal nobility over men of low condition appeared to the nobility themselves, and how unnatural the conception seemed, of a person of the inferior class claiming equality with them, or exercising authority over them. It hardly seemed less so to the class held in subjection. The emancipated serfs and burgesses, even in their most vigorous struggles, never made any pretension to a share of authority; they only demanded more or less of limitation to the power of tyrannizing over them. So true is it that unnatural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural. But how entirely, even in this case, the feeling is dependent on custom, appears by ample experience. Nothing so much astonishes the people of distant parts of the world, when they first learn anything about England, as to be told that it is under a queen: the thing seems to them so unnatural as to be almost incredible. To Englishmen this does not seem in the least degree unnatural, because they are used to it; but they do feel it unnatural that women should be soldiers or members of parliament. In the feudal ages, on the contrary, war and politics were not thought unnatural to women, because not unusual; it seemed natural that women of the privileged classes should be of manly character, inferior in nothing but bodily strength to their husbands and fathers. The independence of women seemed rather less unnatural to the Greeks than to other ancients, on account of the fabulous Amazons (whom they believed to be historical), and the partial example afforded by the Spartan women; who, though no less subordinate by law than in other Greek states, were more free in fact, and being trained to bodily exercises in the same manner with men, gave ample proof that they were not naturally disqualified for them. There can be little doubt that Spartan experience suggested to Plato, among many other of his doctrines, that of the social and political equality of the two sexes.

But, it will be said, the rule of men over women differs from all these others in not being a rule of force: it is accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it. In the first place, a great number of women do not accept it. Ever since there have been women able to make their sentiments known by their writings (the only mode of publicity which society permits to them), an increasing number of them have recorded protests against their present social condition: and recently many thousands of them, headed by the most eminent women

known to the public, have petitioned Parliament for their admission to the Parliamentary Suffrage. The claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge, as men, is urged with growing intensity, and with a great prospect of success; while the demand for their admission into professions and occupations hitherto closed against them, becomes every year more urgent. Though there are not in this country, as there are in the United States, periodical Conventions and an organized party to agitate for the Rights of Women, there is a numerous and active Society organized and managed by women, for the more limited object of obtaining the political franchise. Nor is it only in our own country and in America that women are beginning to protest, more or less collectively, against the disabilities under which they labour. France, and Italy, and Switzerland, and Russia now afford examples of the same thing. How many more women there are who silently cherish similar aspirations, no one can possibly know; but there are abundant tokens how many would cherish them, were they not so strenuously taught to repress them as contrary to the proprieties of their sex. It must be remembered, also, that no enslaved class ever asked for complete liberty at once. When Simon de Montfort called the deputies of the commons to sit for the first time in Parliament, did any of them dream of demanding that an assembly, elected by their constituents, should make and destroy ministries, and dictate to the king in affairs of state? No such thought entered into the imagination of the most ambitious of them. The nobility had already these pretensions; the commons pretended to nothing but to be exempt from arbitrary taxation, and from the gross individual oppression of the king's officers. It is a political law of nature that those who are under any power of ancient origin, never begin by complaining of the power itself, but only of its oppressive exercise. There is never any want of women who complain of ill usage by their husbands. There would be infinitely more, if complaint were not the greatest of all provocatives to a repetition and increase of the ill usage. It is this which frustrates all attempts to maintain the power but protect the woman against its abuses. In no other case (except that of a child) is the person who has been proved judicially to have suffered an injury, replaced under the physical power of the culprit who inflicted it. Accordingly wives, even in the most extreme and protracted cases of bodily ill usage, hardly ever dare avail themselves of the laws made for their protection: and if, in a moment of irrepressible indignation, or by the interference of neighbours, they are induced to do so, their whole effort afterwards is to disclose as little as they can, and to beg off their tyrant from his merited chastisement.

All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds. The masters of all other slaves rely, for maintaining obedience, on fear; either fear of themselves, or religious fears. The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose. All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have

no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have—those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man. When we put together three things—first, the natural attraction between opposite sexes; secondly, the wife’s entire dependence on the husband, every privilege or pleasure she has being either his gift, or depending entirely on his will; and lastly, that the principal object of human pursuit, consideration, and all objects of social ambition, can in general be sought or obtained by her only through him, it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character. And, this great means of influence over the minds of women having been acquired, an instinct of selfishness made men avail themselves of it to the utmost as a means of holding women in subjection, by representing to them meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness. Can it be doubted that any of the other yokes which mankind have succeeded in breaking, would have subsisted till now if the same means had existed, and had been as sedulously used, to bow down their minds to it? If it had been made the object of the life of every young plebeian to find personal favour in the eyes of some patrician, of every young serf with some seigneur; if domestication with him, and a share of his personal affections, had been held out as the prize which they all should look out for, the most gifted and aspiring being able to reckon on the most desirable prizes; and if, when this prize had been obtained, they had been shut out by a wall of brass from all interests not centering in him, all feelings and desires but those which he shared or inculcated; would not serfs and seigneurs, plebeians and patricians, have been as broadly distinguished at this day as men and women are? and would not all but a thinker here and there, have believed the distinction to be a fundamental and unalterable fact in human nature?

The preceding considerations are amply sufficient to show that custom, however universal it may be, affords in this case no presumption, and ought not to create any prejudice, in favour of the arrangements which place women in social and political subjection to men. But I may go farther, and maintain that the course of history, and the tendencies of progressive human society, afford not only no presumption in favour of this system of inequality of rights, but a strong one against it; and that, so far as the whole course of human improvement up to this time, the whole stream of modern tendencies, warrants any inference on the subject, it is, that this relic of the past is discordant with the future, and must necessarily disappear.

For, what is the peculiar character of the modern world—the difference which chiefly distinguishes modern institutions, modern social ideas, modern life itself, from those of times long past? It is, that human beings are no longer born to their place in life, and chained down by an inexorable bond to the place they are born to, but are free to employ their faculties, and such favourable chances as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable. Human society of old was constituted on a very different principle. All were born to a fixed social position, and were mostly kept in it by law, or interdicted from any means by which they could emerge from it. As some men are born white and others black, so some were born slaves and others freemen and citizens; some were born patricians, others plebeians; some were born feudal nobles, others commoners and roturiers. A slave or serf could never make himself free, nor, except by the will of his master, become so. In most European countries it was

not till towards the close of the middle ages, and as a consequence of the growth of regal power, that commoners could be ennobled. Even among nobles, the eldest son was born the exclusive heir to the paternal possessions, and a long time elapsed before it was fully established that the father could disinherit him. Among the industrious classes, only those who were born members of a guild, or were admitted into it by its members, could lawfully practise their calling within its local limits; and nobody could practise any calling deemed important, in any but the legal manner—by processes authoritatively prescribed. Manufacturers have stood in the pillory for presuming to carry on their business by new and improved methods. In modern Europe, and most in those parts of it which have participated most largely in all other modern improvements, diametrically opposite doctrines now prevail. Law and government do not undertake to prescribe by whom any social or industrial operation shall or shall not be conducted, or what modes of conducting them shall be lawful. These things are left to the unfettered choice of individuals. Even the laws which required that workmen should serve an apprenticeship, have in this country been repealed: there being ample assurance that in all cases in which an apprenticeship is necessary, its necessity will suffice to enforce it. The old theory was, that the least possible should be left to the choice of the individual agent; that all he had to do should, as far as practicable, be laid down for him by superior wisdom. Left to himself he was sure to go wrong. The modern conviction, the fruit of a thousand years of experience, is, that things in which the individual is the person directly interested, never go right but as they are left to his own discretion; and that any regulation of them by authority, except to protect the rights of others, is sure to be mischievous. This conclusion, slowly arrived at, and not adopted until almost every possible application of the contrary theory had been made with disastrous result, now (in the industrial department) prevails universally in the most advanced countries, almost universally in all that have pretensions to any sort of advancement. It is not that all processes are supposed to be equally good, or all persons to be equally qualified for everything; but that freedom of individual choice is now known to be the only thing which procures the adoption of the best processes, and throws each operation into the hands of those who are best qualified for it. Nobody thinks it necessary to make a law that only a strong-armed man shall be a blacksmith. Freedom and competition suffice to make blacksmiths strong-armed men, because the weak-armed can earn more by engaging in occupations for which they are more fit. In consonance with this doctrine, it is felt to be an overstepping of the proper bounds of authority to fix beforehand, on some general presumption, that certain persons are not fit to do certain things. It is now thoroughly known and admitted that if some such presumptions exist, no such presumption is infallible. Even if it be well grounded in a majority of cases, which it is very likely not to be, there will be a minority of exceptional cases in which it does not hold: and in those it is both an injustice to the individuals, and a detriment to society, to place barriers in the way of their using their faculties for their own benefit and for that of others. In the cases, on the other hand, in which the unfitness is real, the ordinary motives of human conduct will on the whole suffice to prevent the incompetent person from making, or from persisting in, the attempt.

If this general principle of social and economical science is not true; if individuals, with such help as they can derive from the opinion of those who know them, are not better judges than the law and the government, of their own capacities and vocation; the world cannot too soon abandon this principle, and return to the old system of regulations and disabilities. But if the principle is true, we ought to act as if we believed it, and not to ordain that

to be born a girl instead of a boy, any more than to be born black instead of white, or a commoner instead of a nobleman, shall decide the person's position through all life—shall interdict people from all the more elevated social positions, and from all, except a few, respectable occupations. Even were we to admit the utmost that is ever pretended as to the superior fitness of men for all the functions now reserved to them, the same argument applies which forbids a legal qualification for members of Parliament. If only once in a dozen years the conditions of eligibility exclude a fit person, there is a real loss, while the exclusion of thousands of unfit persons is no gain; for if the constitution of the electoral body disposes them to choose unfit persons, there are always plenty of such persons to choose from. In all things of any difficulty and importance, those who can do them well are fewer than the need, even with the most unrestricted latitude of choice: and any limitation of the field of selection deprives society of some chances of being served by the competent, without ever saving it from the incompetent.

At present, in the more improved countries, the disabilities of women are the only case, save one, in which laws and institutions take persons at their birth, and ordain that they shall never in all their lives be allowed to compete for certain things. The one exception is that of royalty. Persons still are born to the throne; no one, not of the reigning family, can ever occupy it, and no one even of that family can, by any means but the course of hereditary succession, attain it. All other dignities and social advantages are open to the whole male sex: many indeed are only attainable by wealth, but wealth may be striven for by any one, and is actually obtained by many men of the very humblest origin. The difficulties, to the majority, are indeed insuperable without the aid of fortunate accidents; but no male human being is under any legal ban: neither law nor opinion superadd artificial obstacles to the natural ones. Royalty, as I have said, is excepted: but in this case every one feels it to be an exception—an anomaly in the modern world, in marked opposition to its customs and principles, and to be justified only by extraordinary special expedencies, which, though individuals and nations differ in estimating their weight, unquestionably do in fact exist. But in this exceptional case, in which a high social function is, for important reasons, bestowed on birth instead of being put up to competition, all free nations contrive to adhere in substance to the principle from which they nominally derogate; for they circumscribe this high function by conditions avowedly intended to prevent the person to whom it ostensibly belongs from really performing it; while the person by whom it is performed, the responsible minister, does obtain the post by a competition from which no full-grown citizen of the male sex is legally excluded. The disabilities, therefore, to which women are subject from the mere fact of their birth, are the solitary examples of the kind in modern legislation. In no instance except this, which comprehends half the human race, are the higher social functions closed against any one by a fatality of birth which no exertions, and no change of circumstances, can overcome; for even religious disabilities (besides that in England and in Europe they have practically almost ceased to exist) do not close any career to the disqualified person in case of conversion.

The social subordination of women thus stands out an isolated fact in modern social institutions; a solitary breach of what has become their fundamental law; a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else, but retained in the one thing of most universal interest; as if a gigantic dolmen, or a vast temple of Jupiter Olympius, occupied the site of St. Paul's and received daily worship, while the surrounding Christian churches were only resorted to on fasts and festivals. This entire discrepancy between one social fact and all those

*which accompany it, and the radical opposition between its nature and the progressive movement which is the boast of the modern world, and which has successively swept away everything else of an analogous character, surely affords, to a conscientious observer of human tendencies, serious matter for reflection. It raises a *prima facie* presumption on the unfavourable side, far outweighing any which custom and usage could in such circumstances create on the favourable; and should at least suffice to make this, like the choice between republicanism and royalty, a balanced question.*

The least that can be demanded is, that the question should not be considered as prejudged by existing fact and existing opinion, but open to discussion on its merits, as a question of justice and expediency: the decision on this, as on any of the other social arrangements of mankind, depending on what an enlightened estimate of tendencies and consequences may show to be most advantageous to humanity in general, without distinction of sex. And the discussion must be a real discussion, descending to foundations, and not resting satisfied with vague and general assertions. It will not do, for instance, to assert in general terms, that the experience of mankind has pronounced in favour of the existing system. Experience cannot possibly have decided between two courses, so long as there has only been experience of one. If it be said that the doctrine of the equality of the sexes rests only on theory, it must be remembered that the contrary doctrine also has only theory to rest upon. All that is proved in its favour by direct experience, is that mankind have been able to exist under it, and to attain the degree of improvement and prosperity which we now see; but whether that prosperity has been attained sooner, or is now greater, than it would have been under the other system, experience does not say. On the other hand, experience does say, that every step in improvement has been so invariably accompanied by a step made in raising the social position of women, that historians and philosophers have been led to adopt their elevation or debasement as on the whole the surest test and most correct measure of the civilization of a people or an age. Through all the progressive period of human history, the condition of women has been approaching nearer to equality with men.

This does not of itself prove that the assimilation must go on to complete equality; but it assuredly affords some presumption that such is the case.

Neither does it avail anything to say that the nature of the two sexes adapts them to their present functions and position, and renders these appropriate to them. Standing on the ground of common sense and the constitution of the human mind, I deny that any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another. If men had ever been found in society without women, or women without men, or if there had been a society of men and women in which the women were not under the control of the men, something might have been positively known about the mental and moral differences which may be inherent in the nature of each. What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters; for, if conquered and slave races have been, in some respects, more forcibly repressed, whatever in them has not been crushed down by an iron heel has generally been let alone, and if left with any

liberty of development, it has developed itself according to its own laws; but in the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has always been carried on of some of the capabilities of their nature, for the benefit and pleasure of their masters. Then, because certain products of the general vital force sprout luxuriantly and reach a great development in this heated atmosphere and under this active nurture and watering, while other shoots from the same root, which are left outside in the wintry air, with ice purposely heaped all round them, have a stunted growth, and some are burnt off with fire and disappear; men, with that inability to recognise their own work which distinguishes the unanalytic mind, indolently believe that the tree grows of itself in the way they have made it grow, and that it would die if one half of it were not kept in a vapour bath and the other half in the snow.

Of all difficulties which impede the progress of thought, and the formation of well-grounded opinions on life and social arrangements, the greatest is now the unspeakable ignorance and inattention of mankind in respect to the influences which form human character. Whatever any portion of the human species now are, or seem to be, such, it is supposed, they have a natural tendency to be: even when the most elementary knowledge of the circumstances in which they have been placed, clearly points out the causes that made them what they are.

Because a cottier deeply in arrears to his landlord is not industrious, there are people who think that the Irish are naturally idle. Because constitutions can be overthrown when the authorities appointed to execute them turn their arms against them, there are people who think the French incapable of free government. Because the Greeks cheated the Turks, and the Turks only plundered the Greeks, there are persons who think that the Turks are naturally more sincere: and because women, as is often said, care nothing about politics except their personalities, it is supposed that the general good is naturally less interesting to women than to men. History, which is now so much better understood than formerly, teaches another lesson: if only by showing the extraordinary susceptibility of human nature to external influences, and the extreme variableness of those of its manifestations which are supposed to be most universal and uniform. But in history, as in travelling, men usually see only what they already had in their own minds; and few learn much from history, who do not bring much with them to its study.

Hence, in regard to that most difficult question, what are the natural differences between the two sexes—a subject on which it is impossible in the present state of society to obtain complete and correct knowledge—while almost everybody dogmatizes upon it, almost all neglect and make light of the only means by which any partial insight can be obtained into it. This is, an analytic study of the most important department of psychology, the laws of the influence of circumstances on character. For, however great and apparently ineradicable the moral and intellectual differences between men and women might be, the evidence of their being natural differences could only be negative. Those only could be inferred to be natural which could not possibly be artificial—the residuum, after deducting every characteristic of either sex which can admit of being explained from education or external circumstances. The profoundest knowledge of the laws of the formation of character is indispensable to entitle any one to affirm even that there is any difference, much more what the difference is, between the two sexes considered as moral and rational beings; and since no one, as yet, has that knowledge, (for there is hardly any subject which, in proportion to its importance, has been so little studied), no one is thus far entitled to any positive opinion on the

subject. Conjectures are all that can at present be made; conjectures more or less probable, according as more or less authorized by such knowledge as we yet have of the laws of psychology, as applied to the formation of character.

Even the preliminary knowledge, what the differences between the sexes now are, apart from all question as to how they are made what they are, is still in the crudest and most incomplete state. Medical practitioners and physiologists have ascertained, to some extent, the differences in bodily constitution; and this is an important element to the psychologist: but hardly any medical practitioner is a psychologist. Respecting the mental characteristics of women; their observations are of no more worth than those of common men. It is a subject on which nothing final can be known, so long as those who alone can really know it, women themselves, have given but little testimony, and that little, mostly suborned. It is easy to know stupid women. Stupidity is much the same all the world over. A stupid person's notions and feelings may confidently be inferred from those which prevail in the circle by which the person is surrounded. Not so with those whose opinions and feelings are an emanation from their own nature and faculties. It is only a man here and there who has any tolerable knowledge of the character even of the women of his own family. I do not mean, of their capabilities; these nobody knows, not even themselves, because most of them have never been called out. I mean their actually existing thoughts and feelings. Many a man thinks he perfectly understands women, because he has had amatory relations with several, perhaps with many of them. If he is a good observer, and his experience extends to quality as well as quantity, he may have learnt something of one narrow department of their nature—an important department, no doubt. But of all the rest of it, few persons are generally more ignorant, because there are few from whom it is so carefully hidden. The most favourable case which a man can generally have for studying the character of a woman, is that of his own wife: for the opportunities are greater, and the cases of complete sympathy not so unspeakably rare.

And in fact, this is the source from which any knowledge worth having on the subject has, I believe, generally come. But most men have not had the opportunity of studying in this way more than a single case: accordingly one can, to an almost laughable degree, infer what a man's wife is like, from his opinions about women in general. To make even this one case yield any result, the woman must be worth knowing, and the man not only a competent judge, but of a character so sympathetic in itself, and so well adapted to hers, that he can either read her mind by sympathetic intuition, or has nothing in himself which makes her shy of disclosing it. Hardly anything, I believe, can be more rare than this conjunction. It often happens that there is the most complete unity of feeling and community of interests as to all external things, yet the one has as little admission into the internal life of the other as if they were common acquaintance. Even with true affection, authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence. Though nothing may be intentionally withheld, much is not shown. In the analogous relation of parent and child, the corresponding phenomenon must have been in the observation of every one. As between father and son, how many are the cases in which the father, in spite of real affection on both sides, obviously to all the world does not know, nor suspect, parts of the son's character familiar to his companions and equals. The truth is, that the position of looking up to another is extremely unpropitious to complete sincerity and openness with him. The fear of losing ground in his opinion or in his feelings is so strong, that even in an upright character, there is an unconscious tendency to show only the best side, or the side which, though not the best, is that which he most

likes to see: and it may be confidently said that thorough knowledge of one another hardly ever exists, but between persons who, besides being intimates, are equals. How much more true, then, must all this be, when the one is not only under the authority of the other, but has it inculcated on her as a duty to reckon everything else subordinate to his comfort and pleasure, and to let him neither see nor feel anything coming from her, except what is agreeable to him. All these difficulties stand in the way of a man's obtaining any thorough knowledge even of the one woman whom alone, in general, he has sufficient opportunity of studying. When we further consider that to understand one woman is not necessarily to understand any other woman; that even if he could study many women of one rank, or of one country, he would not thereby understand women of other ranks or countries; and even if he did, they are still only the women of a single period of history; we may safely assert that the knowledge which men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial, and always will be so, until women themselves have told all that they have to tell.

And this time has not come; nor will it come otherwise than gradually. It is but of yesterday that women have either been qualified by literary accomplishments, or permitted by society, to tell anything to the general public. As yet very few of them dare tell anything, which men, on whom their literary success depends, are unwilling to hear. Let us remember in what manner, up to a very recent time, the expression, even by a male author, of uncouth opinions, or what are deemed eccentric feelings, usually was, and in some degree still is, received; and we may form some faint conception under what impediments a woman, who is brought up to think custom and opinion her sovereign rule, attempts to express in books anything drawn from the depths of her own nature. The greatest woman who has left writings behind her sufficient to give her an eminent rank in the literature of her country, thought it necessary to prefix as a motto to her boldest work, "Un homme peut braver l'opinion; une femme doit s'y soumettre." [1] The greater part of what women write about women is mere sycophancy to men. In the case of married women, much of it seems only intended to increase their chance of a husband. Many, both married and unmarried, overstep the mark, and inculcate a servility beyond what is desired or relished by any man, except the very vulgarest. But this is not so often the case as, even at a quite late period, it still was. Literary women are becoming more freespoken, and more willing to express their real sentiments. Unfortunately, in this country especially, they are themselves such artificial products, that their sentiments are compounded of a small element of individual observation and consciousness, and a very large one of acquired associations. This will be less and less the case, but it will remain true to a great extent, as long as social institutions do not admit the same free development of originality in women which is possible to men. When that time comes, and not before, we shall see, and not merely hear, as much as it is necessary to know of the nature of women, and the adaptation of other things to it.

I have dwelt so much on the difficulties which at present obstruct any real knowledge by men of the true nature of women, because in this as in so many other things "opinio copiae inter maximas causas inopiae est;" and there is little chance of reasonable thinking on the matter, while people flatter themselves that they perfectly understand a subject of which most men know absolutely nothing, and of which it is at present impossible that any man, or all men taken together, should have knowledge which can qualify them to lay down the law to women as to what is, or

is not, their vocation. Happily, no such knowledge is necessary for any practical purpose connected with the position of women in relation to society and life. For, according to all the principles involved in modern society, the question rests with women themselves—to be decided by their own experience, and by the use of their own faculties. There are no means of finding what either one person or many can do, but by trying—and no means by which any one else can discover for them what it is for their happiness to do or leave undone.

One thing we may be certain of—that what is contrary to women’s nature to do, they never will be made to do by simply giving their nature free play. The anxiety of mankind to interfere in behalf of nature, for fear lest nature should not succeed in effecting its purpose, is an altogether unnecessary solicitude. What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. What they can do, but not so well as the men who are their competitors, competition suffices to exclude them from; since nobody asks for protective duties and bounties in favour of women; it is only asked that the present bounties and protective duties in favour of men should be recalled. If women have a greater natural inclination for some things than for others, there is no need of laws or social inculcation to make the majority of them do the former in preference to the latter. Whatever women’s services are most wanted for, the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducements to them to undertake. And, as the words imply, they are most wanted for the things for which they are most fit; by the apportionment of which to them, the collective faculties of the two sexes can be applied on the whole with the greatest sum of valuable result.

The general opinion of men is supposed to be, that the natural vocation of a woman is that of a wife and mother. I say, is supposed to be, because, judging from acts—from the whole of the present constitution of society—one might infer that their opinion was the direct contrary. They might be supposed to think that the alleged natural vocation of women was of all things the most repugnant to their nature; insomuch that if they are free to do anything else—if any other means of living, or occupation of their time and faculties, is open, which has any chance of appearing desirable to them—there will not be enough of them who will be willing to accept the condition said to be natural to them. If this is the real opinion of men in general, it would be well that it should be spoken out. I should like to hear somebody openly enunciating the doctrine (it is already implied in much that is written on the subject)—“It is necessary to society that women should marry and produce children. They will not do so unless they are compelled. Therefore it is necessary to compel them.” The merits of the case would then be clearly defined. It would be exactly that of the slaveholders of South Carolina and Louisiana. “It is necessary that cotton and sugar should be grown. White men cannot produce them. Negroes will not, for any wages which we choose to give. Ergo they must be compelled.” An illustration still closer to the point is that of impressment.

Sailors must absolutely be had to defend the country. It often happens that they will not voluntarily enlist. Therefore there must be the power of forcing them. How often has this logic been used! and, but for one flaw in it, without doubt it would have been successful up to this day. But it is open to the retort—First pay the sailors the honest value of their labour. When you have made it as well worth their while to serve you, as to work for other employers, you will have no more difficulty than others have in obtaining their services. To this there is no logical answer except “I will not:” and as people are now not only ashamed, but are not desirous, to rob the labourer

of his hire, impressment is no longer advocated. Those who attempt to force women into marriage by closing all other doors against them, lay themselves open to a similar retort. If they mean what they say, their opinion must evidently be, that men do not render the married condition so desirable to women, as to induce them to accept it for its own recommendations. It is not a sign of one's thinking the boon one offers very attractive, when one allows only Hobson's choice, "that or none." And here, I believe, is the clue to the feelings of those men, who have a real antipathy to the equal freedom of women. I believe they are afraid, not lest women should be unwilling to marry, for I do not think that any one in reality has that apprehension; but lest they should insist that marriage should be on equal conditions; lest all women of spirit and capacity should prefer doing almost anything else, not in their own eyes degrading, rather than marry, when marrying is giving themselves a master, and a master too of all their earthly possessions. And truly, if this consequence were necessarily incident to marriage, I think that the apprehension would be very well founded. I agree in thinking it probable that few women, capable of anything else, would, unless under an irresistible entrainment, rendering them for the time insensible to anything but itself, choose such a lot, when any other means were open to them of filling a conventionally honourable place in life: and if men are determined that the law of marriage shall be a law of despotism, they are quite right, in point of mere policy, in leaving to women only Hobson's choice. But, in that case, all that has been done in the modern world to relax the chain on the minds of women, has been a mistake. They never should have been allowed to receive a literary education. Women who read, much more women who write, are, in the existing constitution of things, a contradiction and a disturbing element: and it was wrong to bring women up with any acquirements but those of an odalisque, or of a domestic servant.

CHAPTER II.

IT will be well to commence the detailed discussion of the subject by the particular branch of it to which the course of our observations has led us: the conditions which the laws of this and all other countries annex to the marriage contract. Marriage being the destination appointed by society for women, the prospect they are brought up to, and the object which it is intended should be sought by all of them, except those who are too little attractive to be chosen by any man as his companion; one might have supposed that everything would have been done to make this condition as eligible to them as possible, that they might have no cause to regret being denied the option of any other. Society, however, both in this, and, at first, in all other cases, has preferred to attain its object by foul rather than fair means: but this is the only case in which it has substantially persisted in them even to the present day. Originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband. Until a late period in European history, the father had the power to dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers. The Church, indeed, was so far faithful to a better morality as to require a formal "yes" from the woman at the marriage ceremony; but there was nothing to shew that the consent was other than compulsory; and it was practically impossible for the girl to refuse compliance if the father persevered, except perhaps when she might obtain the protection of religion by a determined resolution to take monastic vows. After marriage, the man had anciently (but this was anterior to Christianity) the power of life and death over his wife. She could invoke

no law against him; he was her sole tribunal and law. For a long time he could repudiate her, but she had no corresponding power in regard to him. By the old laws of England, the husband was called the lord of the wife; he was literally regarded as her sovereign, inasmuch that the murder of a man by his wife was called treason (petty as distinguished from high treason), and was more cruelly avenged than was usually the case with high treason, for the penalty was burning to death. Because these various enormities have fallen into disuse (for most of them were never formally abolished, or not until they had long ceased to be practised) men suppose that all is now as it should be in regard to the marriage contract; and we are continually told that civilization and Christianity have restored to the woman her just rights. Meanwhile the wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called. She vows a lifelong obedience to him at the altar, and is held to it all through her life by law. Casuists may say that the obligation of obedience stops short of participation in crime, but it certainly extends to everything else. She can do no act whatever but by his permission, at least tacit. She can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes ipso facto his. In this respect the wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries: by the Roman law, for example, a slave might have his *peculium*, which to a certain extent the law guaranteed to him for his exclusive use. The higher classes in this country have given an analogous advantage to their women, through special contracts setting aside the law, by conditions of pin-money, &c.: since parental feeling being stronger with fathers than the class feeling of their own sex, a father generally prefers his own daughter to a son-in-law who is a stranger to him. By means of settlements, the rich usually contrive to withdraw the whole or part of the inherited property of the wife from the absolute control of the husband: but they do not succeed in keeping it under her own control; the utmost they can do only prevents the husband from squandering it, at the same time debarring the rightful owner from its use. The property itself is out of the reach of both; and as to the income derived from it, the form of settlement most favourable to the wife (that called "to her separate use") only precludes the husband from receiving it instead of her: it must pass through her hands, but if he takes it from her by personal violence as soon as she receives it, he can neither be punished, nor compelled to restitution. This is the amount of the protection which, under the laws of this country, the most powerful nobleman can give to his own daughter as respects her husband. In the immense majority of cases there is no settlement: and the absorption of all rights, all property, as well as all freedom of action, is complete. The two are called "one person in law," for the purpose of inferring that whatever is hers is his, but the parallel inference is never drawn that whatever is his is hers; the maxim is not applied against the man, except to make him responsible to third parties for her acts, as a master is for the acts of his slaves or of his cattle. I am far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves; but no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is. Hardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and all minutes; in general he has, like a soldier, his fixed task, and when it is done, or when he is off duty, he disposes, within certain limits, of his own time, and has a family life into which the master rarely intrudes. "Uncle Tom" under his first master had his own life in his "cabin," almost as much as any man whose work takes him away from home, is able to have in his own family. But it cannot be so with the wife. Above all, a female slave has (in Christian countries) an admitted right, and is considered under a moral obligation, to refuse to her master the last familiarity. Not so

the wife: however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to—though she may know that he hates her, though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him—he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations. While she is held in this worst description of slavery as to her own person, what is her position in regard to the children in whom she and her master have a joint interest? They are by law his children. He alone has any legal rights over them. Not one act can she do towards or in relation to them, except by delegation from him. Even after he is dead she is not their legal guardian, unless he by will has made her so. He could even send them away from her, and deprive her of the means of seeing or corresponding with them, until this power was in some degree restricted by Serjeant Talfourd’s Act. This is her legal state. And from this state she has no means of withdrawing herself. If she leaves her husband, she can take nothing with her, neither her children nor anything which is rightfully her own. If he chooses, he can compel her to return, by law, or by physical force; or he may content himself with seizing for his own use anything which she may earn, or which may be given to her by her relations. It is only legal separation by a decree of a court of justice, which entitles her to live apart, without being forced back into the custody of an exasperated jailer—or which empowers her to apply any earnings to her own use, without fear that a man whom perhaps she has not seen for twenty years will pounce upon her some day and carry all off. This legal separation, until lately, the courts of justice would only give at an expense which made it inaccessible to any one out of the higher ranks. Even now it is only given in cases of desertion, or of the extreme of cruelty; and yet complaints are made every day that it is granted too easily. Surely, if a woman is denied any lot in life but that of being the personal body-servant of a despot, and is dependent for everything upon the chance of finding one who may be disposed to make a favourite of her instead of merely a drudge, it is a very cruel aggravation of her fate that she should be allowed to try this chance only once. The natural sequel and corollary from this state of things would be, that since her all in life depends upon obtaining a good master, she should be allowed to change again and again until she finds one. I am not saying that she ought to be allowed this privilege. That is a totally different consideration. The question of divorce, in the sense involving liberty of remarriage, is one into which it is foreign to my purpose to enter. All I now say is, that to those to whom nothing but servitude is allowed, the free choice of servitude is the only, though a most insufficient, alleviation. Its refusal completes the assimilation of the wife to the slave—and the slave under not the mildest form of slavery: for in some slave codes the slave could, under certain circumstances of ill usage, legally compel the master to sell him. But no amount of ill usage, without adultery superadded, will in England free a wife from her tormentor.

I have no desire to exaggerate, nor does the case stand in any need of exaggeration. I have described the wife’s legal position, not her actual treatment. The laws of most countries are far worse than the people who execute them, and many of them are only able to remain laws by being seldom or never carried into effect. If married life were all that it might be expected to be, looking to the laws alone, society would be a hell upon earth. Happily there are both feelings and interests which in many men exclude, and in most, greatly temper, the impulses and propensities which lead to tyranny: and of those feelings, the tie which connects a man with his wife affords, in a normal state of things, incomparably the strongest example. The only tie which at all approaches to it, that between him and his children, tends, in all save exceptional cases, to strengthen, instead of conflicting with, the first. Because this is

true; because men in general do not inflict, nor women suffer, all the misery which could be inflicted and suffered if the full power of tyranny with which the man is legally invested were acted on; the defenders of the existing form of the institution think that all its iniquity is justified, and that any complaint is merely quarrelling with the evil which is the price paid for every great good. But the mitigations in practice, which are compatible with maintaining in full legal force this or any other kind of tyranny, instead of being any apology for despotism, only serve to prove what power human nature possesses of reacting against the vilest institutions, and with what vitality the seeds of good as well as those of evil in human character diffuse and propagate themselves. Not a word can be said for despotism in the family which cannot be said for political despotism. Every absolute king does not sit at his window to enjoy the groans of his tortured subjects, nor strips them of their last rag and turns them out to shiver in the road. The despotism of Louis XVI. was not the despotism of Philippe le Bel, or of Nadir Shah, or of Caligula; but it was bad enough to justify the French Revolution, and to palliate even its horrors. If an appeal be made to the intense attachments which exist between wives and their husbands, exactly as much may be said of domestic slavery. It was quite an ordinary fact in Greece and Rome for slaves to submit to death by torture rather than betray their masters. In the proscriptions of the Roman civil wars it was remarked that wives and slaves were heroically faithful, sons very commonly treacherous. Yet we know how cruelly many Romans treated their slaves. But in truth these intense individual feelings nowhere rise to such a luxuriant height as under the most atrocious institutions. It is part of the irony of life, that the strongest feelings of devoted gratitude of which human nature seems to be susceptible, are called forth in human beings towards those who, having the power entirely to crush their earthly existence, voluntarily refrain from using that power. How great a place in most men this sentiment fills, even in religious devotion, it would be cruel to inquire. We daily see how much their gratitude to Heaven appears to be stimulated by the contemplation of fellow-creatures to whom God has not been so merciful as he has to themselves.

Whether the institution to be defended is slavery, political absolutism, or the absolutism of the head of a family, we are always expected to judge of it from its best instances; and we are presented with pictures of loving exercise of authority on one side, loving submission to it on the other—superior wisdom ordering all things for the greatest good of the dependents, and surrounded by their smiles and benedictions. All this would be very much to the purpose if any one pretended that there are no such things as good men. Who doubts that there may be great goodness, and great happiness, and great affection, under the absolute government of a good man?

Meanwhile, laws and institutions require to be adapted, not to good men, but to bad. Marriage is not an institution designed for a select few. Men are not required, as a preliminary to the marriage ceremony, to prove by testimonials that they are fit to be trusted with the exercise of absolute power. The tie of affection and obligation to a wife and children is very strong with those whose general social feelings are strong, and with many who are little sensible to any other social ties; but there are all degrees of sensibility and insensibility to it, as there are all grades of goodness and wickedness in men, down to those whom no ties will bind, and on whom society has no action but through its ultima ratio, the penalties of the law. In every grade of this descending scale are men to whom are committed all the legal powers of a husband. The vilest malefactor has some wretched woman tied to him, against

whom he can commit any atrocity except killing her, and, if tolerably cautious, can do that without much danger of the legal penalty. And how many thousands are there among the lowest classes in every country, who, without being in a legal sense malefactors in any other respect, because in every other quarter their aggressions meet with resistance, indulge the utmost habitual excesses of bodily violence towards the unhappy wife, who alone, at least of grown persons, can neither repel nor escape from their brutality; and towards whom the excess of dependence inspires their mean and savage natures, not with a generous forbearance, and a point of honour to behave well to one whose lot in life is trusted entirely to their kindness, but on the contrary with a notion that the law has delivered her to them as their thing, to be used at their pleasure, and that they are not expected to practise the consideration towards her which is required from them towards everybody else. The law, which till lately left even these atrocious extremes of domestic oppression practically unpunished, has within these few years made some feeble attempts to repress them. But its attempts have done little, and cannot be expected to do much, because it is contrary to reason and experience to suppose that there can be any real check to brutality, consistent with leaving the victim still in the power of the executioner. Until a conviction for personal violence, or at all events a repetition of it after a first conviction, entitles the woman ipso facto to a divorce, or at least to a judicial separation, the attempt to repress these “aggravated assaults” by legal penalties will break down for want of a prosecutor, or for want of a witness.

When we consider how vast is the number of men, in any great country, who are little higher than brutes, and that this never prevents them from being able, through the law of marriage, to obtain a victim, the breadth and depth of human misery caused in this shape alone by the abuse of the institution swells to something appalling. Yet these are only the extreme cases. They are the lowest abysses, but there is a sad succession of depth after depth before reaching them. In domestic as in political tyranny, the case of absolute monsters chiefly illustrates the institution by showing that there is scarcely any horror which may not occur under it if the despot pleases, and thus setting in a strong light what must be the terrible frequency of things only a little less atrocious. Absolute fiends are as rare as angels, perhaps rarer: ferocious savages, with occasional touches of humanity, are however very frequent: and in the wide interval which separates these from any worthy representatives of the human species, how many are the forms and gradations of animalism and selfishness, often under an outward varnish of civilization and even cultivation, living at peace with the law, maintaining a creditable appearance to all who are not under their power, yet sufficient often to make the lives of all who are so, a torment and a burthen to them! It would be tiresome to repeat the commonplaces about the unfitness of men in general for power, which, after the political discussions of centuries, every one knows by heart, were it not that hardly any one thinks of applying these maxims to the case in which above all others they are applicable, that of power, not placed in the hands of a man here and there, but offered to every adult male, down to the basest and most ferocious. It is not because a man is not known to have broken any of the Ten Commandments, or because he maintains a respectable character in his dealings with those whom he cannot compel to have intercourse with him, or because he does not fly out into violent bursts of ill-temper against those who are not obliged to bear with him, that it is possible to surmise of what sort his conduct will be in the unrestraint of home. Even the commonest men reserve the violent, the sulky, the undisguisedly selfish side of their character for those who have no power to withstand it. The relation of superiors to dependents is the nursery of these vices of character, which, wherever else they exist, are an overflowing from that source. A man who

is morose or violent to his equals, is sure to be one who has lived among inferiors, whom he could frighten or worry into submission. If the family in its best forms is, as it is often said to be, a school of sympathy, tenderness, and loving forgetfulness of self, it is still oftener, as respects its chief, a school of wilfulness, overbearingness, unbounded self-indulgence, and a double-dyed and idealized selfishness, of which sacrifice itself is only a particular form: the care for the wife and children being only care for them as parts of the man's own interests and belongings, and their individual happiness being immolated in every shape to his smallest preferences. What better is to be looked for under the existing form of the institution? We know that the bad propensities of human nature are only kept within bounds when they are allowed no scope for their indulgence. We know that from impulse and habit, when not from deliberate purpose, almost every one to whom others yield, goes on encroaching upon them, until a point is reached at which they are compelled to resist. Such being the common tendency of human nature; the almost unlimited power which present social institutions give to the man over at least one human being—the one with whom he resides, and whom he has always present—this power seeks out and evokes the latent germs of selfishness in the remotest corners of his nature—fans its faintest sparks and smouldering embers—offers to him a license for the indulgence of those points of his original character which in all other relations he would have found it necessary to repress and conceal, and the repression of which would in time have become a second nature. I know that there is another side to the question. I grant that the wife, if she cannot effectually resist, can at least retaliate; she, too, can make the man's life extremely uncomfortable, and by that power is able to carry many points which she ought, and many which she ought not, to prevail in. But this instrument of self-protection—which may be called the power of the scold, or the shrewish sanction—has the fatal defect, that it avails most against the least tyrannical superiors, and in favour of the least deserving dependents. It is the weapon of irritable and self-willed women; of those who would make the worst use of power if they themselves had it, and who generally turn this power to a bad use. The amiable cannot use such an instrument, the highminded disdain it. And on the other hand, the husbands against whom it is used most effectively are the gentler and more inoffensive; those who cannot be induced, even by provocation, to resort to any very harsh exercise of authority. The wife's power of being disagreeable generally only establishes a counter-tyranny, and makes victims in their turn chiefly of those husbands who are least inclined to be tyrants.

What is it, then, which really tempers the corrupting effects of the power, and makes it compatible with such amount of good as we actually see? Mere feminine blandishments, though of great effect in individual instances, have very little effect in modifying the general tendencies of the situation; for their power only lasts while the woman is young and attractive, often only while her charm is new, and not dimmed by familiarity; and on many men they have not much influence at any time. The real mitigating causes are, the personal affection which is the growth of time, in so far as the man's nature is susceptible of it, and the woman's character sufficiently congenial with his to excite it; their common interests as regards the children, and their general community of interest as concerns third persons (to which however there are very great limitations); the real importance of the wife to his daily comforts and enjoyments, and the value he consequently attaches to her on his personal account, which, in a man capable of feeling for others, lays the foundation of caring for her on her own; and lastly, the influence naturally acquired over almost all human beings by those near to their persons (if not actually disagreeable to

them): who, both by their direct entreaties, and by the insensible contagion of their feelings and dispositions, are often able, unless counteracted by some equally strong personal influence, to obtain a degree of command over the conduct of the superior, altogether excessive and unreasonable. Through these various means, the wife frequently exercises even too much power over the man; she is able to affect his conduct in things in which she may not be qualified to influence it for good—in which her influence may be not only unenlightened, but employed on the morally wrong side; and in which he would act better if left to his own prompting. But neither in the affairs of families nor in those of states is power a compensation for the loss of freedom. Her power often gives her what she has no right to, but does not enable her to assert her own rights. A Sultan's favourite slave has slaves under her, over whom she tyrannizes; but the desirable thing would be that she should neither have slaves nor be a slave. By entirely sinking her own existence in her husband; by having no will (or persuading him that she has no will) but his, in anything which regards their joint relation, and by making it the business of her life to work upon his sentiments, a wife may gratify herself by influencing, and very probably perverting, his conduct, in those of his external relations which she has never qualified herself to judge of, or in which she is herself wholly influenced by some personal or other partiality or prejudice. Accordingly, as things now are, those who act most kindly to their wives, are quite as often made worse, as better, by the wife's influence, in respect to all interests extending beyond the family. She is taught that she has no business with things out of that sphere; and accordingly she seldom has any honest and conscientious opinion on them; and therefore hardly ever meddles with them for any legitimate purpose, but generally for an interested one. She neither knows nor cares which is the right side in politics, but she knows what will bring in money or invitations, give her husband a title, her son a place, or her daughter a good marriage.

But how, it will be asked, can any society exist without government? In a family, as in a state, some one person must be the ultimate ruler. Who shall decide when married people differ in opinion? Both cannot have their way, yet a decision one way or the other must be come to.

It is not true that in all voluntary association between two people, one of them must be absolute master: still less that the law must determine which of them it shall be. The most frequent case of voluntary association, next to marriage, is partnership in business: and it is not found or thought necessary to enact that in every partnership, one partner shall have entire control over the concern, and the others shall be bound to obey his orders. No one would enter into partnership on terms which would subject him to the responsibilities of a principal, with only the powers and privileges of a clerk or agent. If the law dealt with other contracts as it does with marriage, it would ordain that one partner should administer the common business as if it was his private concern; that the others should have only delegated powers; and that this one should be designated by some general presumption of law, for example as being the eldest. The law never does this: nor does experience show it to be necessary that any theoretical inequality of power should exist between the partners, or that the partnership should have any other conditions than what they may themselves appoint by their articles of agreement. Yet it might seem that the exclusive power might be conceded with less danger to the rights and interests of the inferior, in the case of partnership than in that of marriage, since

he is free to cancel the power by withdrawing from the connexion. The wife has no such power, and even if she had, it is almost always desirable that she should try all measures before resorting to it.

It is quite true that things which have to be decided every day, and cannot adjust themselves gradually, or wait for a compromise, ought to depend on one will: one person must have their sole control. But it does not follow that this should always be the same person. The natural arrangement is a division of powers between the two; each being absolute in the executive branch of their own department, and any change of system and principle requiring the consent of both. The division neither can nor should be pre-established by the law, since it must depend on individual capacities and suitabilities. If the two persons chose, they might pre-appoint it by the marriage contract, as pecuniary arrangements are now often pre-appointed. There would seldom be any difficulty in deciding such things by mutual consent, unless the marriage was one of those unhappy ones in which all other things, as well as this, become subjects of bickering and dispute. The division of rights would naturally follow the division of duties and functions; and that is already made by consent, or at all events not by law, but by general custom, modified and modifiable at the pleasure of the persons concerned.

The real practical decision of affairs, to whichever may be given the legal authority, will greatly depend, as it even now does, upon comparative qualifications. The mere fact that he is usually the eldest, will in most cases give the preponderance to the man; at least until they both attain a time of life at which the difference in their years is of no importance. There will naturally also be a more potential voice on the side, whichever it is, that brings the means of support. Inequality from this source does not depend on the law of marriage, but on the general conditions of human society, as now constituted. The influence of mental superiority, either general or special, and of superior decision of character, will necessarily tell for much. It always does so at present. And this fact shows how little foundation there is for the apprehension that the powers and responsibilities of partners in life (as of partners in business), cannot be satisfactorily apportioned by agreement between themselves. They always are so apportioned, except in cases in which the marriage institution is a failure. Things never come to an issue of downright power on one side, and obedience on the other, except where the connexion altogether has been a mistake, and it would be a blessing to both parties to be relieved from it. Some may say that the very thing by which an amicable settlement of differences becomes possible, is the power of legal compulsion known to be in reserve; as people submit to an arbitration because there is a court of law in the background, which they know that they can be forced to obey. But to make the cases parallel, we must suppose that the rule of the court of law was, not to try the cause, but to give judgment always for the same side, suppose the defendant. If so, the amenability to it would be a motive with the plaintiff to agree to almost any arbitration, but it would be just the reverse with the defendant. The despotic power which the law gives to the husband may be a reason to make the wife assent to any compromise by which power is practically shared between the two, but it cannot be the reason why the husband does. That there is always among decently conducted people a practical compromise, though one of them at least is under no physical or moral necessity of making it, shows that the natural motives which lead to a voluntary adjustment of the united life of two persons in a manner acceptable to both, do on the whole, except in unfavourable cases, prevail. The matter is certainly not improved by laying down as an ordinance of law, that the superstructure of free government shall

be raised upon a legal basis of despotism on one side and subjection on the other, and that every concession which the despot makes may, at his mere pleasure, and without any warning, be recalled. Besides that no freedom is worth much when held on so precarious a tenure, its conditions are not likely to be the most equitable when the law throws so prodigious a weight into one scale; when the adjustment rests between two persons one of whom is declared to be entitled to everything, the other not only entitled to nothing except during the good pleasure of the first, but under the strongest moral and religious obligation not to rebel under any excess of oppression.

A pertinacious adversary, pushed to extremities, may say, that husbands indeed are willing to be reasonable, and to make fair concessions to their partners without being compelled to it, but that wives are not: that if allowed any rights of their own, they will acknowledge no rights at all in any one else, and never will yield in anything, unless they can be compelled, by the man's mere authority, to yield in everything. This would have been said by many persons some generations ago, when satires on women were in vogue, and men thought it a clever thing to insult women for being what men made them. But it will be said by no one now who is worth replying to. It is not the doctrine of the present day that women are less susceptible of good feeling, and consideration for those with whom they are united by the strongest ties, than men are. On the contrary, we are perpetually told that women are better than men, by those who are totally opposed to treating them as if they were as good; so that the saying has passed into a piece of tiresome cant, intended to put a complimentary face upon an injury, and resembling those celebrations of royal clemency which, according to Gulliver, the king of Lilliput always prefixed to his most sanguinary decrees. If women are better than men in anything, it surely is in individual self-sacrifice for those of their own family. But I lay little stress on this, so long as they are universally taught that they are born and created for self-sacrifice. I believe that equality of rights would abate the exaggerated self-abnegation which is the present artificial ideal of feminine character, and that a good woman would not be more self-sacrificing than the best man: but on the other hand, men would be much more unselfish and self-sacrificing than at present, because they would no longer be taught to worship their own will as such a grand thing that it is actually the law for another rational being. There is nothing which men so easily learn as this self-worship: all privileged persons, and all privileged classes, have had it. The more we descend in the scale of humanity, the intenser it is; and most of all in those who are not, and can never expect to be, raised above any one except an unfortunate wife and children. The honourable exceptions are proportionally fewer than in the case of almost any other human infirmity. Philosophy and religion, instead of keeping it in check, are generally suborned to defend it; and nothing controls it but that practical feeling of the equality of human beings, which is the theory of Christianity, but which Christianity will never practically teach, while it sanctions institutions grounded on an arbitrary preference of one human being over another.

There are, no doubt, women, as there are men, whom equality of consideration will not satisfy; with whom there is no peace while any will or wish is regarded but their own. Such persons are a proper subject for the law of divorce. They are only fit to live alone, and no human beings ought to be compelled to associate their lives with them. But the legal subordination tends to make such characters among women more, rather than less, frequent. If the man exerts his whole power, the woman is of course crushed: but if she is treated with indulgence, and permitted to assume power, there is no rule to set limits to her encroachments. The law, not determining her rights, but

theoretically allowing her none at all, practically declares that the measure of what she has a right to, is what she can contrive to get.

The equality of married persons before the law, is not only the sole mode in which that particular relation can be made consistent with justice to both sides, and conducive to the happiness of both, but it is the only means of rendering the daily life of mankind, in any high sense, a school of moral cultivation. Though the truth may not be felt or generally acknowledged for generations to come, the only school of genuine moral sentiment is society between equals. The moral education of mankind has hitherto emanated chiefly from the law of force, and is adapted almost solely to the relations which force creates. In the less advanced states of society, people hardly recognise any relation with their equals. To be an equal is to be an enemy. Society, from its highest place to its lowest, is one long chain, or rather ladder, where every individual is either above or below his nearest neighbour, and wherever he does not command he must obey. Existing moralities, accordingly, are mainly fitted to a relation of command and obedience. Yet command and obedience are but unfortunate necessities of human life: society in equality is its normal state. Already in modern life, and more and more as it progressively improves, command and obedience become exceptional facts in life, equal association its general rule. The morality of the first ages rested on the obligation to submit to power; that of the ages next following, on the right of the weak to the forbearance and protection of the strong. How much longer is one form of society and life to content itself with the morality made for another? We have had the morality of submission, and the morality of chivalry and generosity; the time is now come for the morality of justice. Whenever, in former ages, any approach has been made to society in equality, Justice has asserted its claims as the foundation of virtue. It was thus in the free republics of antiquity. But even in the best of these, the equals were limited to the free male citizens; slaves, women, and the unenfranchised residents were under the law of force. The joint influence of Roman civilization and of Christianity obliterated these distinctions, and in theory (if only partially in practice) declared the claims of the human being, as such, to be paramount to those of sex, class, or social position. The barriers which had begun to be levelled were raised again by the northern conquests; and the whole of modern history consists of the slow process by which they have since been wearing away. We are entering into an order of things in which justice will again be the primary virtue; grounded as before on equal, but now also on sympathetic association; having its root no longer in the instinct of equals for self-protection, but in a cultivated sympathy between them; and no one being now left out, but an equal measure being extended to all. It is no novelty that mankind do not distinctly foresee their own changes, and that their sentiments are adapted to past, not to coming ages. To see the futurity of the species has always been the privilege of the intellectual élite, or of those who have learnt from them; to have the feelings of that futurity has been the distinction, and usually the martyrdom, of a still rarer élite. Institutions, books, education, society, all go on training human beings for the old, long after the new has come; much more when it is only coming. But the true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals; claiming nothing for themselves but what they as freely concede to every one else; regarding command of any kind as an exceptional necessity, and in all cases a temporary one; and preferring, whenever possible, the society of those with whom leading and following can be alternate and reciprocal. To these virtues, nothing in life as at present constituted gives cultivation by exercise. The family is a school of despotism, in which the virtues of despotism, but also its vices, are largely nourished. Citizenship, in free

countries, is partly a school of society in equality; but citizenship fills only a small place in modern life, and does not come near the daily habits or inmost sentiments. The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom. It is sure to be a sufficient one of everything else. It will always be a school of obedience for the children, of command for the parents. What is needed is, that it should be a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other. This it ought to be between the parents. It would then be an exercise of those virtues which each requires to fit them for all other association, and a model to the children of the feelings and conduct which their temporary training by means of obedience is designed to render habitual, and therefore natural, to them. The moral training of mankind will never be adapted to the conditions of the life for which all other human progress is a preparation, until they practise in the family the same moral rule which is adapted to the normal constitution of human society. Any sentiment of freedom which can exist in a man whose nearest and dearest intimacies are with those of whom he is absolute master, is not the genuine or Christian love of freedom, but, what the love of freedom generally was in the ancients and in the middle ages—an intense feeling of the dignity and importance of his own personality; making him disdain a yoke for himself, of which he has no abhorrence whatever in the abstract, but which he is abundantly ready to impose on others for his own interest or glorification.

I readily admit (and it is the very foundation of my hopes) that numbers of married people even under the present law, (in the higher classes of England probably a great majority,) live in the spirit of a just law of equality. Laws never would be improved, if there were not numerous persons whose moral sentiments are better than the existing laws. Such persons ought to support the principles here advocated; of which the only object is to make all other married couples similar to what these are now. But persons even of considerable moral worth, unless they are also thinkers, are very ready to believe that laws or practices, the evils of which they have not personally experienced, do not produce any evils, but (if seeming to be generally approved of) probably do good, and that it is wrong to object to them. It would, however, be a great mistake in such married people to suppose, because the legal conditions of the tie which unites them do not occur to their thoughts once in a twelvemonth, and because they live and feel in all respects as if they were legally equals, that the same is the case with all other married couples, wherever the husband is not a notorious ruffian. To suppose this, would be to show equal ignorance of human nature and of fact. The less fit a man is for the possession of power—the less likely to be allowed to exercise it over any person with that person's voluntary consent—the more does he hug himself in the consciousness of the power the law gives him, exact its legal rights to the utmost point which custom (the custom of men like himself) will tolerate, and take pleasure in using the power, merely to enliven the agreeable sense of possessing it. What is more; in the most naturally brutal and morally uneducated part of the lower classes, the legal slavery of the woman, and something in the merely physical subjection to their will as an instrument, causes them to feel a sort of disrespect and contempt towards their own wife which they do not feel towards any other woman, or any other human being, with whom they come in contact; and which makes her seem to them an appropriate subject for any kind of indignity. Let an acute observer of the signs of feeling, who has the requisite opportunities, judge for himself whether this is not the case: and if he finds that it is, let him not wonder at any amount of disgust and indignation that can be felt against institutions which lead naturally to this depraved state of the human mind.

We shall be told, perhaps, that religion imposes the duty of obedience; as every established fact which is too bad to admit of any other defence, is always presented to us as an injunction of religion. The Church, it is very true, enjoins it in her formularies, but it would be difficult to derive any such injunction from Christianity. We are told that St. Paul said, “Wives, obey your husbands:” but he also said, “Slaves, obey your masters.” It was not St. Paul’s business, nor was it consistent with his object, the propagation of Christianity, to incite any one to rebellion against existing laws. The apostle’s acceptance of all social institutions as he found them, is no more to be construed as a disapproval of attempts to improve them at the proper time, than his declaration, “The powers that be are ordained of God,” gives his sanction to military despotism, and to that alone, as the Christian form of political government, or commands passive obedience to it. To pretend that Christianity was intended to stereotype existing forms of government and society, and protect them against change, is to reduce it to the level of Islamism or of Brahminism. It is precisely because Christianity has not done this, that it has been the religion of the progressive portion of mankind, and Islamism, Brahminism, &c., have been those of the stationary portions; or rather (for there is no such thing as a really stationary society) of the declining portions. There have been abundance of people, in all ages of Christianity, who tried to make it something of the same kind; to convert us into a sort of Christian Mussulmans, with the Bible for a Koran, prohibiting all improvement: and great has been their power, and many have had to sacrifice their lives in resisting them. But they have been resisted, and the resistance has made us what we are, and will yet make us what we are to be.

After what has been said respecting the obligation of obedience, it is almost superfluous to say anything concerning the more special point included in the general one—a woman’s right to her own property; for I need not hope that this treatise can make any impression upon those who need anything to convince them that a woman’s inheritance or gains ought to be as much her own after marriage as before. The rule is simple: whatever would be the husband’s or wife’s if they were not married, should be under their exclusive control during marriage; which need not interfere with the power to tie up property by settlement, in order to preserve it for children. Some people are sentimentally shocked at the idea of a separate interest in money matters, as inconsistent with the ideal fusion of two lives into one. For my own part, I am one of the strongest supporters of community of goods, when resulting from an entire unity of feeling in the owners, which makes all things common between them. But I have no relish for a community of goods resting on the doctrine, that what is mine is yours but what is yours is not mine; and I should prefer to decline entering into such a compact with any one, though I were myself the person to profit by it.

This particular injustice and oppression to women, which is, to common apprehensions, more obvious than all the rest, admits of remedy without interfering with any other mischiefs: and there can be little doubt that it will be one of the earliest remedied. Already, in many of the new and several of the old States of the American Confederation, provisions have been inserted even in the written Constitutions, securing to women equality of rights in this respect: and thereby improving materially the position, in the marriage relation, of those women at least who have property, by leaving them one instrument of power which they have not signed away; and preventing also the scandalous abuse of the marriage institution, which is perpetrated when a man entraps a girl into marrying him without a settlement, for the sole purpose of getting possession of her money. When the support of the family

depends, not on property, but on earnings, the common arrangement, by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure, seems to me in general the most suitable division of labour between the two persons. If, in addition to the physical suffering of bearing children, and the whole responsibility of their care and education in early years, the wife undertakes the careful and economical application of the husband's earnings to the general comfort of the family; she takes not only her fair share, but usually the larger share, of the bodily and mental exertion required by their joint existence. If she undertakes any additional portion, it seldom relieves her from this, but only prevents her from performing it properly. The care which she is herself disabled from taking of the children and the household, nobody else takes; those of the children who do not die, grow up as they best can, and the management of the household is likely to be so bad, as even in point of economy to be a great drawback from the value of the wife's earnings. In an otherwise just state of things, it is not, therefore, I think, a desirable custom, that the wife should contribute by her labour to the income of the family. In an unjust state of things, her doing so may be useful to her, by making her of more value in the eyes of the man who is legally her master; but, on the other hand, it enables him still farther to abuse his power, by forcing her to work, and leaving the support of the family to her exertions, while he spends most of his time in drinking and idleness. The power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman, if she has not independent property. But if marriage were an equal contract, not implying the obligation of obedience; if the connexion were no longer enforced to the oppression of those to whom it is purely a mischief, but a separation, on just terms (I do not now speak of a divorce), could be obtained by any woman who was morally entitled to it; and if she would then find all honourable employments as freely open to her as to men; it would not be necessary for her protection, that during marriage she should make this particular use of her faculties. Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her exertions, during as many years of her life as may be required for the purpose; and that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the requirements of this. The actual exercise, in a habitual or systematic manner, of outdoor occupations, or such as cannot be carried on at home, would by this principle be practically interdicted to the greater number of married women. But the utmost latitude ought to exist for the adaptation of general rules to individual suitabilities; and there ought to be nothing to prevent faculties exceptionally adapted to any other pursuit, from obeying their vocation notwithstanding marriage: due provision being made for supplying otherwise any falling-short which might become inevitable, in her full performance of the ordinary functions of mistress of a family. These things, if once opinion were rightly directed on the subject, might with perfect safety be left to be regulated by opinion, without any interference of law.

Citation

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. Authored by: Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . Provided by: BCcampus. Located at: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. License: CC BY: Attribution*



John Stuart Mill – On The Equality of Women by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT – ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Jeff McLaughlin

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects

To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character: or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet it should seem, allowing them to have souls, that there is but one way appointed by Providence to lead mankind to either virtue or happiness.

If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence? Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our head- strong passions and groveling vices. Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force. Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness or temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives.

Thus Milton describes our first frail mother; though when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace¹, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation.

How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes! For instance, the winning softness so warmly, and frequently, recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expression, and how insignificant is the being – can it be an immortal one? who will condescend to govern by such sinister methods! ‘Certainly,’ says Lord Bacon, ‘man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature!’² Men, indeed, appear to me to act in a very unphilosophical manner when they try to secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood. Rousseau was more consistent when he wished to stop the progress of reason in both sexes, for if men eat of the tree

of knowledge, women will come in for a taste; but, from the imperfect cultivation which their understandings now receive, they only attain a knowledge of evil.

Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness. For if it be allowed that women were destined by Providence to acquire human virtues, and by the exercise of their understandings, that stability of character which is the firmest ground to rest our future hopes upon, they must be permitted to turn to the fountain of light, and not forced to shape their course by the twinkling of a mere satellite. Milton, I grant, was of a very different opinion; for he only bends to the indefeasible right of beauty, though it would be difficult to render two passages which I now mean to contrast, consistent. But into similar inconsistencies are great men often led by their senses.

‘To whom thus Eve with perfect beauty adorn’d. My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst Unargued I obey; so God ordains;

God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more

*Is Woman’s happiest knowledge and her praise.*³

These are exactly the arguments that I have used to children; but I have added, your reason is now gaining strength, and, till it arrives at some degree of maturity, you must look up to me for advice – then you ought to think, and only rely on God.

Yet in the following lines Milton seems to coincide with me; when he makes Adam thus expostulate with his Maker.

Hast thou not made me here thy substitute,

And these inferior far beneath me set? Among unequals what society

Can sort, what harmony or true delight? Which must be mutual, in proportion due Giv’n and receiv’d; but in disparity

The one intense, the other still remiss Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove Tedious alike: of fellowship I speak

*Such as I seek, fit to participate All rational delight –*⁴

In treating, therefore, of the manners of women, let us, disregarding sensual arguments, trace what we should endeavour to make them in order to co-operate, if the expression be not too bold, with the supreme Being.

By individual education, I mean, for the sense of the word is not precisely defined, such an attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the

understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; so that the man may only have to proceed, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason.

To prevent any misconstruction, I must add, that I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In every age there has been a stream of popular opinion that has carried all before it, and given a family character, as it were, to the century. It may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education. It is, however, sufficient for my present purpose to assert, that, whatever effect circumstances have on the abilities, every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason; for if but one being was created with vicious inclinations, that is positively bad, what can save us from atheism? or if we worship a God, is not that God a devil?

Consequently, the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's opinion respecting men: I extend it to women, and confidently assert that they have been drawn out of their sphere by false refinement, and not by an endeavour to acquire masculine qualities. Still the regal homage which they receive is so intoxicating, that till the manners of the times are changed, and formed on more reasonable principles, it may be impossible to convince them that the illegitimate power, which they obtain, by degrading themselves, is a curse, and that they must return to nature and equality, if they wish to secure the placid satisfaction that unsophisticated affections impart. But for this epoch we must wait – wait, perhaps, till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason, and, preferring the real dignity of man to childish state, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings: and if then women do not resign the arbitrary power of beauty – they will prove that they have less mind than man.

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr Gregory⁵, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a lower key; but I am afraid it would have been the whine of affectation, and not the faithful expression of my feelings, of the clear result, which experience and reflection have led me to draw. When I come to that division of the subject, I shall advert to the passages that I more particularly disapprove of, in the works of the authors I have just alluded to; but it is first necessary to observe, that my objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expence of every solid virtue.

Though, to reason on Rousseau's ground, if man did attain a degree of perfection of mind when his body arrived at maturity, it might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife one, that she should rely entirely on his understanding; and the graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, would form a whole in which strength and beauty would be equally conspicuous. But, alas! husbands, as well as their helpmates, are often only overgrown

children; nay, thanks to early debauchery, scarcely men in their outward form – and if the blind lead the blind, one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence.

Many are the causes that, in the present corrupt state of society, contribute to enslave women by cramping their understandings and sharpening their senses. One, perhaps, that silently does more mischief than all the rest, is their disregard of order.

To do every thing in an orderly manner, is a most important precept, which women, who, generally speaking, receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom attend to with that degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy are broken into method, observe. This negligent kind of guesswork, for what other epithet can be used to point out the random exertions of a sort of instinctive common sense, never brought to the test of reason? prevents their generalizing matters of fact – so they do to-day, what they did yesterday, merely because they did it yesterday.

This contempt of the understanding in early life has more baneful consequences than is commonly supposed; for the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment. In the present state of society, a little learning is required to support the character of a gentleman; and boys are obliged to submit to a few years of discipline. But in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment; even while enervated by confinement and false notions of modesty, the body is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which relaxed half-formed limbs never exhibit. Besides, in youth their faculties are not brought forward by emulation; and having no serious scientific study, if they have natural sagacity it is turned too soon on life and manners. They dwell on effects, and modifications, without tracing them back to causes; and complicated rules to adjust behaviour are a weak substitute for simple principles.

As a proof that education gives this appearance of weakness to females, we may instance the example of military men, who are, like them, sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles. The consequences are similar, soldiers acquire a little superficial knowledge, snatched from the muddy current of conversation, and, from continually mixing with society, they gain, what is termed a knowledge of the world, and this acquaintance with manners and customs has frequently been confounded with a knowledge of the human heart. But can the crude fruit of casual observation, never brought to the test of judgment, formed by comparing speculation and experience, deserve such a distinction? Soldiers, as well as women, practise the minor virtues with punctilious politeness. Where is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same? All the difference that I can discern, arises from the superior advantage of liberty, which enables the former to see more of life.

It is wandering from my present subject, perhaps, to make a political remark; but, as it was produced naturally by the train of my reflections, I shall not pass it silently over.

Standing armies can never consist of resolute, robust men; they may be well disciplined machines, but they will seldom contain men under the influence of strong passions, or with very vigorous faculties. And as for any depth of understanding, I will venture to affirm, that it is as rarely to be found in the army as amongst women; and the cause, I maintain, is the same. It may be further observed, that officers are also particularly attentive to their persons, fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures, and ridicule.⁶ Like the fair sex, the business of their lives is gallantry. – They were taught to please, and they only live to please. Yet they do not lose their rank in the distinction of sexes, for they are still reckoned superior to women, though in what their superiority consists, beyond what I have just mentioned, it is difficult to discover.

The great misfortune is this, that they both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have, from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural; satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. So that if they have any sense, it is a kind of instinctive glance, that catches proportions, and decides with respect to manners; but fails when arguments are to be pursued below the surface, or opinions analyzed.

May not the same remark be applied to women? Nay, the argument may be carried still further, for they are both thrown out of a useful station by the unnatural distinctions established in civilized life. Riches and hereditary honours have made cyphers of women to give consequence to the numerical figure; and idleness has produced a mixture of gallantry and despotism into society, which leads the very men who are the slaves of their mistresses to tyrannize over their sisters, wives, and daughters. This is only keeping them in rank and file, it is true. Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing. The sensualist, indeed, has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been duped by their lovers, as princes by their ministers, whilst dreaming that they reigned over them.

I now principally allude to Rousseau, for his character of Sophia is, undoubtedly, a captivating one, though it appears to me grossly unnatural; however it is not the superstructure, but the foundation of her character, the principles on which her education was built, that I mean to attack; nay, warmly as I admire the genius of that able writer, whose opinions I shall often have occasion to cite, indignation always takes place of admiration, and the rigid frown of insulted virtue effaces the smile of complacency, which his eloquent periods are wont to raise, when I read his voluptuous reveries. Is this the man, who, in his ardour for virtue, would banish all the soft arts of peace, and almost carry us back to Spartan discipline? Is this the man who delights to paint the useful struggles of passion, the triumphs of good dispositions, and the heroic flights which carry the glowing soul out of itself? – How are these mighty sentiments lowered when he describes the pretty foot and enticing airs of his little favourite!

But, for the present, I wave the subject, and, instead of severely reprehending the transient effusions of overweening sensibility, I shall only observe, that whoever has cast a benevolent eye on society, must often have been gratified by the sight of humble mutual love, not dignified by sentiment, or strengthened by a union in intellectual pursuits. The domestic trifles of the day have afforded matters for cheerful converse, and innocent caresses have softened toils which did not require great exercise of mind or stretch of thought: yet, has not the sight of this moderate felicity excited more tenderness than respect? An emotion similar to what we feel when children are playing, or animals sporting,⁷ whilst the contemplation of the noble struggles of suffering merit has raised admiration, and carried our thoughts to that world where sensation will give place to reason.

Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.

Let us examine this question. Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquetish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stones of all human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restrictions, because, with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.

What nonsense! when will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject! If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim.

Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue. They may try to render their road pleasant; but ought never to forget, in common with man, that life yields not the felicity which can satisfy an immortal soul. I do not mean to insinuate, that either sex should be so lost in abstract reflections or distant views, as to forget the affections and duties that lie before them, and are, in truth, the means appointed to produce the fruit of life; on the contrary, I would warmly recommend them, even while I assert, that they afford most satisfaction when they are considered in their true, sober light.

Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses's poetical story; yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground; or, only be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate

his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure.

Let it not be concluded that I wish to invert the order of things; I have already granted, that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue. I speak collectively of the whole sex; but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard? I must therefore, if I reason consequentially, as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction, as that there is a God.

It follows then that cunning should not be opposed to wisdom, little cares to great exertions, or insipid softness, varnished over with the name of gentleness, to that fortitude which grand views alone can inspire.

I shall be told that woman would then lose many of her peculiar graces, and the opinion of a well known poet might be quoted to refute my unqualified assertion. For Pope has said, in the name of the whole male sex,

‘Yet ne’er so sure our passion to create,

As when she touch’d the brink of all we hate.’⁸

In what light this sally places men and women, I shall leave to the judicious to determine; meanwhile I shall content myself with observing, that I cannot discover why, unless they are mortal, females should always be degraded by being made subservient to love or lust.

To speak disrespectfully of love is, I know, high treason against sentiment and fine feelings; but I wish to speak the simple language of truth, and rather to address the head than the heart. To endeavour to reason love out of the world, would be to out Quixote Cervantes, and equally offend against common sense; but an endeavour to restrain this tumultuous passion, and to prove that it should not be allowed to dethrone superior powers, or to usurp the sceptre which the understanding should ever coolly wield, appears less wild.

Youth is the season for love in both sexes; but in those days of thoughtless enjoyment provision should be made for the more important years of life, when reflection takes place of sensation. But Rousseau, and most of the male writers who have followed his steps, have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point: – to render them pleasing.

Let me reason with the supporters of this opinion who have any knowledge of human nature, do they imagine that marriage can eradicate the habitude of life? The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone. Will she then have sufficient native energy to look into herself for comfort, and cultivate her dormant faculties? or, is it not more rational to expect that she will try to please other men; and, in the emotions raised by the expectation of new conquests, endeavour to forget the mortification her

love or pride has received? When the husband ceases to be a lover – and the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness; and love, perhaps, the most evanescent of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity.

I now speak of women who are restrained by principle or prejudice; such women, though they would shrink from an intrigue with real abhorrence, yet, nevertheless, wish to be convinced by the homage of gallantry that they are cruelly neglected by their husbands; or, days and weeks are spent in dreaming of the happiness enjoyed by congenial souls till their health is undermined and their spirits broken by discontent. How then can the great art of pleasing be such a necessary study; it is only useful to a mistress; the chaste wife, and serious mother, should only consider her power to please as the polish of her virtues, and the affection of her husband as one of the comforts that render her task less difficult and her life happier. – But, whether she be loved or neglected, her first wish should be to make herself respectable, and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself.

The worthy Dr Gregory fell into a similar error. I respect his heart; but entirely disapprove of his celebrated Legacy to his Daughters.

He advises them to cultivate a fondness for dress, because a fondness for dress, he asserts, is natural to them. I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean, when they frequently use this indefinite term. If they told us that in a pre-existent state the soul was fond of dress, and brought this inclination with it into a new body, I should listen to them with a half smile, as I often do when I hear a rant about innate elegance. – But if he only meant to say that the exercise of the faculties will produce this fondness – I deny it. It is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power.

Dr Gregory goes much further; he actually recommends dissimulation, and advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings, and not dance with spirit, when gaiety of heart would make her feet eloquent without making her gestures immodest. In the name of truth and common sense, why should not one woman acknowledge that she can take more exercise than another? or, in other words, that she has a sound constitution; and why, to damp innocent vivacity, is she darkly to be told that men will draw conclusions which she little thinks of? – Let the libertine draw what inference he pleases; but, I hope, that no sensible mother will restrain the natural frankness of youth by instilling such indecent cautions. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh⁹; and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that the heart should be made clean, and not trivial ceremonies observed, which it is not very difficult to fulfil with scrupulous exactness when vice reigns in the heart.

Women ought to endeavour to purify their heart; but can they do so when their uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power? To gain the affections of a virtuous man is affectation necessary? Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man; but, to ensure her husband's affections, must a wife, who by the exercise of her mind and body whilst she was discharging the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother, has allowed her constitution to retain

its natural strength, and her nerves a healthy tone, is she, I say, to condescend to use art and feign a sickly delicacy in order to secure her husband's affection? Weakness may excite tenderness, and gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected. Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship!

In a seraglio, I grant, that all these arts are necessary; the epicure must have his palate tickled, or he will sink into apathy; but have women so little ambition as to be satisfied with such a condition? Can they supinely dream life away in the lap of pleasure, or the languor of weariness, rather than assert their claim to pursue reasonable pleasures and render themselves conspicuous by practising the virtues which dignify mankind? Surely she has not an immortal soul who can loiter life away merely employed to adorn her person, that she may amuse the languid hours, and soften the cares of a fellow-creature who is willing to be enlivened by her smiles and tricks, when the serious business of life is over.

Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.

Nature, or, to speak with strict propriety, God, has made all things right; but man has sought him out many inventions to mar the work. I now allude to that part of Dr Gregory's treatise, where he advises a wife never to let her husband know the extent of her sensibility or affection. Voluptuous precaution, and as ineffectual as absurd. – Love, from its very nature, must be transitory. To seek for a secret that would render it constant, would be as wild a search as for the philosopher's stone, or the grand panacea: and the discovery would be equally useless, or rather pernicious, to mankind. The most holy band of society is friendship. It has been well said, by a shrewd satirist, 'that rare as true love is, true friendship is still rarer.'¹⁰

This is an obvious truth, and the cause not lying deep, will not elude a slight glance of inquiry.

Love, the common passion, in which chance and sensation take place of choice and reason, is, in some degree, felt by the mass of mankind; for it is not necessary to speak, at present, of the emotions that rise above or sink below love. This passion, naturally increased by suspense and difficulties, draws the mind out of its accustomed state, and exalts the affections; but the security of marriage, allowing the fever of love to subside, a healthy temperature is thought insipid, only by those who have not sufficient intellect to substitute the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect, instead of blind admiration, and the sensual emotions of fondness.

This is, must be, the course of nature – friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love. – And this constitution seems perfectly to harmonize with the system of government which prevails in the moral world. Passions are spurs to action, and open the mind; but they sink into mere appetites, become a personal and momentary gratification,

when the object is gained, and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment. The man who had some virtue whilst he was struggling for a crown, often becomes a voluptuous tyrant when it graces his brow; and, when the lover is not lost in the husband, the dotard, a prey to childish caprices, and fond jealousies, neglects the serious duties of life, and the caresses which should excite confidence in his children are lavished on the overgrown child, his wife.

In order to fulfil the duties of life, and to be able to pursue with vigour the various employments which form the moral character, a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion. I mean to say, that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society, and engross the thoughts that should be otherwise employed. The mind that has never been engrossed by one object wants vigour – if it can long be so, it is weak.

A mistaken education, a narrow, uncultivated mind, and many sexual prejudices, tend to make women more constant than men; but, for the present, I shall not touch on this branch of the subject. I will go still further, and advance, without dreaming of a paradox, that an unhappy marriage is often very advantageous to a family, and that the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother. And this would almost always be the consequence if the female mind were more enlarged: for, it seems to be the common dispensation of Providence, that what we gain in present enjoyment should be deducted from the treasure of life, experience; and that when we are gathering the flowers of the day and revelling in pleasure, the solid fruit of toil and wisdom should not be caught at the same time. The way lies before us, we must turn to the right or left; and he who will pass life away in bounding from one pleasure to another, must not complain if he acquire neither wisdom nor respectability of character.

Supposing, for a moment, that the soul is not immortal, and that man was only created for the present scene, – I think we should have reason to complain that love, infantine fondness, ever grew insipid and palled upon the sense. Let us eat, drink, and love, for to-morrow we die, would be, in fact, the language of reason, the morality of life; and who but a fool would part with a reality for a fleeting shadow? But, if awed by observing the improbable powers of the mind, we disdain to confine our wishes or thoughts to such a comparatively mean field of action; that only appears grand and important, as it is connected with a boundless prospect and sublime hopes, what necessity is there for falsehood in conduct, and why must the sacred majesty of truth be violated to detain a deceitful good that saps the very foundation of virtue? Why must the female mind be tainted by coquetish arts to gratify the sensualist, and prevent love from subsiding into friendship, or compassionate tenderness, when there are not qualities on which friendship can be built? Let the honest heart shew itself, and reason teach passion to submit to necessity; or, let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds.

I do not mean to allude to the romantic passion, which is the concomitant of genius. – Who can clip its wing? But that grand passion not proportioned to the puny enjoyments of life, is only true to the sentiment, and feeds on itself. The passions which have been celebrated for their durability have always been unfortunate. They have acquired strength by absence and constitutional melancholy. – The fancy has hovered round a form of beauty dimly seen – but familiarity might have turned admiration into disgust; or, at least, into indifference, and allowed the

imagination leisure to start fresh game. With perfect propriety, according to this view of things, does Rousseau make the mistress of his soul, Eloisa, love St Preux, when life was fading before her; but this is no proof of the immortality of the passion.

Of the same complexion is Dr Gregory's advice respecting delicacy of sentiment, which he advises a woman not to acquire, if she have determined to marry. This determination, however, perfectly consistent with his former advice, he calls indelicate, and earnestly persuades his daughters to conceal it, though it may govern their conduct: – as if it were indelicate to have the common appetites of human nature.

Noble morality! and consistent with the cautious prudence of a little soul that cannot extend its views beyond the present minute division of existence. If all the faculties of woman's mind are only to be cultivated as they respect her dependence on man; if, when a husband be obtained, she have arrived at her goal, and meanly proud rests satisfied with such a paltry crown, let her grovel contentedly, scarcely raised by her employments above the animal kingdom; but, if, struggling for the prize of her high calling, she looks beyond the present scene, let her cultivate her understanding without stopping to consider what character the husband may have whom she is destined to marry. Let her only determine, without being too anxious about present happiness, to acquire the qualities that ennoble a rational being, and a rough inelegant husband may shock her taste without destroying her peace of mind. She will not model her soul to suit the frailties of her companion, but to bear with them: his character may be a trial, but not an impediment to virtue.

If Dr Gregory confined his remark to romantic expectations of constant love and congenial feelings, he should have recollected that experience will banish what advice can never make us cease to wish for, when the imagination is kept alive at the expence of reason.

I own it frequently happens that women who have fostered a romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling, waste their¹¹ lives in imagining how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day, and all day. But they might as well pine married as single – and would not be a jot more unhappy with a bad husband than longing for a good one. That a proper education; or, to speak with more precision, a well stored mind, would enable a woman to support a single life with dignity, I grant; but that she should avoid cultivating her taste, lest her husband should occasionally shock it, is quitting a substance for a shadow. To say the truth, I do not know of what use is an improved taste, if the individual be not rendered more independent of the casualties of life; if new sources of enjoyment, only dependent on the solitary operations of the mind, are not opened. People of taste, married or single, without distinction, will ever be disgusted by various things that touch not less observing minds. On this conclusion the argument must not be allowed to hinge; but in the whole sum of enjoyment is taste to be denominated a blessing?

The question is, whether it procures most pain or pleasure? The answer will decide the propriety of Dr Gregory's advice, and shew how absurd and tyrannic it is thus to lay down a system of slavery; or to attempt to educate moral beings by any other rules than those deduced from pure reason, which apply to the whole species.

Gentleness of manners, forbearance and long-suffering, are such amiable Godlike qualities, that in sublime poetic strains the Deity has been invested with them; and, perhaps, no representation of his goodness so strongly fastens on the human affections as those that represent him abundant in mercy and willing to pardon. Gentleness, considered in this point of view, bears on its front all the characteristics of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension; but what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently endure injuries; smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl. Abject as this picture appears, it is the portrait of an accomplished woman, according to the received opinion of female excellence, separated by specious reasoners from human excellence. Or, they¹² kindly restore the rib, and make one moral being of a man and woman; not forgetting to give her all the 'submissive charms.'¹³

How woman are to exist in that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told. For though moralists have agreed that the tenor of life seems to prove that man is prepared by various circumstances for a future state, they constantly concur in advising woman only to provide for the present. Gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection are, on this ground, consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of the sex; and, disregarding the arbitrary economy of nature, one writer has declared that it is masculine for a woman to be melancholy. She was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused.

To recommend gentleness, indeed, on a broad basis is strictly philosophical. A frail being should labour to be gentle. But when forbearance confounds right and wrong, it ceases to be a virtue; and, however convenient it may be found in a companion – that companion will ever be considered as an inferior, and only inspire a vapid tenderness, which easily degenerates into contempt. Still, if advice could really make a being gentle, whose natural disposition admitted not of such a fine polish, something towards the advancement of order would be attained; but if, as might quickly be demonstrated, only affectation be produced by this indiscriminate counsel, which throws a stumbling-block in the way of gradual improvement, and true melioration of temper, the sex is not much benefited by sacrificing solid virtues to the attainment of superficial graces, though for a few years they may procure the individuals regal sway.

As a philosopher, I read with indignation the plausible epithets which men use to soften their insults; and, as a moralist, I ask what is meant by such heterogeneous associations, as fair defects, amiable weaknesses, etc.? If there be but one criterion of morals, but one archetype for man, women appear to be suspended by destiny, according to the vulgar tale of Mahomet's coffin; they have neither the unerring instinct of brutes, nor are allowed to fix the eye of reason on a perfect model. They were made to be loved, and must not aim at respect, lest they should be hunted out of society as masculine.

But to view the subject in another point of view. Do passive indolent women make the best wives? Confining our discussion to the present moment of existence, let us see how such weak creatures perform their part? Do the women who, by the attainment of a few superficial accomplishments, have strengthened the prevailing prejudice, merely

contribute to the happiness of their husbands? Do they display their charms merely to amuse them? And have women, who have early imbibed notions of passive obedience, sufficient character to manage a family or educate children? So far from it, that, after surveying the history of woman, I cannot help, agreeing with the severest satirist, considering the sex as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species. What does history disclose but marks of inferiority, and how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man? – So few, that the exceptions remind me of an ingenious conjecture respecting Newton: that he was probably a being of a superior order, accidentally caged in a human body. Following the same train of thinking, I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentrical directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits, confined by mistake in female frames. But if it be not philosophical to think of sex when the soul is mentioned, the inferiority must depend on the organs; or the heavenly fire, which is to ferment the clay, is not given in equal portions.

But avoiding, as I have hitherto done, any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, or frankly acknowledging the inferiority of woman, according to the present appearance of things, I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale. Yet let it be remembered, that for a small number of distinguished women I do not ask a place.

It is difficult for us purblind mortals to say to what height human discoveries and improvements may arrive when the gloom of despotism subsides, which makes us stumble at every step; but, when morality shall be settled on a more solid basis, then, without being gifted with a prophetic spirit, I will venture to predict that woman will be either the friend or slave of man. We shall not, as at present, doubt whether she is a moral agent, or the link which unites man with brutes. But, should it then appear, that like the brutes they were principally created for the use of man, he will let them patiently bite the bridle, and not mock them with empty praise; or, should their rationality be proved, he will not impede their improvement merely to gratify his sensual appetites. He will not, with all the graces of rhetoric, advise them to submit implicitly their understanding to the guidance of man. He will not, when he treats of the education of women, assert that they ought never to have the free use of reason, nor would he recommend cunning and dissimulation to beings who are acquiring, in like manner as himself, the virtues of humanity.

Surely there can be but one rule of right, if morality has an eternal foundation, and whoever sacrifices virtue, strictly so called, to present convenience, or whose duty it is to act in such a manner, lives only for the passing day, and cannot be an accountable creature.

The poet then should have dropped his sneer when he says, 'If weak women go astray,

The stars are more in fault than they'¹⁴

For that they are bound by the adamantine chain of destiny is most certain, if it be proved that they are never to exercise their own reason, never to be independent, never to rise above opinion, or to feel the dignity of a rational

will that only bows to God, and often forgets that the universe contains any being but itself and the model of perfection to which its ardent gaze is turned, to adore attributes that, softened into virtues, may be imitated in kind, though the degree overwhelms the enraptured mind.

If, I say, for I would not impress by declamation when Reason offers her sober light, if they be really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves; or, like the brutes who are dependent on the reason of man, when they associate with him; but cultivate their minds, give them the salutary, sublime curb of principle, and let them attain conscious dignity by feeling themselves only dependent on God. Teach them, in common with man, to submit to necessity, instead of giving, to render them more pleasing, a sex to morals.

Further, should experience prove that they cannot attain the same degree of strength of mind, perseverance, and fortitude, let their virtues be the same in kind, though they may vainly struggle for the same degree; and the superiority of man will be equally clear, if not clearer; and truth, as it is a simple principle, which admits of no modification, would be common to both. Nay, the order of society as it is at present regulated would not be inverted, for woman would then only have the rank that reason assigned her, and arts could not be practised to bring the balance even, much less to turn it.

These may be termed utopian dreams. – Thanks to that Being who impressed them on my soul, and gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex.

I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man. In fact, the conduct of an accountable being must be regulated by the operations of its own reason; or on what foundation rests the throne of God?

It appears to me necessary to dwell on these obvious truths, because females have been insulated, as it were; and, while they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces that enable them to exercise a short-lived tyranny. Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect; and this ignoble desire, like the servility in absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature.

As to the argument respecting the subjection in which the sex has ever been held, it retorts on man. The many have always been enthralled by the few; and monsters, who scarcely have shewn any discernment of human excellence, have tyrannized over thousands of their fellow-creatures. Why have men of superior endowments submitted to such degradation? For, is it not universally acknowledged that kings, viewed collectively, have ever been inferior, in abilities and virtue, to the same number of men taken from the common mass of mankind – yet, have they not,

and are they not still treated with a degree of reverence that is an insult to reason; China is not the only country where a living man has been made a God. Men have submitted to superior strength to enjoy with impunity the pleasure of the moment – women have only done the same, and therefore till it is proved that the courtier, who servilely resigns the birthright of a man, is not a moral agent, it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated.

Brutal force has hitherto governed the world, and that the science of politics is in its infancy, is evident from philosophers scrupling to give the knowledge most useful to man that determinate distinction.

I shall not pursue this argument any further than to establish an obvious inference, that as sound politics diffuse liberty, mankind, including woman, will become more wise and virtuous.

Citation & Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. Authored by: Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . Provided by: BCCampus. Located at: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. License: CC BY: Attribution*



Mary Wollstonecraft – On the Rights of Women by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, 298.
2. From Bacon's "Of Atheism" essay.
3. *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, 634-8.
4. *Paradise Lost*, Book VIII, 381-91.
5. Dr. John Gregory (1724-1773), author of *A Father's Legacy To His Daughters* (1774).
6. Why should women be censured with petulant acrimony, because they seem to have a passion for a scarlet coat? Has not education placed them more on a level with soldiers than any other class of men?
7. Similar feelings has Milton's pleasing picture of paradisiacal happiness ever raised in my mind; yet, instead of envying the lovely pair, I have, with conscious dignity, or Satanic pride, turned to hell for sublimer objects. In the same style, when viewing some noble monument of human art, I have traced the emanation of the Deity in the order I admired, till, descending from that giddy height, I have caught myself contemplating the grandest of all human sights, – for fancy quickly placed, in some solitary recess, an outcast of fortune, rising superior to passion and discontent.
8. *Epistles to Several Persons (also known as the Moral Essays)*, Epistle II, "To a Lady: Of the Characters of Women", 51-52.

9. *Matthew 12:34.*
10. *François de La Rochefoucauld, Reflections; or Sentences and Moral Maxims, 473.*
11. *For example, the herd of Novelists.*
12. *Vide Rousseau, and Swedenborg.*
13. *Paradise Lost, Book IV, 498.*
14. *Matthew Prior, “Hans Carvel” (1700).*

ON MARXISM AND VALUE

Rasmin Canon

What it Means to be Marxist

It's unfortunate that there isn't a better word for "Marxism." Marx himself famously once said that he himself was "not a Marxist" if certain askew interpretations of his theories of historical materialism and capitalism were "Marxist." Part of the problem is that the theories and processes that Marx helped create are too big to fall under a single -ism; Marx was a philosopher (and sort of historian) of political economy, that is, the study of production and trade in relationship to laws, customs, and human systems, whose theories helped inform numerous other disciplines and practices: economics, sociology, history, literature and practical politics, among others.

*The closest analogy that I can think of is to what we would today call "Darwinism," the theories of nineteenth century biologist Charles Darwin. Darwin didn't invent biology, paleontology, genetics, or any of the numerous disciplines and practices that are informed by "Darwinism." And in fact, there are many aspects of classical "Darwinism"—the theories and conclusions arrived at by Darwin and his immediate disciples—that have been outright revised or rejected by people who today would still consider themselves "Darwinists." Since Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, hundreds if not thousands of scientists and philosophers have expanded on and improved on Darwin's theories (the so-called "modern synthesis")—obviously a necessity since during Darwin's lifetime there was no deep concept of molecular genetics.*

It's useful to think of Marxism the same way. Marxism is not a detailed plan for how to create socialism. Marxism isn't a moral philosophy, in the way that the Enlightenment philosophers and their progeny—like John Rawls—tried to build up moral systems from first principles to determine what is the most "fair." It does not instruct us to engage in violent insurrection.

Marx, through his analysis of human society, gave us an understanding of the laws governing how society develops and how we can understand the process of history. His theories of alienation and class struggle inform us as to the causes of human misery and the obstacles to human flourishing. This is the "historical materialism" that is the strongest single thread of his work. Historical materialism is, simply stated, the theory that human societies develop according to how the "forces of production" are ordered, and that the features of a society will, ultimately, relate back to the ordering of the forces of production. People will "relate" to the system of production as a class. Therefore, the core conflict in society has been between classes on opposing sides of the systems of production—this is the dialectical part of his theory.

Just as Darwin was not the first “evolutionist,” Marx was not by any means the first socialist. And as with Darwin and the word “evolution,” “socialism” meant something fairly different before Marx came along. Socialism was basically a moral system, sometimes rooted in Christian values, utopian in character and justified based on what was “fair” or “just.” Marx and Engels spent much of their active years differentiating their theories from prior theories of “utopian” socialism built on moral persuasion—Engels going as far as to publish a book-length pamphlet on it.

*Darwin revolutionized existing theories of “evolution” by introducing the concept of natural selection over geologic time—he should better be remembered for the theory of natural selection than evolution; the early title of his book *Origin of Species* was *Natural Selection*. In the same way, Karl Marx took existing historical and philosophical analysis of human society and political economy and applied an objective approach, from which he developed the theory of historical materialism/dialectical materialism.*

What Marxism teaches us is simply to approach questions of society from a material basis: how does human life persist? Through production of the goods and services needed to live. How are these things produced under capitalist society? Through exploitation of the labor of the working class, that is, by requiring one class of people to sell their labor as a commodity to another class to produce values. What is the result of this system? That workers are “alienated” from their labor, meaning from much of their waking life, constantly required to produce more and more with an ever-precarious access to the means of subsistence.

If we want to engage in political competition and analysis of what Marx would have called “political economy,” there isn’t an alternative to Marxism that has anything near its explanatory power or guidance. That said, I understand the caution many socialists or social democrats may have to subscribing to “Marxism”: Marx’s focus on class “struggle,” the “overthrow” of the capitalist class, and the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” all of which may strike modern American ears as prescriptions for violence and authoritarianism.

It’s important to understand what Marx meant by these things.

*The class struggle doesn’t necessarily mean barricades in the streets and summary execution of plutocrats. That these things can result from struggle is a historical fact; but the “struggle” Marx is talking about is the social and political competition between classes, which is always present: whether in the form of wage demands, petitions, law changes, strikes, non-compliance, all the way up to armed revolt. In the *Manifesto*, Marx describes how sometimes, the capitalists will cave in to demands made via demonstrations and strikes; other times, they will resist until concessions are forcibly extracted. Only the relative strength of the sides determines the nature of the struggle. The whole point of Marx’s method is to understand that the struggle is inherent to the capitalist system; it is objective. How socialists choose strategically to win the struggle depends on many factors, including the avenues available to them to win changes to the system—this is subjective. Whether we like it or not, the way commodities are produced under capitalism will always require struggle between the classes; workers want more, capitalists want them to have less and less.*

As for “overthrow,” Marx looks at how previous systems of production were ended and changed into new forms: from hunter-gatherer to militarized, to slave chiefdoms and kingdoms, to feudalism, and then to capitalism. It is true that these transitions were generally marked by periods of violent competition; but (just like with Darwinism) historical study has showed that the violent outbursts were not the chief or only means of change. In fact, decades, sometimes centuries, of smaller changes accumulated over time to put stress on existing systems and bring about major changes. This is especially true of capitalism, which arose in Europe not all at once after the French beheaded enough nobles, but took place over an extended period beginning as far back as the Fourteenth Century. The growth of state-like kingdoms, “free” trading cities, incremental changes in technology, improvements in communications and logistics, and changes in legal systems eroded the basis of feudalism; the French Revolution was one part of a much longer and broader process of change.

Perhaps most misunderstood is the idea of the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” which comes from the Manifesto and a work called Critique of the Gotha Program, but is often interpreted according to the later theories of Vladimir Lenin. The dictatorship of the proletariat does not mean revolutionary terror against class enemies and the death of freedom. It means something very simple: look around you. Do you see how in “free market” democracies, political power is monopolized (or nearly monopolized) by the ownership class? The “dictatorship” of the proletariat just flips this. For Marxists, the dictatorship of the proletariat simply means a period where political power is held in common for the sole benefit of the working class. Getting to this point requires the working class to realize it is in fact a single class, and acting in its own interests. That this be accompanied by violent revolution isn’t necessary.

Dictatorship is bad. We live under a form of dictatorship today: a dictatorship on behalf of the capitalist class. This doesn’t mean working class people have zero freedoms; it means that the states we live in are specifically organized to protect the capitalist system of social relations. Some people can own the means of production and the rest of us have to sell our labor to survive. The dictatorship of the proletariat just inverts this: it organizes the state to preserve the common ownership of the means of production.

Marx and Engels were critical of moral and “fairness” arguments for socialism because they were ahistorical; they lacked a truly rational basis, and were therefore just formed by ruling class ideology. This isn’t unique to Marx, either: a contemporary philosopher, Bernard Williams (no socialist himself) is among the definitive moral philosophers who rejects the idea that we can reason our way to morality. Historically, the forces of production—the thing that determines human flourishing—had never been reordered through moral argument; it had required engaging in struggle—in political competition. Marx was not trying to provoke people into violence. He was merely exposing and acknowledging that the forces of production create a class struggle, which will resolve in a change to the forces of production.

As socialists post-Marx, as with biologists post-Darwin, we merely accept the material reality of the system we live in. The forces of production rest on exploitation to extract “surplus value” and requires commodifying labor, which alienates workers. Struggle is inherent to the capitalist system. Only when workers become conscious of themselves as

a class and act on their own behalf will they act to affirmatively end the system. There isn't really a deep question of morality here; this isn't about fairness. It is about the struggle between those who control their own destiny and are not alienated from their means of subsistence (capitalists) and those who want this condition for themselves, but are kept from it (the working class).

A word about violence. Like most people, I abhor violence. Violence degrades its perpetrators as it harms its victims. Marx does not prescribe violence, although he does treat it as an obviously common outcome of periods of dramatic change in the forces of production—that is, in periods of “overthrow.” We need to ask ourselves whether major social change has ever avoided violence, and where that violence came from. Consider the U.S. civil rights movement, treated in historical memory as the best example of change from “non-violence.” But wasn't there violence? The fact is that the state, and individuals, reacted to the demands of Black Americans with violence. There was violence during the civil rights movement; it just wasn't meted out on a large scale by those demanding their rights. And once those demands were won, there was “violence” of another sort—when the state prosecuted and rounded up hate groups, like the Klan for example, that was a sort of state “violence” we would consider appropriate. Not to mention that attacks on freedom fighters, whether they were freedom riders, civil rights lawyers, or a person protecting their home from a lynch mob, always entailed violence.

And what about the labor movement? From private guards to local police to the federal army, violence was regularly called down on those engaging in struggle to win rights in the workplace. The U.S. labor movement, in fact, was particularly marked by violence, even over its European counterparts, especially in the mountain west where mining and energy concerns regularly called down armed forces to break strikes. Struggle for the workers were strikes and non-compliance; the reaction was violence.

In historical struggle, those clinging to the system under attack are the first to resort to violence. To be a Marxist doesn't require belief in an armed uprising to bring about a new world, in violent change or authoritarianism. It just means acknowledging as a fact something that already exists: the class struggle. The tactics and strategies workers employ to achieve class consciousness and act to end the exploitative system are ours to determine.

Why contemporary socialism is entwined with Marxism is this understanding of how history moves and how it will move, based not on the moral arguments we make, but on the objective conditions we live in. Workers will not struggle against abstract principles but against living human beings with material interests. In his Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, Marx wrote that “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please.” We can only change the world if we truly understand the actual forces around us. If we want to change the world, we need to be in it, to build from it; to truly be in it, we need to understand it. That makes us Marxists.

Value

Why does a tree catch fire so easily? Every tree holds in its cells the energy it has absorbed from the sun. We don't

think of trees as energetic, but in fact, to grow like they do, trees have to absorb and store an immense amount of energy. When touched by fire, that energy is released—the captured energy from the sun, stored in the cells, is released. A tree is a tree, a fixed thing in the world we can climb or sleep under or chop down for wood or sell. A tree is also a process, a relationship between different processes—the interaction of soil, water, energy, air, and animal life.

Soil is formed by the deposit and interaction of minerals, water, and organic matter, being churned up by rain, worms, ants and other animals, and wind. The seed of a tree falls into the soil and is fed by the soil's nutrients and sunlight. The sunlight itself is part of a process—the thermonuclear reactions of the sun, the travel of the rays of sunlight to the Earth. Rain, too, is part of atmospheric and meteorological processes. All these processes interact to bring the seed into a sapling and the sapling into a tree. The tree itself contains bits of all of these process in its own process of growing.

A tree isn't just a tree: it is a physical expression of and contains these processes, most of which we never see. What we see is what we get out of the tree. Wood, relief from the sun, comfort from the rain. What goes into making the tree, what we enjoy the tree for, and what we can get for a tree we might all think of separately, but they're knotted together in a way that can't be unravelled. Still, we understand these different parts of "tree-ness" pretty instinctively.

So it goes for Marx's theory of value. Value is one of the most complicated concepts in Marx's work, so we'll go easy for this one. But there are three big categories of "value" that are important for us to understand in radical work: the labor value, use value and exchange value.

The stuff we buy and sell, the stuff of life—commodities—contains and expresses these three kinds of value: labor, use, and exchange values.

The labor value is the "socially-necessary labor time" (SNLT) necessary to make the commodity. In a capitalist economy, for example, a house is a commodity we buy and sell, and it has value based on the socially-necessary labor time to make it. By "socially necessary" Marx meant the "average" time the worker or workers would have to spend, using the average productivity and average tools in use at the time the house was built. All of the different bits needed to build that house also had to be produced themselves—the gypsum for the drywall, the wood for the frame, the concrete for the foundation, the architect's time. There is labor time in these, too. The final house has a certain amount of "embodied labor" in it. With automation (labor-saving equipment), the SNLT goes down; but rarely do workers end up working less; to the contrary, the time-savings results in ever more production of commodities. Why? Well, because commodities have "use-values."

The use value is more or less what it sounds like: it is what human beings get out of a commodity. In the case of the house, it has many use-values: a house gives us shelter, storage for our stuff, a sense of place; but it can also give us access to schools, and amenities by its proximity to cultural or natural centers. We get the use-value of a thing

when we use it. We can assign a thing a use-value separately from its “labor value,” and our trusty tree helps us understand why: a typical forest tree required no human labor to come into being, but we would certainly value it for the shade or wood it would provide us. So “use-value” isn’t really tied to the “embodied labor” value—it isn’t built into the thing itself. It is a “relation” of the thing to the individuals who have a want for it. But there’s no doubt that commodities, the stuff of life, have a use-value.

In capitalist economies, commodities will also have an “exchange-value,” which, mercifully, is also what it sounds like: the worth of a thing in an exchange for another thing or things. This isn’t the same as its price (which is an important difference we’ll see in a minute). The exchange value is the value one commodity or quantity of commodities will get for another or other commodities. In capitalism, exchange-value gets reduced to price, but they are not the same thing.

The reason is that our work and ideas are commodities that we sell. The “socially-necessary labor time” that goes into a commodity is sold and paid for; we “commodify” our labor. The house has all that “embodied labor” in it; and when we sell the house, that embodied labor is being purchased. We look at the house and see shelter, and storage, and a school district; we look at the tree and see shade, and shelter, and wood; but running through those things are processes invisible to us. The house, like the tree, contains the energy spent to bring it into being. This is the labor running through it.

People want the house for the use-value, but cannot acquire it without exchange. The exchange value is related to—but not exclusively made up of—the socially-necessary labor-time, the “embodied labor” in the house. In the modern economy, this is expressed by the “price.” Although exchange value and price are not the same thing, in modern market economies, price is the basic way we see exchange value.

In fact, price is the thing that “hides” the embodied labor. Again, this is something we get instinctively. A rare comic book has a limited use value to a limited number of people, and its price won’t reflect the embodied labor in it. Similarly, a ratty house that happens to be in a good school district will have an exchange value-through-price higher than the embodied labor. Marx called this “commodity fetishism,” and it is a reason why we don’t “see” the labor value of commodities; it’s why an iPhone 7 that costs \$220 to make (including all labor, marketing, taxes, etc.) can sell for \$650.

If this all seems pretty technical and not very relevant for radical work, it certainly can be; and there is a lot of debate about how relevant Marx’s concepts of “value” are given modern advances in economic thought. But at their very basic levels, there is something very important to take away from the theories of value.

That is how commodities—not just things, but labor and ideas—have a use value that is distinct from its exchange value and/or price. Think of how in cities with thousands of people suffering homelessness, there are foreclosed homes boarded up, or second homes kept empty by absentee owners for short-term vacation rentals. The use-value of

these commodities for people without them is intensely important, but it's the exchange values that determine how they're distributed.

In fact, it's the wild-eyed chase for higher and higher exchange values (as "prices"), instead of the reasonable distribution of use-values, that leaves so many people with so little and so few people with so much. Those who own much can't afford to let the use-values slip from their grasp, because it drives down the price. In fact, as with the case of boarded up homes, they'd rather destroy the use-values than make them available to those in need. Housing is an obvious example, but there are many others. The United States, and the West in general, produces use-values from clothing to food to housing to transportation, in surplus abundance, but finds ways to restrict them to only those who can afford the exchange value. This is the "artificial scarcity" that keeps us at each others' throats.

Understanding value types helps us understand why our society doesn't have to work this way. When we see cases of water held behind armed guard during a hurricane, we can point to that and say, we know what the social cost of producing that is; we know its value in use to people who don't have it; why isn't it being distributed rationally? Why is the entire distribution system of use-values built on the merciless drive for ever-higher exchange values?

When we understand the processes that went into making a tree and appreciate its uses, we're a step closer to seeing the world as it really is.

Citation and Use

The reading was taken from the following sources.

Canon, Ramsin. "Primer Red (Part 4): Value." *Midwest Socialist (blog)*, October 24, 2017. <http://midwestsocialist.com/2017/10/24/primer-red-part-4-value/>.

———. "What It Means to Be a Marxist." *Midwest Socialist (blog)*, November 29, 2018. <http://midwestsocialist.com/2018/11/29/what-it-means-to-be-a-marxist/>.

This reading is used with the explicit permission of the author.

On Marxism and Value Copyright © 2020 by Rasmin Canon. All Rights Reserved.

AN INTRODUCTION TO MARX'S PHILOSOPHIC AND ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Heather Wilburn, Ph.D

Introductory notes:

*An important concept to keep in mind when approaching the writings of Karl Marx is “the division of labor.” In Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, he explains how the division of labor has caused the greatest improvement in work productivity. For instance, if I were in the pin making business, I could provide step-by-step instructions for my pin-maker to make pins. How many pins could one individual produce in a day? Maybe a couple. However, if we divide the labor out into a series of 20 production steps, a work group could likely make around 50,000 pins per day. The key is that each individual take on only one step, so that each member of the group completes her individual step according to the production plan. The individual completing only one step of the production process will become a master at that one step. According to Smith, the division of labor eliminates lag time from technology maintenance, retraining workers, and the like. Labor is divided and workers’ productivity is much more efficient.*

Marx on Materialism:

Philosophically speaking, Marx is heavily influenced by Hegel. Hegel argues that progress is guided by Spirit, which is a form of idealism. Contrary to Hegel, Marx is a materialist, which means that progress is guided by human activity, particularly as such is related to economic and social factors. Marx’s focus is on the ways that people make a living—labor—and how labor influences social and cultural life. He gives a three tiered framework for classifying features of economic and social life that are essential to his understanding of social and historical change.

- 1. Productive forces used in the process of production: labor power and the means of production*
- 2. Relations of production: social roles between people regarding the control of productive forces used in the process of production (i.e. ownership, slaveholders, slaves, lord, serf, employer, employee. The first two form the economic structures of a society.*
- 3. Legal and political forms of social consciousness, which is what we might refer to as social life of a culture*

While specific societies have different details, all societies have features of this framework. Historical changes grow out of the tendency humans have to develop their productive capacities and their ability to transform and control nature. During the development of productive forces, different relations of production affect the use and growth of productive forces. Over time, new relations of production will be adopted and endure to the extent that they foster

growth, but when growth is restricted or prevented, new relations of production arise. This is how revolutionary changes occur in the organization of society.

Similarly, legal and political forms of social consciousness do not function independently of the existing relations of production in a society and alone do not account for historical change. Legal and political forms of social consciousness are connected to the existing relations of production. This means that when there is a fundamental change in the relations of production, there will be corresponding changes legally and politically.

In Estranged Labor, Marx explains that capitalism is a way of organizing economic life that involves three features:

- 1. Private property in the means of production, used to make a profit*
- 2. Labor power is a commodity, where individual producers own their labor power and are free to exchange it with employers for a wage in a labor market.*
- 3. Commodity production, where production is for exchange in the market rather than for direct consumption.*

According to Marx, under capitalist conditions, the worker becomes a commodity because we exchange our labor as a good on the market. However, this is the worst kind of commodity because we are forced into a competitive relationship with others. The result of this competition is the accumulation of capital in the hands of the few (1% versus 99%). Beyond competition, this also leads to greed.

Marx's critique of capitalism involves an understanding of the worker within the labor processes under capitalism. In his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, he gives an account of alienated or estranged labor that includes four types of alienation.

- 1. **Alienation from the Product of Labor:** What the worker produces is an external realization or "objectification" of the worker's activity. In other words, labor is manifested in external objects as the worker transforms and appropriates the material world according to the worker's goal or plan. Under certain economic conditions this can involve self-satisfaction and self-expression for the worker because the worker can identify with the product. The product is seen as an expression of the worker and is a source of self-worth for the worker. However, Marx argued that under capitalist conditions of production this objectification of labor in the product involves a separation between worker and product, a "loss of reality" for the worker, where the product is not under the worker's control. Instead of belonging to or being an expression of the worker, the product confronts the worker as something independent and at odds with the worker's freedom (Section XXII).*
- 2. **Alienation from the Activity of Labor:** The worker's own activity is not under the control of the worker and is valued by the worker only instrumentally—as a means to a further end (\$). The activity of labor is therefore not intrinsically meaningful or worthwhile in itself; labor is unpleasant and becomes something to*

be avoided (Section XXII).

3. ***Alienation of the Worker from the Worker's Species Being:*** *For Marx, the worker has a particular nature or "species character" as a human being. This means we are capable of producing in a way in which one is conscious of oneself, of one's activity, of the product of one's labor, and of oneself. Essentially, being human means that we are self-aware or self-consciousness and because we have this capacity, humans are able to reflect on and make choices regarding what and how they produce. Thus, they can act freely and can produce "universally" in a variety of ways and for purposes that go beyond basic biological needs. According to Marx, humans realize and express their nature as species beings through production. The non-human animal is immediately one with its life activity. It is not distinct from that activity; it is that activity. Man makes his activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. Under capitalism, work is not adequate fulfillment or expression of the worker's nature of species being. People under capitalism work to survive rather than work because it is enjoyable (Section XXIV).*
4. ***Alienation of Humans from One Another:*** *Marx claims that individuals are alienated from one another during working time, which is evident through the other types of alienation (Section XXV).*

Marx on Communism:

Marx argues that capitalism leads to these various forms of alienation. He does not believe that alienation can be overcome by reform within capitalism because the fundamental aspect of alienation concerns the impoverishment of the worker. Simply raising wages by reform will do nothing but provide better payment for worker, but does not restore human dignity. Marx believes that alienated labor is inseparable from the wage system and private property that characterizes capitalism. Alienated labor can only be overcome and workers can only have their human dignity returned to them by a radically different system. This would be a system without wages and private property, where the workers themselves controlled their productivity—communism.¹

Marx does not provide a full definition of what a communist society would look like. He does describe it as a community of free individuals, working with the means of production in common, in which the labor-power is applied as the combined labor power of the community. This would entail no class divisions and no exploitation of workers by capitalists. Minimally, a communist system would include the following:

1. *Private property in the means of production would be replaced by common ownership.*
2. *The market exchange of labor and the products of labor would be replaced by collective control of labor.*
3. *The products of labor by the community of producers would be in accordance with a consciously adopted plan for production and distribution.*

Marx also describes a two-stage development of communist society that includes a transitional stage and a later stage where the principles governing the distribution of the means of consumption are different in each:

1. *Stage 1: After deductions for certain common funds (e.g. administration, insurance, health, education, taking care of those no longer able to contribute to the labor force, etc), society returns to the individual workers that is proportionate to the labor each laborer supplies. Here there would be inequalities in consumption based on differences in the labor of each of the individuals supplied. Essentially because this communist society would be emerging out of a capitalist society there would be inequalities. This is because we cannot change overnight. In the transitional period the distribution of goods among workers will follow the same principle of distribution that prevails in capitalist societies, where labor is paid in proportion to the labor supplied. Most interpretations of Marx refer to this transitional stage as a form of socialism.*
2. *Stage 2: As a communist society develops and reaches this stage, labor and human motivation regarding labor will be transformed and means of consumption will be distributed according to a different principle: from each according to his own ability and to each according to his own needs.*

The reason that there are not many details that would describe what a communist society would look like is because these cannot be figured out in advance. We, in a capitalist society, cannot create abstract notions of what a non-alienating society would look like and then simply apply it to our actuality. There can be no utopian ideal for Marx. He is a materialist, which means all change must come from the various individuals that are living in different societies and such will reflect specific conditions and problems that cannot be universally solved or determined. In fact, Marx criticized other socialist and communist thinkers for utopian thinking. He thought utopian thinkers made too many assumptions about individuals and institutions that were unrealistic and far removed from what actuality would likely be. Therefore, Marx thought that communist societies would have to be based on and develop out of existing individuals and institutions instead of imaginary ones. Again, this is in line with his materialism. Because development of the new comes out of what exists, no one can say how these new institutions or societies will be.²

Selections from Manifesto of the Communist Party, by Engels and Marx:

If we look at the history of the various relations of production: free/slave; lord/serf; guildmaster/apprentice; employer/employee—all of these are equivalent to oppressor and oppressed.

History shows us the various social ranks. In Ancient Rome there were the patricians, knights, and plebians. In the Middle Ages there were the fuedal lords, vassals, and serfs. Now, in the Industrial Revolution there are the capitalists and the workers. The latter classes simply assert new class antagonisms and new conditions of oppression in place of old ones from feudal times.

The modern bourgeois, is a product of revolutions in the means of production. Remember, as the means of production change so do the relations of production. Then the bourgeois begins to gain political sway: "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

A question we might consider here is, how our political system supports capitalists.

Marx continues, "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal ties, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation."

So, the bourgeois tears apart other relations of production. In the feudal age, man was naturally bound to his superiors (by land, by manor). Only self-interest and money are of importance now. All notions of sentimentalism and chivalry are drowned by the icy waters of egotistical calculation—how can I increase my capital? Personal worth is leveled out by exchange values.

We each become exchangeable—just like an object on the market. We become numbers and can be replaced with any other individual when we are wage-laborers: doctors, lawyers, educators, priests, and poets.

As this system expands, industries no longer use local natural ingredients but import such from the most remote areas and industries produce commodities that are used world-wide.

This relates to a claim that Adam Smith makes regarding importing goods. He claims Smith's that if one can import a good for less cost than using a local resource, one ought to be able to do so. His view is that it will lower the cost for the capitalist, which, will, in turn, lower the cost for the buyer. He believes that any jobs lost due to import will be replaced with other jobs, so it will all work out in the end. Also, think about our current political discourse regarding trade, tariffs, import, and outsourced jobs.

Nations are no longer independent and self-sufficient, but instead are dependent upon other nations. We are a

global community now—even with barbaric societies. This is because of the goods they can offer or the goods we can sell.

In order for the system to continue, new wants and desires are produced—the only way to satisfy a particular desire is with some product that is produced, regardless of where that good is produced.

If you are familiar with the show *Madmen*, think about how Draper's job involved the creation of desires and new markets. The creation of new markets is something that Smith acknowledged as part of the capitalist system and its ability to grow wealth.

The laborer as a commodity—the worst kind of commodity for Marx—is like every other commodity: exposed to the flux of the market and forced into competition with others. “Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his [human] race. But the price of a commodity, and also of labor, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases.”

The average price of wage-labor is the minimum wage (i.e. the amount that is required to keep the laborer in bare existence as a laborer and to reproduce more laborers). Marx explains that they (he and his co-author Engels) by no means intend to abolish the personal appropriation of the products of labor. All they want to do away with is the miserable character of appropriation, under which the laborer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only insofar as the interest of the ruling class requires it. In other words, the point is not to do away with the individual's access to goods, but instead to do away with how we appropriate such goods.

In the end, Marx believed that the proletariat class would rise up and the fall of capitalism would occur. It seems clear that he thought this would've happened by now, but I suppose in the end, time will tell.

Key Concepts

division of labor

philosophical idealism

philosophical materialism

productive forces

relations of production

social consciousness

capitalist

commodity

alienation from the product of labor

alienation from the activity of labor

alienation from the workers' species being

alienation of human beings from one another

communism

bourgeois

proletariat

private property

market exchange and exchange value



An Introduction to Marx's Philosophic and Economic Thought by Heather Wilburn, Ph.D is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Washburn, P. (2003). *The many faces of wisdom: Great philosophers' visions of philosophy* (1st ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ, NJ: Prentice Hall.
2. *ibid.*

MANIFESTO OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Frederick Engels and Karl Marx

Editor's Note: This chapter contains selected readings from The Communist Manifesto. It includes the Preface, the Preamble, and Parts I and II; it does not include Parts III and IV.

The Communist Manifesto

Preface.

The “Manifesto” was published as the platform of the “Communist League” a workingmen’s association, first exclusively German, later an international, and under the political conditions of the Continent before 1848, unavoidably a secret society. At a Congress of the League, held in London in November, 1847, Marx and Engels were commissioned to prepare for publication a complete theoretical and practical party-program. Drawn up in German, in January, 1848, the manuscript was sent to the printer in London a few weeks before the French revolution of February 24th. A French translation was brought out in Paris, shortly before the insurrection of June, 1848. The first English translation, by Miss Helen Macfarlane, appeared in George Julian Harney’s “Red Republican,” London, 1850. A Danish and a Polish edition had also been published.

The defeat of the Parisian insurrection of June, 1848—the first great battle between Proletariat and Bourgeoisie—drove again into the background, for a time, the social and political aspirations of the European working class. Thenceforth, the struggle for supremacy was again, as it had been before the revolution of February, solely between different sections of the propertied class; the working class was reduced to a fight for political elbow-room, and to the position of extreme wing of the Middle-class Radicals. Wherever independent proletarian movements continued to show signs of life, they were ruthlessly hunted down. Thus the Prussian police hunted out the Central Board of the Communist League, then located in Cologne. The members were arrested, and after eighteen months’ imprisonment, they were tried in October, 1852. This celebrated “Cologne Communist trial” lasted from October 4th till November 12th; seven of the prisoners were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in a fortress, varying from three to six years. Immediately after the sentence the League was formally dissolved by the remaining members. As to the “Manifesto,” it seemed thenceforth to be doomed to oblivion.

When the European working class had recovered sufficient strength for another attack on the ruling classes, the International Working Men's Association sprang up. But this association, formed with the express aim of welding into one body the whole militant proletariat of Europe and America, could not at once proclaim the principles laid down in the "Manifesto." The International was bound to have a program broad enough to be acceptable to the English Trades' Unions, to the followers of Proudhon in France, Belgium, Italy and Spain and to the Lassalleans¹ in Germany. Marx, who drew up this program to the satisfaction of all parties, entirely trusted to the intellectual development of the working-class, which was sure to result from combined action and mutual discussion. The very events and vicissitudes of the struggle against Capital, the defeats even more than the victories, could not help bringing home to men's minds the insufficiency of their various favorite nostrums, and preparing the way for a more complete insight into the true conditions of working-class emancipation. And Marx was right. The International, on its breaking up in 1874, left the workers quite different men from what it had found them in 1864. Proudhonism in France, Lasalleanism in Germany were dying out, and even the Conservative English Trades' Unions, though most of them had long since severed their connection with the International, were gradually advancing towards that point at which, last year at Swansea, their president could say in their name, "Continental Socialism has lost its terrors for us." In fact, the principles of the "Manifesto" had made considerable headway among the working men of all countries.

The Manifesto itself thus came to the front again. The German text had been, since 1850, reprinted several times in Switzerland, England and America. In 1872, it was translated into English in New York, where the translation was published in "Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly." From this English version, a French one was made in "Le Socialiste" of New York. Since then at least two more English translations, more or less mutilated, have been brought out in America, and one of them has been reprinted in England. The first Russian translation, made by Bakounine, was published at Herzen's "Kolokol" office in Geneva, about 1863; a second one, by the heroic Vera Zasulitch, also in Geneva, 1882. A new Danish edition is to be found in "Socialdemokratisk Bibliothek," Copenhagen, 1885; a fresh French translation in "Le Socialiste," Paris, 1886. From this latter a Spanish version was prepared and published in Madrid, 1886. The German reprints are not to be counted, there have been twelve altogether at the least. An Armenian translation, which was to be published in Constantinople some months ago, did not see the light, I am told, because the publisher was afraid of bringing out a book with the name of Marx on it, while the translator declined to call it his own production. Of further translations into other languages I have heard, but have not seen them. Thus the history of the Manifesto reflects, to a great extent, the history of the modern working-class movement; at present it is undoubtedly the most widespread, the most international production of all Socialist literature, the common platform acknowledged by millions of working men from Siberia to California.

Yet, when it was written, we could not have called it a Socialist Manifesto. By Socialists, in 1847, were understood, on the one hand, the adherents of the various Utopian systems: Owenites in England, Fourierists in France, both of them already reduced to the position of mere sects, and gradually dying out; on the other hand, the most multifarious social quacks, who, by all manners of tinkering, professed to redress, without any danger to capital

and profit, all sorts of social grievances, in both cases men outside the working class movement, and looking rather to the “educated” classes for support. Whatever portion of the working class had become convinced of the insufficiency of mere political revolutions, and had proclaimed the necessity of a total social change, that portion, then, called itself Communist. It was a crude, rough-hewn, purely instinctive sort of Communism; still, it touched the cardinal point and was powerful enough amongst the working class to produce the Utopian Communism, in France, of Cabet, and in Germany, of Weitling. Thus, Socialism was, in 1847, a middle-class movement, Communism a working class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, “respectable”; Communism was the very opposite. And as our notion, from the very beginning, was that “the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself,” there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we must take. Moreover, we have, ever since, been far from repudiating it.

The “Manifesto” being our joint production, I consider myself bound to state that the fundamental proposition which forms its nucleus, belongs to Marx. That proposition is: that in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; that the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolution in which, now-a-days, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class—the proletariat—cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class—the bourgeoisie—without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class-distinctions and class struggles.

This proposition which, in my opinion, is destined to do for history what Darwin’s theory has done for biology, we, both of us, had been gradually approaching for some years before 1845. How far I had independently progressed towards it, is best shown by my “Condition of the Working Class in England.”² But when I again met Marx at Brussels, in spring, 1845, he had it ready worked out, and put it before me, in terms almost as clear as those in which I have stated it here.

From our joint preface to the German edition of 1872, I quote the following:

“However much the state of things may have altered during the last 25 years, the general principles laid down in this Manifesto, are, on the whole, as correct today as ever. Here and there some detail might be improved. The practical application of the principles will depend, as the manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organization of the working-class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this program has in some details become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune,

viz., that “the working-class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.” (See “The Civil War in France; Address of the General Council of the International Working-men’s Association,” Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Co., where this point is further developed). Further, it is self-evident, that the criticism of socialist literature is deficient in relation to the present time, because it comes down only to 1847; also, that the remarks on the relation of the Communists to the various opposition-parties (Section IV.), although in principle still correct, yet in practice are antiquated, because the political situation has been entirely changed, and the progress of history has swept from off the earth the greater portion of the political parties there enumerated.

“But then, the Manifesto has become a historical document which we have no longer any right to alter.”

The present translation is by Mr. Samuel Moore, the translator of the greater portion of Marx’s “Capital”. We have revised it in common, and I have added a few notes explanatory of historical allusions.

Frederick Engels.

London, 30th January, 1888.

MANIFESTO of the Communist Party

***A SPECTRE** is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre; Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.*

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?

Two things result from this fact.

Communism is already acknowledged by all European Powers to be itself a Power.

It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself.

To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London, and sketched the following manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.

I.

BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS. ³

The history of all hitherto existing society ⁴is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master⁵ and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold graduation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the middle ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature; it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

From the serfs of the middle ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, under which industrial production was monopolized by close guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle-class; division of labor between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labor in each single workshop.

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand, ever rising. Even manufacture no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by

the giant, Modern Industry, the place of the industrial middle-class, by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world-market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, an armed and self-governing association in the mediaeval commune,⁶ here independent urban republic (as in Italy and Germany), there taxable “third estate” of the monarchy (as in France), afterwards, in the period of manufacture proper, serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy as a counterpoise against the nobility, and, in fact, corner stone of the great monarchies in general, the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world-market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-laborers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigor in the Middle Ages, which Reactionists so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first

to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property.

National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world-literature.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i. e., to become bourgeois themselves. In a word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the

population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralized means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralization. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together in one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?

We see then: the means of production and of exchange on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organization of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to burst asunder; they were burst asunder.

Into their places stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economical and political sway of the bourgeois class.

A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence,

too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working-class—the proletarians.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working-class, developed, a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and also of labor, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labor increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work enacted in a given time, or by increased speed of the machinery, etc.

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they the slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State, they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the over-looker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.

The less the skill and exertion or strength implied in manual labor, in other words, the more modern industry

becomes developed, the more is the labor of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labor, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.

No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.

The lower strata of the Middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.

The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual laborers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labor, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages.

At this stage the laborers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeoisie. Thus the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie.

But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number, it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labor, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralize the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.

This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the ten-hour bill in England was carried.

Altogether collisions between the classes of the old society further, in many ways, the course of development of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times, with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

Further, as we have already seen, entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence. These also supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress.

Finally, in times when the class-struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact, within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movements as a whole.

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The lower middle-class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are, therefore, not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by

chance they are revolutionary, they are so, only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat.

The “dangerous class,” the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.

In the conditions of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family-relations; modern industrial labor, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand, sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.

In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie, lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.

Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern laborer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule, because it is incompetent

to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.

The essential condition for the existence, and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labor. Wage-labor rests exclusively on competition between the laborers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the laborers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

II.

PROLETARIANS AND COMMUNISTS.

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties; formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical

movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of Communism.

All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property.

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonism, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.

We Communists have been reproached with the desire of abolishing the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man's own labor, which property is alleged to be the ground work of all personal freedom, activity and independence.

Hard-won, self-acquired, self-earned property! Do you mean the property of the petty artisan and of the small peasant, a form of property that preceded the bourgeois form? There is no need to abolish that; the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it, and is still destroying it daily.

Or do you mean modern bourgeois private property?

But does wage-labor create any property for the laborer? Not a bit. It creates capital, i.e., that kind of property which exploits wage-labor, and which cannot increase except upon condition of getting a new supply of wage-labor for fresh exploitation. Property, in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital and wage-labor. Let us examine both sides of this antagonism.

To be a capitalist, is to have not only a purely personal, but a social status in production. Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion.

Capital is therefore not a personal, it is a social power.

When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class-character.

Let us now take wage-labor.

The average price of wage-labor is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence, which is absolutely requisite to keep the laborer in bare existence as a laborer. What, therefore, the wage-laborer appropriates by means of his labor, merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence. We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labor, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life, and that leaves no surplus wherewith to command the labor of others. All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the laborer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.

In bourgeois society, living labor is but a mean to increase accumulated labor. In Communist society, accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer. In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present; in communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality.

And the abolition of this state of things is called by the bourgeois, abolition of individuality and freedom! And rightly so. The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.

By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying.

But if selling and buying disappears, free selling and buying disappears also. This talk about free selling and buying, and all the other “brave words” of our bourgeoisie about freedom in general, have a meaning, if any, only in contrast with restricted selling and buying, with the fettered traders of the Middle Ages, but have no meaning when opposed to the Communistic abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production, and of the bourgeoisie itself.

You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is, the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society.

In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend.

From the moment when labor can no longer be converted into capital, money, or rent, into a social power capable of being monopolized, i.e., from the moment when individual property can no longer be transformed into bourgeois property, into capital, from that moment, you say, individuality vanishes.

You must, therefore, confess that by “individual” you mean no other person than the bourgeois, than the middle-class owner of property. This person must, indeed, be swept out of the way, and made impossible.

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society: all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation.

It has been objected, that upon the abolition of private property all work will cease, and universal laziness will overtake us.

According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work. The whole of this objection is but another expression of the tautology: that there can no longer be any wage-labor when there is no longer any capital.

All objections urged against the Communistic mode of producing and appropriating material products, have, in the same way, been urged against the Communistic modes of producing and appropriating intellectual products. Just as, to the bourgeois, the disappearance of class property is the disappearance of production itself, so the disappearance of class culture is to him identical with the disappearance of all culture.

That culture, the loss of which he laments, is, for the enormous majority, a mere training to act as a machine.

But don't wrangle with us so long as you apply, to our intended abolition of bourgeois property, the standard of your bourgeois notions of freedom, culture, law, etc. Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will, whose essential character and direction are determined by the economic conditions of existence of your class.

The selfish misconception that induces you to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason, the social forms springing from your present mode of production and form of property—historical relations that rise and disappear in the progress of production—this misconception you share with every ruling class that has preceded you. What you see clearly in the case of ancient property, what you admit in the case of feudal property, you are of course forbidden to admit in the case of your own bourgeois form of property.

Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.

But, you will say, we destroy the most hallowed of relations, when we replace home education by social.

And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention, direct or indirect, of society by means of schools, etc.? The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class.

The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of Modern Industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor.

But you Communists would introduce community of women, screams the whole bourgeoisie in chorus.

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion, than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production.

For the rest, nothing is more ridiculous than the virtuous indignation of our bourgeois at the community of women which, they pretend, is to be openly and officially established by the Communists. The Communists have no need to introduce community of women; it has existed almost from time immemorial.

Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each others' wives.

Bourgeois marriage is in reality a system of wives in common and thus, at the most, what the Communists might possibly be reproached with, is that they desire to introduce, in substitution for a hypocritically concealed, an openly legalized community of women. For the rest, it is self-evident, that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i. e., of prostitution both public and private.

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationalities.

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

National differences, and antagonisms between peoples, are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the

development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world-market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put a end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.

The charges against Communism made from a religious, a philosophical, and generally, from an ideological standpoint, are not deserving of serious examination.

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes in character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.

When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact, that within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence.

When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death-battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.

“Undoubtedly,” it will be said, “religious, moral, philosophical and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law, constantly survived this change.”

“There are, besides, eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience.”

What does this accusation reduce itself to? The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs.

But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part

of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms.

The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property-relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.

But let us have done with the bourgeois objections to Communism.

We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy, to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i. e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionizing the mode of production.

These measures will of course be different in different countries.

Nevertheless in the most advanced countries the following will be pretty generally applicable:

- 1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.*
- 2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.*
- 3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.*
- 4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.*
- 5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.*
- 6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.*
- 7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.*
- 8. Equal liability of all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.*
- 9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of population over the country.*
- 10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc., etc.*

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

Citation

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- *Manifesto of the Communist Party (1847).* **Authored by:** Frederick Engels & Karl Marx. **Provided by:** Marx-Engels Archive. **Located at:** <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>. **License:** CC-BY-SA



Manifesto of the Communist Party by Frederick Engels and Karl Marx is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Lassalle personally, to us, always acknowledged himself to be a disciple of Marx, and, as such, stood on the ground of the “Manifesto.” But in his public agitation, 1860-64, he did not go beyond demanding co-operative workshops supported by State credit.
2. *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844.* By Frederick Engels. Translated by Florence K. W. ischnewetzky—London, Swan, Sonnenschein & Co.
3. By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. [Engels, 1888 English edition]
4. That is, all written history. In 1847, the pre-history of society, the social organisation existing previous to recorded history, all but unknown. Since then, August von Haxthausen (1792-1866) discovered common ownership of land in Russia, Georg Ludwig von Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history, and, by and by, village communities were found to be, or to have been, the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland. The inner organisation of this primitive communistic society was laid bare, in its typical form, by Lewis Henry Morgan's (1818-1881) crowning discovery of the true nature of the gens and its relation to the tribe. With the dissolution of the

primeval communities, society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes. I have attempted to retrace this dissolution in The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, second edition, Stuttgart, 1886. [Engels, 1888 English Edition and 1890 German Edition (with the last sentence omitted)]

5. *Guild-master, that is, a full member of a guild, a master within, not a head of a guild. [Engels, 1888 English Edition]*
6. *This was the name given their urban communities by the townsmen of Italy and France, after they had purchased or conquered their initial rights of self-government from their feudal lords. [Engels, 1890 German edition] “Commune” was the name taken in France by the nascent towns even before they had conquered from their feudal lords and masters local self-government and political rights as the “Third Estate.” Generally speaking, for the economical development of the bourgeoisie, England is here taken as the typical country, for its political development, France. [Engels, 1888 English Edition]*

ANARCHY

Pëtr Kropotkin

ANARCHISM (from the Gr. *an*, and *archos*, contrary to authority), the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government — harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. In a society developed on these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the state in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent — for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs. Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary — as is seen in organic life at large — harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the state.

If, it is contended, society were organized on these principles, man would not be limited in the free exercise of his powers in productive work by a capitalist monopoly, maintained by the state; nor would he be limited in the exercise of his will by a fear of punishment, or by obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities, which both lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind. He would be guided in his actions by his own understanding, which necessarily would bear the impression of a free action and reaction between his own self and the ethical conceptions of his surroundings. Man would thus be enabled to obtain the full development of all his faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral, without being hampered by overwork for the monopolists, or by the servility and inertia of mind of the great number. He would thus be able to reach full individualization, which is not possible either under the present system of individualism, or under any system of state socialism in the so-called Volkstaat (popular state).

The anarchist writers consider, moreover, that their conception is not a utopia, constructed on the a priori method, after a few desiderata have been taken as postulates. It is derived, they maintain, from an analysis of tendencies that are at work already, even though state socialism may find a temporary favour with the reformers. The progress of modern technics, which wonderfully simplifies the production of all the necessities of life; the growing spirit of independence, and the rapid spread of free initiative and free understanding in all branches of

activity — including those which formerly were considered as the proper attribution of church and state — are steadily reinforcing the no-government tendency.

As to their economical conceptions, the anarchists, in common with all socialists, of whom they constitute the left wing, maintain that the now prevailing system of private ownership in land, and our capitalist production for the sake of profits, represent a monopoly which runs against both the principles of justice and the dictates of utility. They are the main obstacle which prevents the successes of modern technics from being brought into the service of all, so as to produce general well-being. The anarchists consider the wage-system and capitalist production altogether as an obstacle to progress. But they point out also that the state was, and continues to be, the chief instrument for permitting the few to monopolize the land, and the capitalists to appropriate for themselves a quite disproportionate share of the yearly accumulated surplus of production. Consequently, while combating the present monopolization of land, and capitalism altogether, the anarchists combat with the same energy the state, as the main support of that system. Not this or that special form, but the state altogether, whether it be a monarchy or even a republic governed by means of the referendum.

The state organization, having always been, both in ancient and modern history (Macedonian Empire, Roman Empire, modern European states grown up on the ruins of the autonomous cities), the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the state all the main sources of economical life — the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on — as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands (education, state-supported religions, defence of the territory, etc.), would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism. True progress lies in the direction of decentralization, both territorial and functional, in the development of the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound, in lieu of the present hierarchy from the centre to the periphery.

In common with most socialists, the anarchists recognize that, like all evolution in nature, the slow evolution of society is followed from time to time by periods of accelerated evolution which are called revolutions; and they think that the era of revolutions is not yet closed. Periods of rapid changes will follow the periods of slow evolution, and these periods must be taken advantage of — not for increasing and widening the powers of the state, but for reducing them, through the organization in every township or commune of the local groups of producers and consumers, as also the regional, and eventually the international, federations of these groups.

In virtue of the above principles the anarchists refuse to be party to the present state organization and to support it by infusing fresh blood into it. They do not seek to constitute, and invite the working men not to constitute, political parties in the parliaments. Accordingly, since the foundation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864–1866, they have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organizations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation.

The historical development of anarchism

The conception of society just sketched, and the tendency which is its dynamic expression, have always existed in mankind, in opposition to the governing hierarchic conception and tendency — now the one and now the other taking the upper hand at different periods of history. To the former tendency we owe the evolution, by the masses themselves, of those institutions — the clan, the village community, the guild, the free medieval city — by means of which the masses resisted the encroachments of the conquerors and the power-seeking minorities. The same tendency asserted itself with great energy in the great religious movements of medieval times, especially in the early movements of the reform and its forerunners. At the same time it evidently found its expression in the writings of some thinkers, since the times of Lao-tsze, although, owing to its non-scholastic and popular origin, it obviously found less sympathy among the scholars than the opposed tendency.

*As has been pointed out by Prof. Adler in his *Geschichte des Sozialismus und Kommunismus*, Aristippus (430 BC), one of the founders of the Cyrenaic school, already taught that the wise must not give up their liberty to the state, and in reply to a question by Socrates he said that he did not desire to belong either to the governing or the governed class. Such an attitude, however, seems to have been dictated merely by an Epicurean attitude towards the life of the masses.*

The best exponent of anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece was Zeno (342–267 or 270 BC), from Crete, the founder of the Stoic philosophy, who distinctly opposed his conception of a free community without government to the state-utopia of Plato. He repudiated the omnipotence of the state, its intervention and regimentation, and proclaimed the sovereignty of the moral law of the individual — remarking already that, while the necessary instinct of self-preservation leads man to egotism, nature has supplied a corrective to it by providing man with another instinct — that of sociability. When men are reasonable enough to follow their natural instincts, they will unite across the frontiers and constitute the cosmos. They will have no need of law-courts or police, will have no temples and no public worship, and use no money — free gifts taking the place of the exchanges. Unfortunately, the writings of Zeno have not reached us and are only known through fragmentary quotations. However, the fact that his very wording is similar to the wording now in use, shows how deeply is laid the tendency of human nature of which he was the mouthpiece.

*In medieval times we find the same views on the state expressed by the illustrious bishop of Alba, Marco Girolamo Vida, in his first dialogue *De dignitate reipublicae* (Ferd. Cavalli, in *Mem. dell'Istituto Veneto*, xiii.; Dr E. Nys, *Researches in the History of Economics*). But it is especially in several early Christian movements, beginning with the ninth century in Armenia, and in the preachings of the early Hussites, particularly Chojecki, and the early Anabaptists, especially Hans Denk (cf. Keller, *Ein Apostel der Wiedertaufer*), that one finds the same ideas forcibly expressed — special stress being laid of course on their moral aspects.*

Rabelais and Fenelon, in their utopias, have also expressed similar ideas, and they were also current in the eighteenth century amongst the French Encyclopaedists, as may be concluded from separate expressions occasionally

met with in the writings of Rousseau, from Diderot's Preface to the Voyage of Bougainville, and so on. However, in all probability such ideas could not be developed then, owing to the rigorous censorship of the Roman Catholic Church.

These ideas found their expression later during the great French Revolution. While the Jacobins did all in their power to centralize everything in the hands of the government, it appears now, from recently published documents, that the masses of the people, in their municipalities and 'sections', accomplished a considerable constructive work. They appropriated for themselves the election of the judges, the organization of supplies and equipment for the army, as also for the large cities, work for the unemployed, the management of charities, and so on. They even tried to establish a direct correspondence between the 36,000 communes of France through the intermediary of a special board, outside the National Assembly (cf. Sigismund Lacroix, *Actes de la commune de Paris*).

It was Godwin, in his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (2 vols., 1793), who was the first to formulate the political and economical conceptions of anarchism, even though he did not give that name to the ideas developed in his remarkable work. Laws, he wrote, are not a product of the wisdom of our ancestors: they are the product of their passions, their timidity, their jealousies and their ambition. The remedy they offer is worse than the evils they pretend to cure. If and only if all laws and courts were abolished, and the decisions in the arising contests were left to reasonable men chosen for that purpose, real justice would gradually be evolved. As to the state, Godwin frankly claimed its abolition. A society, he wrote, can perfectly well exist without any government: only the communities should be small and perfectly autonomous. Speaking of property, he stated that the rights of every one 'to every substance capable of contributing to the benefit of a human being' must be regulated by justice alone: the substance must go 'to him who most wants it'. His conclusion was communism. Godwin, however, had not the courage to maintain his opinions. He entirely rewrote later on his chapter on property and mitigated his communist views in the second edition of *Political Justice* (8vo, 1796).

Proudhon was the first to use, in 1840 (*Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* first memoir), the name of anarchy with application to the no government state of society. The name of 'anarchists' had been freely applied during the French Revolution by the Girondists to those revolutionaries who did not consider that the task of the Revolution was accomplished with the overthrow of Louis XVI, and insisted upon a series of economical measures being taken (the abolition of feudal rights without redemption, the return to the village communities of the communal lands enclosed since 1669, the limitation of landed property to 120 acres, progressive income-tax, the national organization of exchanges on a just value basis, which already received a beginning of practical realization, and so on).

Now Proudhon advocated a society without government, and used the word anarchy to describe it. Proudhon repudiated, as is known, all schemes of communism, according to which mankind would be driven into communistic monasteries or barracks, as also all the schemes of state or state-aided socialism which were advocated by Louis Blanc and the collectivists. When he proclaimed in his first memoir on property that 'Property is theft', he meant only property in its present, Roman-law, sense of 'right of use and abuse'; in property-rights, on the other

hand, understood in the limited sense of possession, he saw the best protection against the encroachments of the state. At the same time he did not want violently to dispossess the present owners of land, dwelling-houses, mines, factories and so on. He preferred to attain the same end by rendering capital incapable of earning interest; and this he proposed to obtain by means of a national bank, based on the mutual confidence of all those who are engaged in production, who would agree to exchange among themselves their produces at cost-value, by means of labour cheques representing the hours of labour required to produce every given commodity. Under such a system, which Proudhon described as 'Mutuellisme', all the exchanges of services would be strictly equivalent. Besides, such a bank would be enabled to lend money without interest, levying only something like 1 per cent, or even less, for covering the cost of administration. Everyone being thus enabled to borrow the money that would be required to buy a house, nobody would agree to pay any more a yearly rent for the use of it. A general 'social liquidation' would thus be rendered easy, without violent expropriation. The same applied to mines, railways, factories and so on.

In a society of this type the state would be useless. The chief relations between citizens would be based on free agreement and regulated by mere account keeping. The contests might be settled by arbitration. A penetrating criticism of the state and all possible forms of government, and a deep insight into all economic problems, were well-known characteristics of Proudhon's work.

It is worth noticing that French mutualism had its precursor in England, in William Thompson, who began by mutualism before he became a communist, and in his followers John Gray (*A Lecture on Human Happiness*, 1825; *The Social System*, 1831) and J. F. Bray (*Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy*, 1839). It had also its precursor in America. Josiah Warren, who was born in 1798 (cf. W. Bailie, *Josiah Warren, the First American Anarchist*, Boston, 1900), and belonged to Owen's 'New Harmony', considered that the failure of this enterprise was chiefly due to the suppression of individuality and the lack of initiative and responsibility. These defects, he taught, were inherent to every scheme based upon authority and the community of goods. He advocated, therefore, complete individual liberty. In 1827 he opened in Cincinnati a little country store which was the first 'equity store', and which the people called 'time store', because it was based on labour being exchanged hour for hour in all sorts of produce. 'Cost — the limit of price', and consequently 'no interest', was the motto of his store, and later on of his 'equity village', near New York, which was still in existence in 1865. Mr Keith's 'House of Equity' at Boston, founded in 1855, is also worthy of notice.

While the economical, and especially the mutual-banking, ideas of Proudhon found supporters and even a practical application in the United States, his political conception of anarchy found but little echo in France, where the Christian socialism of Lamennais and the Fourierists, and the state socialism of Louis Blanc and the followers of Saint-Simon, were dominating. These ideas found, however, some temporary support among the left-wing Hegelians in Germany, Moses Hess in 1843, and Karl Grün in 1845, who advocated anarchism. Besides, the authoritarian communism of Wilhelm Weitling having given origin to opposition amongst the Swiss working men, Wilhelm Marr gave expression to it in the forties.

On the other side, individualist anarchism found, also in Germany, its fullest expression in Max Stirner (Kaspar

Schmidt), whose remarkable works (Der Einzige und sein Eigentum and articles contributed to the Rheinische Zeitung) remained quite overlooked until they were brought into prominence by John Henry Mackay.

Prof. V. Basch, in a very able introduction to his interesting book, L'individualisme anarchiste: Max Stirner (1904), has shown how the development of the German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, and 'the absolute' of Schelling and the Geist of Hegel, necessarily provoked, when the anti-Hegelian revolt began, the preaching of the same 'absolute' in the camp of the rebels. This was done by Stirner, who advocated, not only a complete revolt against the state and against the servitude which authoritarian communism would impose upon men, but also the full liberation of the individual from all social and moral bonds — the rehabilitation of the 'I', the supremacy of the individual, complete 'amoralism', and the 'association of the egotists'. The final conclusion of that sort of individual anarchism has been indicated by Prof. Basch. It maintains that the aim of all superior civilization is, not to permit all members of the community to develop in a normal way, but to permit certain better endowed individuals 'fully to develop', even at the cost of the happiness and the very existence of the mass of mankind. It is thus a return towards the most common individualism, advocated by all the would-be superior minorities, to which indeed man owes in his history precisely the state and the rest, which these individualists combat. Their individualism goes so far as to end in a negation of their own starting-point — to say nothing of the impossibility for the individual to attain a really full development in the conditions of oppression of the masses by the 'beautiful aristocracies'. His development would remain unilateral. This is why this direction of thought, notwithstanding its undoubtedly correct and useful advocacy of the full development of each individuality, finds a hearing only in limited artistic and literary circles.

Anarchism in the International Working Men's Association

A general depression in the propaganda of all fractions of socialism followed, as is known, after the defeat of the uprising of the Paris working men in June 1848 and the fall of the Republic. All the socialist press was gagged during the reaction period, which lasted fully twenty years. Nevertheless, even anarchist thought began to make some progress, namely in the writings of Bellegarrique (Caeurderoy), and especially Joseph Déjacque (Les Lazareacutes, L'Humanisphère, an anarchist-communist utopia, lately discovered and reprinted). The socialist movement revived only after 1864, when some French working men, all 'mutualists', meeting in London during the Universal Exhibition with English followers of Robert Owen, founded the International Working Men's Association. This association developed very rapidly and adopted a policy of direct economical struggle against capitalism, without interfering in the political parliamentary agitation, and this policy was followed until 1871. However, after the Franco-German War, when the International Association was prohibited in France after the uprising of the Commune, the German working men, who had received manhood suffrage for elections to the newly constituted imperial parliament, insisted upon modifying the tactics of the International, and began to build up a Social Democratic political party. This soon led to a division in the Working Men's Association, and the Latin federations, Spanish, Italian, Belgian and Jurassic (France could not be represented), constituted among themselves a Federal union which broke entirely with the Marxist general council of the

International. Within these federations developed now what may be described as modern anarchism. After the names of 'Federalists' and 'Anti-authoritarians' had been used for some time by these federations the name of 'anarchists', which their adversaries insisted upon applying to them, prevailed, and finally it was revindicated.

Bakunin (q.v.) soon became the leading spirit among these Latin federations for the development of the principles of anarchism, which he did in a number of writings, pamphlets and letters. He demanded the complete abolition of the state, which — he wrote — is a product of religion, belongs to a lower state of civilization, represents the negation of liberty, and spoils even that which it undertakes to do for the sake of general well-being. The state was an historically necessary evil, but its complete extinction will be, sooner or later, equally necessary. Repudiating all legislation, even when issuing from universal suffrage, Bakunin claimed for each nation, each region and each commune, full autonomy, so long as it is not a menace to its neighbours, and full independence for the individual, adding that one becomes really free only when, and in proportion as, all others are free. Free federations of the communes would constitute free nations.

As to his economical conceptions, Bakunin described himself, in common with his Federalist comrades of the International (César De Paepe, James Guillaume, Schwitzguébel), a 'collectivist anarchist' — not in the sense of Vidal and Pecqueur in the 1840s, or of their modern Social Democratic followers, but to express a state of things in which all necessities for production are owned in common by the labour groups and the free communes, while the ways of retribution of labour, communist or otherwise, would be settled by each group for itself. Social revolution, the near approach of which was foretold at that time by all socialists, would be the means of bringing into life the new conditions.

*The Jurassic, the Spanish and the Italian federations and sections of the International Working Men's Association, as also the French, the German and the American anarchist groups, were for the next years the chief centres of anarchist thought and propaganda. They refrained from any participation in parliamentary politics, and always kept in close contact with the labour organizations. However, in the second half of the 'eighties and the early 'nineties of the nineteenth century, when the influence of the anarchists began to be felt in strikes, in the 1st of May demonstrations, where they promoted the idea of a general strike for an eight hours' day, and in the anti-militarist propaganda in the army, violent prosecutions were directed against them, especially in the Latin countries (including physical torture in the Barcelona Castle) and the United States (the execution of five Chicago anarchists in 1887). Against these prosecutions the anarchists retaliated by acts of violence which in their turn were followed by more executions from above, and new acts of revenge from below. This created in the general public the impression that violence is the substance of anarchism, a view repudiated by its supporters, who hold that in reality violence is resorted to by all parties in proportion as their open action is obstructed by repression, and exceptional laws render them outlaws. (Cf. *Anarchism and Outrage*, by C. M. Wilson, and *Report of the Spanish Atrocities Committee*, in 'Freedom Pamphlets'; *A Concise History of the Great Trial of the Chicago Anarchists*, by Dyer Lum (New York, 1886); *The Chicago Martyrs: Speeches, etc.*).*

Anarchism continued to develop, partly in the direction of Proudhonian 'mutuellisme', but chiefly as communist-

anarchism, to which a third direction, Christian-anarchism, was added by Leo Tolstoy, and a fourth, which might be ascribed as literary-anarchism, began amongst some prominent modern writers.

*The ideas of Proudhon, especially as regards mutual banking, corresponding with those of Josiah Warren, found a considerable following in the United States, creating quite a school, of which the main writers are Stephen Pearl Andrews, William Grene, Lysander Spooner (who began to write in 1850, and whose unfinished work, *Natural Law*, was full of promise), and several others, whose names will be found in Dr Nettlau's *Bibliographie de l'anarchie*.*

*A prominent position among the individualist anarchists in America has been occupied by Benjamin R. Tucker, whose journal *Liberty* was started in 1881 and whose conceptions are a combination of those of Proudhon with those of Herbert Spencer. Starting from the statement that anarchists are egotists, strictly speaking, and that every group of individuals, be it a secret league of a few persons, or the Congress of the United States, has the right to oppress all mankind, provided it has the power to do so, that equal liberty for all and absolute equality ought to be the law, and 'mind every one your own business' is the unique moral law of anarchism, Tucker goes on to prove that a general and thorough application of these principles would be beneficial and would offer no danger, because the powers of every individual would be limited by the exercise of the equal rights of all others. He further indicated (following H. Spencer) the difference which exists between the encroachment on somebody's rights and resistance to such an encroachment; between domination and defence: the former being equally condemnable, whether it be encroachment of a criminal upon an individual, or the encroachment of one upon all others, or of all others upon one; while resistance to encroachment is defensible and necessary. For their self-defence, both the citizen and the group have the right to any violence, including capital punishment. Violence is also justified for enforcing the duty of keeping an agreement. Tucker thus follows Spencer, and, like him, opens (in the present writer's opinion) the way for reconstituting under the heading of 'defence' all the functions of the state. His criticism of the present state is very searching, and his defence of the rights of the individual very powerful. As regards his economical views B. R. Tucker follows Proudhon.*

The individualist anarchism of the American Proudhonians finds, however, but little sympathy amongst the working masses. Those who profess it — they are chiefly 'intellectuals' — soon realize that the individualization they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts, and either abandon the ranks of the anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economist or they retire into a sort of Epicurean amorality, or superman theory, similar to that of Stirner and Nietzsche. The great bulk of the anarchist working men prefer the anarchist-communist ideas which have gradually evolved out of the anarchist collectivism of the International Working Men's Association. To this direction belong — to name only the better known exponents of anarchism Elisé Reclus, Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure, Émile Pouget in France; Errico Malatesta and Covelli in Italy; R. Mella, A. Lorenzo, and the mostly unknown authors of many excellent manifestos in Spain; John Most amongst the Germans; Spies, Parsons and their followers in the United States, and so on; while Domela Nieuwenhuis occupies an intermediate position in Holland. The chief anarchist papers

which have been published since 1880 also belong to that direction; while a number of anarchists of this direction have joined the so-called syndicalist movement- the French name for the non-political labour movement, devoted to direct struggle with capitalism, which has lately become so prominent in Europe.

As one of the anarchist-communist direction, the present writer for many years endeavoured to develop the following ideas: to show the intimate, logical connection which exists between the modern philosophy of natural sciences and anarchism; to put anarchism on a scientific basis by the study of the tendencies that are apparent now in society and may indicate its further evolution; and to work out the basis of anarchist ethics. As regards the substance of anarchism itself, it was Kropotkin's aim to prove that communism at least partial — has more chances of being established than collectivism, especially in communes taking the lead, and that free, or anarchist-communism is the only form of communism that has any chance of being accepted in civilized societies; communism and anarchy are therefore two terms of evolution which complete each other, the one rendering the other possible and acceptable. He has tried, moreover, to indicate how, during a revolutionary period, a large city — if its inhabitants have accepted the idea could organize itself on the lines of free communism; the city guaranteeing to every inhabitant dwelling, food and clothing to an extent corresponding to the comfort now available to the middle classes only, in exchange for a half-day's, or five-hours' work; and how all those things which would be considered as luxuries might be obtained by everyone if he joins for the other half of the day all sorts of free associations pursuing all possible aims — educational, literary, scientific, artistic, sports and so on. In order to prove the first of these assertions he has analysed the possibilities of agriculture and industrial work, both being combined with brain work. And in order to elucidate the main factors of human evolution, he has analysed the part played in history by the popular constructive agencies of mutual aid and the historical role of the state.

*Without naming himself an anarchist, Leo Tolstoy, like his predecessors in the popular religious movements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Chojecki, Denk and many others, took the anarchist position as regards the state and property rights, deducing his conclusions from the general spirit of the teachings of the Christ and from the necessary dictates of reason. With all the might of his talent he made (especially in *The Kingdom of God in Yourself*) a powerful criticism of the church, the state and law altogether, and especially of the present property laws. He describes the state as the domination of the wicked ones, supported by brutal force. Robbers, he says, are far less dangerous than a well-organized government. He makes a searching criticism of the prejudices which are current now concerning the benefits conferred upon men by the church, the state and the existing distribution of property, and from the teachings of the Christ he deduces the rule of non-resistance and the absolute condemnation of all wars. His religious arguments are, however, so well combined with arguments borrowed from a dispassionate observation of the present evils, that the anarchist portions of his works appeal to the religious and the non-religious reader alike.*

It would be impossible to represent here, in a short sketch, the penetration, on the one hand, of anarchist ideas into modern literature, and the influence, on the other hand, which the libertarian ideas of the best contemporary writers have exercised upon the development of anarchism. One ought to consult the ten big volumes of

the Supplément Littéraire to the paper La Révolte and later the Temps Nouveaux, which contain reproductions from the works of hundreds of modern authors expressing anarchist ideas, in order to realize how closely anarchism is connected with all the intellectual movement of our own times. J. S. Mill's Liberty, Spencer's Individual versus the State, Marc Guyau's Morality without Obligation or Sanction, and Fouillée's La Morale, l'art et la religion, the works of Multatuli (E. Douwes Dekker), Richard Wagner's Art and Revolution, the works of Nietzsche, Emerson, W. Lloyd Garrison, Thoreau, Alexander Herzen, Edward Carpenter and so on; and in the domain of fiction, the dramas of Ibsen, the poetry of Walt Whitman, Tolstoy's War and Peace, Zola's Paris and Le Travail, the latest works of Merezhkovsky, and an infinity of works of less known authors, are full of ideas which show how closely anarchism is interwoven with the work that is going on in modern thought in the same direction of enfranchisement of man from the bonds of the state as well as from those of capitalism.

Citation and Use

The reading was taken from the following work.

Kropotkin, Pëtr. "Anarchism." The Anarchist Library, 1910. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-anarchism-from-the-encyclopaedia-britannica>.

This work is in the Public Domain.



This work (Anarchy by Pëtr Kropotkin) is free of known copyright restrictions.

SOCIAL CONTRACTS OF EXPLOITATION

Charles Mills

I will start with an overview of the Racial Contract, highlighting its differences from, as well as its similarities to, the classical and contemporary social contract. The Racial Contract is political, moral, and epistemological; the Racial Contract is real; and economically, in determining who gets what, the Racial Contract is an exploitation contract.

The Racial Contract is political, moral, and epistemological.

The “social contract” is actually several contracts in one. Contemporary contractarians usually distinguish, to begin with, between the political contract and the moral contract, before going on to make (subsidiary) distinctions within both. I contend, however, that the orthodox social contract also tacitly presupposes an “epistemological” contract, and that for the Racial Contract it is crucial to make this explicit.

The political contract is an account of the origins of government and our political obligations to it. The subsidiary distinction sometimes made in the political contract is between the contract to establish society (thereby taking “natural,” presocial individuals out of the state of nature and reconstructing and constituting them as members of a collective body) and the contract to establish the state (thereby transferring outright or delegating in a relationship of trust the rights and powers we have in the state of nature to a sovereign governing entity).¹ The moral contract, on the other hand, is the foundation of the moral code established for the society, by which the citizens are supposed to regulate their behavior. The subsidiary distinction here is between two interpretations (to be discussed) of the relationship between the moral contract and state-of-nature morality. In modern versions of the contract, most notably Rawls’s of course, the political contract largely vanishes, modern anthropology having long superseded the naive social origin histories of the classic contractarians. The focus is then almost exclusively on the moral contract. This is not conceived of as an actual historical event that took place on leaving the state of nature. Rather, the state of nature survives only in the attenuated form of what Rawls calls the “original position,” and the “contract” is a purely hypothetical exercise (a thought experiment) in establishing what a just “basic structure” would be, with a schedule of rights, duties, and liberties that shapes citizens’ moral psychology, conceptions of the right, notions of self-respect, etc.²

Now the Racial Contract—and the “Racial Contract” as a theory, that is, the distanced, critical examination of the Racial Contract—follows the classical model in being both sociopolitical and moral. It explains how society was created or crucially transformed, how the individuals in that society were reconstituted, how the state was

established, and how a particular moral code and a certain moral psychology were brought into existence. (As I have emphasized, the “Racial Contract” seeks to account for the way things are and how they came to be that way—the descriptive—as well as the way they should be—the normative—since indeed one of its complaints about white political philosophy is precisely its otherworldiness, its ignoring of basic political realities.) But the Racial Contract, as we will see, is also epistemological, prescribing norms for cognition to which its signatories must adhere. A preliminary characterization would run something like this:

The Racial Contract is that set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements (higher-level contracts about contracts, which set the limits of the contracts’ validity) between the members of one subset of humans, henceforth designated by (shifting) “racial” (phenotypical/genealogical/cultural) criteria C1, C2, C3 . . . as “white,” and coextensive (making due allowance for gender differentiation) with the class of full persons, to categorize the remaining subset of humans as “nonwhite” and of a different and inferior moral status, subpersons, so that they have a subordinate civil standing in the white or white-ruled polities the whites either already inhabit or establish or in transactions as aliens with these polities, and the moral and juridical rules normally regulating the behavior of whites in their dealings with one another either do not apply at all in dealings with nonwhites or apply only in a qualified form (depending in part on changing historical circumstances and what particular variety of nonwhite is involved), but in any case the general purpose of the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them. All whites are beneficiaries of the Contract, though some whites are not signatories to it.³

It will be obvious, therefore, that the Racial Contract is not a contract to which the nonwhite subset of humans can be a genuinely consenting party (though, depending again on the circumstances, it may sometimes be politic to pretend that this is the case). Rather, it is a contract between those categorized as white over the nonwhites, who are thus the objects rather than the subjects of the agreement.

The logic of the classic social contract, political, moral, and epistemological, then undergoes a corresponding refraction, with shifts, accordingly, in the key terms and principles.

Politically, the contract to establish society and the government, thereby transforming abstract raceless “men” from denizens of the state of nature into social creatures who are politically obligated to a neutral state, becomes the founding of a racial polity, whether white settler states (where preexisting populations already are or can be made sparse) or what are sometimes called “sojourner colonies,” the establishment of a white presence and colonial rule over existing societies (which are somewhat more populous, or whose inhabitants are more resistant to being made sparse). In addition, the colonizing mother country is also changed by its relation to these new polities, so that its own citizens are altered.

In the social contract, the crucial human metamorphosis is from “natural” man to “civil/political” man, from the resident of the state of nature to the citizen of the created society. This change can be more or less extreme, depending

on the theorist involved. For Rousseau it is a dramatic transformation, by which animal like creatures of appetite and instinct become citizens bound by justice and self-prescribed laws. For Hobbes it is a somewhat more laid-back affair by which people who look out primarily for themselves learn to constrain their self-interest for their own good.⁴ But in all cases the original “state of nature” supposedly indicates the condition of all men, and the social metamorphosis affects them all in the same way.

In the Racial Contract, by contrast, the crucial metamorphosis is the preliminary conceptual partitioning and corresponding transformation of human populations into “white” and “nonwhite” men. The role played by the “state of nature” then becomes radically different. In the white settler state, its role is not primarily to demarcate the (temporarily) pre-political state of “all” men (who are really white men), but rather the permanently pre-political state or, perhaps better, nonpolitical state (insofar as “pre-” suggests eventual internal movement toward) of nonwhite men. The establishment of society thus implies the denial that a society already existed; the creation of society requires the intervention of white men, who are thereby positioned as already sociopolitical beings. White men who are (definitionally) already part of society encounter nonwhites who are not, who are “savage” residents of a state of nature characterized in terms of wilderness, jungle, wasteland. These the white men bring partially into society as subordinate citizens or exclude on reservations or deny the existence of or exterminate. In the colonial case, admittedly preexisting but (for one reason or another) deficient societies (decadent, stagnant, corrupt) are taken over and run for the “benefit” of the nonwhite natives, who are deemed childlike, incapable of self-rule and handling their own affairs, and thus appropriately wards of the state. Here the natives are usually characterized as “barbarians” rather than “savages,” their state of nature being somewhat farther away (though not, of course, as remote and lost in the past—if it ever existed in the first place—as the Europeans’ state of nature). But in times of crisis the conceptual distance between the two, barbarian and savage, tends to shrink or collapse, for this technical distinction within the nonwhite population is vastly less important than the central distinction between whites and nonwhites.

In both cases, then, though in different ways, the Racial Contract establishes a racial polity, a racial state, and a racial juridical system, where the status of whites and nonwhites is clearly demarcated, whether by law or custom. And the purpose of this state, by contrast with the neutral state of classic contractarianism, is, *inter alia*, specifically to maintain and reproduce this racial order, securing the privileges and advantages of the full white citizens and maintaining the subordination of nonwhites. Correspondingly, the “consent” expected of the white citizens is in part conceptualized as a consent, whether explicit or tacit, to the racial order, to white supremacy, what could be called *Whiteness*. To the extent that those phenotypically/genealogically/culturally categorized as white fail to live up to the civic and political responsibilities of *Whiteness*, they are in dereliction of their duties as citizens. From the inception, then, race is in no way an “afterthought,” a “deviation” from ostensibly raceless Western ideals, but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals.

In the social contract tradition, there are two main possible relations between the moral contract and the political contract.

1. *On the first view, the moral contract represents preexisting objectivist morality (theological or secular) and thus constrains the terms of the political contract. This is the view found in Locke and Kant. In other words, there is an objective moral code in the state of nature itself, even if there are no policemen and judges to enforce it. So any society, government, and legal system that are established should be based on that moral code.*
2. *On the second view, the political contract creates morality as a conventionalist set of rules. So there is no independent objective moral criterion for judging one moral code to be superior to another or for indicting a society's established morality as unjust. On this conception, which is famously attributed to Hobbes, morality is just a set of rules for expediting the rational pursuit and coordination of our own interests without conflict with those other people who are doing the same thing.⁵*

The Racial Contract can accommodate both versions, but as it is the former version (the contract as described in Locke and Kant) rather than the latter version (the contract as described in Hobbes) which represents the mainstream of the contract tradition, I focus on that one.⁶ Here, the good polity is taken to rest on a preexisting moral foundation. Obviously, this is a far more attractive conception of a political system than Hobbes's view. The ideal of an objectively just polis to which we should aspire in our political activism goes back in the Western tradition all the way to Plato. In the medieval Christian worldview which continued to influence contractarianism well into the modern period, there is a "natural law" immanent in the structure of the universe which is supposed to direct us morally in striving for this ideal.⁷ (For the later, secular versions of contractarianism, the idea would simply be that people have rights and duties even in the state of nature because of their nature as human beings.) So it is wrong to steal, rape, kill in the state of nature even if there are no human laws written down saying it is wrong. These moral principles must constrain the human laws that are made and the civil rights that are assigned once the polity is established. In part, then, the political contract simply codifies a morality that already exists, writing it down and filling in the details, so we don't have to rely on a divinely implanted moral sense, or conscience, whose perceptions may on occasion be distorted by self-interest. What is right and wrong, just and unjust, in society will largely be determined by what is right and wrong, just and unjust, in the state of nature.

The character of this objective moral foundation is therefore obviously crucial. For the mainstream of the contractarian tradition, it is the freedom and equality of all men in the state of nature. As Locke writes in the Second Treatise, "To understand Political Power right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions.... A State also of Equality, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another."⁸ For Kant, similarly, it is our equal moral personhood.⁹ Contractarianism is (supposedly) committed to moral egalitarianism, the moral equality of all men, the notion that the interests of all men matter equally and all men must have equal rights. Thus, contractarianism is also committed to a principled and foundational opposition to the traditionalist hierarchical ideology of the old feudal order, the ideology of inherent ascribed status and natural subordination. It is this language of equality which echoes in the American and French Revolutions, the Declaration of Independence, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. And it is this moral egalitarianism that

must be retained in the allocation of rights and liberties in civil society. When in a modern Western society people insist on their rights and freedoms and express their outrage at not being treated equally, it is to these classic ideas that, whether they know it or not, they are appealing.

But as we will see in greater detail later on, the color-coded morality of the Racial Contract restricts the possession of this natural freedom and equality to white men. By virtue of their complete nonrecognition, or at best inadequate, myopic recognition, of the duties of natural law, nonwhites are appropriately relegated to a lower rung on the moral ladder (the Great Chain of Being).¹⁰ They are designated as born unfree and unequal. A partitioned social ontology is therefore created, a universe divided between persons and racial subpersons, Untermenschen, who may variously be black, red, brown, yellow—slaves, aborigines, colonial populations—but who are collectively appropriately known as “subject races.” And these subpersons—niggers, injuns, chinks, wogs, greasers, blackfellows, kaffirs, coolies, abos, dinks, googoos, gooks—are biologically destined never to penetrate the normative rights ceiling established for them below white persons. Henceforth, then, whether openly admitted or not, it is taken for granted that the grand ethical theories propounded in the development of Western moral and political thought are of restricted scope, explicitly or implicitly intended by their proponents to be restricted to persons, whites. The terms of the Racial Contract set the parameters for white morality as a whole, so that competing Lockean and Kantian contractarian theories of natural rights and duties, or later anticontractarian theories such as nineteenth-century utilitarianism, are all limited by its stipulations.

Finally, the Racial Contract requires its own peculiar moral and empirical epistemology, its norms and procedures for determining what counts as moral and factual knowledge of the world. In the standard accounts of contractarianism it is not usual to speak of there being an “epistemological” contract, but there is an epistemology associated with contractarianism, in the form of natural law. This provides us with a moral compass, whether in the traditional version of Locke—the light of reason implanted in us by God so we can discern objective right and wrong—or in the revisionist version of Hobbes—the ability to assess the objectively optimal prudential course of action and what it requires of us for self-interested cooperation with others. So through our natural faculties we come to know reality in both its factual and valuational aspects, the way things objectively are and what is objectively good or bad about them. I suggest we can think of this as an idealized consensus about cognitive norms and, in this respect, an agreement or “contract” of sorts. There is an understanding about what counts as a correct, objective interpretation of the world, and for agreeing to this view, one is (“contractually”) granted full cognitive standing in the polity, the official epistemic community.¹¹

But for the Racial Contract things are necessarily more complicated. The requirements of “objective” cognition, factual and moral, in a racial polity are in a sense more demanding in that officially sanctioned reality is divergent from actual reality. So here, it could be said, one has an agreement to misinterpret the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority, whether religious or secular.

Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted

epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made. Part of what it means to be constructed as “white” (the metamorphosis of the sociopolitical contract), part of what it requires to achieve Whiteness, successfully to become a white person (one imagines a ceremony with certificates attending the successful rite of passage: “Congratulations, you’re now an official white person!”), is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities. To a significant extent, then, white signatories will live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland, a “consensual hallucination,” to quote William Gibson’s famous characterization of cyberspace, though this particular hallucination is located in real space.¹² There will be white mythologies, invented Orients, invented Africas, invented Americas, with a correspondingly fabricated population, countries that never were, inhabited by people who never were—Calibans and Tontos, Man Fridays and Sambos—but who attain a virtual reality through their existence in travelers’ tales, folk myth, popular and highbrow fiction, colonial reports, scholarly theory, Hollywood cinema, living in the white imagination and determinedly imposed on their alarmed real-life counterparts.¹³ One could say then, as a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. And these phenomena are in no way accidental, but prescribed by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity.

The Racial Contract is a historical actuality.

The social contract in its modern version has long since given up any pretensions to be able to explain the historical origins of society and the state. Whereas the classic contractarians were engaged in a project both descriptive and prescriptive, the modern Rawls-inspired contract is purely a prescriptive thought experiment. And even Pateman’s Sexual Contract, though its focus is the real rather than the ideal, is not meant as a literal account of what men in 4004 B.C. decided to do on the plains of Mesopotamia. Whatever accounts for what Frederick Engels once called “the world historical defeat of the female sex”¹⁴—whether the development of an economic surplus, as he theorized, or the male discovery of the capacity to rape and the female disadvantage of being the childbearing half of the species, as radical feminists have argued—it is clearly lost in antiquity.

By contrast, ironically, the Racial Contract, never so far as I know explored as such, has the best claim to being an actual historical fact. Far from being lost in the mists of the ages, it is clearly historically locatable in the series of events marking the creation of the modern world by European colonialism and the voyages of “discovery” now increasingly and more appropriately called expeditions of conquest. The Columbian quincentenary a few years ago, with its accompanying debates, polemics, controversies, counterdemonstrations, and outpourings of revisionist literature, confronted many whites with the uncomfortable fact, hardly discussed in mainstream moral and

political theory, that we live in a world which has been foundationally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global white supremacy. Thus not only is the Racial Contract “real,” but—whereas the social contract is characteristically taken to be establishing the legitimacy of the nation-state, and codifying morality and law within its boundaries—the Racial Contract is global, involving a tectonic shift of the ethicojuridical basis of the planet as a whole, the division of the world, as Jean-Paul Sartre put it long ago, between “men” and “natives.”¹⁵

Europeans thereby emerge as “the lords of human kind,” the “lords of all the world,” with the increasing power to determine the standing of the non-Europeans who are their subjects.¹⁶ Although no single act literally corresponds to the drawing up and signing of a contract, there is a series of acts—papal bulls and other theological pronouncements; European discussions about colonialism, “discovery,” and international law; pacts, treaties, and legal decisions; academic and popular debates about the humanity of nonwhites; the establishment of formalized legal structures of differential treatment; and the routinization of informal illegal or quasi-legal practices effectively sanctioned by the complicity of silence and government failure to intervene and punish perpetrators—which collectively can be seen, not just metaphorically but close to literally, as its conceptual, juridical, and normative equivalent.

Anthony Pagden suggests that a division of the European empires into their main temporal periods should recognize “two distinct, but interdependent histories”: the colonization of the Americas, 1492 to the 1830s, and the occupation of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, 1730s to the period after World War II.¹⁷ In the first period, it was, to begin with, the nature and moral status of the Native Americans that primarily had to be determined, and then that of the imported African slaves whose labor was required to build this “New World.” In the second period, culminating in formal European colonial rule over most of the world by the early twentieth century, it was the character of colonial peoples that became crucial. But in all cases “race” is the common conceptual denominator that gradually came to signify the respective global statuses of superiority and inferiority, privilege and subordination. There is an opposition of us against them with multiple overlapping dimensions: Europeans versus non-Europeans (geography), civilized versus wild/savage/barbarians (culture), Christians versus heathens (religion). But they all eventually coalesced into the basic opposition of white versus nonwhite.

A Lumbee Indian legal scholar, Robert Williams, has traced the evolution of the Western legal position on the rights of native peoples from its medieval antecedents to the beginnings of the modern period, showing how it is consistently based on the assumption of “the rightness and necessity of subjugating and assimilating other peoples to [the European] worldview.”¹⁸ Initially the intellectual framework was a theological one, with normative inclusion and exclusion manifesting itself as the demarcation between Christians and heathens. The pope’s powers over the *Societas Christiana*, the universal Christian commonwealth, were seen as “extending not only over all Christians within the universal commonwealth, but over unregenerated heathens and infidels as well,” and this policy would subsequently underwrite not merely the Crusades against Islam but the later voyages to the Americas. Sometimes papal pronouncements did grant rights and rationality to nonbelievers. As a result of dealing with the

*Mongols in the thirteenth century, for example, Pope Innocent IV” conceded that infidels and heathens possessed the natural law right to elect their own secular leaders,” and Pope Paul III’s famous **Sublimis Deus** (1537) stated that Native Americans were rational beings, not to be treated as “dumb brutes created for our service” but “as truly men . . . capable of understanding the Catholic faith.”¹⁹ But as Williams points out, the latter qualification was always crucial. A Eurocentrically normed conception of rationality made it coextensive with acceptance of the Christian message, so that rejection was proof of bestial irrationality.*

*Even more remarkably, in the case of Native Americans this acceptance was to be signaled by their agreement to the **Requerimiento**, a long statement read aloud to them in, of course, a language they did not understand, failing which assent a just war could lawfully be waged against them.²⁰ One author writes:*

The requerimiento is the prototypical example of text justifying conquest. Informing the Indians that their lands were entrusted by Christ to the pope and thence to the kings of Spain, the document offers freedom from slavery for those Indians who accept Spanish rule. Even though it was entirely incomprehensible to a non-Spanish speaker, reading the document provided sufficient justification for dispossession of land and immediate enslavement of the indigenous people. [Bartolomé de] Las Casas’s famous comment on the requerimiento was that one does not know “whether to laugh or cry at the absurdity of it.” . . . While appearing to respect “rights” the requerimiento, in fact, takes them away.²¹

In effect, then, the Catholic Church’s declarations either formally legitimated conquest or could be easily circumvented where a weak prima facie moral barrier was erected.

The growth of the Enlightenment and the rise of secularism did not challenge this strategic dichotomization (Christian/infidel) so much as translate it into other forms. Philip Curtin refers to the characteristic “exceptionalism in European thought about the non-West,” “a conception of the world largely based on self-identification—and identification of ‘the other people.’”²² Similarly, Pierre van den Berghe describes the “Enlightenment dichotomization” of the normative theories of the period.²³ “Race” gradually became the formal marker of this differentiated status, replacing the religious divide (whose disadvantage, after all, was that it could always be overcome through conversion). Thus a category crystallized over time in European thought to represent entities who are humanoid but not fully human (“savages,” “barbarians”) and who are identified as such by being members of the general set of nonwhite races. Influenced by the ancient Roman distinction between the civilized within and the barbarians outside the empire, the distinction between full and question-mark humans, Europeans set up a two-tiered moral code with one set of rules for whites and another for nonwhites.²⁴

Types of Contracts that makeup the Racial Contract

Correspondingly, various moral and legal doctrines were propounded which can be seen as specific manifestations and instantiations, appropriately adjusted to circumstances, of the overarching Racial Contract. These were

specific subsidiary contracts designed for different modes of exploiting the resources and peoples of the rest of the world for Europe:

1. *the expropriation contract,*
2. *the slavery contract,*
3. *the colonial contract.*

The Expropriation Contract

*The “**Doctrine of Discovery**,” for example, what Williams identifies as the “paradigmatic tenet informing and determining contemporary European legal discourse respecting relations with Western tribal societies,” was central to the expropriation contract.²⁵ The American Justice Joseph Story glossed it as granting Europeans*

an absolute dominion over the whole territories afterwards occupied by them, not in virtue of any conquest of, or cession by, the Indian natives, but as a right acquired by discovery.... The title of the Indians was not treated as a right of property and dominion, but as a mere right of occupancy. As infidels, heathens, and savages, they were not allowed to possess the prerogatives belonging to absolute, sovereign, and independent nations. The territory over which they wandered, and which they used for their temporary and fugitive purposes, was, in respect to Christians, deemed as if it were inhabited only by brute animals.²⁶

The Slavery Contract

*Similarly, the slavery contract gave Europeans the right to enslave Native Americans and Africans at a time when slavery was dead or dying out in Europe, based on doctrines of the inherent inferiority of these peoples. A classic statement of the slavery contract is the **1857 Dred Scott v. Sanford** U.S. Supreme Court decision of Chief Justice Roger Taney, which stated that blacks*

had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.... This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics, which no one thought of disputing, or supposed to be open to dispute.²⁷

The Colonial Contract

Finally, there is the colonial contract, which legitimated European rule over the nations in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. Consider, for instance, this wonderful example, almost literally “contractarian” in character, from the French imperial theorist Jules Harmand (1845–1921), who devised the notion of association:

Expansion by conquest, however necessary, seems especially unjust and disturbing to the conscience of democracies.... But to transpose democratic institutions into such a setting is aberrant nonsense. The subject people are not and cannot become citizens in the democratic sense of the term.... It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization.... The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity.

What is therefore necessary is a “Contract’ of Association”:

Without falling into Rousseauan reveries, it is worth noting that association implies a contract, and this idea, though nothing more than an illustration, is more appropriately applied to the coexistence of two profoundly different societies thrown sharply and artificially into contact than it is to the single society formed by natural processes which Rousseau envisaged. This is how the terms of this implicit agreement can be conceived. The European conqueror brings order, foresight, and security to a human society which, though ardently aspiring for these fundamental values without which no community can make progress, still lacks the aptitude to achieve them from within itself.... With these mental and material instruments, which it lacked and now receives, it gains the idea and ambition for a better existence, and the means of achieving it. We will obey you, say the subjects, if you begin by proving yourself worthy. We will obey you if you can succeed in convincing us of the superiority of that civilization of which you talk so much.²⁸

Indian laws, slave codes, and colonial native acts formally codified the subordinate status of nonwhites and (ostensibly) regulated their treatment, creating a juridical space for nonEuropeans as a separate category of beings. So even if there was sometimes an attempt to prevent “abuses” (and these codes were honored far more often in the breach than the observance), the point is that “abuse” as a concept presupposes as a norm the legitimacy of the subordination. Slavery and colonialism are not conceived as wrong in their denial of autonomy to persons; what is wrong is the improper administration of these regimes.

*It would be a fundamental error, then—a point to which I will return—to see racism as anomalous, a mysterious deviation from European Enlightenment humanism. Rather, it needs to be realized that, in keeping with the Roman precedent, European humanism usually meant that only Europeans were human. European moral and political theory, like European thought in general, developed within the framework of the Racial Contract and, as a rule, took it for granted. As Edward Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, we must not see culture as “antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations.” But this occupational blindness has in fact infected most “professional humanists” (and certainly most philosophers), so that “as a result [they are] unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction, philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other.”²⁹ By the nineteenth century, conventional white opinion casually assumed the uncontroversial validity of a hierarchy of “higher” and “lower,” “master” and “subject” races, for whom, it is obvious, different rules must apply.*

The modern world was thus expressly created as a racially hierarchical polity, globally dominated by Europeans. A 1969 Foreign Affairs article worth rereading today reminds us that as late as the 1940s the world “was still by and large a Western white-dominated world. The long-established patterns of white power and nonwhite non-power were still the generally accepted order of things. All the accompanying assumptions and mythologies about race and color were still mostly taken for granted.... [W]hite supremacy was a generally assumed and accepted state of affairs in the United States as well as in Europe’s empires.”³⁰ But statements of such frankness are rare or nonexistent in mainstream white opinion today, which generally seeks to rewrite the past so as to deny or minimize the obvious fact of global white domination.

*Yet the United States itself, of course, is a white settler state on territory expropriated from its aboriginal inhabitants through a combination of military force, disease, and a “century of dishonor” of broken treaties.³¹ The expropriation involved literal genocide (a word now unfortunately devalued by hyperbolic overuse) of a kind that some recent revisionist historians have argued needs to be seen as comparable to the Third Reich’s.³² Washington, Father of the Nation, was, understandably, known somewhat differently to the Senecas as “Town Destroyer.”³³ In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson characterized Native Americans as “merciless Indian Savages,” and in the Constitution, blacks, of course, appear only obliquely, through the famous “60 percent solution.” Thus, as Richard Drinnon concludes: “The Framers manifestly established a government under which non-Europeans were not men created equal—in the white polity . . . they were nonpeoples.”³⁴ Though on a smaller scale and not always so ruthlessly (or, in the case of New Zealand, because of more successful indigenous resistance), what are standardly classified as the other white settler states—for example, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and South Africa—were all founded on similar policies: the extermination, displacement, and/or herding onto reservations of the aboriginal population. Pierre van den Berghe has coined the illuminating phrase “Herrenvolk democracies” to describe these polities, which captures perfectly the dichotomization of the Racial Contract.³⁵ Their subsequent evolution has been somewhat different, but defenders of South Africa’s system of apartheid often argued that U.S. criticism was hypocritical in light of its own history of **Jim Crow**, especially since de facto segregation remains sufficiently entrenched that even today, forty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, two American sociologists can title their study *American Apartheid*.³⁶ The racist record of preliberation Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa is well known; not so familiar may be the fact that the United States, Canada, and Australia all maintained “white” immigration policies until a few decades ago, and native peoples in all three countries suffer high poverty, infant mortality, and suicide rates.*

*Elsewhere, in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, large parts of the world were colonized, that is, formally brought under the rule of one or another of the European powers (or, later, the United States): the early Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Americas, the Philippines, and south Asia; the jealous competition from Britain, France, and Holland; the British conquest of India; the French expansion into Algeria and Indochina; the Dutch advance into Indonesia; the Opium Wars against China; the late nineteenth-century “**scramble for Africa**”; the U.S. war against Spain, seizure of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, and annexation of Hawaii.³⁷ The pace of change this century has been so dramatic that it is easy to forget that less than a hundred years ago, in 1914,*

*“Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths. No other associated set of colonies in history was as large, none so totally dominated, none so unequal in power to the Western metropolis.”*³⁸ One could say that the Racial Contract creates a transnational white polity, a virtual community of people linked by their citizenship in Europe at home and abroad (Europe proper, the colonial greater Europe, and the “fragments” of Euro-America, Euro-Australia, etc.), and constituted in opposition to their indigenous subjects. In most of Africa and Asia, where colonial rule ended only after World War II, rigid “color bars” maintained the separation between Europeans and indigenes. As European, as white, one knew oneself to be a member of the superior race, one’s skin being one’s passport: “Whatever a white man did must in some grotesque fashion be ‘civilized.’”³⁹ So though there were local variations in the Racial Contract, depending on circumstances and the particular mode of exploitation—for example, a bipolar racial system in the (Anglo) United States, as against a subtler color hierarchy in (Iberian) Latin America—it remains the case that the white tribe, as the global representative of civilization and modernity, is generally on top of the social pyramid.⁴⁰

*We live, then, in a world built on the Racial Contract. That we do is simultaneously quite obvious if you think about it (the dates and details of colonial conquest, the constitutions of these states and their exclusionary juridical mechanisms, the histories of official racist ideologies, the battles against slavery and colonialism, the formal and informal structures of discrimination, are all within recent historical memory and, of course, massively documented in other disciplines) and nonobvious, since most whites don’t think about it or don’t think about it as the outcome of a history of political oppression but rather as just “the way things are.” (“You say we’re all over the world because we conquered the world? Why would you put it that way?”) In the **Treaty of Tordesillas** (1494) which divided the world between Spain and Portugal, the **Valladolid (Spain) Conference** (1550–1551) to decide whether Native Americans were really human, the later debates over African slavery and abolitionism, the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) to partition Africa, the various inter-European pacts, treaties, and informal arrangements on policing their colonies, the post-World War I discussions in Versailles after a war to make the world safe for democracy—we see (or should see) with complete clarity a world being governed by white people. So though there is also internal conflict—disagreements, battles, even world wars—the dominant movers and shapers will be Europeans at home and abroad, with non-Europeans lining up to fight under their respective banners, and the system of white domination itself rarely being challenged. (The exception, of course, is Japan, which escaped colonization, and so for most of the twentieth century has had a shifting and ambivalent relationship with the global white polity.) The legacy of this world is, of course, still with us today, in the economic, political, and cultural domination of the planet by Europeans and their descendants. The fact that this racial structure, clearly political in character, and the struggle against it, equally so, have not for the most part been deemed appropriate subject matter for mainstream Anglo-American political philosophy and the fact that the very concepts hegemonic in the discipline are refractory to an understanding of these realities, reveal at best, a disturbing provincialism and an ahistoricity profoundly at odds with the radically foundational questioning on which philosophy prides itself and, at worst, a complicity with the terms of the Racial Contract itself.*

The Racial Contract is an exploitation contract that creates global European economic domination and national white racial privilege.

The classic social contract, as I have detailed, is primarily moral/political in nature. But it is also economic in the background sense that the point of leaving the state of nature is in part to secure a stable environment for the industrious appropriation of the world. (After all, one famous definition of politics is that it is about who gets what and why.) Thus even in Locke's moralized state of nature, where people generally do obey natural law, he is concerned about the safety of private property, indeed proclaiming that "the great and chief end therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property."⁴¹ And in Hobbes's famously amoral and unsafe state of nature, we are told that "there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth."⁴² So part of the point of bringing society into existence, with its laws and enforcers of the law, is to protect what you have accumulated.

What, then, is the nature of the economic system of the new society? The general contract does not itself prescribe a particular model or particular schedule of property rights, requiring only that the "equality" in the prepolitical state be somehow preserved. This provision may be variously interpreted as a self-interested surrender to an absolutist Hobbesian government that itself determines property rights, or a Lockean insistence that private property accumulated in the moralized state of nature be respected by the constitutionalist government. Or more radical political theorists, such as socialists and feminists, might argue that state-of-nature equality actually mandates class or gender economic egalitarianism in society. So, different political interpretations of the initial moral egalitarianism can be advanced, but the general background idea is that the equality of human beings in the state of nature is somehow (whether as equality of opportunity or as equality of outcome) supposed to carry over into the economy of the created sociopolitical order, leading to a system of voluntary human intercourse and exchange in which exploitation is precluded.

By contrast, the economic dimension of the Racial Contract is the most salient, foreground rather than background, since the Racial Contract is calculatedly aimed at economic exploitation. The whole point of establishing a moral hierarchy and juridically partitioning the polity according to race is to secure and legitimate the privileging of those individuals designated as white/persons and the exploitation of those individuals designated as nonwhite/subpersons. There are other benefits accruing from the Racial Contract—far greater political influence, cultural hegemony, the psychic payoff that comes from knowing one is a member of the Herrenvolk (what W. E. B. Du Bois once called "the wages of whiteness")⁴³—but the bottom line is material advantage. Globally, the Racial Contract creates Europe as the continent that dominates the world; locally, within Europe and the other continents, it designates Europeans as the privileged race.

*The challenge of explaining what has been called "**the European miracle**"—the rise of Europe to global domination—has long exercised both academic and lay opinion.⁴⁴ How is it that a formerly peripheral region*

on the outskirts of the Asian land mass, at the far edge of the trade routes, remote from the great civilizations of Islam and the East, was able in a century or two to achieve global political and economic dominance? The explanations historically given by Europeans themselves have varied tremendously, from the straightforwardly racist and geographically determinist to the more subtly environmentalist and culturalist. But what they have all had in common, even those influenced by Marxism, is their tendency to depict this development as essentially autochthonous, their tendency to privilege some set of internal variables and correspondingly downplay or ignore altogether the role of colonial conquest and African slavery. Europe made it on its own, it is said, because of the peculiar characteristics of Europe and Europeans.

Thus whereas no reputable historian today would espouse the frankly biologicistic theories of the past, which made Europeans (in both pre- and post-Darwinian accounts) inherently the most advanced race, as contrasted with the backward/less evolved races elsewhere, the thesis of European specialness and exceptionalism is still presupposed. It is still assumed that rationalism and science, innovativeness and inventiveness found their special home here, as against the intellectual stagnation and traditionalism of the rest of the world, so that Europe was therefore destined in advance to occupy the special position in global history it has. James Blaut calls this the theory, or “super-theory” (an umbrella covering many different versions: theological, cultural, biologicistic, geographical, technological, etc.), of “Eurocentric diffusionism,” according to which European progress is seen as “natural” and asymmetrically determinant of the fate of non-Europe.⁴⁵ Similarly, Sandra Harding, in her anthology on the “racial” economy of science, cites “the assumption that Europe functions autonomously from other parts of the world; that Europe is its own origin, final end, and agent; and that Europe and people of European descent in the Americas and elsewhere owe nothing to the rest of the world.”⁴⁶

*Unsurprisingly, black and Third World theorists have traditionally dissented from this notion of happy divine or natural European dispensation. They have claimed, quite to the contrary, that there is a crucial causal connection between European advance and the unhappy fate of the rest of the world. One classic example of such scholarship from a half century ago was the Caribbean historian Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery*, which argued that the profits from African slavery helped to make the industrial revolution possible, so that internalist accounts were fundamentally mistaken.⁴⁷ And in recent years, with decolonization, the rise of the New Left in the United States, and the entry of more alternative voices into the academy, this challenge has deepened and broadened. There are variations in the authors’ positions—for example, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, André Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein⁴⁸—but the basic theme is that the exploitation of the empire (the bullion from the great gold and silver mines in Mexico and Peru, the profits from plantation slavery, the fortunes made by the colonial companies, the general social and economic stimulus provided by the opening up of the “New World”) was to a greater or lesser extent crucial in enabling and then consolidating the takeoff of what had previously been an economic backwater. It was far from the case that Europe was specially destined to assume economic hegemony; there were a number of centers in Asia and Africa of a comparable level of development which could potentially have evolved in the same way. But the European ascent closed off this development path for others because it*

forcibly inserted them into a colonial network whose exploitative relations and extractive mechanisms prevented autonomous growth.

Overall, then, **colonialism “lies at the heart” of the rise of Europe.**⁴⁹ *The economic unit of analysis needs to be Europe as a whole, since it is not always the case that the colonizing nations directly involved always benefited in the long term. Imperial Spain, for example, still feudal in character, suffered massive inflation from its bullion imports. But through trade and financial exchange, others launched on the capitalist path, such as Holland, profited. Internal national rivalries continued, of course, but this common identity based on the transcontinental exploitation of the non-European world would in many cases be politically crucial, generating a sense of Europe as a cosmopolitan entity engaged in a common enterprise, underwritten by race. As Victor Kiernan puts it, “All countries within the European orbit benefited however, as Adam Smith pointed out, from colonial contributions to a common stock of wealth, bitterly as they might wrangle over ownership of one territory or another.... [T]here was a sense in which all Europeans shared in a heightened sense of power engendered by the successes of any of them, as well as in the pool of material wealth . . . that the colonies produced.”*⁵⁰

*Today, correspondingly, though formal decolonization has taken place and in Africa and Asia black, brown, and yellow natives are in office, ruling independent nations, the global economy is essentially dominated by the former colonial powers, their offshoots (Euro-United States, Euro-Canada), and their international financial institutions, lending agencies, and corporations. (As previously observed, the notable exception, whose history confirms rather than challenges the rule, is Japan, which escaped colonization and, after the Meiji Restoration, successfully embarked on its own industrialization.) Thus one could say that the world is essentially dominated by white capital. Global figures on income and property ownership are, of course, broken down nationally rather than racially, but if a transnational racial disaggregation were to be done, it would reveal that whites control a percentage of the world’s wealth grossly disproportionate to their numbers. Since there is no reason to think that the chasm between First and Third Worlds (which largely coincides with this racial division) is going to be bridged—vide the abject failure of various United Nations plans from the “development decade” of the 1960s onward—it seems undeniable that for years to come, the planet will be white dominated. With the collapse of communism and the defeat of Third World attempts to seek alternative paths, the West reigns supreme, as celebrated in a London Financial Times headline: “The fall of the Soviet bloc has left the IMF and G7 to rule the world and create a new imperial age.”*⁵¹ *Economic structures have been set in place, causal processes established, whose outcome is to pump wealth from one side of the globe to another, and which will continue to work largely independently of the ill will/good will, racist/antiracist feelings of particular individuals. This globally color-coded distribution of wealth and poverty has been produced by the Racial Contract and in turn reinforces adherence to it in its signatories and beneficiaries.*

Moreover, it is not merely that Europe and the former white settler states are globally dominant but that within them, where there is a significant nonwhite presence (indigenous peoples, descendants of imported slaves, voluntary nonwhite immigration), whites continue to be privileged vis-à-vis nonwhites. The old structures of formal, de jure

exclusion have largely been dismantled, the old explicitly biologicistic ideologies largely abandoned⁵²—the Racial Contract, as will be discussed later, is continually being rewritten—but opportunities for nonwhites, though they have expanded, remain below those for whites. The claim is not, of course, that all whites are better off than all nonwhites, but that, as a statistical generalization, the objective life chances of whites are significantly better.

As an example, consider the United States. A series of books has recently documented the decline of the integrationist hopes raised by the 1960s and the growing intransigence and hostility of whites who think they have “done enough,” despite the fact that the country continues to be massively segregated, median black family incomes have begun falling by comparison to white family incomes after some earlier closing of the gap, the so-called “black underclass” has basically been written off, and reparations for slavery and post-Emancipation discrimination have never been paid, or, indeed, even seriously considered.⁵³ Recent work on racial inequality by Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro suggests that wealth is more important than income in determining the likelihood of future racial equalization, since it has a cumulative effect that is passed down through intergenerational transfer, affecting life chances and opportunities for one’s children. Whereas in 1988 black households earned sixty-two cents for every dollar earned by white households, the comparative differential with regard to wealth is much greater and, arguably, provides a more realistically negative picture of the prospects for closing the racial gap: “Whites possess nearly twelve times as much median net worth as blacks, or \$43,800 versus \$ 3,700. In an even starker contrast, perhaps, the average white household controls \$6,999 in net financial assets while the average black household retains no NFA nest egg whatsoever.” Moreover, the analytic focus on wealth rather than income exposes how illusory the much-trumpeted rise of a “black middle class” is: “Middle-class blacks, for example, earn seventy cents for every dollar earned by middle-class whites but they possess only fifteen cents for every dollar of wealth held by middleclass whites.” This huge disparity in white and black wealth is not remotely contingent, accidental, fortuitous; it is the direct outcome of American state policy and the collusion with it of the white citizenry. In effect, “materially, whites and blacks constitute two nations,”⁵⁴ the white nation being constituted by the American Racial Contract in a relationship of structured racial exploitation with the black (and, of course, historically also the red) nation.

A collection of papers from panels organized in the 1980s by the National Economic Association, the professional organization of black economists, provides some insight into the mechanics and the magnitude of such exploitative transfers and denials of opportunity to accumulate material and human capital. It takes as its title *The Wealth of Races*—an ironic tribute to Adam Smith’s famous book *The Wealth of Nations*—and analyzes the different varieties of discrimination to which blacks have been subjected: slavery, employment discrimination, wage discrimination, promotion discrimination, white monopoly power discrimination against black capital, racial price discrimination in consumer goods, housing, services, insurance, etc.⁵⁵ Many of these, by their very nature, are difficult to quantify; moreover, there are costs in anguish and suffering that can never really be compensated. Nonetheless, those that do lend themselves to calculation offer some remarkable figures. (The figures are unfortunately dated; readers should multiply by a factor that takes fifteen years of inflation into account.) If one were to do a calculation of the cumulative benefits (through compound interest) from labor market discrimination

over the forty-year period from 1929 to 1969 and adjust for inflation, then in 1983 dollars, the figure would be over \$1.6 trillion.⁵⁶ An estimate for the total of “diverted income” from slavery, 1790 to 1860, compounded and translated into 1983 dollars, would yield the sum of \$2.1 trillion to \$4.7 trillion.⁵⁷ And if one were to try to work out the cumulative value, with compound interest, of unpaid slave labor before 1863, underpayment since 1863, and denial of opportunity to acquire land and natural resources available to white settlers, then the total amount required to compensate blacks “could take more than the entire wealth of the United States.”⁵⁸

So this gives an idea of the centrality of racial exploitation to the U.S. economy and the dimensions of the payoff for its white beneficiaries from one nation’s Racial Contract. But this very centrality, these very dimensions render the topic taboo, virtually undiscussed in the debates on justice of most white political theory. If there is such a backlash against affirmative action, what would the response be to the demand for the interest on the unpaid forty acres and a mule? These issues cannot be raised because they go to the heart of the real nature of the polity and its structuring by the Racial Contract. White moral theory’s debates on justice in the state must therefore inevitably have a somewhat farcical air, since they ignore the central injustice on which the state rests. (No wonder a hypothetical contractarianism that evades the actual circumstances of the polity’s founding is preferred!)

Both globally and within particular nations, then, white people, Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favoring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology (not just in whites but sometimes in nonwhites also) skewed consciously or unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What were the specific legal and political arrangements that formalized aspects of The Racial Contract? How did each contribute to the Racial Contract and, by extension, the material basis of The Racial Contract?
2. What does it mean that one can be a beneficiary to a contract without being a signatory to that contract? How does this interface with other ideas we’ve talked about in the class? How does it interface with you as a being in the historical, material, and philosophic continuum of relations you find yourself in?

3. If I steal something from you and I turn around and sell it before I'm caught, should the property I stole be returned to you once the authorities find out about all of this even though the property has changed hands? How does your answer here relate with the realization of the sheer amount of stolen wages (this does not include lost property, lost opportunities, slaying of leaders, burning of businesses, etc) as a result of America's slaving past?
4. Survey your society and present moment. What legal arrangements and discourse humanize the other and what arrangements and discourse dehumanize the other?

Citation and Use

The reading was taken from the following work:

Charles W. Mills, "Overview," in The Racial Contract (Cornell University Press, 1997).

This use of this work is governed by the Fair Use doctrine.

Social Contracts of Exploitation Copyright © 2020 by Charles Mills. All Rights Reserved.

Notes

1. Otto Gierke termed these respectively the *Gesellschaftsvertrag* and the *Herrschaftsvertrag*. For a discussion, see, for example, Barker, *Introduction, Social Contract*; and Lessnoff, *Social Contract*, chap. 3.
2. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, pt. 1.
3. In speaking generally of "whites," I am not, of course, denying that there are gender relations of domination and subordination or, for that matter, class relations of domination and subordination within the white population. I am not claiming that race is the only axis of social oppression. But race is what I want to focus on; so in the absence of that chimerical entity, a unifying theory of race, class, and gender oppression, it seems to me that one has to make generalizations that it would be stylistically cumbersome to qualify at every point. So these should just be taken as read. Nevertheless, I do want to insist that my overall picture is roughly accurate, i.e., that whites do in general benefit from white supremacy (though gender and class differentiation mean, of course, that they do not benefit equally) and that historically white racial solidarity has overridden class and gender solidarity. Women, subordinate classes, and nonwhites may be oppressed in common, but it is not a common oppression: the structuring is so different that it has not led to any common front between them. Neither white women nor white workers have as a group (as against principled individuals) historically made common cause with nonwhites against colonialism, white settlement, slavery, imperialism, Jim Crow, apartheid. We all have multiple identities, and, to this extent, most of us are both privileged and disadvantaged by

different systems of domination. But white racial identity has generally triumphed over all others; it is race that (transgender, transclass) has generally determined the social world and loyalties, the lifeworld, of whites—whether as citizens of the colonizing mother country, settlers, nonslaves, or beneficiaries of the “color bar” and the “color line. There has been no comparable, spontaneously crystallizing transracial “workers” world or transracial “female” world: race is the identity around which whites have usually closed ranks. Nevertheless, as a concession, a semantic signal of this admitted gender privileging within the white population, by which white women’s personhood is originally virtual, dependent on their having the appropriate relation (daughter, sister, wife) to the white male, I will sometimes deliberately use the non-gender-neutral “men.” For some recent literature on these problematic intersections of identity, see, for example, Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

4. Rousseau, *Social Contract*; Hobbes, *Leviathan*.
5. For a discussion of the two versions, see Kymlicka, “The Social Contract Tradition.”
6. Hobbes’s judgment that “INJUSTICE, is no other than the not Performance of Covenant,” *Leviathan*, p. 100, has standardly been taken as a statement of moral conventionalism. Hobbes’s egalitarian social morality is based not on the moral equality of humans, but on the fact of a rough parity of physical power and mental ability in the state of nature (chap. 13). Within this framework, the Racial Contract would then be the natural outcome of a systematic disparity in power—of weaponry rather than individual strength—between expansionist Europe and the rest of the world. This could be said to be neatly summed up in Hilaire Belloc’s famous little ditty: “Whatever happens, we have got / The Maxim Gun, and they have not.” Hilaire Belloc, “The Modern Traveller,” quoted in John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (1975; rpt. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Paperbacks, 1986), p. 94. Or at an earlier stage, in the conquest of the Americas, the musket and the steel sword.
7. See, for example, A. P. d’Entreves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy*, 2d rev. ed. (1951; rpt. London: Hutchinson, 1970).
8. Locke, *Second Treatise of Two Treatises of Government*, p. 269.
9. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 230–32.
10. See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948).
11. For the notion of “epistemological communities,” see recent work in feminist theory—for example, Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
12. Thus Ward Churchill, a Native American, speaks sardonically of “fantasies of the master race.” Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992); William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Science Fiction Books, 1984).
13. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1979); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (1992; rpt. New York: Continuum, 1995); Robert Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Gretchen M. Bataille and Charles L. P. Silet, eds., *The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (1971; rpt. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987); Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (1986; rpt. London: Routledge, 1992).
14. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International, 1972), p. 120.

15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Preface to Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1961; rpt. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991).
16. V. G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (1969; rpt. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
17. Pagden, *Lords* pp. 1–2.
18. Robert A. Williams Jr., “The Algebra of Federal Indian Law: The Hard Trail of Decolonizing and Americanizing the White Man’s Indian Jurisprudence,” *Wisconsin Law Review* 1986 (1986): 229. See also Robert A. Williams Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
19. Williams, “Algebra,” pp. 230–31, 233. See also Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 19.
20. Williams, “Algebra”; Hanke, *Aristotle*.
21. Allen Carey-Webb, “Other-Fashioning: The Discourse of Empire and Nation in Lope de Vega’s *El Nuevo mundo descubierto por Cristobal Colon*,” in *Amerindian Images and the Legacy of Columbus*, ed. René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini, *Hispanic Issues*, 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 433–34.
22. Philip D. Curtin, *Introduction*, to *Imperialism*, ed. Curtin (New York: Walker, 1971), p. xiii.
23. Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective*, 2d ed. (New York: Wiley, 1978).
24. Pagden, *Lords*, chap. 1.
25. Williams, “Algebra,” p. 253.
26. Justice Joseph Story, quoted in Williams, “Algebra,” p. 256.
27. *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 1857, in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), p. 323.
28. Excerpt from Jules Harmand, *Domination et colonisation* (1910), in Curtin, *Imperialism*, pp. 294–98.
29. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), pp. xiv, xiii.
30. Harold R. Isaacs, “Color in World Affairs,” *Foreign Affairs* 47 (1969): 235, 246. See also Benjamin P. Bowser, ed., *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1995).
31. Helen Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government’s Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (1881; rpt. New York: Indian Head Books, 1993). In her classic expose, Jackson concludes (pp. 337–38): “It makes little difference . . . where one opens the record of the history of the Indians; every page and every year has its dark stain. The story of one tribe is the story of all, varied only by differences of time and place.... [T]he United States Government breaks promises now [1880] as deftly as then [1795], and with an added ingenuity from long practice.” Jackson herself, it should be noted, saw Native Americans as having a “lesser right,” since there was no question about the “fairness of holding that ultimate sovereignty belonged to the civilized discoverer, as against the savage barbarian.” To think otherwise would merely be “feeble sentimentalism” (pp. 10–11). But she did at least want this lesser right recognized.
32. See, for example, David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
33. Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire-Building* (New York: Meridian, 1980), p. 332.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 102. See also Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (1979; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
35. Van den Berghe, *Race*, p. 18.
36. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3d ed. (1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York:

- Oxford University Press, 1981); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
37. See, for example, Kiernan, *Lords*; V. G. Kiernan, *Imperialism and its Contradictions*, ed. Harvey J. Kaye (New York: Routledge, 1995); D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (1966; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1982); Pagden, *Lords*; Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers, and the African Elite* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871–1914: Myths and Realities*, trans. William Granville Brown (1964; rpt. New York: Praeger, 1966); David Healy, *U. S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).
 38. Said, *Culture*, p. 8.
 39. Kiernan, *Lords*, p. 24.
 40. Linda Alcoff outlines an attractive, distinctively Latin American ideal of hybrid racial identity in her “Mestizo Identity,” in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), pp. 257–78. Unfortunately, however, this ideal has yet to be realized. For an exposure of the Latin American myths of “racial democracy” and a race-transcendent *mestizaje*, and an account of the reality of the ideal of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and the continuing subordination of blacks and the darker-skinned throughout the region, see, for example, Minority Rights Group, ed., *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today* (London: Minority Rights, 1995); and Bowser, *Racism and Anti-Racism*.
 41. Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 350–51. Since Locke also uses “property” to mean rights, this is not quite as one-dimensional a vision of government as it sounds.
 42. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 89.
 43. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1992).
 44. See Eric Jones, *The European Miracle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). My discussion here follows J. M. Blaut et al., 1492: *The Debate on Colonialism, Eurocentrism, and History* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1992); and J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993).
 45. Blaut, 1492; Blaut, *Colonizer’s Model*.
 46. Sandra Harding, Introduction, to Harding, ed., *The “Racial” Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 2.
 47. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1966).
 48. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972; rpt. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974); Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore (1988; rpt. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989); André Gunder Frank, *World Accumulation, 1492–1789* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 3 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974–1988).
 49. Blaut, 1492, p. 3.
 50. Kiernan, *Imperialism*, pp. 98, 149.
 51. . Quoted in Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), p. 61.
 52. But see Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s bestseller *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994), as a sign that the older, straightforwardly racist theories may be making a comeback.
 53. See, for example: Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Scribner’s, 1992); Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992); Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*; Stephen Steinberg, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Tom Wicker, *Tragic Failure: Racial Integration in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1996).

54. Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge 1995), pp. 86, 7.
55. Richard F. America, ed., *The Wealth of Races: The Present Value of Benefits from Past Injustices* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990). For another ironic tribute, whose subject is the international distribution of wealth, see Malcolm Caldwell, *The Wealth of Some Nations* (London: Zed Press, 1977).
56. David H. Swinton, "Racial Inequality and Reparations," in America, *Wealth of Races*, p. 156.
57. James Marketti, "Estimated Present Value of Income Diverted during Slavery," in America, *Wealth of Races*, p. 107.
58. Robert S. Browne, "Achieving Parity through Reparations," in America, *Wealth of Races*, p. 204; Swinton, "Racial Inequality," p. 156.

GOVERNMENT IN THE FUTURE

The following is a lecture given by Chomsky at the Poetry Center in New York on April 1970. A transcript of the lecture can be found at <https://libcom.org/library/government-future-noam-chomsky>.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=105#oembed-1>

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Before hearing this lecture, what came to mind when you heard the terms liberalism, socialism, capitalism, or democracy?
2. How do those impressions differ from the picture that Chomsky weaves for each?
3. How might state socialism differ from other forms of socialism (consider looking them up)?
4. Think of the culture, nation, or subculture in which you find yourself. How are these ways of organizing and reproducing society defined in those spaces?
5. What are the challenges you think we will face, as a society and as a species, in the next 10, 30, and 100 years? Did Chomsky adequately address those concerns?



Philosophical Thought by Heather Wilburn / Tulsa Community College is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

REPUBLICAN FREEDOM

David Campbell

David Campbell is a law lecturer at the University of Oxford where he teaches Jurisprudence – (philosophy of law). His research interests revolve around ascriptions of liability and culpability of practically reasoning agents. as part of this and more generally, he has an interest in notions of Republican freedom as they relate to legal assessments.

Introduction

“A Republic ma’am, if you can keep it.” Such is how Benjamin Franklin is said to have answered Mrs. Powell when she asked what form of government the constitutional convention had decided upon for what has become the United States of America.¹ Not a democracy. Not a representative democracy. A republic. This was no trip of the tongue, or rough approximation, or proxy. What’s more it was recognized as requiring deliberate effort to maintain. Such an effort must surely first require identifying the philosophical demands and ideals of republicanism. Republicanism is an ancient form of constitutional governance but it has specific commitments not necessarily entailed in other forms of government. Much good could come from recognizing these commitments including the importance of civic virtue, the nature of corruption as factionalism or pursuit of one’s party’s interests over the common good; the evil of allowing monied interests to play a role in deliberations on the common good etc. This becomes all the more pertinent if the second part of Franklin’s reply is to be respected, in other words if we are to “keep it.” There are rich, half-forgotten veins of thought that those of us who live in republics could do well to remember and put into practice. The purpose of this paper however is to draw out one special philosophical conception entailed in republicanism; namely, freedom as non-domination. In particular it will use the foil of liberal freedom, or freedom as non-interference to hone in on the special characteristics of republican freedom.²

Historical Context

*Republicanism has ancient roots; noted as being either of an Athenian or Roman variety.³ Somewhat surprisingly (to the uninitiated at least) both streams of thought converge in that great and central republican theorist, Niccolò Machiavelli. Although most famous for his work, *The Prince*,⁴ (which was more by way of a job application to the*

Medici family than an expression of any particular intellectual interest) his greater efforts by far were devoted to republican thought in his seminal work, Discourses on Livy.⁵ Through Machiavelli and into the enlightenment era these ancient strains of thought heavily influenced the English commonwealth tradition and thereafter the American founding fathers. Modern republican thinkers have picked up these strands and have made interesting philosophical claims as to the nature of republican freedom (the purpose of our examination here). Most notable of the modern thinkers as relates to republican freedom is Prof. Philip Pettit.⁶ It has been his enterprise to draw out the specific dimensions of republican freedom which he claims is well represented by the concept of freedom as non-domination. To understand this better we shall contrast freedom as non-domination with liberal freedom or freedom as non-interference.⁷

In the ancient Greco-Roman world – from whence republicanism sprang – slavery was commonplace and so it is little wonder that notions of liberty were elucidated via the distinction between master and slave. While thankfully no longer common place the philosophical scenario or thought experiment of a master/slave relationship will prove useful for drawing out the distinct forms of republican freedom versus liberal freedom.

Negative/Positive Freedom

No consideration of the concept of freedom could arise without reference to Isaiah Berlin's rich contribution, Two Concepts of Liberty⁸ (worthy of careful examination itself). For the purposes of this paper we might briefly describe the two concepts of liberty as follows; Negative freedom/negative liberty is a freedom from type of liberty i.e. an absence of constraints imposed from without. Positive freedom on the other hand can be understood as a freedom to kind of liberty, incorporating an aspect of self-mastery. For example a drug addict may be free from external interference but in many ways they are slaves to their addiction, in this way we might describe them as enjoying negative freedom but not positive freedom.

The liberal thinking on freedom begins in something of a fantasy; the state of nature. Under this model we begin with (hu)man in a state of nature enjoying full sovereignty. Such a state alas is "nasty, brutish and short"⁹ and so as such they trade some sovereignty for security and other values in a social contract. Under this model the interference of others is by definition to be regretted. To be free is to be unencumbered by outside forces; in other words it is freedom as non-interference. This kind of freedom is sometimes referred to as the freedom of the countryside.¹⁰ It is the freedom on the self-sufficient farmer.

Republican freedom by contrast can be thought of as the freedom of the city. The starting point of this model is not a theoretical state of nature but rather the reality of (hu)man-in-community. The reality of human existence is taken to be that we are social animals. Under this paradigm the law is needed for the protections necessary to prevent the domination of the weak by the strong.

Let us turn now to consider what exactly it is republicans mean by domination and what the notion of freedom as non-domination is intended to address.

Non-Domination

Philip Pettit gives a clear exposition of the evil of domination which republican freedom seeks to counter in the following:

The grievance I have in mind is that of having to live at the mercy of (p.5) another, having to live in a manner that leaves you vulnerable to some ill that the other is in a position arbitrarily to impose; and this, in particular, when each of you is in a position to see that you are dominated by the other, in a position to see that you each see this, and so on. It is the grievance expressed by the wife who finds herself in a position where her husband can beat her at will, and without any possibility of redress; by the employee who dare not raise a complaint against an employer, and who is vulnerable to any of a range of abuses, some petty, some serious, that the employer may choose to perpetrate; by the debtor who has to depend on the grace of the moneylender, or the bank official, for avoiding utter destitution and ruin; and by the welfare dependant who finds that they are vulnerable to the caprice of a counter clerk for whether or not their children will receive meal vouchers.¹¹

Pettit argues freedom understood as non-interference is incapable of properly accounting for this type of grievance. He proposes the above highlights the need for something more than just being left alone. Pettit considers such arbitrary power as detailed above an evil which republicanism and its associated equality of citizenship cannot abide.

He claims “freedom as non-domination requires us to reduce the capacities for arbitrary interference to which a person is exposed, while freedom as non-interference requires us to minimize the person’s expectation of interference as such.”¹² Which highlights neatly the distinction between liberal concern with reducing interference and the deeper Republican concern with the status and dignity of the citizen which precludes “talking in probabilistic terms”¹³ As Skinner explains, such talk of reducing the probability of interference is to “misunderstand the existential condition of the slave.”¹⁴

However, both non-interference and non-domination are opportunity conceptions of freedom, so a problem arises; are they (relevantly) different?

Domination vs. Interference:

In order to put clear water between the Republican theory of freedom as non-domination and the liberal theory of freedom as non-interference Pettit has the burden of distinguishing domination from interference and thus devotes considerable effort in his writings to do this.

Concerns have been raised as to whether or not republican freedom as non-domination adds anything to the positive/negative dichotomy. The principal objection is that freedom as non-domination is indistinguishable from negative freedom with some noting:

This account is still closer to the negative than to the positive conception of liberty. It is an opportunity rather than an exercise conception of freedom. It is more concerned with consolidating non-interference than with establishing a fuller notion of freedom.¹⁵

Indeed Pettit himself recognizes this difficulty “But there may be a problem in seeing how it is distinguished from the negative ideal of non-interference by others, for it may not be obvious that mastery or domination really is different from interference.”¹⁶ He focuses in on the distinction between non-interference (negative liberty) and non-domination (his proposed republican freedom). His contention is that “the difference between them comes out in the fact that it is possible to have domination without interference and interference without domination”.¹⁷

An example he draws upon to highlight this distinction is the benign master. Imagine a master who owns a slave. As it happens he is quite content to allow his slave pursue their own interests and desires without interference. He may at any time, and for any reason, or none, interfere in the slave’s choices and actions. It just so happens that he has no desire to do so. Under a negative liberty view of non-interference, once the master doesn’t actually interfere in his slave’s choices then the slave enjoys freedom. However, under the republican view while the slave may be described as fortunate not to be actively interfered with they can, in no substantive way, be deemed to enjoy freedom. This distinction between interference and domination is drawn out by Pettit when he opines:

This account is still closer to the negative than to the positive conception of liberty. It is an opportunity rather than an exercise conception of freedom. It is more concerned with consolidating non-interference than with establishing a fuller notion of freedom.¹⁸

There are – according to this analysis – the following permutations:

- 1. Interference and Domination*
- 2. Interference but no Domination*
- 3. Domination but no Interference*
- 4. No Domination and No Interference*

There is no disagreement between the theories regarding permutations 1 and 4. The differences arise from permutations 2 and 3. Number 3 has been discussed above regarding the concept of the benign master. Pettit proposes the concept of non-mastering interference as an example of number 2. For example, prospective and rule-of-law compliant human rights legislation may interfere with our choices in that the rights of others must now be respected but it does so in a way that cannot be described as arbitrary control or domination.

It is therefore through the above dissociation of interference from domination Pettit proposes we understand the added value and richness of the special character of republican freedom; freedom as non-domination.

Conclusion:

This paper has introduced the republican conception of freedom as non-domination. Following a brief historical contextualization the paper considered the standard division of negative and positive liberty. The piece proceeded then to consider the evil of domination, leading therefrom to an examination of Pettit's disassociation of interference from domination.

Liberty or freedom is a contested concept with reasonable disagreement available. It is important however to understand the contours of the debate. All the more so if we are citizens of, or actively pledge ourselves to, a republic. The special commitments of republicanism become all the more important for us to understand and debate.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Does Pettit successfully disassociate freedom as non-domination from freedom as non-interference?
2. Does freedom as non-domination offer a useful challenge to the concept of non-interference?
3. Does freedom as non-domination offer a 'third way' in the negative/positive liberty model?
4. Ought we consider law to be an impingement on our liberty as citizens or creative of that liberty?
5. Is there a difference between having no master and being one's own master? If so, is this well accounted for by freedom as non-domination?

Republican Freedom by David Campbell is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Cf also <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/10/29/what-we-get-wrong-about-ben-franklins-republic-if-you-can-keep-it/>
2. Needless to say terms such as republicanism and liberalism used here in the formal, theoretical, and philosophical sense rather than the modern everyday usage. Indeed it is interesting to note how committed many political 'republicans' are to liberal ideals of freedom and how attractive republicanism may be to political 'liberals'.
3. Cécile Laborde and John Maynor, 'The Republican Contribution to Contemporary Political Theory' in Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Blackwell Publishing 2008) 3
4. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (George Bull tr, first published 1532, Penguin 1974)
5. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, (Julia Conaway Bonadella and Peter E Bonadella trs, first published 1531, Oxford University Press 2009)
6. <https://www.princeton.edu/~ppettit/>
7. The contrast here will be of a central case variety. As with any concepts and ideological positions there are of course lots of shades and overlaps etc. For the purposes of this introduction however the central case approach is taken as apt.
8. Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, in I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, (Oxford University Press 1969)
9. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Crawford, Brough, Macpherson eds, Penguin 1968)
10. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press 2002) 122
11. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press 2002) 5
12. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press 2002) 85
13. Quentin Skinner, 'Freedom as The Absence of Arbitrary Power' in Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Blackwell Publishing 2008) 96
14. Quentin Skinner, 'Freedom as The Absence of Arbitrary Power' in Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Blackwell Publishing 2008) 96
15. Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (Routledge 2002) 185
16. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press 2002) 22
17. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press 2002)
18. Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (Routledge 2002) 185

CONTEMPORARY JUST WAR THEORY

Femi Omotoyinbo

Femi Omotoyinbo researches on war ethics at the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics (SHAPP), Queen's University, Belfast, United Kingdom. His research interest broadly cuts across applied ethics, and specifically just war theory, moral responsibility, public international law, and African Philosophy. He has taught various topics in ethics, like racism, abortion, animal ethics and global justice, and courses on philosophy of law, problems of philosophy, and African philosophy. With constant innovations and profits from weapons of war and the incessant conflicts across the globe, this chapter from Femi is useful to have a grasp of thoughts and theories that define the nature of war. War is a fixed feature of this world, and this chapter is useful not only to ethically appraise the current situations but also to analyse potential future developments in war. Femi can be contacted via emails: fomotoyinbo01@qub.ac.uk or Jesusphilosopher@live.com.

Introduction

The fall of Kabul was and remains a big issue of concern that somewhat attracted various critical thoughts about wars. To some people, there is no better way to end the war because war is simply evil in all of its ramifications. Those who hold these reactions are realists. Some people think that the way the war ended in Afghanistan reflects that we should probably not have had the war at all. People with these thoughts are pacifists.

Now, between realists and pacifists are the thoughts that war is intrinsically bad, yet there are duties for participants in a war that could make war less harmful if they are effectively handled. These thoughts constitute what is called just war theory. Therefore, in this piece, we are having an introduction into just war theory in its contemporary analytical forms, its schools of thought, the various conditions or principles of the three focal areas of just war theory and finally we shall highlight some developing areas of further thoughts within just war theory.

Contemporary Just War Theory as Applied Ethics

A brief clarification before continuing is that there is historical or classical just war theory that differs from

contemporary just war theory. The former often cuts across the works of scholars like Cicero, St. Augustine, Gratian, Thucydides, Aquinas, Cajetan, Vitoria, Suárez among others. The works of these scholars may arguably not count as part of contemporary just war theory because the methods are comparative and descriptive in their thoughts about wars, particularly those in the Old Testament. Contemporary just war theory is normative, which involves an analytical approach to appraising wars beyond the biblical ones. Thus, further mention of 'just war theory' in this discourse is a reference to contemporary just war theory which is a subset of war ethics under the broad pedagogic umbrella of applied ethics.

Brian Orend (2007, p. 571) defines just war theory as "a coherent set of concepts and values designed to enable systematic and principled moral judgement in war time" The concepts and values are poised to minimising unjust suffering in war, especially for (innocent) civilians, right from the start of the war (ad bellum), during the war (in bello), and after the war (post bellum).

Contemporary just war theory arguably starts from Michael Walzer's seminal book, Just and Unjust Wars and continues with various reactive arguments and counterarguments from some contemporary just war theorists like Jeff McMahan, Henry Shue, Cécile Fabre, Seth Lazar, Yitzhak Benbaji, David Rodin, Helen Frowe, and Susanne Burri. Just war theory aims to ensure justice through these three facets of war by ensuring that those involved in wars are responsible for their actions (Walzer 1977, p. 288). Now, based on their claims and counterclaims, we can roughly categorise contemporary just war theorists into two schools of thought: Traditionalists and Revisionists. We cannot have an exhaustive outline of their differences here, but the main difference concerns the applicability of the principles in just war theory. For the traditionalists, the rights and duties during a war (i.e., in bello context) are the same for all combatants whether just or unjust. This is called the symmetry thesis and it faces rejection through the asymmetry thesis from the revisionists. Also, traditionalists support the independence thesis that rights and duties during a war are not depending on the justice of resorting to the war. For the revisionists, the converse holds, this is the dependence thesis (Rodin and Shue 2008, pp. 2-3). Nevertheless, both traditionalists and revisionists agree that combatants should not deliberately harm non-combatants.

Focal Areas in Contemporary Just War Theory

Here we will be considering the three focal areas of war in just war theory as briefly mentioned above, i.e., Jus ad bellum, Jus in bello and Jus post bellum.

Jus ad bellum (Justice before the war)

Jus ad bellum is etymologically of Latin origin meaning 'right to war'. It is about the conditions that must obtain to determine whether a resort to war will be just or unjust. The conditions are to answer the question: 'how do

we know that it is right to embark on certain wars?’ These conditions (including those of *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*) are sourced from various thoughts and arguments across traditional and contemporary just war theories. Here are seven of such conditions under *jus ad bellum* (Frowe, 2011, 52-66):

1. *Just cause:* This is about having appropriate reasons to go into war and such reasons could be self-defence, protection of the sovereignty of a state, especially in terms of aggression, unjust occupation, self-determination.
2. *Proportionality:* The question here is whether the warfare would be commensurate or match with the actions or activities that trigger the war. For example, it may be unproportionate if a State responds to demolishing a water reservoir by another State by destroying some social facilities and taking the workers hostage.
3. *Reasonable chance of success:* The concern here is the likelihood of the war bringing about the desired or desirable just end. Like the return of Afghanistan to the Taliban, it is important to know if the war will end up with the injustice it seeks to correct.
4. *Legitimate authority:* In practice, only the head(s) of government has the legitimate authority to order or motivate war against another state or sometimes some non-state aggressors.
5. *Right intention:* This concerns the moral side of the cause, which is probably best interpreted as the motives behind the reasons. For example, a reason for war may be to depose a despotic ruler that consistently breaches human rights, but it would count as unjust if the underlying motive is actually to create a state of chaos and gain express access to the resources of the State.
6. *Last resort:* Here, the point is that the war should be the last option to consider after the state intending to war have exhausted other options to respond to the provocative situations. Such options could include diplomatic talks, and if applicable, employing judicial options within the international community (e.g., the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the international human rights court).
7. *Public declaration of war:* The last among the conditions for *jus ad bellum* is that the intention to go for war, after the other conditions have been granted, should be made public. There should be no covert war or some sort of secret sabotage or conflict. Perhaps a reason for the public declaration is for the international community to be aware of the war and be able to adjudge the justness of war or to know how to intervene immediately or later on in the future.

Jus in bello (Justice during the war)

Jus in bello is of Latin origin meaning ‘justice during the war’. It is about the conditions that must obtain to adjudge if an ongoing war is just or unjust. As hinted in the dependence/independence theses above, there are contentions about the distinction between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* conditions. To some just war theorists, there is no reason for such distinction because the conditions that apply for resort to war are also applicable for conducts during the war (McMahan 2008; Frowe 2018, pp. 42-43). Nonetheless, the rules guiding conducts in war, especially on the nature of permitted weapons, treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) are in international

legal conventions like *The Hague 1899 and 1907 Conventions* and the *1948 Geneva Conventions* and its *1977 Protocols*. As we shall notice most of the conditions of *jus in bello* are “prohibitions and restraints in war” (Bailey 1972) ensure fighting well (Walzer 1977, p. 127), especially to guide against unjustified attacks on civilians.

Below are four main conditions of *jus in bello*:

1. *Qualifying as Combatants*: An important point in just war theory is that warfare is normally only for the combatants and there is the need to separate combatants from non-combatants. But what makes a combatant *qua* combatant? Recall that some of the conditions of *jus in bello* are already part of international law. Thus, according to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, someone counts as a combatant if: S/he is part of an organised group that has a clear chain of command.
S/he has an identifiable uniform as a mark of difference from civilians, and sometimes combatants from another chain of command.
S/he bears arms publicly.
S/he follows the rules governing conducts in war as enshrined in the Conventions.
2. *Identifying Legitimate Attacks*: As a condition of *jus in bello*, it is required that combatants identify those who are liable to justified attack and those who are not. According to the 1949 Geneva Convention, combatants must avoid intentional attacks on non-combatants either in terms of hostage-taking, torture or killing. Also, combatants who surrender or are incapacitated to fight may count as POWs but they no longer count as legitimate targets. Generally, civilians and civilian objects, such as hospitals, schools etc are not legitimate military targets, such attack is considered criminal. In fact, some domestic legislation contentiously states that a munition factory is a military object that may be attacked but it extends the protection of civilians to include munition workers despite their significant contributions to war (UK Ministry of Defence, 2.5.2, 2004, p. 24). However, there are cases where illegitimate targets may be attacked with little or no consequence depending on the situation. One notable principle that applies in such a situation is called the doctrine of double effect (DDE) which contentiously suggests that sometimes innocent victims may be unintended but foreseen targets of an attack. In military terms, the unfortunate victims may be considered as collateral damage.
3. *Legitimate Tactics*: This condition links with the previous one. The condition is that although we have identified those who are liable to legitimate attacks, this is not a sanction for indiscriminate attacks on those ‘deserving’ such attacks. There are acceptable and unacceptable means of attacking legitimate attacks. To consider a tactic as legitimate we should be able to identify whether a) if the attack is necessary to achieve the military objective. For example, destroying a military airbase may be unnecessary if bombing a bridge could help in achieving the same military goal. b) ‘Proportionality’ is also an important element of legitimate military tactics. Proportionality as Helen Frowe (2011/2016, p. 112) rightly puts it is that “the harm that one inflicts must be proportionate to the good that is protected, and must be the least harmful means available of achieving the good.” For example, bombing some factories that produce war materials for the enemy combatants may be proportionate to quell a threat of aggression rather than killing the enemy

combatants. Part of the two sub-conditions under legitimate tactics include the nature of the weapons to be employed. Biological, nuclear and chemical weapons are often prohibited in the international legal conventions on war. For example, the three declarations of the first Hague Convention (1899) respectively forbids the discharge of projectiles and explosives from balloons (p. 220); the use of 'asphyxiating or deleterious' gases as weapons and expanding bullets (Scott 1915, pp. 225 & 227).

4. The final condition to consider under *jus in bello* is the treatment of the prisoners of war (POWs). POWs may include combatants who were injured and thereby incapacitated to fight, or those who were captured or those who voluntarily surrender. This is a recent concern in the war between Russia and Ukraine. These persons can no longer be treated as (enemy) combatants, they should not be punished, harassed or compelled to function as slaves or labourers because of their involvement in the war. POWs are only punishable for whatever offence they commit during their status as POWs. The treatment of POWs is to be vice versa between the warring parties and such treatment tend to be a good ground for *jus post bellum*.

Jus post bellum (Justice after the war)

Jus post bellum is etymologically of Latin origin meaning 'justice after war'. It is about conditions that should be in place to end a war and what follows in a just way. According to Larry May (2012, p.1-21), there are "six [interwoven] normative principles of *jus post bellum*" which are: "rebuilding, retribution, reconciliation, restitution, and reparation, as well as proportionality." There are views among just war theorists that conditions of *jus post bellum* are linked with *jus ad bellum* in such a way that considerations should be given to the post bellum conditions even while war is at the *ad bellum* stage. Before briefly considering these conditions, it is informative to mention an interesting contention whether the conditions of post bellum should include 'punishment'. There is the argument that *Jus post bellum* is forward-looking to restore peace in contrast to punishment which is backwards-looking: revisiting the past to inflict harm on wrongdoers (Lazar 2012, p.220; Fabre 2018, p. 508). Some just war theorists think that the exclusion of punishment in the process of *jus post bellum* is tantamount to a flagrant disrespect for the suffering of the victims (Orend 2007, p. 580). Meanwhile, we shall not delve into the arguments here but briefly consider the six conditions of *jus post bellum* - since one of them entails 'punishment'.

1. *Rebuilding*: This is the effort of restoring destroyed institutions, structures and facilities that are significant for afterwar peacebuilding.
2. *Retribution*: This is the condition concerning paying back aggressors or unjust contributors to war. Retribution as a condition does not only entail punishment but it concerns the measurement of the punishment to be met out to unjust aggressors.
3. *Reconciliation*: A very clear explanation on reconciliation is "a process of returning previously warring

parties to a point not only where they do not engage in violence toward each other but also where there is sufficient trust so that a robust and just peace can be attained – and where a just peace means that human rights are protected.” (May 2012, p. 86).

4. *Restitution: During the war, it is likely that some properties or resources that rightfully belong to certain persons may be lost or taken away from them. Looting of resources is often a characteristic of war. Thus, restitution, as a post bellum condition is about returning the resources or properties to their owners.*
5. *Reparation: This is like another side of the coin for restitution because it is also about restoration but here it is about restoring damaged things during a war back to good condition. Classic works in contemporary just war theory suggest that reparation is mainly about wrongful harm from war, and it is usually a post-war attempt to redress injustice to war victims (Walzer 1977, Orend 2006, McMahan 2009).*
6. *Proportionality: You will recall that under the conditions of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* we have ‘proportionality’ and it was about whether the act of war will be commensurate or match with the actions or activities that trigger the war. Under *post bellum*, the case is somewhat different. Here ‘proportionality’ is to ensure that efforts to establish peace do not cause more harm than good to the population concerned (May 2012, p. 225). A further explanation is that *post bellum* proportionality is useful to restrict excessive impositions by the victors on the victims. For example, if there would be an imposition of fines on defeated aggressors it should not be excessive to the detriment of their survival.*

So far, we have seen some of the trends of thoughts that constitute just war theory. However, this is obviously a scratch on the surface of the various arguments and counter-arguments that characterise contemporary just war theory. But before concluding it all, it is worthwhile to consider some thoughts/theories that are gaining attention within contemporary just war theory.

Further Thoughts in Contemporary Just War Theory

To conclude this piece, here are a few topics that are fast gaining attention in contemporary just war theory.

Just War Theory and Feminism

This is broadly about feminist perspectives on war. One of the approaches is the presentation of feminism as another alternative reaction to war. This approach suggests that feminism could provoke a more empathetic approach to thoughts and practices in war than what is currently obtained through the extant principles of just war theory (Peach 1994, pp. 152-172). A somewhat similar thought is that there should be a feminist reinterpretation of just war theory which would further give some normative strength to just war theory (Sjoberg 2008, pp. 1-18).

Artificial Intelligence and Just War Theory

Some of the thoughts in the of artificial intelligence concern what is at stake with the use of autonomous weapons, especially with a legal focus on obligations, human liability/culpability and the significance of the application of autonomous weapons for military conduct and justice in war (Pagallo 2011, pp. 307-323). There are also reflections on the application of artificial intelligence in war and the possible moral/legal and political implications for future warfare (Timothy 2020, Omotoyinbo, 2022).

Just War Theory and Climate Change

*With the increasing focus on climate change, it is interesting to note any connection between just war theory and climate change. An interesting connection is the application of the conditions of *jus ad bellum* to assess the military approach to climate change by the United Nations Security Council (Van der Linden 2019, pp. 117-136). Another thought in this area is the use of a just war framework to demonstrate that geoengineering, as a response to climate change may be helpful to some parts of the world but the stance of the international community, probably the well-off countries, to such option seems lethargic (Hedahl and Fruh 2019).*

War and Covid19

This is a recently developing area within just war theory, especially since the discovery of the pandemic is relatively recent as well. A known thought here is about how the capitalist approach to arms trade has caused a significant distraction and lack of enough funds to tackle the spread of covid19 at the onset of the pandemic. This thought could be expanded to include a comparison between governments' reactive approach to covid19 compare to the reactive approach of supplying weapons to earn profits even if the conflicts are unjust. The link to this interesting thought from Andrew Feinstein will be included in the Bibliographical section below.

Suggested Readings/Videos

Feinstein, A., "How Military Spending Affects the Corona Virus Crisis" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sK8PII3kG4Q> (accessed on Friday 12th November, 2021).

Lazar, S. and Frowe, H. (eds) (2018) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McMahan, A., "What Rights May We Defend by Means of War?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEKWJ73Nd94> (accessed on Friday 12th November, 2021).

Walzer, M. 1977/2006. *Just and Unjust Wars: A moral argument with historical illustrations* (4th edtn), New York: Basic Books.

Walzer, M., "on Terrorism and Just War" <https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2007/walzer-terrorism-just-war> (accessed on Friday 12th November, 2021).

Bibliographical Notes

1949 Geneva Conventions, <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0173.pdf> (assessed on Friday 12th November, 2021)

Bailey, S.D. (1972) *Prohibitions and Restraints in War*, London: Oxford University Press.

Fabre, C., (2018) *War's Aftermath and the Ethics of War* in Lazar, S. and Frowe, H. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 507-518.

Frowe H., (2018) "The Just War Framework" in Lazar, S. and Frowe, H. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 41-58.

Frowe, H., (2011) *The Ethics of War and Peace: Introduction*, Oxford: Routledge.

Hedahl M., and Frub, K., (2019) *Climate change is Unjust War* – *Journal of Philosophy* 57(3).

Lazar, S., (2012) *Skepticism about Jus Post Bellum* in May, L., and Forcehimes, A.T., (eds) *Morality and Jus Post Bellum, and International Law*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

May, L., (2012) *After war ends: A philosophical perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McMahan, J. (2009) *Killing in War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McMahan, J., (2008) *The Morality of War and the Law of War*, in Rodin D. and Shue H. (eds) *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 19-43.

- Omotoyinbo, F.R., (2022) *Smart Soldiers: Towards A More Ethical Warfare, AI & Society*, pp. 1-7.
- Orend, B., (2007) *The Perspective of a Just War Theorist*. *Leiden Journal of International Law* 20:3, pp. 571-591.
- Orend, B., (2006) *The Morality of War*, Ontario: Broadview Press.
- Pagallo U., (2011) *Robots of Just war: a Legal Perspective*, *Philosophy and Technology* 24(3) pp. 307-323.
- Peach, L. J., (1994) *An Alternative to Pacifism? Feminism and Just-war theory*, *Hypatia* 9(2) pp. 152-172.
- Rodin, D. and Shue H., (2008) *Introduction*, in Rodin D. and Shue H. (eds) *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 19-43.
- Scott, J.B., (1915) *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1889 and 1907*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sjoberg, L., (2008) *Why just war needs feminism now more than ever – International Politics* 45 (1) pp. 1-18.
- Timothy J. Demy, (2020) “Something Old, Something New” – *Reflections on AI and the Just War Tradition, Artificial Intelligence and Global Security*, Emerald Publishing.
- UK, Ministry of Defence, (2004) *Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van der Linden, H., (2019) *Climate change mitigation and the UN Security Council: A Just war Analysis. Pacifism, Politics and Feminism*, pp. 117-136.
- Walzer, M., (1977/2006) *Just and Unjust Wars: A moral argument with historical illustrations (4th Ed)*, New York: Basic Books.



HOW CAN PUNISHMENT BE JUSTIFIED? ON KANT'S RETRIBUTIVISM

Guus Duindam

Guus Duindam is a Ph.D Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Michigan working in normative ethics, the philosophy of law, and Kant. Guus also holds a law degree from Michigan Law and currently works as a judicial law clerk at the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

*The institution of **legal punishment** imposes serious harms on lawbreakers. What, if anything, justifies this practice? In this Chapter, you will learn about the definition of legal punishment, why we need a philosophical justification for it, and what kinds of justifications have been offered by philosophers so far. You will also read Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) **retributivist** defense of punishment.*

What is punishment? Why do we need a theory of punishment?

*Most philosophers agree that **legal punishment** has five components: it is the (1) intentional infliction of (2) a harm (3) by a legitimate authority, (4) on someone the authority believes has broken the law, (5) because the authority believes that they've broken the law. So: if the United States government sentences Alfred A. to prison because he robbed the local Walmart, that's an instance of legal punishment. Indeed, it's an instance of punishment even if Alfred is in fact innocent, so long as the sentencing authority believes him to be guilty. It is, after all, possible to punish the wrong person. But if the government secretly kidnaps Alfred and locks him up because he has compromising information about an illegal government program, that does not count as punishment, even if Alfred also robbed the local Walmart. After all, in this example Alfred's imprisonment has nothing to do with his having broken the law.*

Although we won't discuss non-legal punishment in this Chapter, it's interesting to note that all the same conditions seem to apply to non-legal punishment as well. If a parent takes away her child's candy because she hit her sister, that seems like punishment—and it meets the conditions: the parent is a legitimate authority, taking away the candy is meant to be unpleasant, and it's done because the child hit her sister, a breach of a moral rule.

If you remove any one of the conditions from the example, it will no longer feel like an example of punishment. Imagine, for instance, the candy being taken away because it's bad for the child's health; the sister instead of the parent taking the candy away (as retaliation, perhaps), etc. So the five defining conditions of punishment seem to be fairly universal.

Why do we need a philosophical justification of the practice of legal punishment? In an important paper about this issue, Mitchell Berman explains that:

Justification can always be given. There is always some sense in offering the reasons that support one's conduct. But while they may always be offered, justifications cannot always be demanded. Customarily, to claim that actual or contemplated conduct, X, is "in need" of justification means that "ordinarily" or "presumptively" one ought not to X, or that there exists apparent or putative reason not to X. That is, our practice of justification is a dialectical one in which the initial argumentative burden rests on those who deny or question justification.¹

*In other words: it's always possible to justify the things we do, because we could always give our reasons for doing it. For instance, we could provide a justifying theory of toothbrushing by appealing to its health and hygiene benefits. But in some cases, someone can **demand** a justification for our practice. That is true when our practice is **presumptively problematic**, which means there's something about the practice that would normally make it morally wrong. Virtually every philosopher agrees that the practice of legal punishment is presumptively problematic in this way. Punishment needs to be justified because normally it would be wrong to intentionally harm other people.*

To see why, let's return to Alfred. Imagine that Bertold B., Alfred's neighbor, finds out that Alfred robbed the local Walmart. Instead of calling the police, Bertold simply locks Alfred up in his own basement. Bertold's behavior seems (is) insane. It's totally unacceptable to lock someone up in your basement—even if they've committed one (or many!) crimes. But from Alfred's perspective, being locked in Bertold's basement is not so much worse than being locked up in prison. (If Bertold has a nice basement, it might even be better!) So the obvious wrongness of Bertold's behavior shows us something important: the kind of thing that we do to punish lawbreakers would normally be morally wrong. That is why the practice of punishment is in need of a philosophical justification. When we intentionally harm someone, that person is entitled to demand that we explain ourselves.

Backwards, Forwards, or Both?

*Many different attempts at a justification for punishment exist, but they can be grouped into three categories: forward-looking theories, backward-looking theories, and hybrid theories. **Forward-looking theories** try to defend the institution of punishment by appealing to its social benefits. Such theories are forward-looking because they justify punishment by pointing to the good things that will happen after the punishment is imposed. They*

are also called **utilitarian** theories of punishment, because they focus on the practical **utility** (usefulness) of punishment.

The most important social benefit of punishment is usually thought to be **deterrence**. Deterrence refers to the idea that punishing people who have committed crimes will discourage other people from committing those crimes as well. In this sense, punishments function a bit like **threats**: don't commit crimes, or else...! **John Stuart Mill** (1806 – 1873), one of the founders of utilitarian ethics, once argued in a speech to the U.K. Parliament that deterrence should be considered the primary purpose of punishment. "To deter by suffering from inflicting suffering is not only possible, but the very purpose of penal justice." A secondary social benefit of punishment is that wrongdoers will be **incapacitated** from committing crimes while they are being punished. In the case of dangerous criminals, such incapacitation provides additional societal protection.

Backward-looking theories of punishment take a very different approach. They justify punishment not by looking at its practical benefits but by appeal to what the wrongdoer **deserves**. This kind of theory is also known as **retributivism**, because it characterizes punishment as **deserved retribution** for a moral wrong. According to retributivists, those who break the law commit a moral wrong. And those who commit moral wrongs deserve to suffer. Because it is good when people get what they deserve, it is good when wrongdoers suffer. Accordingly, punishment is justified because it imposes deserved harms. **Immanuel Kant** is usually considered the most important retributivist theorist of punishment.

Finally, **hybrid theories** combine aspects of the two other kinds of theories of punishment. For instance, one could argue that punishment is **permissible** (morally acceptable) because it is deserved, and **useful** because it protects society. Many hybrid theories also discuss the use of punishments for **rehabilitation**: helping criminals re-enter society in a more productive way. These kind of theories are hybrid theories because they use both the backward- and the forward-looking justifications. Many modern theories of punishment involve such 'hybrid' justifications.

Kant's Retributivism

In the following sections, we will look closely at Immanuel Kant's famous retributivist defense of punishment. First, we will read an excerpt of Kant's *Doctrine of Right*, the work which contains almost all of his legal philosophy. Then, we will consider the implications of Kant's remarks.

Immanuel Kant, "On the right to punish and to grant clemency," in the *Metaphysics of Morals*²

The right to punish is the right a ruler has against a subject to inflict pain upon him because of his having committed a crime. [...]. Punishment by a court—this is distinct from natural punishment, in which vice punishes itself and which the legislator does not take into account—can never be inflicted merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society. It must always be inflicted upon him only because he

has committed a crime. For a human being can never be treated merely as a means to the purposes of another or be put among the objects of rights to things: his innate personality protects him from this, even though he can be condemned to lose his civil personality. He must previously have been found punishable before any thought can be given to drawing from his punishment something of use for himself or his fellow citizens. The law of punishment is a categorical imperative, and woe to him who crawls through the windings of eudaimonism in order to discover something that releases the criminal from punishment or even reduces its amount by the advantage it promises, in accordance with the Pharisaical saying, "It is better for one man to die than for an entire people to perish." For if justice goes, there is no longer any value in human being's living on the earth. What, therefore, should one think of the proposal to preserve a life of a criminal sentenced to death if he agrees to let dangerous experiments be made on him and is lucky enough to survive them, so that in this way physicians learn something new of benefit to the commonwealth? A court would reject with contempt such a proposal from a medical college, for justice ceases to be justice if it can be bought for any price whatsoever.

But what kind and what amount of punishment is it that public justice makes its principle and measure? None other than the principle of equality (in the position of the needle on the scale of justice), to incline no more to one side than to the other. Accordingly, whatever undeserved evil you inflict upon another within the people, that you inflict upon yourself. If you insult him, you insult yourself; if you steal from him; you steal from yourself; if you strike him, you strike yourself; if you kill him, you kill yourself. But only the law of retribution (ius talionis)—it being understood, of course, that this is applied by a court (not by your private judgment)—can specify definitely the quality and the quantity of punishment; all other principles are fluctuating and unsuited for a sentence of pure and strict justice because extraneous considerations are mixed into them. Now it would indeed seem that differences in social rank would not allow the principle of retribution, of like for like, but even when this is not possible in terms of the letter, the principle can always remain valid in terms of its effect if account is taken of the sensibilities of the upper classes. A fine, for example, imposed for a verbal injury has no relation to the offense, for someone wealthy might indeed allow himself to indulge in a verbal insult on some occasion; yet the outrage he has done to someone's love of honor can still be quite similar to the hurt done to his pride if he is constrained by judgment and right not only to apologize publicly to the one he has insulted but also to kiss his hand, for instance, even though he is of a lower class. Similarly, someone of high standing given to violence could be condemned not only to apologize for striking an innocent citizen socially inferior to himself but also to undergo a solitary confinement involving hardship; in addition to the discomfort he undergoes, the offender's vanity would be painfully affected, so that through his shame like would be fittingly repaid with like.

[...] If, however, [someone] has committed murder, he must die. Here there is no substitute that will satisfy justice. There is no similarity between life, however wretched it may be, and death, hence no likeness between the crime and the retribution unless death is judicially carried out upon the wrongdoer, although it must still be freed from any mistreatment that could make the humanity in the person suffering it into something abominable. Even if a civil society were to be dissolved by the consent of all its members (e.g., if a people inhabiting an island decided to separate and disperse throughout the world), the last murderer remaining in prison would first have to be executed,

so that each has done to him what his deeds deserve and blood guilt does not cling to the people for not having insisted upon this punishment; for otherwise the people can be regarded as collaborators in this public violation of justice.

Interpreting Kant's Defense of Retributivism

*Kant's text is dense and sometimes difficult to understand. In this section, we'll examine the arguments he makes more closely. In the passage provided above, he makes three key points. First, he rejects all forward-looking theories of punishment. Second, he argues that the severity of a punishment may never be increased or decreased because of considerations of societal utility. Third, he defends the **principle of retribution** or the **lex talionis**: the idea that punishments should inflict a harm that is similar to the kind the wrongdoer inflicted on their victims. We'll discuss each argument in turn.*

*Kant begins with the claim that punishment “can never be inflicted as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society.” This is a direct rejection of forward-looking theories of punishment, which, as we've seen, hold that promoting the good of society is the only purpose of punishment. According to Kant, we can't consider the usefulness of a punishment at all until we've determined that someone is “punishable.” By this Kant means to say that we do not have a right to punish anyone who does not deserve to be punished. That is because, in Kant's view, we have an **innate right** never to be used simply as a tool to make society better. To be used “**merely as a means**”—only as a tool—is incompatible with the respect we are owed as human beings. As you will learn if you study Kant in more detail, the principle that we may never use human beings as mere means to our own purposes is one of the key principles of his ethics. He appeals to that principle here to argue that we violate someone's basic human rights if we punish them just to make society a better place. Instead, punishments are never justified unless we first determine that the wrongdoer actually deserves them.*

Implicit in Kant's rejection of forward-looking accounts of punishment is the accusation that such theories would accept or even encourage punishment of those who do not deserve to be punished. This continues to be a problem for some types of utilitarian theories today. Imagine that the population of State X believes that Cecile C. has committed a horrendous crime. The State knows that Cecile is innocent, but they don't know who actually committed the crime. So, the State punishes Cecile. This deters other people in X from committing similar crimes, reduces public unrest about the unsolved crime, and increases the public's sense of safety. Some utilitarian theories of punishment would condone the punishment of Cecile in this instance, despite the fact that she is innocent. In contrast, Kant's theory rejects punishment of the innocent in every case, no matter how useful it would be, because punishment of the innocent is always undeserved.

Kant next turns his attention to the severity of punishments. He argues that we also may not consider the utility of a punishment when we determine how severe it should be. That means we may not impose a punishment that is more severe than the wrongdoer deserves, but we also may not impose a punishment that is less severe. We

should determine the severity of our punishments by thinking only about what the wrongdoer deserves, without considering the usefulness of the punishment. As Kant puts it, punishments must be proportional to the criminal's "inner wickedness."

This part of Kant's argument is essentially a defense of proportional punishment. Most people share the intuition that punishments shouldn't be much worse than the crime warrants—even if that would be societally useful. An extreme example can help illustrate this issue. Imagine that we could significantly reduce traffic deaths by imposing the death penalty on anyone who drives more than ten miles over the speed limit. And imagine that drivers are so scared of being sentenced to death that they all start following the speed limit. (This would be an example of deterrence). As a result, the number of people who die from this new death sentence law is much smaller than the number of people who currently die as a result of speeding related traffic accidents. So this criminal law would save a significant number of lives. Nevertheless, it seems unreasonably harsh. Most people would not support a death sentence for traffic violations even if it would ultimately save lives. In that sense, most people share Kant's intuition that punishments must be proportional to the wrong they are meant to punish.

*Kant also makes the argument in the other direction: he also argues that punishments shouldn't be less severe than deserved. He makes that point with the example about the prisoner who "agrees to let dangerous experiments be made on him" in return for a shorter sentence. Kant would not permit reductions in sentence in return for social benefits. He defends that view primarily by appeal to the **principle of equality**. Kant views the unequal treatment of those who have committed crimes that are equally morally wrong as unjustifiable. "Justice ceases to be justice," Kant says, "if it can be bought for any price whatsoever." On Kant's view, then, punishments are non-negotiable: everyone should get exactly what they deserve—no more, no less.*

In the context of punishment, Kant's views often seem strict and uncompromising. Interestingly, though, many of us share Kant's general intuition that it is a violation of the principle of equality if someone is made better off than they deserve. Consider, for instance, your college grades. Suppose that Derrick D., a classmate of yours, wrote a terrible paper, thrown together in the hour before class. You, in contrast, spent weeks writing the perfect essay. It seems unjust if Derrick gets the same grade as you do—even if you get exactly the grade you deserve. In other words: you might object to Derrick being better off than he deserves in relation to the other people in the class. Kant's view relies on much the same intuition. If A and B commit equally wrong acts, A and B's punishment should be precisely identical.

*This raises a question about how to determine appropriate punishments. Kant tells us that we should proportion punishments to the "inner wickedness" of the criminal, but how can we decide what the proportional punishment should be? That question continues to be a serious problem for retributivists. There doesn't seem to be an easy and reliable way to figure out exactly how much suffering someone deserves. As you have read, Kant defends the **law of retribution** or the **lex talionis** as an answer to this problem. The ancient *lex talionis* is the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" principle according to which the punishment should mirror the crime. Of course, Kant does not take that principle literally. He does not argue that we should steal from thieves, insult those who have defamed*

us, or torture our torturers. As is made clear by his discussion of punishment for the “upper classes,” Kant instead argues that we should impose punishments which impose a harm on the wrongdoer that is similar to the harm the wrongdoer imposed on his victim.

Kant’s own examples are helpful to understand what this principle would mean in practice. He considers a rich nobleman who insults someone of lower social rank. That wrongful act should not be punished with a fine, because then “someone wealthy might indeed allow himself to indulge in a verbal insult on some occasion.” In other words: fines are not suitable punishments because those who are rich enough don’t suffer from them. Instead, they might just choose to commit the crime and pay the fine. So, Kant argues, the nobleman should instead be punished for his insult by being forced to apologize publicly and kissing the hand of his victim. These are things the nobleman will find humiliating, and so he will experience a kind of harm (humiliation) that is similar to the harm he inflicted.

There is another reason we can’t take the lex talionis literally and mirror the crime, and that is that the crime may be too terrible to replicate on the criminal. Kant argues that even the death penalty must be carried out “freed from any mistreatment that could make the humanity in the person suffering it into something abominable.” In other words: we are required to respect the humanity of even the worst imaginable wrongdoers. That means that we may not torture, mistreat, or otherwise disrespect criminals as we try to punish them. Instead, even very serious punishments must be inflicted in a way that is consistent with our respect for the human dignity which we all share.

*We have now reviewed the three key aspects of Kant’s defense of retributivism: his rejection of all forward-looking justifications of punishment, his defense of proportionality, and his defense of a modified law of retribution. But we have not addressed the elephant in the room: Kant’s claim that even if a society were disbanding entirely, it still has a moral obligation to execute “the last murderer remaining in prison.” That claim has made Kant notorious as an extremely unforgiving retributivist. Indeed, some philosophers have argued that retributivism of this kind is completely barbaric.³ Of course, that may be true. (And in any case, today we might no longer believe that it is possible to sentence someone to death while at the same time respecting their dignity as a human being). Whatever you think of Kant’s radical example, though, it is important to recognize that even here, Kant is attempting to apply the principle of equality in a consistent way. In part because of the extreme nature of the example, Kant is sometimes misunderstood as defending a theory of punishment that is based on a desire for **revenge**. That is not correct. In fact, Kant argues that we have a **duty to be forgiving to one another**:*

It is...a duty of virtue not only to refrain from repaying another’s enmity with hatred out of mere revenge but also not even to call upon the judge of the world for vengeance, partly because a human being has enough guilt of his own to be greatly in need of pardon and partly, and indeed especially, because no punishment, no matter from whom it comes, may be inflicted out of hatred. It is therefore a duty of human beings to be forgiving. But this must not be confused with meek toleration of wrongs, renunciation of rigorous means for preventing the recurrence of wrongs by others; for then a human being would be throwing away his rights and letting others trample on them, and so would violate his duty to himself.⁴

So: Kant argues that we shouldn't let others trample on our rights—but we also can't ever punish someone because we hate them, or because we want to take revenge. We should instead be forgiving of others—after all, he points out, we all have our own guilty consciences. Can you make sense of Kant's example about the last murderer in light of his claim that that “no punishment, no matter from whom it comes, may be inflicted out of hatred?”

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Compare Kant's description of punishment (at the beginning of the excerpt) with the modern definition of legal punishment. Are there any differences? If so, what are they?
2. Go back to the example about Cecile C, the innocent person punished by State X. Now read the definition of legal punishment again. Is the punishment of Cecile actually “punishment” according to that definition?
3. What do you think about Kant's argument against fines? Are there other punishments that might affect the rich differently than the poor? If so, do you think Kant's view would require changing those punishments, too?
4. Do you agree with Kant that it would be a human rights violation to punish someone more than they deserve, even if that punishment would be extremely useful to society?
5. What do you think of Kant's ‘last murderer’ example? How does that example relate to the principle of equality?
6. Kant's account, like most retributivist theories, only works if you think people who do morally bad things deserve to suffer. Do you think that is true? If not, why not? If yes, why?

Notes

1. Mitchell N. Berman, "Punishment and Justification," *Ethics* 118, no. 2 (2008): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1086/527424>.
2. Excerpted from the English Cambridge edition of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*. All the emphases are Kant's. Latin phrases are omitted from the quoted text.
3. For instance, see Nathan Hanna, "Retributivism Revisited," *Philosophical Studies* 167, no. 2 (2014): 479, doi:10.1007/s11098-013-0103-0; Victor Tadros, *The Ends of Harm: The Moral Foundations of Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59, 61, 63, 78, 86, 102, 190, 308.
4. *Metaphysics of Morals* at 6:460-461.

UNIT 5 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

Crito

by Plato

On Liberty

Copyright by Jonathan Bennett, 2017

Estranged Labour

by Karl Marx, 1844

Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility

by Vine Deloria

How To Tame A Wild Tongue

by Gloria Anzaldua

Islam and the Challenge of Democratic Commitment

by Dr. Khaled Abou El-Fadl, Copyright 2003

UNIT VI

UNIT 6: AESTHETICS

PLATO'S REPUBLIC BOOK X

Jeff McLaughlin

Republic

Book X

SOCRATES – GLAUCON

OF THE many excellences which I perceive in the order of our State, there is none which upon reflection pleases me better than the rule about poetry.

To what do you refer?

To the rejection of imitative poetry, which certainly ought not to be received; as I see far more clearly now that the parts of the soul have been distinguished.

What do you mean?

Speaking in confidence, for I should not like to have my words repeated to the tragedians and the rest of the imitative tribe— but I do not mind saying to you, that all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them.

Explain the purport of your remark.

Well, I will tell you, although I have always from my earliest youth had an awe and love of Homer, which even now makes the words falter on my lips, for he is the great captain and teacher of the whole of that charming tragic company; but a man is not to be revered more than the truth, and therefore I will speak out.

Very good, he said.

Listen to me then, or rather, answer me.

Put your question.

Can you tell me what imitation is? for I really do not know.

A likely thing, then, that I should know.

Why not? for the duller eye may often see a thing sooner than the keener.

Very true, he said; but in your presence, even if I had any faint notion, I could not muster courage to utter it. Will you enquire yourself?

Well then, shall we begin the enquiry in our usual manner: Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea or form. Do you understand me?

I do.

Let us take any common instance; there are beds and tables in the world— plenty of them, are there not?

Yes.

But there are only two ideas or forms of them—one the idea of a bed, the other of a table.

True.

And the maker of either of them makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, in accordance with the idea—that is our way of speaking in this and similar instances—but no artificer makes the ideas themselves: how could he?

Impossible.

And there is another artist,—I should like to know what you would say of him.

Who is he?

One who is the maker of all the works of all other workmen.

What an extraordinary man!

Wait a little, and there will be more reason for your saying so. For this is he who is able to make not only vessels of every kind, but plants and animals, himself and all other things—the earth and heaven, and the things which are in heaven or under the earth; he makes the gods also.

He must be a wizard and no mistake.

Oh! you are incredulous, are you? Do you mean that there is no such maker or creator, or that in one sense there might be a maker of all these things but in another not? Do you see that there is a way in which you could make them all yourself?

What way?

An easy way enough; or rather, there are many ways in which the feat might be quickly and easily accomplished, none quicker than that of turning a mirror round and round—you would soon enough make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the, other things of which we were just now speaking, in the mirror.

Yes, he said; but they would be appearances only.

Very good, I said, you are coming to the point now. And the painter too is, as I conceive, just such another—a creator of appearances, is he not?

Of course.

But then I suppose you will say that what he creates is untrue. And yet there is a sense in which the painter also creates a bed?

Yes, he said, but not a real bed.

And what of the maker of the bed? Were you not saying that he too makes, not the idea which, according to our view, is the essence of the bed, but only a particular bed?

Yes, I did.

Then if he does not make that which exists he cannot make true existence, but only some semblance of existence; and if anyone were to say that the work of the maker of the bed, or of any other workman, has real existence, he could hardly be supposed to be speaking the truth.

At any rate, he replied, philosophers would say that he was not speaking the truth.

No wonder, then, that his work too is an indistinct expression of truth.

No wonder.

Suppose now that by the light of the examples just offered we enquire who this imitator is?

If you please.

Well then, here are three beds: one existing in nature, which is made by God, as I think that we may say—for no one else can be the maker?

No.

There is another which is the work of the carpenter?

Yes.

And the work of the painter is a third?

Yes.

Beds, then, are of three kinds, and there are three artists who superintend them: God, the maker of the bed, and the painter?

Yes, there are three of them.

God, whether from choice or from necessity, made one bed in nature and one only; two or more such ideal beds neither ever have been nor ever will be made by God.

Why is that?

Because even if He had made but two, a third would still appear behind them which both of them would have for their idea, and that would be the ideal bed and the two others.

Very true, he said.

God knew this, and He desired to be the real maker of a real bed, not a particular maker of a particular bed, and therefore He created a bed which is essentially and by nature one only.

So we believe.

Shall we, then, speak of Him as the natural author or maker of the bed?

Yes, he replied; inasmuch as by the natural process of creation He is the author of this and of all other things.

And what shall we say of the carpenter—is not he also the maker of the bed?

Yes.

But would you call the painter a creator and maker?

Certainly not.

Yet if he is not the maker, what is he in relation to the bed?

I think, he said, that we may fairly designate him as the imitator of that which the others make.

Good, I said; then you call him who is third in the descent from nature an imitator?

And the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth?

That appears to be so.

Then about the imitator we are agreed. And what about the painter?— I would like to know whether he may be thought to imitate that which originally exists in nature, or only the creations of artists?

The latter.

As they are or as they appear? You have still to determine this.

What do you mean?

I mean, that you may look at a bed from different points of view, obliquely or directly or from any other point of view, and the bed will appear different, but there is no difference in reality. And the same of all things.

Yes, he said, the difference is only apparent.

Now let me ask you another question: Which is the art of painting designed to be—an imitation of things as they are, or as they appear— of appearance or of reality?

Of appearance.

Then the imitator, I said, is a long way off the truth, and can do all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image. For example: A painter will paint a cobbler, carpenter, or any other artist, though he knows nothing of their arts; and, if he is a good artist, he may deceive children or simple persons, when he shows them his picture of a carpenter from a distance, and they will fancy that they are looking at a real carpenter.

Certainly.

And whenever any one informs us that he has found a man knows all the arts, and all things else that anybody knows, and every single thing with a higher degree of accuracy than any other man— whoever tells us this, I think that we can only imagine to be

a simple creature who is likely to have been deceived by some wizard or actor whom he met, and whom he thought all-knowing, because he himself was unable to analyse the nature of knowledge and ignorance and imitation.

Most true.

And so, when we hear persons saying that the tragedians, and Homer, who is at their head, know all the arts and all things human, virtue as well as vice, and divine things too, for that the good poet cannot compose well unless he

knows his subject, and that he who has not this knowledge can never be a poet, we ought to consider whether here also there may not be a similar illusion. Perhaps they may have come across imitators and been deceived by them; they may not have remembered when they saw their works that these were but imitations thrice removed from the truth, and could easily be made without any knowledge of the truth, because they are appearances only and not realities? Or, after all, they may be in the right, and poets do really know the things about which they seem to the many to speak so well?

The question, he said, should by all means be considered.

Now do you suppose that if a person were able to make the original as well as the image, he would seriously devote himself to the image-making branch? Would he allow imitation to be the ruling principle of his life, as if he had nothing higher in him?

I should say not.

The real artist, who knew what he was imitating, would be interested in realities and not in imitations; and would desire to leave as memorials of himself works many and fair; and, instead of being the author of encomiums, he would prefer to be the theme of them.

Yes, he said, that would be to him a source of much greater honour and profit.

Then, I said, we must put a question to Homer; not about medicine, or any of the arts to which his poems only incidentally refer: we are not going to ask him, or any other poet, whether he has cured patients like Asclepius, or left behind him a school of medicine such as the Asclepiads were, or whether he only talks about medicine and other arts at second hand; but we have a right to know respecting military tactics, politics, education, which are the chiefest and noblest subjects of his poems, and we may fairly ask him about them. 'Friend Homer,' then we say to him, 'if you are only in the second remove from truth in what you say of virtue, and not in the third— not an image maker or imitator—and if you are able to discern what pursuits make men better or worse in private or public life, tell us what State was ever better governed by your help? The good order of Lacedaemon is due to Lycurgus, and many other cities great and small have been similarly benefited by others; but who says that you have been a good legislator to them and have done them any good? Italy and Sicily boast of Charondas, and there is Solon who is renowned among us; but what city has anything to say about you?' Is there any city which he might name?

I think not, said Glaucon; not even the Homerids themselves pretend that he was a legislator.

Well, but is there any war on record which was carried on successfully by him, or aided by his counsels, when he was alive?

There is not.

Or is there any invention of his, applicable to the arts or to human life, such as Thales the Milesian or Anacharsis the Scythian, and other ingenious men have conceived, which is attributed to him?

There is absolutely nothing of the kind.

But, if Homer never did any public service, was he privately a guide or teacher of any? Had he in his lifetime friends who loved to associate with him, and who handed down to posterity an Homeric way of life, such as was established by Pythagoras who was so greatly beloved for his wisdom, and whose followers are to this day quite celebrated for the order which was named after him?

Nothing of the kind is recorded of him. For surely, Socrates, Creophylus, the companion of Homer, that child of flesh, whose name always makes us laugh, might be more justly ridiculed for his stupidity, if, as is said, Homer was greatly neglected by him and others in his own day when he was alive?

Yes, I replied, that is the tradition. But can you imagine, Glaucon, that if Homer had really been able to educate and improve mankind— if he had possessed knowledge and not been a mere imitator—can you imagine, I say, that he would not have had many followers, and been honoured and loved by them? Protagoras of Abdera, and Prodicus of Ceos, and a host of others, have only to whisper to their contemporaries: ‘You will never be able to manage either your own house or your own State until you appoint us to be your ministers of education’— and this ingenious device of theirs has such an effect in making them love them that their companions all but carry them about on their shoulders. And is it conceivable that the contemporaries of Homer, or again of Hesiod, would have allowed either of them to go about as rhapsodists, if they had really been able to make mankind virtuous? Would they not have been as unwilling to part with them as with gold, and have compelled them to stay at home with them? Or, if the master would not stay, then the disciples would have followed him about everywhere, until they had got education enough?

Yes, Socrates, that, I think, is quite true.

Then must we not infer that all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators; they copy images of virtue and the like, but the truth they never reach? The poet is like a painter who, as we have already observed, will make a likeness of a cobbler though he understands nothing of cobbling; and his picture is good enough for those who know no more than he does, and judge only by colours and figures.

Quite so.

In like manner the poet with his words and phrases may be said to lay on the colours of the several arts, himself understanding their nature only enough to imitate them; and other people, who are as ignorant as he is, and judge only from his words, imagine that if he speaks of cobbling, or of military tactics, or of anything else, in metre and harmony and rhythm, he speaks very well— such is the sweet influence which melody and rhythm by nature have.

And I think that you must have observed again and again what a poor appearance the tales of poets make when stripped of the colours which music puts upon them, and recited in simple prose.

Yes, he said.

They are like faces which were never really beautiful, but only blooming; and now the bloom of youth has passed away from them?

Exactly.

Here is another point: The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only. Am I not right?

Yes.

Then let us have a clear understanding, and not be satisfied with half an explanation.

Proceed.

Of the painter we say that he will paint reins, and he will paint a bit?

Yes.

And the worker in leather and brass will make them?

Certainly.

But does the painter know the right form of the bit and reins? Nay, hardly even the workers in brass and leather who make them; only the horseman who knows how to use them—he knows their right form.

Most true.

And may we not say the same of all things?

What?

That there are three arts which are concerned with all things: one which uses, another which makes, a third which imitates them?

Yes.

And the excellence or beauty or truth of every structure, animate or inanimate, and of every action of man, is relative to the use for which nature or the artist has intended them.

True.

Then the user of them must have the greatest experience of them, and he must indicate to the maker the good or bad qualities which develop themselves in use; for example, the flute-player will tell the flute-maker which of his flutes is satisfactory to the performer; he will tell him how he ought to make them, and the other will attend to his instructions?

Of course.

The one knows and therefore speaks with authority about the goodness and badness of flutes, while the other, confiding in him, will do what he is told by him?

True.

The instrument is the same, but about the excellence or badness of it the maker will only attain to a correct belief; and this he will gain from him who knows, by talking to him and being compelled to hear what he has to say, whereas the user will have knowledge?

True.

But will the imitator have either? Will he know from use whether or no his drawing is correct or beautiful? Or will he have right opinion from being compelled to associate with another who knows and gives him instructions about what he should draw?

Neither.

Then he will no more have true opinion than he will have knowledge about the goodness or badness of his imitations?

I suppose not.

The imitative artist will be in a brilliant state of intelligence about his own creations?

Nay, very much the reverse.

And still he will go on imitating without knowing what makes a thing good or bad, and may be expected therefore to imitate only that which appears to be good to the ignorant multitude?

Just so.

Thus far then we are pretty well agreed that the imitator has no knowledge worth mentioning of what he imitates.

Imitation is only a kind of play or sport, and the tragic poets, whether they write in iambic or in Heroic verse, are imitators in the highest degree?

Very true.

And now tell me, I conjure you, has not imitation been shown by us to be concerned with that which is thrice removed from the truth?

Certainly.

And what is the faculty in man to which imitation is addressed?

What do you mean?

I will explain: The body which is large when seen near, appears small when seen at a distance?

True.

And the same object appears straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water; and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusion about colours to which the sight is liable. Thus every sort of confusion is revealed within us; and this is that weakness of the human mind on which the art of conjuring and of deceiving by light and shadow and other

ingenious devices imposes, having an effect upon us like magic.

True.

And the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding-there is the beauty of them- and the apparent greater or less, or more or heavier, no longer have the mastery over us, but give way before calculation and measure and weight?

Most true.

And this, surely, must be the work of the calculating and rational principle in the soul

To be sure.

And when this principle measures and certifies that some things are equal, or that some are greater or less than others, there occurs an apparent contradiction?

True.

But were we not saying that such a contradiction is the same faculty cannot have contrary opinions at the same time about the same thing?

Very true.

Then that part of the soul which has an opinion contrary to measure is not the same with that which has an opinion in accordance with measure?

True.

And the better part of the soul is likely to be that which trusts to measure and calculation?

Certainly.

And that which is opposed to them is one of the inferior principles of the soul?

No doubt.

This was the conclusion at which I was seeking to arrive when I said that painting or drawing, and imitation in general, when doing their own proper work, are far removed from truth, and the companions and friends and associates of a principle within us which is equally removed from reason, and that they have no true or healthy aim.

Exactly.

The imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior, and has inferior offspring.

Very true.

And is this confined to the sight only, or does it extend to the hearing also, relating in fact to what we term poetry?

Probably the same would be true of poetry.

Do not rely, I said, on a probability derived from the analogy of painting; but let us examine further and see whether the faculty with which poetical imitation is concerned is good or bad.

By all means.

We may state the question thus:—Imitation imitates the actions of men, whether voluntary or involuntary, on which, as they imagine, a good or bad result has ensued, and they rejoice or sorrow accordingly. Is there anything more?

No, there is nothing else.

But in all this variety of circumstances is the man at unity with himself—or rather, as in the instance of sight there was confusion and opposition in his opinions about the same things, so here also is there not strife and inconsistency in his life? Though I need hardly raise the question again, for I remember that all this has been already admitted; and the soul has been acknowledged by us to be full of these and ten thousand similar oppositions occurring at the same moment?

And we were right, he said.

Yes, I said, thus far we were right; but there was an omission which must now be supplied.

What was the omission?

Were we not saying that a good man, who has the misfortune to lose his son or anything else which is most dear to him, will bear the loss with more equanimity than another?

Yes.

But will he have no sorrow, or shall we say that although he cannot help sorrowing, he will moderate his sorrow?

The latter, he said, is the truer statement.

Tell me: will he be more likely to struggle and hold out against his sorrow when he is seen by his equals, or when he is alone?

It will make a great difference whether he is seen or not.

When he is by himself he will not mind saying or doing many things which he would be ashamed of any one hearing or seeing him do?

True.

There is a principle of law and reason in him which bids him resist, as well as a feeling of his misfortune which is forcing him to indulge his sorrow?

True.

But when a man is drawn in two opposite directions, to and from the same object, this, as we affirm, necessarily implies two distinct principles in him?

Certainly.

One of them is ready to follow the guidance of the law?

How do you mean?

The law would say that to be patient under suffering is best, and that we should not give way to impatience, as there is no knowing whether such things are good or evil; and nothing is gained by impatience; also, because no human thing is of serious importance, and grief stands in the way of that which at the moment is most required.

What is most required? he asked.

That we should take counsel about what has happened, and when the dice have been thrown order our affairs in the way which reason deems best; not, like children who have had a fall, keeping hold of the part struck and wasting time in setting up a howl, but always accustoming the soul forthwith to apply a remedy, raising up that which is sickly and fallen, banishing the cry of sorrow by the healing art.

Yes, he said, that is the true way of meeting the attacks of fortune.

Yes, I said; and the higher principle is ready to follow this suggestion of reason?

Clearly.

And the other principle, which inclines us to recollection of our troubles and to lamentation, and can never have enough of them, we may call irrational, useless, and cowardly?

Indeed, we may.

And does not the latter—I mean the rebellious principle—furnish a great variety of materials for imitation? Whereas the wise and calm temperament, being always nearly equable, is not easy to imitate or to appreciate when imitated, especially at a public festival when a promiscuous crowd is assembled in a theatre. For the feeling represented is one to which they are strangers.

Certainly.

Then the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily imitated?

Clearly.

And now we may fairly take him and place him by the side of the painter, for he is like him in two ways: first, inasmuch as his creations have an inferior degree of truth—in this, I say, he is like him; and he is also like him in being concerned with an inferior part of the soul; and therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason. As in a city when the evil are permitted to have authority and the good are put out of the way, so in the soul of man, as we maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which

has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small—he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth.

Exactly.

But we have not yet brought forward the heaviest count in our accusation:— the power which poetry has of harming even the good (and there are very few who are not harmed), is surely an awful thing?

Yes, certainly, if the effect is what you say.

Hear and judge: The best of us, as I conceive, when we listen to a passage of Homer, or one of the tragedians, in which he represents some pitiful hero who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or weeping, and smiting his breast—the best of us, you know, delight in giving way to sympathy, and are in raptures at the excellence of the poet who stirs our feelings most.

Yes, of course I know.

But when any sorrow of our own happens to us, then you may observe that we pride ourselves on the opposite quality—we would fain be quiet and patient; this is the manly part, and the other which delighted us in the recitation is now deemed to be the part of a woman.

Very true, he said.

Now can we be right in praising and admiring another who is doing that which any one of us would abominate and be ashamed of in his own person?

No, he said, that is certainly not reasonable.

Nay, I said, quite reasonable from one point of view.

What point of view?

If you consider, I said, that when in misfortune we feel a natural hunger and desire to relieve our sorrow by weeping and lamentation, and that this feeling which is kept under control in our own calamities is satisfied and delighted by the poets;—the better nature in each of us, not having been sufficiently trained by reason or habit, allows the sympathetic element to break loose because the sorrow is another's; and the spectator fancies that there can be no disgrace to himself in praising and pitying any one who comes telling him what a good man he is, and making a fuss about his troubles; he thinks that the pleasure is a gain, and why should he be supercilious and lose this and the poem too? Few persons ever reflect, as I should imagine, that from the evil of other men something of evil is communicated to themselves. And so the feeling of sorrow which has gathered strength at the sight of the misfortunes of others is with difficulty repressed in our own.

How very true!

And does not the same hold also of the ridiculous? There are jests which you would be ashamed to make yourself, and yet on the comic stage, or indeed in private, when you hear them, you are greatly amused by them, and are not at all disgusted at their unseemliness;— the case of pity is repeated;—there is a principle in human nature which is disposed to raise a laugh, and this which you once restrained by reason, because you were afraid of being thought a buffoon, is now let out again; and having stimulated the risible faculty at the theatre, you are betrayed unconsciously to yourself into playing the comic poet at home.

Quite true, he said.

And the same may be said of lust and anger and all the other affections, of desire and pain and pleasure, which are held to be inseparable from every action—in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue.

I cannot deny it.

Therefore, Glaucon, I said, whenever you meet with any of the eulogists of Homer declaring that he has been the educator of Hellas, and that he is profitable for education and for the ordering of human things, and that you should take him up again and again and get to know him and regulate your whole life according to him, we may love and honour those who say these things— they are excellent people, as far as their lights extend; and we are ready to acknowledge that Homer is the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers; but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State. For if you go beyond this and allow the honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, not law and the reason of mankind, which by common consent have ever been deemed best, but pleasure and pain will be the rulers in our State.

That is most true, he said.

And now since we have reverted to the subject of poetry, let this our defence serve to show the reasonableness of our former judgment in sending away out of our State an art having the tendencies which we have described; for reason constrained us. But that she may impute to us any harshness or want of politeness, let us tell her that there is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry; of which there are many proofs, such as the saying of 'the yelping hound howling at her lord,' or of one 'mighty in the vain talk of fools,' and 'the mob of sages circumventing Zeus,' and the 'subtle thinkers who are beggars after all'; and there are innumerable other signs of ancient enmity between them. Notwithstanding this, let us assure our sweet friend and the sister arts of imitation that if she will only prove her title to exist in a well-ordered State we shall be delighted to receive her—we are very conscious of her charms; but we may not on that account betray the truth. I dare say, Glaucon, that you are as much charmed by her as I am, especially when she appears in Homer?

Yes, indeed, I am greatly charmed.

Shall I propose, then, that she be allowed to return from exile, but upon this condition only—that she make a defence of herself in lyrical or some other metre?

Certainly.

And we may further grant to those of her defenders who are lovers of poetry and yet not poets the permission to speak in prose on her behalf: let them show not only that she is pleasant but also useful to States and to human life, and we will listen in a kindly spirit; for if this can be proved we shall surely be the gainers—I mean, if there is a use in poetry as well as a delight?

Certainly, he said, we shall the gainers.

If her defence fails, then, my dear friend, like other persons who are enamoured of something, but put a restraint upon themselves when they think their desires are opposed to their interests, so too must we after the manner of lovers give her up, though not without a struggle. We too are inspired by that love of poetry which the education of noble States has implanted in us, and therefore we would have her appear at her best and truest; but so long as she is unable to make good her defence, this argument of ours shall be a charm to us, which we will repeat to ourselves while we listen to her strains; that we may not fall away into the childish love of her which captivates the many. At all events we are well aware that poetry being such as we have described is not to be regarded seriously as attaining to the truth; and he who listens to her, fearing for the safety of the city which is within him, should be on his guard against her seductions and make our words his law.

Yes, he said, I quite agree with you.

Yes, I said, my dear Glaucon, for great is the issue at stake, greater than appears, whether a man is to be good or bad. And what will any one be profited if under the influence of honour or money or power, aye, or under the excitement of poetry, he neglect justice and virtue?

Yes, he said; I have been convinced by the argument, as I believe that any one else would have been.

And yet no mention has been made of the greatest prizes and rewards which await virtue.

What, are there any greater still? If there are, they must be of an inconceivable greatness.

Why, I said, what was ever great in a short time? The whole period of threescore years and ten is surely but a little thing in comparison with eternity?

Say rather 'nothing,' he replied.

And should an immortal being seriously think of this little space rather than of the whole?

Of the whole, certainly. But why do you ask?

Are you not aware, I said, that the soul of man is immortal and imperishable?

He looked at me in astonishment, and said: No, by heaven: And are you really prepared to maintain this?

Yes, I said, I ought to be, and you too—there is no difficulty in proving it.

I see a great difficulty; but I should like to hear you state this argument of which you make so light.

Listen then.

I am attending.

There is a thing which you call good and another which you call evil?

Yes, he replied.

Would you agree with me in thinking that the corrupting and destroying element is the evil, and the saving and improving element the good?

Yes.

And you admit that every thing has a good and also an evil; as ophthalmia is the evil of the eyes and disease of the whole body; as mildew is of corn, and rot of timber, or rust of copper and iron: in everything, or in almost everything, there is an inherent evil and disease?

Yes, he said.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. Authored by: Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . Provided by: BCcampus. Located at: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. License: CC BY: Attribution*



Plato's Republic Book X by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

SELECTED READINGS FROM ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

Aristotle

Editor's Note: This chapter includes Parts VI through XI of Aristotle's "Poetics."

Poetics

Part VI

Of the poetry which imitates in hexameter verse, and of Comedy, we will speak hereafter. Let us now discuss Tragedy, resuming its formal definition, as resulting from what has been already said.

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. By 'language embellished,' I mean language into which rhythm, 'harmony' and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts,' I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.

Now as tragic imitation implies persons acting, it necessarily follows in the first place, that Spectacular equipment will be a part of Tragedy. Next, Song and Diction, for these are the media of imitation. By 'Diction' incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. The tragedies of most of our modern poets fail in the rendering of character; and of poets in general this is often true. It is the same in painting; and here lies the difference between Zeuxis and Polygnotus. Polygnotus delineates character well; the style of Zeuxis is devoid of ethical quality. Again, if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character, and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as

with a play which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents. Besides which, the most powerful elements of emotional interest in Tragedy—Peripeteia or Reversal of the Situation, and Recognition scenes—are parts of the plot. A further proof is, that novices in the art attain to finish of diction and precision of portraiture before they can construct the plot. It is the same with almost all the early poets.

The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place. A similar fact is seen in painting. The most beautiful colors, laid on confusedly, will not give as much pleasure as the chalk outline of a portrait. Thus Tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents mainly with a view to the action.

Third in order is Thought—that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. In the case of oratory, this is the function of the political art and of the art of rhetoric: and so indeed the older poets make their characters speak the language of civic life; the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which do not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid anything whatever, are not expressive of character. Thought, on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated.

Fourth among the elements enumerated comes Diction; by which I mean, as has been already said, the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose.

Of the remaining elements Song holds the chief place among the embellishments

The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.

Part VII

These principles being established, let us now discuss the proper structure of the Plot, since this is the first and most important thing in Tragedy.

Now, according to our definition Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.

Again, a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude and order. Hence a very small animal organism cannot be beautiful; for the view of it is confused, the object being seen in an almost imperceptible moment of time. Nor, again, can one of vast size be beautiful; for as the eye cannot take it all in at once, the unity and sense of the whole is lost for the spectator; as for instance if there were one a thousand miles long. As, therefore, in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in one view; so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by the memory. The limit of length in relation to dramatic competition and sensuous presentment is no part of artistic theory. For had it been the rule for a hundred tragedies to compete together, the performance would have been regulated by the water-clock—as indeed we are told was formerly done. But the limit as fixed by the nature of the drama itself is this: the greater the length, the more beautiful will the piece be by reason of its size, provided that the whole be perspicuous. And to define the matter roughly, we may say that the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad.

Part VIII

Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero. For infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life which cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action. Hence the error, as it appears, of all poets who have composed a Heracleid, a Theseid, or other poems of the kind. They imagine that as Heracles was one man, the story of Heracles must also be a unity. But Homer, as in all else he is of surpassing merit, here too—whether from art or natural genius—seems to have happily discerned the truth. In composing the Odyssey he did not include all the adventures of Odysseus—such as his wound on Parnassus, or his feigned madness at the mustering of the host—incidents between which there was no necessary or probable connection: but he made the Odyssey, and likewise the Iliad, to center round an action that in our sense of the word is one. As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole.

Part IX

It is, moreover, evident from what has been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims

*in the names she attaches to the personages. The particular is—for example—what Alcibiades did or suffered. In Comedy this is already apparent: for here the poet first constructs the plot on the lines of probability, and then inserts characteristic names—unlike the lampooners who write about particular individuals. But tragedians still keep to real names, the reason being that what is possible is credible: what has not happened we do not at once feel sure to be possible; but what has happened is manifestly possible: otherwise it would not have happened. Still there are even some tragedies in which there are only one or two well-known names, the rest being fictitious. In others, none are well known—as in Agathon's *Antheus*, where incidents and names alike are fictitious, and yet they give none the less pleasure. We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to the received legends, which are the usual subjects of Tragedy. Indeed, it would be absurd to attempt it; for even subjects that are known are known only to a few, and yet give pleasure to all. It clearly follows that the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions. And even if he chances to take a historical subject, he is none the less a poet; for there is no reason why some events that have actually happened should not conform to the law of the probable and possible, and in virtue of that quality in them he is their poet or maker.*

Of all plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot 'episodic' in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence. Bad poets compose such pieces by their own fault, good poets, to please the players; for, as they write show pieces for competition, they stretch the plot beyond its capacity, and are often forced to break the natural continuity.

But again, Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design. We may instance the statue of Mitys at Argos, which fell upon his murderer while he was a spectator at a festival, and killed him. Such events seem not to be due to mere chance. Plots, therefore, constructed on these principles are necessarily the best.

Part XIII

As the sequel to what has already been said, we must proceed to consider what the poet should aim at, and what he should avoid, in constructing his plots; and by what means the specific effect of Tragedy will be produced.

A perfect tragedy should, as we have seen, be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plan. It should, moreover, imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation. It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.

Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains, then, the character between these two extremes— that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous—a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families.

A well-constructed plot should, therefore, be single in its issue, rather than double as some maintain. The change of fortune should be not from bad to good, but, reversely, from good to bad. It should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character either such as we have described, or better rather than worse. The practice of the stage bears out our view. At first the poets recounted any legend that came in their way. Now, the best tragedies are founded on the story of a few houses—on the fortunes of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and those others who have done or suffered something terrible. A tragedy, then, to be perfect according to the rules of art should be of this construction. Hence they are in error who censure Euripides just because he follows this principle in his plays, many of which end unhappily. It is, as we have said, the right ending. The best proof is that on the stage and in dramatic competition, such plays, if well worked out, are the most tragic in effect; and Euripides, faulty though he may be in the general management of his subject, yet is felt to be the most tragic of the poets.

In the second rank comes the kind of tragedy which some place first. Like the Odyssey, it has a double thread of plot, and also an opposite catastrophe for the good and for the bad. It is accounted the best because of the weakness of the spectators; for the poet is guided in what he writes by the wishes of his audience. The pleasure, however, thence derived is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to Comedy, where those who, in the piece, are the deadliest enemies—like Orestes and Aegisthus—quit the stage as friends at the close, and no one slays or is slain.

Part XIV

Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes Place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of the Oedipus. But to produce this effect by the mere spectacle is a less artistic method, and dependent on extraneous aids. Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy; for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it. And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents.

Let us then determine what are the circumstances which strike us as terrible or pitiful.

Actions capable of this effect must happen between persons who are either friends or enemies or indifferent to one another. If an enemy kills an enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in the act or the intention—except so far

as the suffering in itself is pitiful. So again with indifferent persons. But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another—if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done—these are the situations to be looked for by the poet. He may not indeed destroy the framework of the received legends—the fact, for instance, that Clytemnestra was slain by Orestes and Eriphyle by Alcmaeon—but he ought to show of his own, and skilfully handle the traditional material. Let us explain more clearly what is meant by skilful handling.

The action may be done consciously and with knowledge of the persons, in the manner of the older poets. It is thus too that Euripides makes Medea slay her children. Or, again, the deed of horror may be done, but done in ignorance, and the tie of kinship or friendship be discovered afterwards. The Oedipus of Sophocles is an example. Here, indeed, the incident is outside the drama proper; but cases occur where it falls within the action of the play: one may cite the Alcmaeon of Astydamas, or Telegonus in the Wounded Odysseus. Again, there is a third case—[to be about to act with knowledge of the persons and then not to act. The fourth case] is when some one is about to do an irreparable deed through ignorance, and makes the discovery before it is done. These are the only possible ways. For the deed must either be done or not done—and that wittingly or unwittingly. But of all these ways, to be about to act knowing the persons, and then not to act, is the worst. It is shocking without being tragic, for no disaster follows. It is, therefore, never, or very rarely, found in poetry. One instance, however, is in the Antigone, where Haemon threatens to kill Creon. The next and better way is that the deed should be perpetrated. Still better, that it should be perpetrated in ignorance, and the discovery made afterwards. There is then nothing to shock us, while the discovery produces a startling effect. The last case is the best, as when in the Cresphontes Merope is about to slay her son, but, recognizing who he is, spares his life. So in the Iphigenia, the sister recognizes the brother just in time. Again in the Helle, the son recognizes the mother when on the point of giving her up. This, then, is why a few families only, as has been already observed, furnish the subjects of tragedy. It was not art, but happy chance, that led the poets in search of subjects to impress the tragic quality upon their plots. They are compelled, therefore, to have recourse to those houses whose history contains moving incidents like these.

Enough has now been said concerning the structure of the incidents, and the right kind of plot.

Part XV

In respect of Character there are four things to be aimed at. First, and most important, it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character: the character will be good if the purpose is good. This rule is relative to each class. Even a woman may be good, and also a slave; though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless. The second thing to aim at is propriety. There is a type of manly valor; but valor in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness is inappropriate. Thirdly, character must be true to life: for this is a distinct thing from goodness and propriety, as here described. The fourth point is consistency: for though the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent. As an example of motiveless degradation of character, we have Menelaus in

the Orestes; of character indecorous and inappropriate, the lament of Odysseus in the Scylla, and the speech of Melanippe; of inconsistency, the Iphigenia at Aulis—for Iphigenia the suppliant in no way resembles her later self.

As in the structure of the plot, so too in the portraiture of character, the poet should always aim either at the necessary or the probable. Thus a person of a given character should speak or act in a given way, by the rule either of necessity or of probability; just as this event should follow that by necessary or probable sequence. It is therefore evident that the unraveling of the plot, no less than the complication, must arise out of the plot itself, it must not be brought about by the Deus ex Machina—as in the Medea, or in the return of the Greeks in the Iliad. The Deus ex Machina should be employed only for events external to the drama—for antecedent or subsequent events, which lie beyond the range of human knowledge, and which require to be reported or foretold; for to the gods we ascribe the power of seeing all things. Within the action there must be nothing irrational. If the irrational cannot be excluded, it should be outside the scope of the tragedy. Such is the irrational element the Oedipus of Sophocles.

Again, since Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level, the example of good portrait painters should be followed. They, while reproducing the distinctive form of the original, make a likeness which is true to life and yet more beautiful. So too the poet, in representing men who are irascible or indolent, or have other defects of character, should preserve the type and yet ennoble it. In this way Achilles is portrayed by Agathon and Homer.

These then are rules the poet should observe. Nor should he neglect those appeals to the senses, which, though not among the essentials, are the concomitants of poetry; for here too there is much room for error. But of this enough has been said in our published treatises.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work:

Aristotle, “Poetics,” in the Internet Classics Archive, trans. S.H. Butcher, (site by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics.), <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html>

Permission to download and copy for inclusion in this open textbook was granted by the site owner and can be found here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Help/permissions.html>



This work (Selected Readings from Aristotle's Poetics by Aristotle) is free of known copyright restrictions.

OF THE STANDARD OF TASTE

David Hume

Editor's Note: David Hume (1711-1776) is one of the most important of the British empiricists, philosophers who believe that all human knowledge derives from human experience.

Paragraph numbering below has been added to facilitate class discussion. It was not included in the original text.

Of the Standard of Taste

#1. The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one's observation. Men of the most confined knowledge are able to remark a difference of taste in the narrow circle of their acquaintance, even where the persons have been educated under the same government, and have early imbibed the same prejudices. But those, who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still more surprised at the great inconsistency and contrariety. We are apt to call barbarous whatever departs widely from our own taste and apprehension: But soon find the epithet of reproach retorted on us. And the highest arrogance and self-conceit is at last startled, on observing an equal assurance on all sides, and scruples, amidst such a contest of sentiment, to pronounce positively in its own favour.

#2. As this variety of taste is obvious to the most careless enquirer; so will it be found, on examination, to be still greater in reality than in appearance. The sentiments of men often differ with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds, even while their general discourse is the same. There are certain terms in every language, which import blame, and others praise; and all men, who use the same tongue, must agree in their application of them. Every voice is united in applauding elegance, propriety, simplicity, spirit in writing; and in blaming fustian, affectation, coldness and a false brilliancy: But when critics come to particulars, this seeming unanimity vanishes; and it is found, that they had affixed a very different meaning to their expressions. In all matters of opinion and science, the case is opposite: The difference among men is there oftener found to lie in generals than in particulars; and to be less in reality than in appearance. An explanation of the terms commonly ends the controversy; and the disputants are surprised to find, that they had been quarreling, while at bottom they agreed in their judgment.

#3. *Those who found morality on sentiment, more than on reason, are inclined to comprehend ethics under the former observation, and to maintain, that, in all questions, which regard conduct and manners, the difference among men is really greater than at first sight it appears. It is indeed obvious, that writers of all nations and all ages concur in applauding justice, humanity, magnanimity, prudence, veracity; and in blaming the opposite qualities. Even poets and other authors, whose compositions are chiefly calculated to please the imagination, are yet found, from HOMER down to FENELON, to inculcate the same moral precepts, and to bestow their applause and blame on the same virtues and vices. This great unanimity is usually ascribed to the influence of plain reason; which, in all these cases, maintains similar sentiments in all men, and prevents those controversies, to which the abstract sciences are so much exposed. So far as the unanimity is real, this account may be admitted as satisfactory: But we must also allow that some part of the seeming harmony in morals may be accounted for from the very nature of language. The word virtue, with its equivalent in every tongue, implies praise; as that of vice does blame: And no one, without the most obvious and grossest impropriety, could affix reproach to a term, which in general acceptation is understood in a good sense; or bestow applause, where the idiom requires disapprobation. HOMER's general precepts, where he delivers any such will never be controverted; but it is obvious, that, when he draws particular pictures of manners, and represents heroism in ACHILLES and prudence in ULYSSES, he intermixes a much greater degree of ferocity in the former, and of cunning and fraud in the latter, than FENELON would admit of. The sage ULYSSES in the GREEK poet seems to delight in lies and fictions; and often employs them without any necessity or even advantage: But his more scrupulous son, in the FRENCH epic writer, exposes himself to the most imminent perils, rather than depart from the most exact line of truth and veracity.*

#4. *The admirers and follows of the ALCORAN insist on the excellent moral precepts interspersed throughout that wild and absurd performance. But it is to be supposed, that the ARABIC words, which correspond to the ENGLISH, equity, justice, temperance, meekness, charity, were such as, from the constant use of that tongue, must always be taken in a good sense; and it would have argued the greatest ignorance, not of morals, but of language, to have mentioned them with any epithets, besides those of applause and approbation. But would we know, whether the pretended prophet had really attained a just sentiment of morals? Let us attend to his narration; and we shall soon find, that he bestows praise on such instances of treachery, inhumanity, cruelty, revenge, bigotry, as are utterly incompatible with civilized society. No steady rule of right seems there to be attended to; and every action is blamed or praised, so far only as it is beneficial or hurtful to the true believers.*

#5. *The merit of delivering true general precepts in ethics is indeed very small. Whoever recommends any moral virtues, really does no more than is implied in the terms themselves. That people, who invented the word charity, and use it in a good sense, inculcated more clearly and much more efficaciously, the precept, be charitable, than any pretended legislator or prophet, who should insert such a maxim in his writings. Of all expressions, those, which, together with their other meaning, imply a degree either of blame or approbation, are the least liable to be perverted or mistaken.*

#6. *It is natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.*

#7. *There is a species of philosophy, which cuts off all hopes of success in such an attempt, and represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste. The difference, it is said, is very wide between judgment and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek in the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter. According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter; and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes. It is very natural, and even quite necessary to extend this axiom to mental, as well as bodily taste; and thus common sense, which is so often at variance with philosophy, especially with the skeptical kind, is found, in one instance at least, to agree in pronouncing the same decision.*

#8 *But though this axiom, by passing into a proverb, seems to have attained the sanction of common sense; there is certainly a species of common sense which opposes it, at least serves to modify and restrain it. Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between OGILBY and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous. The principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot, and while we admit it on some occasions, where the objects seem near an equality, it appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where objects so disproportioned are compared together.*

#9. *It is evident that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasonings a priori, or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding, from comparing those habitudes and relations of ideas, which are eternal and immutable. Their foundation is the same with that of all the practical sciences, experience; nor are they any thing but general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages. Many of the beauties of poetry and even of eloquence are founded on falsehood and fiction, on hyperboles, metaphors, and an abuse or perversion of terms from their natural meaning. To check the sallies of*

the imagination, and to reduce every expression to geometrical truth and exactness, would be the most contrary to the laws of criticism; because it would produce a work, which, by universal experience, has been found the most insipid and disagreeable. But though poetry can never submit to exact truth, it must be confined by rules of art, discovered to the author either by genius or observation. If some negligent or irregular writers have pleased, they have not pleased by their transgressions of rule or order, but in spite of these transgressions: They have possessed other beauties, which were conformable to just criticism; and the force of these beauties has been able to overpower censure, and give the mind a satisfaction superior to the disgust arising from the blemishes. ARIOSTO pleases; but not by his monstrous and improbable fictions, by his bizarre mixture of the serious and comic styles, by the want of coherence in his stories, or by the continual interruptions of his narration. He charms by the force and clearness of his expression, by the readiness and variety of his inventions, and by his natural pictures of the passions, especially those of the gay and amorous kind: And however his faults may diminish our satisfaction, they are not able entirely to destroy it. Did our pleasure really arise from those parts of his poem, which we denominate faults, this would be no objection to criticism in general: It would only be an objection to those particular rules of criticism, which would establish such circumstances to be faults, and would represent them as universally blameable. If they are found to please, they cannot be faults; let the pleasure, which they produce, be ever so unexpected and unaccountable.

#10. But though all the general rules of art are founded only on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature, we must not imagine, that, on every occasion the feelings of men will be conformable to these rules. Those finer emotions of the mind are of a very tender and delicate nature, and require the concurrence of many favourable circumstances to make them play with facility and exactness, according to their general and established principles. The least exterior hindrance to such small springs, or the least internal disorder, disturbs their motion, and confounds the operation of the whole machine. When we would make an experiment of this nature, and would try the force of any beauty or deformity, we must choose with care a proper time and place, and bring the fancy to a suitable situation and disposition. A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object; if any of these circumstances be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious, and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic and universal beauty. The relation, which nature has placed between the form and the sentiment will at least be more obscure; and it will require greater accuracy to trace and discern it. We shall be able to ascertain its influence not so much from the operation of each particular beauty, as from the durable admiration, which attends those works, that have survived all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy.

#11. The same HOMER, who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago, is still admired at PARIS and at LONDON. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator, but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with. Envy and jealousy have too much place in a narrow circle; and even familiar acquaintance with his person may diminish the

applause due to his performances. But when these obstructions are removed, the beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments, immediately display their energy and while the world endures, they maintain their authority over the minds of men.

#12. It appears then, that, amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind. Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ. A man in a fever would not insist on his palate as able to decide concerning flavours; nor would one, affected with the jaundice, pretend to give a verdict with regard to colours. In each creature, there is a sound and a defective state; and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a true standard of a taste and sentiment. If, in the sound state of the organ, there be an entire or considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty; in like manner as the appearance of objects in daylight, to the eye of a man in health, is denominated their true and real colour, even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses.

#13. Many and frequent are the defects in the internal organs, which prevent or weaken the influence of those general principles, on which depends our sentiment of beauty or deformity. Though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected, that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt. Particular incidents and situations occur, which either throw a false light on the objects, or hinder the true from conveying to the imagination the proper sentiment and perception.

#14. One obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that delicacy of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions. This delicacy every one pretends to: Every one talks of it; and would reduce every kind of taste or sentiment to its standard. But as our intention in this essay is to mingle some light of the understanding with the feelings of sentiment, it will be proper to give a more accurate definition of delicacy, than has hitherto been attempted. And not to draw our philosophy from too profound a source, we shall have recourse to a noted story in DON QUIXOTE.

#15. It is with good reason, says SANCHE to the squire with the great nose, that I pretend to have a judgment in wine: this is a quality hereditary in our family. Two of my kinsmen were once called to give their opinion of a hogshead, which was supposed to be excellent, being old and of a good vintage. One of them tastes it; considers it; and after mature reflection pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his verdict in favour of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they were both ridiculed for their judgment. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hogshead, there was found at the bottom, an old key with a leathern thong tied to it.

#16. The great resemblance between mental and bodily taste will easily teach us to apply this story. Though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely

to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings. Now as these qualities may be found in a smaller degree, or may be mixed and confounded with each other, it often happens, that the taste is not affected with such minute qualities, or is not able to distinguish all the particular flavours, amidst the disorder, in which they are presented. Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: This we call delicacy of taste, whether we employ these terms in the literal or metaphorical sense. Here then the general rules of beauty are of use; being drawn from established models, and from the observation of what pleases or displeases, when presented singly and in a high degree: And if the same qualities, in a continued composition and in a small degree, affect not the organs with a sensible delight or uneasiness, we exclude the person from all pretensions to this delicacy. To produce these general rules or avowed patterns of composition is like finding the key with the leathern thong; which justified the verdict of SANCHO's kinsmen, and confounded those pretended judges who had condemned them. Though the hogshead had never been emptied, the taste of the one was still equally delicate, and that of the other equally dull and languid: But it would have been more difficult to have proved the superiority of the former, to the conviction of every by-stander. In like manner, though the beauties of writing had never been methodized, or reduced to general principles; though no excellent models had ever been acknowledged; the different degrees of taste would still have subsisted, and the judgment of one man had been preferable to that of another; but it would not have been so easy to silence the bad critic, who might always insist upon his particular sentiment, and refuse to submit to his antagonist. But when we show him an avowed principle of art; when we illustrate this principle by examples, whose operation, from his own particular taste, he acknowledges to be conformable to the principle; when we prove, that the same principle may be applied to the present case, where he did not perceive or feel its influence: He must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself, and that he wants the delicacy, which is requisite to make him sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse.

#17. It is acknowledged to be the perfection of every sense or faculty, to perceive with exactness its most minute objects, and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation. The smaller the objects are, which become sensible to the eye, the finer is that organ, and the more elaborate its make and composition. A good palate is not tried by strong flavours; but by a mixture of small ingredients, where we are still sensible of each part, notwithstanding its minuteness and its confusion with the rest. In like manner, a quick and acute perception of beauty and deformity must be the perfection of our mental taste; nor can a man be satisfied with himself while he suspects, that any excellence or blemish in a discourse has passed him unobserved. In this case, the perfection of the man, and the perfection of the sense or feeling, are found to be united. A very delicate palate, on many occasions, may be a great inconvenience both to a man himself and to his friends: But a delicate taste of wit or beauty must always be a desirable quality; because it is the source of all the finest and most innocent enjoyments, of which human nature is susceptible. In this decision the sentiments of all mankind are agreed. Wherever you can ascertain a delicacy of taste, it is sure to meet with approbation; and the best way of ascertaining it is to appeal to those models and principles, which have been established by the uniform consent and experience of nations and ages.

#18. *But though there be naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another, nothing tends further to encrease and improve this talent, than practice in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty. When objects of any kind are first presented to the eye or imagination, the sentiment, which attends them, is obscure and confused; and the mind is, in a great measure, incapable of pronouncing concerning their merits or defects. The taste cannot perceive the several excellences of the performance; much less distinguish the particular character of each excellency, and ascertain its quality and degree. If it pronounce the whole in general to be beautiful or deformed, it is the utmost that can be expected; and even this judgment, a person, so unpracticed, will be apt to deliver with great hesitation and reserve. But allow him to acquire experience in those objects, his feeling becomes more exact and nice: He not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame. A clear and distinct sentiment attends him through the whole survey of the objects; and he discerns that very degree and kind of approbation or displeasure, which each part is naturally fitted to produce. The mist dissipates, which seemed formerly to hang over the object: the organ acquires greater perfection in its operations; and can pronounce, without danger of mistake, concerning the merits of every performance. In a word, the same address and dexterity, which practice gives to the execution of any work, is also acquired by the same means in the judging of it.*

#19. *So advantageous is practice to the discernment of beauty, that, before we can give judgment of any work of importance, it will even be requisite, that that very individual performance be more than once perused by us, and be surveyed in different lights with attention and deliberation. There is a flutter or hurry of thought which attends the first perusal of any piece, and which confounds the genuine sentiment of beauty. The relation of the parts is not discerned: The true characters of style are little distinguished: The several perfections and defects seem wrapped up in a species of confusion, and present themselves indistinctly to the imagination. Not to mention, that there is a species of beauty, which, as it is florid and superficial, pleases at first; but being found incompatible with a just expression either of reason or passion, soon palls upon the taste, and is then rejected with disdain, at least rated at a much lower value.*

#20. *It is impossible to continue in the practice of contemplating any order of beauty, without being frequently obliged to form comparisons between the several species and degrees of excellence, and estimating their proportion to each other. A man, who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him. By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign the due degree of each. The coarsest daubing contains a certain lustre of colours and exactness of imitation, which are so far beauties, and would affect the mind of a peasant or Indian with the highest admiration. The most vulgar ballads are not entirely destitute of harmony or nature; and none but a person, familiarized to superior beauties, would pronounce their numbers harsh, or narration uninteresting. A great inferiority of beauty gives pain to a person conversant in the highest excellence of the kind, and is for that reason pronounced a deformity: As the most finished object, with which we are acquainted, is naturally supposed to have reached the pinnacle of perfection, and to be entitled to the highest applause. One*

accustomed to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations, can only rate the merits of a work exhibited to his view, and assign its proper rank among the productions of genius.

#21. But to enable a critic the more fully to execute this undertaking, he must preserve his mind free from all prejudice, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination. We may observe, that every work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view, and not be fully relished by persons, whose situation, real or imaginary, is not conformable to that which is required by the performance. An orator addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices; otherwise he hopes in vain to govern their resolutions, and inflame their affections. Should they even have entertained some prepossessions against him, however unreasonable, he must not overlook this disadvantage; but, before he enters upon the subject, must endeavour to conciliate their affection, and acquire their good graces. A critic of a different age or notion, who should peruse this discourse, must have all these circumstances in his eye, and must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment of the oration. In like manner, when any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances. A person influenced by prejudice, complies not with this condition; but obstinately maintains his natural position, without placing himself in that point of view, which the performance supposes. If the work be addressed to persons of a different age or nation, he makes no allowance for their peculiar views and prejudices; but, full of the manners of his own age and country, rashly condemns what seemed admirable in the eyes of those for whom alone the discourse was calculated. If the work be executed for the public, he never sufficiently enlarges his comprehension, or forgets his interest as a friend or enemy, as a rival or commentator. By this means, his sentiments are perverted; nor have the same beauties and blemishes the same influence upon him, as if he had imposed a proper violence on his imagination, and had forgotten himself for a moment. So far his taste evidently departs from the true standard; and of consequence loses all credit and authority.

#22. It is well known, that in all questions, submitted to the understanding, prejudice is destructive of sound judgment, and perverts all operations of the intellectual faculties: It is no less contrary to good taste; nor has it less influence to corrupt our sentiment of beauty. It belongs to good sense to check its influence in both cases; and in this respect, as well as in many others, reason, if not an essential part of taste, is at least requisite to the operations of this latter faculty. In all the nobler productions of genius, there is a mutual relation and correspondence of parts; nor can either the beauties or blemishes be perceived by him, whose thought is not capacious enough to comprehend all those parts, and compare then with each other, in order to perceive the consistence and uniformity of the whole. Every work of art has also a certain end or purpose, for which it is calculated; and is to be deemed more or less perfect, as it is more or less fitted to attain this end. The object of eloquence is to persuade, of history to instruct, of poetry to please by means of the passions and the imagination. These ends we must carry constantly in our view, when we peruse any performance; and we must be able to judge how far the means employed are adapted to their respective purposes. Besides, every kind of composition, even the most poetical, is nothing but a chain of propositions

and reasonings; not always, indeed, the justest and most exact, but still plausible and specious, however disguised by the colouring of the imagination. The persons introduced in tragedy and epic poetry, must be represented as reasoning, and thinking, and concluding, and acting, suitably to their character and circumstances; and without judgment, as well as taste and invention, a poet can never hope to succeed in so delicate an undertaking. Not to mention, that the same excellence of faculties which contributes to the improvement of reason, the same clearness of conception, the same exactness of distinction, the same vivacity of apprehension, are essential to the operations of true taste, and are its infallible concomitants. It seldom, or never happens, that a man of sense, who has experience in any art, cannot judge of its beauty; and it is no less rare to meet with a man who has a just taste without a sound understanding.

#23. Thus, though the principles of taste be universal, and, nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty. The organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles. They either labour under some defect, or are vitiated by some disorder; and by that means, excite a sentiment, which may be pronounced erroneous. When the critic has no delicacy, he judges without any distinction, and is only affected by the grosser and more palpable qualities of the object: The finer touches pass unnoticed and disregarded. Where he is not aided by practice, his verdict is attended with confusion and hesitation. Where no comparison has been employed, the most frivolous beauties, such as rather merit the name of defects, are the object of his admiration. Where he lies under the influence of prejudice, all his natural sentiments are perverted. Where good sense is wanting, he is not qualified to discern the beauties of design and reasoning, which are the highest and most excellent. Under some or other of these imperfections, the generality of men labour; and hence a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character; Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.

#24. But where are such critics to be found? By what marks are they to be known? How distinguish them from pretenders? These questions are embarrassing; and seem to throw us back into the same uncertainty, from which, during the course of this essay, we have endeavoured to extricate ourselves.

#25. But if we consider the matter aright, these are questions of fact, not of sentiment. Whether any particular person be endowed with good sense and a delicate imagination, free from prejudice, may often be the subject of dispute, and be liable to great discussion and enquiry: but that such a character is valuable and estimable will be agreed in by all mankind. Where these doubts occur, men can do no more than in other disputable questions, which are submitted to the understanding: They must produce the best arguments, that their invention suggests to them; they must acknowledge a true and decisive standard to exist somewhere, to wit, real existence and matter of fact; and they must have indulgence to such as differ from them in their appeals to this standard. It is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing, and that some

men in general, however difficult to be particularly pitched upon, will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others.

#26. But in reality the difficulty of finding, even in particulars, the standard of taste, is not so great as it is represented. Though in speculation, we may readily avow a certain criterion in science and deny it in sentiment, the matter is found in practice to be much more hard to ascertain in the former case than in the latter. Theories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology, have prevailed during one age: In a successive period, these have been universally exploded: Their absurdity has been detected: Other theories and systems have supplied their place, which again gave place to their successors: And nothing has been experienced more liable to the revolutions of chance and fashion than these pretended decisions of science. The case is not the same with the beauties of eloquence and poetry. Just expressions of passion and nature are sure, after a little time, to gain public applause, which they maintain for ever. ARISTOTLE, and PLATO, and EPICURUS, and DESCARTES, may successively yield to each other: But TERENCE and VIRGIL maintain an universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men. The abstract philosophy of CICERO has lost its credit: The vehemence of his oratory is still the object of our admiration.

#27. Though men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind. The ascendant, which they acquire, gives a prevalence to that lively approbation, with which they receive any productions of genius, and renders it generally predominant. Many men, when left to themselves, have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty, who yet are capable of relishing any fine stroke, which is pointed out to them. Every convert to the admiration of the real poet or orator is the cause of some new conversion. And though prejudices may prevail for a time, they never unite in celebrating any rival to the true genius, but yield at last to the force of nature and just sentiment. Thus, though a civilized nation may easily be mistaken in the choice of their admired philosopher, they never have been found long to err, in their affection for a favorite epic or tragic author.

#28. But notwithstanding all our endeavours to fix a standard of taste, and reconcile the discordant apprehensions of men, there still remain two sources of variation, which are not sufficient indeed to confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity, but will often serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation or blame. The one is the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country. The general principles of taste are uniform in human nature: where men vary in their judgments, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy; and there is just reason for approving one taste, and condemning another. But where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one the preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments.

#29. A young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who take pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections concerning the conduct of life and moderation of the passions. At twenty, OVID may be the favourite author; HORACE at forty; and

perhaps TACITUS at fifty. Vainly would we, in such cases, endeavour to enter into the sentiments of others, and divest ourselves of those propensities, which are natural to us. We choose our favourite author as we do our friend, from a conformity of humour and disposition. Mirth or passion, sentiment or reflection; whichever of these most predominates in our temper, it gives us a peculiar sympathy with the writer who resembles us.

#30. One person is more pleased with the sublime; another with the tender; a third with raillery. One has a strong sensibility to blemishes, and is extremely studious of correctness: Another has a more lively feeling of beauties, and pardons twenty absurdities and defects for one elevated or pathetic stroke. The ear of this man is entirely turned towards conciseness and energy; that man is delighted with a copious, rich, and harmonious expression. Simplicity is affected by one; ornament by another. Comedy, tragedy, satire, odes, have each its partisans, who prefer that particular species of writing to all others. It is plainly an error in a critic, to confine his approbation to one species or style of writing, and condemn all the rest. But it is almost impossible not to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition. Such preferences are innocent and unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided.

#31. For a like reason, we are more pleased, in the course of our reading, with pictures and characters, that resemble objects which are found in our own age or country, than with those which describe a different set of customs. It is not without some effort, that we reconcile ourselves to the simplicity of ancient manners, and behold princesses carrying water from the spring, and kings and heroes dressing their own victuals. We may allow in general, that the representation of such manners is no fault in the author, nor deformity in the piece; but we are not so sensibly touched with them. For this reason, comedy is not easily transferred from one age or nation to another. A FRENCHMAN or ENGLISHMAN is not pleased with the ANDRIA of TERENCE, or CLITIA of MACHIAVEL; where the fine lady, upon whom all the play turns, never once appears to the spectators, but is always kept behind the scenes, suitably to the reserved humour of the ancient GREEKS and modern ITALIANS. A man of learning and reflection can make allowance for these peculiarities of manners; but a common audience can never divest themselves so far of their usual ideas and sentiments, as to relish pictures which in no wise resemble them.

#32. But here there occurs a reflection, which may, perhaps, be useful in examining the celebrated controversy concerning ancient and modern learning; where we often find the one side excusing any seeming absurdity in the ancients from the manners of the age, and the other refusing to admit this excuse, or at least, admitting it only as an apology for the author, not for the performance. In my opinion, the proper boundaries in this subject have seldom been fixed between the contending parties. Where any innocent peculiarities of manners are represented, such as those above mentioned, they ought certainly to be admitted; and a man, who is shocked with them, gives an evident proof of false delicacy and refinement. The poet's monument more durable than brass, must fall to the ground like common brick or clay, were men to make no allowance for the continual revolutions of manners and customs, and would admit of nothing but what was suitable to the prevailing fashion. Must we throw aside the pictures of our ancestors, because of their ruffs and fardingales? But where the ideas of morality and decency

alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation; this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments; and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners in his age, I never can relish the composition. The want of humanity and of decency, so conspicuous in the characters drawn by several of the ancient poets, even sometimes by HOMER and the GREEK tragedians, diminishes considerably the merit of their noble performances, and gives modern authors an advantage over them. We are not interested in the fortunes and sentiments of such rough heroes: We are displeased to find the limits of vice and virtue so much confounded: And whatever indulgence we may give to the writer on account of his prejudices, we cannot prevail on ourself to enter into his sentiments, or bear an affection to characters, which we plainly discover to be blameable.

#33. The case is not the same with moral principles, as with speculative opinions of any kind. These are in continual flux and revolution. The son embraces a different system from the father. Nay, there scarcely is any man, who can boast of great constancy and uniformity in this particular. Whatever speculative errors may be found in the polite writings of any age or country, they detract but little from the value of those compositions. There needs but a certain turn of thought or imagination to make us enter into all the opinions, which then prevailed, and relish the sentiments or conclusions derived from them. But a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarized. And where a man is confident of the rectitude of that moral standard, by which he judges, he is justly jealous of it, and will not pervert the sentiments of his heart for a moment, in complaisance to any writer whatsoever.

#34. Of all speculative errors, those, which regard religion, are the most excusable in compositions of genius; nor is it ever permitted to judge of the civility or wisdom of any people, or even of single persons, by the grossness or refinement of their theological principles. The same good sense, that directs men in the ordinary occurrences of life, is not harkened to in religious matters, which are supposed to be placed altogether above the cognizance of human reason. On this account, all the absurdities of the pagan system of theology must be overlooked by every critic, who would pretend to form a just notion of ancient poetry; and our posterity, in their turn, must have the same indulgence to their forefathers. No religious principles can ever be imputed as a fault to any poet, while they remain merely principles, and take not such strong possession of his heart, as to lay him under the imputation of bigotry or superstition. Where that happens, they confound the sentiments of morality, and alter the natural boundaries of vice and virtue. They are therefore eternal blemishes, according to the principle above mentioned; nor are the prejudices and false opinions of the age sufficient to justify them.

#35. It is essential to the ROMAN catholic religion to inspire a violent hatred of every other worship, and to represent all pagans, mahometans, and heretics as the objects of divine wrath and vengeance. Such sentiments, though they are in reality very blameable, are considered as virtues by the zealots of that communion, and are represented in their tragedies and epic poems as a kind of divine heroism. This bigotry has disfigured two very

fine tragedies of the FRENCH theatre, POLIEUCTE and ATHALLA; where an intemperate zeal for particular modes of worship is set off with all the pomp imaginable, and forms the predominant character of the heroes. 'What is this,' says the sublime JOAD to JOSABET, finding her in discourse with MATHAN, the priest of BAAL, 'Does the daughter of DAVID speak to this traitor? Are you not afraid, lest the earth should open and pour forth flames to devour you both? Or lest these holy walls should fall and crush you together? What is his purpose? Why comes that enemy of God hither to poison the air, which we breath, with his horrid presence?' Such sentiments are received with great applause on the theatre of PARIS; but at LONDON the spectators would be full as much pleased to hear ACHILLES tell AGAMEMNON, that he was a dog in his forehead, and a deer in his heart, or JUPITER threaten JUNO with a sound drubbing, if she will not be quiet.

#36. RELIGIOUS principles are also a blemish in any polite composition, when they rise up to superstition, and intrude themselves into every sentiment, however remote from any connection with religion. It is no excuse for the poet, that the customs of his country had burthened life with so many religious ceremonies and observances, that no part of it was exempt from that yoke. It must for ever be ridiculous in PETRARCH to compare his mistress LAURA, to JESUS CHRIST. Nor is it less ridiculous in that agreeable libertine, BOCCACE, very seriously to give thanks to GOD ALMIGHTY and the ladies, for their assistance in defending him against his enemies.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Hume begins by noting the wide variance among taste, even among people with “the same prejudices.” What examples from your own experience might support his claim here? (#1-2)
2. He contrasts our differences in “taste” with our disagreements in “opinion and science.” How are the latter resolved? (#2) Is this a persuasive contrast?
3. Hume considers various approaches to ethical standards and emphasizes the role of language in creating a seeming agreement in what constitutes moral behavior. Reasoning by analogy, could this explanation account for seeming agreements in evaluating art? (#3-5)
4. Hume describes in detail a prevailing philosophical view in his time, namely, that “sentiment” is what we might call subjective and no resolution of differences is possible, but that “judgments” are what we might call objective and that disagreements can be resolved according to properties that are “really” in the object. Look for the passages in #7 where he marks out this distinction. In #8, he goes on to say that he rejects this view, even though it has been sanctioned as “common sense” by others. What arguments does he present here

against this “common sense” view?

5. Hume believes that all general rules of art are based on experience, not on *a priori* [prior to experience] reasoning. How does he explain this distinction in #9-10? Is it consistent with your own experience of art?
6. In #11, Hume notes that the greatest works of art are appreciated in all times and places. Is this consistent with your own experiences of art? What examples can you think of from various art forms that seem to support Hume’s observation here?
7. In #12-16, Hume attempts to explain this universal recognition of greatness in terms of the “proper” functioning of taste in various individuals, in response to properties of the object being appreciated. What examples does he give of times when human taste malfunctions? How do we know when our taste is functioning properly? In this important passage, Hume is attempting to explain how we can agree on what counts as “good” art, even though our assessments are founded in our “taste” or “sentiment.” Has he succeeded? What is persuasive about his attempt? What is unsatisfying about his attempt?
8. What are the similarities between “mental and bodily taste”? how does our understanding of “bodily taste” clarify our understanding of our appreciation of art? (#16)
9. In #17, he suggests that we will know if our taste is functioning appropriately if our conclusions are consistent with experiences of other nations and ages. Does this explain why we so often agree on what counts as “great” art? Is this argument persuasive? If it is not, what is bothersome about Hume’s argument here?
10. In #18-20 he suggests that the way to develop our taste so it functions properly is “practice,” by observing many works of art and by making comparisons among them. Is this consistent with your own experience in learning about art, especially art forms with which you were not familiar? After this “practice” are you confident that you can make reliable assessments of the quality of works in that genre of art?
11. We are urged to avoid “prejudice” in assessing art (in #21-22). What does Hume mean by “prejudice” here? Is his advice realistic? What prejudices do we today bring to our appreciation of art? Can they be overcome? Is it possible to have a “pristine eye” free of all prejudice in appreciating art?
12. Hume is confident that “the principles of taste” are “universal,” but admits that it might be difficult to know whether we have perfected our taste, free of prejudice. (#23-25) What are the difficulties in making this determination? Is Hume’s confidence unjustified?
13. Hume ridicules those who claim that we can find objective truth in philosophy and science, but not in our appreciation of art. How does he develop his argument? Is he persuasive? (#26-27)

14. Hume says repeatedly that “general principles of taste are uniform in human nature,” yet he acknowledges the great variations in our actual applications of our taste. What are his examples of these variations? Can these be overcome? (#28-31)
15. Unacceptable moral content seems to Hume to lower the aesthetic value of some art works. (#32) What other philosophers have expressed such a view? Is this consistent with your own assessments of art?
16. Hume criticizes those who excuse much religious art on the grounds that we should be more tolerant of religious diversity than other kinds of diversity. What examples does he give here to support his position? Do we in practice defer more generously to religious art from other cultures? Should we? (#34-36)
17. The central notion in Hume’s aesthetics is taste. No other authority for evaluating art exists other than taste, for Hume. Use the “find” command to review all the references to “taste” in this essay. What does he mean by this concept? Is it different in all people?
18. Hume also relies on the notion of “sentiment” extensively. Use the “find” command to review all the references to “sentiment” in this essay. Is it synonymous with “taste”? If it seems to be used differently, what are the differences?
19. In summary, Hume believes that, even though all of our knowledge comes from our experiences, yet we can explain agreement in aesthetic judgments because of uniformities in the human mind in the exercise of our taste. Has Hume reconciled subjectivity and objectivity? How persuasive is his approach to explaining evaluation in art? Does he explain your experience of evaluating art? Can you think of counter-examples which challenge Hume’s approach?

Additional Resources

Biographical information about Hume

Commentary on “Of the Standard of Taste”

Ty’s David Hume Homepage (links to bibliographies, events, mailings lists, etc. on Hume)

Citation and Use

This essay, originally published in 1757, is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.

The discussion questions, bibliographic references, and hyperlinks have been added by Julie Van Camp. (Copyright Julie C. Van Camp 1997). They too may be freely reproduced, so long as this complete citation is included with any such reproductions.



This work (Of the Standard of Taste by David Hume) is free of known copyright restrictions.

KANT'S PROJECT: A SHORT OVERVIEW

Laura Mueller, Ph.D.

Kant's Critique of Judgment (1790), the first part of which focuses largely on aesthetic judgment, is the last of Kant's three major "critical works." The Critique of Judgment was preceded by the Critique of Pure Reason (first edition, 1781; second edition, 1787) and the Critique of Practical Reason (1788). From just reading the book titles, you might notice that "one of these things is not like the others"; the first two Critiques pertain to different types of reason, while the third Critique focuses on judgment. Without even knowing the content of the books, you might be wondering: why did he move from books about reason to a book about judgment? How does judgment pertain to reason? Where does this Critique of Judgment fit into the picture?

One main idea of Kant's critical works—established in the three Critiques—is that of human autonomy, or a very special kind of human freedom. Auto means "self," and nomos means "law"; human autonomy, then, means human self-law. The critical works show that it is our own human powers that structure all of our experience, including our knowledge of the world around us, morality, and even our judgments of the beautiful. So, for example, the Critique of Pure Reason (the first Critique) establishes that rather than the world around us impressing itself upon our senses to yield knowledge, we, by virtue of certain mental powers (or faculties)—reason, understanding, judgment, and imagination—structure how we experience the world around us.

Think about it this way: first, look around you, and note what you see, feel, hear, and otherwise sense. For example, right now I am looking at a white door. But my senses alone don't tell me that this thing that I see is a white door; "white" and "door" are both concepts and they don't come from the barrage of sensations hitting me. Another creature—perhaps a bat—will also experience what I call a white door, as something totally different. It won't be white, or a door, to a bat. My mental powers—reason, understanding, judgment, and imagination—work together (with each other, and with sensory input) in very specific ways to yield concepts of "door" and of "white," that then allow me to judge this particular thing that I see as having both characteristics of whiteness and doorness. And thus, I can conclude that I have knowledge of this particular sensory input as a "white door."

Now, this argument has two pretty important implications for Kant: 1) humans have a great amount of power in how we structure our experience, and 2) we can't actually know what the world is like outside of our structuring. We will only ever know what the world of experience is like to humans, just as a bat will only ever know what the world of experience is like to bats. The world as it is "in itself" will always be unknowable.

Similar to the first Critique, the second Critique (Critique of Practical Reason) also demonstrates the power of the human mind. Rather than focusing on knowledge of the world of empirical experience—the laws of nature,

what we experience with our senses—though, the second Critique focuses on the world beyond empirical experience: the moral world. In his moral works, Kant establishes that the moral law is provided by human reason. In both Critiques, Kant demonstrates that it is the human power that provides knowledge of the world of experience, and knowledge of the moral world.

There are two things to note at this point in our discussion: 1) the first Critique is about what structures knowledge of the world of nature, while the second Critique concerns knowledge of the world of freedom (the moral world), and 2) in each Critique, the source of knowledge is not empirical. Look back, for a moment, at our example of how we structure our experience of the white door. The powers that provide the categories—and enable us to make a judgment—about this particular object as a white door do not come from experience. Rather, they are what make experience possible! So, rather than an empirical basis for knowledge of experience, the foundations of knowledge and experience must be a priori—they must be independent of experience. The same is true for moral knowledge. If our only basis of moral knowledge was empirical, then we would merely be doing anthropology; we would have no universality or certainty in moral demands. An a priori basis provides certainty in knowledge—of the natural world and of the moral world—and universality, true for all humans. Thus, it delivers us from skepticism and solipsism. And, since the a priori by definition cannot be empirical, it must come from somewhere else: the very structure of the human mind. Thus, in establishing a priori foundations of natural and moral knowledge, Kant also demonstrates human freedom in structuring the fundamental nature of our worlds. We are not just shaped by the world; rather, we are the world-shapers.

The Third Critique as a Bridge Between Worlds

Despite our newly-gained background knowledge of Kant's project, we haven't yet answered one of the very first questions we posed: how does the third Critique fit into all of this? The first two Critiques, after all, are about types of reason, but the Critique of Judgment is about, well, judgment. In his opening remarks in the third Critique, Kant tells us that his critique of the power of judgment is going to connect the two different "worlds" that his previous Critiques established: the world of nature, and the world of freedom. In other words, for Kant, judgment mediates between understanding (the power which a priori structures our experience, as established in the Critique of Pure Reason) and reason (the power which a priori yields moral knowledge, as established in the Critique of Practical Reason). Though they both have their a priori origins in common, the "two worlds" seem to otherwise be completely at odds with each other. After all, the "world of nature," structured by our power of understanding (more on that soon) is a world completely governed by laws of nature, especially cause and effect. But the world of freedom, the moral world, cannot be governed by natural laws of cause and effect. If it were, it wouldn't be free.

From the perspective of my existence in the world of nature, every action that I partake in has some other cause, and that has a cause, and back into infinity; similarly every action also causes something else, which causes something else, similarly forward into infinity. There is no room for freedom in the world of nature. However, from the

perspective of my existence in the moral world, the world of freedom, each moral action that I make is a free action. If it were not, I could not be held responsible (for praise or blame) for that action. When I am determined by nothing other than the dictates of reason alone (remember, the moral law is provided by reason, not by anything empirical, and is thus given a priori), then I am autonomous. While Kant established many important theories for philosophy, he also left us with quite a conundrum: how can we unite the world of nature with the world of freedom?

For Kant, judgment was key to uniting these two worlds; thus, his third major critical work, the Critique of Judgment, does have a place in the system. It resolves the tension between the two domains that he previously established. It is the completion of his system of philosophy! Just as Kant sought to establish a priori principles of the power of understanding (in structuring our experience) and a priori principles of the power of reason (in providing moral knowledge), so too does he seek to establish a priori principles of the power of judgment in dealing with aesthetic judgments. As we will find, the special a priori principles of judgment do link the worlds of nature and freedom, which we see when we analyze our aesthetic experiences of the beautiful.

The key to this unity between nature and freedom lies in the principle of judgment, which, rather than autonomous, is heautonomous. This means that the principle of judgment presides only over judgment, not over any other mental power. In Kant's first Critique, the power of understanding is the main area of focus. The power of understanding a priori provides various concepts, which Kant refers to as the "categories of understanding." Every judgment made with regard to knowledge of an object places that particular "thing" we are judging under a universal concept; that is a building block of how our mental powers structure knowledge and experience as such. Without the categories provided by understanding, we would not have experience or knowledge. So, for example, if I am looking at a white door, and experiencing a white door, I am only doing that because I can make a judgment that this particular thing I am sensing falls under certain kinds of concepts. These concepts—or categories—of the understanding act like rules for judging. They tell judgment what to do. The concepts (or categories, or rules) of understanding also, in structuring experience, therefore apply to other mental powers, such as judgment. In other words, the concepts (or categories) come from understanding and serve as rules for other mental powers to follow. Understanding "rules the roost," so to speak.

But, in the third Critique, Kant shows us that the a priori principles of judgment does not apply to any other power; they are rules only for judgment itself. Hence, his special term "heautonomy," rather than "autonomy." What we eventually find is that this special a priori principle of judgment is what Kant calls a special concept of purpose, also known as "purposeless purposiveness." While the term seems oxymoronic, it makes sense if we recognize two different meanings to "purpose"—one meaning based on what we might call "determinative judgment," and another meaning based on "reflective judgment." As you will see in the excerpt provided in this book, purpose plays a vital role in Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful." So, to understand how judgment, through its special principle of purpose, provides a bridge between nature and freedom, we need to take a bit of a circuitous route and first look at purpose and its relationship to concepts.

Judgment's Special Concept

Once again, let us refer back to the first Critique. Remember, in the first Critique, the categories of understanding provides the rules for other mental powers (such as judgment) to follow so we can structure experience and so that knowledge can be attained. Judgment works at the behest of understanding and follows its rules (the concepts of understanding). I bring awareness of some particular thing (a soon-to-be-object) under a concept, and from this very complicated a priori procedure, knowledge is yielded. Whatever I was judging is now an object for me to experience and for me to know.

If I judge that “This creature is a cat,” then I am subsuming this particular creature under the universal category of “cat” to make a knowledge claim. Judgment, in this role, is the power of determining whether or not something fits under a given rule. If this particular creature is not, in fact, a cat, then I can make that judgment, too. Judgment, in this capacity, follows the rules of understanding; it has concepts already provided, and not-so-simply determines whether or not a particular “fits” under any given universal (concept). The concepts are universal because they are provided a priori by understanding, and thus the same for every human being; they are a fundamental part of the structure of our experience. This kind of judgment is called determinative or determinate judgment; we are trying to “determine” what an object is, and the rule (concept) is already provided a priori by understanding. Judgment just follows the rules already given to it.

But what happens when there is no determinate concept provided for judgment? While judgment’s usual function, under the rule of understanding, is to subsume a particular under a universal, sometimes that universal is not provided! Sometimes, we are judging something for which no concept can be given by understanding. In such cases, judgment must rely on itself, on its own principle. In certain, special instances, when we are making judgments, but not determinate ones, judgment must work with its own concept, a very special concept. Aesthetic judgments are the ones in which judgment must provide its own concept; it no longer has any other rule to follow but its own (hence, judgment’s heautonomy). Kant refers to these special sorts of judgments as the work of reflective judgment; with no given rule, judgment must reflect on itself.

We can use this brief explanation to analyze the meaning of that seemingly oxymoronic phrase, “purposeless purposiveness” or “purposiveness without purpose.” In the “usual” sense of purpose (determinate judgment), purpose means “the object of a concept, insofar as the concept is regarded as the cause of the object,” (Critique of Judgment, § 10). After all, as we’ve already learned, we don’t get objects without concepts to serve as rules! In this case, concepts truly are the “causes” of objects, insofar as concepts make objects possible. In reflective judgment, since we don’t have such concepts already provided, we find ourselves without purposes (objects caused by concepts), or our judgments are “purposeless.”

However, what we also find in reflective judgments, along with purposelessness, is purposiveness. We think of something as caused by purposes, even if it isn’t. Something can, then, be thought of as having purposes (being

purposive) without actually being a given purpose; thus, in reflective judgment, with no given concept from understanding, we end up with “purposeless purposiveness.” For Kant, this special kind of purposiveness is subjective. This doesn’t mean it “depends on the individual,” but rather, by subjective he simply means “belonging to the subject.” Judgment, without guidance from understanding, strives to seek unity on its own. It brings together dissimilar phenomena from nature under a higher law, and then brings those results together under still higher laws. We see nature-as-a-system as ultimately purposive, even if there is no purpose guiding that. When judgment accomplishes this, we feel a harmony between nature and our mental abilities to know nature. We believe that nature is adapted to our mental powers. We experience this harmony as pleasurable.

We can (hopefully) see how, on the one hand, aesthetic judgment is important for the possibility of the world of nature. It allows us to see unity in nature as a whole. On the other hand, aesthetic judgment is also important for the world of freedom. For example, when judgment is engaged reflectively—operating heautonomously—it is free. The harmony we feel between nature and our mental powers is a pleasure that occurs solely from the free play of our mental powers. The purposiveness we experience is the purposiveness that we provide, not determined by anything else, not determined by any concept of understanding for the purposes of cognition. Judgment, imagination, and even understanding are free from the behest of any cognitive or moral goal. There is a clear analogy, then, between reflective judgments and moral freedom. In various other parts of the third Critique, Kant claims that aesthetic judgments prepare us for moral feeling, that the moral law is sublime (sublimity is a special kind of aesthetic judgment), and that beauty is a symbol of morality. The freedom of our mental powers that gives rise to nature as a system of a whole is also the freedom that serves as an analogy for moral freedom. Thus, as heautonomously free, reflective judgment bridges both the natural and the moral worlds.

The Analytic of the Beautiful

Regardless of the success or failure of Kant’s critical project, the third Critique still plays an important role in the history of aesthetic theory. His “Analytic of the Beautiful” establishes that the principles of aesthetic judgment are a priori rather than empirical, thus providing a response to previous aesthetic accounts (such as David Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste”). With an a priori basis, aesthetic judgments thus rise to the rank of universal; judgments of the beautiful are not just a “matter of subjective opinion,” but demand universal assent. However, because aesthetic judgments are also subjective, they are not about any property of the objects themselves; such judgments are universal, but not objective. If you are familiar with the history of Western philosophy, you will see reflected in Kant’s aesthetics his overall position in regard to empiricism and rationalism: neither one nor the other, but a new way forward.

In Kant’s preliminary analysis of aesthetic judgments, he presents the “four moments” of taste (quality, quantity, relation, modality). The moments are: disinterested (quality), universal (quantity), purposive (relation), and necessary (modality). Following the excerpt in the text, I will walk you through the first three moments of taste.

First Moment

Kant's first moment, that of disinterest, does not mean uninterested. Rather, "disinterested" points to the fact that there is no concept of the understanding provided, so we are not making a determinative judgment. Recall that when a concept of the understanding is given, and tells judgment what to do, we are making judgments about objects in the world of nature. Recall, also, that "purpose" means the object that is "caused" by a concept. If there is no concept provided, there is no object that is cognized. This means that aesthetic judgments are not about the object; thus, we are disinterested in the object. Additionally, since aesthetic judgments are not about the object, they are also not empirical. This is what Kant means when he states, "We easily see that in saying it is beautiful and in showing that I have taste, I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the object, but with that which I make out of this representation in myself," (Critique of Judgment, § 2). What is beautiful is not the object at all. Rather, as we will find out, to say "This is beautiful" means that I feel a certain harmony that is pleasurable, and I demand that possible others ought to feel that harmony as well.

Kant distinguishes between the pleasure of aesthetic judgments, the pleasure of that which is satisfactory (or agreeable), and the pleasure that accompanies morality. He writes, "That which GRATIFIES a man is called pleasant; that which merely PLEASES him is beautiful; that which is ESTEEMED [or approved] by him, i.e. that to which he accords an objective worth, is good. Pleasantness concerns irrational animals also; but Beauty only concerns men, i.e. animal, but still rational, beings—not merely quâ rational (e.g. spirits), but quâ animal also; and the Good concerns every rational being in general," (Critique of Judgment, § 5). In other words, when something gratifies us (or is satisfactory or agreeable), we feel pleasure in the object that gratifies. We call this object pleasant. But, in an aesthetic judgment, again, because there is no universal concept of understanding provided, we are not concerned with the object. Thus, the pleasure involved in an aesthetic judgment cannot be the pleasure of satisfaction. Similarly, when we feel a pleasure or approval of something moral, we call that "good." But here, again, "good" is a moral concept provided by reason, and in aesthetic judgments, no universal concepts are given. Both satisfaction and moral approval are based on interest in an object, whether it is an object that gratifies or an object of which we morally approve. As Kant states, "for the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement (either theoretical or practical), and thus is not based on concepts, nor has it concepts as its purpose," (Critique of Judgment, § 5). Aesthetic judgments, which are not object-oriented, are thus disinterested. And so, Kant concludes the first moment of taste, stating, "Taste is the faculty of judging an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful," (Critique of Judgment, § 5).

Second Moment

Since aesthetic judgments are not about the object, they are not objective. Rather, they are about the subject, and thus subjective judgments. However, this does not mean that aesthetic judgments are relative to the individual. In fact, Kant very succinctly states this in his explanation of the beautiful from the second moment: "The beautiful

is that which pleases universally, without a concept,” (Critique of Judgment, § 9). Another way Kant speaks of the beautiful is as “subjectively universal.” That which is pleasant is easily claimed as pleasant for me and only me. However, as Kant points out, it is laughable to consider something as beautiful only for me. When we say “This is beautiful,” we mean something much stronger than “This is beautiful only for me.” We, Kant states, demand that others would assent to this judgment. Thus, when it comes to the beautiful, there is an “oughtness” implied; aesthetic taste is not just a matter of particular tastes. Aesthetic taste is universal.

The subjective universality of an aesthetic judgment of taste marks such judgments as very special, indeed. Consider for a moment previous remarks on concepts of the understanding and how they provide universality. First of all, they are, as we have learned, a priori, and thus are independent of experience and in fact, necessary for any experience at all to be possible. Thus, these concepts of understanding are necessary for all humans to have in order to structure all possible experience. They are universal. But remember, too, that in aesthetic judgment, we have no such concepts! How, then, do we get universality without a concept of the understanding?

The way aesthetic judgments are subjectively universal stems from two special features of the judgments: 1) aesthetical universality, as opposed to logical universality, and 2) the kind of pleasure at hand in the judgments. As we stated above, most of the time, universality is a logical universality. When we make a judgment like “X is Y,” we’re making a judgment about a property (Y) that the object (X) has. But, aesthetic judgments are disinterested, insofar as they are not concerned with the object or its properties. This is why aesthetic judgments are subjective. So a “normal logical” judgment cannot be the kind we use here. Another way of stating all of this is that, insofar as we are dealing with the subjective part of an aesthetic judgment, we are making a singular judgment. I can say “This rose is beautiful.” Such a judgment refers only to my feeling of pleasure (or pain). So, as Kant states, “In respect of logical quantity all judgements of taste are singular judgements. For because I must refer the object immediately to my feeling of pleasure and pain, and that not by means of concepts, they cannot have the quantity of objective generally valid judgements,” (Critique of Judgment, § 8).

But here, something very interesting happens; because I’m making an aesthetic judgment of taste—and not a judgment about something being merely agreeable or gratifying—I treat that singular logical judgment as if it were a universal judgment. We can do this because singular and universal judgments operate in the same way. A universal judgment is exhaustive; this means that the predicate holds true of all subjects. If I say “All Xs are Y,” this means that the predicate, Y, is exhaustive of all subjects, Xs. Singular judgments work in the same way, but only for one thing. If I say “This X is Y,” it still means, that for this one, particular X, the predicate, Y, is exhaustive. This is what Kant means when he writes that “Nevertheless if the singular representation of the Object of the judgement of taste in accordance with the conditions determining the latter, were transformed by comparison into a concept, a logically universal judgement could result therefrom,” (Critique of Judgment, § 8). This does not mean that everyone actually has to agree with the judgment. Rather, we compare our singular judgment with the idea of universal agreement from everyone else: “The universal voice is, therefore, only an Idea (we do not yet inquire upon what it rests). It may be uncertain whether or not the man, who believes that he is laying down a judgement of

taste, is, as a matter of fact, judging in conformity with that idea; but that he refers his judgement thereto, and, consequently, that it is intended to be a judgement of taste, he announces by the expression 'beauty,'" (Critique of Judgment, § 8).

Aesthetic judgments of taste, though they are subjective, are also universal. They demand that everyone would assent to the judgment being made. One reason they are subjectively universal is because they treat the aesthetically singular logical judgment as if it were an objectively universal logical judgment. However, we can only make such a logical move because of the peculiar kind of pleasure felt in an aesthetic judgment.

We already know that the pleasure in an aesthetic judgment is not from gratification or from moral approval; rather, the pleasure is disinterested. Because there is no concept of understanding or concept of reason given to determine what the other mental powers must do (or what they must cognize), the mental powers are in what Kant calls a "free play." In particular, the powers of imagination and understanding are in free play. In cognition (as discussed in the first Critique) understanding provides the rules by which the other powers operate. It tells judgment how to judge and imagination how to pull things together. When there is no rule provided by understanding, though, the powers are "free" and can "play" with one another in harmony. It is this harmony of the free play of imagination and understanding that we experience as pleasurable. Nothing is trying to be accomplished; we aren't evaluating a moral good or cognizing an object for knowledge. There is no goal, and thus our mental powers can "linger" in this pleasurable free play. Since everyone has these mental powers, and since there is no particular agreeableness of an object at hand here, the pleasure we experience in the beautiful can be demanded as universal. This kind of pleasure in the harmony of free play is thus described as "universally communicable." And so Kant states, "This state of free play of the cognitive faculties in a representation by which an object is given, must be universally communicable," and "We are conscious that this subjective relation, suitable for cognition in general, must be valid for every one, and thus must be universally communicable, just as if it were a definite cognition, resting always on that relation as its subjective condition," (Critique of Judgment, § 9).

Third Moment

We know, at this point, that a purpose is a concept of an object, but that, since aesthetic judgments have no given concept from reason or understanding, such judgments are purposeless. That does not mean, however, that they are not purposive. Purposiveness, normally, refers to the causality of a concept (with respect to an object). Obviously, in aesthetic judgments, that is not the kind of purposiveness we are dealing with. Rather, in aesthetic judgments, the purposiveness we feel is not from the object but rather from the "representation of the object without any purpose," or in other words the "mere form of purposiveness . . . by which an object is given to us," (Critique of Judgment, § 11). By "form of purposiveness," Kant means the free play activity of imagination and understanding with each other and with the object. In other words, we feel as if the object and our mental powers were made for each other; we feel as if there is a purpose, even if there is not one. When judgment must rely solely on its own principle we feel purposiveness. What we find is a freedom in judgment—freedom from being at the behest of any

other mental power. When neither understanding nor reason are determining the mental powers, when we are cognizing neither the natural or the moral worlds, the mental powers find themselves in a free play. This free play is pleasurable to us, and feels purposiveness even if there is no purpose given.

Such purposiveness is distinct from the purposes that stem from concepts of perfection, or from agreeable emotions or charm. Perfection is based on what Kant calls objective purposiveness, which is either what a thing does, or what a thing is meant to be. Either notion of purposiveness determines an object based on a concept, so clearly aesthetic purposiveness cannot be objective. Or, as Kant states, subjective purposiveness “simply refers the representation, by which an Object is given, to the subject; and brings to our notice no characteristic of the object, but only the purposive form in the determination of the representative powers which are occupying themselves therewith. The judgement is called aesthetical just because its determining ground is not a concept, but the feeling (of internal sense) of that harmony in the play of the mental powers . . .” (Critique of Judgment, § 15).

Thus, any judgment of the beautiful which is based on some objective concept is an “impure” judgement. We cannot have a concept of what the object ought to be (perfection) and, based on that concept, call the judgment a pure judgment of the beautiful. What we do find in pure judgments of the beautiful is a special kind of freedom of judgment. Since we are not concerned with moral approval, agreeable sensations, what the object ought to be or ought to do, but are only concerned with the pleasure in the subjective (but universal!) harmony of our own mental powers, we also find a freedom to linger. Aesthetic judgment, seeking to accomplish nothing—nothing practical (moral), nothing theoretical (cognitive)—is, in its own special way, free. The pleasure of aesthetic judgments does nothing other than reproduce itself; it has what Kant calls an “inner causality.” As we noted from the first moment of taste: “But this contemplation itself is not directed to concepts; for the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement (either theoretical or practical), and thus is not based on concepts, nor has it concepts as its purpose,” (Critique of Judgment, § 5).

Concluding Thoughts

Kant’s philosophical works—stemming epistemology, morality, political thought, and aesthetics—are notoriously difficult. If you find this short introduction to his works difficult, you are certainly not alone. Kant’s aesthetic works are part of a much larger and more comprehensive system of thought that interweaves knowledge, morality, and aesthetic experience to account for how we know, perceive, believe, and act in the world and among each other. On the one hand, then, we can see that to truly understand Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, you must also strive to understand knowledge, logic, and morality.

On the other hand, one must not be overwhelmed or intimidated by Kant’s works. Like any system, it can be broken down into smaller steps until we can see how they each fit together. Hopefully this introduction helps you see the larger context of his Critique of Judgment, and some of the steps into which it can be broken down. Furthermore, even without the context, we can see the import of Kant’s aesthetic theory. For example, by showing the principle

of judgment as a priori, Kant has claimed universality and necessity for aesthetic judgments; no longer are we confined to the simplistic retort “everyone has his own taste.” However, this also does not mean that aesthetic judgments are solely objective; they are not, as we have seen, about any property the object might have that we discover. Rather, such judgments are uniquely subjectively universal, and encourage us to look at the structure of human experience itself.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What does Kant mean by purposeless purposiveness?
2. What does it mean to you to say that something “has a purpose”? Is that really part of the pleasure we feel in judging something as beautiful?
3. Do you agree that aesthetic judgments of the beautiful are universally necessary? Why or why not? What are some consequences of your position?
4. Do you think there is a link between morality and beauty? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

Key Terminology

Determinate judgment

Reflective judgment

A priori

Heteronomy

Autonomy

Understanding

Judgment

Purpose

Purposiveness

Aesthetic

World of nature

World of freedom

Disinterested

Beautiful



Kant's Project: A Short Overview by Laura Mueller, Ph.D. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

IMMANUEL KANT – ON THE AESTHETIC TASTE

Jeff McLaughlin

Critique of the Aesthetical Judgement

1: The judgement of taste is aesthetical

In order to decide whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer the representation, not by the Understanding to the Object for cognition but, by the Imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the Understanding) to the subject, and its feeling of pleasure or pain. The judgement of taste is therefore not a judgement of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be no other than subjective. Every reference of representations, even that of sensations, may be objective (and then it signifies the real in an empirical representation); save only the reference to the feeling of pleasure and pain, by which nothing in the Object is signified, but through which there is a feeling in the subject, as it is affected by the representation.

To apprehend a regular, purposive building by means of one's cognitive faculty (whether in a clear or a confused way of representation) is something quite different from being conscious of this representation as connected with the sensation of satisfaction. Here the representation is altogether referred to the subject and to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or pain. This establishes a quite separate faculty of distinction and of judgement, adding nothing to cognition, but only comparing the given representation in the subject with the whole faculty of representations, of which the mind is conscious in the feeling of its state. Given representations in a judgement can be empirical (consequently, aesthetical); but the judgement which is formed by means of them is logical, provided they are referred in the judgement to the Object. Conversely, if the given representations are rational, but are referred in a judgement simply to the subject (to its feeling), the judgement is so far always aesthetical.

2: The satisfaction which determines the judgement of taste is disinterested

The satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Such satisfaction always has reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or as necessarily connected with its determining ground. Now when the question is if a thing is beautiful, we do not want to know whether anything depends or can depend on the existence of the thing either for myself or for any one else, but how we judge

it by mere observation (intuition or reflection). If any one asks me if I find that palace beautiful which I see before me, I may answer: I do not like things of that kind which are made merely to be stared at. Or I can answer like that Iroquois sachem who was pleased in Paris by nothing more than by the cook-shops. Or again after the manner of Rousseau I may rebuke the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. In fine I could easily convince myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island without the hope of ever again coming among men, and could conjure up just such a splendid building by my mere wish, I should not even give myself the trouble if I had a sufficiently comfortable hut. This may all be admitted and approved; but we are not now talking of this. We wish only to know if this mere representation of the object is accompanied in me with satisfaction, however indifferent I may be as regards the existence of the object of this representation. We easily see that in saying it is beautiful and in showing that I have taste, I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the object, but with that which I make out of this representation in myself. Every one must admit that a judgement about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgement of taste. We must not be in the least prejudiced in favour of the existence of the things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in things of taste.

We cannot, however, better elucidate this proposition, which is of capital importance, than by contrasting the pure disinterested satisfaction in judgements of taste, with that which is bound up with an interest, especially if we can at the same time be certain that there are no other kinds of interest than those which are now to be specified.

3: The satisfaction in the PLEASANT is bound up with interest

That which pleases the senses in sensation is PLEASANT. Here the opportunity presents itself of censuring a very common confusion of the double sense which the word sensation can have, and of calling attention to it. All satisfaction (it is said or thought) is itself sensation (of a pleasure). Consequently everything that pleases is pleasant because it pleases (and according to its different degrees or its relations to other pleasant sensations it is agreeable, lovely, delightful, enjoyable, etc.). But if this be admitted, then impressions of Sense which determine the inclination, fundamental propositions of Reason which determine the Will, mere reflective forms of intuition which determine the Judgement, are quite the same, as regards the effect upon the feeling of pleasure. For this would be pleasantness in the sensation of one's state, and since in the end all the operations of our faculties must issue in the practical and unite in it as their goal, we could suppose no other way of estimating things and their worth than that which consists in the gratification that they promise. It is of no consequence at all how this is attained, and since then the choice of means alone could make a difference, men could indeed blame one another for stupidity and indiscretion, but never for baseness and wickedness. For all, each according to his own way of seeing things, seek one goal, that is, gratification.

If a determination of the feeling of pleasure or pain is called sensation, this expression signifies something quite different from what I mean when I call the representation of a thing (by sense, as a receptivity belonging to the

cognitive faculty) sensation. For in the latter case the representation is referred to the Object, in the former simply to the subject, and is available for no cognition whatever, not even for that by which the subject cognises itself.

In the above elucidation we understand by the word sensation, an objective representation of sense; and in order to avoid misinterpretation, we shall call that, which must always remain merely subjective and can constitute absolutely no representation of an object, by the ordinary term “feeling.” The green colour of the meadows belongs to objective sensation, as a perception of an object of sense; the pleasantness of this belongs to subjective sensation by which no object is represented, i.e. to feeling, by which the object is considered as an Object of satisfaction (which does not furnish a cognition of it).

Now that a judgement about an object, by which I describe it as pleasant, expresses an interest in it, is plain from the fact that by sensation it excites a desire for objects of that kind; consequently the satisfaction presupposes not the mere judgement about it, but the relation of its existence to my state, so far as this is affected by such an Object. Hence we do not merely say of the pleasant, it pleases; but, it gratifies. I give to it no mere approval, but inclination is aroused by it; and in the case of what is pleasant in the most lively fashion, there is no judgement at all upon the character of the Object, for those who always lay themselves out only for enjoyment (for that is the word describing intense gratification) would fain dispense with all judgement.

4: The satisfaction in the GOOD is bound up with interest

Whatever by means of Reason pleases through the mere concept is GOOD. That which pleases only as a means we call good for something (the useful); but that which pleases for itself is good in itself. In both there is always involved the concept of a purpose, and consequently the relation of Reason to the (at least possible) volition, and thus a satisfaction in the presence of an Object or an action, i.e. some kind of interest.

In order to find anything good, I must always know what sort of a thing the object ought to be, i.e. I must have a concept of it. But there is no need of this, to find a thing beautiful. Flowers, free delineations, outlines intertwined with one another without design and called foliage, have no meaning, depend on no definite concept, and yet they please. The satisfaction in the beautiful must depend on the reflection upon an object, leading to any concept (however indefinite); and it is thus distinguished from the pleasant which rests entirely upon sensation.

It is true, the Pleasant seems in many cases to be the same as the Good. Thus people are accustomed to say that all gratification (especially if it lasts) is good in itself; which is very much the same as to say that lasting pleasure and the good are the same. But we can soon see that this is merely a confusion of words; for the concepts which properly belong to these expressions can in no way be interchanged. The pleasant, which, as such, represents the object simply in relation to Sense, must first be brought by the concept of a purpose under principles of Reason, in order to call it good, as an object of the Will. But that there is [involved] a quite different relation to satisfaction in calling that which gratifies at the same time good, may be seen from the fact that in the case of the good the question always is,

whether it is mediately or immediately good (useful or good in itself); but on the contrary in the case of the pleasant there can be no question about this at all, for the word always signifies something which pleases immediately. (The same is applicable to what I call beautiful).

Even in common speech men distinguish the Pleasant from the Good. Of a dish which stimulates the taste by spices and other condiments we say unhesitatingly that it is pleasant, though it is at the same time admitted not to be good; for though it immediately delights the senses, yet mediately, i.e. considered by Reason which looks to the after results, it displeases. Even in the judging of health we may notice this distinction. It is immediately pleasant to every one possessing it (at least negatively, i.e. as the absence of all bodily pains). But in order to say that it is good, it must be considered by Reason with reference to purposes; viz. that it is a state which makes us fit for all our business. Finally in respect of happiness every one believes himself entitled to describe the greatest sum of the pleasantnesses of life (as regards both their number and their duration) as a true, even as the highest, good. However Reason is opposed to this. Pleasantness is enjoyment. And if we were concerned with this alone, it would be foolish to be scrupulous as regards the means which procure it for us, or [to care] whether it is obtained passively by the bounty of nature or by our own activity and work. But Reason can never be persuaded that the existence of a man who merely lives for enjoyment (however busy he may be in this point of view), has a worth in itself; even if he at the same time is conducive as a means to the best enjoyment of others, and shares in all their gratifications by sympathy. Only what he does, without reference to enjoyment, in full freedom and independently of what nature can procure for him passively, gives an [absolute] worth to his being, as the existence of a person; and happiness, with the whole abundance of its pleasures, is far from being an unconditioned good.

However, notwithstanding all this difference between the pleasant and the good, they both agree in this that they are always bound up with an interest in their object. [This is true] not only of the pleasant (§ 3), and the mediate good (the useful) which is pleasing as a means towards pleasantness somewhere, but also of that which is good absolutely and in every aspect, viz. moral good, which brings with it the highest interest. For the good is the Object of will (i.e. of a faculty of desire determined by Reason). But to will something, and to have a satisfaction in its existence, i.e. to take an interest in it, are identical.

5: Comparison of the three specifically different kinds of satisfaction

The pleasant and the good have both a reference to the faculty of desire; and they bring with them—the former a satisfaction pathologically conditioned (by impulses, stimuli)—the latter a pure practical satisfaction, which is determined not merely by the representation of the object, but also by the represented connexion of the subject with the existence of the object. [It is not merely the object that pleases, but also its existence.] On the other hand, the judgement of taste is merely contemplative; i.e. it is a judgement which, indifferent as regards the being of an object, compares its character with the feeling of pleasure and pain. But this contemplation itself is not directed to concepts; for the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement (either theoretical or practical), and thus is not based on concepts, nor has it concepts as its purpose.

The Pleasant, the Beautiful, and the Good, designate then, three different relations of representations to the feeling of pleasure and pain, in reference to which we distinguish from each other objects or methods of representing them. And the expressions corresponding to each, by which we mark our complacency in them, are not the same. That which GRATIFIES a man is called pleasant; that which merely PLEASES him is beautiful; that which is ESTEEMED [or approved] by him, i.e. that to which he accords an objective worth, is good. Pleasantness concerns irrational animals also; but Beauty only concerns men, i.e. animal, but still rational, beings—not merely quâ rational (e.g. spirits), but quâ animal also; and the Good concerns every rational being in general. This is a proposition which can only be completely established and explained in the sequel. We may say that of all these three kinds of satisfaction, that of taste in the Beautiful is alone a disinterested and free satisfaction; for no interest, either of Sense or of Reason, here forces our assent. Hence we may say of satisfaction that it is related in the three aforesaid cases to inclination, to favour, or to respect. Now favour is the only free satisfaction. An object of inclination, and one that is proposed to our desire by a law of Reason, leave us no freedom in forming for ourselves anywhere an object of pleasure. All interest presupposes or generates a want; and, as the determining ground of assent, it leaves the judgement about the object no longer free.

As regards the interest of inclination in the case of the Pleasant, every one says that hunger is the best sauce, and everything that is eatable is relished by people with a healthy appetite; and thus a satisfaction of this sort does not indicate choice directed by taste. It is only when the want is appeased that we can distinguish which of many men has or has not taste. In the same way there may be manners (conduct) without virtue, politeness without good-will, decorum without modesty, etc. For where the moral law speaks there is no longer, objectively, a free choice as regards what is to be done; and to display taste in its fulfilment (or in judging of another's fulfilment of it) is something quite different from manifesting the moral attitude of thought. For this involves a command and generates a want, whilst moral taste only plays with the objects of satisfaction, without attaching itself to one of them.

EXPLANATION OF THE BEAUTIFUL RESULTING FROM THE FIRST MOMENT

Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.

SECOND MOMENT: OF THE JUDGEMENT OF TASTE, VIZ. ACCORDING TO QUANTITY

6: The beautiful is that which apart from concepts is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction

This explanation of the beautiful can be derived from the preceding explanation of it as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction. For the fact of which every one is conscious, that the satisfaction is for him quite disinterested, implies in his judgement a ground of satisfaction for every one. For since it does not rest on any inclination of the subject (nor upon any other premeditated interest), but since he who judges feels himself quite

free as regards the satisfaction which he attaches to the object, he cannot find the ground of this satisfaction in any private conditions connected with his own subject; and hence it must be regarded as grounded on what he can presuppose in every other man. Consequently he must believe that he has reason for attributing a similar satisfaction to every one. He will therefore speak of the beautiful, as if beauty were a characteristic of the object and the judgement logical (constituting a cognition of the Object by means of concepts of it); although it is only aesthetical and involves merely a reference of the representation of the object to the subject. For it has this similarity to a logical judgement that we can presuppose its validity for every one. But this universality cannot arise from concepts; for from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or pain (except in pure practical laws, which bring an interest with them such as is not bound up with the pure judgement of taste). Consequently the judgement of taste, accompanied with the consciousness of separation from all interest, must claim validity for every one, without this universality depending on Objects. That is, there must be bound up with it a title to subjective universality.

7: Comparison of the Beautiful with the Pleasant and the Good by means of the above characteristic

As regards the Pleasant every one is content that his judgement, which he bases upon private feeling, and by which he says of an object that it pleases him, should be limited merely to his own person. Thus he is quite contented that if he says “Canary wine is pleasant,” another man may correct his expression and remind him that he ought to say “It is pleasant to me.” And this is the case not only as regards the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat, but for whatever is pleasant to any one’s eyes and ears. To one violet colour is soft and lovely, to another it is faded and dead. One man likes the tone of wind instruments, another that of strings. To strive here with the design of reproving as incorrect another man’s judgement which is different from our own, as if the judgements were logically opposed, would be folly. As regards the pleasant therefore the fundamental proposition is valid, every one has his own taste (the taste of Sense).

The case is quite different with the Beautiful. It would (on the contrary) be laughable if a man who imagined anything to his own taste, thought to justify himself by saying: “This object (the house we see, the coat that person wears, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our judgement) is beautiful for me.” For he must not call it beautiful if it merely pleases himself. Many things may have for him charm and pleasantness; no one troubles himself at that; but if he gives out anything as beautiful, he supposes in others the same satisfaction—he judges not merely for himself, but for every one, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says “the thing is beautiful”; and he does not count on the agreement of others with this his judgement of satisfaction, because he has found this agreement several times before, but he demands it of them. He blames them if they judge otherwise and he denies them taste, which he nevertheless requires from them. Here then we cannot say that each man has his own particular taste. For this would be as much as to say that there is no taste whatever; i.e. no aesthetical judgement, which can make a rightful claim upon every one’s assent.

At the same time we find as regards the Pleasant that there is an agreement among men in their judgements upon it, in regard to which we deny Taste to some and attribute it to others; by this not meaning one of our organic senses, but a faculty of judging in respect of the pleasant generally. Thus we say of a man who knows how to entertain his guests with pleasures (of enjoyment for all the senses), so that they are all pleased, “he has taste.” But here the universality is only taken comparatively; and there emerge rules which are only general (like all empirical ones), and not universal; which latter the judgement of Taste upon the beautiful undertakes or lays claim to. It is a judgement in reference to sociability, so far as this rests on empirical rules. In respect of the Good it is true that judgements make rightful claim to validity for every one; but the Good is represented only by means of a concept as the Object of a universal satisfaction, which is the case neither with the Pleasant nor with the Beautiful.

8: The universality of the satisfaction is represented in a judgement of Taste only as subjective

This particular determination of the universality of an aesthetical judgement, which is to be met with in a judgement of taste, is noteworthy, not indeed for the logician, but for the transcendental philosopher. It requires no small trouble to discover its origin, but we thus detect a property of our cognitive faculty which without this analysis would remain unknown.

First, we must be fully convinced of the fact that in a judgement of taste (about the Beautiful) the satisfaction in the object is imputed to every one, without being based on a concept (for then it would be the Good). Further, this claim to universal validity so essentially belongs to a judgement by which we describe anything as beautiful, that if this were not thought in it, it would never come into our thoughts to use the expression at all, but everything which pleases without a concept would be counted as pleasant. In respect of the latter every one has his own opinion; and no one assumes, in another, agreement with his judgement of taste, which is always the case in a judgement of taste about beauty. I may call the first the taste of Sense, the second the taste of Reflection; so far as the first lays down mere private judgements, and the second judgements supposed to be generally valid (public), but in both cases aesthetical (not practical) judgements about an object merely in respect of the relation of its representation to the feeling of pleasure and pain. Now here is something strange. As regards the taste of Sense not only does experience show that its judgement (of pleasure or pain connected with anything) is not valid universally, but every one is content not to impute agreement with it to others (although actually there is often found a very extended concurrence in these judgements). On the other hand, the taste of Reflection has its claim to the universal validity of its judgements (about the beautiful) rejected often enough, as experience teaches; although it may find it possible (as it actually does) to represent judgements which can demand this universal agreement. In fact for each of its judgements of taste it imputes this to every one, without the persons that judge disputing as to the possibility of such a claim; although in particular cases they cannot agree as to the correct application of this faculty.

Here we must, in the first place, remark that a universality which does not rest on concepts of Objects (not even on empirical ones) is not logical but aesthetical, i.e. it involves no objective quantity of the judgement but only

that which is subjective. For this I use the expression general validity which signifies the validity of the reference of a representation, not to the cognitive faculty but, to the feeling of pleasure and pain for every subject. (We can avail ourselves also of the same expression for the logical quantity of the judgement, if only we prefix objective to “universal validity,” to distinguish it from that which is merely subjective and aesthetical.)

A judgement with objective universal validity is also always valid subjectively; i.e. if the judgement holds for everything contained under a given concept, it holds also for every one who represents an object by means of this concept. But from a subjective universal validity, i.e. aesthetical and resting on no concept, we cannot infer that which is logical; because that kind of judgement does not extend to the Object. Hence the aesthetical universality which is ascribed to a judgement must be of a particular kind, because it does not unite the predicate of beauty with the concept of the Object, considered in its whole logical sphere, and yet extends it to the whole sphere of judging persons.

In respect of logical quantity all judgements of taste are singular judgements. For because I must refer the object immediately to my feeling of pleasure and pain, and that not by means of concepts, they cannot have the quantity of objective generally valid judgements. Nevertheless if the singular representation of the Object of the judgement of taste in accordance with the conditions determining the latter, were transformed by comparison into a concept, a logically universal judgement could result therefrom. E.g. I describe by a judgement of taste the rose, that I see, as beautiful. But the judgement which results from the comparison of several singular judgements, “Roses in general are beautiful” is no longer described simply as aesthetical, but as a logical judgement based on an aesthetical one. Again the judgement “The rose is pleasant” (to smell) is, although aesthetical and singular, not a judgement of Taste but of Sense. It is distinguished from the former by the fact that the judgement of Taste carries with it an aesthetical quantity of universality, i.e. of validity for every one; which cannot be found in a judgement about the Pleasant. It is only judgements about the Good which—although they also determine satisfaction in an object,—have logical and not merely aesthetical universality; for they are valid of the Object, as cognitive of it, and thus are valid for every one.

If we judge Objects merely according to concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can be no rule according to which any one is to be forced to recognise anything as beautiful. We cannot press [upon others] by the aid of any reasons or fundamental propositions our judgement that a coat, a house, or a flower is beautiful. We wish to submit the Object to our own eyes, as if the satisfaction in it depended on sensation; and yet if we then call the object beautiful, we believe that we speak with a universal voice, and we claim the assent of every one, although on the contrary all private sensation can only decide for the observer himself and his satisfaction.

We may see now that in the judgement of taste nothing is postulated but such a universal voice, in respect of the satisfaction without the intervention of concepts; and thus the possibility of an aesthetical judgement that can, at the same time, be regarded as valid for every one. The judgement of taste itself does not postulate the agreement of every one (for that can only be done by a logically universal judgement because it can adduce reasons); it only imputes this agreement to every one, as a case of the rule in respect of which it expects, not confirmation by concepts,

but assent from others. The universal voice is, therefore, only an Idea (we do not yet inquire upon what it rests). It may be uncertain whether or not the man, who believes that he is laying down a judgement of taste, is, as a matter of fact, judging in conformity with that idea; but that he refers his judgement thereto, and, consequently, that it is intended to be a judgement of taste, he announces by the expression “beauty.” He can be quite certain of this for himself by the mere consciousness of the separation of everything belonging to the Pleasant and the Good from the satisfaction which is left; and this is all for which he promises himself the agreement of every one—a claim which would be justifiable under these conditions, provided only he did not often make mistakes, and thus lay down an erroneous judgement of taste.

9: Investigation of the question whether in the judgement of taste the feeling of pleasure precedes or follows the judging of the object

The solution of this question is the key to the Critique of Taste, and so is worthy of all attention.

If the pleasure in the given object precedes, and it is only its universal communicability that is to be acknowledged in the judgement of taste about the representation of the object, there would be a contradiction. For such pleasure would be nothing different from the mere pleasantness in the sensation, and so in accordance with its nature could have only private validity, because it is immediately dependent on the representation through which the object is given.

Hence, it is the universal capability of communication of the mental state in the given representation which, as the subjective condition of the judgement of taste, must be fundamental, and must have the pleasure in the object as its consequent. But nothing can be universally communicated except cognition and representation, so far as it belongs to cognition. For it is only thus that this latter can be objective; and only through this has it a universal point of reference, with which the representative power of every one is compelled to harmonise. If the determining ground of our judgement as to this universal communicability of the representation is to be merely subjective, i.e. is conceived independently of any concept of the object, it can be nothing else than the state of mind, which is to be met with in the relation of our representative powers to each other, so far as they refer a given representation to cognition in general.

The cognitive powers, which are involved by this representation, are here in free play, because no definite concept limits them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence, the state of mind in this representation must be a feeling of the free play of the representative powers in a given representation with reference to a cognition in general. Now a representation by which an object is given, that is to become a cognition in general, requires Imagination, for the gathering together the manifold of intuition, and Understanding, for the unity of the concept uniting the representations. This state of free play of the cognitive faculties in a representation by which an object is given, must be universally communicable; because cognition, as the determination of the Object with which given representations (in whatever subject) are to agree, is the only kind of representation which is valid for every one.

The subjective universal communicability of the mode of representation in a judgement of taste, since it is to be possible without presupposing a definite concept, can refer to nothing else than the state of mind in the free play of the Imagination and the Understanding (so far as they agree with each other, as is requisite for cognition in general). We are conscious that this subjective relation, suitable for cognition in general, must be valid for every one, and thus must be universally communicable, just as if it were a definite cognition, resting always on that relation as its subjective condition.

This merely subjective (aesthetical) judging of the object, or of the representation by which it is given, precedes the pleasure in it, and is the ground of this pleasure in the harmony of the cognitive faculties; but on the universality of the subjective conditions for judging of objects is alone based the universal subjective validity of the satisfaction bound up by us with the representation of the object that we call beautiful.

The power of communicating one's state of mind, even though only in respect of the cognitive faculties, carries a pleasure with it, as we can easily show from the natural propension of man towards sociability (empirical and psychological). But this is not enough for our design. The pleasure that we feel is, in a judgement of taste, necessarily imputed by us to every one else; as if, when we call a thing beautiful, it is to be regarded as a characteristic of the object which is determined in it according to concepts; though beauty, without a reference to the feeling of the subject, is nothing by itself. But we must reserve the examination of this question until we have answered another, viz. "If and how aesthetical judgements are possible a priori?"

We now occupy ourselves with the easier question, in what way we are conscious of a mutual subjective harmony of the cognitive powers with one another in the judgement of taste; is it aesthetically by mere internal sense and sensation? or is it intellectually by the consciousness of our designed activity, by which we bring them into play?

If the given representation, which occasions the judgement of taste, were a concept uniting Understanding and Imagination in the judging of the object, into a cognition of the Object, the consciousness of this relation would be intellectual (as in the objective schematism of the Judgement of which the Critique treats). But then the judgement would not be laid down in reference to pleasure and pain, and consequently would not be a judgement of taste. But the judgement of taste, independently of concepts, determines the Object in respect of satisfaction and of the predicate of beauty. Therefore that subjective unity of relation can only make itself known by means of sensation. The excitement of both faculties (Imagination and Understanding) to indeterminate, but yet, through the stimulus of the given sensation, harmonious activity, viz. that which belongs to cognition in general, is the sensation whose universal communicability is postulated by the judgement of taste. An objective relation can only be thought, but yet, so far as it is subjective according to its conditions, can be felt in its effect on the mind; and, of a relation based on no concept (like the relation of the representative powers to a cognitive faculty in general), no other consciousness is possible than that through the sensation of the effect, which consists in the more lively play of both mental powers (the Imagination and the Understanding) when animated by mutual agreement. A representation which, as singular and apart from comparison with others, yet has an agreement with the conditions of universality which it is the business of the Understanding to supply, brings the cognitive faculties

into that proportionate accord which we require for all cognition, and so regard as holding for every one who is determined to judge by means of Understanding and Sense in combination (i.e. for every man).

EXPLANATION OF THE BEAUTIFUL RESULTING FROM THE SECOND MOMENT

The beautiful is that which pleases universally, without a concept.

THIRD MOMENT: OF JUDGEMENTS OF TASTE, ACCORDING TO THE RELATION OF THE PURPOSES WHICH ARE BROUGHT INTO CONSIDERATION THEREIN.

10: Of purposiveness in general

If we wish to explain what a purpose is according to its transcendental determinations (without presupposing anything empirical like the feeling of pleasure) [we say that] the purpose is the object of a concept, in so far as the concept is regarded as the cause of the object (the real ground of its possibility); and the causality of a concept in respect of its Object is its purposiveness (forma finalis). Where then not merely the cognition of an object, but the object itself (its form and existence) is thought as an effect only possible by means of the concept of this latter, there we think a purpose. The representation of the effect is here the determining ground of its cause and precedes it. The consciousness of the causality of a representation, for maintaining the subject in the same state, may here generally denote what we call pleasure; while on the other hand pain is that representation which contains the ground of the determination of the state of representations into their opposite [of restraining or removing them].

The faculty of desire, so far as it is determinable only through concepts, i.e. to act in conformity with the representation of a purpose, would be the Will. But an Object, or a state of mind, or even an action, is called purposive, although its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of a purpose, merely because its possibility can be explained and conceived by us only so far as we assume for its ground a causality according to purposes, i.e. a will which would have so disposed it according to the representation of a certain rule. There can be, then, purposiveness without purpose, so far as we do not place the causes of this form in a will, but yet can only make the explanation of its possibility intelligible to ourselves by deriving it from a will. Again, we are not always forced to regard what we observe (in respect of its possibility) from the point of view of Reason. Thus we can at least observe a purposiveness according to form, without basing it on a purpose (as the material of the nexus finalis), and we can notice it in objects, although only by reflection.

11: The judgement of taste has nothing at its basis but the form of the purposiveness of an object (or of its mode of representation)

Every purpose, if it be regarded as a ground of satisfaction, always carries with it an interest—as the determining ground of the judgement—about the object of pleasure. Therefore no subjective purpose can lie at the basis of the

judgement of taste. But neither can the judgement of taste be determined by any representation of an objective purpose, i.e. of the possibility of the object itself in accordance with principles of purposive combination, and consequently it can be determined by no concept of the good; because it is an aesthetical and not a cognitive judgement. It therefore has to do with no concept of the character and internal or external possibility of the object by means of this or that cause, but merely with the relation of the representative powers to one another, so far as they are determined by a representation.

Now this relation in the determination of an object as beautiful is bound up with the feeling of pleasure, which is declared by the judgement of taste to be valid for every one; hence a pleasantness, accompanying the representation, can as little contain the determining ground [of the judgement] as the representation of the perfection of the object and the concept of the good can. Therefore it can be nothing else than the subjective purposiveness in the representation of an object without any purpose (either objective or subjective); and thus it is the mere form of purposiveness in the representation by which an object is given to us, so far as we are conscious of it, which constitutes the satisfaction that we without a concept judge to be universally communicable; and, consequently, this is the determining ground of the judgement of taste.

12: The judgement of taste rests on a priori grounds

To establish a priori the connexion of the feeling of a pleasure or pain as an effect, with any representation whatever (sensation or concept) as its cause, is absolutely impossible; for that would be a [particular] causal relation which (with objects of experience) can always only be cognised a posteriori, and through the medium of experience itself. We actually have, indeed, in the Critique of practical Reason, derived from universal moral concepts a priori the feeling of respect (as a special and peculiar modification of feeling which will not strictly correspond either to the pleasure or the pain that we get from empirical objects). But there we could go beyond the bounds of experience and call in a causality which rested on a supersensible attribute of the subject, viz. freedom. And even there, properly speaking, it was not this feeling which we derived from the Idea of the moral as cause, but merely the determination of the will. But the state of mind which accompanies any determination of the will is in itself a feeling of pleasure and identical with it, and therefore does not follow from it as its effect. This last must only be assumed if the concept of the moral as a good precede the determination of the will by the law; for in that case the pleasure that is bound up with the concept could not be derived from it as from a mere cognition.

Now the case is similar with the pleasure in aesthetical judgements, only that here it is merely contemplative and does not bring about an interest in the Object, which on the other hand in the moral judgement it is practical. The consciousness of the mere formal purposiveness in the play of the subject's cognitive powers, in a representation through which an object is given, is the pleasure itself; because it contains a determining ground of the activity of the subject in respect of the excitement of its cognitive powers, and therefore an inner causality (which is purposive) in respect of cognition in general without however being limited to any definite cognition; and consequently contains a mere form of the subjective purposiveness of a representation in an aesthetical judgement. This pleasure is in no

way practical, neither like that arising from the pathological ground of pleasantness, nor that from the intellectual ground of the represented good. But yet it involves causality, viz. of maintaining the state of the representation itself, and the exercise of the cognitive powers without further design. We linger over the contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself, which is analogous to (though not of the same kind as) that lingering which takes place when a [physical] charm in the representation of the object repeatedly arouses the attention, the mind being passive.

13: The pure judgement of taste is independent of charm and emotion

Every interest spoils the judgement of taste and takes from its impartiality, especially if the purposiveness is not, as with the interest of Reason, placed before the feeling of pleasure but grounded on it. This last always happens in an aesthetical judgement upon anything so far as it gratifies or grieves us. Hence judgements so affected can lay no claim at all to a universally valid satisfaction, or at least so much the less claim, in proportion as there are sensations of this sort among the determining grounds of taste. That taste is still barbaric which needs a mixture of charms and emotions in order that there may be satisfaction, and still more so if it make these the measure of its assent.

Nevertheless charms are often not only taken account of in the case of beauty (which properly speaking ought merely to be concerned with form) as contributory to the aesthetical universal satisfaction; but they are passed off as in themselves beauties, and thus the matter of satisfaction is substituted for the form. This misconception, however, like so many others which have something true at their basis, may be removed by a careful definition of these concepts.

A judgement of taste on which charm and emotion have no influence (although they may be bound up with the satisfaction in the beautiful),—which therefore has as its determining ground merely the purposiveness of the form,—is a pure judgement of taste.

14: Elucidation by means of examples

Aesthetical judgements can be divided just like theoretical (logical) judgements into empirical and pure. The first assert pleasantness or unpleasantness; the second assert the beauty of an object or of the manner of representing it. The former are judgements of Sense (material aesthetical judgements); the latter [as formal] are alone strictly judgements of Taste.

A judgement of taste is therefore pure, only so far as no merely empirical satisfaction is mingled with its determining ground. But this always happens if charm or emotion have any share in the judgement by which anything is to be described as beautiful.

Now here many objections present themselves, which fallaciously put forward charm not merely as a necessary ingredient of beauty, but as alone sufficient [to justify] a thing's being called beautiful. A mere colour, e.g. the green of a grass plot, a mere tone (as distinguished from sound and noise) like that of a violin, are by most people described as beautiful in themselves; although both seem to have at their basis merely the matter of representations, viz. simply sensation, and therefore only deserve to be called pleasant. But we must at the same time remark that the sensations of colours and of tone have a right to be regarded as beautiful only in so far as they are pure. This is a determination which concerns their form, and is the only [element] of these representations which admits with certainty of universal communicability; for we cannot assume that the quality of sensations is the same in all subjects, and we can hardly say that the pleasantness of one colour or the tone of one musical instrument is judged preferable to that of another in the same way by every one.

If we assume with Euler that colours are isochronous vibrations (pulsus) of the aether, as sounds are of the air in a state of disturbance, and,—what is most important,—that the mind not only perceives by sense the effect of these in exciting the organ, but also perceives by reflection the regular play of impressions (and thus the form of the combination of different representations)—which I still do not doubt—then colours and tone cannot be reckoned as mere sensations, but as the formal determination of the unity of a manifold of sensations, and thus as beauties in themselves.

But “pure” in a simple mode of sensation means that its uniformity is troubled and interrupted by no foreign sensation, and it belongs merely to the form; because here we can abstract from the quality of that mode of sensation (abstract from the colours and tone, if any, which it represents). Hence all simple colours, so far as they are pure, are regarded as beautiful; composite colours have not this advantage, because, as they are not simple, we have no standard for judging whether they should be called pure or not.

But as regards the beauty attributed to the object on account of its form, to suppose it to be capable of augmentation through the charm of the object is a common error, and one very prejudicial to genuine, uncorrupted, well-founded taste. We can doubtless add these charms to beauty, in order to interest the mind by the representation of the object, apart from the bare satisfaction [received]; and thus they may serve as a recommendation of taste and its cultivation, especially when it is yet crude and unexercised. But they actually do injury to the judgement of taste if they draw attention to themselves as the grounds for judging of beauty. So far are they from adding to beauty that they must only be admitted by indulgence as aliens; and provided always that they do not disturb the beautiful form, in cases when taste is yet weak and untrained.

In painting, sculpture, and in all the formative arts—in architecture, and horticulture, so far as they are beautiful arts—the delineation is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste. The colours which light up the sketch belong to the charm; they may indeed enliven the object for sensation, but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful. In most cases they are rather limited by the requirements of the beautiful form; and even where charm is permissible it is ennobled solely by this.

Every form of the objects of sense (both of external sense and also mediately of internal) is either figure or play. In the latter case it is either play of figures (in space, viz. pantomime and dancing), or the mere play of sensations (in time). The charm of colours or of the pleasant tones of an instrument may be added; but the delineation in the first case and the composition in the second constitute the proper object of the pure judgement of taste. To say that the purity of colours and of tones, or their variety and contrast, seems to add to beauty, does not mean that they supply a homogeneous addition to our satisfaction in the form because they are pleasant in themselves; but they do so, because they make the form more exactly, definitely, and completely, intuitible, and besides by their charm [excite the representation, whilst they] awaken and fix our attention on the object itself.

Even what we call ornaments [parerga], i.e. those things which do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements but only externally as complements, and which augment the satisfaction of taste, do so only by their form; as for example [the frames of pictures, or] the draperies of statues or the colonnades of palaces. But if the ornament does not itself consist in beautiful form, and if it is used as a golden frame is used, merely to recommend the painting by its charm, it is then called finery and injures genuine beauty.

Emotion, i.e. a sensation in which pleasantness is produced by means of a momentary checking and a consequent more powerful outflow of the vital force, does not belong at all to beauty. But sublimity [with which the feeling of emotion is bound up] requires a different standard of judgement from that which is at the foundation of taste; and thus a pure judgement of taste has for its determining ground neither charm nor emotion, in a word, no sensation as the material of the aesthetical judgement.

15: The judgement of taste is quite independent of the concept of perfection

Objective purposiveness can only be cognised by means of the reference of the manifold to a definite purpose, and therefore only through a concept. From this alone it is plain that the Beautiful, the judging of which has at its basis a merely formal purposiveness, i.e. a purposiveness without purpose, is quite independent of the concept of the Good; because the latter presupposes an objective purposiveness, i.e. the reference of the object to a definite purpose.

Objective purposiveness is either external, i.e. the utility, or internal, i.e. the perfection of the object. That the satisfaction in an object, on account of which we call it beautiful, cannot rest on the representation of its utility, is sufficiently obvious from the two preceding sections; because in that case it would not be an immediate satisfaction in the object, which is the essential condition of a judgement about beauty. But objective internal purposiveness, i.e. perfection, comes nearer to the predicate of beauty; and it has been regarded by celebrated philosophers as the same as beauty, with the proviso, if it is thought in a confused way. It is of the greatest importance in a Critique of Taste to decide whether beauty can thus actually be resolved into the concept of perfection.

To judge of objective purposiveness we always need not only the concept of a purpose, but (if that purposiveness is

not to be external utility but internal) the concept of an internal purpose which shall contain the ground of the internal possibility of the object. Now as a purpose in general is that whose concept can be regarded as the ground of the possibility of the object itself; so, in order to represent objective purposiveness in a thing, the concept of what sort of thing it is to be must come first. The agreement of the manifold in it with this concept (which furnishes the rule for combining the manifold) is the qualitative perfection of the thing. Quite different from this is quantitative perfection, the completeness of a thing after its kind, which is a mere concept of magnitude (of totality). In this what the thing ought to be is conceived as already determined, and it is only asked if it has all its requisites. The formal [element] in the representation of a thing, i.e. the agreement of the manifold with a unity (it being undetermined what this ought to be), gives to cognition no objective purposiveness whatever. For since abstraction is made of this unity as purpose (what the thing ought to be), nothing remains but the subjective purposiveness of the representations in the mind of the intuiting subject. And this, although it furnishes a certain purposiveness of the representative state of the subject, and so a facility of apprehending a given form by the Imagination, yet furnishes no perfection of an Object, since the Object is not here conceived by means of the concept of a purpose. For example, if in a forest I come across a plot of sward, round which trees stand in a circle, and do not then represent to myself a purpose, viz. that it is intended to serve for country dances, not the least concept of perfection is furnished by the mere form. But to represent to oneself a formal objective purposiveness without purpose, i.e. the mere form of a perfection (without any matter and without the concept of that with which it is accordant, even if it were merely the Idea of conformity to law in general is a veritable contradiction.

Now the judgement of taste is an aesthetical judgement, i.e. such as rests on subjective grounds, the determining ground of which cannot be a concept, and consequently cannot be the concept of a definite purpose. Therefore in beauty, regarded as a formal subjective purposiveness, there is in no way thought a perfection of the object, as a wouldbe formal purposiveness, which yet is objective. And thus to distinguish between the concepts of the Beautiful and the Good, as if they were only different in logical form, the first being a confused, the second a clear concept of perfection, but identical in content and origin, is quite fallacious. For then there would be no specific difference between them, but a judgement of taste would be as much a cognitive judgement as the judgement by which a thing is described as good; just as when the ordinary man says that fraud is unjust he bases his judgement on confused grounds, whilst the philosopher bases it on clear grounds, but both on identical principles of Reason. I have already, however, said that an aesthetical judgement is unique of its kind, and gives absolutely no cognition (not even a confused cognition) of the Object; this is only supplied by a logical judgement. On the contrary, it simply refers the representation, by which an Object is given, to the subject; and brings to our notice no characteristic of the object, but only the purposive form in the determination of the representative powers which are occupying themselves therewith. The judgement is called aesthetical just because its determining ground is not a concept, but the feeling (of internal sense) of that harmony in the play of the mental powers, so far as it can be felt in sensation. On the other hand, if we wish to call confused concepts and the objective judgement based on them, aesthetical, we shall have an Understanding judging sensibly or a Sense representing its Objects by means of concepts [both of which are contradictory.] The faculty of concepts, be they confused or clear, is the Understanding; and although Understanding has to do with the judgement of taste, as an aesthetical judgement (as it has with all judgements),

yet it has to do with it not as a faculty by which an object is cognised, but as the faculty which determines the judgement and its representation (without any concept) in accordance with its relation to the subject and the subject's internal feeling, in so far as this judgement may be possible in accordance with a universal rule.

16: The judgement of taste, by which an object is declared to be beautiful under the condition of a definite concept, is not pure

There are two kinds of beauty; free beauty (pulchritudo vaga) or merely dependent beauty (pulchritudo adhaerens). The first presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance therewith. The first is called the (self-subsistent) beauty of this or that thing; the second, as dependent upon a concept (conditioned beauty), is ascribed to Objects which come under the concept of a particular purpose.

Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly any one but a botanist knows what sort of a thing a flower ought to be; and even he, though recognising in the flower the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no regard to this natural purpose if he is passing judgement on the flower by Taste. There is then at the basis of this judgement no perfection of any kind, no internal purposiveness, to which the collection of the manifold is referred. Many birds (such as the parrot, the humming bird, the bird of paradise), and many sea shells are beauties in themselves, which do not belong to any object determined in respect of its purpose by concepts, but please freely and in themselves. So also delineations à la grecque, foliage for borders or wall-papers, mean nothing in themselves; they represent nothing — no Object under a definite concept,—and are free beauties. We can refer to the same class what are called in music phantasies (i.e. pieces without any theme), and in fact all music without words.

In the judging of a free beauty (according to the mere form) the judgement of taste is pure. There is presupposed no concept of any purpose, for which the manifold should serve the given Object, and which therefore is to be represented therein. By such a concept the freedom of the Imagination which disports itself in the contemplation of the figure would be only limited.

But human beauty (i.e. of a man, a woman, or a child), the beauty of a horse, or a building (be it church, palace, arsenal, or summer-house) presupposes a concept of the purpose which determines what the thing is to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; it is therefore adherent beauty. Now as the combination of the Pleasant (in sensation) with Beauty, which properly is only concerned with form, is a hindrance to the purity of the judgement of taste; so also is its purity injured by the combination with Beauty of the Good (viz. that manifold which is good for the thing itself in accordance with its purpose).

We could add much to a building which would immediately please the eye, if only it were not to be a church. We could adorn a figure with all kinds of spirals and light but regular lines, as the New Zealanders do with their tattooing, if only it were not the figure of a human being. And again this could have much finer features and

a more pleasing and gentle cast of countenance provided it were not intended to represent a man, much less a warrior.

Now the satisfaction in the manifold of a thing in reference to the internal purpose which determines its possibility is a satisfaction grounded on a concept; but the satisfaction in beauty is such as presupposes no concept, but is immediately bound up with the representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought). If now the judgement of Taste in respect of the beauty of a thing is made dependent on the purpose in its manifold, like a judgement of Reason, and thus limited, it is no longer a free and pure judgement of Taste.

It is true that taste gains by this combination of aesthetical with intellectual satisfaction, inasmuch as it becomes fixed; and though it is not universal, yet in respect to certain purposively determined Objects it becomes possible to prescribe rules for it. These, however, are not rules of taste, but merely rules for the unification of Taste with Reason, i.e. of the Beautiful with the Good, by which the former becomes available as an instrument of design in respect of the latter. Thus the tone of mind which is self-maintaining and of subjective universal validity is subordinated to the way of thinking which can be maintained only by painful resolve, but is of objective universal validity. Properly speaking, however, perfection gains nothing by beauty or beauty by perfection; but, when we compare the representation by which an object is given to us with the Object (as regards what it ought to be) by means of a concept, we cannot avoid considering along with it the sensation in the subject. And thus when both states of mind are in harmony our whole faculty of representative power gains.

A judgement of taste, then, in respect of an object with a definite internal purpose, can only be pure, if either the person judging has no concept of this purpose, or else abstracts from it in his judgement. Such a person, although forming an accurate judgement of taste in judging of the object as free beauty, would yet by another who considers the beauty in it only as a dependent attribute (who looks to the purpose of the object) be blamed, and accused of false taste; although both are right in their own way, the one in reference to what he has before his eyes, the other in reference to what he has in his thought. By means of this distinction we can settle many disputes about beauty between judges of taste; by showing that the one is speaking of free, the other of dependent, beauty,—that the first is making a pure, the second an applied, judgement of taste.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. Authored by: Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . Provided by: BCCampus. Located at: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. License: CC BY: Attribution*



Immanuel Kant – On the Aesthetic Taste by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

SELECTED READINGS FROM EDMUND BURKE'S "A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS OF THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL"

Jeff McLaughlin

Editor's Note: This chapter contains text from several sections of "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: With An Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste," which is contained in the first volume of *The Works of The Right Honourable Edmund Burke in Twelve Volumes*.

A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS OF THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL

PART I

SECTION VII.

OF THE SUBLIME.

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than

any pleasures which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy. Nay, I am in great doubt whether any man could be found, who would earn a life of the most perfect satisfaction at the price of ending it in the torments, which justice inflicted in a few hours on the late unfortunate regicide in France. But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience. The cause of this I shall endeavor to investigate hereafter.

PART II.

SECTION I.

OF THE PASSION CAUSED BY THE SUBLIME.

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.¹ In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect.

SECTION II.

TERROR.

No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.² For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous. There are many animals, who, though far from being large, are yet capable of raising ideas of the sublime, because they are considered as objects of terror. As serpents and poisonous animals of almost all kinds. And to things of great dimensions, if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater. A level plain of a vast extent on

land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes; but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror. Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime. Several languages bear a strong testimony to the affinity of these ideas. They frequently use the same word to signify indifferently the modes of astonishment or admiration and those of terror. [Greek: Thambos] is in Greek either fear or wonder; [Greek: deinos] is terrible or respectable; [Greek: abideo], to reverence or to fear. Vereor in Latin is what [Greek: abideo] is in Greek. The Romans used the verb stupeo, a term which strongly marks the state of an astonished mind, to express the effect either of simple fear, or of astonishment; the word attonitus (thunderstruck) is equally expressive of the alliance of these ideas; and do not the French étonnement, and the English astonishment and amazement, point out as clearly the kindred emotions which attend fear and wonder? They who have a more general knowledge of languages, could produce, I make no doubt, many other and equally striking examples.

SECTION III.

OBSCURITY.

To make anything very terrible, obscurity³ seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. Those despotic governments which are founded on the passions of men, and principally upon the passion of fear, keep their chief as much as may be from the public eye. The policy has been the same in many cases of religion. Almost all the heathen temples were dark. Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans at this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship. For this purpose too the Druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks. No person seems better to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things, if I may use the expression, in their strongest light, by the force of a judicious obscurity than Milton. His description of death in the second book is admirably studied; it is astonishing with what a gloomy pomp, with what a significant and expressive uncertainty of strokes and coloring, he has finished the portrait of the king of terrors:

"The other shape,

If shape it might be called that shape had none

Distinguishable, in member, joint, or limb;

Or substance might be called that shadow seemed;

For each seemed either; black he stood as night;

Fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell;

And shook a deadly dart. What seemed his head

The likeness of a kingly crown had on."

In this description all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree.

SECTION IV.

OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLEARNESS AND OBSCURITY WITH REGARD TO THE PASSIONS.

It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination. If I make a drawing of a palace, or a temple, or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of those objects; but then (allowing for the effect of imitation which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape, would have affected in the reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give raises a very obscure and imperfect idea of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger emotion by the description than I could do by the best painting. This experience constantly evinces. The proper manner of conveying the affections of the mind from one to another is by words; there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication; and so far is a clearness of imagery from being absolutely necessary to an influence upon the passions, that they may be considerably operated upon, without presenting any image at all, by certain sounds adapted to that purpose; of which we have a sufficient proof in the acknowledged and powerful effects of instrumental music. In reality, a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever...

[T]he Abbé du Bos gives painting the preference to poetry in the article of moving the passions; principally on account of the greater clearness of the ideas it represents. I believe this excellent judge was led into this mistake (if it be a mistake) by his system; to which he found it more conformable than I imagine it will be found to experience. I know several who admire and love painting, and yet who regard the objects of their admiration in that art with coolness enough in comparison of that warmth with which they are animated by affecting pieces of poetry or rhetoric. Among the common sort of people, I never could perceive that painting had much influence on their passions. It is true that the best sorts of painting, as well as the best sorts of poetry, are not much understood in that sphere. But it is most certain that their passions are very strongly roused by a fanatic preacher, or by the ballads of Chevy Chase, or the Children in the Wood, and by other little popular poems and tales that are current in that rank of life. I do not know of any paintings, bad or good, that produce the same effect. So that poetry, with all its

obscurity, has a more general, as well as a more powerful dominion over the passions, than the other art. And I think there are reasons in nature, why the obscure idea, when properly conveyed, should be more affecting than the clear. It is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions. Knowledge and acquaintance make the most striking causes affect but little. It is thus with the vulgar; and all men are as the vulgar in what they do not understand. The ideas of eternity, and infinity, are among the most affecting we have: and yet perhaps there is nothing of which we really understand so little, as of infinity and eternity. We do not anywhere meet a more sublime description than this justly-celebrated one of Milton, wherein he gives the portrait of Satan with a dignity so suitable to the subject:

"He above the rest

In shape and gesture proudly eminent

Stood like a tower; his form had yet not lost

All her original brightness, nor appeared

Less than archangel ruined, and th' excess

Of glory obscured :as when the sun new risen

Looks through the horizontal misty air

Shorn of his beams; or from behind the moon

In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds

On half the nations; and with fear of change

Perplexes monarchs."

Here is a very noble picture; and in what does this poetical picture consist?

In images of a tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists, or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs and the revolutions of kingdoms. The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For separate them, and you lose much of the greatness; and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness. The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind; though in general the effects of poetry are by no means to be attributed to the images it raises; which point we shall examine more at large hereafter.⁴ But painting, when we have allowed for the pleasure of imitation, can only affect simply by the images it presents; and even in painting, a judicious obscurity in some things contributes to the effect of the picture; because the images in painting are exactly similar to those in nature; and in nature, dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions, than those have which are more clear and

determinate. But where and when this observation may be applied to practice, and how far it shall be extended, will be better deduced from the nature of the subject, and from the occasion, than from any rules that can be given.

I am sensible that this idea has met with opposition, and is likely still to be rejected by several. But let it be considered that hardly anything can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea. There is a passage in the book of Job amazingly sublime, and this sublimity is principally due to the terrible uncertainty of the thing described: In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof; an image was before mine eyes; there was silence; and I heard a voice — Shall mortal man be more just than God? We are first prepared with the utmost solemnity for the vision; we are first terrified, before we are let even into the obscure cause of our emotion: but when this grand cause of terror makes its appearance, what is it? Is it not wrapt up in the shades of its own incomprehensible darkness, more awful, more striking, more terrible, than the liveliest description, than the clearest painting, could possibly represent it? When painters have attempted to give us clear representations of these very fanciful and terrible ideas, they have, I think, almost always failed; insomuch that I have been at a loss, in all the pictures I have seen of hell, to determine whether the painter did not intend something ludicrous. Several painters have handled a subject of this kind, with a view of assembling as many horrid phantoms as their imagination could suggest; but all the designs I have chanced to meet of the temptations of St. Anthony were rather a sort of odd, wild grotesques, than any thing capable of producing a serious passion. In all these subjects poetry is very happy. Its apparitions, its chimeras, its harpies, its allegorical figures, are grand and affecting; and though Virgil's Fame and Homer's Discord are obscure, they are magnificent figures. These figures in painting would be clear enough, but I fear they might become ridiculous.

SECTION V.

POWER.

Besides those things which directly suggest the idea of danger, and those which produce a similar effect from a mechanical cause, I know of nothing sublime, which is not some modification of power. And this branch rises, as naturally as the other two branches, from terror, the common stock of everything that is sublime. The idea of power, at first view, seems of the class of those indifferent ones, which may equally belong to pain or to pleasure. But in reality, the affection arising from the idea of vast power is extremely remote from that neutral character. For first, we must remember⁵ that the idea of pain, in its highest degree, is much stronger than the highest degree of pleasure; and that it preserves the same superiority through all the subordinate gradations. From hence it is, that where the chances for equal degrees of suffering or enjoyment are in any sort equal, the idea of the suffering must always be

prevalent. And indeed the ideas of pain, and, above all, of death, are so very affecting, that whilst we remain in the presence of whatever is supposed to have the power of inflicting either, it is impossible to be perfectly free from terror. Again, we know by experience, that, for the enjoyment of pleasure, no great efforts of power are at all necessary; nay, we know that such efforts would go a great way towards destroying our satisfaction: for pleasure must be stolen, and not forced upon us; pleasure follows the will; and therefore we are generally affected with it by many things of a force greatly inferior to our own. But pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain, and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together. Look at a man, or any other animal of prodigious strength, and what is your idea before reflection? Is it that this strength will be subservient to you, to your ease, to your pleasure, to your interest in any sense? No; the emotion you feel is, lest this enormous strength should be employed to the purposes of⁶ rapine and destruction. That power derives all its sublimity from the terror with which it is generally accompanied, will appear evidently from its effect in the very few cases, in which it may be possible to strip a considerable degree of strength of its ability to hurt. When you do this, you spoil it of everything sublime, and it immediately becomes contemptible. An ox is a creature of vast strength; but he is an innocent creature, extremely serviceable, and not at all dangerous; for which reason the idea of an ox is by no means grand. A bull is strong too; but his strength is of another kind; often very destructive, seldom (at least amongst us) of any use in our business; the idea of a bull is therefore great, and it has frequently a place in sublime descriptions, and elevating comparisons. Let us look at another strong animal, in the two distinct lights in which we may consider him. The horse in the light of an useful beast, fit for the plough, the road, the draft; in every social useful light, the horse has nothing sublime; but is it thus that we are affected with him, whose neck is clothed with thunder, the glory of whose nostrils is terrible, who swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage, neither believeth that it is the sound of the trumpet? In this description, the useful character of the horse entirely disappears, and the terrible and sublime blaze out together. We have continually about us animals of a strength that is considerable, but not pernicious. Amongst these we never look for the sublime; it comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros. Whenever strength is only useful, and employed for our benefit or our pleasure, then it is never sublime; for nothing can act agreeably to us, that does not act in conformity to our will; but to act agreeably to our will, it must be subject to us, and therefore can never be the cause of a grand and commanding conception. The description of the wild ass, in Job, is worked up into no small sublimity, merely by insisting on his freedom, and his setting mankind at defiance; otherwise the description of such an animal could have had nothing noble in it. Who hath loosed (says he) the bands of the wild ass? whose house I have made the wilderness and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the voice of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture. The magnificent description of the unicorn and of leviathan, in the same book, is full of the same heightening circumstances: Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee? canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? wilt thou trust him because his strength is great? — Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant forever? shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? In short, wheresoever we find strength, and in what light soever we look upon power, we shall all along observe the sublime the concomitant of terror, and contempt the attendant on a

strength that is subservient and innoxious. The race of dogs, in many of their kinds, have generally a competent degree of strength and swiftness; and they exert these and other valuable qualities which they possess, greatly to our convenience and pleasure. Dogs are indeed the most social, affectionate, and amiable animals of the whole brute creation; but love approaches much nearer to contempt than is commonly imagined; and accordingly, though we caress dogs, we borrow from them an appellation of the most despicable kind, when we employ terms of reproach; and this appellation is the common mark of the last vileness and contempt in every language. Wolves have not more strength than several species of dogs; but, on account of their unmanageable fierceness, the idea of a wolf is not despicable; it is not excluded from grand descriptions and similitudes. Thus we are affected by strength, which is natural power. The power which arises from institution in kings and commanders, has the same connection with terror. Sovereigns are frequently addressed with the title of dread majesty. And it may be observed, that young persons, little acquainted with the world, and who have not been used to approach men in power, are commonly struck with an awe which takes away the free use of their faculties. When I prepared my seat in the street, (says Job,) the young men saw me, and hid themselves. Indeed so natural is this timidity with regard to power, and so strongly does it inhere in our constitution, that very few are able to conquer it, but by mixing much in the business of the great world, or by using no small violence to their natural dispositions. I know some people are of opinion, that no awe, no degree of terror, accompanies the idea of power; and have hazarded to affirm, that we can contemplate the idea of God himself without any such emotion. I purposely avoided, when I first considered this subject, to introduce the idea of that great and tremendous Being, as an example in an argument so light as this; though it frequently occurred to me, not as an objection to, but as a strong confirmation of, my notions in this matter. I hope, in what I am going to say, I shall avoid presumption, where it is almost impossible for any mortal to speak with strict propriety. I say then, that whilst we consider the Godhead merely as he is an object of the understanding, which forms a complex idea of power, wisdom, justice, goodness, all stretched to a degree far exceeding the bounds of our comprehension, whilst we consider the divinity in this refined and abstracted light, the imagination and passions are little or nothing affected. But because we are bound, by the condition of our nature, to ascend to these pure and intellectual ideas, through the medium of sensible images, and to judge of these divine qualities by their evident acts and exertions, it becomes extremely hard to disentangle our idea of the cause from the effect by which we are led to know it. Thus, when we contemplate the Deity, his attributes and their operation, coming united on the mind, form a sort of sensible image, and as such are capable of affecting the imagination. Now, though in a just idea of the Deity, perhaps none of his attributes are predominant, yet, to our imagination, his power is by far the most striking. Some reflection, some comparing, is necessary to satisfy us of his wisdom, his justice, and his goodness. To be struck with his power, it is only necessary that we should open our eyes. But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him. And though a consideration of his other attributes may relieve, in some measure, our apprehensions; yet no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand. If we rejoice, we rejoice with trembling; and even whilst we are receiving benefits, we cannot but shudder at a power which can confer benefits of such mighty importance. When

the prophet David contemplated the wonders of wisdom and power which are displayed in the economy of man, he seems to be struck with a sort of divine horror, and cries out, fearfully and wonderfully am I made! An heathen poet has a sentiment of a similar nature; Horace looks upon it as the last effort of philosophical fortitude, to behold without terror and amazement, this immense and glorious fabric of the universe[.]

Lucretius is a poet not to be suspected of giving way to superstitious terrors; yet, when he supposes the whole mechanism of nature laid open by the master of his philosophy, his transport on this magnificent view, which he has represented in the colors of such bold and lively poetry, is overcast with a shade of secret dread and horror...

*But the Scripture alone can supply ideas answerable to the majesty of this subject. In the Scripture, wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, everything terrible in nature is called up to heighten the awe and solemnity of the Divine presence. The Psalms, and the prophetic books, are crowded with instances of this kind. The earth shook, (says the Psalmist,) the heavens also dropped at the presence of the Lord. And what is remarkable, the painting preserves the same character, not only when he is supposed descending to take vengeance upon the wicked, but even when he exerts the like plenitude of power in acts of beneficence to mankind. Tremble, thou earth! at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters! It were endless to enumerate all the passages, both in the sacred and profane writers, which establish the general sentiment of mankind, concerning the inseparable union of a sacred and reverential awe, with our ideas of the divinity. Hence the common maxim, *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*. This maxim may be, as I believe it is, false with regard to the origin of religion. The maker of the maxim saw how inseparable these ideas were, without considering that the notion of some great power must be always precedent to our dread of it. But this dread must necessarily follow the idea of such a power, when it is once excited in the mind. It is on this principle that true religion has, and must have, so large a mixture of salutary fear; and that false religions have generally nothing else but fear to support them. Before the Christian religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the Divinity, and brought it somewhat nearer to us, there was very little said of the love of God. The followers of Plato have something of it, and only something; the other writers of pagan antiquity, whether poets or philosophers, nothing at all. And they who consider with what infinite attention, by what a disregard of every perishable object, through what long habits of piety and contemplation it is that any man is able to attain an entire love and devotion to the Deity, will easily perceive that it is not the first, the most natural, and the most striking effect which proceeds from that idea. Thus we have traced power through its several gradations unto the highest of all, where our imagination is finally lost; and we find terror, quite throughout the progress, its inseparable companion, and growing along with it, as far as we can possibly trace them. Now, as power is undoubtedly a capital source of the sublime, this will point out evidently from whence its energy is derived, and to what class of ideas we ought to unite it.*

SECTION VI.

PRIVATION.

ALL general privations are great, because they are all terrible; vacuity, darkness, solitude, and silence. With what a fire of imagination, yet with what severity of judgment, has Virgil amassed all these circumstances, where he knows that all the images of a tremendous dignity ought to be united at the mouth of hell! Where, before he unlocks the secrets of the great deep, he seems to be seized with a religious horror, and to retire astonished at the boldness of his own design.

SECTION VII.

VASTNESS.

Greatness⁷ of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime. This is too evident, and the observation too common, to need any illustration; it is not so common to consider in what ways greatness of dimension, vastness of extent or quantity, has the most striking effect. For, certainly, there are ways and modes wherein the same quantity of extension shall produce greater effects than it is found to do in others. Extension is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least; a hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower a hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude. I am apt to imagine, likewise, that height is less grand than depth; and that we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than looking up at an object of equal height; but of that I am not very positive. A perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane, and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished. It would carry us out of our way to enter in this place into the cause of these appearances, but certain it is they afford a large and fruitful field of speculation. However, it may not be amiss to add to these remarks upon magnitude, that as the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise; when we attend to the infinite divisibility of matter, when we pursue animal life into these excessively small, and yet organized beings, that escape the nicest inquisition of the sense; when we push our discoveries yet downward, and consider those creatures so many degrees yet smaller, and the still diminishing scale of existence, in tracing which the imagination is lost as well as the sense; we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness; nor can we distinguish in its effect this extreme of littleness from the vast itself. For division must be infinite as well as addition; because the idea of a perfect unity can no more be arrived at, than that of a complete whole, to which nothing may be added.

SECTION VIII.

INFINITY.

Another source of the sublime is infinity; if it does not rather belong to the last. Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses, that are really and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure.

Whenever we repeat any idea frequently, the mind, by a sort of mechanism, repeats it long after the first cause has ceased to operate.⁸ After whirling about, when we sit down, the objects about us still seem to whirl. After a long succession of noises, as the fall of waters, or the beating of forge-hammers, the hammers beat and the waters roar in the imagination long after the first sounds have ceased to affect it; and they die away at last by gradations which are scarcely perceptible. If you hold up a straight pole, with your eye to one end, it will seem extended to a length almost incredible.⁹ Place a number of uniform and equi-distant marks on this pole, they will cause the same deception, and seem multiplied without end. The senses, strongly affected in some one manner, cannot quickly change their tenor, or adapt themselves to other things; but they continue in their old channel until the strength of the first mover decays. This is the reason of an appearance very frequent in madmen; that they remain whole days and nights, sometimes whole years, in the constant repetition of some remark, some complaint, or song; which having struck powerfully on their disordered imagination, in the beginning of their frenzy, every repetition reinforces it with new strength, and the hurry of their spirits, unrestrained by the curb of reason, continues it to the end of their lives.

SECTION IX.

SUCCESSION AND UNIFORMITY.

Succession and uniformity of parts are what constitute the artificial infinite. 1. Succession; which is requisite that the parts may be continued so long and in such a direction, as by their frequent impulses on the sense to impress the imagination with an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits. 2. Uniformity; because, if the figures of the parts should be changed, the imagination at every change finds a check; you are presented at every alteration with the termination of one idea, and the beginning of another; by which means it becomes impossible to continue that uninterrupted progression, which alone can stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity. It is in this kind of artificial infinity, I believe, we ought to look for the cause why a rotund has such a noble effect.¹⁰ For in a rotund, whether it be a building or a plantation, you can nowhere fix a boundary; turn which way you will, the same object still seems to continue, and the imagination has no rest. But the parts must be uniform, as well as circularly disposed, to give this figure its full force; because any difference, whether it be in the disposition, or in the figure, or even in the color of the parts, is highly prejudicial to the idea of infinity, which every change must check and interrupt, at every alteration commencing a new series. On the same principles of succession and uniformity,

the grand appearance of the ancient heathen temples, which were generally oblong forms, with a range of uniform pillars on every side, will be easily accounted for. From the same cause also may be derived the grand effect of the aisles in many of our own old cathedrals. The form of a cross used in some churches seems to me not so eligible as the parallelogram of the ancients; at least, I imagine it is not so proper for the outside. For, supposing the arms of the cross every way equal, if you stand in a direction parallel to any of the side walls, or colonnades, instead of a deception that makes the building more extended than it is, you are cut off from a considerable part (two thirds) of its actual length; and, to prevent all possibility of progression, the arms of the cross taking a new direction, make a right angle with the beam, and thereby wholly turn the imagination from the repetition of the former idea. Or suppose the spectator placed where he may take a direct view of such a building, what will be the consequence? the necessary consequence will be, that a good part of the basis of each angle formed by the intersection of the arms of the cross, must be inevitably lost; the whole must of course assume a broken, unconnected figure; the lights must be unequal, here strong, and there weak; without that noble gradation which the perspective always effects on parts disposed uninterruptedly in a right line. Some or all of these objections will lie against every figure of a cross, in whatever view you take it. I exemplified them in the Greek cross, in which these faults appear the most strongly; but they appear in some degree in all sorts of crosses. Indeed, there is nothing more prejudicial to the grandeur of buildings than to abound in angles; a fault obvious in many; and owing to an inordinate thirst for variety, which, whenever it prevails, is sure to leave very little true taste.

SECTION X.

MAGNITUDE IN BUILDING.

To the sublime in building, greatness of dimension seems requisite; for on a few parts, and those small, the imagination cannot rise to any idea of infinity. No greatness in the manner can effectually compensate for the want of proper dimensions. There is no danger of drawing men into extravagant designs by this rule; it carries its own caution along with it. Because too great a length in buildings destroys the purpose of greatness, which it was intended to promote; the perspective will lessen it in height as it gains in length; and will bring it at last to a point; turning the whole figure into a sort of triangle, the poorest in its effect of almost any figure that can be presented to the eye. I have ever observed, that colonnades and avenues of trees of a moderate length were, without comparison, far grander than when they were suffered to run to immense distances. A true artist should put a generous deceit on the spectators, and effect the noblest designs by easy methods. Designs that are vast only by their dimensions are always the sign of a common and low imagination. No work of art can be great, but as it deceives; to be otherwise is the prerogative of nature only. A good eye will fix the medium betwixt an excessive length or height (for the same objection lies against both), and a short or broken quantity: and perhaps it might be ascertained to a tolerable degree of exactness, if it was my purpose to descend far into the particulars of any art.

SECTION XI.

INFINITY IN PLEASING OBJECTS.

Infinity, though of another kind, causes much of our pleasure in agreeable, as well as of our delight in sublime images. The spring is the pleasantest of the seasons; and the young of most animals, though far from being completely fashioned, afford a more agreeable sensation than the full-grown; because the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more, and does not acquiesce in the present object of the sense. In unfinished sketches of drawing, I have often seen something which pleased me beyond the best finishing; and this I believe proceeds from the cause I have just now assigned.

SECTION XII.

DIFFICULTY.

Another source of greatness is difficulty.¹¹ When any work seems to have required immense force and labor to effect it, the idea is grand. Stonehenge, neither for disposition nor ornament, has anything admirable; but those huge rude masses of stone, set on end, and piled each on other, turn the mind on the immense force necessary for such a work. Nay, the rudeness of the work increases this cause of grandeur, as it excludes the idea of art and contrivance; for dexterity produces another sort of effect, which is different enough from this.

SECTION XIII.

MAGNIFICENCE.

Magnificence is likewise a source of the sublime. A great profusion of things, which are splendid or valuable in themselves, is magnificent. The starry heaven, though it occurs so very frequently to our view never fails to excite an idea of grandeur. This cannot be owing to the stars themselves, separately considered. The number is certainly the cause. The apparent disorder augments the grandeur, for the appearance of care is highly contrary to our ideas of magnificence. Besides, the stars lie in such apparent confusion, as makes it impossible on ordinary occasions to reckon them. This gives them the advantage of a sort of infinity. In works of art, this kind of grandeur which consists in multitude, is to be very cautiously admitted; because a profusion of excellent things is not to be attained, or with too much difficulty; and because in many cases this splendid confusion would destroy all use, which should be attended to in most of the works of art with the greatest care; besides, it is to be considered, that unless you can produce an appearance of infinity by your disorder, you will have disorder only without magnificence. There are, however, a sort of fireworks, and some other things, that in this way succeed well, and are truly grand. There are also many descriptions in the poets and orators, which owe their sublimity to a richness and profusion of images,

in which the mind is so dazzled as to make it impossible to attend to that exact coherence and agreement of the allusions, which we should require on every other occasion. I do not now remember a more striking example of this, than the description which is given of the king's army in the play of Henry IV.:—

"All furnished, all in arms,

All plumed like ostriches that with the wind

Baited like eagles having lately bathed:

As full of spirit us the month of May,

And gorgeous as the sun in midsummer,

Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls.

I saw young Harry with his beaver on

Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury;

And vaulted with such ease into his seat,

As if an angel dropped down from the clouds

To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus."

In that excellent book, so remarkable for the vivacity of its descriptions, as well as the solidity and penetration of its sentences, the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach, there is a noble panegyric on the high-priest Simon the son of Onias; and it is a very fine example of the point before us:—

How was he honored in the midst of the people, in his coming out of the sanctuary! He was as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full; as the sun shining upon the temple of the Most High, and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds: and as the flower of roses in the spring of the year, as lilies by the rivers of waters, and as the frankincense-tree in summer; as fire and incense in the censer, and as a vessel of gold set with precious stones; as a fair olive-tree budding forth fruit, and as a cypress which groweth up to the clouds. When he put on the robe of honor, and was clothed with the perfection of glory, when he went up to the holy altar, he made the garment of holiness honorable. He himself stood by the hearth of the altar, compassed with his brethren round about; as a young cedar in Libanus, and as palm-trees compassed they him about. So were all the sons of Aaron in their glory, and the oblations of the Lord in their hands, &c.

SECTION XIV.

LIGHT.

Having considered extension, so far as it is capable of raising ideas of greatness; color comes next under consideration. All colors depend on light. Light therefore ought previously to be examined; and with it its opposite, darkness. With regard to light, to make it a cause capable of producing the sublime, it must be attended with some circumstances, besides its bare faculty of showing other objects. Mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind, and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime. But such a light as that of the sun, immediately exerted on the eye, as it overpowers the sense, is a very great idea. Light of an inferior strength to this, if it moves with great celerity, has the same power; for lightning is certainly productive of grandeur, which it owes chiefly to the extreme velocity of its motion. A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has yet a greater effect. But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light. Our great poet was convinced of this; and indeed so full was he of this idea, so entirely possessed with the power of a well-managed darkness, that in describing the appearance of the Deity, amidst that profusion of magnificent images, which the grandeur of his subject provokes him to pour out upon every side, he is far from forgetting the obscurity which surrounds the most incomprehensible of all beings, but

"With majesty of darkness round

Circles his throne."

And what is no less remarkable, our author had the secret of preserving this idea, even when he seemed to depart the farthest from it, when he describes the light and glory which flows from the Divine presence; a light which by its very excess is converted into a species of darkness:—

"Dark with excessive light thy skirts appear."

Here is an idea not only poetical in a high degree, but strictly and philosophically just. Extreme light, by overcoming the organs of sight, obliterates all objects, so as in its effect exactly to resemble darkness. After looking for some time at the sun, two black spots, the impression which it leaves, seem to dance before our eyes. Thus are two ideas as opposite as can be imagined reconciled in the extremes of both; and both, in spite of their opposite nature, brought to concur in producing the sublime. And this is not the only instance wherein the opposite extremes operate equally in favor of the sublime, which in all things abhors mediocrity.

SECTION XV.

LIGHT IN BUILDING.

As the management of light is a matter of importance in architecture, it is worth inquiring, how far this remark is applicable to building. I think, then, that all edifices calculated to produce an idea of the sublime, ought rather to be dark and gloomy, and this for two reasons; the first is, that darkness itself on other occasions is known by experience to have a greater effect on the passions than light. The second is, that to make an object very striking, we should make it as different as possible from the objects with which we have been immediately conversant; when therefore you enter a building, you cannot pass into a greater light than you had in the open air; to go into one some few degrees less luminous, can make only a trifling change; but to make the transition thoroughly striking, you ought to pass from the greatest light, to as much darkness as is consistent with the uses of architecture. At night the contrary rule will hold, but for the very same reason; and the more highly a room is then illuminated, the grander will the passion be.

SECTION XVI.

COLOR CONSIDERED AS PRODUCTIVE OF THE SUBLIME.

Among colors, such as are soft or cheerful (except perhaps a strong red, which is cheerful) are unfit to produce grand images. An immense mountain covered with a shining green turf, is nothing, in this respect, to one dark and gloomy; the cloudy sky is more grand than the blue; and night more sublime and solemn than day. Therefore in historical painting, a gay or gaudy drapery can never have a happy effect: and in buildings, when the highest degree of the sublime is intended, the materials and ornaments ought neither to be white, nor green, nor yellow, nor blue, nor of a pale red, nor violet, nor spotted, but of sad and fuscous colors, as black, or brown, or deep purple, and the like. Much of gilding, mosaics, painting, or statues, contribute but little to the sublime. This rule need not be put in practice, except where an uniform degree of the most striking sublimity is to be produced, and that in every particular; for it ought to be observed, that this melancholy kind of greatness, though it be certainly the highest, ought not to be studied in all sorts of edifices, where yet grandeur must be studied; in such cases the sublimity must be drawn from the other sources; with a strict caution however against anything light and riant; as nothing so effectually deadens the whole taste of the sublime.

SECTION XVII.

SOUND AND LOUDNESS.

The eye is not the only organ of sensation by which a sublime passion may be produced. Sounds have a great power in these as in most other passions. I do not mean words, because words do not affect simply by their sounds, but by means altogether different. Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror. The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful

sensation in the mind, though we can observe no nicety or artifice in those sorts of music. The shouting of multitudes has a similar effect; and by the sole strength of the sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that, in this staggering and hurry of the mind, the best established tempers can scarcely forbear being borne down, and joining in the common cry, and common resolution of the crowd.

SECTION XVIII.

SUDDENNESS.

A sudden beginning, or sudden cessation of sound of any considerable force, has the same power. The attention is roused by this; and the faculties driven forward, as it were, on their guard. Whatever, either in sights or sounds, makes the transition from one extreme to the other easy, causes no terror, and consequently can be no cause of greatness. In everything sudden and unexpected, we are apt to start; that is, we have a perception of danger, and our nature rouses us to guard against it. It may be observed that a single sound of some strength, though but of short duration, if repeated after intervals, has a grand effect. Few things are more awful than the striking of a great clock, when the silence of the night prevents the attention from being too much dissipated. The same may be said of a single stroke on a drum, repeated with pauses; and of the successive firing of cannon at a distance. All the effects mentioned in this section have causes very nearly alike.

SECTION XIX.

INTERMITTING.

A low, tremulous, intermitting sound, though it seems, in some respects, opposite to that just mentioned, is productive of the sublime. It is worth while to examine this a little. The fact itself must be determined by every man's own experience and reflection. I have already observed, that night¹² increases our terror, more perhaps than anything else; it is our nature, when we do not know what may happen to us, to fear the worst that can happen; and hence it is that uncertainty is so terrible, that we often seek to be rid of it, at the hazard of a certain mischief. Now some low, confused, uncertain sounds, leave us in the same fearful anxiety concerning their causes, that no light, or an uncertain light, does concerning the objects that surround us...

Quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna
Est iter in sylvis.

"A faint shadow of uncertain light,
Like as a lamp, whose life doth fade away;
Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
Doth show to him who walks in fear and great affright."

SPENSER.

But light now appearing, and now leaving us, and so off and on, is even more terrible than total darkness; and a sort of uncertain sounds are, when the necessary dispositions concur, more alarming than a total silence.

SECTION XX.

THE CRIES OF ANIMALS.

Such sounds as imitate the natural inarticulate voices of men, or any animals in pain or danger, are capable of conveying great ideas; unless it be the well-known voice of some creature, on which we are used to look with contempt. The angry tones of wild beasts are equally capable of causing a great and awful sensation.

It might seem that those modulations of sound carry some connection with the nature of the things they represent, and are not merely arbitrary; because the natural cries of all animals, even of those animals with whom we have not been acquainted, never fail to make themselves sufficiently understood; this cannot be said of language. The modifications of sound, which may be productive of the sublime, are almost infinite. Those I have mentioned are only a few instances to show on what principles they are all built.

SECTION XXI.

SMELL AND TASTE. — BITTERS AND STENCHES.

Smells and tastes have some share too in ideas of greatness; but it is a small one, weak in its nature, and confined in its operations. I shall only observe that no smells or tastes can produce a grand sensation, except excessive bitters, and intolerable stench. It is true that these affections of the smell and taste, when they are in their full force, and lean directly upon the sensory, are simply painful, and accompanied with no sort of delight; but when they are moderated, as in a description or narrative, they become sources of the sublime, as genuine as any other, and upon the very same principle of a moderated pain. "A cup of bitterness"; "to drain the bitter cup of fortune"; "the bitter apples of Sodom"; these are all ideas suitable to a sublime description.

...[I]t is one of the tests by which the sublimity of an image is to be tried, not whether it becomes mean when associated with mean ideas; but whether, when united with images of an allowed grandeur, the whole composition is supported with dignity. Things which are terrible are always great; but when things possess disagreeable qualities, or such as have indeed some degree of danger, but of a danger easily overcome, they are merely odious; as toads and spiders.

SECTION XXII.

FEELING. — PAIN.

Of feeling little more can be said than that the idea of bodily pain, in all the modes and degrees of labor, pain, anguish, torment, is productive of the sublime; and nothing else in this sense can produce it. I need not give here any fresh instances, as those given in the former sections abundantly illustrate a remark that, in reality, wants only an attention to nature, to be made by everybody.

Having thus run through the causes of the sublime with reference to all the senses, my first observation (Sect. 7) will be found very nearly true; that the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation; that it is, therefore, one of the most affecting we have; that its strongest emotion is an emotion of distress; and that no pleasure¹³ from a positive cause belongs to it.

PART III.

SECTION XII.

THE REAL CAUSE OF BEAUTY.

Having endeavored to show what beauty is not, it remains that we should examine, at least with equal attention, in what it really consists. Beauty is a thing much too affecting not to depend upon some positive qualities. And since it is no creature of our reason, since it strikes us without any reference to use, and even where no use at all can be discerned, since the order and method of nature is generally very different from our measures and proportions, we must conclude that beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses. We ought, therefore, to consider attentively in what manner those sensible qualities are disposed, in such things as by experience we find beautiful, or which excite in us the passion of love, or some correspondent affection.

SECTION XIII.

BEAUTIFUL OBJECTS SMALL.

The most obvious point that presents itself to us in examining any object is its extent or quantity. And what degree of extent prevails in bodies that are held beautiful, may be gathered from the usual manner of expression concerning it. I am told that, in most languages, the objects of love are spoken of under diminutive epithets. It is

so in all the languages of which I have any knowledge. In Greek the [Greek: ion] and other diminutive terms are almost always the terms of affection and tenderness. These diminutives were commonly added by the Greeks to the names of persons with whom they conversed on terms of friendship and familiarity. Though the Romans were a people of less quick and delicate feelings, yet they naturally slid into the lessening termination upon the same occasions. Anciently, in the English language, the diminishing ling was added to the names of persons and things that were the objects of love. Some we retain still, as darling (or little dear), and a few others. But to this day, in ordinary conversation, it is usual to add the endearing name of little to everything we love; the French and Italians make use of these affectionate diminutives even more than we. In the animal creation, out of our own species, it is the small we are inclined to be fond of; little birds, and some of the smaller kinds of beasts. A great beautiful thing is a manner of expression scarcely ever used; but that of a great ugly thing is very common. There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered, into compliance. In short, the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions. So that, attending to their quantity, beautiful objects are comparatively small.

SECTION XIV.

SMOOTHNESS.

The next property constantly observable in such objects is smoothness;¹⁴ a quality so essential to beauty, that I do not now recollect anything beautiful that is not smooth. In trees and flowers, smooth leaves are beautiful; smooth slopes of earth in gardens; smooth streams in the landscape; smooth coats of birds and beasts in animal beauties; in fine women, smooth skins; and in several sorts of ornamental furniture, smooth and polished surfaces. A very considerable part of the effect of beauty is owing to this quality; indeed the most considerable. For, take any beautiful object, and give it a broken, and rugged surface; and, however well formed it may be in other respects, it pleases no longer. Whereas, let it want ever so many of the other constituents, if it wants not this, it becomes more pleasing than almost all the others without it. This seems to me so evident, that I am a good deal surprised that none who have handled the subject have made any mention of the quality of smoothness in the enumeration of those that go to the forming of beauty. For, indeed, any ruggedness, any sudden, projection, any sharp angle, is in the highest degree contrary to that idea.

SECTION XV.

GRADUAL VARIATION.

But as perfectly beautiful bodies are not composed of angular parts, so their parts never continue long in the same right line.¹⁵ They vary their direction every moment, and they change under the eye by a deviation continually carrying on, but for whose beginning or end you will find it difficult to ascertain a point. The view of a beautiful bird will illustrate this observation. Here we see the head increasing insensibly to the middle, from whence it lessens gradually until it mixes with the neck; the neck loses itself in a larger swell, which continues to the middle of the body, when the whole decreases again to the tail; the tail takes a new direction, but it soon varies its new course, it blends again with the other parts, and the line is perpetually changing, above, below, upon every side. In this description I have before me the idea of a dove; it agrees very well with most of the conditions of beauty. It is smooth and downy; its parts are (to use that expression) melted into one another; you are presented with no sudden protuberance through the whole, and yet the whole is continually changing. Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness, the softness, the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface, continual, and yet hardly perceptible at any point, which forms one of the great constituents of beauty? It gives me no small pleasure to find that I can strengthen my theory in this point by the opinion of the very ingenious Mr. Hogarth, whose idea of the line of beauty I take in general to be extremely just. But the idea of variation, without attending so accurately to the manner of the variation, has led him to consider angular figures as beautiful; these figures, it is true, vary greatly, yet they vary in a sudden and broken manner, and I do not find any natural object which is angular, and at the same time beautiful. Indeed, few natural objects are entirely angular. But I think those which approach the most nearly to it are the ugliest. I must add, too, that so far as I could observe of nature, though the varied line is that alone in which complete beauty is found, yet there is no particular line which is always found in the most completely beautiful, and which is therefore beautiful in preference to all other lines. At least I never could observe it.

SECTION XVI.

DELICACY.

An air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of delicacy, and even of fragility, is almost essential to it. Whoever examines the vegetable or animal creation will find this observation to be founded in nature. It is not the oak, the ash, or the elm, or any of the robust trees of the forest which we consider as beautiful; they are awful and majestic, they inspire a sort of reverence. It is the delicate myrtle, it is the orange, it is the almond, it is the jasmine, it is the vine which we look on as vegetable beauties. It is the flowery species, so remarkable for its weakness and momentary duration, that gives us the liveliest idea of beauty and elegance. Among animals, the greyhound is more beautiful than the mastiff, and the delicacy of a jennet, a barb, or an Arabian horse, is much more amiable than the strength and stability of some horses of war or carriage. I need here say little of the fair sex, where I believe the point will be easily allowed me. The beauty of women is considerably owing to their

weakness or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it. I would not here be understood to say, that weakness betraying very bad health has any share in beauty; but the ill effect of this is not because it is weakness, but because the ill state of health, which produces such weakness, alters the other conditions of beauty; the parts in such a case collapse, the bright color, the lumen purpureum juventæ is gone, and the fine variation is lost in wrinkles, sudden breaks, and right lines.

SECTION XVII.

BEAUTY IN COLOR.

As to the colors usually found in beautiful bodies, it may be somewhat difficult to ascertain them, because, in the several parts of nature, there is an infinite variety. However, even in this variety, we may mark out something on which to settle. First, the colors of beautiful bodies must not be dusky or muddy, but clean and fair. Secondly, they must not be of the strongest kind. Those which seem most appropriated to beauty, are the milder of every sort; light greens; soft blues; weak whites; pink reds; and violets. Thirdly, if the colors be strong and vivid, they are always diversified, and the object is never of one strong color; there are almost always such a number of them (as in variegated flowers) that the strength and glare of each is considerably abated. In a fine complexion there is not only some variety in the coloring, but the colors: neither the red nor the white are strong and glaring. Besides, they are mixed in such a manner, and with such gradations, that it is impossible to fix the bounds. On the same principle it is that the dubious color in the necks and tails of peacocks, and about the heads of drakes, is so very agreeable. In reality, the beauty both of shape and coloring are as nearly related as we can well suppose it possible for things of such different natures to be.

SECTION XVIII.

RECAPITULATION.

On the whole, the qualities of beauty, as they are merely sensible qualities, are the following: First, to be comparatively small. Secondly, to be smooth. Thirdly, to have a variety in the direction of the parts; but, fourthly, to have those parts not angular, but melted, as it were, into each other. Fifthly, to be of a delicate frame, without any remarkable appearance of strength. Sixthly, to have its colors clear and bright, but not very strong and glaring. Seventhly, or if it should have any glaring color, to have it diversified with others. These are, I believe, the properties on which beauty depends; properties that operate by nature, and are less liable to be altered by caprice, or confounded by a diversity of tastes, than any other.

SECTION XIX.

THE PHYSIOGNOMY.

The physiognomy has a considerable share in beauty, especially in that of our own species. The manners give a certain determination to the countenance; which, being observed to correspond pretty regularly with them, is capable of joining the effect of certain agreeable qualities of the mind to those of the body. So that to form a finished human beauty, and to give it its full influence, the face must be expressive of such gentle and amiable qualities, as correspond with the softness, smoothness, and delicacy of the outward form.

SECTION XX.

THE EYE.

I have hitherto purposely omitted to speak of the eye, which has so great a share in the beauty of the animal creation, as it did not fall so easily under the foregoing heads, though in fact it is reducible to the same principles. I think, then, that the beauty of the eye consists, first, in its clearness; what colored eye shall please most, depends a good deal on particular fancies; but none are pleased with an eye whose water (to use that term) is dull and muddy.¹⁶ We are pleased with the eye in this view, on the principle upon which we like diamonds, clear water, glass, and such like transparent substances. Secondly, the motion of the eye contributes to its beauty, by continually shifting its direction; but a slow and languid motion is more beautiful than a brisk one; the latter is enlivening; the former lovely. Thirdly, with regard to the union of the eye with the neighboring parts, it is to hold the same rule that is given of other beautiful ones; it is not to make a strong deviation from the line of the neighboring parts; nor to verge into any exact geometrical figure. Besides all this, the eye affects, as it is expressive of some qualities of the mind, and its principal power generally arises from this; so that what we have just said of the physiognomy is applicable here.

SECTION XXI.

UGLINESS.

It may perhaps appear like a sort of repetition of what we have before said, to insist here upon the nature of ugliness; as I imagine it to be in all respects the opposite to those qualities which we have laid down for the constituents of beauty. But though ugliness be the opposite to beauty, it is not the opposite to proportion and fitness. For it is possible that a thing may be very ugly with any proportions, and with a perfect fitness to any uses. Ugliness I imagine likewise to be consistent enough with an idea of the sublime. But I would by no means insinuate that ugliness of itself is a sublime idea, unless united with such qualities as excite a strong terror.

SECTION XXII.

GRACE.

Gracefulness is an idea not very different from beauty; it consists in much the same things. Gracefulness is an idea belonging to posture and motion. In both these, to be graceful, it is requisite that there be no appearance of difficulty; there is required a small inflection of the body; and a composure of the parts in such a manner, as not to incumber each other, not to appear divided by sharp and sudden angles. In this case, this roundness, this delicacy of attitude and motion, it is that all the magic of grace consists, and what is called its je ne sçai quoi; as will be obvious to any observer, who considers attentively the Venus de Medicis, the Antinous or any statue generally allowed to be graceful in a high degree.

SECTION XXIII.

ELEGANCE AND SPECIOUSNESS.

When any body is composed of parts smooth and polished, without pressing upon each other, without showing any ruggedness or confusion, and at the same time affecting some regular shape, I call it elegant. It is closely allied to the beautiful, differing from it only in this regularity; which, however, as it makes a very material difference in the affection produced, may very well constitute another species. Under this head I rank those delicate and regular works of art, that imitate no determinate object in nature, as elegant buildings, and pieces of furniture. When any object partakes of the above-mentioned qualities, or of those of beautiful bodies, and is withal of great dimensions, it is full as remote from the idea of mere beauty; I call fine or specious.

SECTION XXIV.

THE BEAUTIFUL IN FEELING.

The foregoing description of beauty, so far as it is taken in by the eye, may be greatly illustrated by describing the nature of objects, which produce a similar effect through the touch. This I call the beautiful in feeling. It corresponds wonderfully with what causes the same species of pleasure to the sight. There is a chain in all our sensations; they are all but different sorts of feelings calculated to be affected by various sorts of objects, but all to be affected after the same manner. All bodies that are pleasant to the touch, are so by the slightness of the resistance they make. Resistance is either to motion along the surface, or to the pressure of the parts on one another: if the former be slight, we call the body smooth; if the latter, soft. The chief pleasure we receive by feeling, is in the one or the other of these

qualities; and if there be a combination of both, our pleasure is greatly increased. This is so plain, that it is rather more fit to illustrate other things, than to be illustrated itself by an example. The next source of pleasure in this sense, as in every other, is the continually presenting somewhat new; and we find that bodies which continually vary their surface, are much the most pleasant or beautiful to the feeling, as any one that pleases may experience. The third property in such objects is, that though the surface continually varies its direction, it never varies it suddenly. The application of anything sudden, even though the impression itself have little or nothing of violence, is disagreeable. The quick application of a finger a little warmer or colder than usual, without notice, makes us start; a slight tap on the shoulder, not expected, has the same effect. Hence it is that angular bodies, bodies that suddenly vary the direction of the outline, afford so little pleasure to the feeling. Every such change is a sort of climbing or falling in miniature; so that squares, triangles, and other angular figures are neither beautiful to the sight nor feeling. Whoever compares his state of mind, on feeling soft, smooth, variated, unangular bodies, with that in which he finds himself, on the view of a beautiful object, will perceive a very striking analogy in the effects of both; and which may go a good way towards discovering their common cause. Feeling and sight, in this respect, differ in but a few points. The touch takes in the pleasure of softness, which is not primarily an object of sight; the sight, on the other hand, comprehends color, which can hardly be made perceptible to the touch: the touch, again, has the advantage in a new idea of pleasure resulting from a moderate degree of warmth; but the eye triumphs in the infinite extent and multiplicity of its objects. But there is such a similitude in the pleasures of these senses, that I am apt to fancy, if it were possible that one might discern color by feeling (as it is said some blind men have done) that the same colors, and the same disposition of coloring, which are found beautiful to the sight, would be found likewise most grateful to the touch. But, setting aside conjectures, let us pass to the other sense; of hearing.

SECTION XXV.

THE BEAUTIFUL IN SOUNDS.

In this sense we find an equal aptitude to be affected in a soft and delicate manner; and how far sweet or beautiful sounds agree with our descriptions of beauty in other senses, the experience of every one must decide. Milton has described this species of music in one of his juvenile poems.¹⁷ I need not say that Milton was perfectly well versed in that art; and that no man had a finer ear, with a happier manner of expressing the affections of one sense by metaphors taken from another. The description is as follows:—

“And ever against eating cares,

Lap me in soft Lydian airs;

In notes with many a winding bout

Of linked sweetness long drawn out;

With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,

The melting voice through mazes running;

Untwisting all the chains that tie

The hidden soul of harmony."

Let us parallel this with the softness, the winding surface, the unbroken continuance, the easy gradation of the beautiful in other things; and all the diversities of the several senses, with all their several affections, will rather help to throw lights from one another to finish one clear, consistent idea of the whole, than to obscure it by their intricacy and variety.

To the above-mentioned description I shall add one or two remarks. The first is; that the beautiful in music will not bear that loudness and strength of sounds, which may be used to raise other passions; nor notes which are shrill, or harsh, or deep; it agrees best with such as are clear, even, smooth, and weak. The second is; that great variety, and quick transitions from one measure or tone to another, are contrary to the genius of the beautiful in music. Such¹⁸ transitions often excite mirth, or other sudden or tumultuous passions; but not that sinking, that melting, that languor, which is the characteristic effect of the beautiful as it regards every sense. The passion excited by beauty is in fact nearer to a species of melancholy, than to jollity and mirth. I do not here mean to confine music to any one species of notes, or tones, neither is it an art in which I can say I have any great skill. My sole design in this remark is to settle a consistent idea of beauty. The infinite variety of the affections of the soul will suggest to a good head, and skilful ear, a variety of such sounds as are fitted to raise them. It can be no prejudice to this, to clear and distinguish some few particulars that belong to the same class, and are consistent with each other, from the immense crowd of different and sometimes contradictory ideas, that rank vulgarly under the standard of beauty. And of these it is my intention to mark such only of the leading points as show the conformity of the sense of hearing with all the other senses, in the article of their pleasures.

SECTION XXVI.

TASTE AND SMELL.

This general agreement of the senses is yet more evident on minutely considering those of taste and smell. We metaphorically apply the idea of sweetness to sights and sounds; but as the qualities of bodies by which they are fitted to excite either pleasure or pain in these senses are not so obvious as they are in the others, we shall refer an explanation of their analogy, which is a very close one, to that part wherein we come to consider the common efficient cause of beauty, as it regards all the senses. I do not think anything better fitted to establish a clear and settled idea of visual beauty than this way of examining the similar pleasures of other senses; for one part is

sometimes clear in one of the senses that is more obscure in another; and where there is a clear concurrence of all, we may with more certainty speak of any one of them. By this means, they bear witness to each other; nature is, as it were, scrutinized; and we report nothing of her but what we receive from her own information.

SECTION XXVII.

THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL COMPARED.

On closing this general view of beauty, it naturally occurs that we should compare it with the sublime; and in this comparison there appears a remarkable contrast. For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent: beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line; and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure; and, however they may vary afterwards from the direct nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them, a distinction never to be forgotten by any whose business it is to affect the passions. In the infinite variety of natural combinations, we must expect to find the qualities of things the most remote imaginable from each other united in the same object. We must expect also to find combinations of the same kind in the works of art. But when we consider the power of an object upon our passions, we must know that when anything is intended to affect the mind by the force of some predominant property, the affection produced is like to be the more uniform and perfect, if all the other properties or qualities of the object be of the same nature, and tending to the same design as the principal.

"If black and white blend, soften, and unite

A thousand ways, are there no black and white?"

If the qualities of the sublime and beautiful are sometimes found united, does this prove that they are the same; does it prove that they are any way allied; does it prove even that they are not opposite and contradictory? Black and white may soften, may blend; but they are not therefore the same. Nor, when they are so softened and blended with each other, or with different colors, is the power of black as black, or of white as white, so strong as when each stands uniform and distinguished.

Citation and Use

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- *The Originals: Classic Readings in Western Philosophy. Authored by: Dr. Jeff McLaughlin . Provided*

by: BCcampus. **Located at:** <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/classicreadings/>. **License:** CC BY: Attribution



Selected Readings from Edmund Burke's "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" by Jeff McLaughlin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1. Part I. sect. 3, 4, 7.
2. Part IV. sect. 3, 4, 5, 6.
3. Part IV. sect. 14, 15, 16.
4. Part V.
5. Part I. sect. 7.
6. Vide Part III. sect. 21.
7. Part IV. sect. 9.
8. Part IV. sect. 11.
9. Part IV. sect. 13.
10. Mr. Addison, in the Spectators concerning the pleasures of the imagination, thinks it is because in the rotund at one glance you see half the building. This I do not imagine to be the real cause.
11. Part IV. sect. 4, 5, 6.
12. Sect. 3.
13. Vide Part I. sect. 6.
14. Part IV. sect. 20.
15. Part IV. sect. 23.
16. Part IV. sect. 25.
17. L'Allegro.
18. "I ne'er am merry, when I hear sweet music." – Shakespeare

UNIT 6 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

Art As Experience

by John Dewey, Copyright 1934

After the End of Art

by Arthur C. Danto, Copyright, 1998

UNIT VII

UNIT 7: EXISTENTIALISM

SELECTED READING FROM SØREN KIERKEGAARD: FEAR AND TREMBLING

Søren Kierkegaard

Fear and Trembling

Introduction II

Not only in the world of commerce but also in the world of ideas our age has arranged a regular clearance-sale. Everything may be had at such absurdly low prices that very soon the question will arise whether any one cares to bid. Every waiter with a speculative turn who carefully marks the significant progress of modern philosophy, every lecturer in philosophy, every tutor, student, every sticker-and-quitter of philosophy—they are not content with doubting everything, but “go right on.” It might, possibly, be ill-timed and inopportune to ask them whither they are bound; but it is no doubt polite and modest to take it for granted that they have doubted everything—else it were a curious statement for them to make, that they were proceeding onward. So they have, all of them, completed that preliminary operation and, it would seem, with such ease that they do not think it necessary to waste a word about how they did it. The fact is, not even he who looked anxiously and with a troubled spirit for some little point of information, ever found one, nor any instruction, nor even any little dietetic prescription, as to how one is to accomplish this enormous task. “But did not Descartes proceed in this fashion?” Descartes, indeed! that venerable, humble, honest thinker whose writings surely no one can read without deep emotion—Descartes did what he said, and said what he did. Alas, alas! that is a mighty rare thing in our times! But Descartes, as he says frequently enough, never uttered doubts concerning his faith...

In our times, as was remarked, no one is content with faith, but “goes right on.” The question as to whither they are proceeding may be a silly question; whereas it is a sign of urbanity and culture to assume that every one has faith, to begin with, for else it were a curious statement for them to make, that they are proceeding further. In the olden days it was different. Then, faith was a task for a whole life-time because it was held that proficiency in faith was not to be won within a few days or weeks. Hence, when the tried patriarch felt his end approaching, after having fought his battles and preserved his faith, he was still young enough at heart not to have forgotten the fear and trembling which disciplined his youth and which the mature man has under control, but which no one entirely outgrows—except insofar as he succeeds in “going on” as early as possible. The goal which those venerable men reached at last—at that spot every one starts, in our times, in order to “proceed further.”...

PREPARATION

There lived a man who, when a child, had heard the beautiful Bible story of how God tempted Abraham and how he stood the test, how he maintained his faith and, against his expectations, received his son back again. As this man grew older he read this same story with ever greater admiration; for now life had separated what had been united in the reverent simplicity of the child. And the older he grew, the more frequently his thoughts reverted to that story. His enthusiasm waxed stronger and stronger, and yet the story grew less and less clear to him. Finally he forgot everything else in thinking about it, and his soul contained but one wish, which was, to behold Abraham: and but one longing, which was, to have been witness to that event. His desire was, not to see the beautiful lands of the Orient, and not the splendor of the Promised Land, and not the reverent couple whose old age the Lord had blessed with children, and not the venerable figure of the aged patriarch, and not the god-given vigorous youth of Isaac—it would have been the same to him if the event had come to pass on some barren heath. But his wish was, to have been with Abraham on the three days' journey, when he rode with sorrow before him and with Isaac at his side. His wish was, to have been present at the moment when Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw Mount Moriah afar off; to have been present at the moment when he left his asses behind and wended his way up to the mountain alone with Isaac. For the mind of this man was busy, not with the delicate conceits of the imagination, but rather with his shuddering thought.

The man we speak of was no thinker, he felt no desire to go beyond his faith: it seemed to him the most glorious fate to be remembered as the Father of Faith, and a most enviable lot to be possessed of that faith, even if no one knew it.

The man we speak of was no learned exegetist, he did not even understand Hebrew—who knows but a knowledge of Hebrew might have helped him to understand readily both the story and Abraham.

I

And God tempted Abraham and said unto him: take Isaac, thine only son, whom thou lovest and go to the land Moriah and sacrifice him there on a mountain which I shall show thee.¹

It was in the early morning, Abraham arose betimes and had his asses saddled. He departed from his tent, and Isaac with him; but Sarah looked out of the window after them until they were out of sight. Silently they rode for three days; but on the fourth morning Abraham said not a word but lifted up his eyes and beheld Mount Moriah in the distance. He left his servants behind and, leading Isaac by the hand, he approached the mountain. But Abraham said to himself: "I shall surely conceal from Isaac whither he is going." He stood still, he laid his hand on Isaac's head to bless him, and Isaac bowed down to receive his blessing. And Abraham's aspect was fatherly, his glance was mild, his speech admonishing. But Isaac understood him not, his soul would not rise to him; he embraced Abraham's knees, he besought him at his feet, he begged for his young life, for his beautiful hopes, he recalled the joy in Abraham's house when he was born, he reminded him of the sorrow and

the loneliness that would be after him. Then did Abraham raise up the youth and lead him by his hand, and his words were full of consolation and admonishment. But Isaac understood him not. He ascended Mount Moriah, but Isaac understood him not. Then Abraham averted his face for a moment; but when Isaac looked again, his father's countenance was changed, his glance wild, his aspect terrible, he seized Isaac and threw him to the ground and said: "Thou foolish lad, believest thou I am thy father? An idol-worshipper am I. Believest thou it is God's command? Nay, but my pleasure." Then Isaac trembled and cried out in his fear: "God in heaven, have pity on me, God of Abraham, show mercy to me, I have no father on earth, be thou then my father!" But Abraham said softly to himself: "Father in heaven, I thank thee. Better is it that he believes me inhuman than that he should lose his faith in thee."

When the child is to be weaned, his mother blackens her breast; for it were a pity if her breast should look sweet to him when he is not to have it. Then the child believes that her breast has changed; but his mother is ever the same, her glance is full of love and as tender as ever. Happy he who needed not worse means to wean his child!

II

It was in the early morning. Abraham arose betimes and embraced Sarah, the bride of his old age. And Sarah kissed Isaac who had taken the shame from her—Isaac, her pride, her hope for all coming generations. Then the twain rode silently along their way, and Abraham's glance was fastened on the ground before him; until on the fourth day, when he lifted up his eyes and beheld Mount Moriah in the distance; but then his eyes again sought the ground. Without a word he put the fagots in order and bound Isaac, and without a word he unsheathed his knife. Then he beheld the ram God had chosen, and sacrificed him, and wended his way home.... From that day on Abraham, grew old. He could not forget that God had required this of him. Isaac flourished as before; but Abraham's eye was darkened, he saw happiness no more.

When the child has grown and is to be weaned, his mother will in maidenly fashion conceal her breast. Then the child has a mother no longer. Happy the child who lost not his mother in any other sense!

III

It was in the early morning. Abraham arose betimes; he kissed Sarah, the young mother, and Sarah kissed Isaac, her joy, her delight for all times. And Abraham rode on his way, lost in thought—he was thinking of Hagar and her son whom he had driven out into the wilderness. He ascended Mount Moriah and he drew the knife.

It was a calm evening when Abraham rode out alone, and he rode to Mount Moriah. There he cast himself down on his face and prayed to God to forgive him his sin in that he had been about to sacrifice his son Isaac, and in that the father had forgotten his duty toward his son. And yet oftener he rode on his lonely way, but he found no rest. He could not grasp that it was a sin that he had wanted to sacrifice to God his most precious possession, him for

whom he would most gladly have died many times. But, if it was a sin, if he had not loved Isaac thus, then could he not grasp the possibility that he could be forgiven: for what sin more terrible?

When the child is to be weaned, the mother is not without sorrow that she and her child are to be separated more and more, that the child who had first lain under her heart, and afterwards at any rate rested at her breast, is to be so near to her no more. So they sorrow together for that brief while. Happy he who kept his child so near to him and needed not to sorrow more!

IV

It was in the early morning. All was ready for the journey in the house of Abraham. He bade farewell to Sarah; and Eliezer, his faithful servant, accompanied him along the way for a little while. They rode together in peace, Abraham and Isaac, until they came to Mount Moriah. And Abraham prepared everything for the sacrifice, calmly and mildly; but when his father turned aside in order to unsheathe his knife, Isaac saw that Abraham's left hand was knit in despair and that a trembling shook his frame—but Abraham drew forth the knife.

Then they returned home again, and Sarah hastened to meet them; but Isaac had lost his faith. No one in all the world ever said a word about this, nor did Isaac speak to any man concerning what he had seen, and Abraham suspected not that any one had seen it.

When the child is to be weaned, his mother has the stronger food ready lest the child perish. Happy he who has in readiness this stronger food!

Thus, and in many similar ways, thought the man whom I have mentioned about this event. And every time he returned, after a pilgrimage to Mount Moriah, he sank down in weariness, folding his hands and saying: "No one, in truth, was great as was Abraham, and who can understand him?"

A PANEGYRIC ON ABRAHAM

If a consciousness of the eternal were not implanted in man; if the basis of all that exists were but a confusedly fermenting element which, convulsed by obscure passions, produced all, both the great and the insignificant; if under everything there lay a bottomless void never to be filled—what else were life but despair? If it were thus, and if there were no sacred bonds between man and man; if one generation arose after another, as in the forest the leaves of one season succeed the leaves of another, or like the songs of birds which are taken up one after another; if the generations of man passed through the world like a ship passing through the sea and the wind over the desert—a fruitless and a vain thing; if eternal oblivion were ever greedily watching for its prey and there existed no power strong enough to wrest it from its clutches—how empty were life then, and how dismal! And therefore it is not thus; but, just as God created man and woman, he likewise called into being the hero and the poet or orator. The latter cannot perform the deeds of the hero—he can only admire and love him and rejoice in him. And yet he also is

happy and not less so; for the hero is, as it were, his better self with which he has fallen in love, and he is glad he is not himself the hero, so that his love can express itself in admiration.

The poet is the genius of memory, and does nothing but recall what has been done, can do nothing but admire what has been done. He adds nothing of his own, but he is jealous of what has been entrusted to him. He obeys the choice of his own heart; but once he has found what he has been seeking, he visits every man's door with his song and with his speech, so that all may admire the hero as he does, and be proud of the hero as he is. This is his achievement, his humble work, this is his faithful service in the house of the hero. If thus, faithful to his love, he battles day and night against the guile of oblivion which wishes to lure the hero from him, then has he accomplished his task, then is he gathered to his hero who loves him as faithfully; for the poet is at it were the hero's better self, unsubstantial, to be sure, like a mere memory, but also transfigured as is a memory. Therefore shall no one be forgotten who has done great deeds; and even if there be delay, even if the cloud of misunderstanding obscure the hero from our vision, still his lover will come some time; and the more time has passed, the more faithfully will he cleave to him.

No, no one shall be forgotten who was great in this world. But each hero was great in his own way, and each one was eminent in proportion to the great things he loved. For he who loved himself became great through himself, and he who loved others became great through his devotion, but he who loved God became greater than all of these. Everyone of them shall be remembered, but each one became great in proportion to his trust. One became great by hoping for the possible; another, by hoping for the eternal; but he who hoped for the impossible, he became greater than all of these. Every one shall be remembered; but each one was great in proportion to the power with which he strove. For he who strove with the world became great by overcoming himself; but he who strove with God, he became the greatest of them all. Thus there have been struggles in the world, man against man, one against a thousand; but he who struggled with God, he became greatest of them all. Thus there was fighting on this earth, and there was he who conquered everything by his strength, and there was he who conquered God by his weakness. There was he who, trusting in himself, gained all; and there was he who, trusting in his strength sacrificed everything; but he who believed in God was greater than all of these. There was he who was great through his strength, and he who was great through his wisdom, and he who was great through his hopes, and he who was great through his love; but Abraham was greater than all of these—great through the strength whose power is weakness, great through the wisdom whose secret is folly, great through the hope whose expression is madness, great through the love which is hatred of one's self.

Through the urging of his faith Abraham left the land of his forefathers and became a stranger in the land of promise. He left one thing behind and took one thing along: he left his worldly wisdom behind and took with him faith. For else he would not have left the land of his fathers, but would have thought it an unreasonable demand. Through his faith he came to be a stranger in the land of promise, where there was nothing to remind him of all that had been dear to him, but where everything by its newness tempted his soul to longing. And yet was he God's chosen, he in whom the Lord was well pleased! Indeed, had he been one cast off, one thrust out of God's mercy, then might he have comprehended it; but now it seemed like a mockery of him and of his faith. There have been others

who lived in exile from the fatherland which they loved. They are not forgotten, nor is the song of lament forgotten in which they mournfully sought and found what they had lost. Of Abraham there exists no song of lamentation. It is human to complain, it is human to weep with the weeping; but it is greater to believe, and more blessed to consider him who has faith.

Through his faith Abraham received the promise that in his seed were to be blessed all races of mankind. Time passed, there was still the possibility of it, and Abraham had faith. Another man there was who also lived in hopes. Time passed, the evening of his life was approaching; neither was he paltry enough to have forgotten his hopes: neither shall he be forgotten by us! Then he sorrowed, and his sorrow did not deceive him, as life had done, but gave him all it could; for in the sweetness of sorrow he became possessed of his disappointed hopes. It is human to sorrow, it is human to sorrow with the sorrowing; but it is greater to have faith, and more blessed to consider him who has faith.

No song of lamentation has come down to us from Abraham. He did not sadly count the days as time passed; he did not look at Sarah with suspicious eyes, whether she was becoming old; he did not stop the sun's course lest Sarah should grow old and his hope with her; he did not lull her with his songs of lamentation. Abraham grew old, and Sarah became a laughing-stock to the people; and yet was he God's chosen, and heir to the promise that in his seed were to be blessed all races of mankind. Were it, then, not better if he had not been God's chosen? For what is it to be God's chosen? Is it to have denied to one in one's youth all the wishes of youth in order to have them fulfilled after great labor in old age?

But Abraham had faith and steadfastly lived in hope. Had Abraham been less firm in his trust, then would he have given up that hope. He would have said to God: "So it is, perchance, not Thy will, after all, that this shall come to pass. I shall surrender my hope. It was my only one, it was my bliss. I am sincere, I conceal no secret grudge for that Thou didst deny it to me." He would not have remained forgotten, his example would have saved many a one; but he would not have become the Father of Faith. For it is great to surrender one's hope, but greater still to abide by it steadfastly after having surrendered it; for it is great to seize hold of the eternal hope, but greater still to abide steadfastly by one's worldly hopes after having surrendered them.

Then came the fulness of time. If Abraham had not had faith, then Sarah would probably have died of sorrow, and Abraham, dulled by his grief, would not have understood the fulfillment, but would have smiled about it as a dream of his youth. But Abraham had faith, and therefore he remained young; for he who always hopes for the best, his life will deceive, and he will grow old; and he who is always prepared for the worst, he will soon age; but he who has faith, he will preserve eternal youth. Praise, therefore, be to this story! For Sarah, though advanced in age, was young enough to wish for the pleasures of a mother, and Abraham, though grey of hair, was young enough to wish to become a father. In a superficial sense it may be considered miraculous that what they wished for came to pass, but in a deeper sense the miracle of faith is to be seen in Abraham's and Sarah's being young enough to wish, and their faith having preserved their wish and therewith their youth. The promise he had received was fulfilled,

and he accepted it in faith, and it came to pass according to the promise and his faith; whereas Moses smote the rock with his staff but believed not.

There was joy in Abraham's house when Sarah celebrated the day of her Golden Wedding.

But it was not to remain thus; for once more was Abraham to be tempted. He had struggled with that cunning power to which nothing is impossible, with that ever watchful enemy who never sleeps, with that old man who outlives all—he had struggled with Time and had preserved his faith. And now all the terror of that fight was concentrated in one moment. “And God tempted Abraham, saying to him: take now thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee off.”²

All was lost, then, and more terribly than if a son had never been given him! The Lord had only mocked Abraham, then! Miraculously he had realized the unreasonable hopes of Abraham; and now he wished to take away what he had given. A foolish hope it had been, but Abraham had not laughed when the promise had been made him. Now all was lost—the trusting hope of seventy years, the brief joy at the fulfillment of his hopes. Who, then, is he that snatches away the old man's staff, who that demands that he himself shall break it in two? Who is he that renders disconsolate the grey hair of old age, who is he that demands that he himself shall do it? Is there no pity for the venerable old man, and none for the innocent child? And yet was Abraham God's chosen one, and yet was it the Lord that tempted him. And now all was to be lost! The glorious remembrance of him by a whole race, the promise of Abraham's seed—all that was but a whim, a passing fancy of the Lord, which Abraham was now to destroy forever! That glorious treasure, as old as the faith in Abraham's heart, and many, many years older than Isaac, the fruit of Abraham's life, sanctified by prayers, matured in struggles—the blessing on the lips of Abraham: this fruit was now to be plucked before the appointed time, and to remain without significance; for of what significance were it if Isaac was to be sacrificed? That sad and yet blessed hour when Abraham was to take leave from all that was dear to him, the hour when he would once more lift up his venerable head, when his face would shine like the countenance of the Lord, the hour when he would collect his whole soul for a blessing strong enough to render Isaac blessed all the days of his life—that hour was not to come! He was to say farewell to Isaac, to be sure, but in such wise that he himself was to remain behind; death was to part them, but in such wise that Isaac was to die. The old man was not in happiness to lay his hand on Isaac's head when the hour of death came, but, tired of life, to lay violent hands on Isaac. And it was God who tempted him. Woe, woe to the messenger who would have come before Abraham with such a command! Who would have dared to be the messenger of such dread tidings? But it was God that tempted Abraham.

But Abraham had faith, and had faith for this life. Indeed, had his faith been but concerning the life to come, then might he more easily have cast away all, in order to hasten out of this world which was not his....

But Abraham had faith and doubted not, but trusted that the improbable would come to pass. If Abraham had doubted, then would he have undertaken something else, something great and noble; for what could Abraham

have undertaken but was great and noble! He would have proceeded to Mount Moriah, he would have cloven the wood, and fired it, and unsheathed his knife—he would have cried out to God: “Despise not this sacrifice; it is not, indeed, the best I have; for what is an old man against a child foretold of God; but it is the best I can give thee. Let Isaac never know that he must find consolation in his youth.” He would have plunged the steel in his own breast. And he would have been admired throughout the world, and his name would not have been forgotten; but it is one thing to be admired and another, to be a lode-star which guides one troubled in mind.

But Abraham had faith. He prayed not for mercy and that he might prevail upon the Lord: it was only when just retribution was to be visited upon Sodom and Gomorrha that Abraham ventured to beseech Him for mercy.

We read in Scripture: “And God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am.”³ You, whom I am now addressing did you do likewise? When you saw the dire dispensations of Providence approach threateningly, did you not then say to the mountains, Fall on me; and to the hills, Cover me?⁴ Or, if you were stronger in faith, did not your step linger along the way, longing for the old accustomed paths, as it were? And when the voice called you, did you answer, then, or not at all, and if you did, perchance in a low voice, or whispering? Not thus Abraham, but gladly and cheerfully and trustingly, and with a resonant voice he made answer: “Here am I.” And we read further: “And Abraham rose up early in the morning.”⁵ He made haste as though for some joyous occasion, and early in the morning he was in the appointed place, on Mount Moriah. He said nothing to Sarah, nothing to Eliezer, his steward; for who would have understood him? Did not his temptation by its very nature demand of him the vow of silence? “He laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”⁶ My listener! Many a father there has been who thought that with his child he lost the dearest of all there was in the world for him; yet assuredly no child ever was in that sense a pledge of God as was Isaac to Abraham. Many a father there has been who lost his child; but then it was God, the unchangeable and inscrutable will of the Almighty and His hand which took it. Not thus with Abraham. For him was reserved a more severe trial, and Isaac’s fate was put into Abraham’s hand together with the knife. And there he stood, the old man, with his only hope! Yet did he not doubt, nor look anxiously to the left or right, nor challenge Heaven with his prayers. He knew it was God the Almighty who now put him to the test; he knew it was the greatest sacrifice which could be demanded of him; but he knew also that no sacrifice was too great which God demanded—and he drew forth his knife.

Who strengthened Abraham’s arm, who supported his right arm that it drooped not powerless? For he who contemplates this scene is unnerved. Who strengthened Abraham’s soul so that his eyes grew not too dim to see either Isaac or the ram? For he who contemplates this scene will be struck with blindness. And yet, it is rare enough that one is unnerved or is struck with blindness, and still more rare that one narrates worthily what there did take place between father and son. To be sure, we know well enough—it was but a trial!

If Abraham had doubted, when standing on Mount Moriah; if he had looked about him in perplexity; if he had accidentally discovered the ram before drawing his knife; if God had permitted him to sacrifice it instead of Isaac—then would he have returned home, and all would have been as before, he would have had Sarah and

would have kept Isaac; and yet how different all would have been! For then had his return been a flight, his salvation an accident, his reward disgrace; his future, perchance, perdition. Then would he have borne witness neither to his faith nor to God's mercy, but would have witnessed only to the terror of going to Mount Moriah. Then Abraham would not have been forgotten, nor either Mount Moriah. It would be mentioned, then, not as is Mount Ararat on which the Ark landed, but as a sign of terror, because it was there Abraham doubted.

Venerable patriarch Abraham! When you returned home from Mount Moriah you required no encomiums to console you for what you had lost; for, indeed, you did win all and still kept Isaac, as we all know. And the Lord did no more take him from your side, but you sate gladly at table with him in your tent as in the life to come you will, for all times. Venerable patriarch Abraham! Thousands of years have passed since those times, but still you need no late-born lover to snatch your memory from the power of oblivion, for every language remembers you—and yet do you reward your lover more gloriously than any one, rendering him blessed in your bosom, and taking heart and eyes captive by the marvel of your deed. Venerable patriarch Abraham! Second father of the race! You who first perceived and bore witness to that unbounded passion which has but scorn for the terrible fight with the raging elements and the strength of brute creation, in order to struggle with God; you who first felt that sublimest of all passions, you who found the holy, pure, humble expression for the divine madness which was a marvel to the heathen—forgive him who would speak in your praise, in case he did it not fittingly. He spoke humbly, as if it concerned the desire of his heart; he spoke briefly, as is seemly; but he will never forget that you required a hundred years to obtain a son of your old age, against all expectations; that you had to draw the knife before being permitted to keep Isaac; he will never forget that in a hundred and thirty years you never got farther than to faith.

PRELIMINARY EXPECTORATION

An old saying, derived from the world of experience, has it that “he who will not work shall not eat.”⁷ But, strange to say, this does not hold true in the world where it is thought applicable; for in the world of matter the law of imperfection prevails, and we see, again and again, that he also who will not work has bread to eat—indeed, that he who sleeps has a greater abundance of it than he who works. In the world of matter everything belongs to whosoever happens to possess it; it is thrall to the law of indifference, and he who happens to possess the Ring also has the Spirit of the Ring at his beck and call, whether now he be Nouredin or Aladdin,⁸ and he who controls the treasures of this world, controls them, howsoever he managed to do so. It is different in the world of spirit. There, an eternal and divine order obtains, there the rain does not fall on the just and the unjust alike, nor does the sun shine on the good and the evil alike;⁹ but there the saying does hold true that he who will not work shall not eat, and only he who was troubled shall find rest, and only he who descends into the nether world shall rescue his beloved, and only he who unsheathes his knife shall be given Isaac again. There, he who will not work shall not eat, but shall be deceived, as the gods deceived Orpheus with an immaterial figure instead of his beloved Euridice,¹⁰ deceived him because he was love-sick and not courageous, deceived him because he was a player on the cithara rather than a man. There, it avails not to have an Abraham for one's father,¹¹ or to have seventeen ancestors. But in that world

the saying about Israel's maidens will hold true of him who will not work: he shall bring forth wind;¹² but he who will work shall give birth to his own father.

There is a kind of learning which would presumptuously introduce into the world of spirit the same law of indifference under which the world of matter groans. It is thought that to know about great men and great deeds is quite sufficient, and that other exertion is not necessary. And therefore this learning shall not eat, but shall perish of hunger while seeing all things transformed into gold by its touch. And what, forsooth, does this learning really know? There were many thousands of contemporaries, and countless men in after times, who knew all about the triumphs of Miltiades; but there was only one whom they rendered sleepless.¹³ There have existed countless generations that knew by heart, word for word, the story of Abraham; but how many has it rendered sleepless?

Now the story of Abraham has the remarkable property of always being glorious, in however limited a sense it is understood; still, here also the point is whether one means to labor and exert one's half. Now people do not care to labor and exert themselves, but wish nevertheless to understand the story. They extol Abraham, but how? By expressing the matter in the most general terms and saying: "the great thing about him was that he loved God so ardently that he was willing to sacrifice to Him his most precious possession." That is very true; but "the most precious possession" is an indefinite expression. As one's thoughts, and one's mouth, run on one assumes, in a very easy fashion, the identity of Isaac and "the most precious possession"—and meanwhile he who is meditating may smoke his pipe, and his audience comfortably stretch out their legs. If the rich youth whom Christ met on his way¹⁴ had sold all his possessions and given all to the poor, we would extol him as we extol all which is great—aye, would not understand even him without labor; and yet would he never have become an Abraham, notwithstanding his sacrificing the most precious possessions he had. That which people generally forget in the story of Abraham is his fear and anxiety; for as regards money, one is not ethically responsible for it, whereas for his son a father has the highest and most sacred responsibility. However, fear is a dreadful thing for timorous spirits, so they omit it. And yet they wish to speak of Abraham.

So they keep on speaking, and in the course of their speech the two terms Isaac and "the most precious thing" are used alternately, and everything is in the best order. But now suppose that among the audience there was a man who suffered with sleeplessness—and then the most terrible and profound, the most tragic, and at the same time the most comic, misunderstanding is within the range of possibility. That is, suppose this man goes home and wishes to do as did Abraham; for his son is his most precious possession. If a certain preacher learned of this he would, perhaps, go to him, he would gather up all his spiritual dignity and exclaim: "Thou abominable creature, thou scum of humanity, what devil possessed thee to wish to murder thy son?" And this preacher, who had not felt any particular warmth, nor perspired while speaking about Abraham, this preacher would be astonished himself at the earnest wrath with which he poured forth his thunders against that poor wretch; indeed, he would rejoice over himself, for never had he spoken with such power and unction, and he would have said to his wife: "I am an orator, the only thing I have lacked so far was the occasion. Last Sunday, when speaking about Abraham, I did not feel thrilled in the least."

Now, if this same orator had just a bit of sense to spare, I believe he would lose it if the sinner would reply, in a quiet and dignified manner: "Why, it was on this very same matter you preached, last Sunday!" But however could the preacher have entertained such thoughts? Still, such was the case, and the preacher's mistake was merely not knowing what he was talking about. Ah, would that some poet might see his way clear to prefer such a situation to the stuff and nonsense of which novels and comedies are full! For the comic and the tragic here run parallel to infinity. The sermon probably was ridiculous enough in itself, but it became infinitely ridiculous through the very natural consequence it had. Or, suppose now the sinner was converted by this lecture without daring to raise any objection, and this zealous divine now went home elated, glad in the consciousness of being effective, not only in the pulpit, but chiefly, and with irresistible power, as a spiritual guide, inspiring his congregation on Sunday, whilst on Monday he would place himself like a cherub with flaming sword before the man who by his actions tried to give the lie to the old saying that "the course of the world follows not the priest's word."

If, on the other hand, the sinner were not convinced of his error his position would become tragic. He would probably be executed, or else sent to the lunatic asylum—at any rate, he would become a sufferer in this world; but in another sense I should think that Abraham rendered him happy; for he who labors, he shall not perish.

Now how shall we explain the contradiction contained in that sermon? Is it due to Abraham's having the reputation of being a great man—so that whatever he does is great, but if another should undertake to do the same it is a sin, a heinous sin? If this be the case I prefer not to participate in such thoughtless laudations. If faith cannot make it a sacred thing to wish to sacrifice one's son, then let the same judgment be visited on Abraham as on any other man. And if we perchance lack the courage to drive our thoughts to the logical conclusion and to say that Abraham was a murderer, then it were better to acquire that courage, rather than to waste one's time on undeserved encomiums. The fact is, the ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he wanted to murder Isaac; the religious, that he wanted to sacrifice him. But precisely in this contradiction is contained the fear which may well rob one of one's sleep. And yet Abraham were not Abraham without this fear. Or, again, supposing Abraham did not do what is attributed to him, if his action was an entirely different one, based on conditions of those times, then let us forget him; for what is the use of calling to mind that past which can no longer become a present reality?—Or, the speaker had perhaps forgotten the essential fact that Isaac was the son. For if faith is eliminated, having been reduced to a mere nothing, then only the brutal fact remains that Abraham wanted to murder Isaac—which is easy for everybody to imitate who has not the faith—the faith, that is, which renders it most difficult for him....

Love has its priests in the poets, and one hears at times a poet's voice which worthily extols it. But not a word does one hear of faith. Who is there to speak in honor of that passion? Philosophy "goes right on." Theology sits at the window with a painted visage and sues for philosophy's favor, offering it her charms. It is said to be difficult to understand the philosophy of Hegel; but to understand Abraham, why, that is an easy matter! To proceed further than Hegel is a wonderful feat, but to proceed further than Abraham, why, nothing is easier! Personally, I have devoted a considerable amount of time to a study of Hegelian philosophy and believe I understand it fairly well; in fact, I am

rash enough to say that when, notwithstanding an effort, I am not able to understand him in some passages, it is because he is not entirely clear about the matter himself. All this intellectual effort I perform easily and naturally, and it does not cause my head to ache. On the other hand, whenever I attempt to think about Abraham I am, as it were, overwhelmed. At every moment I am aware of the enormous paradox which forms the content of Abraham's life, at every moment I am repulsed, and my thought, notwithstanding its passionate attempts, cannot penetrate into it, cannot forge on the breadth of a hair. I strain every muscle in order to envisage the problem—and become a paralytic in the same moment.

I am by no means unacquainted with what has been admired as great and noble, my soul feels kinship with it, being satisfied, in all humility, that it was also my cause the hero espoused; and when contemplating his deed I say to myself: “*jam tua causa agitur*.”¹⁵ I am able to identify myself with the hero; but I cannot do so with Abraham, for whenever I have reached his height I fall down again, since he confronts me as the paradox. It is by no means my intention to maintain that faith is something inferior, but, on the contrary, that it is the highest of all things; also that it is dishonest in philosophy to offer something else instead, and to pour scorn on faith; but it ought to understand its own nature in order to know what it can offer. It should take away nothing; least of all, fool people out of something as if it were of no value. I am not unacquainted with the sufferings and dangers of life, but I do not fear them, and cheerfully go forth to meet them.... But my courage is not, for all that, the courage of faith, and is as nothing compared with it. I cannot carry out the movement of faith: I cannot close my eyes and confidently plunge into the absurd—it is impossible for me; but neither do I boast of it....

Now I wonder if every one of my contemporaries is really able to perform the movements of faith. Unless I am much mistaken they are, rather, inclined to be proud of making what they perhaps think me unable to do, viz., the imperfect movement. It is repugnant to my soul to do what is so often done, to speak inhumanly about great deeds, as if a few thousands of years were an immense space of time. I prefer to speak about them in a human way and as though they had been done but yesterday, to let the great deed itself be the distance which either inspires or condemns me. Now if I, in the capacity of tragic hero—for a higher flight I am unable to take—if I had been summoned to such an extraordinary royal progress as was the one to Mount Moriah, I know very well what I would have done. I would not have been craven enough to remain at home; neither would I have dawdled on the way; nor would I have forgot my knife—just to draw out the end a bit. But I am rather sure that I would have been promptly on the spot, with every thing in order—in fact, would probably have been there before the appointed time, so as to have the business soon over with. But I know also what I would have done besides. In the moment I mounted my horse I would have said to myself: “Now all is lost, God demands Isaac, I shall sacrifice him, and with him all my joy—but for all that, God is love and will remain so for me; for in this world God and I cannot speak together, we have no language in common.”

Possibly, one or the other of my contemporaries will be stupid enough, and jealous enough of great deeds, to wish to persuade himself and me that if I had acted thus I should have done something even greater than what Abraham did; for my sublime resignation was (he thinks) by far more ideal and poetic than Abraham's literal-minded

action. And yet this is absolutely not so, for my sublime resignation was only a substitute for faith. I could not have made more than the infinite movement (of resignation) to find myself and again repose in myself. Nor would I have loved Isaac as Abraham loved him. The fact that I was resolute enough to resign is sufficient to prove my courage in a human sense, and the fact that I loved him with my whole heart is the very presupposition without which my action would be a crime; but still I did not love as did Abraham, for else I would have hesitated even in the last minute, without, for that matter, arriving too late on Mount Moriah. Also, I would have spoiled the whole business by my behavior; for if I had had Isaac restored to me I would have been embarrassed. That which was an easy matter for Abraham would have been difficult for me, I mean, to rejoice again in Isaac; for he who with all the energy of his soul proprio motu et propriis auspiciis¹⁶ has made the infinite movement of resignation and can do no more, he will retain possession of Isaac only in his sorrow.

But what did Abraham? He arrived neither too early nor too late. He mounted his ass and rode slowly on his way. And all the while he had faith, believing that God would not demand Isaac of him, though ready all the while to sacrifice him, should it be demanded of him. He believed this on the strength of the absurd; for there was no question of human calculation any longer. And the absurdity consisted in God's, who yet made this demand of him, recalling his demand the very next moment. Abraham ascended the mountain and whilst the knife already gleamed in his hand he believed—that God would not demand Isaac of him. He was, to be sure, surprised at the outcome; but by a double movement he had returned at his first state of mind and therefore received Isaac back more gladly than the first time....

On this height, then, stands Abraham. The last stage he loses sight of is that of infinite resignation. He does really proceed further, he arrives at faith. For all these caricatures of faith, wretched lukewarm sloth, which thinks: "Oh, there is no hurry, it is not necessary to worry before the time comes"; and miserable hopefulness, which says: "One cannot know what will happen, there might perhaps—," all these caricatures belong to the sordid view of life and have already fallen under the infinite scorn of infinite resignation.

Abraham, I am not able to understand; and in a certain sense I can learn nothing from him without being struck with wonder. They who flatter themselves that by merely considering the outcome of Abraham's story they will necessarily arrive at faith, only deceive themselves and wish to cheat God out of the first movement of faith—it were tantamount to deriving worldly wisdom from the paradox. But who knows, one or the other of them may succeed in doing this; for our times are not satisfied with faith, and not even with the miracle of changing water into wine—they "go right on" changing wine into water.

Is it not preferable to remain satisfied with faith, and is it not outrageous that every one wishes to "go right on"? If people in our times decline to be satisfied with love, as is proclaimed from various sides, where will we finally land? In worldly shrewdness, in mean calculation, in paltriness and baseness, in all that which renders man's divine origin doubtful. Were it not better to stand fast in the faith, and better that he that standeth take heed lest he fall;¹⁷ for the movement of faith must ever be made by virtue of the absurd, but, note well, in such wise that one does not lose the things of this world but wholly and entirely regains them.

As far as I am concerned, I am able to describe most excellently the movements of faith; but I cannot make them myself. When a person wishes to learn how to swim he has himself suspended in a swimming-belt and then goes through the motions; but that does not mean that he can swim. In the same fashion I too can go through the motions of faith; but when I am thrown into the water I swim; to be sure (for I am not a wader in the shallows), but I go through a different set of movements, to-wit, those of infinity; whereas faith does the opposite, to-wit, makes the movements to regain the finite after having made those of infinite resignation. Blessed is he who can make these movements, for he performs a marvelous feat, and I shall never weary of admiring him, whether now it be Abraham himself or the slave in Abraham's house, whether it be a professor of philosophy or a poor servant-girl: it is all the same to me, for I have regard only to the movements. But these movements I watch closely, and I will not be deceived, whether by myself or by any one else. The knights of infinite resignation are easily recognized, for their gait is dancing and bold. But they who possess the jewel of faith frequently deceive one because their bearing is curiously like that of a class of people heartily despised by infinite resignation as well as by faith—the philistines.

Let me admit frankly that I have not in my experience encountered any certain specimen of this type; but I do not refuse to admit that as far as I know, every other person may be such a specimen. At the same time I will say that I have searched vainly for years. It is the custom of scientists to travel around the globe to see rivers and mountains, new stars, gay-colored birds, misshapen fish, ridiculous races of men. They abandon themselves to a bovine stupor which gapes at existence and believe they have seen something worth while. All this does not interest me; but if I knew where there lived such a knight of faith I would journey to him on foot, for that marvel occupies my thoughts exclusively. Not a moment would I leave him out of sight, but would watch how he makes the movements, and I would consider myself provided for life, and would divide my time between watching him and myself practicing the movements, and would thus use all my time in admiring him.

As I said, I have not met with such a one; but I can easily imagine him. Here he is. I make his acquaintance and am introduced to him. The first moment I lay my eyes on him I push him back, leaping back myself, I hold up my hands in amazement and say to myself: "Good Lord! that person? Is it really he—why, he looks like a parish-beadle!" But it is really he. I become more closely acquainted with him, watching his every movement to see whether some trifling incongruous movement of his has escaped me, some trace, perchance, of a signaling from the infinite, a glance, a look, a gesture, a melancholy air, or a smile, which might betray the presence of infinite resignation contrasting with the finite.

But no! I examine his figure from top to toe to discover whether there be anywhere a chink through which the infinite might be seen to peer forth. But no! he is of a piece, all through. And how about his footing? Vigorous, altogether that of finiteness, no citizen dressed in his very best, prepared to spend his Sunday afternoon in the park, treads the ground more firmly. He belongs altogether to this world, no philistine more so. There is no trace of the somewhat exclusive and haughty demeanor which marks off the knight of infinite resignation. He takes pleasure in all things, is interested in everything, and perseveres in whatever he does with the zest characteristic of persons wholly given to worldly things. He attends to his business, and when one sees him one might think he was a clerk

who had lost his soul in doing double bookkeeping, he is so exact. He takes a day off on Sundays. He goes to church. But no hint of anything supernatural or any other sign of the incommensurable betrays him, and if one did not know him it would be impossible to distinguish him in the congregation, for his brisk and manly singing proves only that he has a pair of good lungs.

In the afternoon he walks out to the forest. He takes delight in all he sees, in the crowds of men and women, the new omnibuses, the Sound—if one met him on the promenade one might think he was some shopkeeper who was having a good time, so simple is his joy; for he is not a poet, and in vain have I tried to lure him into betraying some sign of the poet's detachment. Toward evening he walks home again, with a gait as steady as that of a mail-carrier. On his way he happens to wonder whether his wife will have some little special warm dish ready for him, when he comes home—as she surely has—as, for instance, a roasted lamb's head garnished with greens. And if he met one minded like him he is very likely to continue talking about this dish with him till they reach the East Gate, and to talk about it with a zest befitting a chef. As it happens, he has not four shillings to spare, and yet he firmly believes that his wife surely has that dish ready for him. If she has, it would be an enviable sight for distinguished people, and an inspiring one for common folks, to see him eat, for he has an appetite greater than Esau's. His wife has not prepared it—strange, he remains altogether the same.

Again, on his way he passes a building lot and there meets another man. They fall to talking, and in a trice he erects a building, freely disposing of everything necessary. And the stranger will leave him with the impression that he has been talking with a capitalist—the fact being that the knight of my admiration is busy with the thought that if it really came to the point he would unquestionably have the means wherewithal at his disposal.

Now he is lying on his elbows in the window and looking over the square on which he lives. All that happens there, if it be only a rat creeping into a gutter-hole, or children playing together—everything engages his attention, and yet his mind is at rest as though it were the mind of a girl of sixteen. He smokes his pipe in the evening, and to look at him you would swear it was the green-grocer from across the street who is lounging at the window in the evening twilight. Thus he shows as much unconcern as any worthless happy-go-lucky fellow; and yet, every moment he lives he purchases his leisure at the highest price, for he makes not the least movement except by virtue of the absurd; and yet, yet—indeed, I might become furious with anger, if for no other reason than that of envy—and yet, this man has performed, and is performing every moment, the movement of infinity... He has resigned everything absolutely, and then again seized hold of it all on the strength of the absurd...

But this miracle may so easily deceive one that it will be best if I describe the movements in a given case which may illustrate their aspect in contact with reality; and that is the important point. Suppose, then, a young swain falls in love with a princess, and all his life is bound up in this love. But circumstances are such that it is out of the question to think of marrying her, an impossibility to translate his dreams into reality. The slaves of paltriness, the frogs in the sloughs of life, they will shout, of course: "Such a love is folly, the rich brewer's widow is quite as good and solid a match." Let them but croak. The knight of infinite resignation does not follow their advice, he does not surrender his love, not for all the riches in the world. He is no fool, he first makes sure that this love really is the contents of his

life, for his soul is too sound and too proud to waste itself on a mere intoxication. He is no coward, he is not afraid to let his love insinuate itself into his most secret and most remote thoughts, to let it wind itself in innumerable coils about every fiber of his consciousness—if he is disappointed in his love he will never be able to extricate himself again. He feels a delicious pleasure in letting love thrill his every nerve, and yet his soul is solemn as is that of him who has drained a cup of poison and who now feels the virus mingle with every drop of his blood, poised in that moment between life and death.

Having thus imbibed love, and being wholly absorbed in it, he does not lack the courage to try and dare all. He surveys the whole situation, he calls together his swift thoughts which like tame pigeons obey his every beck, he gives the signal, and they dart in all directions. But when they return, every one bearing a message of sorrow, and explain to him that it is impossible, then he becomes silent, he dismisses them, he remains alone; and then he makes the movement. Now if what I say here is to have any significance, it is of prime importance that the movement be made in a normal fashion. The knight of resignation is supposed to have sufficient energy to concentrate the entire contents of his life and the realization of existing conditions into one single wish. But if one lacks this concentration, this devotion to a single thought; if his soul from the very beginning is scattered on a number of objects, he will never be able to make the movement—he will be as worldly-wise in the conduct of his life as the financier who invests his capital in a number of securities to win on the one if he should lose on the other; that is, he is no knight. Furthermore, the knight is supposed to possess sufficient energy to concentrate all his thought into a single act of consciousness. If he lacks this concentration he will only run errands in life and will never be able to assume the attitude of infinite resignation; for the very minute he approaches it he will suddenly discover that he forgot something so that he must remain behind. The next minute, thinks he, it will be attainable again, and so it is; but such inhibitions will never allow him to make the movement but will, rather, tend to let him sink ever deeper into the mire.

Our knight, then, performs the movement—which movement? Is he intent on forgetting the whole affair, which, too, would presuppose much concentration? No, for the knight does not contradict himself, and it is a contradiction to forget the main contents of one's life and still remain the same person. And he has no desire to become another person; neither does he consider such a desire to smack of greatness. Only lower natures forget themselves and become something different. Thus the butterfly has forgotten that it once was a caterpillar—who knows but it may forget altogether that it once was a butterfly, and turn into a fish! Deeper natures never forget themselves and never change their essential qualities. So the knight remembers all; but precisely this remembrance is painful. Nevertheless, in his infinite resignation he has become reconciled with existence. His love for the princess has become for him the expression of an eternal love, has assumed a religious character, has been transfigured into a love for the eternal being which, to be sure, denied him the fulfillment of his love, yet reconciled him again by presenting him with the abiding consciousness of his love's being preserved in an everlasting form of which no reality can rob him....

Now, he is no longer interested in what the princess may do, and precisely this proves that he has made the

movement of infinite resignation correctly. In fact, this is a good criterion for detecting whether a person's movement is sincere or just make-believe. Take a person who believes that he too has resigned, but lo! time passed, the princess did something on her part, for example, married a prince, and then his soul lost the elasticity of its resignation. This ought to show him that he did not make the movement correctly, for he who has resigned absolutely is sufficient unto himself. The knight does not cancel his resignation, but preserves his love as fresh and young as it was at the first moment, he never lets go of it just because his resignation is absolute. Whatever the princess does, cannot disturb him, for it is only the lower natures who have the law for their actions in some other person, i.e. have the premises of their actions outside of themselves....

Infinite resignation is the last stage which goes before faith, so that every one who has not made the movement of infinite resignation cannot have faith; for only through absolute resignation do I become conscious of my eternal worth, and only then can there arise the problem of again grasping hold of this world by virtue of faith.

We will now suppose the knight of faith in the same case. He does precisely as the other knight, he absolutely resigns the love which is the contents of his life, he is reconciled to the pain; but then the miraculous happens, he makes one more movement, strange beyond comparison, saying: "And still I believe that I shall marry her—marry her by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the act that to God nothing is impossible." Now the absurd is not one of the categories which belong to the understanding proper. It is not identical with the improbable, the unforeseen, the unexpected. The very moment our knight resigned himself he made sure of the absolute impossibility, in any human sense, of his love. This was the result reached by his reflections, and he had sufficient energy to make them. In a transcendent sense, however, by his very resignation, the attainment of his end is not impossible; but this very act of again taking possession of his love is at the same time a relinquishment of it. Nevertheless this kind of possession is by no means an absurdity to the intellect; for the intellect all the while continues to be right, as it is aware that in the world of finalities, in which reason rules, his love was and is, an impossibility. The knight of faith realizes this fully as well. Hence the only thing which can save him is recourse to the absurd, and this recourse he has through his faith. That is, he clearly recognizes the impossibility, and in the same moment he believes the absurd; for if he imagined he had faith, without at the same time recognizing, with all the passion his soul is capable of, that his love is impossible, he would be merely deceiving himself, and his testimony would be of no value, since he had not arrived even at the stage of absolute resignation....

This last movement, the paradoxical movement of faith, I cannot make, whether or no it be my duty, although I desire nothing more ardently than to be able to make it. It must be left to a person's discretion whether he cares to make this confession; and at any rate, it is a matter between him and the Eternal Being, who is the object of his faith, whether an amicable adjustment can be affected. But what every person can do is to make the movement of absolute resignation, and I for my part would not hesitate to declare him a coward who imagines he cannot perform it. It is a different matter with faith. But what no person has a right to, is to delude others into the belief that faith is something of no great significance, or that it is an easy matter, whereas it is the greatest and most difficult of all things.

But the story of Abraham is generally interpreted in a different way. God's mercy is praised which restored Isaac to him—it was but a trial! A trial. This word may mean much or little, and yet the whole of it passes off as quickly as the story is told: one mounts a winged horse, in the same instant one arrives on Mount Moriah, and presto one sees the ram. It is not remembered that Abraham only rode on an ass which travels but slowly, that it was a three days' journey for him, and that he required some additional time to collect the firewood, to bind Isaac, and to whet his knife.

And yet one extols Abraham. He who is to preach the sermon may sleep comfortably until a quarter of an hour before he is to preach it, and the listener may comfortably sleep during the sermon, for everything is made easy enough, without much exertion either to preacher or listener. But now suppose a man was present who suffered with sleeplessness and who went home and sat in a corner and reflected as follows: "The whole lasted but a minute, you need only wait a little while, and then the ram will be shown and the trial will be over." Now if the preacher should find him in this frame of mind, I believe he would confront him in all his dignity and say to him: "Wretch that thou art, to let thy soul lapse into such folly; miracles do not happen, all life is a trial." And as he proceeded he would grow more and more passionate, and would become ever more satisfied with himself; and whereas he had not noticed any congestion in his head whilst preaching about Abraham, he now feels the veins on his forehead swell. Yet who knows but he would stand aghast if the sinner should answer him in a quiet and dignified manner that it was precisely this about which he preached the Sunday before.

Let us then either waive the whole story of Abraham, or else learn to stand in awe of the enormous paradox which constitutes his significance for us, so that we may learn to understand that our age, like every age, may rejoice if it has faith. If the story of Abraham is not a mere nothing, an illusion, or if it is just used for show and as a pastime, the mistake cannot by any means be in the sinner's wishing to do likewise; but it is necessary to find out how great was the deed which Abraham performed, in order that the man may judge for himself whether he has the courage and the mission to do likewise. The comical contradiction in the procedure of the preacher was his reduction of the story of Abraham to insignificance whereas he rebuked the other man for doing the very same thing.

But should we then cease to speak about Abraham? I certainly think not. But if I were to speak about him I would first of all describe the terrors of his trial. To that end leech-like I would suck all the suffering and distress out of the anguish of a father, in order to be able to describe what Abraham suffered whilst yet preserving his faith. I would remind the hearer that the journey lasted three days and a goodly part of the fourth—in fact, these three and a half days ought to become infinitely longer than the few thousand years which separate me from Abraham. I would remind him, as I think right, that every person is still permitted to turn about-before trying his strength on this formidable task; in fact, that he may return every instant in repentance. Provided this is done, I fear for nothing. Nor do I fear to awaken great desire among people to attempt to emulate Abraham. But to get out a cheap edition of Abraham and yet forbid every one to do as he did, that I call ridiculous.¹⁸

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Kierkegaard, Søren, "Fear and Trembling," in *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard*, trans. L. M. Hollander, *Comparative Literature Series No. 3* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 8 July, 1923), http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:ghttps://www.gutenberg.org/files/60333/60333-h/60333-h.htm#FEAR_AND_TREMBLING.

The use of this work is governed by the Project Gutenberg License, included with the eBook linked above.



This work (Selected Reading from Søren Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling by Søren Kierkegaard) is free of known copyright restrictions.

Notes

1. *Freely after Genesis 22.*
2. *Genesis 20, 11 f.*
3. *Genesis 22, 1.*
4. *Luke 23, 30.*
5. *Genesis 22, 3.*
6. *Genesis 22, 9.*
7. *Cf. Thessalonians 3, 10.*
8. *In Aladdin, Oehlenschläger's famous dramatic poem, Aladdin, "the cheerful son of nature," is contrasted with Nouredin, representing the gloom of doubt and night.*
9. *Matthew 5, 45.*
10. *Cf. not the legend but Plato's Symposium.*
11. *Matthew 3, 9.*
12. *Isaiah 26, 18.*
13. *Themistocles, that is; see Plutarch, Lives.*
14. *Matthew 19, 16 f.*
15. *Your cause, too, is at stake.*
16. *By his own impulse and on his own responsibility.*
17. *Cf. I Cor. 10, 12.*
18. *The above, with the omissions indicated, constitutes about one-third of "Fear and Trembling."*

SELECTED READINGS ON SØREN KIERKEGAARD

In 2010, The Guardian ran a series of eight pieces by Clare Carlisle on Kierkegaard as part of their philosophy and religion series, How to Believe. Brief excerpts of each are included below, per their Open License Terms, follow by a link to the complete text at The Guardian.

Kierkegaard's World, Part 1: What Does it Mean to Exist?

For Kierkegaard, the most pressing question for each person is the meaning of his or her own existence

It is difficult to categorise Søren Kierkegaard: to some readers he is primarily a philosopher, to others a Christian thinker or theologian. He was also a perceptive psychologist and incisive cultural critic. But above all, Kierkegaard was a writer. Much of his adult life was spent pacing around his Copenhagen apartment, composing out loud the sentences that he would then write down, still standing, at his tall desk.

He was extraordinarily prolific, producing on average a couple of books each year during the 1840s.
[continue reading here]

Kierkegaard's World, Part 2: The Truth of Knowledge and the Truth of Life

Kierkegaard understood that, when faced with a choice in real life, no amount of

knowledge can resolve the dilemma.

One of Kierkegaard's most influential ideas is his distinction between two kinds of truth. Sometimes he describes these as "objective" and "subjective" truth; sometimes as truth that is known, and truth that is lived. According to Kierkegaard, it is the lived, subjective kind of truth that is most important to each existing human being. [continue reading here]

EXISTENTIALISM IS A HUMANISM

Existentialism is a Humanism

Follow the links before to read (and/or listen to) this lecture given by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1946.

- [Text version of Existentialism is a Humanism](#)
- [Audio only version of Existentialism is a Humanism](#)

SELECTED READING FROM SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR: INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND SEX

The Second Sex, “Women as Other”

Editor’s Note: The following link will take you to the text of Beauvoir’s Introduction to *The Second Sex*, “Women as Other,” which was translated by H M Parshley, Penguin 1972. **Link to text of “Women as Other.”**

Additional Resources

Podcast: Philosophize This! Episode 89: “Simone de Beauvoir – The Second Sex”

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

The Myth of Sisyphus

Editor's Note: The Myth of Sisyphus, written by by Albert Camus (1913-1966) in 1942, is still protected by full copyright restrictions. Click on the link below to read a translation by Justin O'Brien, Copyright 1955 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

[Link to The Myth of Sisyphus](#)

Additional Resources

Editor's Note: For relevant takes and discussions on Camus, consider the resources below. Please note that recommended sources may contain explicit language.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=768#oembed-1>





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/?p=768#oembed-2>

SELECTED READINGS FROM AND ON FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S "ETERNAL RECURRENCE"

Friedrich Nietzsche

Editor's Note: The following brief excerpt is taken from the Fourth Book ("Sanctus Januarius") of the Second Edition of Thomas Common's translation of Nietzsche's *The Joyful Wisdom*.

Part 341

The Heaviest Burden.—What if a demon crept after thee into thy loneliest loneliness some day or night, and said to thee: "This life, as thou livest it at present, and hast lived it, thou must live it once more, and also innumerable times; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh, and all the unspeakably small and great in thy life must come to thee again, and all in the same series and sequence—and similarly this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and similarly this moment, and I myself. The eternal sand-glass of existence will ever be turned once more, and thou with it, thou speck of dust!"—Wouldst thou not throw thyself down and gnash thy teeth, and curse the demon that so spake? Or hast thou once experienced a tremendous moment in which thou wouldst answer him: "Thou art a God, and never did I hear aught more divine!" If that thought acquired power over thee, as thou art, it would transform thee, and perhaps crush thee; the question with regard to all and everything: "Dost thou want this once more, and also for innumerable times?" would lie as the heaviest burden upon thy activity! Or, how wouldst thou have to become favourably inclined to thyself and to life, so as to long for nothing more ardently than for this last eternal sanctioning and sealing?—

Editor's Note:

For more on Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence or eternal return, consider "Nietzsche's Idea of Eternal Recurrence," an essay by Emrys Westacott.

Citation and Use

The text was taken from the following work.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, "The Joyful Wisdom," Volume Ten in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Thomas Common, (The Darien Press, Edinburgh, 1910), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52881/52881-h/52881-h.htm#>

The use of this work is governed by the Project Gutenberg License, included with the eBook linked above.



This work (Selected Readings from and on Friedrich Nietzsche's "Eternal Recurrence" by Friedrich Nietzsche) is free of known copyright restrictions.

UNIT 7 SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair

by A.J. Grunthaler

The Plague

by Albert Camus

Beyond Good and Evil

by Friedrich Nietzsche

The Gay Science

by Friedrich Nietzsche

The Will to Power

by Friedrich Nietzsche

Philosophize This!

There is a great set of episodes on Sartre and Camus on Steven West's podcast, *Philosophize This!*

- Philosophize This! Episode 86 Sartre and Camus pt. 1: Freedom
- Philosophize This! Episode 87 Sartre and Campus pt. 2
- Philosophize This! Episode 88 Sartre and Campus pt. 3: The Great Debate
- Philosophize This! Episode 103 Sartre and Campus pt. 4: The Quest for Certainty
- Philosophize This! Episode 104 Sartre and Campus pt. 5: Consciousness is Freedom
- Philosophize This! Episode 105 Sartre and Campus pt. 6: The Self

Note: If you prefer to read the transcripts, click on "Podcasts" on their website.

FOURTH EDITION NOTES

This page will reflect changes made to the Fourth Edition after 8/12/22.