CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

Ethics or moral philosophy asks basic questions about the good life, about what is better and worse, about whether there is any objective right and wrong, and how we know if there is.
. In this unit we will try to consider the subject matter of moral philosophy.

Objectives

-introducing the meaning and nature of moral philosophy

-understanding the basic features of moral philosophy

-understanding the key concepts in moral philosophy

Section One;What is moral philosophy?

Brain Storming: Dear learner! Have you ever heard about moral philosophy, if 'yes' what kind of concepts are involved? --

Ethics is a branch of philosophy. It is also called moral philosophy. Philosophy is a discipline in which we ask and attempt to answer basic questions about key areas or subject matters of human life. We can ask philosophical questions about many subjects. In aesthetics, or the philosophy of art, philosophers ask about what kind of things do or should count as art, what leads to an appreciation of a work of art and so on. In the philosophy of art, ask amongst other things whether science can give us knowledge of ultimate reality, whether progress exists in science and so on. In the philosophy of knowledge or epistemology, we try to answer questions about knowledge. Issues of reality are articulated in metaphysics and principles of correct reasoning in logic.

1.1 The basic features of moral philosophy

The word ethics comes from the Greek ethos, meaning something like 'morals'. In fact, ethics is defined as the systematic reflection on what is moral. In this definition, morality is the whole of opinions, decisions and actions with which people express what they think is good or right. So, in

short, to think ethically, you need to systematically reflect on what people think is good or right. Ethics is not a manual with answers on how to act. It is only a search for the right kind of morality. There are several ethical theories around. But, before we are going to discuss them, we first look at two extremes of the normative ethical theories. On one hand is normative relativism. It states that all moral points of view are relative. The morals of one person are not necessarily equal to the morals of another person. Next to this, it is also impossible to say that certain norms and values are better than other norms and values. The problem with this theory is that it is now impossible to discuss normative ethics: all norms and values are allowed. On the other hand is absolutism, also known as universalism. It states that there is a system of norms and values that is universally applicable to everyone, everywhere at every time. Absolutism makes no exceptions: a rule is a rule. However, there is no set of norms and values that never contradicts itself. So, absolutism in general doesn't work either.

 As Francis snare sees it Philosophy does not arise out of mere idle speculation or otherworldly fantasizing. That is a caricature. It begins, at least, with what we do, say, and think in everyday life. On reflection, it can be seen that our everyday actions and thoughts already presuppose certain philosophical views, or else give rise to certain philosophical problems. To say 'I'm going to be practical, and not worry about philosophy' is simply to accept these conventional presuppositions uncritically and to pretend the problems do not arise. One does not really escape having (implicit) philosophical views, although most people avoid being critical or reflective about them. More particularly, moral philosophy (or 'ethical theory', or 'ethics') typically begins with what is a rather deep-rooted part of everyday practice, i.e. the making of moral judgments and the thinking of moral thoughts. Some of the judgments are easily recognizable as moral because they involve the use of rather venerable and even somewhat old-fashioned terms, such as 'moral', 'immoral', 'right', 'wrong', 'good', 'evil', 'bad', 'ought', 'obligation', 'duty', 'guilty', 'blameworthy', 'praiseworthy', 'noble', 'disgraceful', 'righteous', and 'virtuous'. However, other terms employed in moral judgments do not advertise themselves quite so obviously, e.g. 'is responsible for. . . ', 'is liable for. . . ', 'fair', 'unfair', 'owns' or 'has', 'mine', 'is part of one's job as. . . ', 'deserves', 'one's rights', 'human rights', 'is a thief, 'is a responsible person', 'was negligent', 'is a coward', and 'exploits the workers'. We say things like 'You just don't do A' (e.g. dob in your mates), which usually is a way of just saying 'A is wrong' or 'A ought not to be done', without of course actually using such

explicit language. Even to say 'A is permissible' seems to be a moral judgment, for it means that A is *not wrong.* (This is the *weak* sense of 'is permissible', as we shall see in a moment.) That is, it is the *denial* that a person has an obligation to *not* do A. But one would think that the denial of a moral judgment would itself be a moral judgment – it's just the other side of the particular moral issue. So even to say 'A is permissible' is to take a moral stand. When said seriously it is to think a moral thought.

Actually, many people intend 'A is permissible' in a *stronger* sense than this, one which entails, not only that doing A is not wrong (i.e. just 'is permissible' in the weak sense), but, further, that other parties (including law and society) *ought* not to interfere (at least in certain ways) with an individual's doing A. Such a judgment places as heavy an obligation on humankind as any Victorian moralist ever did, although it does it in a somewhat backhanded way. Thus 'permissivists', whatever they may pretend, do take a moral stand – and one which is, at first glance, no easier to defend than any other.

For Francis snare,there are four important problems which arise concerning everyday moral judgments. The ancient Greeks were aware of most of these (which may partly explain why they pioneered work in moral philosophy). Problems arise from:

P1 Conflicts within one's moral code. For example, Sophocles' Antigone, or Sartre's example of the young Frenchman torn between the duty to join the resistance and his duty to supporthis ageing mother.

P2 Application of one's moral code to new circumstances. For example, the question of whether a fetus (at various stages) has any human rights, or the question of whether future generations have any claims on the earth's present resources.

Of course, in everyday life we often make particular moral judgments (about particular occasions) without worrying about whether there are any general principles, or more general formulations, behind the particular judgments we make. It is usually only when we run into 'hard cases' that such worries arise. P1 and P2 are two important kinds of 'hard cases'. Thus problems like P1 and P2 provoke us into asking:

Q1 Are there any *general* principles of morality behind the various particular moral judgments we make? Or, what are the principles of morality?

But while a more complete *formulation* of our moral principles might do much to overcome problems such as P1 and P2, there are two further problems which arise in any case:

P3 Conflicts between moral codes of different societies. Herodotus in his *History* discussed such differences between societies, as do modern anthropologists, sociologists, and historians.

P4 The conflict between duty and self-interest: is it 'reasonable' to follow moral duty when it conflicts with self-interest? Some of the Greek sophists held that moral duty is mere 'convention' and that it is reasonable to 'follow nature' (for them, self-interest). Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II of Plato's *Republic* set up the problem of conflict rather articulately.

Ethical judgments are evaluative in their nature. They tell us what the speaker believes is good or bad. They do not simply describe what the object of judgment is.They go further and express a positive or negative regard for it. Generally we can distinguish between empirical or descriptive judgments by which we state certain factual beliefs and evaluative judgments by which we make judgments about these matters. Moral judgments are evaluative because they place a value, negative or positive on some action or practice.

1.2 Morality as a subject –matter

People discuss morality quite often and many of our actions are based on assumptions about morality. I will discuss the meaning of "morality" within ordinary language and illustrate the difference between morality and everything else by comparing moral and nonmoral standards. What does "morality" mean? Morality involves what we ought to do, right and wrong, good and bad, values, justice, and virtues. Morality is taken to be important; moral actions are often taken to merit praise and rewards, and immoral actions are often taken to merit blame and punishment. What we ought to do – What we morally ought to do is what's morally preferable. It's morally preferable to give to certain charities and to refrain from hurting people who make us angry; so we morally ought to do these things.

Sometimes what we ought to do isn't seen as "optional." Instead, we often think we have moral duties (obligations). It might not be a moral duty to give to any charities, but it seems likely that we often have a duty not to hurt people. Nonetheless, what we ought to do doesn't just cover our obligations.

It's possible to do something morally preferable that's not wrong. For example, we can act "above the call of duty." Some actions are heroic, such as when we risk our life to run into a burning building to save a child. Some philosophers call actions that are above the call of duty "supererogatory" rather than "obligatory."

Right and wrong – Something is morally right if it's morally permissible and morally wrong if it's morally impermissible. For example, it's morally right to help people and give to certain charities, but morally wrong to kill people indiscriminately. Good and bad – "Good" and "bad" refer to positive and negative value. Something is morally good if it helps people attain something of positive value, avoid something of negative vale, or has a positive value that merits being a goal. For example, food is good because it is necessary to attain something of positive value because it helps us survive; and our survival could have positive value that merits being a goal. Something is morally bad if it makes it difficult to attain something of positive value, could lead to something of negative value, or has a negative value that merits avoidance. For example, starvation is bad because it could lead to suffering; and suffering could have negative value that warrants its avoidance.

Something has "instrumental moral value" if it is relevant to achieving moral goals. Food is instrumentally good because it helps us achieve our goal to survive; and starvation is instrumentally bad when we have a goal to avoid suffering, and starvation makes it more difficult for us to achieve this goal. We take some of our goals to be worthy as "moral goals" for their own sake rather than being instrumental for the sake of something else. These goals could be taken to be worthy for having positive value (or help us avoid something of negative value)—what Aristotle calls "final ends" or what other philosophers call "intrinsic values." Imagine that someone asks you why you have a job and you say it's to make money. We can then ask why you want to make money and you can reply that it's to buy food. We can then ask why you want to buy food, and you can reply that it's to survive. At this point you might not have a reason to want to survive other than valuing your existence for its own sake. If not, then we will wonder if you are wasting your time with a job. All of our goals must be justified at some point by something taken to be worthy as a goal for its own sake, or its not clear that any of our goals are really justified.

Final ends – Final ends are goals that we think are worthy. Pleasure, survival, and knowledge are possible examples of goods that should be taken to be promoted as final ends. Some final ends are

also meant to help us avoid something of negative value, such as our goals to avoid pain and death. The goals of attaining these goods are "final ends." It is possible that final ends are merely things we desire "for their own sake" but some final ends could be better and of greater importance than others. Aristotle thought that our "most final end" or "ultimate end" is happiness and no other good could override the importance of happiness. Final ends seem relevant to right and wrong. It seems morally right to try to achieve our final ends because they are worthy. All things equal, it seems morally right to try to attain happiness and survive. Intrinsic values – Intrinsic values are things of positive or negative value that have that value just for existing, and some philosophers think Aristotle's truly worthy final ends have intrinsic value. The main difference here is that final ends could merely be psychological—what we take to be worthy goals, but a goal has intrinsic value only if it really is worthy. Some people might have "final ends" but actually be wrong about what goals are worthy of being final ends.

We can desire intrinsic values "for their own sake," many think it's rational to often try to attain things that are intrinsically good, and whatever is intrinsically good is good no matter who attains it. For example, if human life is intrinsically good, then survival is good for every person. Intrinsic value plays the same role as final ends—we think it's often morally right to try to achieve goals that help people attain intrinsic goods and we morally ought to do so. However, intrinsic values can conflict. If pain is intrinsically bad, that doesn't mean we should never allow ourselves or others to experience pain because there might be intrinsic goods that can be attained as a result of our pain. For example, homework and learning is often painful, but the knowledge attained can help us live better lives and could even be intrinsically good for its own sake.

Justice – Justice refers to our interest in certain ethical issues such as equality, fairness, and merit. It is unjust to have slavery or to have different laws for different racial groups because people should be equal before the law, it's unfair, and racial groups don't merit unequal treatment before the law. It is just to punish all people who break the law equally rather than let certain people—such as the wealthy—break certain laws that other people aren't allowed to break. Additionally, it's unjust to punish the innocent and to find the innocent guilty in a court of law.

Virtues – Some people are better at being moral than others. It's important that we know the difference between right and wrong, attain the skills necessary to reach demanding moral goals, and

find the motivation to do what is morally preferable. For example, courage is a virtue that involves knowledge of right and wrong, skills, and motivation. Courage requires us to endanger our personal well being when doing so is morally preferable, to have skills that make it possible to endanger our personal well being in many situations, and to have the motivation to be willing to endanger our well being when we ought to do so.

Praise and blame – We often think that moral behavior merits praise and immoral behavior merits blame. It often seems appropriate to tell people who have done good deeds, such as saving lives that we appreciate it and that what they are doing is good; and it often seems appropriate to tell people who have done something immoral that we don't appreciate it and that they did something morally wrong. Additionally, it generally seems appropriate to hold people responsible for their actions and let them know that their actions could have been different.

Reward and punishment – One way to hold people responsible for their actions is to reward and punish them for their behavior, and this often seems appropriate. We could give gifts or return favors to people who help us, and break our friendship or ignore those who do something immoral. For example, a company that scams people should be held responsible and punished by consumers who decide to no longer do business with that company. Sometimes punishments could be severe and could seem immoral in any other context. For example, it might be morally justified to throw murderers in prison even though it would be an immoral example of kidnapping and imprisonment in many other contexts. We can't just throw anyone in prison that we want.

Section two; Amorality

Brain Storming: Dear learner! Do you think that morality and amorality are the exact reverse of each other? -- --- ---

Moral and nonmoral standards

Not everything is morally right or wrong. Sometimes something is entirely nonmoral and irrelevant to morality—such as standing on your head or counting blades of grass. One way to clarify what "morality" refers to is to compare and contrast it to nonmoral things that are sometimes confused with it. What we

morally or nonmorally ought to do – We don't just talk about right and wrong, good or bad, or what we ought to do in moral contexts. This is because there is both moral and nonmoral instrumental value.

1. Moral instrumental value – We ought to do what is necessary to attain moral goals. For example, we morally ought to get a job and buy food to stay alive. It's morally right to get a job and buy food, and food has moral instrumental value insofar as it helps us attain our moral goal of survival.

2. Nonmoral instrumental value – Not all instrumental value helps us achieve moral goals. We can also have personal goals that have (almost) nothing to do with morality. For example, I might have a goal of standing on my head and taking gymnastics classes could be what I ought to do to achieve this goal. The right thing to do to be able to stand on your head is to take gymnastics classes, even though it has nothing to do with morality. Additionally, some instrumental values could even be immoral. For example, I might have a goal to murder someone and I could say I ought to use a gun if that's the best way to murder someone. That's not to say that I morally ought to murder anyone.

Etiquette – Etiquette tells us how to be polite and show respect within a culture. Etiquette tells us not to chew our food with our mouths open, to open doors for people, and not to interrupt people who are talking. Sometimes being rude and impolite can be morally wrong, but the fact that etiquette and morality sometimes overlap doesn't mean they are identical or that etiquette is always relevant to morality. First, etiquette tends not to be serious enough to be morally relevant.

Law – The law tells us what we are or are not allowed doing, and breaking the law often leads to punishment. What's legal is often based on what's moral, but not always. For example, it's illegal and immoral to murder people. However, the fact that legality and morality can overlap doesn't mean they are identical. It was once illegal to free slaves, but that doesn't mean it was morally wrong; and it can be legal for a company to pollute or dump toxic waste, but that doesn't mean it's morally right to do so. It's hard to pinpoint what morality is about, but we often discuss morality with ease anyway. There are many related ideas concerning morality, such as what we ought to do, right and wrong, and justice; but these ideas often have a nonmoral counterpart. This seems clear when we compare moral and nonmoral instrumental value. Moreover, etiquette and law are often confused with morality, but they are not identical to morality. What's polite or legal is often moral, but not always. What's bad etiquette or illegal can be moral as well.

Section three; the key concepts in morality

Brain Storming: Dear learner! What are the key concepts in morality? ----------------------------
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The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. Philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. *Metaethics* investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean. Are they merely social inventions? Do they involve more than expressions of our individual emotions? Metaethical answers to these questions focus on the issues of universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves. *Normative ethics* takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or the consequences of our behavior on others. Finally, *applied ethics* involves examining specific controversial issues, such as abortion, infanticide, animal rights, environmental concerns, homosexuality, capital punishment, or nuclear war. By using the conceptual tools of metaethics and normative ethics, discussions in applied ethics try to resolve these controversial issues. The lines of distinction between metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics are often blurry. For example, the issue of abortion is an applied ethical topic since it involves a specific type of controversial behavior. But it also depends on more general normative principles, such as the right of self-rule and the right to life, which are litmus tests for determining the morality of that procedure. The issue also rests on metaethical issues such as, "where do rights come from?" and "what kinds of beings have rights?"

1. Metaethics

The term "meta" means *after* or *beyond*, and, consequently, the notion of metaethics involves a removed, or bird's eye view of the entire project of ethics. We may define metaethics as the study of the origin and meaning of ethical concepts. When compared to normative ethics and applied ethics, the field of metaethics is the least precisely defined area of moral philosophy. It covers issues from moral semantics to moral epistemology. Two issues, though, are prominent: (1) *metaphysical* issues concerning whether morality exists independently of humans, and (2) *psychological* issues concerning the underlying mental basis of our moral judgments and conduct.

a. Metaphysical Issues: Objectivism and Relativism

Metaphysics is the study of the kinds of things that exist in the universe. Some things in the universe are made of physical stuff, such as rocks; and perhaps other things are nonphysical in nature, such as thoughts, spirits, and gods. The metaphysical component of metaethics involves discovering specifically whether moral values are eternal truths that exist in a spirit-like realm, or simply human conventions. There are two general directions that discussions of this topic take, one *other-worldly* and one *this-worldly*.

Proponents of the other-worldly view typically hold that moral values are objective in the sense that they exist in a spirit-like realm beyond subjective human conventions. They also hold that they are absolute, or eternal, in that they never change, and also that they are universal insofar as they apply to all rational creatures around the world and throughout time. The second and more this-worldly approach to the metaphysical status of morality follows in the skeptical philosophical tradition, such as that articulated by Greek philosopher SextusEmpiricus, and denies the objective status of moral values. Technically, skeptics did not reject moral values themselves, but only denied that values exist as spirit-like objects, or as divine commands in the mind of God. Moral values, they argued, are strictly human inventions, a position that has since been called *moral relativism*.

b. Psychological Issues in Metaethics

A second area of metaethics involves the psychological basis of our moral judgments and conduct, particularly understanding what motivates us to be moral. We might explore this subject by asking the simple question, "Why be moral?" Even if I am aware of basic moral standards, such as don't kill and don't steal, this does not necessarily mean that I will be psychologically compelled to act on them. Some answers to the question "Why be moral?" are to avoid punishment, to gain praise, to attain happiness, to be dignified, or to fit in with society.

i. Egoism and Altruism

One important area of moral psychology concerns the inherent selfishness of humans. 17ᵗʰ century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes held that many, if not all, of our actions are prompted by selfish desires. Even if an action seems selfless, such as donating to charity, there are still selfish causes for this, such as

experiencing power over other people. This view is called *psychological egoism* and maintains that self-oriented interests ultimately motivate all human actions. Closely related to psychological egoism is a view called *psychological hedonism* which is the view that *pleasure* is the specific driving force behind all of our actions. 18ᵗʰ century British philosopher Joseph Butler agreed that instinctive selfishness and pleasure prompt much of our conduct. However, Butler argued that we also have an inherent psychological capacity to show benevolence to others. This view is called *psychological altruism* and maintains that at least some of our actions are motivated by instinctive benevolence.

ii. Emotion and Reason

A second area of moral psychology involves a dispute concerning the role of reason in motivating moral actions. If, for example, I make the statement "abortion is morally wrong," am I making a rational assessment or only expressing my feelings? On the one side of the dispute, 18ᵗʰ century British philosopher David Hume argued that moral assessments involve our emotions, and not our reason. We can amass all the reasons we want, but that alone will not constitute a moral assessment. We need a distinctly emotional reaction in order to make a moral pronouncement. Reason might be of service in giving us the relevant data, but, in Hume's words, "reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions." Inspired by Hume's anti-rationalist views, some 20th century philosophers, most notably A.J. Ayer, similarly denied that moral assessments are factual descriptions. For example, although the statement "it is good to donate to charity" may on the surface look as though it is a factual description about charity, it is not. Instead, a moral utterance like this involves two things. First, I (the speaker) I am expressing my personal feelings of approval about charitable donations and I am in essence saying "Hooray for charity!" This is called the *emotive* element insofar as I am expressing my emotions about some specific behavior. Second, I (the speaker) am trying to get you to donate to charity and am essentially giving the command, "Donate to charity!" This is called the *prescriptive* element in the sense that I am prescribing some specific behavior.

From Hume's day forward, more rationally-minded philosophers have opposed these emotive theories of ethics and instead argued that moral assessments are indeed acts of reason. 18ᵗʰ century German philosopher Immanuel Kant is a case in point. Although emotional factors often do influence our

conduct, he argued, we should nevertheless resist that kind of sway. Instead, true moral action is motivated only by reason when it is free from emotions and desires. A recent rationalist approach, offered by Kurt Baier (1958), was proposed in direct opposition to the emotivist and prescriptivist theories of Ayer and others. Baier focuses more broadly on the reasoning and argumentation process that takes place when making moral choices. All of our moral choices are, or at least can be, backed by some reason or justification. If I claim that it is wrong to steal someone's car, then I should be able to justify my claim with some kind of argument. For example, I could argue that stealing Smith's car is wrong since this would upset her, violate her ownership rights, or put the thief at risk of getting caught. According to Baier, then, proper moral decision making involves giving the best reasons in support of one course of action versus another.

iii. Male and Female Morality

A third area of moral psychology focuses on whether there is a distinctly female approach to ethics that is grounded in the psychological differences between men and women. Discussions of this issue focus on two claims: (1) traditional morality is male-centered, and (2) there is a unique female perspective of the world which can be shaped into a value theory. According to many feminist philosophers, traditional morality is male-centered since it is modeled after practices that have been traditionally male-dominated, such as acquiring property, engaging in business contracts, and governing societies. The rigid systems of rules required for trade and government were then taken as models for the creation of equally rigid systems of moral rules, such as lists of rights and duties. Women, by contrast, have traditionally had a nurturing role by raising children and overseeing domestic life. These tasks require less rule following, and more spontaneous and creative action. Using the woman's experience as a model for moral theory, then, the basis of morality would be spontaneously caring for others as would be appropriate in each unique circumstance. On this model, the agent becomes part of the situation and acts caringly within that context. This stands in contrast with male-modeled morality where the agent is a mechanical actor who performs his required duty, but can remain distanced from and unaffected by the situation. A care-based approach to morality, as it is sometimes called, is offered by feminist ethicists as either a replacement for or a supplement to traditional male-modeled moral systems.

2. Normative Ethics

Normative ethics involves arriving at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. In a sense, it is a search for an ideal litmus test of proper behavior. The Golden Rule is a classic example of a normative principle: We should do to others what we would want others to do to us. Since I do not want my neighbor to steal my car, then it is wrong for me to steal her car. Since I would want people to feed me if I was starving, then I should help feed starving people. Using this same reasoning, I can theoretically determine whether any possible action is right or wrong. So, based on the Golden Rule, it would also be wrong for me to lie to, harass, victimize, assault, or kill others. The Golden Rule is an example of a normative theory that establishes a *single principle* against which we judge all actions. Other normative theories focus on a *set* of foundational principles, or a set of good character traits.

The key assumption in normative ethics is that there is only *one* ultimate criterion of moral conduct, whether it is a single rule or a set of principles. Three strategies will be noted here: (1) virtue theories, (2) duty theories, and (3) consequentialist theories.

a. Virtue Theories

Many philosophers believe that morality consists of following precisely defined rules of conduct, such as "don't kill," or "don't steal." Presumably, I must learn these rules, and then make sure each of my actions live up to the rules. Virtue ethics, however, places less emphasis on learning rules, and instead stresses the importance of developing *good habits of character*, such as benevolence. Once I've acquired benevolence, for example, I will then habitually act in a benevolent manner. Historically, virtue theory is one of the oldest normative traditions in Western philosophy, having its roots in ancient Greek civilization. Plato emphasized four virtues in particular, which were later called *cardinal virtues*: wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. Other important virtues are fortitude, generosity, self-respect, good temper, and sincerity. In addition to advocating good habits of character, virtue theorists hold that we should avoid acquiring bad character traits, or *vices*, such as cowardice, insensibility, injustice, and vanity. Virtue theory emphasizes moral education since virtuous character traits are developed in one's youth. Adults, therefore, are responsible for instilling virtues in the young.

b. Duty Theories

Many of us feel that there are clear obligations we have as human beings, such as to care for our children, and to not commit murder. Duty theories base morality on specific, foundational principles of obligation. These theories are sometimes called *deontological*, from the Greek word *deon*, or duty, in view of the foundational nature of our duty or obligation. They are also sometimes called *nonconsequentialist* since these principles are obligatory, irrespective of the consequences that might follow from our actions. For example, it is wrong to not care for our children even if it results in some great benefit, such as financial savings. There are four central duty theories.

C. Consequentialist Theories

It is common for us to determine our moral responsibility by weighing the consequences of our actions. According to <u>consequentialism,</u> correct moral conduct is determined *solely* by a cost-benefit analysis of an action's consequences: *Consequentialism:* An action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable.

Consequentialist normative principles require that we first tally both the good and bad consequences of an action. Second, we then determine whether the total good consequences outweigh the total bad consequences. If the good consequences are greater, then the action is morally proper. If the bad consequences are greater, then the action is morally improper. Consequentialist theories are sometimes called *teleological* theories, from the Greek word *telos*, or end, since the end result of the action is the sole determining factor of its morality.

Consequentialist theories became popular in the 18ᵗʰ century by philosophers who wanted a quick way to morally assess an action by appealing to experience, rather than by appealing to gut intuitions or long lists of questionable duties. In fact, the most attractive feature of consequentialism is that it appeals to publicly observable consequences of actions. Most versions of consequentialism are more precisely formulated than the general principle above. In particular, competing consequentialist theories specify which consequences for affected groups of people are relevant. Three subdivisions of consequentialism emerge:

- *Ethical Egoism*: an action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable *only to the agent* performing the action.

- *Ethical Altruism:* an action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable *to everyone except the agent*.
- *Utilitarianism:* an action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable *to everyone*.

3. Applied Ethics

Applied ethics is the branch of ethics which consists of the analysis of specific, controversial moral issues such as abortion, animal rights, or euthanasia. In recent years applied ethical issues have been subdivided into convenient groups such as medical ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, and sexual ethics. Generally speaking, two features are necessary for an issue to be considered an "applied ethical issue." First, the issue needs to be controversial in the sense that there are significant groups of people both for and against the issue at hand. The issue of drive-by shooting, for example, is not an applied ethical issue, since everyone agrees that this practice is grossly immoral. By contrast, the issue of gun control would be an applied ethical issue since there are significant groups of people both for and against gun control.

The second requirement for an issue to be an applied ethical issue is that it must be a distinctly moral issue. On any given day, the media presents us with an array of sensitive issues such as affirmative action policies, gays in the military, involuntary commitment of the mentally impaired, capitalistic versus socialistic business practices, public versus private health care systems, or energy conservation. Although all of these issues are controversial and have an important impact on society, they are not all moral issues. Some are only issues of social policy. The aim of social policy is to help make a given society run efficiently by devising conventions, such as traffic laws, tax laws, and zoning codes. Moral issues, by contrast, concern more universally obligatory practices, such as our duty to avoid lying, and are not confined to individual societies. Frequently, issues of social policy and morality overlap, as with murder which is both socially prohibited and immoral. However, the two groups of issues are often distinct. For example, many people would argue that sexual promiscuity is immoral, but may not feel that there should be social policies regulating sexual conduct, or laws punishing us for promiscuity. Similarly, some social policies forbid residents in certain neighborhoods from having yard sales. But, so long as the neighbors are not offended, there is nothing immoral in itself about a resident having a yard

sale in one of these neighborhoods. Thus, to qualify as an applied ethical issue, the issue must be more than one of mere social policy: it must be morally relevant as

Definitions of Ethics

Ethical motive: motivation based on ideas of right and wrong

The philosophical study of moral values and rules
According to the Church of Scientology, "Ethics may be defined as the actions an individual takes on himself to ensure his continued survival across the dynamics. It is a personal thing. When one is ethical, it is something he does himself by his own choice."
Ethics is a branch of philosophy which seeks to address questions about morality, such as what the fundamental semantic, ontological, and epistemic nature of ethics or morality is (meta-ethics), how moral values should be determined (normative ethics), how a moral outcome can be achieved in ...

CHAPTER TWO

Theories of Moral Philosophy

Introduction

Virtue ethics and perfectionism are the ancient fields of moral philosophy developed under the normative aspect of moral philosophy. In this unit we will try to consider perfectionist and virtue moral philosophy.

Objectives

-introducing the meaning of perfectionist moral philosophy

-understanding the basic features of virtue ethics

-understanding the ancient and modern traditions in moral philosophy

Section One; **Perfectionism as an ethical view**

Brain Storming: Dear learner! What do you know about perfectionism?

Perfectionism has acquired a number of meanings in contemporary moral and political philosophy. The term is used to refer to an account of the good human life, an account of human well-being, a moral theory, and an approach to politics. Historically, perfectionism is associated with ethical theories that characterize the human good in terms of the development of human nature. Writers as diverse as Aristotle, Aquinas, Spinoza, Marx, and T.H. Green are perfectionists in this sense.

But all perfectionists defend an account of the human good that is objective in the sense that it identifies states of affairs and/or activities as good in themselves and not good in virtue of the fact that they are desired or enjoyed by human beings.

2.1. Perfectionist Value

An objective account of the good need make no reference to the good of human beings. Works of art or aspects of the natural world might have value even if no human being existed. Perfectionist accounts of the good are accounts of the human good. They seek to identify the goods that contribute to the best or most perfect life for human beings.

The best life for human beings can be understood in at least two importantly different ways. On the first understanding, such a life is understood in terms of well-being. The best life for a human being is a life that goes maximally well for the person who leads it. On the second understanding, the best life for a human being is understood in terms of excellence or success. An excellent human life need not be one that is best in terms of well-being, for it is possible that the most excellent life that a human being can live requires him to make sacrifices in his own well-being for the sake of other persons or goods. Thus the notion of an excellent human life is

broader than the notion of well-being. For this reason, a general characterization of perfectionism should employ it rather than well-being.

Perfectionism, so understood, contrasts with both hedonism and desire satisfaction accounts of the human good. Let *X* refer to an object, an activity or a relationship. Then, for the perfectionist, if *X* is good, then it is not good in virtue of the fact that it is desired, or would be desired under appropriate conditions, by human beings. Likewise, for the perfectionist, if *X* is good, it does not follow that *X* must be a pleasant mental state or causally related to one. Perfectionist accounts of the human good can allow that some goods are experiential, but they reject the hedonistic thesis that all intrinsic human goods consist in pleasurable sensations or attitudes.

2.1.1 Two Versions of Perfectionism

Perfectionist goods contribute to or are components of an excellent human life. Historically, as noted above, perfectionists have related these goods to the development of human nature. For example, the development of rationality is often considered to be a perfectionist good because it is a capacity essential to and distinctive of human nature. Following Aristotle, a number of contemporary writers have sought to develop accounts of the human good along these lines. We can use the term *human nature perfectionism* to refer generally to accounts of the human good that relate perfectionist goods to the development of human nature. Other writers, however, have characterized perfectionism without any reference to human nature. John Rawls, for example, characterizes perfectionism in terms of the maximum "achievement of human excellence in art, science and culture". Derek Parfit likewise characterizes perfectionism in terms of the achievement or realization of "the best things in life". Here it is the existence of the objective goods, and not their relation to the development of human nature, that is highlighted. Similarly, other writers have identified perfectionism with the realization of a specified list of objective goods. We can use the term *objective goods perfectionism* to refer generally to accounts of the human good that identify perfectionist goods without relating them to the development of human nature.

Proponents of human nature perfectionism must defend an account of human nature. More precisely, they must give an account of the properties or capacities that are central to human

nature and the development of which have value. By contrast, proponents of objective goods perfectionism must explain why some goods, and not others, are included. Objective goods perfectionists need not formulate an exhaustive list of objective goods. They may believe such an undertaking to be misguided. But they should have something to say about what makes an alleged good an objective good, one worthy of pursuit.

2.1.2 Perfectionism and Pluralism

The distinction between human nature perfectionism and objective goods perfectionism helps us approach an important question in value theory. Must perfectionists be monists, holding that there is at bottom only one form of life that is best for all human beings; or can they hold that there exists a plurality of equally good forms of life for human beings? The question is important, since it is very plausible to think that the best life for one human being may differ from the best life for another.

Human nature perfectionism identifies the human good with the development of human nature. This looks like a monistic ideal, one that identifies a single form of life as best for all human beings. But, in fact, the ideal leaves many issues open. Let us stipulate that the best life for a human being is the life that maximizes the development of his nature. Then, it still could be true that for different human beings different activities and pursuits would best promote their good. This could be true, since different people may be able to best develop different aspects of human nature. Given their temperament and talents, some do well to concentrate on artistic pursuits, while others do well to focus on theoretical studies or athletic achievements. Moreover, even those who do well to focus on the same type of perfection, may find that some activities and goals serve this end better for them than for others. And, finally, it may not be true, as the above supposition holds, that the best life for a human being is one that maximizes the development of his nature. For the most perfect life for a human being may require him to sacrifice his own self-development to some extent for the self-development of others. Different tradeoffs between one's own perfection and the perfection of others may be rationally eligible; and this fact, if it is indeed a fact, also would contribute to the plurality and variety of modes of life consistent with the perfectionist ideal.

The compatibility of objective goods perfectionism and value pluralism also can be established. One need only assume that some perfectionist goods are either roughly equal or incommensurable in value. Friendship and understanding, for example, may both be perfectionist goods, but they may not be comparable in a way that allows us to rank lives that realize these goods to different degrees. More generally, perfectionist goods may be combinable in different proportions, yielding a range of different types of life that are valuable and worthy of pursuit. The adjective "perfect" when applied to a human life suggests one that is maximally good or excellent, but if goods conflict and are incomparable, then a plurality of different types of life may have a title to that designation.

Nothing said here, of course, rules out the possibility that there really is only one way of life that is maximally best for human beings. The point pressed here is merely that perfectionism is consistent with value pluralism. Put otherwise, if objective values are plural and incomparable, as many recent writers maintain, then this fact about the nature of value does not undercut the plausibility of perfectionism, of either the human nature or objective goods variety. To be sure, a plausible perfectionism will recognize that pluralism has its limits. Some ways of life are not valuable for human beings. Perfectionist value theory is action guiding in the sense that it seeks to identify goods and activities that human beings ought to pursue, even if they do not desire or find pleasure in them.

Section two; Perfectionist Ethics

Brain Storming: Dear learner! What is perfectionist ethics? --- --- ---

Perfectionism as a moral theory directs human beings to protect and promote objectively good human lives. As such, it can take an egoistic or non-egoistic form. Egoistic forms of perfectionism are well represented in the history of moral philosophy. These theories direct each

human being to perfect himself as much as possible, or at least to some threshold level. Egoistic forms of perfectionism need not be narrowly self-interested. A number of perfectionist writers have held that the good of others is a derivative part of one's own good. On such views, there is no conflict between one's own perfection and the perfection of others. Non-egoistic forms of perfectionism, by contrast, allow for such conflicts. They hold that each human being has a non-derivative duty to perfect others as well as a duty to perfect him. Such views, at least in principle, can direct human beings to sacrifice their own perfection for the sake of others.

Whether it takes an egoistic or non-egoistic form, perfectionism is best understood as a moral theory that directs human beings to care about the perfection of others as well as themselves. This claim is consistent with recognizing, what is evidently true, that there are serious limits to our ability to bring about the perfection of others. These limits explain why some philosophers, most notably Kant, have held that we cannot have a duty to promote the perfection of others. Many perfectionist goods require self-direction for their realization. We cannot compel another to develop her capacities, at least not all of them. Nor can we compel another to participate in valuable social relationships. This valid point, however, should not be overstated. We can work to ensure that others live under conditions that are conducive to their own self-development or their own realization of perfectionist goods. Indirect promotion may be possible where direct promotion is not. The fact that human beings cannot directly bring about the perfection of others is nonetheless important. It may explain why, in practice if not in principle, a plausible perfectionism would direct each human being to be more concerned with her own perfection than with the perfection of others.

2.2.1 Consequentialism and Deontology

The best life for a human being might be one that simultaneously best perfects himself and best perfects others. But this possibility is unlikely. Even if the conflict between one's own good and the good of others is not as sharp as it is often taken to be, there will, in all likelihood, be circumstances in which human beings must choose between their own perfection and the perfection of others.

How then should this conflict be adjudicated within perfectionist ethics? Egoistic forms of perfectionism have a ready answer to this question, but non-egoistic forms must find a way to balance the conflicting demands. One natural response to this problem is straightforwardly consequentialist. Perfectionism, it can be said, requires that we pursue the greatest development of all human beings at all times. So understood, perfectionism gives each human being a shared comprehensive goal. This makes perfectionism a very demanding moral theory. It is demanding in two distinct respects. First, it demands, other things being the same, that we weigh the perfection of others equally with our own perfection. Second, it demands that, to the extent left open by the first demand, that we maximize our own perfection.

Perhaps this kind of consequentialist perfectionism asks too much of us. We can imagine forms of perfectionism that relax both of its demands.

Consider, for example, a perfectionist moral theory that includes an agent-centered prerogative. Such a theory could allow that persons can favor their own perfection, to some reasonable degree, over the perfection of others and that persons need only pursue their own perfection up to some threshold level. This relaxed perfectionism would depart from the main historical defenses of perfectionism (which emphasize maximization) and it would not well fit the term perfectionism (which connotes maximization). But the important question is whether a view of this type is nonetheless plausible.

The answer depends, in part, on whether human nature or objective goods perfectionism is the favored view. If perfection is understood in terms of the development of human nature, then a view that departs from the maximizing injunction will look less promising. A person who has extraordinary potential for excellence, but who only achieves a threshold level of development does not plausibly achieve perfection. Since she was capable of so much more, we should not be content with her modest achievements. Intuitively, we should judge that she has not fully lived up to the requirements of perfectionist morality. Moreover, on this version of perfectionism, an agent's primary moral goal is to develop human nature. But if the development of human nature is the goal, then it is a bit of a mystery why each human being's own development should have special value for himself.

Matters look different if perfection is understood in terms of the realization of objective goods. For, on this version of perfectionism, it is plausible to hold that each human being has an agent-relative interest in leading a successful life, where success is understood in terms of the pursuit of valuable goals and the realization of perfectionist goods. A successful life, so understood, plausibly requires only a threshold realization of certain perfectionist goods, such as friendship, knowledge, and aesthetic experience. For these reasons, a non-maximizing injunction fits better with objective goods perfectionism than with human nature perfectionism.

Whatever its merits, the introduction of an agent-centered prerogative into perfectionist morality would exacerbate a problem with standard consequentialist versions of perfectionism. It would appear to give human beings a moral liberty to harm others if doing so would promote their own perfection. True, the problem is present even without the introduction of the agent-centered prerogative. Pure consequentialist perfectionism in principle could enjoin the sacrifice of those who had little potential for perfectionist achievement for those who had great potential. But such a view would at least have the virtue that those who were sacrificed would be contributing to the goal of maximum perfectionist achievement — a goal they should share if they are consequentialist perfectionists. The same is not guaranteed to hold true if the prerogative is introduced.

Since the worry here is one that confronts consequentialist accounts of morality in general, it might be thought that perfectionist morality should take a deontological structure instead. Deontological perfectionism would hold that the goal of promoting human perfection is constrained by the requirement to respect the perfection, or the capacity to achieve it, in each human being. The structure of such a view can be glimpsed by considering the objective goods version of perfectionism. For it is plausible that the achievement of certain objective goods, such as friendship or community with others, requires that we treat others with respect. Requirements of respect, it can be argued, are constitutively necessary conditions for the realization of many perfectionist goods.

This is not the place to explore the structure of such a view in detail. Nor is it the place to discuss the extent to which it represents a genuine departure from consequentialism. Instead, another possible response to the worry can be mentioned. As Rawls pointed out, perfectionism is often

taken to be merely one element of a general moral theory. The moral duty to maximize human perfection must be balanced against other moral principles. Deontological constraints and agent-centered prerogatives might limit the duty to promote human perfection, but they might do so because they are derived from independent moral principles. On this mixed view, in which perfectionism is understood as merely one element of a general moral theory, it is possible to recommend perfectionism as an agent-neutral maximizing doctrine and avoid the unwanted implications that morality is excessively demanding and that it endorses the sacrifice of some for the sake of greater overall human perfection.

2.2.2 Elitism and Inequality

Perfectionist ethics has long been associated with elitist doctrines. Whether it takes a consequentialist or deontological structure, perfectionism is compatible with assigning different weights to the perfection of different human beings. And a number of important perfectionist writers have maintained that the perfection that matters the most is the perfection of those who are capable of achieving the most. This "superman" version of perfectionism, a view famously associated with Nietzsche, gives absolute weight to the excellence achievable by certain great men, such as Socrates or Goethe and zero weight to the rest of humanity. The superman version of perfectionism is an extreme view. It holds that some human lives count for much and many human lives count for nothing. This view should not be confused with a different and less extreme view, one that can be termed the *prioritarian version* of perfectionism. This view holds that we should value the perfection of each and every human being, but in aggregating human perfection we should count the greater perfections more, by some multiplier, than the lesser perfections. The prioritarian version of perfectionism is not elitist, since it does not imply that the lives of those who can achieve more count for more. It holds only that greater perfections — a greater development of human nature or a greater realization of objective goods — count for more in summing up overall human perfection. More precisely, it directs human beings to pursue the greatest overall human perfection, where this is determined by a weighted summing of the perfection of all human beings.

Compared with the superman version, the prioritarian version of perfectionism is vastly more plausible. It captures the thought that greater achievements are more valuable than lesser

achievements without denying value to the latter. It recognizes the claims of greatness without excluding some persons from moral concern. Still, while not elitist, prioritarian perfectionism will likely have inegalitarian implications for the distribution of resources. Thomas Nagel explains:

A society should try to foster the creation and preservation of what is best, or as good as it possibly can be, and this is just as important as the widespread dissemination of what is merely good enough. Such an aim can be pursued only by recognizing and exploiting the natural inequalities between persons, encouraging specialization and distinction of levels in education, and accepting the variation in accomplishment which results.

One might object to these claims by holding that a sufficient amount of goods that are "merely good enough" should be able to outweigh a small number of truly excellent goods. But if the excellent goods are weighted more heavily, as recommended by the prioritarian version of perfectionism, then in practice this possibility may be unlikely. (Much depends here on the strength of the prioritarian multiplier.) Nagel appears to accept the prioritarian view, for he concludes that "no egalitarianism can be right which would permit haute cuisine, haute couture, and exquisite houses to disappear just because not everyone can have them."

The prioritarian version of perfectionism, then, may license significant inequality in the distribution of resources. The inegalitarian character of the view has some attractive consequences, however. When applied to population ethics, it has the potential to avoid Parfit's "Repugnant Conclusion". As Parfit explains:

We might claim that, even if some change brings a great net benefit to those who are affected, it is a change for the worse if it involves the loss of one of the best things in life.

The focus here, as with Nagel's remarks, is on perfectionist goods rather than on the welfare of human beings. To avoid the repugnant conclusion, it must be claimed that these goods — "the kinds of experience and activity which do most to make life most worth living" — take *absolute* priority over less valuable experiences and activities.

This claim, as Parfit allows, is vulnerable to counterexample. It is very hard to believe that the best artistic experience is infinitely better than a slightly less good, but still excellent, artistic experience. Viewing a Picasso might be better than viewing a Braque, but not infinitely better. It is more plausible, then, to construe the prioritarian version of perfectionism as just assigning some finite positive multiplier to the greater perfections. But while such a view would not be vulnerable to the kind of counterexample just adduced, it would disable it from answering the Repugnant Conclusion.

The discussion so far has emphasized the perfectionist concern with creating and preserving the best human experiences and activities. This concern inclines perfectionism toward inequality. But it is possible to defend an egalitarian version of the view; and the history of perfectionist ethics contains a number of such examples. Here four possibilities for developing an egalitarian version of perfectionism briefly can be mentioned.

(1) One can hold, as Spinoza did, that the most important perfectionist goods, such as understanding, are non-competitive. Their realization by one human being does not impede, and may advance, their realization in others. Maximum perfection, so understood, is compatible with equality of material condition (Spinoza *Ethics*).

(2) One can hold, as some writers like T. H. Green did, that inequality in the distribution of resources impedes the perfection of all, the rich as well as the poor. Perfectionist values, on this view, can be fully realized only in a society in which each member is roughly equal in power and status.

(3) One can hold that the perfection of each human being matters equally and that the distribution of resources most likely to promote the greatest overall human perfection is not one that contains great inequalities. Such a view would reject the prioritarian weighting function discussed above, holding instead that the perfection attained by each human being should count equally.

(4) One can hold that perfectionism inclines toward inequality, but that other non-perfectionist principles impose an egalitarian constraint on the pursuit of perfectionist values.

These possibilities show that there is no tight connection between perfectionism and inequality. The degree to which perfectionism licenses inequality will depend on answers to a number of difficult questions, e.g. which version of perfectionism is best?, how great are the natural differences between human beings?, to what extent are perfectionist goods competitive?, and what, if any, non-perfectionist moral principles limit the pursuit of perfectionist values? The answers to these questions are very much in dispute within perfectionist morality. Without firm answers to them, no one should reject perfectionist ethics out of hand because of a commitment to egalitarian values.

2.2.3 Self-Regarding Duties

Human beings should care about their own perfection as well as the perfection of others. As we have seen, the standard of perfection is objective in the sense that it guides, or should guide, human action, even if it what it recommends is not desired. These claims explain why perfectionism assigns an important place to self-regarding duties. A self-regarding duty to develop one's talents, if there is such a duty, is categorical. One has the duty whether or not one has a desire to fulfill it.

The possibility of self-regarding duties of this kind is sometimes rejected on conceptual grounds. Moral duties concern one's treatment of others, and so a moral duty to oneself is a confused notion. But this worry should not detain us for long. The key point is that we can have categorical reasons to develop our nature or to engage in valuable, as opposed to worthless, activities. It is a secondary issue whether we should classify a self-regarding duty as a moral duty or as (merely) a categorical non-moral duty. But while the worry should not detain us, it does point to an attractive feature of perfectionist ethics. Much contemporary moral theory ignores duties to oneself, whether understood as moral duties or not, and focuses exclusively on our duties toward others. Perfectionist ethics is an important corrective to this tendency. By expanding the domain of ethical concern, it has the potential to enrich contemporary moral philosophy.

Different perfectionist theories offer different accounts of the content of self-regarding duties. Generally speaking, it is useful to distinguish negative from positive duties to oneself. Negative

duties are duties to refrain from damaging or destroying one's capacity to lead a good life. For example, barring exceptional circumstances, one has duties to refrain from suicide and self-mutilation. Positive duties, by contrast, are duties to exercise one's capacity to develop one's nature and/or to realize perfectionist goods. For example, one has a duty to develop one's talents and not to devote one's life entirely to idleness and pleasure.

Specific negative and positive self-regarding duties are derived from the more comprehensive duty to oneself to do what one can to lead a good life. It is probably true, as Aristotle pointed out, that the success of one's life depends on factors outside of one's control. If so, then no one can have a duty to have a good life. Still, excluding the effects of luck, we can say that each human being will have a more or less successful life depending on the decisions they make and the options they pursue. And we can add that each human being has a comprehensive duty to lead a successful life, to the extent that it is within his or her power to do so.

Stated at this level of abstraction, the perfectionist case for affirming self-regarding duties does not look particularly controversial. Resistance to it will likely derive from one of two quarters. Some will reject the very possibility of categorical duties, whether to oneself or to others. Others will accept the possibility of categorical duties, but insist that they are limited to the treatment of others. This latter view, on its face, looks unstable. It is likely motivated by the worry that if self-regarding duties are acknowledged, then the door is open for paternalistic interference. To address this concern, we must turn now from perfectionist ethics to perfectionist politics.

Section three; virtues in the moral philosophy of the modern world

Brain Storming: Dear learner! What are the virtues in the moral philosophy of the modern world?---

Virtue ethics is a broad term for theories that emphasize the role of character and virtue in moral philosophy rather than either doing one's duty or acting in order to bring about good consequences. A virtue ethicist is likely to give you this kind of moral advice: "Act as a virtuous person would act in your situation." Most virtue ethics theories take their inspiration from

Aristotle who declared that a virtuous person is someone who has ideal character traits. These traits derive from natural internal tendencies, but need to be nurtured; however, once established, they will become stable. For example, a virtuous person is someone who is kind across many situations over a lifetime because that is her character and not because she wants to maximize utility or gain favors or simply do her duty. Unlike deontological and consequentialist theories, theories of virtue ethics do not aim primarily to identify universal principles that can be applied in any moral situation. And virtue ethics theories deal with wider questions—"How should I live?" and "What is the good life?" and "What are proper family and social values?"

Since its revival in the twentieth century, virtue ethics has been developed in three main directions: Eudaimonism, agent-based theories, and the ethics of care. Eudaimonism bases virtues in human flourishing, where flourishing is equated with performing one's distinctive function well. In the case of humans, Aristotle argued that our distinctive function is reasoning, and so the life "worth living" is one which we reason well. An agent-based theory emphasizes that virtues are determined by common-sense intuitions that we as observers judge to be admirable traits in other people. The third branch of virtue ethics, the ethics of care, was proposed predominately by feminist thinkers. It challenges the idea that ethics should focus solely on justice and autonomy; it argues that more feminine traits, such as caring and nurturing, should also be considered.

Here are some common objections to virtue ethics. Its theories provide a self-centered conception of ethics because human flourishing is seen as an end in itself and does not sufficiently consider the extent to which our actions affect other people. Virtue ethics also does not provide guidance on how we should act, as there are no clear principles for guiding action other than "act as a virtuous person would act given the situation." Lastly, the ability to cultivate the right virtues will be affected by a number of different factors beyond a person's control due to education, society, friends and family. If moral character is so reliant on luck, what role does this leave for appropriate praise and blame of the person?

Changing Modern Moral Philosophy

a.Anscombe

In 1958 Elisabeth Anscombe published a paper titled "Modern Moral Philosophy" that changed the way we think about normative theories. She criticized modern moral philosophy's pre-occupation with a law conception of ethics. A law conception of ethics deals exclusively with obligation and duty. Among the theories she criticized for their reliance on universally applicable principles were J. S. Mill's utilitarianism and Kant's deontology. These theories rely on rules of morality that were claimed to be applicable to any moral situation (that is, Mill's Greatest Happiness Principle and Kant's Categorical Imperative). This approach to ethics relies on universal principles and results in a rigid moral code. Further, these rigid rules are based on a notion of obligation that is meaningless in modern, secular society because they make no sense without assuming the existence of a lawgiver—an assumption we no longer make.

In its place, Anscombe called for a return to a different way of doing philosophy. Taking her inspiration from Aristotle, she called for a return to concepts such as character, virtue and flourishing. She also emphasized the importance of the emotions and understanding moral psychology. With the exception of this emphasis on moral psychology, Anscombe's recommendations that we place virtue more centrally in our understanding of morality were taken up by a number of philosophers. The resulting body of theories and ideas has come to be known as virtue ethics.

Anscombe's critical and confrontational approach set the scene for how virtue ethics was to develop in its first few years. The philosophers who took up Anscombe's call for a return to virtue saw their task as being to define virtue ethics in terms of what it is not—that is, how it differs from and avoids the mistakes made by the other normative theories. Before we go on to consider this in detail, we need to take a brief look at two other philosophers, Bernard Williams and Alasdair MacIntyre, whose call for theories of virtue was also instrumental in changing our understanding of moral philosophy.

b. Williams

Bernard Williams' philosophical work has always been characterized by its ability to draw our attention to a previously unnoticed but now impressively fruitful area for philosophical discussion. Williams criticized how moral philosophy had developed. He drew a distinction between morality and ethics. *Morality* is characterized mainly by the work of Kant and notions such as duty and obligation. Crucially associated with the notion of obligation is the notion of blame. Blame is appropriate because we are obliged to behave in a certain way and if we are capable of conforming our conduct and fail to, we have violated our duty.

Williams was also concerned that such a conception for morality rejects the possibility of luck. If morality is about what we are obliged to do, then there is no room for what is outside of our control. But sometimes attainment of the good life is dependant on things outside of our control.

In response, Williams takes a wider concept, ethics, and rejects the narrow and restricting concept of morality. *Ethics* encompasses many emotions that are rejected by morality as irrelevant. Ethical concerns are wider, encompassing friends, family and society and make room for ideals such as social justice. This view of ethics is compatible with the Ancient Greek interpretation of the good life as found in Aristotle and Plato.

C. MacIntyre

Finally, the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre acted as a stimulus for the increased interest in virtue. MacIntyre's project is as deeply critical of many of the same notions, like ought, as Anscombe and Williams. However, he also attempts to give an account of virtue. MacIntyre looks at a large number of historical accounts of virtue that differ in their lists of the virtues and have incompatible theories of the virtues. He concludes that these differences are attributable to different practices that generate different conceptions of the virtues. Each account of virtue requires a prior account of social and moral features in order to be understood. Thus, in order to understand Homeric virtue you need to look its social role in Greek society. Virtues, then, are exercised within practices that are coherent, social forms of activity and seek to realize goods

internal to the activity. The virtues enable us to achieve these goods. There is an end (or *telos*) that transcends all particular practices and it constitutes the good of a whole human life. That end is the virtue of integrity or constancy.

These three writers have all, in their own way, argued for a radical change in the way we think about morality. Whether they call for a change of emphasis from obligation, a return to a broad understanding of ethics, or a unifying tradition of practices that generate virtues, their dissatisfaction with the state of modern moral philosophy lay the foundation for change.

Modern virtue ethics takes its inspiration from the Aristotelian understanding of character and virtue. Aristotelian character is, importantly, about a state of being. It's about having the appropriate inner states. For example, the virtue of kindness involves the right sort of emotions and inner states with respect to our feelings towards others. Character is also about doing. Aristotelian theory is a theory of action, since having the virtuous inner dispositions will also involve being moved to act in accordance with them. Realizing that kindness is the appropriate response to a situation and feeling appropriately kindly disposed will also lead to a corresponding attempt to act kindly.

Another distinguishing feature of virtue ethics is that character traits are stable, fixed, and reliable dispositions. If an agent possesses the character trait of kindness, we would expect him or her to act kindly in all sorts of situations, towards all kinds of people, and over a long period of time, even when it is difficult to do so. A person with a certain character can be relied upon to act consistently over a time.

It is important to recognize that moral character develops over a long period of time. People are born with all sorts of natural tendencies. Some of these natural tendencies will be positive, such as a placid and friendly nature, and some will be negative, such as an irascible and jealous nature. These natural tendencies can be encouraged and developed or discouraged and thwarted by the influences one is exposed to when growing up. There are a number of factors that may affect one's character development, such as one's parents, teachers, peer group, role-models, the degree of encouragement and attention one receives, and exposure to different situations. Our

natural tendencies, the raw material we are born with, are shaped and developed through a long and gradual process of education and habituation.

Moral education and development is a major part of virtue ethics. Moral development, at least in its early stages, relies on the availability of good role models. The virtuous agent acts as a role model and the student of virtue emulates his or her example. Initially this is a process of habituating oneself in right action. Aristotle advises us to perform just acts because this way we become just. The student of virtue must develop the right habits, so that he tends to perform virtuous acts. Virtue is not itself a habit. Habituation is merely an aid to the development of virtue, but true virtue requires choice, understanding, and knowledge. The virtuous agent doesn't act justly merely out of an unreflective response, but has come to recognize the value of virtue and why it is the appropriate response. Virtue is chosen knowingly for its own sake.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSEQUENTIALIST (TELEOLOGICAL) ETHICS

Introduction

Consequentialism is the view that morality is *all* about producing the right kinds of overall consequences. Here the phrase "overall consequences" of an action means everything the action brings about, including the action itself. In this unit we will try to consider the nature of consequentialist moral philosophy.

Objectives

-introducing the nature of consequentialist moral philosophy

-understanding the basic features of consequentialist moral philosophy

-understanding egoistic and social hedonism

Section one; Consequentialism as a theory

Brain Storming: Dear learner! As ethical theory, how consequentialism judges the rightness and wrongness of actions? --

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Consequentialism is the view that morality is *all* about producing the right kinds of overall consequences. Here the phrase "overall consequences" of an action means everything the action brings about, including the action itself. For example, if you think that the whole point of morality is (a) to spread happiness and relieve suffering, or (b) to create as much freedom as possible in the world, or (c) to promote the survival of our species, then you accept consequentialism. Although those three views disagree about which kinds of consequences matter, they agree that consequences are all that matters. So, they agree that consequentialism is true. The utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham is a well-known example of consequentialism. By contrast, the deontological theories of John Locke and Immanuel Kant are non-consequentialist.

Consequentialism is controversial. Various non consequentialist views are that morality is all about doing one's duty, respecting rights, obeying nature, obeying God, obeying one's own heart, actualizing one's own potential, being reasonable, respecting all people, or not interfering with others—no matter the consequences.

Section two; Hedonism

Brain Storming: Dear learner! As ethical theory, how hedonism judges the rightness and wrongness of actions in terms the pleasure they produce? --

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The term "hedonism," from the Greek word ἡδονή (*hēdonē)* for pleasure, refers to several related theories about what is good for us, how we should behave, and what motivates us to behave in the way that we do. All hedonistic theories identify pleasure and pain as the only important elements of whatever phenomena they are designed to describe. If hedonistic theories identified pleasure and pain as merely two important elements, instead of the *only* important elements of what they are describing, then they would not be nearly as unpopular as they all are. However,

the claim that pleasure and pain are the *only* things of ultimate importance is what makes hedonism distinctive and philosophically interesting.

Philosophical hedonists tend to focus on hedonistic theories of value, and especially of well-being (the good life for the one living it). As a theory of value, hedonism states that all and only pleasure is intrinsically valuable and all and only pain is intrinsically not valuable. Hedonists usually define pleasure and pain broadly, such that both physical and mental phenomena are included. Thus, a gentle massage and recalling a fond memory are both considered to cause pleasure and stubbing a toe and hearing about the death of a loved one are both considered to cause pain. With *pleasure* and *pain* so defined, hedonism as a theory about what is valuable for us is intuitively appealing. Indeed, its appeal is evidenced by the fact that nearly all historical and contemporary treatments of well-being allocate at least some space for discussion of hedonism. Unfortunately for hedonism, the discussions rarely endorse it and some even deplore its focus on pleasure.

Normative Hedonism

Value Hedonism, occasionally with assistance from Motivational Hedonism, has been used to argue for specific theories of right action (theories that explain which actions are morally permissible or impermissible and why). The theory that happiness should be pursued (that pleasure should be pursued and pain should be avoided) is referred to as Normative Hedonism and sometimes Ethical Hedonism. There are two major types of Normative Hedonism, Hedonistic Egoism and Hedonistic Utilitarianism. Both types commonly use happiness (defined as pleasure minus pain) as the sole criterion for determining the moral rightness or wrongness of an action. Important variations within each of these two main types specify either the actual resulting happiness (after the act) or the predicted resulting happiness (before the act) as the moral criterion. Although both major types of Normative Hedonism have been accused of being repugnant, Hedonistic Egoism is considered the most offensive.

Hedonistic Egoism

Hedonistic Egoism is a hedonistic version of egoism, the theory that we should, morally speaking, do whatever is most in our own interests. Hedonistic Egoism is the theory that we

ought, morally speaking, to do whatever makes us happiest – that is whatever provides us with the most net pleasure after pain is subtracted. The most repugnant feature of this theory is that one never has to ascribe any value whatsoever to the consequences for anyone other than oneself. For example, a Hedonistic Egoist who did not feel saddened by theft would be morally required to steal, even from needy orphans (if he thought he could get away with it). Would-be defenders of Hedonistic Egoism often point out that performing acts of theft, murder, treachery and the like would not make them happier overall because of the guilt, the fear of being caught, and the chance of being caught and punished. The would-be defenders tend to surrender, however, when it is pointed out that a Hedonistic Egoist is morally obliged by their own theory to pursue an unusual kind of practical education; a brief and possibly painful training period that reduces their moral emotions of sympathy and guilt. Such an education might be achieved by desensitizing over-exposure to, and performance of, torture on innocents. If Hedonistic Egoists underwent such an education, their reduced capacity for sympathy and guilt would allow them to take advantage of any opportunities to perform pleasurable, but normally-guilt-inducing, actions, such as stealing from the poor.

Hedonistic Egoism is very unpopular amongst philosophers, not just for this reason, but also because it suffers from all of the objections that apply to Prudential Hedonism.

Hedonistic Utilitarianism

Hedonistic Utilitarianism is the theory that the right action is the one that produces (or is most likely to produce) the greatest net happiness for all concerned. Hedonistic Utilitarianism is often considered fairer than Hedonistic Egoism because the happiness of everyone involved (everyone who is affected or likely to be affected) is taken into account and given equal weight. Hedonistic Utilitarians, then, tend to advocate not stealing from needy orphans because to do so would usually leave the orphan far less happy and the (probably better-off) thief only slightly happier (assuming he felt no guilt). Despite treating all individuals equally, Hedonistic Utilitarianism is still seen as objectionable by some because it assigns no intrinsic moral value to justice, friendship, truth, or any of the many other goods that are thought by some to be irreducibly valuable. For example, a Hedonistic Utilitarian would be morally obliged to publicly execute an innocent friend of theirs if doing so was the only way to promote the greatest happiness overall.

Although unlikely, such a situation might arise if a child was murdered in a small town and the lack of suspects was causing large-scale inter-ethnic violence. Some philosophers argue that executing an innocent friend is immoral precisely because it ignores the intrinsic values of justice, friendship, and possibly truth.

Hedonistic Utilitarianism is rarely endorsed by philosophers, but mainly because of its reliance on Prudential Hedonism as opposed to its utilitarian element. Non-hedonistic versions of utilitarianism are about as popular as the other leading theories of right action, especially when it is the actions of institutions that are being considered.

Section three; Ethical and psychology egoism

Brain Storming: Dear learner! As ethical theory, what do you think are the justification of egoism and altruism in deciding actions as moral and immoral? -------------------------------------
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3.3.1 Egoism

In philosophy, egoism is the theory that one's self is, or should be, the motivation and the goal of one's own action. Egoism has two variants, descriptive or normative. The descriptive (or positive) variant conceives egoism as a *factual* description of human affairs. That is, people are motivated by their own interests and desires, and they cannot be described otherwise. The normative variant proposes that people should be so motivated, regardless of what presently motivates their behavior. Altruism is the opposite of egoism. The term "egoism" derives from "ego," the Latin term for "I" in English. Egoism should be distinguished from *egotism*, which means a psychological overvaluation of one's own importance, or of one's own activities.

Descriptive and Psychological Egoism

The descriptive egoist's theory is called "psychological egoism." Psychological egoism describes human nature as being wholly self-centered and self-motivated. Examples of this explanation of

human nature predate the formation of the theory, and, are found in writings such as that of British Victorian historian, Macaulay, and, in that of British Reformation political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. To the question, "What proposition is there respecting human nature which is absolutely and universally true?" Macaulay, replies, "We know of only one . . . that men always act from self-interest." In *Leviathan,* Hobbes maintains that, "No man giveth but with intention of good to himself; because gift is voluntary; and of all voluntary acts the object to every man is his own pleasure." In its strong form, psychological egoism asserts that people *always* act in their own interests, and, cannot but act in their own interests, even though they may disguise their motivation with references to helping others or doing their duty.

Opponents claim that psychological egoism renders ethics useless. However, this accusation assumes that ethical behavior is necessarily other-regarding, which opponents would first have to establish. Opponents may also exploit counterfactual evidence to criticize psychological egoism— surely, they claim, there is a host of evidence supporting altruistic or duty bound actions that cannot be said to engage the self-interest of the agent. However, what qualifies to be counted as apparent counterfactual evidence by opponents becomes an intricate and debatable issue. This is because, in response to their opponents, psychological egoists may attempt to shift the question away from outward appearances to ultimate motives of acting benevolently towards others; for example, they may claim that seemingly altruistic behavior (giving a stranger some money) necessarily does have a self-interested component. For example, if the individual were not to offer aid to a stranger, he or she may feel guilty or may look bad in front of a peer group.

On this point, psychological egoism's validity turns on examining and analyzing moral motivation. But since motivation is inherently private and inaccessible to others (an agent could be lying to herself or to others about the original motive), the theory shifts from a theoretical description of human nature–one that can be put to observational testing–to an assumption about the inner workings of human nature: psychological egoism moves beyond the possibility of empirical verification and the possibility of empirical negation (since motives are private), and therefore it becomes what is termed a "closed theory."

A closed theory is a theory that rejects competing theories on its own terms and is non-verifiable and non-falsifiable. If psychological egoism is reduced to an assumption concerning human

nature and its hidden motives, then it follows that it is just as valid to hold a competing theory of human motivation such as psychological altruism.

Psychological altruism holds that all human action is necessarily other-centered, and other-motivated. One's becoming a hermit (an apparently selfish act) can be reinterpreted through psychological altruism as an act of pure noble selflessness: a hermit is not selfishly hiding herself away, rather, what she is doing is not inflicting her potentially ungraceful actions or displeasing looks upon others. A parallel analysis of psychological altruism thus results in opposing conclusions to psychological egoism. However, psychological altruism is arguably just as closed as psychological egoism: with it one assumes that an agent's inherently private and consequently unverifiable motives are altruistic. If both theories can be validly maintained, and if the choice between them becomes the flip of a coin, then their soundness must be questioned.

A weak version of psychological egoism accepts the possibility of altruistic or benevolent behavior, but maintains that, whenever a choice is made by an agent to act, the action is by definition one that the *agent* wants to do at that point. The action is self-serving, and is therefore sufficiently explained by the theory of psychological egoism. Let one assume that person A wants to help the poor; therefore, A is acting egoistically by actually wanting to help; again, if A ran into a burning building to save a kitten, it must be the case that A wanted or desired to save the kitten. However, defining all motivations as what an agent desires to do remain problematic: logically, the theory becomes tautologies and therefore unable to provide a useful, descriptive meaning of motivation because one is essentially making an arguably philosophically uninteresting claim that an agent is motivated to do what she is motivated to do. Besides which, if helping others is what A desires to do, then to what extent can A be continued to be called an egoist? A acts because that is what A does, and consideration of the ethical "ought" becomes immediately redundant. Consequently, opponents argue that psychological egoism is philosophically inadequate because it sidesteps the great nuances of motive. For example, one can argue that the psychological egoist's notion of motive sidesteps the clashes that her theory has with the notion of duty, and, related social virtues such as honor, respect, and reputation, which fill the tomes of history and literature.

David Hume, in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Appendix II—Of Self Love), offers six rebuttals of what he calls the "selfish hypothesis," an arguably archaic relative of psychological egoism. First, Hume argues that self-interest opposes moral sentiments that may engage one in concern for others, and, may motivate one's actions for others. These moral sentiments include love, friendship, compassion, and gratitude. Second, psychological egoism attempts to reduce human motivation to a single cause, which is a 'fruitless' task—the "love of *simplicity*…has been the source of much false reasoning in philosophy." Third, it is evident that animals act benevolently towards one another, and, if it is admitted that animals can act altruistically, then how can it be denied in humans? Fourth, the concepts we use to describe benevolent behavior cannot be meaningless; sometimes an agent obviously does not have a personal interest in the fortune of another, yet will wish her well. Any attempt to create an imaginary vested interest, as the psychological egoist will attempt, proves futile. Fifth, Hume asserts that we have prior motivations to self-interest; we may have, for example, a predisposition towards vanity, fame, or vengeance that transcends any benefit to the agent. Finally, Hume claims that even if the selfish hypothesis were true, there are a sufficient number of dispositions to generate a wide possibility of moral actions, allowing one person to be called vicious and another humane; and he claims that the latter is to be preferred over the former.

Normative Egoism

The second variant of egoism is normative in that it stipulates the agent *ought* to promote the self above other values. Herbert Spencer said, "Ethics has to recognize the truth, recognized in unethical thought that egoism comes before altruism. The acts required for continued self-preservation, including the enjoyments of benefits achieved by such arts, are the first requisites to universal welfare. Unless each duly cares for himself, his care for all others is ended in death, and if each thus dies there remain no others to be cared for." He was echoing a long history of the importance of self-regarding behavior that can be traced back to Aristotle's theory of friendship in the *Nichomachaean Ethics.* In his theory, Aristotle argues that a man must befriend himself before he can befriend others. The general theory of normative egoism does not attempt to describe human nature directly, but asserts how people ought to behave. It comes in two general forms: rational egoism and ethical egoism.

Ethical Egoism

Ethical egoism is the normative theory that the promotion of one's own good is in accordance with morality. In the strong version, it is held that it is always moral to promote one's own good, and it is never moral not to promote it. In the weak version, it is said that although it is always moral to promote one's own good, it is not necessarily never moral to not. That is, there may be conditions in which the avoidance of personal interest may be a moral action.

In an imaginary construction of a world inhabited by a single being, it is possible that the pursuit of morality is the same as the pursuit of self-interest in that what is good for the agent is the same as what is in the agent's interests. Arguably, there could never arise an occasion when the agent ought not to pursue self-interest in favor of another morality, unless he produces an alternative ethical system in which he ought to renounce his values in favor of an imaginary self, or, other entity such as the universe, or the agent's God. Opponents of ethical egoism may claim, however, that although it is possible for this Robinson Crusoe type creature to lament previous choices as not conducive to self-interest (enjoying the pleasures of swimming all day, and not spending necessary time producing food), the mistake is not a moral mistake but a mistake of identifying self-interest. Presumably this lonely creature will begin to comprehend the distinctions between short, and long-term interests, and, that short-term pains can be countered by long-term gains.

In addition, opponents argue that even in a world inhabited by a single being, duties would still apply; (Kantian) duties are those actions that reason dictates ought to be pursued regardless of any gain, or loss to self or others. Further, the deontologist asserts the application of yet another moral sphere which ought to be pursued, namely, that of impartial duties. The problem with complicating the creature's world with impartial duties, however, is in defining an impartial task in a purely subjective world. Impartiality, the ethical egoist may retort, could only exist where there are competing selves: otherwise, the attempt to be impartial in judging one's actions is a redundant exercise. However, the Cartesian rationalist could retort that need not be so, that a sentient being should act rationally, and reason will disclose what are the proper actions he should follow.

If we move away from the imaginary construct of a single being's world, ethical egoism comes under fire from more pertinent arguments. In complying with ethical egoism, the individual aims at her own greatest good. Ignoring a definition of the good for the present, it may justly be argued that pursuing one's own greatest good can conflict with another's pursuit, thus creating a situation of conflict. In a typical example, a young person may see his greatest good in murdering his rich uncle to inherit his millions. It is the rich uncle's greatest good to continue enjoying his money, as he sees fit. According to detractors, conflict is an inherent problem of ethical egoism, and the model seemingly does not possess a conflict resolution system. With the additional premise of living in society, ethical egoism has much to respond to: obviously there are situations when two people's greatest goods – the subjectively perceived working of their own self-interest – will conflict, and, a solution to such dilemmas is a necessary element of any theory attempting to provide an ethical system.

The ethical egoist contends that her theory, in fact, has resolutions to the conflict. The first resolution proceeds from a state of nature examination. If, in the wilderness, two people simultaneously come across the only source of drinkable water a potential dilemma arises if both make a simultaneous claim to it. With no recourse to arbitration they must either accept an equal share of the water, which would comply with rational egoism. (In other words, it is in the interest of both to share, for both may enjoy the water and each other's company, and, if the water is inexhaustible, neither can gain from monopolizing the source.) But a critic may maintain that this solution is not necessarily in compliance with ethical egoism. Arguably, the critic continues, the two have no possible resolution, and must, therefore, fight for the water. This is often the line taken against egoism generally: that it results in insoluble conflict that implies, or necessitates a resort to force by one or both of the parties concerned. For the critic, the proffered resolution is, therefore, an acceptance of the ethical theory that "might is right;" that is, the critic maintains that the resolution accepts that the stronger will take possession and thereby gain proprietary rights.

However, ethical egoism does not have to *logically* result in a Darwinian struggle between the strong and the weak in which strength determines moral rectitude to resources or values. Indeed, the "realist" position may strike one as philosophically inadequate as that of psychological egoism, although popularly attractive. For example, instead of succumbing to insoluble conflict,

the two people could cooperate (as rational egoism would require). Through cooperation, both agents would, thereby, mutually benefit from securing and sharing the resource. Against the critic's pessimistic presumption that conflict is insoluble without recourse to victory, the ethical egoist can retort that reasoning people can recognize that their greatest interests are served more through cooperation than conflict. War is inherently costly, and, even the fighting beasts of the wild instinctively recognize its potential costs, and, have evolved conflict-avoiding strategies.

On the other hand, the ethical egoist can argue less benevolently, that in case one man reaches the desired resource first, he would then be able to take rightful control and possession of it – the second person cannot possess any right to it, except insofar as he may trade with its present owner. Of course, charitable considerations may motivate the owner to secure a share for the second comer, and economic considerations may prompt both to trade in those products that each can better produce or acquire: the one may guard the water supply from animals while the other hunts. Such would be a classical liberal reading of this situation, which considers the advance of property rights to be the obvious solution to apparently intractable conflicts over resources.

A second conflict-resolution stems from critics' fears that ethical egoists could logically pursue their interests at the cost of others. Specifically, a critic may contend that personal gain logically cannot be in one's best interest if it entails doing harm to another: doing harm to another would be to accept the principle that doing harm to another is ethical (that is, one would be equating "doing harm" with "one's own best interests"), whereas, reflection shows that principle to be illogical on universalistic criteria. However, an ethical egoist may respond that in the case of the rich uncle and greedy nephew, for example, it is *not* the case that the nephew would be acting ethically by killing his uncle, and that for a critic to contend otherwise is to criticize personal gain from the separate ethical standpoint that condemns murder. In addition, the ethical egoist may respond by saying that these particular fears are based on a confusion resulting from conflating ethics (that is, self-interest) with personal gain; The ethical egoist may contend that if the nephew were to attempt to do harm for personal gain, that he would find that his uncle or others would or may be permitted to do harm in return. The argument that "I have a right to harm those who get in my way" is foiled by the argument that "others have a right to harm me should I get in the way." That is, in the end, the nephew variously could see how harming another for personal gain would not be in his self-interest at all.

The critics' fear is based on a misreading of ethical egoism, and is an attempt to subtly reinsert the "might is right" premise. Consequently, the ethical egoist is unfairly chastised on the basis of a straw-man argument. Ultimately, however, one comes to the conclusion reached in the discussion of the first resolution; that is, one must either accept the principle that might is right (which in most cases would be evidentially contrary to one's best interest), or accept that cooperation with others is a more successful approach to improving one's interests. Though interaction can either be violent or peaceful, an ethical egoist rejects violence as undermining the pursuit of self-interest.

A third conflict-resolution entails the insertion of rights as a standard. This resolution incorporates the conclusions of the first two resolutions by stating that there is an ethical framework that can logically be extrapolated from ethical egoism. However, the logical extrapolation is philosophically difficult (and, hence, intriguing) because ethical egoism is the theory that the promotion of one's own self-interest is in accordance with morality whereas rights incorporate boundaries to behavior that reason or experience has shown to be contrary to the pursuit of self-interest. Although it is facile to argue that the greedy nephew does not have a right to claim his uncle's money because it is not his but his uncle's, and to claim that it is wrong to act aggressively against the person of another because that person has a legitimate right to live in peace (thus providing the substance of conflict-resolution for ethical egoism), the problem of expounding this theory for the ethical egoist lies in the intellectual arguments required to substantiate the claims for the existence of rights and then, once substantiated, connecting them to the pursuit of an individual's greatest good.

3.3.2 Cyrenacism and Epicureanism

The Cyrenaics, founded by Aristippus (c. 435-356 B.C.E.), were also sceptics and Hedonistic Egoists. Although the paucity of original texts makes it difficult to confidently state all of the justifications for the Cyrenaics' positions, their overall stance is clear enough. The Cyrenaics believed pleasure was the ultimate good and everyone should pursue all immediate pleasures for themselves. They considered bodily pleasures better than mental pleasures, presumably because they were more vivid or trustworthy. The Cyrenaics also recommended pursuing immediate pleasures and avoiding immediate pains with scant or no regard for future consequences. Their

reasoning for this is even less clear, but is most plausibly linked to their sceptical views – perhaps that what we can be most sure of in this uncertain existence is our current bodily pleasures.

Epicurus (c. 341-271 B.C.E.), founder of Epicureanism, developed a Normative Hedonism in stark contrast to that of Aristippus. The Epicureanism of Epicurus is also quite the opposite to the common usage of Epicureanism; while we might like to go on a luxurious "Epicurean" holiday packed with fine dining and moderately excessive wining, Epicurus would warn us that we are only setting ourselves up for future pain. For Epicurus, happiness was the complete absence of bodily and especially mental pains, including fear of the Gods and desires for anything other than the bare necessities of life. Even with only the limited excesses of ancient Greece on offer, Epicurus advised his followers to avoid towns, and especially marketplaces, in order to limit the resulting desires for unnecessary things. Once we experience unnecessary pleasures, such as those from sex and rich food, we will then suffer from painful and hard to satisfy desires for more and better of the same. No matter how wealthy we might be, Epicurus would argue, our desires will eventually outstrip our means and interfere with our ability to live tranquil, happy lives. Epicureanism is generally egoistic, in that it encourages everyone to pursue happiness for themselves. However, Epicureans would be unlikely to commit any of the selfish acts we might expect from other egoists because Epicureans train themselves to desire only the very basic, which gives them very little reason to do anything to interfere with the affairs of others.

Cyrenaics

The Cyrenaics are one of the minor Socratic schools. The school was founded by <u>Aristippus,</u> a follower of Socrates. The Cyrenaics are notable mainly for their empiricist and skeptical <u>epistemology</u> and their sensualist hedonism. They believe that we can have certain knowledge of our immediate states of perceptual awareness, *e.g.,* that I am seeing white now. However, we cannot go beyond these experiences to gain any knowledge about the objects themselves that cause these experiences or about the external world in general. Some of their arguments prefigure the positions of <u>later Greek skeptics,</u> and their distinction between the incorrigibility ofimmediate perceptual states versus the uncertainty of belief about the external world became key to the epistemological problems confronting philosophers of the 'modern' period, such as

<u>Descartes</u> and <u>Hume.</u> In ethics, they advocate pleasure as the highest good. Furthermore, bodily pleasures are preferable to mental pleasures, and we should pursue whatever will bring us pleasure now, rather than deferring present pleasures for the sake of achieving better long-term consequences. In all these respects, their iconoclastic and 'crude' hedonism stands well outside the mainstream of Greek ethical thought, and their theories were often contrasted with <u>Epicurus'</u> more moderate hedonism.

History

The Cyrenaic school was founded by <u>Aristippus</u> (c. 435-356 B.C.), a follower of Socrates and a rough contemporary of <u>Plato</u>. The name 'Cyrenaic' comes from Cyrene, Aristippus' home town, a Greek colony in Northern Africa. Aristippus taught philosophy to his daughter Arete, who in turn taught philosophy to her son Aristippus. Aristippus the younger formulated many of the theories of the Cyrenaic school, so that some scholars count him as being more properly the founder of the school, with Aristippus the Elder being merely the school's figurehead. However, disentangling the exact contributions of the two to the Cyrenaic philosophy is difficult. Later Cyrenaics, notably Hegesias, Anniceris, and Theodorus, who were rough contemporaries of Epicurus, modified the Cyrenaic ethical doctrines in different directions, and the school died out shortly afterwards, around the middle of the 3rd century B.C. However, it did have some influence on later philosophers. Epicurus most likely developed some of the distinctive features of his ascetic hedonism in order to avoid what he saw as the unpalatable consequences of Cyrenaic hedonism, and many of the Cyrenaic arguments against the possibility of gaining knowledge of the external world were appropriated by later academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics.

Epistemology

The Cyrenaics are empiricists and skeptics. As empiricists, they believe that all that we have access to as a potential source of knowledge are our own experiences. These experiences are private to each of us. We can have incorrigible knowledge of our experiences (that is, it impossible to be mistaken about what we are currently experiencing), but not of the objects that cause us to have these experiences. This results in their skepticism—their conviction that we cannot have knowledge of the external world.

Experiences and Their Causes

The Cyrenaics affirm that *pathê*–affections, or experiences–are the criterion of knowledge. They distinguish sharply between the experiences that one has–*e.g.,* that I am now seeing gray–and the objects that cause one to have these experiences–*e.g.,* the computer screen.

We can have infallible knowledge of our own experiences, since we have immediate access to them, but we do not have access to objects and qualities in the external world. As the Cyrenaics put it, "The experience which takes place in us reveals to us nothing more than itself." The Cyrenaics reinforce this point by saying that, strictly speaking, we should not say, "I am seeing something yellow," for instance, but "I am being yellowed," or "I am being moved by somethingyellowly," since the latter statements make it clear that we are reporting only our immediate perceptual state. (In this respect, the Cyrenaics bear a striking resemblance to some modern epistemologists, who resort to locutions like "I am being appeared to redly now" as describing accurately what is immediately given to us in experience.)

The Cyrenaics have two main arguments for why it is impossible to make inferences about the qualities of objects in the external world on the basis of our experiences:

The Relativity of Perception

The Cyrenaics note that the same object can cause different perceivers to experience different sensible qualities, depending on the bodily condition of the perceivers. For instance, honey will taste sweet to most people, but bitter to somebody with an illness, and the same wall that appears white to one person will look yellow to somebody with jaundice. And if a person presses his eye, he sees double.

From the fact that the wall appears white to me and yellow to you, the Cyrenaics think we should infer that we cannot know which quality the wall itself has on the basis of our experience of it, presumably because we have no criterion outside of our experiences to use to adjudicate which one (if either) of our experiences is correct. Such arguments from the relativity of perception are common in ancient Greek philosophy, and other thinkers draw different conclusions; for

example, Protagoras says we should conclude that the wall is *both* white (for me) and yellow (for you), while Democritus thinks that we should conclude that it is *neither* white nor yellow.

The Privacy of Experience and the Problem of Other Minds

Even if all people were to agree on the perceptual quality that some object has–for instance, that a wall appears white–the Cyrenaics still think that we could not confidently say that we are having the same experience. This is because each of us has access only to our own experiences, not to those of other people, and so the mere fact that each of us calls the wall 'white' does not show us that we are all having the same experience that I am having when *I* use the word 'white.'

This argument of the Cyrenaics anticipates the problem of other minds—that is, how can I know that other people have a mind like I do, since I only observe their behavior (if even that), not the mental states that might or might not cause that behavior?

The Cyrenaics, Relativism, and Skepticism

The Cyrenaic position bears some striking resemblance to the relativistic epistemology of the sophist Protagoras, as depicted in Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus,* and to the skeptical epistemology of the Pyrrhonists. Because of this, the Cyrenaics' epistemology is sometimes wrongly assimilated that of Protagoras or the Pyrrhonists. However, the Cyrenaics' subjectivism is quite different from those positions, and explaining their differences will help bring out what is distinctive about the Cyrenaics.

The Cyrenaics and Protagoras

The Cyrenaics and Protagoras do have similar starting-points. Protagoras also says that knowledge comes from perception. He uses basically the same arguments from relativity that the Cyrenaics use, and on their basis asserts that each of us infallibly has knowledge of how things appear to us. So, if I feel that the wind is hot, and judge that "the wind is hot," I am judging truly

(for me) how the wind is. And if the wind feels not-hot to you, and you judge that "the wind is not hot," you are also judging truly (for you) how the wind is. These apparently contradictory statements can both betrue, since each of us is judging only about how things appear to us.

However, there are important differences between Protagoras' relativism and the Cyrenaics' subjectivism. The Cyrenaics would more likely want to say "that the wind appears hot to me is true" *(simpliciter)* rather than "'The wind is hot' is true-for-me." The Cyrenaic position retains the possibility of error whenever you go beyond the immediate content of your experience, whereas Protagoras says that however things appear to you is 'true for you.' According to the Cyrenaics, I may know infallibly that "I am being appeared to hotly now," but if I were to say that the wind itself were hot, I might be mistaken, and if I were to judge that "You are being appeared to hotly now," whereas in fact you were having a chilly experience, I would be mistaken. Protagoras, as depicted in the *Theaetetus,* does away with the possibility of people genuinely contradicting one another, since all statements are about how things appear to the individual making the statement, and hence all (sincere) statements turn out to be true–for that individual, at that time.

Also, when Protagoras says that each us can judge infallibly how things 'appear' to us, the sense of 'appearance' that Protagoras is using extends beyond the initial restricted sense of phenomenal appearances, *e.g.,* a wind feeling hot or a wall seeming white, to cover beliefs generally. That is, if I believe that "the laws of Athens are just," then Protagoras would say that this is equivalent to "it seems to me that the laws of Athens are just." And since each of us can judge infallibly about our own appearances, I can also know that it is true (for me) that "the laws of Athens are just." The Cyrenaics retain the more restricted sense of 'appearance,' where each of can know infallibly our immediate perceptual states, for instance, knowing that I am having a red experience, but this does not extend to knowledge of laws 'appearing' to be just, or the future 'appearing' to be hopeful.

The Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonian Skeptics

The later academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics make use of arguments from the relativity of perception to try to refute the position of dogmatists, like the <u>Stoics</u> and the Epicureans, who

claim that we can gain knowledge of the external world on the basis of sense-perception. However, although the Cyrenaics might properly be called 'skeptics,' their skepticism differs from the skepticism of the Pyrrhonists in at least three respects.

The first difference is that the Cyrenaics claim that we can have knowledge of the contents of our experiences, while the Pyrrhonists disavow any knowledge whatsoever. However, this difference might not be as significant as it seems, since the Pyrrhonists do acknowledge that we can accurately report how things appear to us–*e.g.,* that the wind appears hot. However, they refuse to say that this qualifies as knowledge, since knowledge concerns how things *are,* not merely how they appear to us.

The second difference is that the Cyrenaics claim that it is impossible to gain knowledge of the external world, while the Pyrrhonists claim neither that one can nor that one cannot gain such knowledge. The Pyrrhonists would label the Cyrenaic position as a form of 'negative dogmatism,' since the Cyrenaics do advance assertions about the impossibility of knowledge of the external world. This is a type of second-order purported 'knowledge' about the limits of our knowledge, and the Pyrrhonists, as true skeptics, do not make even these types of pronouncements.

Third, although the Cyrenaics do claim that it is impossible to gain knowledge of what the external world is like, it is not as clear that they doubt that there exists an external world, which the Pyrrhonists do. Some sources ascribe to the Cyrenaics the position that whether there is an external world is not known, while others ascribe to them the position that we can know *that* there is an external world that is the cause of our experiences, but that we cannot know what this world is *like.* The latter position fits in more smoothly with the way the Cyrenaics conceive of experiences, as effects of external causes ("I am being yellowed"), but has obvious difficulties of its own. (For instance, if we can know *nothing* about what characteristics objects in the external world have, what basis do we have to think that these objects exist?) However, if this is what the Cyrenaics think, a parallel can be drawn between their position and what Immanuel Kant says about the existence of the *noumenal*world of 'things in themselves,' which is the unknowable source of the data which ultimately forms our experiences.

Finally, the Cyrenaic position, at least in the limited reports we have concerning it, does not appear to be as fully-developed as that of the later skeptics. The academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics engaged in long controversies with the dogmatists, and as a result, they needed to answer the objections of the dogmatists, *e.g.,* that it is impossible to live as a skeptic, or that skepticism is self-refuting. The Cyrenaics, as far as we know, do not address these questions.

Ethics

The Cyrenaics are unabashed sensual hedonists: the highest good is my own pleasure, with all else being valuable only as a means to securing my own pleasure, and bodily pleasures are better than mental pleasures. Their iconoclastic theory stands well outside the mainstream of Greek ethical thought, with the traditional virtues of moderation, justice, and friendship being disparaged by them. The Value and Nature of Pleasure

The Cyrenaics start from the Greek ethical commonplace that the highest good is what we all seek for its own sake, and not for the sake of anything else. This they identify as pleasure, because we instinctively seek pleasure for its own sake, and when we achieve pleasure, we want nothing more. Similarly, pain is bad because we shun it.

When the Cyrenaics say that 'pleasure' is the highest good, they do not mean that pleasure in general in good, so that we should seek to maximize the overall amount of pleasure in the world, as utilitarians say. Instead, they mean that, for each of us, our *own* pleasure is what is valuable *to us,* because that is what each of us seeks. Also, each of us can only experience our own pleasures, and not the pleasures of other people. Thus, the Cyrenaic view is a form of <u>egoistic</u> hedonism.

Pleasure and pain are both 'movements,' according to the Cyrenaics: pleasure a smooth motion, and pain a rough motion. The absence of either type of motion is an intermediate state which is neither pleasurable nor painful. This is directed against Epicurus' theory that thehomeostatic state of being free of pain, need and worry is itself most pleasant. The Cyrenaics make fun of the Epicurean theory by saying that this state of being free of desires and pain is the condition of a corpse.

The Cyrenaics admit that there are both bodily pleasures (for example, sexual gratification) and mental pleasures (*e.g.,* delight at the prosperity of one's country), and they maintain, against the Epicureans, that not all mental pleasures are based upon bodily pleasures. However, they exalt bodily over mental pleasures, presumably because bodily pleasures are much more vivid than mental pleasures. They also assert that bodily pains are worse than mental pains, and give as evidence for this claim that criminals are punished with bodily instead of mental pains.

Pleasure, Happiness, and Prudence

One of the most striking features of Cyrenaic ethics is their assertion that it is pleasure, and *not* happiness, which is the highest good. Almost all other Greek theorists agree that happiness is the highest good, but disagree about what happiness consists in. Even Epicurus, who is a hedonist, remains within this tradition by asserting that happiness is the same as leading a pleasant life. The Cyrenaics, however, say that what we really seek are individual pleasures, *e.g.,* the pleasure of eating a steak. Happiness, which is thought of as the sum of all of these individual pleasures, is valuable only because of the value of each of the individual pleasures that make it up.

Another striking feature of the Cyrenaic theory is its lack of future-concern. The Cyrenaics advocate going after whatever will bring one pleasure *now,* enjoying the pleasure while one is experiencing it, and not worrying too much about what the future will bring. Although the Cyrenaics say that prudence is valuable for attaining pleasure, they do not seem much concerned with exercising self-control in pursuing pleasure, or with deferring present pleasures (or undergoing present pains) for the sake of experiencing greater pleasure (or avoiding greater pains) in the future.

This lack of future-concern is not a direct consequence of their hedonism, nor of their privileging of bodily over mental pleasures. If pleasure is the highest good, and one wants to maximize the pleasure in one's life, then the natural position to take is the one Socrates lays out in Plato's dialogue the *Protagoras.* Socrates describes a type of hedonism in which one uses a 'measuring art' to weigh equally all of the future pleasures and pains one would experience . Although present pleasures might seem more alluring than distant ones, Socrates maintains that this is like an optical illusion in which nearer objects seem larger than distant ones, and that one must

correct for this distortion if one is going to plan one's life rationally. Epicurus, likewise, says that the wise person is willing to forgo some particular pleasure if that pleasure will bring one greater pain in the future. Simply indulging in whatever pleasures are close at hand will ultimately bring one unhappiness.

The texts we have do not allow us to obtain with any degree of confidence the reasons that the Cyrenaics have for their advocacy of the pleasures of the moment. There are at least three plausible speculations, however:

Personal Identity and Momentary Pleasure

The first reason that the Cyrenaics might have for rejecting long-term planning about one's pursuits is that they are skeptical about personal identity across time. If all I have access to are momentary, fluctuating experiences, what reason do I have to think that the 'self' that exists today will be the same 'self' as the person who will bear my name 30 years hence? After all, in most respects, a person at 30 years old is almost completely different from that 'same' person at 10, and the 'same' person at 50 will also be much changed. So, if what I desire is pleasure for myself, what reason do I have to sacrifice my pleasures for the sake of the pleasures of that 'other' person down the temporal stream from myself? Nursing a hangover, or deep in debt, that future self might curse the past self for his intemperance, but what concern is that of mine?

If the Cyrenaics do believe that personal identity does not persist over time, their position would be similar to one espoused by Protagoras in the *Theaetetus.* Because of the similarities between the Protagorean and Cyrenaic epistemologies, as well as the fact that having such a position would help make sense of the Cyrenaics' focus on pursuing present pleasures, some scholars have attributed this view of personal identity to the Cyrenaics. However, there is little direct evidence that they held such a view, and the way they describe people and objects seems, indeed, to presuppose their identity across time.

The Self-Defeating Nature of Future-Concern

The Cyrenaics may also think that planning for the future, and trying to assure happiness by foregoing present pleasures for the sake of the future, is self-defeating. If this is right, then it is

not the case that the Cyrenaics think that future pleasures and pains are unimportant, it is simply that they believe that worrying about the future is futile. One gains happiness, and maximizes the pleasure in one's life, not by anxiously planning one's future out, and toiling on behalf of the future, but simply by enjoying whatever pleasures are immediately at hand, without worrying about the long-term consequences.

The Cyrenaics think that "to pile up the pleasures which produce happiness is most unpleasant," because one will need to be choosing things which are painful for the sake of future pleasures. The Cyrenaics instead aim at enjoying the pleasures that are present, without letting themselves be troubled at what is not present, *i.e.,* the past and future. Epicurus thinks that the memory of past pleasures, and the expectation of future pleasures, are themselves most pleasant, and hence he emphasizes the importance of careful planning in arranging what one will experience in the future. The Cyrenaics, however, deny this, saying that pleasures are pleasant only when actually being experienced.

Present Preferences and Future-Concern

Finally, the Cyrenaics lack of future-concern may result from radically relativizing the good to one's present preferences. It's reported that Aristippus "discerned the good by the single present time alone," and later Cyrenaics assert that there is no *telos*–goal or good–to life asa whole; instead, particular actions and desires each aim at some particular pleasure. So the notion of some overall goal or good for one's entire life is rejected and is replaced by a succession of short-terms goals. As one's desires change over time, what is good for you at that time likewise changes, and at each moment, it makes sense to try to satisfy the desires that one has at that time, without regard to the desires one may happen to have in the future.

If the Cyrenaics thought that to choose rationally is to endeavor to maximize the fulfillment of one's *present* preferences, their position would be analogous to the model of economic rationality put forward by current philosophers like David Gauthier.

Custom, Morality, and Friendship

In ancient times, the Cyrenaics were among the most dismissive of traditional Greek morality. They say that nothing is just or base by nature: what is just or base is set entirely by the customs and conventions of particular societies. So, for instance, there is nothing in the world or in human nature that makes incest, or stealing, or parricide wrong in themselves. However, these things become base in a particular society because the laws and customs of that society designate those practices as base. You should normally refrain from wrong-doing, not because wrong-doing is bad in itself, but because of the punishments that you will suffer if you are caught.

Many of the stories surrounding Aristippus stress his willingness to do things that were considered demeaning or shocking, like putting on a woman's robes when the king commands it, or exposing his child to die with no remorse when it was an inconvenience. Although most of these stories are malicious and probably untrue, they do seem to have a basis in the Cyrenaics' disregard of conventions of propriety when they think they can get away with it. All pleasures are good, they say, even ones that result from unseemly behavior.

The Cyrenaic attitude toward friendship also is consistent with their egoistic hedonism and well outside the traditional attitudes toward friendship. Friendship, according to the Cyrenaics, is entered into for self-interested motives. That is, we obtain friends simply because we believe that by doing so we will be in a better position to obtain pleasure for ourselves, not because we think that the friendship is valuable for its own sake, or because we love our friend for his own sake.

Philosophy of Mind

Epicurus is one of the first philosophers to put forward an Identity Theory of Mind. In modern versions of the identity theory, the mind is identified with the brain, and mental processes are identified with neural processes. Epicurus' physiology is quite different; the mind is identified as an organ that resides in the chest, since the common Greek view was that the chest, not the head, is the seat of the emotions. However, the underlying idea is quite similar. (Note: not all commentators accept that Epicurus' theory is actually an Identity Theory.)

The main point that Epicurus wants to establish is that the mind is something bodily. The mind must be a body, thinks Epicurus, because of its ability to interact with the body. The mind is affected by the body, as vision, drunkenness, and disease show. Likewise, the mind affects the body, as our ability to move our limbs when we want to and the physiological effects of emotional states show. Only bodies can interact with other bodies, so the mind must be a body. Epicurus says that the mind cannot be something incorporeal, as Plato thinks, since the only thing that is not a body is void, which is simply empty space and cannot act or be acted upon.

The mind, then, is an organ in the body, and mental processes are identified with atomic processes. The mind is composed of four different types of particles–fire, air, wind, and the "nameless element," which surpasses the other particles in its fineness. Although Epicurus is reticent about the details, some features of the mind are accounted for in terms of the features of these atoms–for instance, the mind is able to be moved a great deal by the impact of an image (which is something quite flimsy), because of the smallness of the particles that make up the mind. The mind proper, which is primarily responsible for sensation and thought, is located in the chest, but Epicurus thinks that there is also a 'spirit,' spread throughout the rest of the body, which allows the mind to communicate with it. The mind and spirit play roles very similar to those of the central and peripheral nervous systems in modern theory.

One important result of Epicurus' philosophy of mind is that death is annihilation. The mind is able to engage in the motions of sensation and thought only when it is housed in the body and the atoms that make it up are properly arranged. Upon death, says Epicurus, the container of the body shatters, and the atoms disperse in the air. The atoms are eternal, but the mind made up of these atoms is not, just as other compound bodies cease to exist when the atoms that make them up disperse.

Perception

Epicurus explains perception in terms of the interaction of atoms with the sense-organs. Objects continually throw off one-atom-thick layers, like the skin peeling off of an onion. These images, or "eidola," fly through the air and bang into one's eyes, from which one learns about the properties of the objects that threw off these *eidola.* This explains vision. Other senses are

analyzed in similar terms; e.g., the soothing action of smooth atoms on the tongue causes the sensation of sweetness. As noted above, Epicurus maintains that such sensible qualities are real qualities of bodies.

Epistemology

Epicurus' epistemology is resolutely empiricist and anti-skeptical. All of our knowledge ultimately comes from the senses, thinks Epicurus, and we can trust the senses, when properly used. Epicurus' epistemology was contained in his work the 'Canon,' or 'measuring stick,' which is lost, so many of the details of his views are unavailable to us. 4a. The Canon: sensations, preconceptions, and feelings

Epicurus says that there are three criteria of truth: sensations, 'preconceptions,' and feelings. Sensations give us information about the external world, and we can test the judgments based upon sensations against further sensations; e.g., a provisional judgment that a tower is round, based upon sensation, can be tested against later sensations to be corroborated or disproved. Epicurus says that all sensations give us information about the world, but that sensation itself is never in error, since sensation is a purely passive, mechanical reception of images and the like by sense-organs, and the senses themselves do not make judgments 'that' the world is this way or that. Instead, error enters in when we make judgments about the world based upon the information received through the senses.

Epicurus thinks that, in order to make judgments about the world, or even to start any inquiry whatsoever, we must already be in possession of certain basic concepts, which stand in need of no further proof or definition, on pain of entering into an infinite regress. This concern is similar to the Paradox of Inquiry explored by Plato in the *Meno that* one must already know about something in order to be able to inquire about it. However, instead of postulating that our immaterial souls had acquaintance with transcendent Forms in a pre-natal existence, as Plato does, Epicurus thinks that we have certain 'preconceptions'–concepts such as 'body,' 'person,' 'usefulness,' and 'truth'–which are formed in our (material) minds as the result of repeated sense-experiences of similar objects. Further ideas are formed by processes of analogy or

similarity or by compounding these basic concepts. Thus, all ideas are ultimately formed on the basis of sense-experience.

Feelings of pleasure and pain form the basic criteria for what is to be sought and avoided.

Anti-skeptical Arguments

Epicurus is concerned to refute the skeptical tendencies of Democritus, whose metaphysics and theory of perception were similar to Epicurus'. At least three separate anti-skeptical arguments are given by Epicureans:

The "Lazy Argument"

Epicurus says that it is impossible to live as a skeptic. If a person really were to believe that he knows nothing, then he would have no reason to engage in one course of action instead of another. Thus, the consistent skeptic would engage in no action whatsoever, and would die.

The Self-refutation Argument

If a skeptic claims that nothing can be known, then one should ask whether he *knows* that nothing can be known. If he says 'yes,' then he is contradicting himself. If he doesn't say yes, then he isn't making a claim, and we don't need to listen to him.

The Argument from Concept-formation

If the skeptic says that nothing can be known, or that we cannot know the truth, we can ask him where he gets his knowledge of concepts such as 'knowledge' and 'truth.' If the senses cannot be relied on, as the skeptic claims, then he is not entitled to use concepts such as 'knowledge' and 'truth' in formulating his thesis, since such concepts derive from the senses.

Ethics

Epicurus' ethics is a form of egoistic hedonism; i.e., he says that the only thing that is intrinsically valuable is one's own pleasure; anything else that has value is valuable merely as a

means to securing pleasure for oneself. However, Epicurus has a sophisticated and idiosyncratic view of the nature of pleasure, which leads him to recommend a virtuous, moderately ascetic life as the best means to securing pleasure. This contrasts Epicurus strongly with the Cyrenaics, a group of ancient hedonists who better fit the stereotype of hedonists as recommending a policy of "eat, drink, and be merry."

Hedonism, Psychological and Ethical

Epicurus' ethics starts from the Aristotelian commonplace that the highest good is what is valued for its own sake, and not for the sake of anything else, and Epicurus agrees with Aristotle that happiness is the highest good. However, he disagrees with Aristotle by identifying happiness with pleasure. Epicurus gives two reasons for this. The main reason is that pleasure is the only thing that people do, as a matter of fact, value for its own sake; that is, Epicurus' ethical hedonism is based upon his psychological hedonism. Everything we do, claims Epicurus, we do for the sake ultimately of gaining pleasure for ourselves. This is supposedly confirmed by observing the behavior of infants, who, it is claimed, instinctively pursue pleasure and shun pain. This is also true of adults, thinks Epicurus, but in adults it is more difficult to see that this is true, since adults have much more complicated beliefs about what will bring them pleasure. But the Epicureans did spend a great deal of energy trying to make plausible the contention that all activity, even apparently self-sacrificing activity or activity done solely for the sake of virtue or what is noble, is in fact directed toward obtaining pleasure for oneself.

The second proof, which fits in well with Epicurus' empiricism, supposedly lies in one's introspective experience. One immediately perceives that pleasure is good and that pain is bad, in the same way that one immediately perceives that fire is hot; no further argument is needed to show the goodness of pleasure or the badness of pain. (Of course, this does not establish Epicurus' further contention that *only* pleasure is intrinsically valuable and *only* pain is intrinsically bad.)

Although all pleasures are good and all pains evil, Epicurus says that not all pleasures are choice worthy or all pains to be avoided. Instead, one should calculate what is in one's long-term self-

interest, and forgo what will bring pleasure in the short-term if doing so will ultimately lead to greater pleasure in the long-term.

Types of Pleasure

For Epicurus, pleasure is tied closely to satisfying one's desires. He distinguishes between two different types of pleasure: 'moving' pleasures and 'static' pleasures. 'Moving' pleasures occur when one is in the process of satisfying a desire, e.g., eating a hamburger when one is hungry. These pleasures involve an active titillation of the senses, and these feelings are what most people call 'pleasure.' However, Epicurus says that *after* one's desires have been satisfied, (e.g., when one is full after eating), the state of satiety, of no longer being in need or want, is itself pleasurable. Epicurus calls this a 'static' pleasure, and says that these static pleasures are the best pleasures.

Because of this, Epicurus denies that there is any intermediate state between pleasure and pain. When one has unfulfilled desires, this is painful, and when one no longer has unfulfilled desires, this steady state is the most pleasurable of all, not merely some intermediate state between pleasure and pain.

Epicurus also distinguishes between physical and mental pleasures and pains. Physical pleasures and pains concern only the present, whereas mental pleasures and pains also encompass the past (fond memories of past pleasure or regret over past pain or mistakes) and the future (confidence or fear about what will occur). The greatest destroyer of happiness, thinks Epicurus, is anxiety about the future, especially fear of the gods and fear of death. If one can banish fear about the future, and face the future with confidence that one's desires will be satisfied, then one will attain tranquility *(ataraxia),* the most exalted state. In fact, given Epicurus' conception of pleasure, it might be less misleading to call him a 'tranquillist' instead of a 'hedonist.'

Types of Desire

Because of the close connection of pleasure with desire-satisfaction, Epicurus devotes a considerable part of his ethics to analyzing different kinds of desires. If pleasure results from getting what you want (desire-satisfaction) and pain from not getting what you want (desire-

frustration), then there are two strategies you can pursue with respect to any given desire: you can either strive to fulfill the desire, or you can try to eliminate the desire. For the most part Epicurus advocates the second strategy, that of paring your desires down to a minimum core, which are then easily satisfied.

Epicurus distinguishes between three types of desires: natural and necessary desires, natural but non-necessary desires, and "vain and empty" desires. Examples of natural and necessary desires include the desires for food, shelter, and the like. Epicurus thinks that these desires are easy to satisfy, difficult to eliminate (they are 'hard-wired' into human beings naturally), and bring great pleasure when satisfied. Furthermore, they are necessary for life, and they are naturally limited: that is, if one is hungry, it only takes a limited amount of food to fill the stomach, after which the desire is satisfied. Epicurus says that one should try to fulfill these desires.

Vain desires include desires for power, wealth, fame, and the like. They are difficult to satisfy, in part because they have no natural limit. If one desires wealth or power, no matter how much one gets, it is always possible to get more, and the more one gets, the more one wants. These desires are not natural to human beings, but inculcated by society and by false beliefs about what we need; e.g., believing that having power will bring us security from others. Epicurus thinks that these desires should be eliminated.

An example of a natural but non-necessary desire is the desire for luxury food. Although food is needed for survival, one does not need a particular type of food to survive. Thus, despite his hedonism, Epicurus advocates a surprisingly ascetic way of life. Although one shouldn't spurn extravagant foods if they happen to be available, becoming dependent on such goods ultimately leads to unhappiness. As Epicurus puts it, "If you wish to make Pythocles wealthy, don't give him more money; rather, reduce his desires." By eliminating the pain caused by unfulfilled desires, and the anxiety that occurs because of the fear that one's desires will not be fulfilled in the future, the wise Epicurean attains tranquility, and thus happiness.

The Virtues

Epicurus' hedonism was widely denounced in the ancient world as undermining traditional morality. Epicurus, however, insists that courage, moderation, and the other virtues are needed in order to attain happiness. However, the virtues for Epicurus are all purely instrumental goods– that is, they are valuable solely for the sake of the happiness that they can bring oneself, not for their own sake. Epicurus says that all of the virtues are ultimately forms of prudence, of calculating what is in one's own best interest. In this, Epicurus goes against the majority of Greek ethical theorists, such as the Stoics, who identify happiness with virtue, and Aristotle, who identifies happiness with a life of virtuous activity. Epicurus thinks that natural science and philosophy itself also are instrumental goods. Natural science is needed in order to give mechanistic explanations of natural phenomena and thus dispel the fear of the gods, while philosophy helps to show us the natural limits of our desires and to dispel the fear of death.

Justice

Epicurus is one of the first philosophers to give a well-developed contractarian theory of justice. Epicurus says that justice is an agreement "neither to harm nor be harmed," and that we have a preconception of justice as "what is useful in mutual associations." People enter into communities in order to gain protection from the dangers of the wild, and agreements concerning the behavior of the members of the community are needed in order for these communities to function, e.g., prohibitions of murder, regulations concerning the killing and eating of animals, and so on. Justice exists only where there are such agreements.

Like the virtues, justice is valued entirely on instrumental grounds, because of its utility for each of the members of society. Epicurus says that the main reason not to be unjust is that one will be punished if one gets caught, and that even if one does not get caught, the fear of being caught will still cause pain. However, he adds that the fear of punishment is needed mainly to keep fools in line, who otherwise would kill, steal, etc. The Epicurean wise man recognizes the usefulness of the laws, and since he does not desire great wealth, luxury goods, political power, or the like, he sees that he has no reason to engage in the conduct prohibited by the laws in any case.

Although justice only exists where there is an agreement about how to behave, that does not make justice entirely 'conventional,' if by 'conventional' we mean that any behavior dictated by the laws of a particular society is thereby just, and that the laws of a particular society are just for that society. Since the 'justice contract' is entered into for the purpose of securing what is useful for the members of the society, only laws that are actually useful are just. Thus, a prohibition of murder would be just, but antimiscegenation laws would not. Since what is useful can vary from place to place and time to time, what laws are just can likewise vary.

Friendship

Epicurus values friendship highly and praises it in quite extravagant terms. He says that friendship "dances around the world" telling us that we must "wake to blessedness." He also says that the wise man is sometimes willing to die for a friend. Because of this, some scholars have thought that in this area, at least, Epicurus abandons his egoistic hedonism and advocates altruism toward friends. This is not clear, however. Epicurus consistently maintains that friendship is valuable because it is one of the greatest means of attaining pleasure. Friends, he says, are able to provide one another the greatest security, whereas a life without friends is solitary and beset with perils. In order for there to be friendship, Epicurus says, there must be trust between friends, and friends have to treat each other as well as they treat themselves. The communities of Epicureans can be seen as embodying these ideals, and these are ideals that ultimately promote *ataraxia.*

Death

One of the greatest fears that Epicurus tries to combat is the fear of death. Epicurus thinks that this fear is often based upon anxiety about having an unpleasant afterlife; this anxiety, he thinks, should be dispelled once one realizes that death is annihilation, because the mind is a group of atoms that disperses upon death.

i. The No Subject of Harm Argument

If death is annihilation, says Epicurus, then it is 'nothing to us.' Epicurus' main argument for why death is not bad is contained in the Letter to Menoeceus and can be dubbed the 'no subject

of harm' argument. If death is bad, *for whom* is it bad? Not for the living, since they're not dead, and not for the dead, since they don't exist. His argument can be set out as follows:

1. Death is annihilation.
2. The living have not yet been annihilated (otherwise they wouldn't be alive).
3. Death does not affect the living. (from 1 and 2)
4. So, death is not bad for the living. (from 3)
5. For something to be bad for somebody, that person has to exist, at least.
6. The dead do not exist. (from 1)
7. Therefore, death is not bad for the dead. (from 5 and 6)
8. Therefore death is bad for neither the living nor the dead. (from 4 and 7)

Epicurus adds that if death causes you no pain when you're dead, it's foolish to allow the fear of it to cause you pain now.

ii. The Symmetry Argument

A second Epicurean argument against the fear of death, the so-called 'symmetry argument,' is recorded by the Epicurean poet Lucretius. He says that anyone who fears death should consider the time before he was born. The past infinity of pre-natal non-existence is like the future infinity of post-mortem non-existence; it is as though nature has put up a mirror to let us see what our future non-existence will be like. But we do not consider not having existed for an eternity before our births to be a terrible thing; therefore, neither should we think not existing for an eternity after our deaths to be evil.

Section four; Social Hedonism (Utilitarianism) – Act –utilitarianism and Rule – utilitarianism

Brain Storming: Dear learner! What will the principle be if the pleasure aimed is for the greatest number or for the society as a whole? ---

Quantity Based Utilitarianism-Jeremy Bentham (1748—1832)

Jeremy Bentham was an English philosopher and political radical. He is primarily known today for his moral philosophy, especially his principle of utilitarianism, which evaluates actions based upon their consequences. The relevant consequences, in particular, are the overall happiness created for everyone affected by the action. Influenced by many enlightenment thinkers, especially empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume, Bentham developed an ethical theory grounded in a largely empiricist account of human nature. He famously held a hedonistic account of both motivation and value according to which what is fundamentally valuable and what ultimately motivates us is pleasure and pain. Happiness, according to Bentham, is thus a matter of experiencing pleasure and lack of pain.

Although he never practiced law, Bentham did write a great deal of philosophy of law, spending most of his life critiquing the existing law and strongly advocating legal reform. Throughout his work, he critiques various natural accounts of law which claim, for example, that liberty, rights, and so on exist independent of government. In this way, Bentham arguably developed an early form of what is now often called "legal positivism." Beyond such critiques, he ultimately maintained that putting his moral theory into consistent practice would yield results in legal theory by providing justification for social, political, and legal institutions.

A leading theorist in Anglo-American philosophy of law and one of the founders of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham was born in Houndsditch, London on February 15, 1748. He was the son and grandson of attorneys, and his early family life was colored by a mix of pious superstition (on his mother's side) and Enlightenment rationalism (from his father). Bentham lived during a time of major social, political and economic change. The Industrial Revolution (with the massive economic and social shifts that it brought in its wake), the rise of the middle class, and revolutions in France and America all were reflected in Bentham's reflections on existing institutions. In 1760, Bentham entered Queen's College, Oxford and, upon graduation in 1764, studied law at Lincoln's Inn. Though qualified to practice law, he never did so. Instead, he devoted most of his life to writing on matters of legal reform—though, curiously, he made little effort to publish much of what he wrote.

Bentham spent his time in intense study, often writing some eight to twelve hours a day. While most of his best known work deals with theoretical questions in law, Bentham was an active polemicist and was engaged for some time in developing projects that proposed various practical ideas for the reform of social institutions. Although his work came to have an important influence on political philosophy, Bentham did not write any single text giving the essential principles of his views on this topic. His most important theoretical work is the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), in which much of his moral theory—which he said reflected "the greatest happiness principle"—is described and developed.

In 1781, Bentham became associated with the Earl of Shelburne and, through him, came into contact with a number of the leading Whig politicians and lawyers. Although his work was admired by some at the time, Bentham's ideas were still largely unappreciated. In 1785, he briefly joined his brother Samuel in Russia, where he pursued his writing with even more than his usual intensity, and he devised a plan for the now infamous "Panopticon"—a model prison where all prisoners would be observable by (unseen) guards at all times—a project which he had hoped would interest the Czarina Catherine the Great. After his return to England in 1788, and for some 20 years thereafter, Bentham pursued—fruitlessly and at great expense—the idea of the panopticon. Fortunately, an inheritance received in 1796 provided him with financial stability. By the late 1790s, Bentham's theoretical work came to have a more significant place in political reform. Still, his influence was, arguably, still greater on the continent. (Bentham was made an honorary citizen of the fledgling French Republic in 1792, and his *The Theory of Legislation* was published first, in French, by his Swiss disciple, Etienne Dumont, in 1802.)

The precise extent of Bentham's influence in British politics has been a matter of some debate. While he attacked both Tory and Whig policies, both the Reform Bill of 1832 (promoted by Bentham's disciple, Lord Henry Brougham) and later reforms in the century (such as the secret ballot, advocated by Bentham's friend, George Grote, who was elected to parliament in 1832) reflected Benthamite concerns. The impact of Bentham's ideas goes further still. Contemporary philosophical and economic vocabulary (for example, "international," "maximize," "minimize," and "codification") is indebted to Bentham's proclivity for inventing terms, and among his other disciples were James Mill and his son, John (who was responsible for an early edition of some of Bentham's manuscripts), as well as the legal theorist, John Austin.

At his death in London, on June 6, 1832, Bentham left literally tens of thousands of manuscript pages—some of which was work only sketched out, but all of which he hoped would be prepared for publication. He also left a large estate, which was used to finance the newly-established University College, London (for those individuals excluded from university education—that is, non-conformists, Catholics and Jews), and his cadaver, *per* his instructions, was dissected, embalmed, dressed, and placed in a chair, and to this day resides in a cabinet in a corridor of the main building of University College. The Bentham Project, set up in the early 1960s at University College, has as its aim the publishing of a definitive, scholarly edition of Bentham's works and correspondence.

Human Nature

For Bentham, morals and legislation can be described scientifically, but such a description requires an account of human nature. Just as nature is explained through reference to the laws of physics, so human behavior can be explained by reference to the two primary motives of pleasure and pain; this is the theory of psychological hedonism.

There is, Bentham admits, no direct proof of such an analysis of human motivation—though he holds that it is clear that, in acting, all people implicitly refer to it. At the beginning of the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham writes:

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. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. (Ch. 1)

From this we see that, for Bentham, pleasure and pain serve not only as explanations for action, but they also define one's good. It is, in short, on the basis of pleasures and pains, which can exist only in individuals, that Bentham thought one could construct a calculus of value.

Related to this fundamental hedonism is a view of the individual as exhibiting a natural, rational self-interest—a psychological egoism. In his "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy" (1833), Mill

cites Bentham's *The Book of Fallacies* that "*every* human breast… self-regarding interest is predominant over social interest; each person's own individual interest over the interests of all other persons taken together." Fundamental to the nature and activity of individuals, then, is their own well-being, and reason—as a natural capability of the person—is considered to be subservient to this end.

Bentham believed that the nature of the human person can be adequately described without mention of social relationships. To begin with, the idea of "relation" is but a "fictitious entity," though necessary for "convenience of discourse." And, more specifically, he remarks that "the community is a fictitious body," and it is but "the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it." Thus, the extension of the term "individual" is, in the main, no greater and no less than the biological entity. Bentham's view, then, is that the individual—the basic unit of the social sphere—is an "atom" and there is no "self" or "individual" greater than the human individual. A person's relations with others—even if important—are not essential and describe nothing that is, strictly speaking, necessary to its being what it is.

Finally, the picture of the human person presented by Bentham is based on a psychological associationism indebted to David Hartley and Hume; Bentham's analysis of "habit" (which is essential to his understanding of society and especially political society) particularly reflects associationist presuppositions. On this view, pleasure and pain are objective states and can be measured in terms of their intensity, duration, certainty, proximity, fecundity and purity. This allows both for an objective determination of an activity or state and for a comparison with others.

Bentham's understanding of human nature reveals, in short, a psychological, ontological, and also moral individualism where, to extend the critique of utilitarianism made by Graeme Duncan and John Gray (1979), "the individual human being is conceived as the source of values and as himself the supreme value."

Moral Philosophy

As ElieHalévy (1904) notes, there are three principal characteristics of which constitute the basis of Bentham's moral and political philosophy: (i) the greatest happiness principle, (ii) universal

egoism and (iii) the artificial identification of one's interests with those of others. Though these characteristics are present throughout his work, they are particularly evident in the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, where Bentham is concerned with articulating rational principles that would provide a basis and guide for legal, social and moral reform.

To begin with, Bentham's moral philosophy reflects what he calls at different times "the greatest happiness principle" or "the principle of utility"—a term which he borrows from Hume. In adverting to this principle, however, he was not referring to just the usefulness of things or actions, but to the extent to which these things or actions promote the general happiness. Specifically, then, what is morally obligatory is that which produces the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people, happiness being determined by reference to the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. Thus, Bentham writes, "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." And Bentham emphasizes that this applies to "every action whatsoever" (Ch. 1). That which does not maximize the greatest happiness (such as an act of pure ascetic sacrifice) is, therefore, morally wrong. (Unlike some of the previous attempts at articulating a universal hedonism, Bentham's approach is thoroughly naturalistic.)

Bentham's moral philosophy, then, clearly reflects his psychological view that the primary motivators in human beings are pleasure and pain. Bentham admits that his version of the principle of utility is something that does not admit of direct proof, but he notes that this is not a problem as some explanatory principles do not admit of any such proof and all explanation must start somewhere. But this, by itself, does not explain why another's happiness—or the general happiness—should count. And, in fact, he provides a number of suggestions that could serve as answers to the question of why we should be concerned with the happiness of others.

First, Bentham says, the principle of utility is something to which individuals, in acting, refer either explicitly or implicitly, and this is something that can be ascertained and confirmed by simple observation. Indeed, Bentham held that all existing systems of morality can be "reduced to the principles of sympathy and antipathy," which is precisely that which defines utility. A

second argument found in Bentham is that, if pleasure is the good, then it is good irrespective of whose pleasure it is. Thus, a moral injunction to pursue or maximize pleasure has force independently of the specific interests of the person acting. Bentham also suggests that individuals would reasonably seek the general happiness simply because the interests of others are inextricably bound up with their own, though he recognized that this is something that is easy for individuals to ignore. Nevertheless, Bentham envisages a solution to this as well. Specifically, he proposes that making this identification of interests obvious and, when necessary, bringing diverse interests together would be the responsibility of the legislator.

Finally, Bentham held that there are advantages to a moral philosophy based on a principle of utility. To begin with, the principle of utility is clear (compared to other moral principles), allows for objective and disinterested public discussion, and enables decisions to be made where there seem to be conflicts of (*prima facie*) legitimate interests. Moreover, in calculating the pleasures and pains involved in carrying out a course of action (the "hedonic calculus"), there is a fundamental commitment to human equality. The principle of utility presupposes that "one man is worth just the same as another man" and so there is a guarantee that in calculating the greatest happiness "each person is to count for one and no one for more than one."

For Bentham, then, there is no inconsistency between the greatest happiness principle and his psychological hedonism and egoism. Thus, he writes that moral philosophy or ethics can be simply described as "the art of directing men's action to the production of the greatest possible quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view."

Jeremy Bentham was influenced both by Hobbes' account of human nature and Hume's account of social utility. He famously held that humans were ruled by two sovereign masters — pleasure and pain. We seek pleasure and the avoidance of pain, they "…govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think…" (Bentham PML, 1) Yet he also promulgated the principle of utility as the standard of right action on the part of governments and individuals. Actions are approved when they are such as to promote happiness, or pleasure, and disapproved of when they have a tendency to cause unhappiness, or pain. (PML) Combine this criterion of rightness with a view that we should be actively trying to promote overall happiness, and one has a serious incompatibility with psychological egoism. Thus, his apparent endorsement of Hobbesian

psychological egoism created problems in understanding his moral theory since psychological egoism rules out acting to promote the overall well-being when that it is incompatible with one's own. For the psychological egoist, that is not even a possibility. So, given 'ought implies can' it would follow that we are not obligated to act to promote overall well-being when that is incompatible with our own. This generates a serious tension in Bentham's thought, one that was drawn to his attention. He sometimes seemed to think that he could reconcile the two commitments empirically, that is, by noting that when people act to promote the good they are helping themselves, too. But this claim only serves to muddy the waters, since the standard understanding of psychological egoism — and Bentham's own statement of his view — identifies motives of action which are self-interested. Yet this seems, again, in conflict with his own specification of the method for making moral decisions which is not to focus on self-interest — indeed, the addition of *extent* as a parameter along which to measure pleasure produced distinguishes this approach from ethical egoism. Aware of the difficulty, in later years he seemed to pull back from a full-fledged commitment to psychological egoism, admitting that people do sometimes act benevolently — with the overall good of humanity in mind.

Bentham also benefited from Hume's work, though in many ways their approaches to moral philosophy were completely different. Hume rejected the egoistic view of human nature. Hume also focused on character evaluation in his system. Actions are significant as evidence of character, but only have this derivative significance. In moral evaluation the main concern is that of character. Yet Bentham focused on act-evaluation. There was a tendency — remarked on by J. B. Schneewind, for example — to move away from focus on character evaluation after Hume and towards act-evaluation. Recall that Bentham was enormously interested in social reform. Indeed, reflection on what was morally problematic about laws and policies influenced his thinking on utility as a standard. When one legislates, however, one is legislating in support of, or against, certain actions. Character — that is, a person's true character — is known, if known at all, only by that person. If one finds the opacity of the will thesis plausible then character, while theoretically very interesting, isn't a practical focus for legislation. Further, as Schneewind notes, there was an increasing sense that focus on character would actually be disruptive, socially, particularly if one's view was that a person who didn't agree with one on a moral issues was

defective in terms of his or her character, as opposed to simply making a mistake reflected in action.

But Bentham does take from Hume the view that utility is the measure of virtue — that is, utility more broadly construed than Hume's actual usage of the term. This is because Hume made a distinction between pleasure that the perception of virtue generates in the observer, and social utility, which consisted in a trait's having tangible benefits for society, any instance of which may or may not generate pleasure in the observer. But Bentham is not simply reformulating a Humean position — he's merely been influenced by Hume's arguments to see pleasure as a measure or standard of moral value. So, why not move from pleasurable *responses* to traits to pleasure as a kind of *consequence* which is good, and in relation to which, actions are morally right or wrong? Bentham, in making this move, avoids a problem for Hume. On Hume's view it seems that the response — corrected, to be sure — determines the trait's quality as a virtue or vice. But on Bentham's view the action (or trait) is morally good, right, virtuous in view of the consequences it generates, the pleasure or utility it produces, which could be completely independent of what our responses are to the trait. So, unless Hume endorses a kind of ideal observer test for virtue, it will be harder for him to account for how it is people make mistakes in evaluations of virtue and vice. Bentham, on the other hand, can say that people may not respond to the actions good qualities — perhaps they don't perceive the good effects. But as long as there are these good effects which are, on balance, better than the effects of any alternative course of action, then the action is the right one. Rhetorically, anyway, one can see why this is an important move for Bentham to be able to make. He was a social reformer. He felt that people often had responses to certain actions — of pleasure or disgust — that did not reflect anything morally significant at all. Indeed, in his discussions of homosexuality, for example, he explicitly notes that 'antipathy' is not sufficient reason to legislate against a practice:

The circumstances from which this antipathy may have taken its rise may be worth enquiring to…. One is the physical antipathy to the offence…. The act is to the highest degree odious and disgusting, that is, not to the man who does it, for he does it only because it gives him pleasure, but to one who thinks of it. Be it so, but what is that to him?

Bentham then notes that people are prone to use their physical antipathy as a pretext to transition to moral antipathy, and the attending desire to punish the persons who offend their taste. This is illegitimate on his view for a variety of reasons, one of which is that to punish a person for violations of taste, or on the basis of prejudice, would result in runaway punishments, "…one should never know where to stop…" The prejudice in question can be dealt with by showing it "to be ill-grounded". This reduces the antipathy to the act in question. This demonstrates an optimism in Bentham. If a pain can be demonstrated to be based on false beliefs then he believes that it can be altered or at the very least 'assuaged and reduced'. This is distinct from the view that a pain or pleasure based on a false belief should be discounted. Bentham does not believe the latter. Thus Bentham's hedonism is a very straightforward hedonism. The one intrinsic good is pleasure, the bad is pain. We are to promote pleasure and act to reduce pain. When called upon to make a moral decision one measures an action's value with respect to pleasure and pain according to the following: intensity (how strong the pleasure or pain is), duration (how long it lasts), certainty (how likely the pleasure or pain is to be the result of the action), proximity (how close the sensation will be to performance of the action), fecundity (how likely it is to lead to further pleasures or pains), purity (how much intermixture there is with the other sensation). One also considers extent — the number of people affected by the action.

Keeping track of all of these parameters can be complicated and time consuming. Bentham does not recommend that they figure into every act of moral deliberation because of the efficiency costs which need to be considered. Experience can guide us. We know that the pleasure of kicking someone is generally outweighed by the pain inflicted on that person, so such calculations when confronted with a temptation to kick someone are unnecessary. It is reasonable to judge it wrong on the basis of past experience or consensus. One can use 'rules of thumb' to guide action, but these rules are overridable when abiding by them would conflict with the promotion of the good.

Bentham's view was surprising to many at the time at least in part because he viewed the moral quality of an action to be determined instrumentally. It isn't so much that there is a particular kind of action that is intrinsically wrong; actions that are wrong are wrong simply in virtue of their effects, thus, instrumentally wrong. This cut against the view that there are some actions that by their very nature are just wrong, regardless of their effects. Some may be wrong because

they are 'unnatural' — and, again, Bentham would dismiss this as a legitimate criterion. Some may be wrong because they violate liberty, or autonomy. Again, Bentham would view liberty and autonomy as good — but good instrumentally, not intrinsically. Thus, any action deemed wrong due to a violation of autonomy is derivatively wrong on instrumental grounds as well. This is interesting in moral philosophy — as it is far removed from the Kantian approach to moral evaluation as well as from natural law approaches. It is also interesting in terms of political philosophy and social policy. On Bentham's view the law is not monolithic and immutable. Since effects of a given policy may change, the moral quality of the policy may change as well. Nancy Rosenblum noted that for Bentham one doesn't simply decide on good laws and leave it at that: "Lawmaking must be recognized as a continual process in response to diverse and changing desires that require adjustment." A law that is good at one point in time may be a bad law at some other point in time. Thus, lawmakers have to be sensitive to changing social circumstances. To be fair to Bentham's critics, of course, they are free to agree with him that this is the case in many situations, just not all — and that there is still a subset of laws that reflect the fact that some actions just are intrinsically wrong regardless of consequences. Bentham is in the much more difficult position of arguing that effects are all there are to moral evaluation of action and policy.

Quality Based Utilitarianism-John Stuart mill

The ethical theory of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) is most extensively articulated in his classical text *Utilitarianism* (1861). Its goal is to justify the utilitarian principle as the foundation of morals. This principle says actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote overall human happiness. So, Mill focuses on consequences of actions and neither on rights nor ethical sentiments.

This article primarily examines the central ideas of his text *Utilitarianism*, but the article's last two sections are devoted to Mill's views on the freedom of the will and the justification of punishment, which are found in *System of Logic* (1843) and *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (1865), respectively.

Educated by his father James Mill who was a close friend to Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill came in contact with utilitarian thought at a very early stage of his life. In his *Autobiography* he claims to have introduced the word "utilitarian" into the English language when he was sixteen. Mill remained a utilitarian throughout his life. Beginning in the 1830s he became increasingly critical of what he calls Bentham's "theory of human nature". The two articles "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy" (1833) and "Bentham" (1838) are his first important contributions to the development of utilitarian thought. Mill rejects Bentham's view that humans are unrelentingly driven by narrow self-interest. He believed that a "desire of perfection" and sympathy for fellow human beings belong to human nature. One of the central tenets of Mill's political outlook is that, not only the rules of society, but also people themselves are capable of improvement.

Mill tells us in his *Autobiography* that the "little work with the name" *Utilitarianism* arose from unpublished material, the greater part of which he completed in the final years of his marriage to Harriet Taylor, that is, before 1858. For its publication he brought old manuscripts into form and added some new material.

The work first appeared in 1861 as a series of three articles for *Fraser's Magazine*, a journal that, though directed at an educated audience, was by no means a philosophical organ. Mill planned from the beginning a separate book publication, which came to light in 1863. Even if the circumstances of the genesis of this work gesture to an occasional piece with a popular goal, on closer examination *Utilitarianism* turns out to be a carefully conceived work, rich in thought. One must not forget that since his first reading of Bentham in the winter of 1821-22, the time to which Mill dates his conversion to utilitarianism, forty years had passed. Taken this way, *Utilitarianism* was anything but a philosophical accessory, and instead the programmatic text of a thinker who for decades had understood himself as a utilitarian and who was profoundly familiar with popular objections to the principle of utility in moral theory. Almost ten years earlier (1852) Mill had defended utilitarianism against the intuitionistic philosopher William Whewell (*Whewell on Moral Philosophy*).

The priority of the text was to popularize the fundamental thoughts of utilitarianism within influential circles. This goal explains the composition of the work. After some general introductory comments, the text defends utilitarianism from common criticisms ("What

Utilitarianism Is"). After this Mill turns to the question concerning moral motivation ("Of the Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility").This is followed by the notorious proof of the principle of utility ("Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible") and the long concluding chapter on the relation of utility and justice ("On the Connection Between Justice and Utility"). The last chapter is often neglected – and wrongly so, for it contains a central statement of Mill's understanding of morals; it creates the foundation for the philosopher's theory of moral rights that plays a preeminent role in the context of his political thought.

According to his early essay "Bentham", all reasonable moral theories assume that "the morality of actions depends on the consequences which they tend to produce"; thus, the difference between moral theories lies on an axiological plane. His own theory of morality, writes Mill in *Utilitarianism*, is grounded in a particular "theory of life…–namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, is the only things desirable as ends." Such a theory of life is commonly called hedonistic, and it seems appropriate to say that Mill conceives his own position as hedonistic, even if he does never use the word "hedonism" or its cognates. What makes utilitarianism peculiar, according to Mill, is its hedonistic theory of the good. Utilitarians are, by definition, hedonists. For this reason, Mill sees no need to differentiate between the utilitarian and the hedonistic aspect of his moral theory.

Modern readers are often confused by the way in which Mill uses the term 'utilitarianism'. Today we routinely differentiate between hedonism as a theory of the good and utilitarianism as a consequentialist theory of the right. Mill, however, considered both doctrines to be so closely intertwined that he used the term 'utilitarianism' to signify both theories. On the one hand, he says that the "utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end." On the other hand, he defines utilitarianism as a moral theory according to which "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness…".

Utilitarians are, for him, consequentialists who believe that pleasure is the only intrinsic value.

Mill counts as one of the great classics of utilitarian thought; but this moral theory deviates from what many contemporary philosophers consider core features of utilitarianism. This explains why the question whether Mill is a utilitarian is more serious than it may appear on first

inspection. One may respond that this problem results from an anachronistic understanding of utilitarianism, and that it disappears if one abstains from imputing modern philosophical concepts on a philosopher of the nineteenth century. However, this response would oversimplify matters. For it is not clear whether Mill's value theory was indeed hedonistic. As mentioned before, Mill maintains that hedonism is the *differentia specifica* of utilitarianism; if he were not a hedonist, he would be no utilitarian by his own definition. In view of the fact that Mill's value theory constitutes the center of his ethics, the problem of determining its precise nature and adequate naming has attracted considerable attention over the last 150 years.

Morality as a System of Social Rules

The fifth and final chapter of *Utilitarianism* is of unusual importance for Mill's theory of moral obligation. Until the 1970s, the significance of the chapter had been largely overlooked. It then became one of the bridgeheads of a revisionist interpretation of Mill, which is associated with the work of David Lyons, John Skorupski and others.

Mill worked very hard to hammer the fifth chapter into shape and his success has great meaning for him. Towards the end of the book he maintains the "considerations which have now been adduced resolve, I conceive, the only real difficulty in the utilitarian theory of morals." At the beginning of *Utilitarianism,* Mill postulates that moral judgments presume rules. In contrast to Kant who grounds his ethical theory on *self-imposed* rules, so-called maxims, Mill thinks that morality builds on *social* rules. But what makes *social* rules *moral* rules? Mill's answer is based on a thesis about how competent speakers use the phrase "morally right" or "morally wrong". He maintains that we name a type of action morally wrong if we think that it should be sanctioned either through formal punishment, public disapproval (external sanctions) or through a bad conscience (internal sanctions). This is the critical difference between "morality and simple expediency". Wrong or inexpedient actions are those that we cannot recommend to a person, like harming oneself. But in contrast to immoral actions, inexpedient actions are not worthy of being sanctioned.

Mill differentiates various spheres of action. In his *System of Logic* he names morality, prudence and aesthetics as the three departments of the "Art of Life". The principle of utility governs not only morality, but also prudence and taste. It is not a moral principle but a meta-principle of practical reason.

There is a field of action in which moral rules obtain, and a "person may rightfully be compelled to fulfill" them. But there are also fields of action, in which sanctions for wrong behavior would be inappropriate. One of them is the sphere of self-regarding acts with which Mill deals in *On Liberty.* In this private sphere we can act at our convenience and indulge in inexpedient and utterly useless behavior as long as we do not harm others.

It is fundamental to keep in mind that Mill looks into morality as a social practice and not as autonomous self-determination by reason, like Kant. For Kantians, moral deliberation determines those actions which we have the most reason to perform. Mill disagrees; for him, it makes sense to say that "*A* is the right thing to do for Jeremy, but Jeremy is not morally obliged to do *A*."For instance, even if Jeremy is capable of writing a brilliant book that would improve the life of millions (and deteriorate none), he is not morally obliged to do so. According to Mill, our moral obligations result from the *justified* part of the moral code of our society; and the task of moral philosophy consists in bringing the moral code of a society in better accordance with the principle of utility.

The Role of Moral Rules (Secondary Principles)

In *Utilitarianism,* Mill designs the following model of moral deliberation. In the *first step* the actor should examine which of the rules (secondary principles) in the moral code of his or her society are pertinent in the given situation. If in a given situation moral rules (secondary principles) conflict, then (and only then) cans the *second step* invoke the formula of utility as a first principle. Pointedly one could say: the principle of utility is for Mill not a *component* of morality, but instead its *basis*. It serves the validation of rightness for our moral system and allows – as a meta-rule – the decision of conflicting norms. In the introductory chapter of *Utilitarianism*, Mill maintains that it would be "easy to show that whatever steadiness or consistency these moral beliefs have attained, has been mainly due to the tacit influence of a

standard not recognized", namely the principle of utility. The tacit influence of the principle of utility made sure that a considerable part of the moral code of our society is justified (promotes general well-being). But other parts are clearly unjustified. One case that worried Mill deeply was the role of women in Victorian Britain. In "The Subjection of Women" he criticizes the "legal subordination of one sex to the other" as incompatible with "all the principles involved in modern society" .

Moral rules are also critical for Mill because he takes human action in essence as to be guided by dispositions. A virtuous person has the disposition to follow moral rules. In his early essay "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy" he asserts that a "man is not really virtuous", unless the mere thought of committing certain acts is so painful that he does not even consider the possibility that they may have good consequences. He repeats this point in his *System of Logic* and *Utilitarianism*:

The mind is not in a right state, not in a state conformable to Utility, not in the state most conducive to the general happiness, unless it does love virtue in this manner – as a thing desirable in itself, even although, in the individual instance, it should not produce those other desirable consequences which it tends to produce, and on account of which it is held to be virtue. It is one thing to say that it could have optimal consequences (and thus be objectively better) to break a moral rule in a concrete singular case. Another is the question as to whether it would facilitate happiness to educate humans such that they would have the disposition to maximize situational utility. Mill answers the latter in the negative. Again, the upshot is that education matters. Humans are guided by acquired dispositions. This makes moral degeneration, but also moral progress possible.

Applying the Standard of Morality

In "Whewell on Moral Philosophy", Mill rejects an objection raised by one of his most competent philosophical adversaries. Whewell claimed that utilitarianism permits murder and other crimes in particular circumstances and is therefore incompatible with our considered moral judgments. Mill's discussion of Whewell's criticism is exceedingly helpful in clarifying his ethical approach:

Take, for example, the case of murder. There are many persons to kill whom would be to remove men who are a cause of no good to any human being, of cruel physical and moral suffering to several, and whose whole influence tends to increase the mass of unhappiness and vice. Were such a man to be assassinated, the balance of traceable consequences would be greatly in favor of the act. Mill gives no concrete case. Since he wrote – together with his wife Harriet Taylor –a couple of articles on horrible cases of domestic violence in the early 1850s, he might have had the likes of Robert Curtis Bird in mind, a man who tortured his servant Mary Ann Parsons to death .Does utilitarianism require us to kill such people who are the "cause of no good to any human being, of cruel physical and moral suffering to several"? Mill answers in the negative. His main point is that nobody's life would be safe if people were allowed to kill others whom they believe to be a source of unhappiness. Thus, a general rule that would allow to "removing men who are a cause of no good" would be worse than a general rule that does not allow such acts. People should follow the rule not to kill other humans because the general observance of this rule tends to promote the happiness of all.

This argument can be interpreted in a rule utilitarian or an indirect act utilitarian fashion. Along indirect act utilitarian lines, one could maintain that we would be cognitively overwhelmed by the task of calculating the consequences of any action. We therefore need rules as touchstones that point us to the path of action which tends to promote the greatest general happiness. Mill compares, in a critical passage, the core principles of our established morality (which he also calls "secondary principles") with the *Nautical Almanack*, a companion for navigating a voyage. Just as the *Nautical Almanack*is not first calculated at sea, but instead exists as already calculated, the agent must not in individual cases calculate the expected utility. In his moral deliberation the agent can appeal to secondary principles, such as the prohibition of homicide, as an approximate solution for the estimated problem.

Apparently, the act utilitarian interpretation finds further support in a letter Mill wrote to John Venn in 1872. He states:

I agree with you that the right way of testing actions by their consequences, is to test them by their natural consequences of the particular actions, and not by those which would follow if everyone did the same. But, for the most part, considerations of what would happen if everyone

did the same, is the only means we have of discovering the tendency of the act in the particular case. Mill argues that in many cases we can assess the *actual, expected* consequences of an action, only if we hypothetically consider that all would act in the same manner. This means we *recognize* that the consequences of *this particular* action would be damaging if everyone acted that way. A similar consideration is found in the Whewell essay. Here Mill argues: If a hundred breaches of rule (homicides, in this case) led to a particular harm (murderous chaos), then a single breach of rule is responsible for a hundredth of the harm. This hundredth of harm offsets the expected utility of this particular breach of rule. Mill believes that the breach of the rule is wrong because it is actually harmful. The argument is questionable because Mill overturns the presumption he introduces: that the actual consequences of the considered action would be beneficial. If the breach of the rule is actually harmful, then it is to be rejected in every conceivable version of utilitarianism. The result is trivial then and misses the criticism that act utilitarianism has counter-intuitive implications in particular circumstances.

There is one crucial difficulty with the interpretation of Mill as an indirect act utilitarian regarding moral obligation. If the function of rules was in fact *only* epistemic, as suggested by indirect act utilitarianism, one would expect that the principle of utility – when the epistemic conditions are satisfactory – can be and should be directly applied. But Mill is quite explicit here. The utilitarian principle should only be applied when moral rules conflict:"We must remember that only in these cases of conflict between secondary principles is it requisite that first principles should be appealed to." From an act utilitarian view regarding moral obligation, this is implausible. Why should one be morally obliged to follow a rule of which one positively knows that its observance in a particular case will not promote general utility?

Coming back to the example, it is important to remember that "the balance of traceable consequences would be greatly in favor of the act of homicide." Thus, according to an act utilitarian approach regarding moral obligation it would be morally allowed, if not required, to kill the man.

As mentioned, Mill arrives at a different conclusion. His position can be best understood with recourse to the distinction between the *theory of objective rightness* and the *theory of moral obligation* introduced in the last section. Seen from the perspective of an all-knowing and

impartial observer, it is – in regard to the given description – objectively right to perpetrate the homicide. However, moral laws, permissions, and prohibitions are not made for omniscient and impartial observers, but instead for cognitively limited and partial beings like humans whose actions are mainly guided by acquired dispositions. Their capacity to recognize what would be objectively right is imperfect; and their ability to motivate themselves to do the right thing is limited. As quoted before in his "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy",he states that some violations of the established moral code are simply unthinkable for the members of society: people recoil "from the very thought of committing" particular acts. Because humans cannot reliably recognize objective rightness and, in critical cases, cannot bring themselves to act objectively right, they are not obliged to maximize happiness. For ought implies can. In regard to the given description, the fact that the assassination of a human would be objectively right does not imply that the assassination of this human would be morally imperative or allowed. In other words: Mill differentiates between the *objectively right act* and the *morally right act*. With this he can argue that the assassination would be forbidden (*theory of moral obligation)*. To enact a forbidden action is *morally wrong*. As noted, Mill's theory allows for the possibility that an action is objectively right, but morally wrong (prohibited). An action *can* be wrong (bearing unhappiness), but its enactment would be no less morally right .Thus, Mill's considered position should be interpreted in the following way: First, the objective rightness of an act depends upon actual consequences; second, in order to know what we are morally obliged to do we have to draw on justified rules of the established moral code.

Utility and Justice

In the final chapter of *Utilitarianism*, Mill turns to the sentiment of justice. Actions that are perceived as unjust provoke outrage. The spontaneity of this feeling and its intensity makes it impossible for it to be ignored by the theory of morals. Mill considers two possible interpretations of the source of the sentiment of justice: first of all, that we are equipped with a sense of justice which is an independent source of moral judgment; second, that there is a general and independent principle of justice. Both interpretations are irreconcilable with Mill's position, and thus it is no wonder that he takes this issue to be of exceptional importance. He names the integration of justice the only real difficulty for utilitarian theory .

Mill splits this problem of integration into three tasks: The first consists in explaining the intensity and spontaneity of the sentiment of justice. The second task is to make plausible that the various types of judgments about justice can be traced back to a systematic core; and the third task consists in showing that the principle of utility constructs this core.

In a nutshell, Mill explains the sentiment of justice as the sublimation of the impulse to take revenge for perceived mortifications of all kinds. Mill sees vengeance as "an animal desire" that operates in the service of self-preservation. If it is known that one will not accept interventions in spheres of influence and interest, the probability of such interventions dwindles. The preparedness to take revenge tends to deter aggression in the first place. Thus, a reputation for vindictiveness – at first glance an irrational trait – arguably has survival value. This helps to explain why the sentiment is so widespread and vehement.

Our sentiment of justice, for Mill, is based on a refinement and sublimation of this animal desire. Humans are capable of empathizing such that the pleasure of others can instill one's own pleasure, and the mere sight of suffering can cause own suffering. The hurting of another person or even an animal may therefore produce a very similar affect as the hurting of one's own person. Mill considers the extension of the animal impulse of vengeance on those with whom we have sympathy as "natural", because the social feelings are for him natural. This natural extension of the impulse of revenge with the help of the social feelings represents a step in the direction of cultivating and refining human motivation. People begin to feel outrage when the interests of the members of their tribe are being violated or when shared social rules are being disregarded.

Gradually, sympathy becomes more inclusive. Humans discover that co-operation with people outside the tribe is advantageous. The "human capacity of enlarged sympathy" follows suit .As soon as humans begin to think about which parts of the moral code of a society are justified and which parts are not, they inevitably begin to consider consequences. This often occurs in non-systematic, prejudiced or distorted ways. Across historical periods of times, the correct ideas of intrinsic good and moral rightness will gradually gain more influence. Judgments about justice approximate progressively the requirements of utilitarianism: The rules upon which the judgments about justice rest will be assessed in light of their tendency to promote happiness. To

summarize: Our sentiment of justice receives its intensity from the "animal desire to repel or retaliate a hurt or damage to oneself", and its morality from the "human capacity of enlarged sympathy" and intelligent self-interest.

According to Mill, when we see a social practice or a type of action as unjust, we see that the *moral rights* of persons were harmed. The thought of moral rights is the *systematic core* of our judgments of justice. Rights breed perfect obligations, says Mill. Moral rights are concerned with the basic conditions of a good life. They protect an "extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility.". Mill subsumes this important and impressive kind of utility under the term security, "the most vital of all interests". It comprises such things as protection from aggression or starvation, the possibility to shape one's own life unmolested by others and enforcement of contracts. Thus, the requirements of justice "stand higher in the scale of social utility". To have a moral right means to have something that society is morally required to guard either through the compulsion of law, education or the pressure of public opinion. Because everyone has an interest in the security of these conditions, it is desirable that the members of society reciprocally guarantee each other "to join in making safe for us the very groundwork of our existence".Insofar as moral rights secure the basis of our existence, they serve our natural interest in self-preservation – this is the reason why their harm calls forth such intense emotional reactions. The interplay of social feelings and moral education explains, in turn, why we are not only upset by injustices when we personally suffer, but also when the elemental rights of *others* are harmed. This motivates us to sanction the suffering of others as unjust. Moral rights thus form the "most sacred and binding part of all morality". But they do not exhaust the moral realm. There are imperfect obligations which have no correlative right.

The thesis that moral rights form the systematic core of our judgments of justice is by no means unique to utilitarianism. Many people take it to be evident that individuals have absolute, inalienable rights; but they doubt that these rights can be grounded in the principle of utility. Intuitionists may claim that we recognize moral rights spontaneously, that we have intuitive knowledge of them. In order to reject such a view, Mill points out that our judgments of justice do not form a systematic order. If we had a sense of justice that would allow us to recognize what is just, similar to how touch reveals forms or sight reveals color, then we would expect that our corresponding judgments would exhibit a high degree of reliability, definitude and

unanimity. But experience teaches us that our judgments regarding just punishments, just tax laws or just remuneration for waged labor are anything but unanimous. The intuitionists must therefore mobilize a *first principle* that is independent of experience and that secures the unity and consistency of our theory of justice. So far they have not succeeded. Mill sees no suggestion that is plausible or which has been met with general acceptance.

The Proof of Utilitarianism

What Mill names the "proof" of utilitarianism belongs presumably to the most frequently attacked text passages in the history of philosophy. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord once remarked that Mill seems to answer by example the question of how many serious mistakes a brilliant philosopher can make within a brief paragraph. Meanwhile the secondary literature has made it clear that Mill's proof contains no logical fallacies and is less foolish than often portrayed.

It is found in the fourth part, "Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible", of *Utilitarianism*. For the assessment of the proof two introductory comments are helpful. Already at the beginning of *Utilitarianism*, Mill points out that "questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof." Notwithstanding, it is possible to give reasons for theories about the good, and these considerations are "equivalent to proof". These reasons are empirical and touch upon the careful observation of oneself and others. More cannot be done and should not be expected in a proof re ultimate ends.

A further introductory comment concerns the basis of observation through which Mill seeks to support utilitarianism. In moral philosophy the appeal to intuitions plays a prominent role. They are used to justify moral claims and to check the plausibility of moral theories. The task of thought-experiments in testing ethical theories is analogous to the observation of facts in testing empirical theories. This suggests that intuitions are the right observational basis for the justification of first moral principles. Mill, however, was a fervent critic of intuitionism throughout his philosophical work. In his *Autobiography* he calls intuitionism "the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions." Mill considered the idea that truths can be known *a priori*, independently of observation and experience, to be a stronghold of conservatism.

His argument against intuitionistic approaches to moral philosophy has two parts. The first part points out those intuitionists have not been able to bring our intuitive moral judgments into a system. There is neither a complete list of intuitive moral precepts nor a basic principle of morality which would found such a list. The second part of the Millian argument consists in an explanation of this result: What some call moral intuition is actually the result of our education and present social discourse. Society inculcates us with our moral views, and we come to believe strongly in their unquestionable truth. There is no system, no basic principle in the moral views of the Victorian era though. In *The Subjection of Women,* Mill caustically criticizes the moral intuitions of his contemporaries regarding the role of women. He finds them incompatible with the basic principles of the modern world, such as equality and liberty. Because the first principle of morality is missing, intuitionist ethics is in many regards just a decoration of the moral prejudices with which one is brought up not so much a guide as a consecration of men's actual sentiments".

What we need, Mill contends, is a basis of observation that verifies a first principle, a principle that is capable of bringing our practice of moral judgments into order. This elemental observational basis – and this is the core idea in Mill's proof – is human aspiration.

His argument for the utilitarian principle – if not a deductive argument, an argument all the same – involves three steps. First, Mill argues that it is reasonable for humans to aspire to one's own well-being; second, that it is reasonable to support the well-being of all persons (instead of only one's own); and third, that well-being represents the *only* ultimate goal and the rightness of our actions is to be measured exclusively in regard to the balance of happiness to which they lead.

Let us turn to the *first step of the argument*. Upon an initial reading it seems in fact to have little success. Mill argues that one's own well-being is *worthy* of striving for because each of us strives for his or her own well-being. Here he leans on a questionable analogy: "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it."

Can a more evident logical fallacy be given than the claim that something is *worthy* of striving for because it is factually sought? But Mill in no way believes that the relation between desirable and desired is a matter of definition. He is not saying that desirable objects are by definition objects which people desire; he writes instead that what people desire is the only *evidence* for what is desirable. If we want to know what is ultimately desirable for humans, we have to acquire observational knowledge about what humans ultimately strive for.

Mill's argument is simple: We know by observation that people desire their own happiness. With a conclusion that Mill calls "inductive", and to which he ascribes a central role in regard to our acquisition of knowledge, we succeed to the general thesis that all humans finally aspire to their happiness. This inductive conclusion serves as evidence for the claim that one's own happiness is not only desired, but *desirable*, worthy of aspiration. Mill thus supports the thesis that one's own happiness is an ultimate good to oneself with the observation that every human ultimately strives for his or her own well-being.

On this basis, Mill concludes in the *second step* of his proof that the happiness of all is also a good: "…each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons."

The "therefore" in the cited sentence above has evoked many a raised eyebrows. Does Mill claim here that each person tries to promote the happiness of all? This seems to be patently wrong. In a famous letter to a Henry Jones, he clarifies that he did not mean that every person, in fact, strives for the general good. "I merely meant in this particular sentence to argue that since *A's* happiness is a good, *B's* a good, *C's* a good, &c., the sum of all these goods must be a good.

Indeed, in the "particular sentence" he just concludes that general happiness is a "good to the aggregate of all persons." Nonetheless, one may doubt that Mill adequately responds to Jones' reservations. It is unclear what it means that general happiness is the good of the aggregate of all persons. Neither each person, nor the aggregate of all persons seem to strive for the happiness of all. But Mill's point in the second step of the argument is arguably a more modest one.

He simply wanted to vindicate the claim that if each person's happiness is a good to each person, then we are entitled to conclude that general happiness is also a good. As he says in the letter to

Jones: "the sum of all these goods must be a good." Similar to the first step of the argument we have here an epistemic relationship: The fact that each person is striving for his or her own happiness is evidence that happiness as such (regardless to whom) is valuable. If happiness as such is valuable, it is not unreasonable to promote the well-being of all sentient beings. With this, the second step of the argument is complete. The result may seem meager at first. That it is not unreasonable to promote the happiness of all appears to be no particularly controversial claim. On closer inspection, however, Mill's conclusion is quite interesting since it imposes pressure on self-interest theories of practical rationality. The "notion that self-interest possesses a special, underived rationality seems suddenly to require justification."What Mill fails to show is that each person has most reason to promote the general good. One should note, however, that the aim of the proof is not to answer the question why one should be moral. Mill does not want to demonstrate that we have reason to prefer general happiness to personal happiness.

Hedonism states not only that happiness is intrinsically good, but also that it is *the only* good and thus the only measure for our action. To show this, is the goal of the *third step* of the proof. Mill's reflections in this step are based on psychological hedonism and the principle of association. According to Mill, humans cannot desire anything except that which is either an instrument to or a component of happiness. He concedes that people seem to strive for every possible thing as ultimate ends. Philosophers may pursue knowledge as their ultimate goal; others value virtue, fame or wealth. Corresponding to his basic thesis that "the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it", Mill must consider the possibility that knowledge, fame or wealth have intrinsic value.

He blocks this inference with the thesis that humans do not "naturally and originally" desire other goods than happiness. That knowledge, virtue, wealth or fame is seen as intrinsically valuable is due to the operation of the principle of association. In the course of our socialization, goods, like knowledge, virtue, wealth or fame acquire value by their association with pleasure. A philosopher came to experience knowledge as pleasurable, and this is why he desires it. Humans strive for virtue and other goods only if they are associated with the natural and original tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Virtue, knowledge or wealth can thus become parts of happiness. At this point, Mill declares that the proof is completed.

Evaluating Consequences

According to Mill's *Second Formula* of the utilitarian standard, a good human life must be rich in enjoyments, in both quantitative and qualitative respects. A manner of existence without access to the higher pleasures is not desirable: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."

The life of Socrates is better because no person who is familiar with higher pleasures will trade the joy of philosophizing against an even infinite amount of lower pleasures, Mill suggests. This does not amount to a modern version of Aristotle's' view that only a life completely devoted to theoretical activity is desirable. One must not forget that Mill is a hedonist after all. What kind of life is joyful and therefore good for a particular person depends upon many factors, such as tastes, talents and character. There are a great variety of lifestyles that are equally good. But Mill insists that a human life that is completely deprived of higher pleasures is not as good as it could be. It is not a desirable "mode of existence", nothing a "competent judge" would choose.

Utilitarianism demands that we establish and observe a system of social, legal and moral rules that enables all mankind to have the best life possible, a life that is "as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality". Mill's statement that every human has an equal claim "to all the means of happiness", belongs in this context. Society must make sure that the social-economic preconditions of a non-impoverished life prevail. In one text passage, Mill even includes the happiness of animals. Animals, too, should have the best possible life, "so far as the nature of things admits".

The *Second Formula* maintains that a set of social rules *A* is better than the set *B*, if in *A* less humans suffer from an impoverished, unhappy life and more enjoy a fulfilled, rich life than in *B*.

More difficult is the question how to evaluate scenarios that involve unequal population sizes. With Mill there is no explicit unpacking of this problem; but his advocacy of the regulation of birth gives us at least an indication of the direction in which his considerations would go. Let us consider the following example: Which world would be better: world *X* in which 1000 humans have a fulfilled life and 100 a bad one, or world *Y* in which 10000 humans have a fulfilled life and 800 an impoverished one? The answer to this question depends on whether we focus on the

minimizing the number of bad lives or on maximizing the number of good lives, and whether we measure this absolutely or relatively to the total population.

(i) One possible answer concerns the minimization of the number of *bad lives*. This can mean the absolute number of humans with joyless or impoverished lives. If one answers this way, then world *X* would be better than world *Y* because in this world the absolute number of humans with bad lives would be less. But it is also possible to think of the *Second Formula* as a statement about the relative number of humans with bad lives; in this case world *Y* would be preferable.

(ii) Another possible answer emphasizes the maximization of fulfilled lives. If one follows this interpretation, then world *Y* is better than world *X* because in this world absolute and relative measurements suggest that more humans have fulfilled lives.

Under the influence of Malthus, Mill insisted throughout his work that the problem of poverty is to be resolved only through a reduction of the population number – as noted, he encouraged the regulation of birth. This proposal is reconcilable with all three interpretations, but does not bear any relation to the question concerning which of the interpretations he could have preferred. One can speculate how Mill would answer, but there is not clear textual basis.

A further theme that Mill does not address concerns the problem of measurement and the interpersonal comparison of quantities of happiness. From an utilitarian point of view, other things being equal, it makes no moral difference whether *A* or *B* experiences an equal quantity of happiness (CW 10, 258). A quantity of happiness for *A* bears precisely as much value as a quantity of happiness for *B*. But this answers neither the question of measurement nor the question of the comparison of interpersonal utility. Can quantities of happiness be measured like temperatures? The philosopher and economist Francis Edgeworth spoke in his 1881 *Mathematical Psychics* of a fictitious instrument of measurement, a hedonimeter, with whose help the quantities of pleasure and pain could be determined with scientific accuracy.

Or do amounts of happiness have to be assessed approximately, such that Harriet Taylor for example can say that she is happier today than she was yesterday. Interpersonal comparisons of utility are confronted with the related question whether and under which conditions one can say that, for instance, Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill experience an equal amount of happiness.

Mill gave both themes little attention. But probably he was convinced that precise measurement and comparison of interpersonal utility would not be needed, maybe not even possible. One often does not need a thermometer to discern whether or not an object is warmer than another. Similarly, in many cases we do not need something like a hedonimeter to judge whether the condition of world *A* is better than that of world *B*. We need only a reasonable degree of experience and the capacity to empathize. Often, though, we may be unsure what to say. Which of two systems of income tax, for instance, promotes general happiness more? Mill's position here seems to be that we have to decide questions like these by means of public debate and not by means of a hedonimeter.

Regarding moral rights, "the most sacred and binding part of all morality" (all competent judges seem to agree that they promote general happiness. Our capacity to estimate quantities and qualities of happiness is thus sufficiently good in order to conclude that a society that does protect "the most vital of all interests" is better than a society that does not.

Freedom of Will

In various places of his work John Stuart Mill occupied himself with the question of the freedom of the human will. The respective chapter in the *System ofLogic* he later claimed was the best part of the entire book. Here Mill presents the solution to a problem with which he wrestled not only intellectually. In his *Autobiography* he calls it a "heavy burden" and reports: "I pondered painfully on the subject." Freedom of the will is a traditional philosophical problem whose roots stretch back to antiquity. The problem results from the conflict of two positions: On the one hand, that all events – and thus also all actions – have causes from which they necessarily follow; on the other hand, that humans are free. Both claims cannot be reconciled, or so it seems, and this is the problem.

Mill is a determinist and assumes that human actions follow necessarily from antecedent conditions and psychological laws. This apparently commits him to the claim that humans are

not free; for if their actions occurred necessarily and inevitably, then they could not act otherwise. With perfect knowledge of antecedent conditions and psychological laws, we could predict human behavior with perfect accuracy.

But Mill is convinced that humans are free in a relevant sense. In modern terminology, this makes him a compatibilist, someone who believes in the reconcilability of determinism and free will. Part of his solution to the problem of compatibility is based on the discovery of a "misleading association", which accompanies the word "necessity". We have to differentiate between the following two statements: On the one hand, those actions occur *necessarily*; on the other hand, that they are predetermined and agents have no influence on them. Corresponding to this is the differentiation of the doctrine of necessity (determinism) and the doctrine of fatalism. Fatalism is indeed not compatible with human freedom, says Mill, but determinism is.

He grounds his thesis that determinism is reconcilable with a sense of human freedom, first, (i) with a repudiation of common misunderstandings regarding the content of determinism and, second, (ii) with a presentation of what he takes to be the appropriate concept of human freedom.

(i) With regard to human action, the "doctrine of necessity" claims that actions are determined by the external circumstances and the effective motives of the person at a given point in time. Causal necessity means that events are accompanied not only factually without exception by certain effects, but would also be under counter-factual circumstances. Given the preconditions and laws, it is necessary that a person acts in a certain way, and a well-informed observer would have predicted precisely this. As things were, this *had* to happen.

Fatalism advocates a completely different thesis. It claims that all essential events in life are fixed, regardless of antecedent conditions or psychological laws. Nothing could change their occurrence. If someone's fate is to die on a particular day, there is no way of changing it. One finds this kind of fatalism in Sophocles "Oedipus". Oedipus is destined to kill his father and marry his mother and his desperate attempts to avoid his foretold fate are in vain. The determinists of his day, Mill suggests, were "more or less obscurely" also fatalists – and he thought that this explains the predominance of the belief that human will can be free only if determinism is false.

(ii) Mill now turns to the question of whether determinism – correctly understood – is indeed incompatible with the doctrine of free will. His central idea is, *firstly*, that determinism in no way excludes the possibility that a person can influence his or her character; and *secondly*, that the ability to have influence on one's own character is what we mean by free will.

(1) Actions are determined by one's character and the prevailing external circumstances. The character of a person is constituted by his or her motives, habits, convictions and so forth. All these are governed by psychological laws. A person's character is not given at birth. It is being formed through education; the goals that we pursue, the motives and convictions that we have depend to a large degree on our socialization. But if it is possible to form someone's character by means of education, then it is also possible to form one's own character through self-education: "We are exactly as capable of making our own character, *if we will*, as others are of making it for us."

If we have the wish to change ourselves, then we can. Experience teaches us that we are capable of having influence on our habits and attitudes. The desire to change oneself resides, for Mill, in the individual, thus *in our selves*. Discontent with oneself and one's own life, or the admiration for another lifestyle may be reasons why one wants to change.

(2) The ability to influence the formation of one's own character, for Mill, is the substance of the doctrine of free will: "that what is really inspiring and ennobling in the doctrine of freewill, is the conviction that we have real power over the formation of our own character; that our will, by influencing some of our circumstances, can modify our future habits or capabilities of willing. All this was entirely consistent with the doctrine of circumstances, or rather, was that doctrine itself, properly understood." Nothing more is intended by the doctrine of free will: We are capable of acting in a way that corresponds to our own desires; and we are, if we want, capable of shaping our desires. More precisely said, Mill advocates the idea that we are in a measure free, insofar as we can become those who we want to be.

One may object here that Mill's theory presumes the desire to change. But what about those who do not want to change? If one does not want to change, then one could not change. And with this, not all humans are free. But such an objection presumes that those who do not have the desire to

change themselves are missing something (namely, the desire to change), and that, because of this lack, they are less free. But Mill contends that persons in certain ways "are their desires". If someone is lacking the desire to change, he or she is no less free than a person who has this desire. It is not as if one were simply missing an entry upon a list of choices. The "I" does not choose between various desires and options; instead it is rather that "one's self" is identified with one's desires: "…it is obvious that 'I' am both parties in the contest; the conflict is between me and myself; between (for instance) me desiring a pleasure, and me dreading self-reproach. What causes Me, or, if you please, my Will, to be identified with one side rather than with the other, is that one of the Me's represents a more permanent state of feelings than the other one does." The thought that there is no "I" is also the reason why Mill rejects the idea that freedom presupposes the capacity to refrain from an act in a given situation ("I could have done otherwise"). Mill finds the idea utterly curious that someone's will was only free if he could have acted differently. For what does it mean to say that "one could have acted differently?" Is it supposed to mean that one could have chosen what one did not want to choose? According to Mill's analysis, what we mean by the phrase (that we could have acted differently) is this: If the circumstances, or my character or my mood or my knowledge and so forth, would have been different, I would have acted differently. Without such variations, the thought that one could have acted differently seems strange to Mill:"I dispute therefore altogether that we are conscious of being able to act in opposition to the strongest present desire or aversion." Because a person cannot counteract an effective desire, he is necessarily determined by it – just as things are.

Responsibility and Punishment

Mill variously examines the thesis that punishment is only justified if the perpetrator could have acted differently. A contemporary of Mill's, the social reformer Robert Owen, claimed that punishment of the breaking of social norms is unjustified, because the character of a person is the result of social influences. No one is the author of himself. Because actions follow from the character and one is not responsible for this, it is not just to punish people for the violation of norm which they could not help violating. It was not within their power to act differently. And it is unjust to punish someone for something, if he could not do anything to hinder its occurrence .

Mill responds to Owen's criticism that persons could very well have influence on their characters, *if they wanted*. But does this satisfy us as a defense of punishment for the breaking of norms? It might be right that someone who does not *want* to change will not become depressed about his inability to change. Probably the thought will not even occur to him. But the point here is not whether one's inability is a source of depression or not. The point is whether it is fair to punish people for actions which they could not control. If one lacks the respective desire, then one cannot change one's character. It seems unfair to blame a person for her rotten character if there is no "I" that we can accuse of failing to have the desire to change.

Mill's solution to this problem is somewhat surprising. We have to be clear as to what it means to say that a person "could not have acted differently". Certainly, it does not mean that a person would have performed a particular act under all conceivable circumstances. This would be the case, if humans were programmed like robots to act in certain ways, regardless of the external conditions. In actual fact, one can in almost all cases imagine variations in circumstances that would effectively hold a person back from acting how he or she acted. Someone with criminal tendencies might not be able to keep himself from acting criminally, because he does not consider the possibility that he will be severely punished if caught. "If, on the contrary, the impression is strong in his mind that a heavy punishment will follow, he can, and in most cases does, help it." It is the purpose of punishments to reduce anti-social behavior, in particular the violation of moral rights, "the most vital of all interests". The justification of punishment consists in the fact that it serves this justified goal. If someone cannot be restrained from breaking the norm through the threat of punishment, then the threat of punishment was ineffective in regard to this individual. It was not enough – seen in the light of his character and his perception of the situation – to discourage him from violating the norm. But that the criminal inclinations of an individual is higher than average and that it had therefore needed a stronger incentive in order to bring him to respect the norm makes neither the punishment nor the threat of punishment unjust or illegitimate.

According to Mill, conceiving oneself as a morally responsible agent does not mean to see oneself as an "I" who could have acted differently. It means to consider oneself as member of a moral community entitled to sanction the violation of justified social norms. This idea of moral responsibility does not seem far-fetched. A person may well agree that it is appropriate to punish

him for the violation of moral rights, even if he "could not have done otherwise" under the given circumstances.

Rule or Act Utilitarianism?

There is considerable disagreement as to whether Mill should be read as a rule utilitarian or an (indirect) act utilitarian. Many philosophers look upon rule utilitarianism as an untenable position and favor an act utilitarian reading of Mill. Under the pressure of many contradicting passages, however, a straightforward act utilitarian interpretation is difficult to sustain. Recent studies emphasize Mill's rule utilitarian leanings or find elements of both theories in Mill.

In *Utilitarianism* he seems to give two different formulations of the utilitarian standard. The first points in an act utilitarian, the second in a rule utilitarian direction. Since act and rule utilitarianism are incompatible claims about what makes actions morally right, the formulations open up the fundamental question concerning what style of utilitarianism Mill wants to advocate and whether his moral theory forms a consistent whole. It is important to note that the distinction between rule and act utilitarianism had not yet been introduced in Mill's days. Thus Mill is not to blame for failing to make explicit which of the two approaches he advocates.

In the first and more famous formulation of the utilitarian standard (*First Formula)* Mill states:

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 (…). But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded…." Just a few pages later, following his presentation of qualitative hedonism, Mill gives his second formulation (*Second Formula)*:

According to the Greatest Happiness Principle the ultimate end is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; . This, being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the

standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined, *the rules and precepts for human conduct*, by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation. The *Second Formula* relates the principle of utility to *rules and precepts* and not to actions. It seems to say that an act is correct when it corresponds to rules whose preservation increases the mass of happiness in the world. And this appears to be a rule-utilitarian conception.

In the light of these passages, it is not surprising that the question whether Mill is an act- or a rule-utilitarian has been intensely debated. In order to understand his position it is important to differentiate between two ways of defining act and rule utilitarianism. (i) One can conceive of them as competing *theories about objective rightness*. An action is objectively right if it is the thing which the agent has most reason to do. Act utilitarianism would say that an action is objectively right, if it actually promotes happiness. For rule utilitarianism, in contrast, an action would be objectively right, if it actually corresponds to rules that promote happiness.

(ii) One can also conceive of act- and rule utilitarianism as *theories about moral obligation*. Act utilitarianism requires us to aim for the maximization of happiness; rule utilitarianism, in contrast, requires us to observe rules that facilitate happiness. Understood as a theory about moral obligation, act utilitarianism postulates: Act in a way that promotes happiness the most. Rule utilitarianism claims, on the other hand: Follow a rule whose general observance promotes happiness the most.

Mill is in regard to (i) an act utilitarian and in regard to (ii) a rule utilitarian. This way the seeming contradiction between the *First* and the *Second Formula* can be resolved. The *First Formula* states what is right and what an agent has most reason to do. It points to the "foundation of morals". In contrast, the *Second Formula* tells us what our moral obligations are. We are morally obliged to follow those social rules and precepts the observance of which promotes happiness in the greatest extent possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEONTOLOGICAL (NON – CONSEQUENTIALIST) ETHICS

Section one; Performance of one's own duty

Brain Storming: Dear learner! What do you think is the role of performing one's duty in relation to moral obligation we have as moral beings in judging actions as moral and immoral? ---

Deontologists' ethicists believe that the moral worth of an action has nothing to do with any consequences that the act might have. This is because the consequences of an action are often out with our control and cannot be easily predicted. Therefore the moral worth of an act must derive from something **i**ntrinsic to the act itself rather than extrinsicto it.

4.1. Divine –based morality

Divine Command Theory

Philosophers both past and present have sought to defend theories of ethics that are grounded in a theistic framework. Roughly, Divine Command Theory is the view that morality is somehow dependent upon God, and that moral obligation consists in obedience to God's commands. Divine Command Theory includes the claim that morality is ultimately based on the commands or character of God, and that the morally right action is the one that God commands or requires. The specific content of these divine commands varies according to the particular religion and the particular views of the individual divine command theorist, but all versions of the theory hold in common the claim that morality and moral obligations ultimately depend on God.

Divine Command Theory has been and continues to be highly controversial. It has been criticized by numerous philosophers, including Plato, Kai Nielsen, and J. L. Mackie. The theory also has many defenders, both classic and contemporary, such as Thomas Aquinas, Robert Adams, and Philip Quinn. The question of the possible connections between religion and ethics is of interest to moral philosophers as well as philosophers of religion, but it also leads us to consider the role of religion in society as well as the nature of moral deliberation. Given this, the arguments offered for and against Divine Command Theory have both theoretical and practical importance.

In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, <u>Immanuel Kant</u>, who has traditionally not been seen as an advocate of Divine Command Theory, claims that morality requires faith in God and an afterlife. According to Kant, we must believe that God exists because the requirements of morality are too much for us to bear. We must believe that there is a God who will help us satisfy the demands of the moral law. With such a belief, we have the hope that we will be able to live moral lives. Moreover, Kant argues that "there is not the slightest ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and proportionate happiness of a being who belongs to the world as one of its parts and is thus dependent on it" .However, if there is a God and an afterlife where the righteous are rewarded with happiness and justice obtains, this problem goes away. That is, being moral does not guarantee happiness, so we must believe in a God who will reward the morally righteous with happiness. Kant does not employ the concept of moral faith as an argument for Divine Command Theory, but a contemporary advocate could argue along Kantian lines that these advantages do accrue to this view of morality.

Another possible advantage of Divine Command Theory is that it provides an objective metaphysical foundation for morality. For those committed to the existence of objective moral truths, such truths seem to fit well within a theistic framework. That is, if the origin of the universe is a personal moral being, then the existence of objective moral truths are at home, so to speak, in the universe. By contrast, if the origin of the universe is non-moral, then the existence of such truths becomes philosophically perplexing, because it is unclear how moral properties can come into existence via non-moral origins. Given the metaphysical insight that *ex nihilo, nihilo fit*, the resulting claim is that out of the non-moral, nothing moral comes. Objective moral properties stick out due to a lack of naturalness of fit in an entirely naturalistic universe. This perspective assumes that objective moral properties exist, which is of course highly controversial.

Not only does Divine Command Theory provide a metaphysical basis for morality, but according to many it also gives us a good answer to the question, why be moral? William Lane Craig argues that this is an advantage of a view of ethics that is grounded in God. On theism, we are held accountable for our actions by God. Those who do evil will be punished, and those who live morally upstanding lives will be vindicated and even rewarded. Good, in the end, triumphs over evil. Justice will win out. Moreover, on a theistic view of ethics, we have a reason to act in

ways that run counter to our self-interest, because such actions of self-sacrifice have deep significance and merit within a theistic framework. On Divine Command Theory it is therefore rational to sacrifice my own well-being for the well-being of my children, my friends, and even complete strangers, because God approves of and even commands such acts of self-sacrifice.

An important objection to the foregoing points is that there is something inadequate about a punishment and reward orientation of moral motivation. That is, one might argue that if the motive for being moral on Divine Command Theory is to merely avoid punishment and perhaps gain eternal bliss, then this is less than ideal as an account of moral motivation, because it is a mark of moral immaturity. Should we not instead seek to live moral lives in community with others because we value them and desire their happiness? In response to this, advocates of Divine Command Theory may offer different accounts of moral motivation, agreeing that a moral motivation based solely on reward and punishment is inadequate. For example, perhaps the reason to be moral is that God designed human beings to be constituted in such a way that being moral is a necessary condition for human flourishing. Some might object that this is overly egoistic, but at any rate it seems less objectionable than the motivation to be moral provided by the mere desire to avoid punishment. Augustine develops a view along these lines. Augustine begins with the notion that ethics is the pursuit of the supreme good, which provides the happiness that all humans seek. He then claims that the way to obtain this happiness is to love the right objects, that is, those that are worthy of our love, in the right way. In order to do this, we must love God, and then we will be able to love our friends, physical objects, and everything else in the right way and in the right amount. On Augustine's view, love of God helps us to orient our other loves in the proper way, proportional to their value. However, even if these points in defense of Divine Command Theory are thought to be satisfactory, there is another problem looming for the view that was famously discussed by Plato over two thousand years ago.

4.2 Rule- Intuitionism(Deontological)-Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is one of the most influential philosophers in the history of Western philosophy. His contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and

aesthetics have had a profound impact on almost every philosophical movement that followed him.

Historical Background to Kant

In order to understand Kant's position, we must understand the philosophical background that he was reacting to. First, this article presents a brief overview of his predecessor's positions with a brief statement of Kant's objections, then I will return to a more detailed exposition of Kant's arguments. There are two major historical movements in the early modern period of philosophy that had a significant impact on Kant: Empiricism and Rationalism. Kant argues that both the method and the content of these philosophers' arguments contain serious flaws. A central epistemological problem for philosophers in both movements was determining how we can escape from within the confines of the human mind and the immediately knowable content of our own thoughts to acquire knowledge of the world outside of us. The Empiricists sought to accomplish this through the senses and *a posteriori* reasoning. The Rationalists attempted to use *a priori* reasoning to build the necessary bridge. A posteriori reasoning depends upon experience or contingent events in the world to provide us with information. That "Bill Clinton was president of the United States in 1999," for example, is something that I can know only through experience; I cannot determine this to be true through an analysis of the concepts of "president" or "Bill Clinton." A priori reasoning, in contrast, does not depend upon experience to inform it. The concept "bachelor" logically entails the ideas of an unmarried, adult, human male without my needing to conduct a survey of bachelors and men who are unmarried. Kant believed that this twofold distinction in kinds of knowledge was inadequate to the task of understanding metaphysics for reasons we will discuss in a moment.

The Ideas of Reason

The faculty of reason has two employments. For the most part, we have engaged in an analysis of theoretical reason which has determined the limits and requirements of the employment of the faculty of reason to obtain knowledge. Theoretical reason, Kant says, makes it possible to cognize what is. But reason ought its practical employment in

determining what to be as well. This distinction roughly corresponds to the two philosophical enterprises of metaphysics and ethics. Reason's practical use is manifest in the regulative function of certain concepts that we must think with regard to the world, even though we can have no knowledge of them.

Kant believes that, "Human reason is by its nature architectonic." That is, reason thinks of all cognitions as belonging to a unified and organized system. Reason is our faculty of making inferences and of identifying the grounds behind every truth. It allows us to move from the particular and contingent to the global and universal. I infer that "Caius is mortal" from the fact that "Caius is a man" and the universal claim, "All men are mortal." In this fashion, reason seeks higher and higher levels of generality in order to explain the way things are. In a different kind of example, the biologist's classification of every living thing into a kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species, illustrates reason's ambition to subsume the world into an ordered, unified system. The entire empirical world, Kant argues, must be conceived of by reason as causally necessitated (as we saw in the Analogies). We must connect, "one state with a previous state upon which the state follows according to a rule." Each cause, and each cause's cause, and each additional ascending cause must itself have a cause. Reason generates this hierarchy that combines to provide the mind with a conception of a whole system of nature. Kant believes that it is part of the function of reason to strive for a complete, determinate understanding of the natural world. But our analysis of theoretical reason has made it clear that we can never have knowledge of the totality of things because we cannot have the requisite sensations of the totality, hence one of the necessary conditions of knowledge is not met. Nevertheless, reason seeks a state of rest from the regression of conditioned, empirical judgments in some unconditioned ground that can complete the series. Reason's structure pushes us to accept certain *ideas of reason* that allow completion of its striving for unity. We must assume the ideas of *God, freedom*, and *immortality*, Kant says, not as objects of knowledge, but as practical necessities for the employment of reason in the realm where we can have knowledge. By denying the possibility of knowledge of these ideas, yet arguing for their role in the system of reason, Kant had to, "annul knowledge in order to make room for faith."

Kant's Ethics

It is rare for a philosopher in any era to make a significant impact on any single topic in philosophy. For a philosopher to impact as many different areas as Kant did is extraordinary. His ethical theory has been as influential as, if not more influential than, his work in epistemology and metaphysics. Most of Kant's work on ethics is presented in two works. *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* is Kant's "search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality." In *The Critique of Practical Reason* Kant attempts to unify his account of practical reason with his work in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant is the primary proponent in history of what is called deontological ethics. Deontology is the study of duty. On Kant's view, the sole feature that gives an action moral worth is not the outcome that is achieved by the action, but the motive that is behind the action. The categorical imperative is Kant's famous statement of this duty: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

a. Reason and Freedom

For Kant, as we have seen, the drive for total, systematic knowledge in reason can only be fulfilled with assumptions that empirical observation cannot support. The metaphysical facts about the ultimate nature of things in themselves must remain a mystery to us because of the spatiotemporal constraints on sensibility. When we think about the nature of things in themselves or the ultimate ground of the empirical world, Kant has argued that we are still constrained to think through the categories, we cannot think otherwise, but we can have no knowledge because sensation provides our concepts with no content. So, reason is put at odds with itself because it is constrained by the limits of its transcendental structure, but it seeks to have complete knowledge that would take it beyond those limits.

Freedom plays a central role in Kant's ethics because the possibility of moral judgments presupposes it. Freedom is an idea of reason that serves an indispensable practical function. Without the assumption of freedom, reason cannot act. If we think of ourselves as completely causally determined, and not as uncaused causes ourselves, then any attempt to conceive of a rule that prescribes the means by which some end can be

achieved is pointless. I cannot both think of myself as entirely subject to causal law and as being able to act according to the conception of a principle that gives guidance to my will. We cannot help but think of our actions as the result of an uncaused cause if we are to act at all and employ reason to accomplish ends and understand the world.

So reason has an unavoidable interest in thinking of itself as free. That is, theoretical reason cannot demonstrate freedom, but practical reason must assume for the purpose of action. Having the ability to make judgments and apply reason puts us outside that system of causally necessitated events. "Reason creates for itself the idea of a spontaneity that can, on its own, start to act–without, i.e., needing to be preceded by another cause by means of which it is determined to action in turn, according to the law of causal connection," Kant says. In its intellectual domain, reason must think of itself as free.

It is dissatisfying that he cannot demonstrate freedom; nevertheless, it comes as no surprise that we must think of ourselves as free. In a sense, Kant is agreeing with the common sense view that how I choose to act makes a difference in how I actually act. Even if it were possible to give a predictive empirical account of why I act as I do, say on the grounds of a functionalist psychological theory, those considerations would mean nothing to me in my deliberations. When I make a decision about what to do, about which car to buy, for instance, the mechanism at work in my nervous system makes no difference *to me*. I still have to peruse *Consumer Reports*, consider my options, reflect on my needs, and decide on the basis of the application of general principles. My first person perspective is unavoidable; hence the deliberative, intellectual process of choice is unavoidable.

b. The Duality of the Human Situation

The question of moral action is not an issue for two classes of beings, according to Kant. The animal consciousness, the purely sensuous being, is entirely subject to causal determination. It is part of the causal chains of the empirical world, but not an originator of causes the way humans are. Hence, rightness or wrongness, as concepts that apply to situations one has control over, do not apply. We do not morally fault the lion for killing the gazelle, or even for killing its own young. The actions of a purely rational being, by

contrast, are in perfect accord with moral principles, Kant says. There is nothing in such a being's nature to make it falter. Its will always conforms with the dictates of reason. Humans are between the two worlds. We are both sensible and intellectual, as was pointed out in the discussion of the first *Critique*. We are neither wholly determined to act by natural impulse, nor are we free of non-rational impulse. Hence we need rules of conduct. We need, and reason is compelled to provide, a principle that declares how we ought to act when it is in our power to choose

Since we find ourselves in the situation of possessing reason, being able to act according to our own conception of rules, there is a special burden on us. Other creatures are *acted upon* by the world. But having the ability to choose the principle to guide our actions makes us *actors*. We must exercise our will and our reason to act. Will is the capacity to act according to the principles provided by reason. Reason assumes freedom and conceives of principles of action in order to function.

Two problems face us however. First, we are not wholly rational beings, so we are liable to succumb to our non-rational impulses. Second, even when we exercise our reason fully, we often cannot know which action is the best. The fact that we can choose between alternate courses of actions (we are not determined to act by instinct or reason) introduces the possibility that there can be better or worse ways of achieving our ends and better or worse ends, depending upon the criteria we adopt. The presence of two different kinds of object in the world adds another dimension, a moral dimension, to our deliberations. Roughly speaking, we can divide the world into beings with reason and will like ourselves and things that lack those faculties. We can think of these classes of things as ends-in-themselves and mere means-to-ends, respectively. Ends-in-themselves are <u>autonomous</u> beings with their own agendas; failing to recognize their capacity to determine their own actions would be to thwart their freedom and undermine reason itself. When we reflect on alternative courses of action, means-to-ends, things like buildings, rocks, and trees, deserve no special status in our deliberations about what goals we should have and what means we use to achieve them. The class of ends-in-themselves, reasoning agents like ourselves, however, do have a special status in our considerations about what goals we should have and the means we employ to accomplish

them. Moral actions, for Kant, are actions where reason leads, rather than follows, and actions where we must take other beings that act according to their own conception of the law into account.

c. The Good Will

The will, Kant says, is the faculty of acting according to a conception of law. When we act, whether or not we achieve what we intend with our actions is often beyond our control, so the morality of our actions does not depend upon their outcome. What we can control, however, is the will behind the action. That is, we can will to act according to one law rather than another. The morality of an action, therefore, must be assessed in terms of the motivation behind it. If two people, Smith and Jones, perform the same act, from the same conception of the law, but events beyond Smith's control prevent her from achieving her goal, Smith is not less praiseworthy for not succeeding. We must consider them on equal moral ground in terms of the will behind their actions.

The only thing that is good without qualification is the good will, Kant says. All other candidates for an intrinsic good have problems, Kant argues. Courage, health, and wealth can all be used for ill purposes, Kant argues, and therefore cannot be intrinsically good. Happiness is not intrinsically good because even being worthy of happiness, Kant says, requires that one possess a good will. The good will is the only unconditional good despite all encroachments. Misfortune may render someone incapable of achieving her goals, for instance, but the goodness of her will remains.

Goodness cannot arise from acting on impulse or natural inclination, even if impulse coincides with duty. It can only arise from conceiving of one's actions in a certain way. A shopkeeper, Kant says, might do what is in accord with duty and not overcharge a child. Kant argues, "it is not sufficient to do that which should be morally good that it conform to the law; it must be done for the sake of the law." There is a clear moral difference between the shopkeeper that does it for his own advantage to keep from offending other customers and the shopkeeper who does it from duty and the principle of honesty. Likewise, in another of Kant's carefully studied examples, the kind act of the person who overcomes a natural lack of sympathy for other people out of respect for duty has moral

worth, whereas the same kind act of the person who naturally takes pleasure in spreading joy does not. A person's moral worth cannot be dependent upon what nature endowed them with accidentally. The selfishly motivated shopkeeper and the naturally kind person both act on equally subjective and accidental grounds. What matters to morality is that the actor thinks about their actions in the right manner.

We might be tempted to think that the motivation that makes an action good is having a positive goal–to make people happy, or to provide some benefit. But that is not the right sort of motive, Kant says. No outcome, should we achieve it, can be unconditionally good. Fortune can be misused, what we thought would induce benefit might actually bring harm, and happiness might be undeserved. Hoping to achieve some particular end, no matter how beneficial it may seem, is not purely and unconditionally good. It is not the effect or even the intended effect that bestows moral character on an action. All intended effects "could be brought about through other causes and would not require the will of a rational being, while the highest and unconditional good can be found only in such a will." It is the possession of a rationally guided will that adds a moral dimension to one's acts. So it is the recognition and appreciation of duty itself that must drive our actions.

d. Duty

What is the duty that is to motivate our actions and to give them moral value? Kant distinguishes two kinds of law produced by reason. Given some end we wish to achieve, reason can provide a *hypothetical imperative*, or rule of action for achieving that end. A hypothetical imperative says that *if* you wish to buy a new car, *then* you must determine what sorts of cars are available for purchase. Conceiving of a means to achieve some desired end is by far the most common employment of reason. But Kant has shown that the acceptable conception of the moral law cannot be merely hypothetical. Our actions cannot be moral on the ground of some conditional purpose or goal. Morality requires an unconditional statement of one's duty.

And in fact, reason produces an absolute statement of moral action. The moral imperative is unconditional; that is, its imperative force is not tempered by the conditional "*if* I want to achieve some end, *then* do X." It simply states, do X. Kant believes that reason dictates

a *categorical imperative* for moral action. He gives at least three formulations of the Categorical Imperative.

"Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."   "Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature."   Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."   What are Kant's arguments for the Categorical Imperative? First, consider an example. Consider the person who needs to borrow money and is considering making a false promise to pay it back. The maxim that could be invoked is, "when I need of money, borrow it, promising to repay it, even though I do not intend to." But when we apply the universality test to this maxim it becomes clear that if everyone were to act in this fashion, the institution of promising itself would be undermined. The borrower makes a promise, willing that there be no such thing as promises. Thus such an action fails the universality test.

The argument for the first formulation of the categorical imperative can be thought of this way. We have seen that in order to be good, we must remove inclination and the consideration of any particular goal from our motivation to act. The act cannot be good if it arises from subjective impulse. Nor can it be good because it seeks after some particular goal which might not attain the good we seek or could come about through happenstance. We must abstract away from all hoped for effects. If we remove all subjectivity and particularity from motivation we are only left with will to universality. The question "what rule determines what I ought to do in this situation?" becomes "what rule ought to universally guide action?" What we must do in any situation of moral choice is act according to a maxim that we would will everyone to act according to.

The second version of the Categorical Imperative invokes Kant's conception of nature and draws on the first *Critique*. In the earlier discussion of nature, we saw that the mind necessarily structures nature. And reason, in its seeking of ever higher grounds of explanation, strives to achieve unified knowledge of nature. A guide for us in moral matters is to think of what would not be possible to will universally. Maxims that fail the

test of the categorical imperative generate a contradiction. Laws of nature cannot be contradictory. So if a maxim cannot be willed to be a law of nature, it is not moral.

The third version of the categorical imperative ties Kant's whole moral theory together. Insofar as they possess a rational will, people are set off in the natural order of things. They are not merely subject to the forces that act upon them; they are not merely means to ends. They are ends in themselves. All means to an end have a merely conditional worth because they are valuable only for achieving something else. The possessor of a rational will, however, is the only thing with unconditional worth. The possession of rationality puts all beings on the same footing, "every other rational being thinks of his existence by means of the same rational ground which holds also for myself; thus it is at the same time an objective principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will."

Kant's Criticisms of Utilitarianism

Kant's criticisms of utilitarianism have become famous enough to warrant some separate discussion. Utilitarian moral theories evaluate the moral worth of action on the basis of happiness that is produced by an action. Whatever produces the most happiness in the most people is the moral course of action. Kant has an insightful objection to moral evaluations of this sort. The essence of the objection is that utilitarian theories actually devalue the individuals it is supposed to benefit. If we allow utilitarian calculations to motivate our actions, we are allowing the valuation of one person's welfare and interests in terms of what good they can be used for. It would be possible, for instance, to justify sacrificing one individual for the benefits of others if the utilitarian calculations promise more benefit. Doing so would be the worst example of treating someone utterly as a means and not as an end in themselves.

Another way to consider his objection is to note that utilitarian theories are driven by the merely contingent inclination in humans for pleasure and happiness, not by the universal moral law dictated by reason. To act in pursuit of happiness is arbitrary and subjective, and is no more moral than acting on the basis of greed, or selfishness. All three emanate from subjective, non-rational grounds. The danger of utilitarianism lies in its embracing

of baser instincts, while rejecting the indispensable role of reason and freedom in our actions.

4.3 Act-Intuitionism (Deontological) -William David Ross

Sir William David Ross (1877–1971) made significant contributions to the translation and interpretation of the works of Aristotle and to moral philosophy. His work in ancient philosophy, especially his various commentaries on Aristotle, is still considered to be of the highest caliber. Many believe that Ross's work in this area is his most valuable contribution to philosophy. However, his main writings in moral philosophy are of lasting if not equal value. His *The Right and the Good* is arguably one of the most important works of moral philosophy published in the twentieth century.

The Case Against Ideal Utilitarianism and Kant's Moral Theory

Armed with an account of the main convictions of common-sense morality, Ross attacked ideal utilitarianism and Kantianism, though ideal utilitarianism, the view that the only basic moral requirement is to maximally promote a plurality of intrinsic goods, was his main opponent.

Ross's basic complaint about his rivals is that each, in a different way, 'over-simplifies the moral life'. Both Kant and ideal utilitarians fail to capture some salient element of the 'main moral convictions of the plain man'. Ross contends that Kant oversimplifies the moral life in a number of distinct ways. First, Kant is wrong to think that 'the rightness or wrongness of an individual act can be inferred with certainty from its falling or not falling under a rule capable of being universalized'. Second, Kant is wrong to think that there is only one motive that has value, and that the moral life consists in a 'contest between one element which alone has worth [i.e., the good will] and a multitude of others which have none; the truth is rather that it is a struggle between a multiplicity of desires having various degrees of worth'. Third, Kant is wrong to think that moral rules have 'absolute authority admitting of no exception'. The ideal utilitarianism of both Moore and Hastings Rashdall is guilty of a number of distortions of common-sense thinking. First, it wrongly assumes that there is a 'general character which makes right acts right', that of maximising a plurality of intrinsic goods. Second, in virtue of presupposing that

there is only one thing that we ought all things considered to do it distorts our understanding of moral deliberation. For example, when deciding whether to fulfil a promise we think much more of the fact that in the past we have made a promise than of the consequences we might realise by fulfilling it. Third, ideal utilitarianism wrongly implies that the only morally significant relation 'in which my neighbours stand to me is that of being possible beneficiaries by my action'.

Ross's Distinctive Moral Framework: The Right and the Good

Out of these criticisms emerges a distinct moral position, emphasizing the complexity of moral life. In a review of *Foundations of Ethics*, C. D. Broad writes that *The Right and the Good* was 'much the most important contribution to ethical theory made in England for a generation'. The best explanation of Broad's praise is that the book presents a unique and compelling form of deontology, according to which there are a plurality of both moral requirements and intrinsic goods. There is no one master principle that explains why the particular things that we believe are wrong/right are in fact wrong/right. Instead, there are a number of basic moral requirements which cannot be reduced to some more fundamental principle. These are relied upon in making decisions about what we ought to do all things considered, though there is no sense in which this is deduced from principles. There is no one intrinsic good/evil that explains why the particular things we think are good/evil are in fact good/evil. Instead, there are a number of goods which cannot be reduced to some more fundamental good. These are relied upon in making decisions about the goodness or badness of a state of affairs all things considered, though there is no sense in which this is deduced from these claims. It is his articulation of this particular view that makes Ross's work a lasting philosophical contribution.

The Right

There is some dispute as to the precise number of principles to which Ross subscribes. It seems that he holds that there are five duties each of which rests on a separate and distinct ground and each of which specifies a factor which counts in favor of or against an act. Ross believes that we have a duty of *fidelity*, that is, a duty to keep our promises; a duty of *reparation* or a duty to act to right a previous wrong we have done; a duty of *gratitude*, or a duty to return

services to those from whom we have in the past accepted benefits; a duty to *promote a maximum of aggregate good*; and finally a duty of *non-maleficence*, or a duty not to harm others.

He does not see these duties as equally important. He holds that the duty of non-maleficence is more important than the duty to promote a maximum of aggregate good, and he suggests that the duties of fidelity, reparation, and gratitude are in general more weighty than the duty to promote the good. Unlike the duty to promote the good, the duties of fidelity, reparation and gratitude rest on personal relations with others, which generate special rather than general duties. It is important to Ross that we can stand in the obligation-generating relations 'of promisee to promiser, of creditor to debtor, of wife to husband, of child to parent, of friend to friend, of fellow countryman to fellow countryman, and the like'. Rival views, as noted, ignore these morally significant relations, or the 'highly personal character of duty', at their peril. Finally, although he does not say it, his view would surely be that the duty of non-maleficence is weightier than the duties of reparation, gratitude, and fidelity: it is (unless much is at stake) wrong to harm others in order to fulfil these duties.

Ross's major innovation is that these principles state *prima facie* rather than absolute obligations. This is an idea that simply had not occurred to critics of deontological theories, and therefore represented at the time a major advance in the dialectic existing between utilitarians and non-utilitarians. Ross claims that '*prima facie*' is an unfortunate phrase on which to rely. It suggests that these only appear to be duties which further reflection might reveal to be illusory. This is not the view: these principles express real facts. There is a further worry, for these are not really duties of any kind. He thinks instead that these principles simply specify factors or features of a situation that speak in favor of or against, morally speaking, an act or what to set ourselves to do.The fact that an act fails to fulfill a promise is a fact that counts against it, morally. The fact that an act promotes a maximum of aggregate good is a fact that counts in favor of it, morally. One way to state what Ross has in mind, though this is controversial, is to say that each principle specifies a fact that counts as a moral reason for or against an act. Ross suggests another, equally plausible view, that each of the principles specifies a responsibility. Therefore, we have responsibilities to express gratitude, to compensate for past wrongs, to promote the good, and so on. These responsibilities are what we are required to draw on to determine what we ought all things considered to do.

Is this list of responsibilities complete? Ross intimates that this list is the best representation of the *core* commitments of common-sense morality. He is confident that we have these responsibilities. He states, for example, that 'the existence of an obligation arising from the making of a promise is so axiomatic that no moral universe can be imagined in which it would not exist'. He is not entirely confident that there exist only these responsibilities; he offers this list 'without claiming completeness or finality for it'. His view is not meant to be hostile to the idea that we might recognize a 'new duty' in light of new circumstances. However, he does hold that 'the general principles which it i.e., intuitionism regards as intuitively seen to be true are very few in number and very general in character'. He seems to think that most disputes about the above list would revolve around what should be added rather than what should be subtracted or reduced, since the responsibilities listed above are 'authentic…duties'. But if new circumstances can lead to the recognition of new duties, why may they not lead to the recognition that there are fewer duties than we might otherwise have supposed? This seems to be the nub of the issue between Ross and his ideal utilitarian foes.

Ideal utilitarians and others are keen to argue that Ross's view is problematic because it is not systematic enough. In *Some Problems in Ethics*, H. W. B. Joseph suggested that views like Ross's go wrong, since 'our obligations are not a heap of unrelated obligations'. Forty years later, Rawls registered the same complaint: without some account of how the plurality of normative principles are to be weighed against one another using 'reasonable ethical criteria, the means of rational discussion have come to an end. An intuitionist conception of justice [and by extension ethics] is, one might say, but half a conception'.

Ross is moved in part by this sort of worry. He initially lists what appear to be seven responsibilities, including a responsibility of justice a responsibility to bring about 'a distribution of happiness between other people in proportion to merit' and a responsibility of self-improvement a responsibility to improve oneself in respect of virtue and knowledge. He argues that these can be subsumed by the responsibility 'that we should produce as much good as possible'. But beyond this reduction Ross will travel no further: 'loyalty to the facts is worth more than a symmetrical architecture or a hastily reached simplicity'. Indeed, he has a very strong case against many of his critics, including Moore, Rashdall, and Joseph, since they adopt a form of value pluralism for similar reasons. He has a further argument against Rawls. Rawls's

theory contains two principles of justice, lexically ordered. His first principle outlining a set of basic rights takes priority over his second principle outlining the correct distribution of social benefits and burdens. Rawls does not think it is ever right to violate rights in order to produce just distributions. This gets him a theory that is as systematic as his classical average utilitarian rival and more systematic than Ross's theory, but Ross can argue that Rawls achieves system at the expense of absolutism, which many acknowledge to have counterintuitive results.

But it is not clear that Ross has a lock on the best representation of common-sense morality. It is relatively clear that most hedonistic utilitarians are reformers of common-sense morality. These philosophers may not be moved at the level of moral foundations by claims that their view conflicts with common-sense morality. For their aim in part is to revise it. Ross gives hedonism short shrift because he thinks it obvious that pleasure is not the only thing that is intrinsically valuable. He often argues that ideal utilitarianism, like hedonistic utilitarianism, can be dismissed because it is at odds with common-sense morality. Yet, it is far from clear that ideal utilitarianism is reformist like hedonistic or classical utilitarianism. The better way to represent the dispute between ideal utilitarians and Ross is over which view best represents common-sense moral thinking. It is certainly the case that the main proponents of ideal utilitarianism took themselves to be aiming to best represent common-sense morality. As Ross conducts it, the main dispute between the two revolves around the issue of whether ideal utilitarians can make sense of the obligation to keep one's promises. Ross's view is that 'to make a promise is not merely to adapt an ingenious device for promoting the general well-being; it is to put oneself in a new relation to one person in particular, a relation which creates a specifically new*prima facie* duty to him, not reducible to the duty of promoting the general well-being of society'. He employs the following example to illustrate his initial case . Suppose that by fulfilling a promise to Edward you will produce 100 units of good for him but that by breaking the promise and doing something else that you have not promised to do you will produce 101 units of good for James. The ideal utilitarian view entails that it is wrong to fulfil the promise: we must benefit James. But this is not the verdict of common-sense morality. According to Ross, it takes a much greater disparity in value between the two to justify begging off on the promise. In reply, the ideal utilitarian argues that the common-sense verdict may be captured by noting that breaking promises erodes mutual confidence and that keeping promises increases mutual confidence.

These goods and evils tip the balance in favor of keeping the promise. But Ross thinks this a lame response. There will no doubt be cases where all the benefits of breaking the promise will outweigh (though only very slightly) all the costs associated with breaking it, and in this case the ideal utilitarian will have to admit that it is obligatory to break the promise . Ross thinks that this is not the verdict of common-sense morality.

In a set of engaging essays, W. A. Pickard-Cambridge pressed Ross on the issue of whether ideal utilitarianism was actually as at odds with common-sense morality as Ross suggested. Pickard-Cambridge first argues that there are strong direct and indirect reasons for taking promises very seriously. He further argues that ideal utilitarianism accounts better for our intuitions about the following kinds of cases:

> Chuck has promised Peter that he will replace a string on his violin by 4:00 tomorrow, but just before Chuck intends to fulfill the promise Peter contracts an illness that makes it impossible for him ever to use his violin. There appears to be no responsibility on Chuck's part to fulfill the promise. This is the verdict of the plain man and the verdict of the ideal utilitarian, but it is not the verdict that seems entailed by Ross's view . A rich miser pretends to be a pauper in order to get Richard to agree to pay him $100. Richard takes pity on him, and he agrees to pay him the money in six month's time. Richard discovers a few months later through newspapers reports that the miser is a fraud. There again appears to be no responsibility to fulfil the promise. Again, this is the verdict of the plain man and the verdict of the ideal utilitarian, but it is not the verdict that seems entailed by Ross's view.

> A poor man contacts Anne via the Internet asking her to please pay him $100.00 in six month's time. Anne agrees to give him the money. Three months later, before Anne has paid the money, the poor man wins the lottery and is rich. The ideal utilitarian says that there is now no reason to fulfill the promise and the plain man agrees, but this is not the verdict that is entailed by Ross's view.

In response to (1), Ross argues that we must insist on'some common sense in the interpretation of the promise'. Both Peter and Chuck assume that if by 3:00 Peter is rendered unable ever to use his violin, then the promise is null and void. But the ideal utilitarian may see a

weakness here and urge that she can provide an interpretation and that her interpretation and its explanation fits more easily with common-sense morality. Peter and Chuck assume what they do because no good would otherwise come from insisting on the promise being fulfilled.

In reply to (2), Ross contends that the promise 'arose out of conversation with the miser, which was conducted under the implied contract to tell each other the truth'. Therefore the promise is null and void. The difficulty with this reply is that to secure it Ross has to contend that the implied contract stipulates that we are to tell each other the whole truth or all of the truth, and it is not clear that this requirement is one to which the plain man subscribes. It is not obvious that when I sell you something I am required to tell you all the truths about the item for sale. The ideal utilitarian is in a better position to explain why in the case of the miser the implied contract to tell the truth requires that one not state that one is a beggar when one is not and why it does not require us to tell all of the truth in other cases. The contract is specified this way because this produces good outcomes.

In reply to (3), Ross contends initially that if Anne has 'a very delicate sense of honor', then she ought to consider paying the poor man on account of her carelessness in agreeing unconditionally in the first place. This is not plausible. There is no reason to enrich an already rich person simply because of carelessness (of this sort). Ross further argues that what is promised is not that Anne pay $100.00; rather, what is promised is that she pay a poor man $100.00, and since the man in question is no longer poor, there is therefore no need to fulfil the promise. But what drives this interpretation of the promise? The ideal utilitarian may argue that the reason we interpret the promise this way is that doing so promotes the good. Furthermore, the ideal utilitarian can argue that even without thinking of this interpretation of the promise we still believe that we have no or only very weak reasons to pay, and that they can offer the best explanation of this fact. They can also explain why this is (as Ross notes) a difficult issue to decide: there are utilitarian reasons on either side.

Pickard-Cambridge further argues that ideal utilitarianism gives the best explanation of the strength of a promise. Ross agrees that some promises are more binding than others, e.g., the promise to visit a sick friend is stronger than the promise to attend the theatre with friends. He suggests that the former is stronger because of the value of what is being promised. In discussing

his view that a casual promise is less binding and a recent promise is more binding he adds that this is due to the fact that the way in which and the time at which a promise has been made 'intensify the promise's awareness of its existence and the promise's expectation of its fulfillment'. These responses seem to play right into the hands of the ideal utilitarian: the promise is more binding in the first case because of the greater value at stake and in the second case because the expectation and the disappointment are greater, all of which are goods of the sort that the ideal utilitarian claims we need to balance in deciding what we ought all things considered to do.

Ross has one final reply to Pickard-Cambridge, using the following example. *A* is dying. He entrusts his property to *B*, on the strength of *B*'s promise to give it to *C*. *C* does not know of *A*'s intentions or *B*'s promise. *B*'s activities will not disappoint *A* or *C*, nor will his activities negatively affect the general mutual confidence. Suppose that *D* could make better use of the property than *C*. It follows on ideal utilitarianism that *B* ought to give the property to *D*. Ross thinks this breach of trust 'outrageous' .

The version of ideal utilitarianism to which Pickard-Cambridge subscribes seems to entail that B has no reason to fulfill the promise to A. This is a problem for the view. However, Ross's own view seems to imply revision in this case. He argues that 'when we consider ourselves bound…to fulfill a promise, we think of the fulfillment of the promise as the bringing into existence of some source of pleasure or satisfaction for the person to whom we have made the promise'. This suggests that the rightness of the promise depends on it producing some pleasure or satisfaction for *A*. But since *A* is dead when *B* fulfils the promise no pleasure or satisfaction can be brought into existence for *A*, implying that *B* has no obligation by Ross's lights to fulfill the promise. Ross might drop this requirement and suggest only that the fulfillment of a promise be 'bonific' for someone . This seems to put him at odds with the plain man in other cases. Consider a death-bed promise with a different content, that *A* be buried with *C*, his wife. Suppose that this promise is not bonific. Ross will have to say that there is no reason to fulfil it. Hence, he'll have to advocate revision to common-sense morality. Perhaps he can argue that his revision is more conservative than the revisions required by ideal utilitarianism. But this is a very thin difference, and may not be enough to give Ross the edge. Given these worries and the fact that ideal utilitarianism seems quite close to the plain man or common-sense morality in many of the

other important cases, that it would entail that it is right to break the promise in the initial case above can hardly be considered a death blow.

The ideal utilitarian may not be satisfied with this outcome. Perhaps the more appropriate route for her is not to opt for revision to common-sense morality. For this may in the end give Ross a philosophical advantage, especially if he drops the claim that it is a necessary condition of act of promise keeping being right that it be'bonific' or promote some good and if he can find satisfactory replies to Pickard-Cambridge's objections. Instead, perhaps the better strategy is to suggest that they can capture the importance of promise keeping to common-sense morality by holding that promise keeping is intrinsically valuable or at least that promise breaking is intrinsically evil . The general strategy is to subsume all of Ross's non-utilitarian duties in this way. This is a compelling response. To assess it, it is important to examine his theory of value.

The Good

In RG, Ross contends that four things are intrinsically good: justice (happiness apportioned to merit), pleasure, knowledge and virtue (or, 'virtuous disposition and action, i.e. action, or disposition to act, from any one of certain motives, of which at all events the most notable are the desire to do one's duty, the desire to bring into being something that is good, and the desire to give pleasure or save pain to others'. Virtue, knowledge and pleasure are states of mind, while justice is a relation between states of mind .These values are not of the same importance. Ross holds that virtue is the most important and that some virtuous motives are more important than others (e.g., the desire to do one's duty is more valuable than the desire to promote others' pleasure) .Knowledge is the next most important of the values.Knowledge is more important than right opinion, since the former has certainty which the latter lacks, and 'knowledge of general principles is intellectually more valuable than knowledge of isolated matters of fact'. The least most valuable is pleasure .It is not clear where to place justice in this hierarchy, since Ross says only that it is less valuable than virtue .It is not implausible to think that it should be placed between (virtuous) knowledge and pleasure, and therefore that the values are ranked as follows: virtue, (virtuous) knowledge, justice and pleasure.

In FE, Ross defends a slightly different view. He appears to maintain again that there are four values: virtue, intellectual and aesthetic activities, justice and (others') pleasure. In RG, Ross

maintains that all intrinsic values are valuable in the same way: the goodness of good things is intrinsic to them . But in FE he revises this view. He contends that virtue and intellectual activities are 'fit objects of admiration' or objects 'worthy of admiration'. The goodness of these things is a 'quality intrinsic to them'. The values of justice and pleasure are 'worthy objects of satisfaction' or things in which it is right to take satisfaction or an interest. The goodness of these things is not intrinsic to them; rather, it is a relational property, which depends on our rightly taking an interest or rightly finding (some kind of) satisfaction in them. This appears to follow from the fact that 'while it is self-evident that the only ground on which a thing is worthy of admiration is that it is good in itself, it is not self-evident that the only ground on which a thing is worthy of our interest or liking is that it is good in itself'. This distinction allows Ross to explain why only innocent pleasures or pleasures that are not undeserved or taken in the misfortune of others or in lust or in cruelty are good and why only the pleasure of others is good and hence why we think that we have to promote only them. The reason that only innocent pleasure is valuable is that only it is worthy of satisfaction, and the reason that only the pleasure of others is valuable is that only it is an object of 'sympathetic satisfaction' . One's own pleasure is not an object of sympathetic satisfaction, since one cannot feel sympathy for oneself; instead, one's own pleasure is merely an *inevitable* object of satisfaction.

That in FE Ross holds that there are four goods is controversial. It has been suggested that in FE Ross rejects the view that pleasure is intrinsically good. This is hard to accept. He repeatedly claims that the pleasure of others is good. He thinks we have a duty to promote the pleasure of others and that the basis of this judgment is that their pleasure is good. Finally, it really would be contrary to the plain man's view and to reflective thinking to deny that pleasure is a good and that pain is an evil. The view that Ross thinks that justice is good is also less clear. He often states that there are only three non-instrumental goods. In early writings, he claims that justice is a requirement of duty not a value. However, since he suggests quite clearly at one point that he thinks that justice is good in the same sense that the pleasure of others is good it is not unreasonable to think that he holds that justice is a good. He also suggests at one point that promise keeping is good in the same way that justice and pleasure are good. But he more often rejects the claim that promise keeping is good, suggesting that not all things that are objects worthy of satisfaction are valuable.

It is now possible to assess the second ideal utilitarian reply to Ross mentioned above. Some ideal utilitarians contend that his objections to the view may be overcome by arguing that promise keeping, reparation, and gratitude are non-instrumentally valuable. The most plausible argument of this variety states that Ross must accept that promise keeping is valuable (or at least that promise breaking is evil) because he accepts that knowledge and justice are valuable and there is no real distinction between these values and the value of keeping promises or the disvalue of breaking promises. The characterization provided above of Ross's theory of value provides him with a defense. He seems to insist on any occasions that only states of mind or relations between states of mind have value. Promise keeping, reparation, and gratitude are not merely states of mind or relations between states of mind. Therefore, they cannot be good.

One worry is that knowledge is not merely a state of consciousness. Ross insists that knowledge has intrinsic value. He sometimes suggests this in FE. However, his considered view is that it is not knowledge but intellectual and aesthetic activities that have value. It is not unreasonable to think that Ross moved away from thinking that it is knowledge that has value and to thinking that it is intellectual (and aesthetic) activity that has value because only the latter is properly called a state of consciousness. This might be problematic for Ross. If he rejects the idea that knowledge is intrinsically valuable while accepting that intellectual activities are intrinsically valuable, he cannot account for the fact that knowledge appears to be more important than justified opinion. But Ross can argue that knowledge is more important because of its instrumental properties, e.g., it helps us better promote justice or morality or pleasure. *A fortiori* the claim that it is intellectual activities that are intrinsically good explains why some instances of knowledge are more important than others. Ross says that 'different instances of this [intellectual] activity are good in proportion as they are conducted according to these principles' i.e., principles discovered by logic. Because more philosophical or more general knowledge requires greater and more sophisticated use of 'the principles discovered by logic', it is better. The value of the intellectual activities explains the value of the knowledge.

But what about the fact that justice is an intrinsic value? It is not a state of consciousness; it is a relation between states of mind. If Ross is willing to accept this as a good, why not accept that promise keeping, and so on, are good? It might be that he can still insist that justice is different from promise keeping, reparation, and gratitude because it is compounded from states of

consciousness and that is why it and not these other things are good. However, perhaps the better reply is simply to drop justice from his list of values. He repeatedly contends that it is only states of mind that have value, and justice is not a state of mind. He can insist on this view and block the ideal utilitarian response. He is open to characterizing justice as a requirement of duty rather than a value, and he loses little by dropping it as a value. Further, he might argue that understanding justice as a moral requirement is the best way to think of it if one wants to capture what we think. In this case, the burden of proof is on the ideal utilitarian.

Ross relies quite heavily on the Moorean isolation method to defend his value theory. His value theory came under much less scrutiny than did his deontic theory, and therefore he did not see fit to consider monistic responses to it. This may in part be due to the fact that there is agreement amongst his main rivals—Moore, Rashdall, Pickard-Cambridge, Ewing, and Johnson—that value pluralism is true. This may also be due in part to the fact that he considered the main monistic rival—that is, hedonism—a dead end. But hedonism lives on. Therefore, it may be that Ross's value theory is in for a challenge that neither he nor his ideal utilitarian critics anticipated.

To get a taste of what this challenge may look like consider the following hedonistic reply to Ross's argument for the idea that virtue is intrinsically valuable. Hedonistshold*pace* Ross that while it is obvious that virtue is instrumentally good and vice is instrumentally bad, it is far from clear that the former is intrinsically good and the latter is intrinsically bad. In response, Ross asks us to imagine two worlds, $W_1$and W_2. $W_1$and W_2includes the same quantity of pleasure. However, W_1 contains agents that are virtuous, who act from or who are disposed to act from the right motives, while W_2 contains agents who are vicious, who act from or who are disposed to act from the wrong motives. Is not W_1 preferable to W_2? Ross thinks it is, and he says that what explains this is that virtue is intrinsically good.

But the hedonist has a reply. The situation envisaged is impossible, for surely W_1 would have more pleasure than W_2 because typically virtuous people produce more pleasure than vicious people. Indeed, would not a world with virtuous people be more likely to continue to be filled with pleasure and lack the possibility of descending into chaos than a world with vicious people? Is not this ultimately the reason why we desire or prefer it? In response, Ross reminds us that not

all pleasure springs from the actions of virtuous people and not all pain springs from actions of vicious. Some issues from 'the operation of natural laws'. Suppose, then, that there are two worlds, W_1 and W_2. W_1 contains virtuous people and W_2 contains vicious people, and that the two worlds contain equal amounts of pleasure, because although W_1-type worlds usually contain more pleasure than W_2-type worlds, W_1's extra virtue-generated pleasure is offset by 'a much greater incidence of disease', making the worlds equal in pleasure. Ross contends that it is still the case that the virtuous world, W_1, is better than W_2.

This is a good response, but the hedonist has a rejoinder. Would not W_1 be on the whole better (hedonistically speaking) in the long run because of the virtuous people? Would not W_1 be a place where it is more likely to be the case that a cure is found or where it is more likely that pain is treated effectively and sympathetically or where it is more likely to remain stable enough to handle the disease and illness? Ross may rely on strategies that are similar to the ones he adopts against the ideal utilitarian's attempt to show that she can explain the importance of promise keeping. But it is clear that proponents of Ross's view of value may well have to contend with arguments of this variety given the recent resurgence of hedonism.

Moral Epistemology

How do we acquire moral and axiological knowledge? Ross maintains that 'both in mathematics and in ethics we have certain crystal-clear intuitions from which we build up all that we can know about the nature of numbers and the nature of duty'. Our knowledge of the basic moral and axiological propositions which are the object of our moral intuitions is non-inferential. They are non-inferentially knowable because they are self-evident or knowable on the basis of an understanding alone. For example, that we have a responsibility to keep our promises is self-evident. It is by a process of reflection on this proposition that we come to apprehend that we have this responsibility. Ross thinks we can trust our moral apprehensions, and since apprehension is a matter of knowledge, and knowledge implies certainty, he is certain that we have the above responsibilities and that certain things are intrinsically valuable.

That our responsibilities are self-evident does not entail that they are obvious to everyone who reflects on them. Ross maintains that a responsibility is self-evident 'not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first

time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematic axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident'. The analogy with mathematics is instructive, for we acquire our moral knowledge in the same way we acquire knowledge of mathematical axioms. We apprehend that $2+2 = 4$ by apprehending that 2+2 matches makes 4 matches and that 2+2 balls makes 4 balls, and so on. We apprehend the algorithm in the particular cases after repeated exposure to particular instances of its application, by a process of intuitive induction. We apprehend that it is *prima facie* right to keep promises by apprehending that it is *prima facie* right to fulfill this or that particular promise. 'What comes first in time is the apprehension of the self-evident *prima facie* rightness of an individual act of a particular type. From this we come by reflection to apprehend the self-evident general principle of *prima facie*duty'.

How do we decide what we ought to do, all things considered, in some particular circumstance? What is the relationship between the responsibilities we have and the 'actual or absolute duty to do one particular act in particular circumstances'? Our self-evident responsibilities are not 'principles by the immediate application of which our duty in particular circumstances can be deduced'. Rather, one determines what one ought to do all things considered, that is, one's actual duty or one's duty proper, by reference to '*all* the morally significant kinds it the act is an instance of'. What one has most responsibility to do or what is most suitable all things considered 'belongs to an act in virtue of its whole nature and of nothing less than this' . We never *know* what we ought to do all things considered. Instead, we have a 'considered opinion' or 'probable opinion' regarding what we ought all things considered to do in a particular situation. An example will help us here. Imagine that I can help my neighbor with his gardening project and this will produce a lot of good for both of us. I have also promised you that I will meet you to discuss an assignment, but this produces less good than helping my neighbor. Ross says that in this case we have to balance the two responsibilities. He thinks that typically the requirement to keep one's promises is more stringent than the requirement to benefit other people. In such situations what you ought to do is that thing 'of all those possible for the agent in the circumstances, that has…the greatest balance of*prima facie* rightness, in those respects in which they are*prima facie* right, over their *prima facie* wrongness, in those respects in

which they are *prima facie*wrong'. The act which is one's actual duty or duty proper is the one for which one is most responsible or to which the weightier of one's responsibilities attach. 'This sense of our particular duty in particular circumstances, preceded and informed by the fullest reflection we can bestow on the act in all its bearings, is highly fallible, but it is the only guide we have to our duty'. In the end, the decision regarding what to do, to use Aristotle's phrase, 'rests with perception'. It is important to note that all of the responsibilities have a valence, positive or negative, and this valence persists even when a responsibility is outweighed by weightier responsibilities.

This epistemology has been attacked from a variety of different angles. One main worry is that there is very little agreement in intuitions, and this suggests that there is no fact of the matter as to what has value or what one is responsible for. Ross concedes that there is a lot of disagreement. His response begins by noting that a lot of moral diversity rests not on 'disagreement about fundamental moral principles, but partly on differences in the circumstances of different societies, and partly on different views which people hold, not on moral questions but on questions of fact' . He thinks that most of the differences concern *media axiomata*, i.e., attempts to apply general principles to particular circumstances, which rest on different circumstances or different factual beliefs. About these, he says that intuitionists must have an open mind.

There are many differences that cannot be explained away in this fashion, however. There are differences as to the 'comparative worth of different goods' and as to the stringency of the responsibilities Ross endorses. These disagreements should not, he thinks, undermine our confidence that there is objective moral truth. It is very hard to see a resolution to these problems. He says that despite changes in scientific theories there is a sense that science progresses toward the truth. The same is true in ethics. There is no reason to 'doubt that man progresses fairly steadily towards moral truth as he does towards scientific' .The difficulty with this response is that whereas in scientific matters there is an independent way of establishing progress, there is no such independent or seemingly independent way of establishing this in ethics. Recent research in the social sciences on moral judgment should not leave us confident. The problems with Ross's moral epistemology are compounded by the fact that he thinks that the principles of his framework best reflect the main elements of common-sense moral thinking, and

that this is necessary to an acceptable moral theory. This threatens to make his position appear parochial. He is aware of this worry. He replies by noting that the number of principles that intuitionism endorses is small in number and general in content and that this leaves room to reject much of what is commonly taken to be right. This seems like the right kind of move to make. However, it puts him in a rather awkward position. If it really is true that the number is small and that it is possible therefore to reject much of what is commonly recognized to be morally required, then the position has a more reformist edge, and to the extent that it is reformist it is more rather than less like the other views that Ross rejects. In this case, it makes it much more difficult for him to fault his rivals for not capturing common-sense morality. If he attempts to move more toward the plain man's view, then although he can more easily raise objections to ideal utilitarianism and other views, he is much more likely to lose his critical element and therefore fend off the charge of parochialism. The point may be made another way. The more general and less robust his list of responsibilities and goods the less likely the charge of parochialism may stick, but it is also less likely that the view is as close to common sense as he suggests, in which case that his opponents deviate from it to some extent is not a mark against them or at least cannot be used by Ross as a mark against them.

Moral Metaphysics

Like many in his time, Ross took pains to undermine various definitions of moral terms. He draws a distinction between naturalistic and non-naturalistic definitions. The former are 'definitions which claim to define an ethical term without using any other ethical term'. The latter are definitions which attempt 'to define one ethical term by the aid of another'. Ross rejects all naturalistic definitions of moral terms, including 'right' and (intrinsic) 'good'. In RG, he argues that the moral terms 'right' and 'ought' are incapable of definition: 'right 'is an 'irreducible notion'. In FE, he suggests again that 'right' is indefinable, though he is sympathetic to the idea that 'right' is definable in terms of 'suitable'. On this view, 'this act is right' means 'this act has "the greatest amount of suitability possible in the circumstances. This is not a naturalist definition, since 'suitability' is itself a 'unique and indefinable' ethical notion. In RG, Ross appears to reject all naturalistic attempts to define 'good'. He is in particular keen to impugn views that provide relational accounts of 'good'; that is, views that define it in terms of some relation to a mental state, e.g., desire. His view appears to be that 'goodness is a quality

which can no more be defined in terms of anything other than itself, than can the quality of the sensation which we describe as being one of "seeing yellow"'. In FE, he seems to affirm the view that 'good' is indefinable, though again he seems sympathetic to a non-naturalistic definition, according to which 'good' is definable in terms of 'admirable' or 'commendable'. He says that this sense of 'good' applies only to things that are intrinsically good in the sense of being objects worthy of admiration, and (as noted above) only virtue and intellectual activity are worthy of admiration. The notion of 'good' as applied to the goods of pleasure and justice can be defined relationally. These goods are not objects worthy of admiration but rather fit objects of satisfaction. Both notions of good are in a sense definable, but the definitions are non-natural: in both cases 'good' is defined in terms of 'worthiness' or 'rightness'.

Ross suggests a number of arguments against various (naturalistic and non-naturalistic) definitions of moral terms. He relies in part on the following kind of argument, which is directed at Moore. If 'right' and 'being productive of the greatest good in the circumstances' mean the same thing, then it is not the case that it is intelligible that the proposition 'the "right act" just is "the act productive of the greatest good in the circumstances"' should have been denied and maintained 'with so much fervor; for we do not fight for or against analytic propositions'. It is intelligible that these propositions should have been denied and maintained with so much fervor. Therefore, it is not the case that 'right' and 'productive of the greatest good in the circumstances' mean the same thing. This argument can be generalized to reject the usual suspects, e.g., 'right' means 'approved of by me' or 'right' means 'approved of by the majority of society', and so on. But it is not the best argument, since we may well fight over analytic propositions, especially when they are opaque or unobvious.

Ross seems to acknowledge this sort of worry. He writes that 'the fact that we accept some definition as correct shows that the term did somehow stand for a complex of elements; yet the fact that we are for some time in doubt about whether the term is analyzable, and if so, what the correct analysis is, shows that this complex of elements was not distinctly present to our mind before, or during, the search for a definition'. In reply, he says that the only way to rebut the claim that 'right' and 'good' are definable (naturalistically) is to examine 'all the definitions that possess any initial plausibility' . To these we should apply two tests. First, we should determine whether 'the definition applies to all things to which the term applies, and to no others'. Second,

we should ask whether the proposed definition expresses 'explicitly what we had implicitly in mind when we used the term'. Using these tools, Ross rejects (among others) the position that 'this act is right' means 'all or most men…react to the act with a feeling of approval' .We often judge that an act is right even when we know that we are alone in holding this view .

These are not the only arguments on which Ross relies. Against the claim that 'right' means 'awakes in me the emotion of approval', he argues that it is unable to explain 'the possibility of difference of opinion on the rightness of acts'. On this view, if I say 'incest is impermissible' and you say 'incest is permissible' we are not disagreeing, since all I am saying is 'incest awakes in me the emotion of disapproval' and all you are saying is 'incest awakes in me the emotion of approval', two statements that appear to be 'perfectly compatible' with each other. But we want to say that the two statements are not compatible. Ross gives the same argument against the claim that '*X* is good' means 'I have a certain feeling toward *X*'. If I say '*X* is good'and you say '*X* is bad', then you are saying that you have a certain (negative) feeling toward *X* and I am saying that I have a certain (positive) feeling toward *X*, two statements that seem to be compatible with each other. Yet, he urges, 'if anything is clear, it is that we do suppose ourselves to be making incompatible statements about the object'.

Ross also appears to reject various analyses of moral terms in order to preserve a certain way of conducting moral philosophy. He notes that 'there is a system of moral truth, as objective as all truth must be, which, and whose implications, we are interested in discovering'. The discovery of these truths is *not* a matter of scientific (empirical) investigation. Ethical truths are not discovered by 'mere observation'. Instead, they are 'grasped by an intuitive act of human reason' The use of the senses, and the physical sciences, give us no propositions in which 'right' or 'obligatory' occurs as a term' .There are 'two types of predicate—those that can be discovered by experience to belong to their subjects, and those that can be discovered by insight, and let us grant that rightness belongs to the second class'. In science, 'sense-experience…furnishes…real data'. In ethics, 'no such appeal is possible. We have no more direct way of access to the facts about rightness and goodness and about what things are right or good, *than by thinking about them*'. To entrench this idea he draws analogies between mathematic and logical knowledge and ethical knowledge. He is fan of synthetic a priori truths in ethics (and elsewhere). Since it might be possible to arrive at ethical knowledge by means of (mere) experience if moral terms were

reducible to natural terms, this provides Ross with an incentive to show that no such reduction is possible. He wants in short to protect a moral methodology that prizes appeal to what 'we' think, the thoughts of the 'best and most enlightened' consensus amongst experts and various kinds of thought experiments. Indeed, it has been suggested that through the use of these tools it is possible to demonstrate that though 'right' is not synonymous with a natural property it nonetheless refers to some natural property, e.g., what has the greatest balance of justice, beneficence, fidelity, and so on, over injustice, non-malfeasance and infidelity, and so on. (This may be controversial if such notions as 'justice' are incapable of complete naturalization. If complete naturalization is not an option, then Ross may be forced to endorse a less palatable metaphysics.)

Ross holds that the basic claims of morality express 'facts which are self-evidently necessary'. Are these objective facts of a special kind? The standard suggestion is that for Ross moral facts are non-natural facts or non-natural properties. It is not clear that he actually holds this view. He says very little about the nature of moral facts except (perhaps unhelpfully) to compare them to mathematical and logical facts. He does not appear to infer from the fact that naturalistic definitions of moral terms fail that therefore the terms refer to distinct properties. His focus is almost entirely on definitions of 'right' and (intrinsic) 'good'. His concern is with what 'we have in mind' not with properties, though, problematically, he often refers to 'good' as a 'quality' or 'characteristic' or 'property'. He writes that 'the difference between goodness or value and such attributes as yellowness is there whereas the latter are *differentiae*…of their possessors; the former is a *property* (i.e. a consequential attribute) of them'. It is not clear that Ross intends this view to be an inference from his arguments against naturalistic or other analyses. That he offers no explicit argument to this effect suggests that he likely did not intend the inference, and he nowhere rules out that moral properties are natural properties. At any rate, he does not need to make this inference to achieve the aims he has in rebutting the various definitions he discusses. The arguments he uses are sufficient to preserve (in his view) plausible moral semantics, moral disagreement, and his moral methodology. This should please the adherents of this view, though it still leaves Ross with the task of making sense of the nature of moral truth if it is not to be understood as correspondence to the moral facts.

Ross's appeal to self-evidence and his defense of the synthetic *a priori* may seem problematic to many, though recent defenses of these views suggest that their fortunes are improving. To defend himself, Ross might simply eschew appeal to self-evidence and certainty with respect to intuitions about general principles and replace them with appeal to moral beliefs of high reliability or to considered convictions about moral claims. This seems to give him what he needs methodologically. The appeal to considered convictions allows him the ability to say, for example, that we know directly that pain is bad and that it is wrong to harm others without good reason; in addition, he can avoid the defects of coherence theories of justification. This (importantly) puts him on the same level as almost all moral theorists working today. It is less clear that Ross is able to divest himself of synthetic *a prior* truths. But if his endorsement of the synthetic *a priori* truths is one way of securing the standard way of doing moral philosophy, which involves appeal to thought-experiments, intuition, what we think, and so on, it is more difficult to reject. It is more difficult to reject still if we accept such claims in areas outside ethics and if we are not keen on (radical forms of) empiricism.